Paths of Expansion

Trace how federal actions changed settlement and Native homelands.

USH.C.1.3.A "Explain the impact of the Homestead Act, the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, and the purchase of Alaska on settlement patterns and Native populations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline phrases that show where newcomers settled, circle phrases that show effects on Native peoples, and number the three federal actions in the order they occurred.

Three Decisions, Changing Homelands

1 In 1862, the Homestead Act offered eligible settlers up to 160 acres of federal land if they lived on it and improved it for five years. Promoters advertised farms across the Great Plains. Newcomers built homes and planted crops where the government claimed land it could distribute. Yet much of that land was already home to Native nations. As settlers moved west, federal officials pressured Native communities into smaller reservations, often breaking earlier agreements. The law encouraged a scattered pattern of farm settlement, while the loss of land restricted Native peoples' movement and access to resources.

2 In 1869, crews joined the first transcontinental railroad at Promontory Summit, Utah, linking rail lines between the eastern United States and the Pacific coast. Trains carried settlers and supplies west and shipped grain and cattle east. Towns grew near stations, so settlement clustered along the tracks as well as spreading across farmland. The federal government had granted railroad companies vast stretches of land, including land claimed by Native nations. Railroad construction crossed Native homelands, and train access helped hunters kill bison in large numbers. For Plains peoples who relied on bison, this destruction compounded pressure from settlers and soldiers.

3 In 1867, the United States bought Alaska from Russia for $7.2 million. The purchase expanded US territory but did not instantly produce the farm boom seen on the Great Plains. Alaska's Indigenous peoples, including Tlingit and Iñupiat communities, already lived across the region. American traders, officials, and later miners concentrated in coastal ports and resource-rich areas rather than settling the territory evenly. US officials often failed to recognize Indigenous land claims, while newcomers increased pressure on local resources. Together, these three federal actions redirected where newcomers traveled and settled, but Native populations experienced their effects differently in each region.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Homestead Act change where settlers lived, and how did that change affect Native communities?

2. How did the completed railroad shape settlement and affect Plains peoples who relied on bison?

3. After the Alaska purchase, where did newcomers tend to gather, and what pressure did Indigenous communities face?

4. Why did the railroad produce a different settlement pattern from the Homestead Act?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label titled “Three Routes, Different Costs.” In 75 to 95 words, connect all three federal actions to where newcomers settled and explain how effects on Native peoples differed between Alaska and the Great Plains.

ANSWER KEY

Paths of Expansion

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.1.3.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline phrases that show where newcomers settled, circle phrases that show effects on Native peoples, and number the three federal actions in the order they occurred. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Homestead Act change where settlers lived, and how did that change affect Native communities?	**It encouraged scattered farms across the Great Plains on land that was already home to Native nations. Native communities faced pressure to move to smaller reservations and lost access to land and resources.**
2	How did the completed railroad shape settlement and affect Plains peoples who relied on bison?	**Trains brought settlers and supplies west, and towns grew near stations. Train access also helped hunters kill bison in large numbers, harming Plains peoples who relied on them.**
3	After the Alaska purchase, where did newcomers tend to gather, and what pressure did Indigenous communities face?	**Newcomers concentrated in coastal ports and resource-rich areas. Indigenous communities faced unrecognized land claims and increased pressure on local resources.**
4	Why did the railroad produce a different settlement pattern from the Homestead Act?	**The Homestead Act encouraged scattered farms, while train service drew towns and businesses to stations along the tracks.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Three Routes, Different Costs

The Homestead Act encouraged families to spread across Great Plains farmland. After the transcontinental railroad was completed, train service drew newcomers to station towns and made distant farms easier to reach. Alaska's purchase brought American control, but newcomers gathered mainly at ports and places with valuable resources instead of filling the region with farms. On the Plains, land loss and bison destruction undermined Native communities' homes and food sources. In Alaska, Indigenous peoples also faced threats to land and resources as American traders, miners, and officials arrived.

Accept other passage-supported explanations that distinguish scattered farms, railroad station towns, and concentrated settlement in Alaska. Responses should recognize that these lands were already home to Native peoples.