Looking Back, Looking Ahead

In Section 1, you learned about Roman life and achievements when the empire was at its height. Over time, however, the Roman Empire began to have problems, and it gradually grew weaker. Eventually, Rome fell to outside invaders.

Focusing on the Main Ideas

- Poor leadership, a declining economy, and attacks by Germanic tribes weakened the Roman Empire. (page 475)
- Rome finally fell when invaders swept through the empire during the A.D. 400s. (page 479)
- Rome passed on many achievements in government, law, language, and the arts. (page 482)

Locating Places

Constantinople (KAHN•STAN•tuhr•OH•puhl)

Meeting People

Diocletian (DY•uh•KLEE•shuhn)
Constantine (KAHN•stuhn•TEEN)
Theodosius (THEE•uh•DOH•shuhs)
Alaric (A•luh•rihk)
Odoacer (OH•duh•WAY•shuhr)

Content Vocabulary

inflation (ihn•FLAY•shuhn)
barter (BAHR•tuhr)
reform (rih•FAWRM)

Academic Vocabulary

authority (uh•THAHR•uh•tee)
expand (ihk•SPAND)

Reading Strategy

Sequencing Information
Create a diagram to show the events that led up to the fall of the Roman Empire.

Where & When?

A.D. 250
Britain Gaul Spain Italy Rome
Constantinople Greece Egypt

A.D. 284
Diocletian tries to reform empire

A.D. 350

A.D. 395
Roman Empire divided into eastern and western parts

A.D. 450

A.D. 476
Rome’s last emperor overthrown
After Commodus, emperors called the Severans ruled Rome. Much of their time was spent putting down revolts and protecting Rome’s borders. The Severans stayed in power by paying the army well, but they ignored the growing problems of crime and poverty.

**Political and Social Problems** When the last Severan ruler died in A.D. 235, Rome’s government became very weak. For almost 50 years, army leaders constantly fought each other for the throne. During this time, Rome had 22 different emperors.

Poor leadership was not Rome’s only difficulty. Fewer Romans honored the old ideals of duty, courage, and honesty. Many government officials took bribes. As problems
increased, talented people often refused to serve in government. Many wealthy citizens even stopped paying taxes. Fewer people attended schools, and a large number of the empire’s people were now enslaved. Wealthy Romans supported slavery because it was a cheap way to get work done.

**Economic and Military Problems** During the A.D. 200s, Rome’s economy began to fall apart. As government weakened, law and order broke down. Roads and bridges were destroyed, and trade routes became unsafe. Information could not be sent quickly across the empire, and Rome’s army could no longer organize quickly enough to drive out invaders. Roman soldiers and invaders seized crops and destroyed fields. Farmers grew less food, and hunger began to spread.

As the economy worsened, people bought fewer goods. Artisans produced less, and shopkeepers lost money. Many businesses closed, and the number of workers dropped sharply. Many workers had to leave jobs and serve in the military.

Rome also began to suffer from inflation (ihn•FLAY•shuhn), or rapidly increasing prices. Inflation happens when money loses its value. How did this happen? The weak economy meant fewer taxes were paid. With less money coming in, the Roman government could not afford to defend its territories and had to find a way to pay its soldiers and officials. One way for the government to get the money it needed was to put less gold in its coins.

By putting less gold in each coin, the government could make extra coins and pay for more things. People soon learned that the coins did not have as much gold in them, and the coins began losing value. Prices went up, and many people stopped using money altogether. They began to barter (BAHR•tuhr), or exchange goods without using currency.

Meanwhile, invaders swept into the empire. In the west, Germanic tribes raided Roman farms and towns. In the east, armies from Persia pushed into the empire’s territory. As fighting increased, the government could no longer enlist and pay Romans as soldiers. It began using Germanic warriors in the army. However, these Germanic soldiers were not loyal to Rome.
What Were Diocletian’s Reforms? In A.D. 284 a general named Diocletian (dyuh KLEE shuhn) became emperor. To stop the empire’s decline, he introduced reforms (rih FAWRMZ), or political changes to make things better. Believing the empire to be too large to rule by himself, Diocletian changed its framework by dividing it into four parts. He named officials to rule these areas but kept authority over all.

Diocletian also worked to boost the economy. To slow inflation, he issued rules that set the prices of goods and the wages to be paid to workers. To make sure more goods were produced, he ordered workers to occupy the same jobs until they died. Diocletian’s reforms failed. The people ignored the new rules, and Diocletian did not have enough power to enforce them.

Who Was Constantine? In A.D. 305 Diocletian retired from office. After an interval of conflict, another general named Constantine (KAHN stuhn TEEN) became emperor in A.D. 312. To aid the economy, Constantine issued several orders and passed important legislation. The sons of workers had to follow their fathers’ trades, the sons of farmers had to work the land their fathers worked, and the sons of soldiers had to serve in the army.

Constantine’s changes did not halt the empire’s decline in the west. As a result, Constantine moved the capital from a dying Rome to a new city in the east. He chose the site of the Greek city of Byzantium (buh ZAN tee uh). There he built a forum, an amphitheater called the Hippodrome, and many palaces. The city became known as Constantinople (KAHN tuhn OH puhl). Today, Constantinople is called Istanbul.

Reading Check Explain How did Diocletian try to reverse the decline of Rome?
CONSTANTINE THE GREAT
C. A.D. 280–337
First Christian Roman Emperor

Constantine was the first Roman Emperor to become a Christian, although he was not baptized until near his death in A.D. 337. He first came to believe in Christianity many years earlier, when he was a military leader. Constantine believed he had seen a flaming cross in the sky inscribed with these words: “By this sign thou shall conquer.” The next day his army was victorious in an important battle. He believed that the cross was a call to the Christian God.

During his reign, Constantine granted new opportunities to Christians and helped advance the power of the early Catholic Church. At the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, he encouraged discussion about the acceptance of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). He also boosted the political positions and power of bishops within the Roman government.

Even though Constantine had many political and religious successes, his life was filled with controversy and tragedy. Constantine married a woman named Fausta. His eldest son from a previous marriage was named Crispus. Fausta accused Crispus of crimes and claimed that he was planning to seize the throne.

Constantine was so shocked that he had his son killed. Constantine later discovered that Fausta had lied because she wanted her own son to be in line for the throne. He then had Fausta killed.

Modern-day Constantinople

Constantine believed freedom of religion was important for the success of his empire and made sure that Christians could no longer be persecuted. What part of the U.S. Constitution protects freedom of religion?
Rome Falls

Main Idea Rome finally fell when invaders swept through the empire during the A.D. 400s.

Reading Connection How would you feel if a favorite place—a shop, park, or recreation center—was closed after being open for many years? Read to learn how the Romans had to face an even greater loss when their city and empire fell.

Both Diocletian and Constantine failed to save the Roman Empire. When Constantine died in A.D. 337, fighting broke out again. A new emperor called Theodosius (THEE・uh・DOH・shuhs) finally gained control and ended the fighting.

Ruling the empire proved to be difficult. Theodosius decided to divide the empire after his death. In A.D. 395, the Roman Empire split into two separate empires. One was the Western Roman Empire, with its capital at Rome. The other was the Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital at Constantinople.

Rome Is Invaded As Rome declined, it was no longer able to hold back the Germanic tribes on its borders. Many different Germanic groups existed—Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Angles, and Saxons. They came from the forests and marshes of northern Europe.

These Germanic groups were in search of warmer climates and better grazing land for their cattle. They also were drawn by Rome’s wealth and culture. In addition, many were fleeing the Huns, fierce warriors from Mongolia in Asia.

In the late A.D. 300s, the Huns entered Eastern Europe and defeated the Ostrogoths (AHS・truh・GATHHS). The Visigoths, fearing for their own welfare, asked the Eastern Roman emperor for protection. He let them settle just inside the empire’s border. In return they promised to be loyal to Rome.

Before long, trouble broke out between the Visigoths and Romans. The empire forced the Visigoths to buy food at very high prices. The Romans also kidnapped and enslaved many Visigoths.

Finally, the Visigoths rebelled against the Romans. In A.D. 378 they defeated Roman legions at the Battle of Adrianople (AV・dree・uh・NOH・puhl). After that defeat, Rome was forced to surrender land to the Visigoths inside Roman territory.
The Germanic tribes now knew that Rome was not capable of defending itself. More and more Germanic warriors crossed the borders in search of land. In the winter of A.D. 406, the Rhine River in Western Europe froze. Germanic groups crossed the frozen river and entered Gaul, which is today France. The Romans were too weak to force them back across the border.

In A.D. 410 the Visigoth leader Alaric (A·luh·rihk) and his soldiers captured Rome. They burned records and looted the treasury. Rome’s capture shocked the empire’s people. It was the first time Rome had been conquered in 800 years.

Another Germanic group known as the Vandals overran Spain and northern Africa. They enslaved some Roman landowners and drove others away. Then the Vandals sailed to Italy. In A.D. 455 they entered Rome. They spent 12 days stripping buildings of everything valuable and burning them. From these attacks came the English word vandalism, which means “the willful destruction of property.”
Rome Falls  By the mid-A.D. 400s, several Germanic leaders held high posts in Rome’s government and army. In A.D. 476 a Germanic general named Odoacer (OH•duh•WAY•suhr) took control, overthrowing the western emperor, a 14-year-old boy named Romulus Augustulus (RAHM•yuh•luhs aw•GUHS•chah•luhs). After Romulus Augustulus, no emperor ever again ruled from Rome. Historians often use this event to mark the end of the Western Roman Empire.

Odoacer controlled Rome for almost 15 years. Then a group of Visigoths seized the city and killed Odoacer. They set up a kingdom in Italy under their leader, Theodoric (thee•AH•duh•rihk). Elsewhere in Europe, other Germanic kingdoms arose. For example, in the Roman province of Gaul, a Germanic people called the Franks took power in A.D. 486. About 10 years later, Clovis, the Frankish king, converted to Christianity and became a Catholic. Before long, nearly all of the Franks became Catholic, helping to spread Christianity in Europe.

By A.D. 550, the Western Roman Empire had faded away. Many Roman beliefs and practices remained in use, however. For example, Europe’s new Germanic rulers adopted the Latin language, Roman laws, and Christianity. Despite the Western Roman Empire’s fall to Germanic invaders, the Eastern Roman Empire prospered. It became known as the Byzantine Empire and lasted nearly 1,000 more years.

Identify  Which event usually marks the fall of the Western Roman Empire?
The Legacy of Rome

Main Idea: Rome passed on many achievements in government, law, language, and the arts.

Reading Connection: Did you know that the words doctor, animal, circus, and family come from Latin, the Roman language? Read to discover other things we have borrowed from the Romans.

A legacy is something that someone leaves to future generations of people. The Romans left a large legacy. Our world would be very different if the Romans had never existed. Many words in the English language and many of our ideas about government come from the Romans. The same is true for our code of laws and our knowledge about building. Roman rule also allowed the Christian religion to spread.

Roman Ideas and Government Today
Roman ideas about law, as first written in the Twelve Tables, are with us today. We, like the Romans, believe that all people are equal under the law. We expect our judges to...
decide cases fairly, and we consider a person innocent until proven guilty.

Roman ideas about government and citizenship are also important in many countries today. For example, like the early Romans, Americans believe that a republic made up of equal citizens is the best form of government. We also believe that a republic works best if citizens do their duty, participate in government, and work to make their society better.

**Roman Influence on Culture** Today we use the Latin alphabet, expanded from 22 to 26 letters. Latin shaped the languages of Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, and Romania. Many English words also come from Latin. Scientists, doctors, and lawyers still use Latin phrases. Every known species of plant and animal has a Latin name. Today, we also still read the works of Romans such as Virgil, Horace, Livy, Cicero, Suetonius, and Tacitus.

Ancient Rome also left a lasting mark on architecture. We still use concrete for construction, and Roman architectural styles are still seen in public buildings today. When you visit Washington, D.C., or the capital city of most states, you will see capitols with domes and arches inspired by Roman architecture.

**Christianity** As you probably know, Christianity is one of the major religions in the world today. Christianity began in the Roman Empire. When Rome’s government adopted Christianity in the A.D. 300s, it helped the new religion to grow and spread.

**Reading Check** Compare Which aspects of Rome are reflected in present-day cultures?

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**Reading Summary**

**Review the Main Ideas**

- A series of weak emperors, invasions by outsiders, disease, and a number of other factors led to a greatly weakened Roman Empire.
- Numerous invasions by Germanic peoples led to the fall of Rome in A.D. 476.
- Roman ideas about government and Roman architecture are just some of the legacies of ancient Rome.

**What Did You Learn?**

1. What social problems helped cause the empire’s decline?
2. Why did the Roman government use Germanic warriors in its army?

**Critical Thinking**

3. Summarizing Information
   Draw a diagram like the one below. Fill in details about Rome’s legacy. (CA 6RC2.4)

4. Cause and Effect What caused Rome’s economy to weaken? How did inflation affect Rome? (CA H1c.)
5. Describe Who were the Visigoths, and why are they important? (CA H1a.)
6. The Big Ideas What is the influence of Rome’s language and architecture today? (CA 6RC2.3)
7. Persuasive Writing Write an essay explaining what you think is the main reason for the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and what might have been done to prevent it. (CA 6WS1.1; 6WA2.5)