Routes to Power

How land and water shaped kingdoms and trade

SS24.8.5a "Describe how physical geography shaped the growth of medieval African kingdoms and trade with neighboring regions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one mention each of the Sahara, the Sahel, and the Niger River. Circle words that show an effect of each feature on a kingdom or its trade, then number each feature and its matching effect 1, 2, or 3.

Where Routes Met

1. At the southern edge of the Sahara, a trader waits for a camel caravan to reach a watering stop. Crossing the desert was dangerous because water was scarce, so travelers followed routes with wells and oases. North African merchants brought salt across the Sahara; traders from lands farther south supplied gold. The kingdom of Ghana grew near these routes, between the desert and gold-producing areas. Its rulers could charge taxes on goods passing through their territory, gaining wealth from trade with North Africa.

2. South of the Sahara lies the Sahel, a band of grassland where herders could graze animals and farmers could grow crops in suitable places. This land helped support settlements, including those linked to Ghana and later Mali. Farther east, the Niger River helped Mali grow. Its seasonal floods watered fields, and boats could carry food and goods between riverside towns. Timbuktu became a meeting place for river traders and caravans crossing the Sahara, linking Mali to markets in North Africa.

3. Later, Songhai ruled a long stretch of the Niger River, including Gao. River travel helped its rulers move supplies and connect towns, while nearby farmland fed people in those towns. At Gao, traders could transfer goods between boats and desert caravans. Camels carried salt south from North Africa, while gold from regions farther south traveled north through trade networks. The Sahara limited travel to routes with water, but those routes also brought merchants together. By controlling busy river and desert connections, Songhai gained trade income and political power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Sahara shape Ghana's trade with North Africa and help Ghana's rulers gain wealth?

2. How did the Sahel help support the growth of settlements linked to Ghana and Mali?

3. How did the Niger River help Mali's towns grow and trade?

4. Why did Gao's location help Songhai gain trade income and power?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are advising people who plan to build a new trading town at the edge of the Sahel near a river. In 4 or 5 sentences, explain how two physical features could help the town grow, how it could trade with a neighboring region, and one geographic challenge with a practical response.

Routes to Power

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one mention each of the Sahara, the Sahel, and the Niger River. Circle words that show an effect of each feature on a kingdom or its trade, then number each feature and its matching effect 1, 2, or 3. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Sahara shape Ghana's trade with North Africa and help Ghana's rulers gain wealth?	**Scarce water kept caravans on routes with wells and oases. Ghana grew near these routes and taxed goods passing through its territory.**
2	How did the Sahel help support the growth of settlements linked to Ghana and Mali?	**Its grassland provided grazing for herders and places where farmers could grow crops.**
3	How did the Niger River help Mali's towns grow and trade?	**Seasonal floods watered fields, while boats carried food and goods between towns. River trade also helped link Timbuktu to desert caravans.**
4	Why did Gao's location help Songhai gain trade income and power?	**At Gao, traders could move goods between Niger River boats and desert caravans. Songhai gained income and power by controlling those connections.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Build the town beside the river so farmers can use its water and boats can carry goods. The Sahel's grassland could provide grazing for animals brought to market. Traders could send goods toward North Africa and receive salt in return. Because the Sahara has little water, caravans should follow routes with wells and oases.

Accept other passage-supported links between geography, settlement, and trade. For Part 3, look for two distinct physical features, a trade connection, and a practical response to a geographic challenge.