Across the Sahara

How a desert shaped settlement, exchange, and slavery

MWH.C.1.2 "Explain how geographical and environmental factors impacted settlement and cultural development. Explain different ways in which societies interact across regions (e.g., trade, exploration..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show how geography shaped travel or settlement, circle examples of ideas moving between regions, and write 1 beside a cause of enslavement and 2 beside a reason people bought enslaved captives.

Routes Between Wells

1 In the medieval Sahara, a journey between West Africa and North Africa depended on scattered oases. Caravans traveled from well to well because people and animals needed water. Camels could carry loads across long dry stretches. Towns grew around wells and at the desert's edges, where traders could rest, buy food, and exchange goods.

2 Merchants carried salt south from desert mines and gold north from West Africa. Along these routes, travelers also carried Arabic writing and Islamic beliefs. In cities such as Timbuktu, scholars studied and copied books in Arabic. This spread of ideas did not mean that everyone adopted the same customs; local practices continued alongside new ones.

EXAMPLES OF GOODS MOVING ACROSS THE SAHARA

Direction	Goods
Toward North Africa	Gold from West Africa
Toward West Africa	Salt from desert mines

3 Caravans also transported enslaved people. Before the 1400s, warfare and raids could lead to captives being sold, while buyers sought labor for households, farms, or armies. Enslavement existed in many regions, not only along Saharan routes. Trade connected distant societies, but those connections could spread knowledge and goods while also sustaining the forced movement of people.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did water sources shape both caravan travel and the location of towns?

2. How did contact along the trade routes affect cultural life in Timbuktu without making every community the same?

3. Use the table and passage to compare what moved north and south. What else spread along the same routes?

4. How did warfare and the demand for labor each contribute to slavery before the 1400s?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a medieval town at a river crossing, not in the Sahara. In four sentences, explain why people settle there, how contact with another region changes one cultural practice, and how war and demand for labor could lead to slavery before 1400.

Across the Sahara

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that show how geography shaped travel or settlement, circle examples of ideas moving between regions, and write 1 beside a cause of enslavement and 2 beside a reason people bought enslaved captives. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did water sources shape both caravan travel and the location of towns?	**Caravans traveled between oases to reach water, and towns grew around wells where traders could stop.**
2	How did contact along the trade routes affect cultural life in Timbuktu without making every community the same?	**Arabic writing and Islamic beliefs spread along the routes, and scholars in Timbuktu studied books in Arabic. Local practices also continued.**
3	Use the table and passage to compare what moved north and south. What else spread along the same routes?	**Gold moved north, while salt moved south. Arabic writing and Islamic beliefs also spread along the routes.**
4	How did warfare and the demand for labor each contribute to slavery before the 1400s?	**Warfare and raids produced captives who could be sold, while buyers sought enslaved labor for households, farms, or armies.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I place my town beside a river crossing because boats can bring food and goods there. Merchants arriving from another region share a way of writing that some townspeople begin to use. After a nearby war, captives are forced to work rather than return home. Buyers seeking labor for farms purchase some captives, linking warfare and economic demand to slavery before 1400.

Accept different plausible river-crossing settlements and cultural changes. The response should connect a geographic advantage to settlement, contact to cultural diffusion, and both warfare and labor demand to slavery.