Name _____ Date _____

The Fall of the Western Roman Empire: Causes

Directions: Read the passage about the end of Roman rule in the West. Watch for words that show causes and effects, since several questions ask how the passage is organized.

The Fall of the West

Why the West Fell Apart

By the 200s CE, the Roman Empire faced serious trouble. Historians point to several causes that worked together, and they still debate which mattered most.

One cause was unstable government. In the 200s, emperors rose and fell quickly, and many were murdered. Civil wars weakened the empire.

A second cause was money trouble. To pay soldiers, emperors raised taxes and put less silver in their coins. As a result, the coins lost value and prices rose.

A third cause was size. Some historians argue that the empire had grown too large to defend. After 395 CE, it was split for good into a western half and an eastern half ruled from Constantinople.

Pressure from outside grew too. In the late 300s, the Huns moved west and pushed the Goths and other Germanic peoples toward Roman lands. In 410, the Visigoths looted the city of Rome. The Vandals took North Africa, one of the West's richest regions, and looted Rome again in 455. Losing rich lands meant losing the taxes that paid the army.

In 476 CE, a Germanic general named Odoacer removed the young western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, and named no one to replace him. Historians often use 476 as the date the Western Roman Empire fell. The West broke into kingdoms ruled by Germanic kings, but its people did not vanish.

The eastern half survived. Its people called themselves Romans, though today it is often called the Byzantine Empire. It lasted until 1453, when the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople.

1. Complete the sentences about the eastern half of the Roman Empire.

Word bank
Rome • Constantinople • Vandal • Byzantine

Today the eastern half is often called the _____ Empire. It was ruled from _____.

2. Which statement about the causes of the fall matches the passage?

A. The fall was caused only by bad weather.
B. Historians point to several causes and still debate which mattered most.
C. One cause, the Huns, explains the whole fall.
D. Historians agree that the fall had no causes at all.

3. How is most of the passage organized?
A. It tells the life story of one emperor from birth to death.
B. It describes a problem and then a solution that saved the West.
C. It explains several causes and then the result they led to.
D. It lists events from the most recent to the oldest.

4. According to the passage, which two problems came from the Roman government itself?
☐ A. Emperors raised taxes and put less silver in their coins.
☐ B. The Huns pushed the Goths toward Roman lands.
☐ C. The Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople.
☐ D. Emperors rose and fell quickly, and many were murdered.
☐ E. The Vandals took North Africa.

5. Which words from the passage most clearly signal a cause-and-effect link?
A. Today it is often called
B. As a result
C. In 476 CE
D. By the 200s CE

6. How did the movement of the Huns affect the Roman Empire?
A. They brought silk and spices from China.
B. They built new roads for the Roman army.
C. They sailed to North Africa and took it from Rome.
D. They pushed the Goths and other peoples toward Roman lands.

7. According to the passage, what was one result of losing rich regions such as North Africa?
A. The West had less tax money to pay its army.
B. Emperors put more silver in their coins.
C. The Huns stopped moving west.
D. The East moved its capital to Rome.

8. Which event happened between the split of 395 CE and the end of the West in 476 CE?
A. Emperors rose and fell quickly in the 200s.
B. The Ottoman Turks captured the eastern capital.
C. The Visigoths looted the city of Rome.
D. The empire was split into two halves for good.

9. Why do historians often use 476 CE as the date the Western Roman Empire fell?
A. The Visigoths looted Rome that year.
B. The empire was split into two halves that year.
C. The Ottoman Turks captured the eastern capital that year.
D. Odoacer removed the western emperor and named no one to replace him.

10. Why does the passage end with a paragraph about the eastern half of the empire?
A. To show that only the western half fell in 476
B. To explain where the Huns came from
C. To describe daily life in Rome in 476
D. To prove that the East caused the fall of the West