

Reasons to Move West

Read for the goals that drew people westward.

USII.1.b "identifying the motivations for westward expansion;"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline words or phrases that tell why people moved west. Write a small number beside each different motivation so you can compare them.

Why Americans Went West

- ① During the 1800s, many Americans looked beyond the Mississippi River for land. Farmers in crowded eastern areas hoped to buy or claim larger fields where they could grow crops and raise animals. Some families left because land in the East cost too much. The federal government encouraged settlement with laws such as the Homestead Act of 1862. It offered eligible settlers a chance to gain western land if they lived on it and improved it. For these people, moving west promised a new farm and a more independent life.
- ② Other migrants sought wealth rather than farms. Gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in California in 1848, and news of the discovery drew thousands of people west in 1849. Most did not become rich, but miners still hoped to find gold. Merchants, cooks, and builders also followed, expecting to earn money by selling supplies or services in growing mining towns. Later, railroads made travel and shipping easier. Railroad companies, workers, and business owners saw chances for jobs, profits, and new customers in western communities.
- ③ Some Americans supported expansion because they believed the United States had a destiny to spread across the continent. This idea, often called Manifest Destiny, made expansion seem patriotic and right to its supporters. Others sought religious freedom. In 1847, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints traveled to the Salt Lake Valley after facing persecution. Government leaders wanted control of Pacific ports and routes for trade with Asia. These motivations had serious consequences, since western lands were already home to Indigenous nations.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What problem in the eastern United States encouraged some families to seek land in the West?

2 Why did both miners and people who sold supplies move to western mining towns?

3 What motivation led members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to travel to the Salt Lake Valley? Use evidence from the passage.

4 Name two motivations in paragraph 3, other than religious freedom, that supported westward expansion.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write exactly five sentences explaining why different people might choose to move west in the 1800s. Include a reason about land or farming, a reason about earning money, and either religious freedom, a belief about expansion, or a government trade goal. In your fifth sentence, state which reason might matter most to a farming family and why.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline words or phrases that tell why people moved west. Write a small number beside each different motivation so you can compare them. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What problem in the eastern United States encouraged some families to seek land in the West?	Eastern land was crowded and could cost too much. Families hoped for larger, more affordable fields in the West.
2	Why did both miners and people who sold supplies move to western mining towns?	Miners hoped to find gold. Merchants and other workers hoped to earn money by selling supplies or services.
3	What motivation led members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to travel to the Salt Lake Valley? Use evidence from the passage.	They sought religious freedom after facing persecution.
4	Name two motivations in paragraph 3, other than religious freedom, that supported westward expansion.	Some people believed in Manifest Destiny, the idea that the United States should spread across the continent. Government leaders also wanted Pacific ports and trade routes with Asia.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Families may move west because a larger farm could give them room to grow crops and live more independently. A miner, merchant, or railroad worker may hope to earn money from gold, services, jobs, or customers. Some people may believe expansion across the continent is patriotic. Leaders may also want Pacific ports for trade with Asia. For a farming family, land might matter most because it could provide both work and a home.

Accept accurate paraphrases of the motivations in the passage, including land, economic opportunity, religious freedom, Manifest Destiny, and Pacific trade. For the open response, check that all required motivation types appear and that the student gives a reasonable explanation for the farming family.