Routes and Roots

How geography and trade shaped culture in Mali

7.C.5 "Evaluate the development and impact of culture on the major regions and peoples of the Eastern Hemisphere. Compare cultural traits of major cultural regions and explain how culture can change over time through the process of cultural..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways geography helped societies grow. Circle two cultural practices that spread to Mali through contact with others, then write 1 beside an older practice that continued.

At a River Crossroads

1. In the 1300s, a merchant arriving in Mali might have seen canoes carrying food along the Niger River and caravans crossing the Sahara. The river supported farming and fishing, while overland routes linked Mali to distant markets. Traders exchanged West African gold for salt and other goods. Mali grew wealthy by controlling parts of this trade and collecting taxes. Its location made it a cultural crossroads, too. Goods did not travel alone: people also carried languages, stories, and religious ideas.

2. Islam had spread to West Africa through contact with Muslim traders and scholars. In Mali, some rulers and town residents adopted Islam, while many people continued local religious practices. Mansa Musa, a ruler of Mali, traveled to Mecca in 1324 on a pilgrimage, drawing attention to his kingdom. Mosques and schools in places such as Timbuktu supported Islamic learning. Scholars used Arabic for religious study and writing, while storytellers passed down histories aloud. These traditions existed alongside one another rather than changing all at once.

3. Mali was not the first civilization shaped by geography. In Mesopotamia, farmers used water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to grow crops; cities developed with written records and laws. Mali also depended on food production and organized government, but its crossroads connected it to faraway traders, and its oral histories remained important alongside Arabic writing. The two regions show a shared pattern: people built complex societies where they could grow food and connect with others. Their distinct traditions show that cultural diffusion adds practices without always erasing older ones.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did both the Niger River and the overland routes help Mali grow?

2. How did Islam reach Mali, and what is one way it influenced learning there?

3. What evidence shows that cultural change in Mali did not erase all older traditions?

4. What helped both Mali and Mesopotamia develop complex societies? How did their ways of recording history differ?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a new town beside a river and a busy trade route. In four sentences, explain how its location helps it grow, how travelers change two cultural practices, and one local tradition people keep.

ANSWER KEY

Routes and Roots

GRADE 7 · 7.C.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways geography helped societies grow. Circle two cultural practices that spread to Mali through contact with others, then write 1 beside an older practice that continued. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did both the Niger River and the overland routes help Mali grow?	**The Niger supported farming and fishing. Overland routes brought traders, goods, and tax income.**
2	How did Islam reach Mali, and what is one way it influenced learning there?	**Contact with Muslim traders and scholars helped spread Islam. Mosques and schools supported Islamic learning.**
3	What evidence shows that cultural change in Mali did not erase all older traditions?	**Some people continued local religious practices, and storytellers continued to pass down histories aloud.**
4	What helped both Mali and Mesopotamia develop complex societies? How did their ways of recording history differ?	**Both had food production and organized government. Mesopotamian cities used written records, while Mali kept oral histories alongside Arabic writing.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Seasonal river floods leave rich soil for crops, and traders stop to exchange goods. Merchants teach town leaders a writing system, which leaders use to record agreements. Travelers also share a belief in setting aside a day for prayer, and some families begin to observe it. People still tell old river stories at harvest meals.

Accept plausible four-sentence responses that connect growth to both the river and trade route, describe two cultural changes brought by travelers, and identify a continuing local tradition. For the marking job, accept any two supported geographic advantages and two practices spread through contact.