Setting the Stage: Trade has played an important role in the economy of West Africa since very early times. As early as 300 AD, 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 salt 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. Later, 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. Part of their exchange and encounter meant increasing interactions with Muslims from Northern Africa.

Skills: - reading for main ideas and supporting details, reading maps and keys, critical thinking, finding evidence in texts

Directions: Today we will work in groups. Your group will be split into 3 sections. Each section will complete a different activity and then report back to the larger group.

I will complete (circle your assigned section) ACTIVITY 1 ACTIVITY 2 ACTIVITY 3

Learning Targets: Answer these when your group comes back together:

- List the major products and trade routes of ancient West Africa

- Explain how the kingdom of Ghana became wealthy

- Define the key concepts of Islam

- Show/explain how Islam spread from Arabia to Africa

- Describe how Muslim merchants contributed to the expansion of West African trade
Concluding Activity

Pretend you are standing are in a bustling trading center in Ghana. What products are being traded? (Remember the “silent trade” of gold, European goods, Arabian goods) What are the merchants quibbling about? What are the smells in the air? The sounds? Who is there?

Choices: Write a cinquain poem OR draw a picture about your experience and give it a creative title.

Poem Instructions
Write a Cinquain poem that summarizes a person, term or concept from the activity that fits the prompt above: You have the formula and example below. **YOU choose the term or concept to write the poem about.**

### Example Poem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cinquain format</th>
<th>Timbuktu (your poem!)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Original Term or Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative, Resourceful</td>
<td>Two Adjectives (describing words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivating, creating, smiling</td>
<td>Three “ing” verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always thinking, Always learning</td>
<td>Four-word sentence or phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>Word that has the same meaning as (or relates to) the original term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Illustration Instructions
Create an illustration the fits the prompt above. Use the knowledge gained in this activity to help you imagine what a busy Medieval trading center like Timbuktu would have looked like. Include a creative and descriptive title to let your audience know what they’re looking at!

Title:
Activity 1: The Salt Mines of the Sahara

Introduction: The main stopping point of caravans moving south across the Saharan Desert was the salt mines of Targhaza. In this activity, you will find out how the salt was obtained and why it was so important in the West African trade networks.

Part A. Map-Geography: “I can locate places on a map and read the map key to identify features on the map.”

Trans-Saharan Gold Trade 7th century-14th century
The shaded portion of this map indicates the empire of Mali in the fourteenth century, and the dashed lines trace the main trans-Saharan routes of the period.

Complete on the map or answer the question:
1. Locate the cities Targhaza, and Timbuktu and the map. Circle them in blue.
2. Trace the empire of Mali on the map in brown.
3. What is located in Taghaza?
   ______________________________________

Part B. Reading Texts “I can identify main ideas and supporting details in simple texts.”
Read the texts that follow and answer questions related to each.

The Topic: SALT
Salt is a clear, brittle mineral that contains the elements of sodium and chlorine. Salt forms clear, cube-shaped crystals. Impurities can cause salt to appear white, gray, yellow, or red. Table salt also appears to be white.

All salt deposits began as salty water; brine from seas, oceans, and salt lakes. Even underground salt deposits were formed by the evaporation of seawater, thousands and thousands of years ago. In ancient times, salt was found mainly in the dry coastal areas like those surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

Since ancient times, salt has been used to flavor and preserve food. Early trade routes and many of the first roads were established for transporting salt. Many ancient civilizations levied taxes on salt. Salt was considered so precious that it was traded ounce for ounce for gold. In ancient China, coins were made of salt. In the Mediterranean regions, salt cakes were used as money. Ancient cities such as Genoa, Pisa, and Venice became salt market centers. By the fifteenth century, salt was obtained by boiling brine from salt springs, and many towns and cities in Europe located near such sources...


Questions:
1. What are the main uses of salt?
2. **Underline in the text** and write out one direct quote that explains why salt was so valuable in ancient times and the Middle Ages.

---

**Saharan Salt Trade**

Salt is produced in the Sahara and has been for over 2½ thousand years, mentions of the mineral were found in writing by Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian, in several pieces. It is mined from underground—solid blocks are chopped and cut from around 8 metres below the surface in places such as Taoudenni. It is also made by evaporation and can be found in the regions around Fachi and Bilma in the Ténéré desert.

The photographs below illustrate the evaporative pools of Taggiddan and Tessoum. The salt industry is a family one for the Kanuri. It is then traded across Africa by the Tuareg. Camel caravans of up to 8,000 camels are involved.

Salt is an essential part of the human metabolism. The body needs salt to replace what lost through evaporation (sweat) and excretion (in urine). People whose diet is animal based (meat and milk) can survive without additional salt intake. Those who are vegetarians cannot, and must supplement their diet with added salt.

from: http://www.the153club.org/salt.html

---

**Question:**

3. Circle the words that best describe ways of obtaining salt in the Sahara (as described in the above text)

- on camels
- grows on trees
- mining
- evaporation
In Sahara, Salt-Hauling Camel Trains Struggle On

“...Arriving at the salt mines, we encountered a working mine that appeared from out of the sandy haze of the desert, a mythical scene from the pages of the Bible. The mine was cut out of an ancient seabed, an empty sandy region that stretches in every direction. Several hundred men work the mines as indentured slaves, chipping away at the ground beneath the Earth in musty, salt-choked caves.

Once the salt has been cut from the mine, slabs are loaded onto camel caravans. The caravans head south towards Timbuktu, traveling nearly two weeks through featureless sand dunes that warp the mind’s depth perceptions. What appears to be close is in fact on the horizon. What appears to be miles away, becomes a small rock that one discovers yards from where you stood....

Upon arrival in Timbuktu, the salt is passed onto local merchants and distributed down river along the Niger to the largest salt market in West Africa: the river town of Mopti. There the salt blocks are cut into smaller slabs then sold throughout West Africa, a rich and scarce commodity borne of the desert...”

Question:
4. Who mined the salt in ancient times? ____________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________

On the Edge, Timbuktu

“...Travelers have been coming for centuries to Timbuktu, now part of the West African country of Mali. It’s a resting point for those emerging from the desert, or heading into it. [In the trade of salt,] Mali is the starting point. Camel caravans carrying the mineral operate in the desert there as they have for a thousand years. Situated at the southern edge of the Sahara in Mali is the legendary city of Timbuktu. A millennium ago, caravans with gold, slaves and spices left Timbuktu to cross the desert to reach the Mediterranean. They would return with goods from Europe, and with salt from Saharan mines -- and with scholars and books.

The salt mined in the Sahara and carried on the backs of camels for trade in Timbuktu helped turn the city into a medieval intellectual center. The traders need accountants, and they turned to Islamic scribes, who were known as trustworthy. The city became a center for learning and today Malian historians are trying to preserve the city's ancient libraries, which are filled with hundreds of thousands of manuscripts, covering subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, Islamic sciences and treaties. This is just one example of a vanishing cultural legacy that Davis and Rainier have come to document...”


Question:
5. Explain how each of the places/regions below played a role in the trade of salt.

Timbuktu:

Europe:

Middle East:
Activity 2: Ghana Corners the Gold Market

Introduction: The salt that was brought down from the Sahara was usually traded for gold. The gold was mined in the forests of Guinea, near the source of the Niger, and carried downstream to the markets along the Niger in dugout canoes. Many local merchants became quite wealthy. Ghana, West Africa’s first kingdom, depended upon income from trade. It became so rich it was known as the Land of Gold.

Part A. Map-Geography: “I can locate places on a map and read the map key to identify features on the map.”

Complete on the map or answer the question:
1. Locate the features on the map
   - salt mines-shade the area in blue
   - goldfields-shade the area in gold

2. Location: Identify cities
   - What city or cities are near the salt mines:
   - What city or cities are near the goldfields?

Part B. Reading Texts “I can identify main ideas and supporting details in simple texts.”

Directions: Read the three short texts that follow and answer questions related to each. As you read look for the following examples and use the appropriate annotation symbol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When you identify...</th>
<th>use this annotation symbol:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>products Ghana traded (export)</td>
<td>underline it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Empires of Western Sudan: Ghana
(shaded section of map is the Ghana Empire, 11th century)
Famous to North Africans as the "Land of Gold," Ghana was said to possess sophisticated methods of administration and taxation, large armies, and a monopoly over notoriously well-concealed gold mines. The king of the Soninke people who founded Ghana never fully embraced Islam, but good relations with Muslim traders were fostered. Ghana’s preeminence faded toward the end of the eleventh century, when its power was broken by a long struggle with the Almoravids led by Abdullah ibn Yasin. Ghana subsequently fell to the expanding Soso kingdom.

BBC-Story of Africa: Ghana-Gold & Trade
“...GOLD
What is clear, is that the Empire derived power and wealth from gold. And the introduction of the camel in the Trans-Saharan trade boosted the amount of goods that could be transported.

Most of our knowledge of Ghana comes from Arab writers. Al-Hamdani, for example, describes Ghana as having the richest gold mines on earth. These were situated at Bambuk, on the upper Senegal River. The Soninke also sold slaves, salt and copper, in exchange for textiles, beads and finished goods. The capital of Kumbi Saleh became the focus of all trade, with a systematic form of taxation. Later Audaghust was another commercial centre.

TRADE
The route taken by traders of the Maghreb to Ghana would have started in North Africa in Tahert, sweeping down through Sijilimasa in Southern Morocco. From there the trail went south and inland, roughly running parallel with the coast. Then it curved round to the south east through Awdaghust, finally ending up in Kumbi Saleh - the royal town of Ghana.

ISLAM
Inevitably traders brought Islam with them. Initially, the Islamic community at Kumbi Saleh remained a separate community some distance away from the king's palace. It had its own mosques and schools. But, the king retained his traditional beliefs. He drew on the book-keeping and literary skills of Muslim scholars to help run the administration of the territory. The state of Takrur to the west had already adopted Islam as its official religion and evolved ever closer trading ties with North Africa...


Kingdom of Ghana: Trans-Saharan Trade
When the king was not busy enforcing his power among the people, he was spreading it internationally through trade. At its peak, Ghana was chiefly bartering gold, ivory, and slaves for salt from Arabs and horses, cloth, swords, and books from North Africans and Europeans.

As salt was worth its weight in gold, and gold was so abundant in the kingdom, Ghana achieved much of its wealth through trade with the Arabs. Islamic merchants traveled over two months through the desert to reach Ghana and "do business." They were taxed for both what they brought in and what they took out.
With this system, it is no wonder that Ghana got rich quickly. The wealth that the kingdom acquired did not, however, serve in its favor forever. Competition from other states in the gold trade eventually took its toll.

Questions:

1. Besides gold, what are some of the other products traded in Ghana? Circle all that match the details in the texts above:
   - slaves
   - silver
   - pepper
   - copper
   - salt
   - birds
   - beads
   - chocolate
   - potatoes
   - finished goods
   - fabrics (textiles)

2. How did the ruler of Ghana make a large profit? Describe two ways:
   - Trade:
   - Tax:

3. Describe Ghana’s relationship with Muslim traders in 3-5 sentences. Use at least one direct quote from the sources above in your answer.

   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

History of “Silent Trade”

Gold was so abundant in West Africa that ordinary people adorned themselves in it making the area famous for its wealth. To protect this wealth the location of the gold mines was kept as a well-guarded secret.

Trade took place far from the gold mines at a place along the Niger River. It was there that traders bartered by “silent trade.” Arab and African traders brought salt from the north and upon arriving at the trading place they would spread out their goods and announce their presence by beating on a drum called a deba. They would retreat and traders bearing gold would arrive laying out amounts of gold next to the salt or other goods as payment and then depart.

When the first group returned, if the amount of gold was sufficient they accepted it and left. If not, they would leave everything untouched and wait for more gold to be put out.

Question:

1. What might have been the reasons for the practice of “silent trade”? ________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
Activity 3: Muslim Merchants Flock to Mali

Introduction: The expansion of Islam across North Africa in the 7th century led to a great increase in West African commercial activities, as Muslim merchants became actively involved in the trans-Saharan trade routes.

Part A. Reading Texts/Review of Islam: “I can identify main ideas and supporting details in simple texts.” “I can use prior knowledge to help me answer questions.”

Introduction to Islam

Today, about 1.5 billion people practice Islam. Islam is an Arabic word that means "surrender to God." Believers in Islam are called Muslims, or "those who surrender." Muslims adhere to the teaching of Muhammad, who Muslims believe was the last of a series of holy prophets that included Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

Mohammad lived about 600 CE in what we now call Saudi Arabia. Mohammad was a merchant by trade, but often he visited a cave to think. According to Islamic tradition, an angel began to appear in the cave. The angel presented Mohammad with a series of messages. When Muhammad told people about the messages, he became well known in his area. Eventually, Mohammad’s followers collected the messages and gathered them into a book known as the Quran. The Quran is the holy book of Islam. The Quran has been translated into many languages, but many Muslims believe that the only true version of the Quran is written in Arabic. This is why the Arabic language spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Often non-Arab Muslims will learn Arabic as a second language.

The Islamic house of worship is a mosque. Muslims gather in mosques on Friday afternoon for prayers. The two primary branches of Islam are Sunni and Shia. The branches formed after the death of Muhammad about a disagreement over who should become caliph. The caliph is the leader of the faith. 85% of Muslims belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The Shia comprise the majority of the population of Iran southern Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan and include a substantial minority of the population in several Muslim nations.

Mecca is a holy city to Muslims because it is the site of the Kaaba, a small shrine that Muslims believe to be a sacred site. Muslims orient themselves toward the Kaaba during their daily prayers. Every Muslim who makes the pilgrimage to Mecca walks around the Kaaba seven times.

from: http://www.mrdowling.com/605-islam.html
Questions:

1. Define or describe the significance of the following words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qur'an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecca</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part B. Map-Geography: “I can locate places on a map and read the map key to identify features on the map.”

Directions: Read the text below to help you complete the map activity.

**Birth of Islam-Expansion of the Empire**

Although Muhammad died in 632, his followers, led by a series of four caliphs (Arabic: *khalifa*, "successor") known as the Rightly Guided, continued to spread the message of Islam. Under their command, the Arab armies carried the new faith and leadership from the Arabian Peninsula to the shores of the Mediterranean and to the eastern reaches of Iran. The Arabs conquered Syria, Palestine, and Egypt from the Byzantine empire, while Iraq and Iran, the heart of the Sasanian empire, succumbed to their forces. Here in these lands, Islam fostered the development of a religious, political, and cultural commonwealth and the creation of a global empire.

**On the map below, identify the expansion of Islam from Arabia.**

1. Circle Mecca in blue.
2. Shade the places name in “Birth of Islam-Expansion of the Empire” in red.
Part C. Reading Texts: “I can identify main ideas and supporting details in simple texts.”

Trans-Saharan Gold Trade: Gold Trade and Ancient Ghana
Around the fifth century, thanks to the availability of the camel, Berber-speaking people began crossing the Sahara Desert. From the eighth century onward, annual trade caravans would follow the same routes to trade. Gold, sought from the western and central Sudan, was the main commodity (item) of the trans-Saharan trade. The traffic in gold was spurred by the demand for and supply of coinage.
from: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/gold/hd_gold.htm

Questions:
1. Why did people in the north want the African gold?
   a. because they wanted it  
   b. to make jewelry  
   c. to make weapons  
   d. to make coins/money

Story of Africa: Islam
According to Arab oral tradition, Islam first came to Africa with Muslim refugees fleeing persecution in the Arab Peninsula. This was followed by a military invasion, some seven years after the death of the prophet Mohammed in 639. It quickly spread West from Alexandria (Egypt) in North Africa, reducing the Christians to pockets in Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia.

Islam came to root along the East African coast some time in the 8th century, as part of a continuing dialogue between the people on the East coast and traders from the Persian Gulf and Oman.

In the early centuries of its existence, Islam in Africa had a dynamic and turbulent history, with reforming movements and dynasties clashing and succeeding each other. Gaining power depended on securing trade routes into gold-producing areas in Sub-Saharan Africa. Islamic rulers expanded north (into Europe) as well as south (farther into Africa). In the last quarter of the 11th century (the 1000s), Islam dominated the Mediterranean world.
West Africa
Islam first came to West Africa as a slow and peaceful process, spread by Muslim traders and scholars. The early journeys across the Sahara were done in stages. Goods passed through chains of Muslim traders, purchased, finally, by local non-Muslims at the southern-most end of the route. The kings of Ghana in the 11th century were not Muslims, but Muslims played a crucial role in their government. By the 14th century the most powerful kingdom in West Africa was Mali under the leadership of Sundiata. One of his successors, Mansa Musa, made a celebrated hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca. His entourage was so huge and luxuriously dressed, and carrying such vast amounts of gold, that he became the talk of the Muslim world. As well as being very prosperous, Mali became a great seat of learning renowned throughout the Muslim world. Though some leaders and their people converted, the majority of the people did not convert to Islam until the 18th century.


Ancient Ghana
“...ISLAM
Inevitably traders brought Islam with them. Initially, the Islamic community at Kumbi Saleh remained a separate community some distance away from the king's palace. It had its own mosques and schools. But, the king retained his traditional beliefs. He drew on the book-keeping and literary skills of Muslim scholars to help run the administration of the territory. The state of Takrur to the west had already adopted Islam as its official religion and evolved ever closer trading ties with North Africa.

MUSLIMS IN ANCIENT GHANA: Taken from an account by geographer Al-Bakri who lived from 1014-1094.
"The city of Ghana consists of two towns situated on a plain. One of these towns, which is inhabited by Muslims, is large and possesses twelve mosques in one of which they assemble for the Friday prayer. There are salaried imams and muezzins, as well as jurists and scholars. The king's town is six miles distant from this one...

The king has a palace and a number of domed dwellings all surrounded with an enclosure like a city wall. Around the king's town are domed buildings and groves and thickets where the sorcerers of these people, men in charge of the religious cult, live. In them too are their idols and the tombs of their kings."

from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/4chapter1.shtml

1. Did Islam coexist peacefully with local tribal religions? Circle

   YES  or  No

2. Choose one direct quote from the text(s) to support your answer: _____________________________

   _______________________________________

   _______________________________________

3. Do you think there was pressure for the African rulers to convert to Islam? Why or why not?

   _______________________________________

   _______________________________________
4. How and why did Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula to Northern Africa? From Northern Africa to Western Africa?

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

Use this map to draw a visual of the spread of Islam

Arabian Peninsula (Mecca) → Egypt → Northern Africa → Western Africa

for teachers- lesson activities and questions adapted from: