

Land Shapes Lives

Trace how environment shaped settlement, work, and change.

8.11 "Geography. The student understands the physical characteristics of North America and how humans adapted to and modified the environment through the mid-19th century..."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each physical feature, circle the settlement or economic activity it influenced, and write a + or – beside each environmental change to show a positive or negative consequence.

Environment and Expansion

- ① Before railroads linked distant regions, many U.S. communities grew where water, soil, and travel routes supported daily life. Along the Atlantic coast and navigable rivers, ships carried people and goods, so ports and river towns attracted settlers. Fertile soil in the Mid-Atlantic and Ohio Valley supported farms and denser rural populations. In contrast, the dry Great Plains, rugged mountains, and deserts held fewer settlers. These environments did not make settlement impossible, but they raised the cost and difficulty of travel, farming, and supplying towns.
- ② In the South, long warm growing seasons and rich soils encouraged plantation agriculture, especially cotton. Enslaved laborers were forced to produce much of this crop, creating wealth for planters while causing profound human suffering. Forests in the Northeast supplied timber, and fast-moving streams powered early mills. Coal and iron deposits also drew miners and factory owners to particular places. Thus, physical resources shaped regional economies, while roads, canals, and later railroads helped producers send crops and manufactured goods to larger markets.
- ③ Americans changed environments to make settlement and trade easier. The Erie Canal, completed in 1825, connected the Hudson River to Lake Erie, lowering shipping costs and helping towns and farms grow along its route. Farmers cleared forests, drained some wetlands, and plowed prairie for fields. These changes expanded food production and transportation, but they also caused soil erosion, habitat loss, and dirtier waterways in some places. By the mid-1800s, people benefited from altered land and water while facing new environmental costs.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How did navigable water routes affect where people settled?

2 Use two examples from the passage to explain how physical resources shaped regional economic activities.

3 What was one benefit of the Erie Canal, and how did it influence settlement or economic activity?

4 Identify one positive and one negative consequence of farmers changing forests, wetlands, or prairie.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Create two different plans for fictional U.S. regions before 1850. In each row, name a physical feature, predict a settlement or economic activity, propose a human modification, and explain one benefit and one environmental cost.

PHYSICAL FEATURE	SETTLEMENT OR ECONOMIC ACTIVITY	HUMAN MODIFICATION	BENEFIT	ENVIRONMENTAL COST

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each physical feature, circle the settlement or economic activity it influenced, and write a + or – beside each environmental change to show a positive or negative consequence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did navigable water routes affect where people settled?	Navigable water routes let ships carry people and goods, so ports and river towns attracted settlers.
2	Use two examples from the passage to explain how physical resources shaped regional economic activities.	Long warm seasons and rich Southern soils supported cotton plantation agriculture. Northeast forests supplied timber, and fast-moving streams powered mills. Coal and iron also drew miners and factory owners.
3	What was one benefit of the Erie Canal, and how did it influence settlement or economic activity?	It lowered shipping costs and helped towns and farms grow along its route by improving trade connections.
4	Identify one positive and one negative consequence of farmers changing forests, wetlands, or prairie.	Positive consequences included expanded food production and easier transportation. Negative consequences included soil erosion, habitat loss, or dirtier waterways.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

PHYSICAL FEATURE	SETTLEMENT OR ECONOMIC ACTIVITY	HUMAN MODIFICATION	BENEFIT	ENVIRONMENTAL COST
Rocky, forested hills	Sparse farms and logging	Build a turnpike	Lumber reaches markets faster	Road cuts and tree clearing erode soil
Sheltered bay	Port town, fishing, and trade	Build docks and warehouses	Goods load more easily	Dredging can damage water habitats

Accept equivalent cause-and-effect explanations that accurately connect a physical characteristic to settlement, population distribution, or economic activity. For Part 3, accept reasonable historical modifications if each includes both a benefit and a related environmental cost.