

Time Travel in West Africa
World History
Honors

Due: _____

100 points

“Timbuktu is widely used to describe a place extremely far away and regarded by many as a myth. In reality, it is a city in Mali, West Africa, of great historical importance that in 1988 was designated a World Heritage Site.” – American Memory at the Library of Congress

Trade has played an important role in the economy of West Africa since very early times. As early as 300 CE, camel caravans carried salt from mines in the Sahara Desert to trading centers along the Niger River in present-day Mali. Their mission was to exchange the sale for the gold that was mined in forests near the headwaters of the Niger. West Africa’s first kingdom, Ghana, became wealthy and powerful because it controlled the trade routes and commercial activities in its region.

The spread of Islam across North Africa in the 7th century dramatically increased trans-Saharan trade. As the market expanded, strategically sited towns became major centers of commerce, welcoming merchants from distant lands.

Hop in the time capsule and travel back to ancient times! Look around! You’re in the Moroccan city of Sijilmasa, an important center of trade. You are disguised as a Muslim merchant, the proud owner of 8 camels. You are about to join up with a trade caravan and begin the long trek south across the Sahara Desert to West Africa. Your disguise will enable you to get a first-hand view of trading activities in ancient West Africa.

Your task is to discover answers to the following questions:

1. What were West Africa’s main products of trade?
2. How did trade develop in ancient West Africa?
3. How did the kingdom of Ghana become very wealthy?
4. What is Islam, and why did it spread across Africa?
5. How did Muslim merchants influence the development of trade in West Africa?
6. What caused the decline of Timbuktu, and how was it “rediscovered” by Europeans?

Each response must be at least 1-2 paragraphs (5-8 sentences) and should be typed and double spaced. Make sure to include a bibliography on a separate page (but not as a separate document) showing where you got your information.