

Land Shapes Lives

How physical environments influenced where Americans lived and worked

8.11.A “analyze how physical characteristics of the environment influenced population distribution, settlement patterns, and economic activities in the United States; and”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each physical characteristic of the environment. Number 1, 2, or 3 beside each effect on population distribution, settlement patterns, or economic activities.

From Coast to Plains

- ① In the early 1800s, many Americans lived near the Atlantic coast, where rivers, harbors, and fertile soil supported towns and farms. The Appalachian Mountains formed a rough barrier to travel west. Settlers often followed river valleys and low mountain passes because wagons could move more easily there. Coastal ports such as New York connected farmers and merchants to overseas trade. These physical features helped population cluster along waterways and encouraged shipping, fishing, and market farming.
- ② Beyond the mountains, the Ohio River and other inland waterways drew settlers to the Midwest. Flat land and deep, rich prairie soil made large-scale grain farming possible. Towns grew beside rivers, where boats could carry wheat and corn to markets. Later, railroads crossed the plains and linked farms to cities. In contrast, areas with thin soil, steep slopes, or few dependable water sources usually attracted fewer people and supported smaller farms or grazing instead of intensive crop production.
- ③ In the West, dry climate shaped settlement differently. Much of the interior received too little rain for reliable farming without irrigation. People settled near rivers, springs, and projects that brought water to fields. Ranching spread across broad grasslands, where cattle could graze on land unsuited to many crops. Mining communities also appeared near valuable deposits of gold, silver, copper, and coal. Some grew into permanent cities when railroads, water, and other jobs supported residents after the mines declined.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How did the Appalachian Mountains affect westward settlement, and what routes did settlers use instead?

2 Explain how the Midwest's land and waterways led to both settlement and an economic activity.

3 Why did places with thin soil, steep slopes, or little dependable water usually have fewer people?

4 How did dry climate influence where people settled in the West and the work they did there?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Imagine a region with a broad river, a fertile floodplain, and forested hills. Write three sentences explaining where people would likely settle and describing at least two economic activities the environment could support.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each physical characteristic of the environment. Number 1, 2, or 3 beside each effect on population distribution, settlement patterns, or economic activities. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Appalachian Mountains affect westward settlement, and what routes did settlers use instead?	The mountains made westward travel difficult. Settlers often used river valleys and low mountain passes.
2	Explain how the Midwest's land and waterways led to both settlement and an economic activity.	Flat land and rich prairie soil supported large grain farms, drawing settlers. Rivers helped towns grow because boats carried wheat and corn to markets.
3	Why did places with thin soil, steep slopes, or little dependable water usually have fewer people?	These conditions made intensive crop farming difficult. Such areas supported smaller farms or grazing and attracted fewer people.
4	How did dry climate influence where people settled in the West and the work they did there?	People settled near rivers, springs, and irrigation projects because farming needed water. Broad grasslands supported ranching, and mineral deposits supported mining.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A broad river and fertile floodplain would lead many families to settle near the riverbanks. Farmers could grow vegetables and grain in the rich soil, and boat crews could carry those goods to nearby towns. The forested hills farther away would have fewer homes but could support logging.

Accept answers that accurately connect a physical feature to where people lived or built towns and to work they performed. For Part 3, accept other logical settlement patterns and economic activities if the student explains the environmental connection.