Section Summary

Eastern Europe lies between Central Europe to the west and Russia to the east. Included in this region is the Balkan Peninsula. Both goods and cultural influences traveled along its rivers.

Many ethnic groups settled in Eastern Europe. An ethnic group is a large group of people who share the same language and culture. The West Slavs settled in Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe, while the South Slavs occupied the Balkans. Asian peoples, like the Magyars, as well as Vikings and other Germanic peoples also migrated to Eastern Europe. At times, some groups tried to dominate the region.

Many cultural and religious influences spread to Eastern Europe. Byzantine missionaries brought Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Byzantine culture to the Balkans. German knights and missionaries brought Roman Catholic Christianity to Poland and other areas. In the 1300s, the Ottomans invaded the Balkans and introduced Islam. Jews who were persecuted in Western Europe fled to Eastern Europe, especially to Poland, where their liberties were protected.

During the Middle Ages, Eastern Europe included many kingdoms and small states. The marriage in 1386 of Queen Jadwiga of Poland to Duke Wladyslaw Jagiello of Lithuania made Poland-Lithuania the largest state in Europe. However, power gradually shifted from the monarch to the nobles. The nobles met in a diet, or assembly, where a single noble could block passage of a law. Without a strong central government, Poland-Lithuania declined and eventually disappeared from the map.

The Magyars settled in Hungary and became Roman Catholics. The Hungarian king was forced to sign the Golden Bull of 1222, which strictly limited royal power. The Mongols overran Hungary in 1241, killing half of its people. Although they soon withdrew, the Ottoman Turks ended Hungarian independence in 1526.

Some of the South Slavs who settled in the Balkans became the ancestors of the Serbs. Most Serbs became Orthodox Christians and set up a state based on a Byzantine model. Serbia reached its height in the 1300s but could not withstand the advance of the Ottoman Turks. It was conquered by the Ottomans in 1389.

Review Questions
1. Why did Poland-Lithuania decline?

2. What group ended Hungarian and Serbian independence?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY
What does the word dominate mean in the underlined sentence? The word comes from the Latin word dominus, which means “master” or “lord.” Use this word-origins clue to help you understand what dominate means.

READING SKILL
Recognize Multiple Causes
Jews migrated from Western Europe to Poland for two main reasons. List the two reasons below.