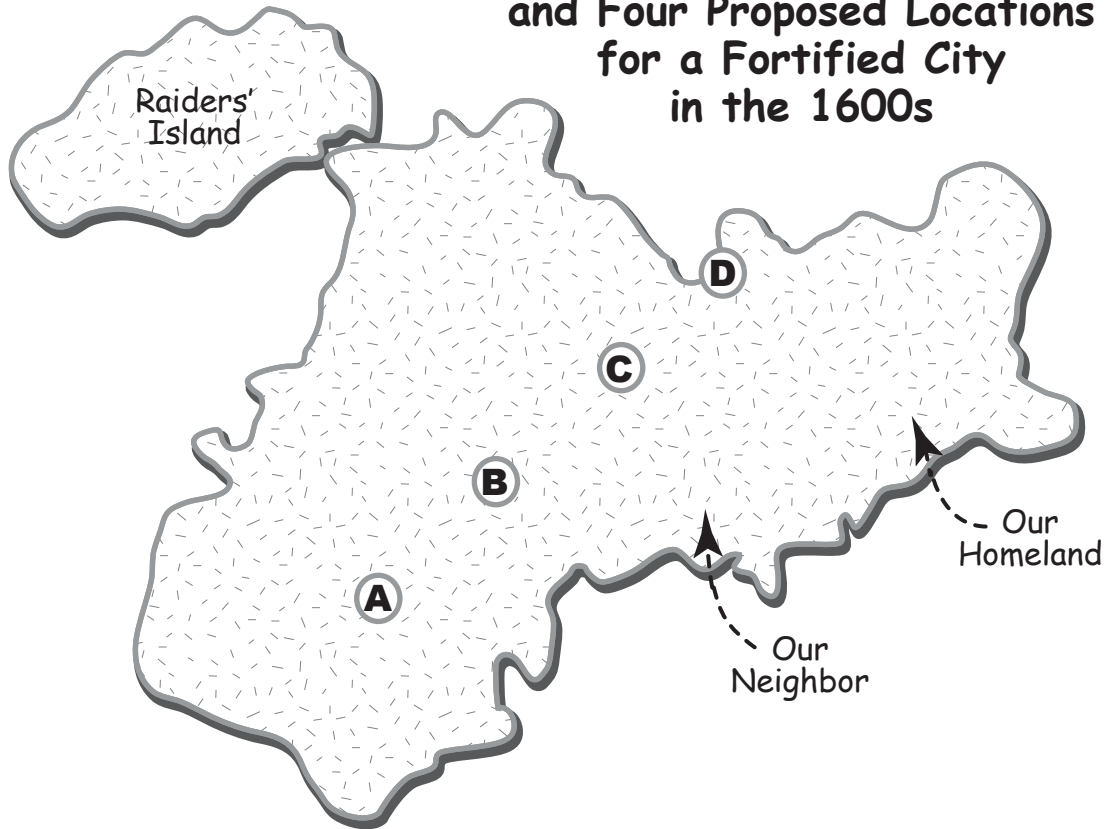
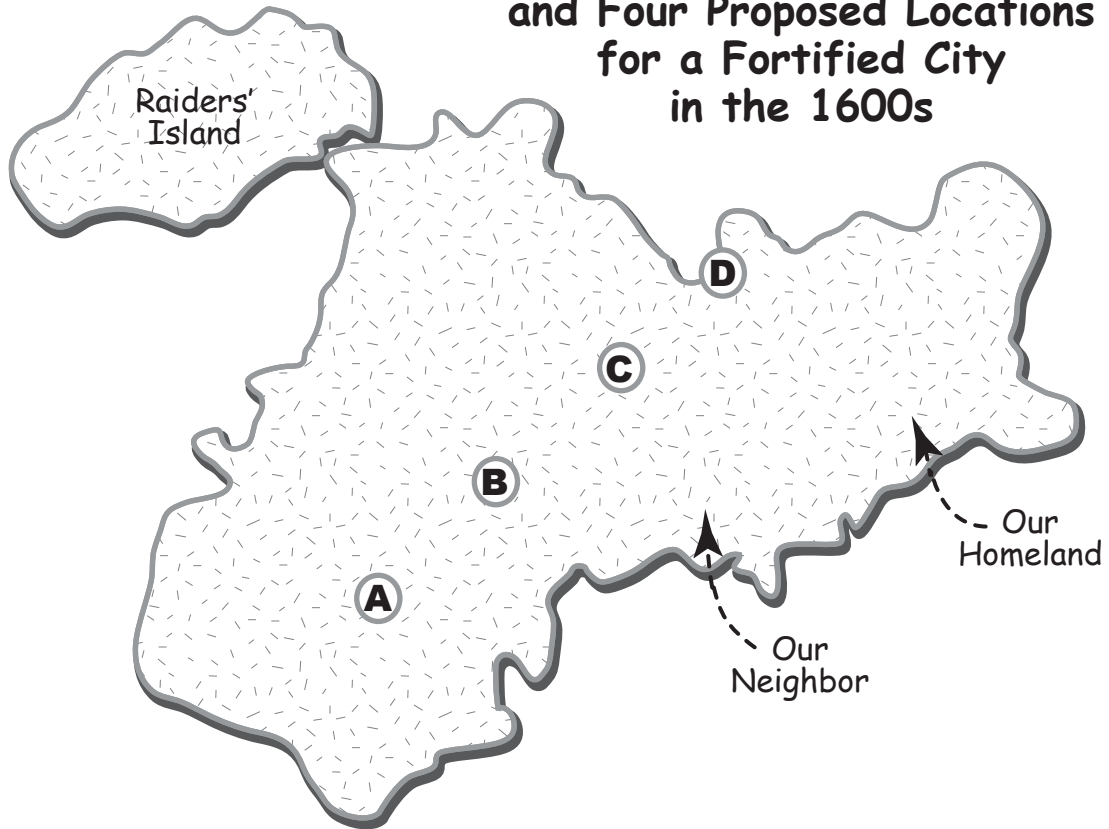


"Our" Continent, "Their" Island, and Four Proposed Locations for a Fortified City in the 1600s



1. Our homeland is a California-sized piece of land near the eastern end of a small continent. We are lucky to have fertile soil and good weather - we can grow many crops, from grain to wine grapes. Most of the rest of the continent is colder, drier, or mountainous.
2. Our neighboring country, for example, is colder in winter and hotter in summer. Some of their land is flat and swampy, other parts are hilly. In past years, they have occasionally tried to capture some of our land, especially a small area that has valuable deposits of iron. As a result, we have a long history of occasional small wars.
3. Our differences with our neighbors, however, do not seem important when we think about the entire continent. The really big problem is the people who live on the large island to the northwest. This land has serious problems - the soil is thin and rocky, and the weather is not good for crops. The people have decided that it is easier to make a living by trading (and occasionally raiding), rather than farming.
4. In recent years, the island people have actually invaded into "our" continent. As a result, we have talked with our neighbors about the possibility of building a fortified city at one of the locations marked with letters A-D on the map.
5. Which location would you choose for the fort? Why?

"Our" Continent, "Their" Island, and Four Proposed Locations for a Fortified City in the 1600s



1) Which locations had the best and worst local **conditions** for a fort/city in the 1600s?
Circle their letters below and briefly note some good or bad things about the sites.

Best: A B C D _____

Worst: A B C D _____

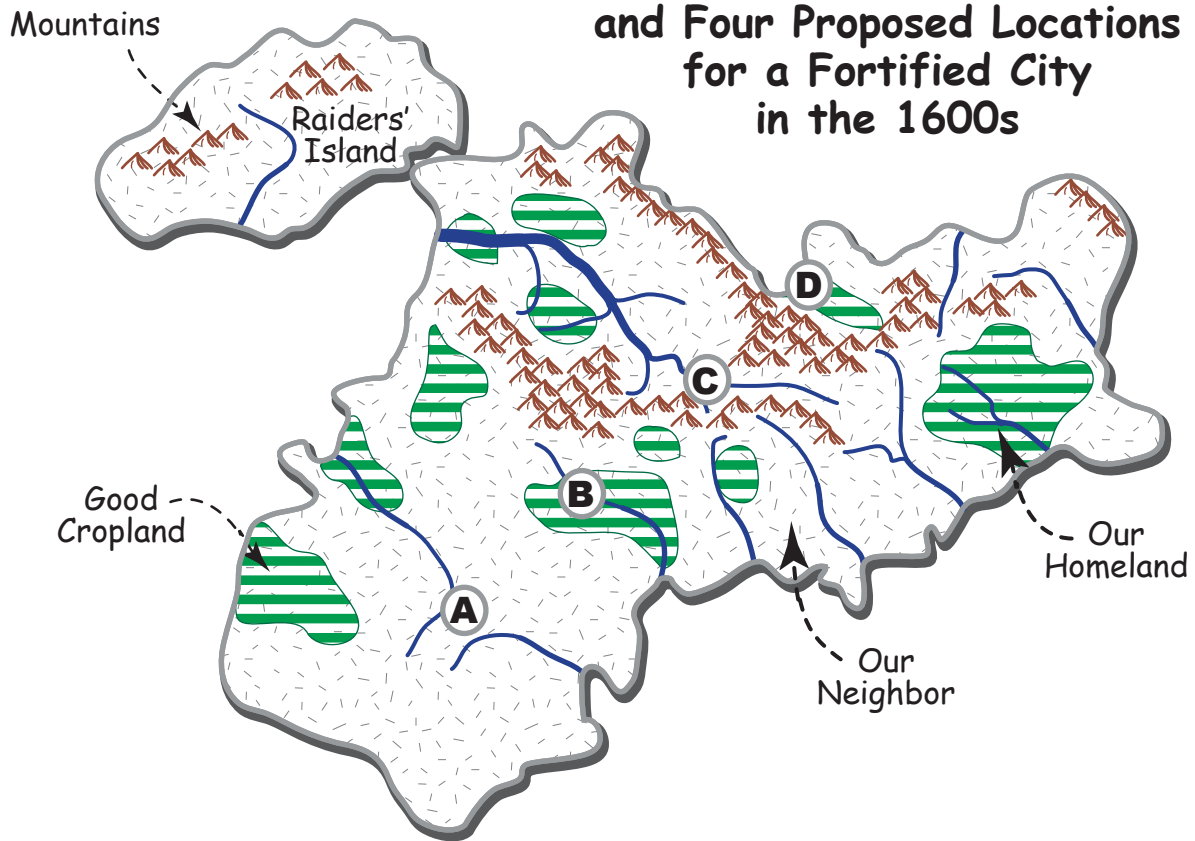
2) Which locations had the best and worst **connections** with other places in the 1600s?
Circle their letters below and describe some good or bad things about the situations.

Best: A B C D _____

Worst: A B C D _____

3) Now put the ideas of conditions and connections together. Write a speech or design a poster to recommend a location for a fort/city in the 1600s, and explain why you chose that place.

"Our" Continent, "Their" Island, and Four Proposed Locations for a Fortified City in the 1600s



1) Which locations had the best and worst local **conditions** for a fort/city in the 1600s?
Circle their letters below and briefly note some good or bad things about the sites.

Best: A B C D _____

Worst: A B C D _____

2) Which locations had the best and worst **connections** with other places in the 1600s?
Circle their letters below and describe some good or bad things about the situations.

Best: A B C D _____

Worst: A B C D _____

3) Now put the ideas of conditions and connections together. Write a speech or design a poster to recommend a location for a fort/city in the 1600s, and explain why you chose that place.

Teacher Notes

Locating a Fort – Conditions and Connections

(adapted from ARGWorld Activity H – Association of American Geographers)

Big question: What should people think about when they choose a location for a fort or town?

Situation: In the late 1600s, invaders from the northwest are seen as a threat by people in the southeastern part of a continent. Acting as advisors to people in different regions of the continent, students use maps to identify advantages and drawbacks of several locations for a fortified city.

Focus Questions

How can maps help us identify advantages and drawbacks of suggested locations for a city?

What are some important site considerations (favorable or unfavorable conditions at a place)?

What are some important situation considerations (good or bad connections with other places)?

Learner outcomes and curricular links

After doing this Activity, a student should be able to:

- 1) interpret maps in order to learn about conditions at places and connections between places (Standard 1: Using maps and other geographic representations);
- 2) describe influences on city location and empire success at key times in the history of Europe (Standard 12: identify factors involved in the development of cities; Standard 17: how geographic contexts have influenced events and conditions in the past);
- 3) classify the advantages of a location according to whether they are primarily a result of its local conditions (its site) or its connections with other places (its situation) (Standard 15: how physical systems influence human systems).

This Activity can fit a unit on European history, a geography unit on city location, or an economics unit on comparative and absolute advantage. Its focus on critical thinking makes this a Common Core activity about persuasive speaking or writing.

Resources

Time: One to four periods, depending on whether students start with the Response Sheet or the teacher shows the presentation as discussion proceeds, and whether they do research on other cities.

Work map, either simple or complex, depending on whether information is released all at once or gradually as the discussion progresses

Multimedia unit on Locating a Fort, Borders in History, Pie Graphs (population in the Balkans, a result of the historic movements of people), Map on the Wall in Dubrovnik, NAFTA Highway (another city with a uniquely strategic location at a particular moment in history).

web sites:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/europe/vienna/history.htm>

<http://www.cityguide.travel-guides.com/cities/vie/History.asp>

<http://www.nhm-wien.ac.at/> English language version under construction

Classroom procedures

- 1) Hand out or project the maps and ask students to write some advantages and drawbacks of each lettered location as a possible site for a fort.

Some teachers prefer to start with the complex map, showing all relevant information; others expressed a strong preference for starting an open-ended discussion and adding information as discussion proceeds – that is the approach of the multimedia presentation.

- 2) Conduct class discussion to evaluate (and add to) their lists of reasons; the Background section on the next page gives detailed background to help you run this discussion. During discussion, have students vote for the location they think would be most successful.
- 3) If you wish, expose the secret: the map shows part of Europe, upside down; the best location for a fortified city turns out to be Vienna, which was an important outpost of the Roman Empire, later became the capital of the Habsburg Empire, and was one of Napoleon's major defeats.
- 4) Optional: ask students if their choice would change if it was 1850 or 1940 rather than 1580.

Introducing the activity

The location of a city is both historical event and geographical fact. At a specific point in time, specific people decided to build in a particular place. That is historical fact, often immortalized by a plaque or statue in a park, public plaza, or other prominent place.

- ? Would this city be here if that event (General Famous building a fort, or whatever actually happened) had not occurred on this site at that particular time in history?

In some cases, the answer is no. But in many cases, someone else would probably have used the location, because it had some clear advantages: a waterfall for power, for example, or a safe crossing of a river, a pass through a mountain range, a valuable mineral deposit, a good site for a fort, etc.

Caveat about perspective

This activity works well from several points of view – the farming people, trying to choose a location for a fort to defend their homeland; the swamp people, trying to survive in a precarious world; or the island people, trying to choose which place to attack in order to expand their territory. Pick one, and explain the scenario to the class, or divide the class into two or three groups to represent each side. The simplest scenario is to have students choose a location to defend the eastern homeland against the raiders from the northwest. The drawback of that approach is its tendency to reinforce a Eurocentric view of history, with Vienna as a key part of a line of defense against the expansion of the Ottoman Empire – when in fact the Habsburg Empire had its own expansionist plans, many parts of Europe were allied against the Austrians, and Turkish people had memories of European Crusader armies invading their homeland.

Alternative introductions

This Activity can also be started by:

- asking students to list some reasons why a settlement might fail. What kinds of locations tend to make failure more likely? Less likely?
- describing a contemporary rivalry between towns and asking which town is more likely to "win".
- asking students why the Ottoman Turks might have had different ideas about where to live, especially as compared to northern Europeans

- asking students how ideas about where to live in the Middle Ages might have been different from those of modern Americans

Background: advantages/drawbacks of the four locations

During discussion, try to get students to consider both aspects of the idea of location: local conditions and connections with other places. They should suggest and evaluate ideas like these:

Location A has good connections to the island – it is only a short distance up a river that flows into the ocean on the “invader’s” side of the continent. On the other hand, it is not located directly between the farmers and the northwest island, and it has no good cropland (an important local condition). If, as the presentation suggests, the land gets colder and swampier as you go east from the farmers’ region, this location might be still worse (since it is still farther east!).

Location B has much better conditions than A, because it has a river for fresh water and good cropland for food. The river flows to the west, and there are mountains between the place and the invaders. As a result, it is easy for the farmers and hard for the raiders to get to this location.

Location C has great connections, where a large river goes through a pass between two ranges of high mountains. Whatever country controls Location C probably can control the movements of traders (and armies), since it is hard to carry supplies over high mountains. On the other hand, the conditions at the place are not particularly good: it does not have much cropland nearby, and it might be prone to flooding because of the narrow valley and nearby mountains.

Site D has great conditions, with plenty of water, cropland, and beaches. On the other hand, it may be harder to defend than the other locations, because it is also vulnerable to attack by both land and sea. It is also much easier to reach from the homeland of the raiders than from the farmers.

Background: historical setting

As mentioned above, this is not a hypothetical situation; the activity map was rotated to keep students from arguing backward from the present map rather than trying to imagine living at a specific time in the past. When the map is rotated 180 degrees, so that the top becomes the bottom, then . . .

Location A is an early Viking trading center, where people crossed from the northward-flowing Dvina River to the southward-flowing Dnepr River. That portage was a key part of a Viking trading route between their Scandinavian homeland and their contacts around the Black Sea.

Location B is close to Warsaw, the capital of modern Poland. This area had decent conditions for living, but it also had a hard-to-defend location between Russia and Germany. This combination of favorable site and unfavorable situation was partly responsible for the fact that the country was fairly densely populated but also frequently invaded and conquered.

Location C is probably the best choice for a fort. It is Wien (pronounced VEEen, and spelled Vienna in English). Vienna was an important Roman outpost, a medieval city, the central city of the Habsburg Empire, and the capital of modern Austria, and now it has offices for the United Nations and the European Union. Some people also consider Vienna to be close to a “dividing line” between predominantly Christian Europe and the Islamic world centered in Arabia.

Location D is Venice, a key ocean port for thousands of years. Its importance as a trading center was limited only by the relatively small size of the area behind it – on a continental scale, this location is surrounded by high mountains that are difficult to cross. Its site on a low island, however, is responsible for its present problems of flooding and water quality.

Debriefing

As with any “role-play” simulation, a strong debriefing session is needed to ensure maximum pedagogic benefit. This debriefing should focus on five major points:

- 1) People usually have multiple reasons for choosing locations for forts, trading posts, or cities.
- 2) Most of those reasons fall into two broad categories: site advantages (conditions in the local area) and situation advantages (connections with other places).
- 3) The city of Vienna has exceptionally good geographic connections, being located close to the gap where the largest river in Europe passes between two mountain ranges. This was already seen as a key location in Roman times. Vienna increased in importance during the long conflict between the Christian nations of northern Europe and the Muslim Ottoman Empire, and it still plays important roles in the United Nations and the European Union.
- 4) The advantages of a location can change when technology changes; for example, the presence of a waterfall for power became less important when steam engines were invented.
- 5) The photographs from modern Vienna in the multimedia presentation include several remnants of old fortifications, as well as some large Islamic mosques and Christian churches – evidence for its present position near a border between two major cultural realms.

Concluding the activity

Focus on the process of gathering information and deciding where to locate a town. The list of important factors is not fixed: it depends on the place, the time, and the aspirations and level of technology of the people involved. Here are some thought questions:

Did you change your ideas about what factors to consider in deciding where to put a town?

How might these factors change through time?

What implications does this have for the future? If a city loses its locational advantage, does a country as a whole have a responsibility to help people move to better locations?

Extension and enrichment

This Activity is a natural springboard for individual investigation of other towns. Students can choose a city, do research on its site and situation at the time of its founding, and create a similar activity (a map with background information, several choices, and a challenge to choose the best location). Suggestions include the early trading center of Timbuktu in West Africa; the city of Istanbul; cities such as Buchara, Samarkand, Tashkent, or Lanzhou along the old Silk Road in central Asia; St. Petersburg, which became Leningrad during the Communist era and is now St. Petersburg again; and Buenos Aires on the estuary of the Rio de la Plata in Argentina. These suggested cities have one thing in common: some fairly easy-to-understand and plausible reasons for their location. Other cities may have more convoluted histories or less obvious reasons for their location, and therefore are suitable only for advanced inquiry. If research on a city leads to the conclusion that it was built in a non-optimal location, don't worry – students should learn that historical locational decisions were not always the best. Indeed, many modern problems can be traced to questionable locational decisions in the past. Examples might include flood-prone cities such as Venice, Dhaka, or New Orleans; earthquake-prone cities such as Managua, Taipei, or Tehran; or cities that were hard to defend and therefore often overrun, such as Belgrade, Delhi, or Jerusalem.

A study of ghost towns and other abandoned locations is thus another possible extension of this unit!

Frequently asked questions about site and situation: a sample dialog

Student: I'd put the fort at place C; is that correct?

(Mistaken response: right – that's Vienna, which some say was the most important city in Europe in the 1500s and 1600s.

It may seem almost too obvious, but the point of a simulation is to explore a decision-making process, not just to get the “right” answer. In this case, students could have arrived at this answer as the result of a thorough investigation of alternatives, or simply as a good guess. We'll never know, unless we test the clarity and strength of their opinions.)

Redirection: That may be a good choice, but how will you feed an army at this location, since there's no good cropland nearby?

Student: I could bring food from the cropland over here.

Teacher: But wouldn't that area be under the control of the enemy if place C was on the border?

The same logic applies to answers that focus on a particular aspect of site or situation. For example, if several students focus on topography, test their opinion by asking about other things, such as drinking water, strategic alliances, or whether a particular place might already have people who could be friendly or hostile. The key is to keep stretching the range of considerations. Insisting that students rank places in terms of both conditions and connections is one way of doing this.

Why doesn't the activity focus on one group of people?

It could! Students could look at the world from the perspective of one group, such as the farming people in the southeast corner of the continent. When they find out that they have been “defending Europe against Asian invaders,” however, one could use that moment to extend their knowledge of the historic setting and its modern implications. Some teachers liked this approach, while others preferred to divide their class into groups to represent different groups of people on the continent.

What other modern implications are built in to this activity?

As noted in the historical background, all four places were strategically important at different times, for different reasons. The strongest link to modern history is probably Place B, near Warsaw, Poland. This city has reasonably good conditions (good cropland, fresh water, etc.) Its hard-to-defend situation, however, has made this city vulnerable to attack from many directions. The CD unit on Borders and History shows the historic extent of Poland as various neighbors expanded and contracted over the centuries.

The actions of Viennese leaders after the Turkish invasions are also significant. Fearful of another attack by the Turks, they forcibly moved the Serbian people into land held by the weaker Croatian people. This produced the population conditions described in the CD unit about Pie Graphs, which then became part of the reason for several 20th-century conflicts in the Balkan region.

Locating a Fort - Conditions and Connections

Glossary of key terms

alliance: agreement made by two or more countries to co-operate in defending each other or attacking a common enemy

break-of-bulk point: where traders move goods from one mode of transportation to another; New Orleans is a break-of-bulk point between ocean ships and river barges

chokepoint: where many routes go through a relatively narrow area; Gibraltar is a chokepoint for trade out of the Mediterranean; the Bosphorus for trade out of the Black Sea

fertile: when referring to land, fertile means that the land is good for growing crops

fortified city: city with a wall around it and other structures to help defend it against attack by enemies; before the invention of gunpowder or airplanes, a fortified city could often defend itself successfully against a much larger attacking army

Habsburg: important European empire based in what is now the country of Austria, with a capital at Vienna, which was formerly an outpost for the Roman Empire

isthmus: narrow stretch of land that connects two larger masses of land; a road or canal across an isthmus such as Panama can have great strategic value

multi-ethnic: including people from many nations, families, clans, languages, or religions

Ottoman: important Asian empire based in what is now the country of Turkey, with a capital at Istanbul, which was formerly an important city called Constantinople

outpost: a location that is occupied by an army for strategic purposes but little else

settlement: a place where people are trying to start a new town or city

siege: method of capturing a city or fort by surrounding it and waiting for the defenders to run out of food, water, or patience!

site: conditions right at a particular place, such as its climate, geology, vegetation, soil, slope, languages of the people there, income, ethnicity, religion, etc.

situation: connections that a place has with other places, both natural and of human origin, such as location downstream, upwind, upslope, connected by a canal or road, etc.

strait: narrow stretch of water between two masses of land; straits such as Gibraltar, the English Channel, Hormuz, or Malacca can have great strategic value

strategic: adjective that indicates that a location has military value; Harper's Ferry had a strategic location during the United States Civil War

trade route: path or route that traders take in moving goods from producers to buyers

Vikings: ancient people in North Europe; the Vikings are famous for being very aggressive

watergap: place where a river cuts through a mountain range; watergaps often had great strategic value, especially before the invention of dynamite (to make tunnels) and airplanes (to fly over mountains)

Locating a Fort - Conditions and Connections

Sample test questions

- ___ 1) What event marked the maximum extent of the Ottoman Empire into Europe?
- A. the fall of Rome, which allowed western armies to invade farther toward the east
 - B. the siege of Vienna, where armies from France and Poland joined the Austrians
 - C. the battle of Smolensk, where cavalry gave the Russian army a decisive advantage
 - D. the treaty of Versailles, which divided the Austrian Empire into three parts
- ___ 2) What is the best description of the geographic situation of Poland through history?
- A. a place with good conditions, but vulnerable to invasion from several directions
 - B. a place with good connections to the east and west, but unfavorable conditions
 - C. a place hard to invade because of high mountains and other adverse conditions
 - D. a place left alone because it had few natural resources and sparse population
- ___ 3) What historic decision is most responsible for the complex population map in the Balkan area?
- A. Istanbul: to expand the Ottoman empire into south-central Asia rather than Europe
 - B. Moscow: to build several parallel roads and railroads to connect Israel and Russia
 - C. Rome: to expand eastward beyond the Black Sea into the oil-rich Caspian region
 - D. Vienna: to move Serbian people into Croatia as a buffer against Ottoman invasion
- ___ 4) What is the most important geographic reason for the historic importance of Byzantium (later known as Constantinople and then Istanbul)?
- A. its location near the major gold-producing area of the European continent
 - B. its location near the narrow strait between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea
 - C. its location where the Danube River cuts through the Carpathian Mountains
 - D. its location in the middle of the largest food-producing area of Southwest Asia
- ___ 5) What the most important geographic reason for the historic importance of Vienna?
- A. its location near the major gold-producing area of the European continent
 - B. its location near the narrow strait between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea
 - C. its location where the Danube River cuts through the Carpathian Mountains
 - D. its location on a sheltered island at the northern end of the Adriatic Sea
- ___ 6) What is the most important geographic reason for the historic importance of Venice?
- A. its location near the major gold-producing area of the European continent
 - B. its location near the narrow strait between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea
 - C. its location where the Danube River cuts through the Carpathian Mountains
 - D. its location on a sheltered island at the northern end of the Adriatic Sea
- ___ 7) What city had the best location to resist the advance of the Ottoman Empire?
- A. Buda, because it controlled the exceptionally productive farmland of the Hungarian Plain
 - B. Vienna, because it controlled the gap where the Danube River cut through the mountains
 - C. Smolensk, because it controlled the portage between the Dvina River and the Dnepr River
 - D. Byzantium, because it controlled the strait between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea
- ___ 8) What city was the capital of the Habsburg Empire?
- A. Buda, in the middle of the exceptionally productive farmland of the Hungarian Plain
 - B. Vienna, near the strategic gap where the Danube River cut through the mountains
 - C. Smolensk, near the strategic portage between the Dvina River and the Dnepr River
 - D. Byzantium, near the strategic strait between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea