Routes and Roots

Trace how contact spread beliefs and languages across African societies.

SS24.8.5b "Trace the spread of culture, language, and religion among African civilizations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each route or connection that helped a belief or language spread, and circle what spread through it. Give each linked route and result the same number so you can trace their connections.

Different Paths Across Africa

1. At a market in medieval Timbuktu, a merchant might bargain in a local language while a scholar copied an Arabic book. Camel caravans crossed the Sahara, linking West Africa with North African towns. Merchants carried salt and cloth south and gold north; they also brought Islam and Arabic writing. In the Mali Empire, some rulers and town residents adopted Islam. Scholars used Arabic to study and record ideas, but many people continued speaking local languages and following older religious practices. Trade helped new customs travel, yet it did not erase local ones.

2. Far across the continent, ships from Arabia and other Indian Ocean ports stopped at East Africa's coast. In towns such as Kilwa, traders exchanged African gold and ivory for goods brought by sea. Contact with Muslim merchants helped Islam spread in coastal towns. Swahili grew from African Bantu languages and absorbed words from Arabic through these contacts. It became a common language for trade along the coast. Many homes and markets remained rooted in local African traditions, even as mosques and overseas trade became part of town life.

3. Another path began near the Red Sea. Links across that sea connected the kingdom of Aksum with Christian communities beyond Africa. In the fourth century, Aksum's rulers adopted Christianity. Centuries later, Christian communities in Ethiopia's highlands built churches and copied sacred texts in Ge'ez, a language of the region. Monks helped preserve and teach this faith. Christianity there did not arrive through the Sahara caravans or Indian Ocean coastal trade that helped spread Islam elsewhere in Africa. Across these regions, different connections shaped which beliefs and languages spread.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Trace how Islam and Arabic writing reached the Mali Empire. What route carried them, and where did that route connect?

2. Trace how contact along the East African coast shaped Swahili. What brought speakers into contact, and what changed in the language?

3. Trace Christianity from Aksum to later communities in Ethiopia's highlands. What connection helped it reach Aksum, and how was it kept in use?

4. Compare the paths that helped Islam spread in the Mali Empire and in East African coastal towns. How did each path move people or ideas?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write six sentences from an imaginary traveler's notebook describing stops in two regions from the passage. For each stop, trace how a belief or language reached the region, and include a detail showing that local culture remained important.

ANSWER KEY

Routes and Roots

GRADE 8 · SS24.8.5b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each route or connection that helped a belief or language spread, and circle what spread through it. Give each linked route and result the same number so you can trace their connections. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Trace how Islam and Arabic writing reached the Mali Empire. What route carried them, and where did that route connect?	**Camel caravans crossed the Sahara between North African towns and West Africa, bringing Islam and Arabic writing to the Mali Empire.**
2	Trace how contact along the East African coast shaped Swahili. What brought speakers into contact, and what changed in the language?	**Indian Ocean trade brought coastal communities into contact with Arabic speakers. Swahili, which grew from Bantu languages, absorbed Arabic words.**
3	Trace Christianity from Aksum to later communities in Ethiopia's highlands. What connection helped it reach Aksum, and how was it kept in use?	**Links across the Red Sea connected Aksum to Christian communities beyond Africa. Later, highland communities built churches, copied sacred texts in Ge'ez, and had monks teach the faith.**
4	Compare the paths that helped Islam spread in the Mali Empire and in East African coastal towns. How did each path move people or ideas?	**Sahara caravans linked Mali with North African towns by land. Ships and merchants connected East African coastal towns with Arabia and other Indian Ocean ports by sea.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My imaginary notebook opens at a market in Timbuktu. Here, caravans crossing the Sahara helped carry Islam and Arabic writing from North Africa. I hear merchants bargain in a local language while scholars study Arabic books. My next imagined stop is Kilwa on East Africa's coast. Indian Ocean traders helped bring Islam there, and contact with Arabic speakers added words to Swahili. Yet Swahili grew from African Bantu languages, so its use shows that exchange did not replace local culture.

Accept accurate routes and connections stated in the passage, even if students name different examples of what spread. For the notebook, look for two distinct regions, a traced route for each, and evidence of continuing local culture in exactly six sentences.