Timbuktu at the Crossroads

Trace how trade, political power, and learning shaped a city.

AWH.C.11.4 "Examine the influence of the Mali Empire, with attention to the role Timbuktu played in control over West African trade and a center of culture and learning during the Golden Age of Islam."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Read the passage and mark the details that show how Timbuktu connected trade to Mali's influence and to learning.

A City Where Routes Met

1. In the fourteenth century, Timbuktu stood near the Niger River, where routes across the Sahara met routes into the lands to the south. Camel caravans brought salt from desert mines and goods from North Africa. River boats and overland traders carried food and gold from regions farther south. Merchants could exchange goods at Timbuktu instead of making every part of a long journey themselves. After Mali brought the city under its rule in the early 1300s, this meeting place helped the empire connect distant markets. Its location made Timbuktu valuable, but location alone did not make trade secure.

2. Mali's rulers gained influence not by owning every gold mine but by holding important routes and trading towns. They could collect taxes on goods moving through their territory and use some of that revenue to support officials and soldiers. Security mattered to merchants, who risked losing cargo when routes were unsafe. Control of Timbuktu gave Mali a foothold at a meeting point between desert caravans and Niger River traffic. Yet Mali did not command every trader or every route, and its hold on the city changed over time. Trade depended on merchants, local communities, and the empire's power working together.

3. Trade also connected Timbuktu to a wider world of ideas. Muslim merchants and travelers brought books and helped link the city to scholars elsewhere in North Africa and beyond. In the 1300s, Mali's ruler Mansa Musa supported mosque building in Timbuktu after his famous pilgrimage to Mecca. Scholars in the city studied and taught subjects such as Islamic law and Arabic grammar, while scribes copied texts. Money from trade could help people buy books and support teachers, although learning also relied on scholars and patrons. Timbuktu's importance as a center of learning continued after Mali's control ended.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Timbuktu's location help Mali connect distant markets?

2. How could Mali's control of routes and trading towns increase its influence without owning every gold mine?

3. Explain two ways trade could support learning in Timbuktu.

4. Why would it be misleading to say Mali alone created Timbuktu's trade and learning?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine Mali loses control of Timbuktu while trade continues there. Write a 75 to 100 word advisory note to a Mali ruler explaining two likely effects on Mali's trade influence and one possible effect on learning in the city. Use at least three specific details from the passage, and distinguish Mali's loss of control from the city's continued activity.

ANSWER KEY

Timbuktu at the Crossroads

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.11.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Read the passage and mark the details that show how Timbuktu connected trade to Mali's influence and to learning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Timbuktu's location help Mali connect distant markets?	**Timbuktu was near the Niger River where routes from the Sahara met routes from the south, so merchants could exchange goods from both regions there.**
2	How could Mali's control of routes and trading towns increase its influence without owning every gold mine?	**Mali could tax goods moving through its territory and use the revenue to support officials and soldiers.**
3	Explain two ways trade could support learning in Timbuktu.	**Merchants and travelers brought books and connections to other scholars. Money from trade could help people buy books and support teachers.**
4	Why would it be misleading to say Mali alone created Timbuktu's trade and learning?	**Merchants and local communities also sustained trade, while scholars and patrons supported learning. Timbuktu remained a center of learning after Mali's control ended.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Your Majesty, caravans could still bring salt to Timbuktu near the Niger River even if Mali lost the city. But Mali might collect less tax on goods passing through it, leaving less revenue for officials and soldiers. Its ability to protect routes might weaken. Merchants and local communities could continue trading without Mali's rule. Scholars might still teach Islamic law and copy texts, since learning also depended on scholars and patrons. Yet reduced trade income could make books and teachers harder to support.

Accept supported inferences that distinguish Mali's political control from Timbuktu's continuing trade and scholarship. For the advisory note, look for two effects on Mali's trade influence, one possible effect on learning, and at least three accurate passage details.