

Empires and Rivers

Locate three West African societies and identify what made each one important.

USI.4.a "identifying the location and characteristics of West African societies of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai before European exploration;"

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline phrases that tell where Ghana, Mali, and Songhai were located. Circle details that describe a characteristic of each society, so you can connect each empire to its place and strengths.

West African Empires Before European Exploration

- ① Before Europeans explored West Africa's coast, powerful societies grew south of the Sahara Desert. Ghana, the earliest of the three, stood between the Sahara and gold fields to its south, in parts of today's Mauritania and Mali. Ghana's rulers taxed traders who carried gold, salt, and other goods across the desert. Its capital, Kumbi Saleh, was an important trading town.
- ② Mali rose farther southwest of Ghana during the 1200s. Its heartland lay along the upper Niger River, in much of present-day Mali. Under Sundiata, Mali united many peoples. Later, Mansa Musa ruled a wealthy empire. Gold trade helped Mali grow, while river travel and camel caravans connected its towns with North Africa. Timbuktu became a busy center of trade and learning.
- ③ Songhai began near the Niger River bend, with Gao as its early center. It later took control of Mali's lands and became the largest of these three empires. Songhai's leaders supported trade across the Sahara, and its farmers used the Niger River's water. Gao and Timbuktu became centers for trade and learning. In 1591, an army from Morocco defeated Songhai.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 Where was Ghana located in relation to the Sahara Desert and the gold fields?

2 What two ways did Mali's towns connect with North Africa?

3 Which two cities became centers for trade and learning in Songhai?

4 What natural feature was near Songhai's early center, and how did Songhai farmers use it?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write three sentences that compare Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. Include one location detail and one characteristic for each empire, and use the word *while* in at least one sentence.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline phrases that tell where Ghana, Mali, and Songhai were located. Circle details that describe a characteristic of each society, so you can connect each empire to its place and strengths. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Where was Ghana located in relation to the Sahara Desert and the gold fields?	Ghana was south of the Sahara Desert and north of the gold fields.
2	What two ways did Mali's towns connect with North Africa?	They were connected by river travel and camel caravans.
3	Which two cities became centers for trade and learning in Songhai?	Gao and Timbuktu.
4	What natural feature was near Songhai's early center, and how did Songhai farmers use it?	The Niger River was near Songhai's early center. Farmers used its water.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Ghana lay between the Sahara and southern gold fields, while Mali's heartland lay along the upper Niger River. Ghana taxed desert traders, while Mali grew wealthy from gold trade. Songhai began near the Niger River bend and supported trade across the Sahara.

Accept accurate location descriptions and characteristics from the passage, including clear paraphrases. For the open response, check that all three empires have a location detail and a characteristic, and that at least one sentence uses *while* correctly.