Before European Contact

Achievements across Africa, 600 to 1300 CE

WH.3.5 "Examine the key achievements of civilizations in Africa prior to European contact."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one achievement in each paragraph, then circle a detail that shows why that achievement mattered.

Kingdoms, Walls, and Ocean Routes

1. At a market in the kingdom of Ghana around 1000 CE, merchants brought salt across the Sahara and gold from regions farther south. Ghana's rulers did not mine all that gold themselves. They built a powerful kingdom along routes linking the goldfields to North African buyers. Officials collected taxes on goods entering and leaving, while armed forces helped keep trade routes under royal control. This system gave rulers resources to support their government and army. It also made Ghana an important meeting point for merchants from different regions, long before Europeans reached West Africa by sea.

2. In the southern African interior, another kind of achievement took shape at Great Zimbabwe. By the 1200s, builders stacked stone without mortar to form walls and enclosures. They used local granite, splitting it into blocks that could be laid in steady courses. These walls surrounded spaces linked to leaders and community life, though historians still debate exactly how every area was used. Cattle herding, farming, and trade supported the settlement. Finds of imported goods show that its people were connected, through trading networks, to the Indian Ocean coast.

3. On the East African coast, Kilwa Kisiwani grew into a busy Swahili trading city during the 1200s. Its merchants exchanged goods from inland Africa, including gold and ivory, for cloth, ceramics, and other products brought by ships crossing the Indian Ocean. The people of Kilwa built mosques and homes using coral stone from the coast. Their Swahili language and culture developed in African coastal communities that also had contacts with merchants from Arabia and elsewhere. Kilwa's buildings and trade show how local skills and long-distance exchange could strengthen a city without European direction.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Ghana's way of managing trade strengthen its government?

2. What does Great Zimbabwe's stone construction show about local building skills? Use one detail from the passage.

3. How did Kilwa's merchants connect inland Africa with places across the Indian Ocean?

4. Compare Ghana's and Kilwa's achievements in trade. How did each place use a different route?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label of 75 to 100 words about two places in the passage. For each place, describe an achievement and explain what it reveals about people's skills or connections. End with a sentence that challenges the idea that these civilizations depended on Europeans to develop.

ANSWER KEY

Before European Contact

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one achievement in each paragraph, then circle a detail that shows why that achievement mattered. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Ghana's way of managing trade strengthen its government?	**Officials taxed goods entering and leaving, giving rulers resources to support the government and army.**
2	What does Great Zimbabwe's stone construction show about local building skills? Use one detail from the passage.	**Builders could work local granite into blocks and stack it in steady courses without mortar.**
3	How did Kilwa's merchants connect inland Africa with places across the Indian Ocean?	**They exchanged inland gold and ivory for goods such as cloth and ceramics brought by ocean-going ships.**
4	Compare Ghana's and Kilwa's achievements in trade. How did each place use a different route?	**Ghana taxed and controlled routes across the Sahara that linked goldfields to North African buyers. Kilwa traded inland African goods through its coastal port with ships crossing the Indian Ocean.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Great Zimbabwe's stone walls show that builders knew how to shape local granite and stack it without mortar. The settlement also received imported goods through trade networks, so its people were connected to places beyond the southern African interior. At Kilwa Kisiwani, merchants exchanged inland gold and ivory for goods carried across the Indian Ocean. Its coral-stone buildings show another use of local materials. These achievements grew from African skills and far-reaching connections, not from European direction.

Accept other accurately supported achievements and effects from the passage. For the museum label, look for two distinct places, an explained achievement for each, and a final sentence that addresses the claim.