|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **LESSON 1**  **Physical Geography of West Africa**  **ESSENTIAL QUESTION:*How does physical geography influence the way people live?*** | |
|  | |
| *West Africa has a varied landscape. Its vast grasslands are bounded on the north by the world’s largest desert and on the south by coastal rain forests. West Africa provides an example of how cultures adapt to different climates and landforms.*  **Landforms and Bodies of Water**  ***In what ways do major rivers contribute to the economies of West African countries?***  West Africa is a land of broad contrasts. Many of the countries of the region have Atlantic coastlines. Four places in the region—Cape Verde, St. Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha—are islands in the Atlantic. Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso are landlocked countries, or countries entirely enclosed by land. The southern reaches of the Sahara extend into the northern regions of the steppe, and savannas merge into rain forests in the south.  **Landforms**  Erosion has worn most of the land of West Africa into a rolling plateau that slopes to sea level on the coasts. West Africa has no major mountain ranges, but it has highland regions and isolated mountains. The Air, also known as the Air Massif, is a group of mountains in central Niger, along the southern reaches of the Sahara. The livestock of the Tuareg people graze in the fertile valleys between the mountains of the Air Massif. The Tibesti Mountains, located mostly in the northwestern part of Chad, have the highest elevations in West Africa. The highest peak is Emi Koussi, an extinct volcano standing 11,204 feet (3,415 m) above sea level. |  |

Southeast of the Tibesti Mountains, near Chad’s eastern border, is an arid desert plateau region called the Ennedi. There are abundant wild game animals in the Ennedi. These animals attract a small population of seminomadic people who live here with their livestock during the rainy season. The Jos Plateau in central Nigeria is mostly open grassland and farmland.

In central Guinea is a highland region of savanna and deciduous forest known as the Fouta Djallon. It extends southeast to become the Guinea highlands, a humid, densely forested region.

**Bodies of Water**

The Niger River, West Africa’s longest and most important river, originates at an elevation of 2,800 feet (853 m) in the Guinea highlands. It flows northeast toward the Sahara. Just beyond the town of Mopti in Mali, the Niger River enters the “inland delta.” This is an area where the river spreads out across the relatively flat land into many creeks, marshes, and lakes that are connected to the river by channels. During the rainy season, the area floods completely. In the dry season, however, the waters recede, leaving fertile farmland.

As the Niger flows past Timbuktu, along the southern edges of the Sahara, the inland delta ends and the river returns to a single channel. As it flows through Niger and Nigeria, it joins its most important tributary, the Benue River, which doubles its **volume** of water. Where the Niger River reaches the Gulf of Guinea, it forms the Niger delta. This large area is a great **basin**, a lower area of land drained by a river and its tributaries. Along its 2,600-mile (4,184-km) course, the Niger provides water for irrigation and hydroelectric power. It is the main source of Mali’s fishing industry, and it serves as an important route for transporting crops and goods.

The Senegal River rises in the Fouta Djallon in Guinea. Then it flows northwest to the Atlantic Ocean. For about 515 miles (829 km), the course of the Senegal River marks the border between the countries of Mauritania and Senegal.

The Black Volta River and the White Volta River originate in Burkina Faso and flow into Ghana. At a point near where the two rivers once met is the Akosombo Dam, which forms one of the world’s largest artificial lakes—Lake Volta. The dam provides most of Ghana’s electrical needs, and the lake provides water for irrigation.

Lake Chad covers portions of Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon along the south part of the Sahara. The size of the lake varies from season to season, depending on the rainfall that feeds its tributaries. A series of droughts helped cause Lake Chad to shrink. Another cause was the amount of water taken from the lake and from the rivers that feed it to use for irrigating crops. People may be taking more water than water systems will be able to replace.

***Describing*** Describe the landforms of West Africa.

**Climate**

***How do amounts of rainfall differ throughout West Africa?***

The climate of West Africa is diverse, from the harsh, arid Sahara in the north to the lush, coastal rain forests in the south. In between are vast stretches of grassland—the dry, semiarid Sahel and the lush, rainier savanna. The key characteristic of the climates throughout the region is its two distinct seasons: the wet season and the dry season.

**Dry Zones**

The Sahel is a semiarid region that runs between the arid Sahara and the savanna. Beginning in northern Senegal and stretching west into East Africa, the Sahel has a short rainy season. Annual rainfall ranges from only 8 inches to 20 inches (20 cm to 51 cm). This climate supports low grasses, thorny shrubs, and a few trees. The grasses are plentiful enough to support grazing livestock, such as cattle, sheep, camels, and pack oxen. It is important, however, that the herds do not grow too large. Too many animals leads to overgrazing and permanent damage to the grasslands. Overgrazing and too much farming result in desertification, the process in which semiarid lands become drier and more desert-like.

North of the Sahel is the Sahara. Daytime high temperatures are often more than 100°F (38°C) in the summer, though temperatures at night can drop by as much as 50°F. The few shrubs and other small plants that live in the Sahara must go for long periods without water. Some plants send long roots to water sources deep underground. After a rainfall, plants that have waited many months will suddenly flower, carpeting the desert with color.

From late November until mid-March, the dry, hot wind known as the**harmattan** blows through the Sahara with intensity. It carries thick clouds of dust that can extend hundreds of miles over the Atlantic Ocean, where it settles on the decks of ships. Harmattan winds contribute to the process of desertification.

**Wet Zones**

South of the Sahel, rains are more plentiful and feed the fuller, lusher plant life of the savanna. The savanna has two seasons—rainy and dry. The rainy season usually extends from April to September, and the rest of the year is dry. Annual rainfall reaches between 31 inches and 59 inches (79 cm and 150 cm). In some locations, though, annual rainfall can be as little as 20 inches (51 cm). This wide variability in rainfall makes human activity difficult.

Farther to the south, tropical rain forests cover the land. The rain forests, known for their broad-leaved evergreen trees and rich biodiversity, receive plenty of rain. Rain forests in Sierra Leone and Liberia can receive as much as 200 inches (508 cm) of rain per year.

***Identifying*** What are the two major grassland areas of West Africa?

**Resources**

***How do West African countries provide for their energy needs?***

West Africa contains many resources, but some countries lack the money to develop their resources into industries.

**Energy Resources**

Nigeria is the region’s biggest producer of petroleum. In 2010 Nigeria ranked among the top 10 in the world, producing oil at a rate of almost 2.5 million barrels per day. The petroleum industry has not been as quick to tap the country’s vast natural gas reserves.

Chad has oil fields in the area north of Lake Chad. Benin has offshore oil fields, as does Ghana. The oil in Ghana was considered too expensive to extract until increases in oil prices made it profitable to drill.

Ghana’s main sources of electricity are two dams on the Volta River: the Akosombo Dam and the dam at Kpong. The Organization for the Development of the Senegal River, which is made up of several countries of the region, manages the river’s resources, including hydroelectric stations. The Senegal River provides about half of the energy used in Mauritania today. Hydroelectric power is vital to meeting the energy needs in Togo and Nigeria.

**Other Resources**

The gold trade attracted Portuguese explorers, who first visited the region in 1471. For centuries afterward, the country was simply called the Gold Coast and Europeans lived and worked there, building trading posts and forts. Gold mining remains important to the economy of Ghana, along with the mining of diamonds, manganese, and bauxite. Ghana also has unmined deposits of limestone and iron ore.

Gold is mined in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria, too. Togo mines phosphate and limestone, which are used as fertilizers and to make paper, glass, paint, and other everyday products. Togo also has promising gold deposits, but so far no gold-mining industry. Niger has a salt-mining industry. In addition to its important gold industry, Mali also mines salt and limestone, but many of Mali’s mineral resources are untapped. These include iron ore and manganese, which are important in making steel.

Mauritania mines copper and iron ore, but many of the iron ore deposits have been depleted. Nigeria mines iron ore, tin, limestone, and small quantities of other minerals. Burkina Faso is one of the world’s leading sources of manganese. Benin has deposits of iron ore, limestone, chromium ore, gold, and marble. Benin is a leader in the production of hardwoods, but most of the rain forests where this wood comes from have been cleared.

***Analyzing*** Why is Benin’s hardwood industry at risk? What is another industry in this region that has faced a similar problem?

**Reviewing Vocabulary**

1. How can the*harmattan* winds influence climate and vegetation?

**Answering the Guiding Questions**

1. ***Describing*** Why has Lake Chad changed in size over time?
2. ***Determining Central Ideas*** Why is desertification an issue in West Africa?
3. ***Identifying*** Why did the government in Ghana change its mind about its offshore oil deposits?
4. ***Informative/Explanatory Writing*** Explain how desertification occurs and why it is such an important environmental issue in West Africa.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **LESSON 2**  **History of West Africa**  **ESSENTIAL QUESTION:*How do new ideas change the way people live?*** | |
|  | |
| *West Africa was under the control of a series of wealthy trading kingdoms until the late 1800s, when Europeans seized control of their lands. Regaining their independence from Europe and establishing themselves in the modern world has been a challenge.*  **Ancient Times**  ***What opportunities did Muslims from North Africa see in West Africa?***  Early civilizations in West Africa learned to thrive in a variety of climates and landscapes, from the Sahara to the tropical rain forests. Throughout its history, the region was open to many migrations and invasions because of its resources.  **Ancient Herders**  We think of the Sahara as a hot, intensely dry place where few living things can survive. Ten thousand years ago, the Sahara was a much different place. Rock drawings from 8000 B.C. depict a world that looks more like a savanna than a desert. Drawings include lakes, forests, and large animals not seen in the Sahara in modern times: ostriches, giraffes, elephants, antelope, and rhinoceroses. Seminomadic people herded cattle and hunted wild animals. As the climate grew drier, fewer species of plants and animals survived the harsh environment. Many people moved south, following the retreat of the grasslands and the rain. During this period of desertification, people discovered that camels can survive without water for longer periods than cattle, sheep, or goats. Camels also can carry heavy loads for long distances. They were perfect domesticated animals for desert dwellers. |  |

**Movement of People**

The Bantu people inhabited West Africa in ancient times. They had developed farming as early as 2000 B.C. A vast migration of Bantu people out of West Africa began around 1000 B.C. and continued for hundreds of years. Their farming practices allowed them to expand rather easily into areas occupied by hunter-gatherer groups. The Bantu became the dominant population in most of East and South Africa. The Bantu might have reached the East African coast as early as the A.D. 200s. They**displaced** many of the people who had lived on these lands before them.

Wherever the Bantu moved, they spread their culture, including three vital**elements**. First, the Bantu cultivated bananas, taro, and yams, which were originally from Malaysia. These crops thrived in the humidity of the tropical rain forests. Second, the Bantu spread their languages everywhere they settled. Today, more than 500 distinct Bantu languages are spoken by 85 million Africans. Third, the Bantu brought iron-smelting technology. They could create tools and weapons unlike any the native people had ever seen.

**Trade Across the Sahara**

For thousands of years, the Sahara was a barrier to contact between West Africa and North Africa. By the A.D. 700s, Arab Muslims had crossed the Sahara and conquered most of North Africa. They dominated the southern Mediterranean and controlled trade in that region, as well as Saharan trade routes into West Africa. Arab geographers slowly learned about Africa south of the Sahara. They realized that the region offered opportunities, not only in trade, but also in adding converts to Islam. One of the West African kingdoms they learned about was Ghana.

Ghana controlled the gold trade in the region. It traded gold for salt that Arab traders brought in from the Sahara. Salt was a very important trade good. It was the best preserver of food, and it was rare and difficult to acquire.

The Berber people had lived in North Africa long before the Arabs arrived. The Berbers resisted Islam for a while, but in time they converted. Several groups of Islamic Berbers joined together to become the Almoravids. They were fierce fighters, and they wanted to spread their new faith.

**The First Trading Kingdom**

The Ghana Empire was a powerful kingdom in West Africa during the Middle Ages. It had grown wealthy from its control of the gold trade. As the empire grew wealthy, it conquered many of its neighbors, including gold-rich lands to the south. Ghana built a strong trade with Muslim countries in North Africa.

In the A.D. 1000s, the Almoravids conquered Ghana. Almoravid rule over Ghana lasted only a few years, but that was long enough to damage the trade that kept the empire alive. With the arrival of so many Almoravids, there was now a larger population to feed. The dry climate could not support the sudden increase in agriculture, and this resulted in desertification: Land that at one time was fertile became desert. Ghana became weak, and its conquered neighbors began to break away.

***Determining Central Ideas*** Why did the Ghana Empire collapse?

**West African Kingdoms**

***Why was the city of Timbuktu important to different trading kingdoms in West Africa?***

Several West African kingdoms sought to take control of the trade the fallen Ghana Empire had established in the region. Islam was taking hold in northern West Africa, and the most powerful of the new trading kingdoms were Muslim: Mali and Songhai.

**Mali**

The trading kingdom of Mali came after Ghana. Mali grew rich from the gold-for-salt trade. Its rulers conquered neighboring lands and built an empire.

The empire of Mali reached its height under the emperor Mansa Musa. The city of Timbuktu, which was already an important trading post, became a center for Islamic culture. Mansa Musa went on a historic pilgrimage to Mecca. By the time Mansa Musa returned home, the Islamic world knew there was a new and powerful Islamic kingdom south of the Sahara.

**Songhai**

After Mansa Musa’s death, Songhai replaced Mali as the most powerful West African empire. A well-trained army and a navy that patrolled the Niger River made Songhai the largest of the three trading empires. Songhai now controlled the region’s trade routes, had salt mines in the Sahara, and sought to turn their empire into the center for Islamic learning. The Songhai Empire eventually fell to the Moroccans, who seized the salt mines and destroyed the empire by the end of the 1500s.

**Coastal Kingdoms**

Slavery had been practiced in Africa for centuries. Muslims from North Africa and Asia had been buying enslaved people from south of the Sahara. As European colonists established colonies in the Western Hemisphere, they purchased enslaved people to do their labor. Small African kingdoms along the Atlantic coast became trading partners with Portugal, Spain, and Great Britain. Trade in enslaved persons became highly profitable in these kingdoms. When Europeans outlawed the slave trade, the kingdoms’ economies began to fail.

***Identifying*** How did the slave trade in West Africa change after the arrival of the Europeans?

**European Domination**

***What were some of the factors that aroused European interest in exploring and colonizing Africa?***

In the late 1800s, several European countries were eager to expand into Africa with its many natural resources. After hundreds of years of self-rule, West Africans lost control of their lands to the Europeans.

**Changing Trade**

The British government outlawed the slave trade in 1807. Great Britain tried but could not keep other European countries from continuing to export slaves. The British founded the colony of Freetown in Sierra Leone in 1787 as a safe haven for runaway or freed enslaved persons. The Americans followed suit in 1822, founding Liberia as a home for freed American slaves.

The British encouraged development of the palm oil trade to make up for the loss of **revenue** from the slave trade. British traders and missionaries familiarized themselves with the trading culture of the Niger River. The British started to profit from their growing role in West African trade. Before long, France took notice.

**Creating Colonies**

Before the mid-1800s, the British and French posted military in North Africa, and the British and Dutch had settled in South Africa. In 1869 two events increased Europe’s interest in Africa. First, the Suez Canal—an artificial waterway connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea—opened. Second, diamonds were discovered in South Africa.

Before that time, Europeans had been in contact with the coastal kingdoms, but few had ventured into the interior of West Africa. This began to change as Great Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium, and the new, unified country of Germany began planning to carve out empires in Africa. Europeans followed a policy of **imperialism**, or seizing political control of other places to create an empire. At the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, the European powers established rules for partitioning Africa.

The French and British claimed the most territory in West Africa. The modern countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal were French colonies. Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and St. Helena were British colonies. Togo started out as a German possession, but Germany lost it in World War I.

Some colonies were ruled more harshly than others, but one thing was true about all of them: Europeans made the important decisions about how Africans lived. Settlers from Europe could set up farms on the most fertile land, even if Africans were forced off that land. Africans resisted, sometimes violently.

***Describing*** What was the purpose of the Berlin Conference?

**New Countries**

***How does a ruler gain and hold political power?***

West African colonies began gaining independence in the late 1950s. The struggle for economic and political success was difficult because of the complex ethnic makeup of these countries. Another factor working against political stability was the actions taken by the leaders. Often, they seized power and then used force to stay in power.

**Ghana Leads the Way**

The Gold Coast had been important to European trade since Portugal set up its first fort there in 1487. By the early 1800s, it was under British control, and in 1874 the Gold Coast became a British colony. The most important industries were gold, forest resources, and a newly introduced crop—the cocoa bean from which chocolate is made. By the 1920s, the Gold Coast supplied more than half the world’s cocoa.

After the end of World War II, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah led protests calling for independence. Protests flared throughout the colony. In 1957 the Gold Coast gained its independence and became the Republic of Ghana. For many years, Ghana was troubled by conflict. In 1992 Ghana approved a new constitution that established a multiparty democracy. Since then, presidential elections have been peaceful, and Ghana has become a model of political reform in West Africa.

**Former French Colonies**

Throughout the 1950s, France made concessions to its West African colonies, many of which had instituted some form of self-rule. The independence of Ghana excited and inspired Africans, however. Cries for independence began erupting all over Africa. French Sudan and Senegal united to become the Republic of Mali, but Senegal broke away the following year, and Mali declared its own independence. In 1960 Mauritania, Niger, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, and Burkina Faso declared their independence. By 1961, all of France’s colonies in West Africa were independent.

**Nigeria**

Nigeria had never been a country before the British combined two of their colonies to form the Nigerian Protectorate in 1914. Several different ethnic groups lived in this new territory. The Yoruba and Edo people had distinct territories in the south. The Hausa people were Muslims who lived in the north. The Igbo people were farmers who began to migrate east after British colonization.

When Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, tensions grew between ethnic groups. Because Britain had concentrated most of its development, including building schools, in southern Nigeria, most well-educated Nigerians lived in the south. They became leaders of the new government. Many of them were Igbo, who were mostly Christian. When they ventured north to govern the Hausa, they were met with hostility. Conflicts among the three major ethnic divisions in the country—the Hausa, the Yoruba, and the Igbo—grew violent. Thousands of Igbo living in northern Nigeria were massacred. As many as a million more fled to a region dominated by the Igbo. In 1967 the eastern region **seceded**, or withdrew formally, from Nigeria and announced that it was now the independent republic of Biafra. Nigerian forces invaded Biafra, and after more than two years of war, Biafra was in ruins. Starvation and disease may have killed more than 1 million people.

For long periods since then, the military has controlled the country’s government. A new constitution was written in 1978. A year later, a democratically elected civilian government took office. That ended in a military coup in 1983. It was not until 1999 that another democratically elected president was able to rule Nigeria.

**Civil War**

Sometimes a military coup erupts into civil war. In late 1989, Charles Taylor led an invasion of Liberia. His aim was to depose the president, Samuel Doe. Ethnic conflict was at the heart of this struggle. Taylor and his rebels were of the Mano and Gio peoples. President Doe belonged to the Krahn people. After Doe’s arrest and execution, Liberia endured seven years of civil war.

Conflict spilled over Liberia’s borders into neighboring Sierra Leone. Thousands of civilians died, and many were forced to leave their homes. The civil war in Sierra Leone did not end until 2002. Estimates are that 50,000 died and another 2 million people lost their homes in the civil war. In 2012 Charles Taylor was brought to trial by a special court. He was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity for his part in Sierra Leone’s civil war.

***Determining Central Ideas*** What reason might the French have had for letting their African colonies declare independence?

**LESSON 2 REVIEW**

**Reviewing Vocabulary**

1. How did the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 help achieve the goals of European*imperialism*?

**Answering the Guiding Questions**

1. ***Determining Central Ideas*** How did the Bantu culture influence the parts of Africa to which the Bantu migrated?
2. ***Identifying*** How did the Islamic world become aware of the wealth of the Mali Empire?
3. ***Describing*** Why did the British encourage development of the palm oil trade in African kingdoms on the Atlantic coast?
4. ***Analyzing*** Why did Nigeria face so many challenges when becoming an independent country?
5. ***Argument Writing*** Write a speech to the French government in the late 1950s about how important the independence of Ghana is and why France should release its colonies.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **LESSON 3**  **Life in West Africa**  **ESSENTIAL QUESTION:*What makes a culture unique?*** | |
|  | |
| *West African countries have faced many challenges in the decades since they achieved independence. Even as they struggle to modernize and improve their economies, West Africans have been able to spread their artistic gifts to people around the world.*  **The People of the Region**  ***Why are two or more languages spoken in some West African countries?***  West Africa is the most populous region of Africa. Many different ethnic groups live here, and each group brings something unique to their country’s culture.  **Ethnic Groups**  European countries that carved up Africa to add to their overseas empires had their own reasons for setting colonial borders where they did. They did not consider the borders of the different ethnic groups of the Africans who already lived on the land they colonized. As a result, the European colonies in Africa contained populations that were ethnically **diverse**. When African countries declared independence, the new national borders closely followed the old colonial borders, preserving that diversity.  Establishing a sense of national unity is difficult, however. Many people have a stronger identification with their ethnic group than with the country they live in. For example, the Hausa are citizens of Nigeria, but many feel closer ties to the people and culture of the Hausa than to the country of Nigeria. |  |

Another factor working against national unity is that a West African ethnic group does not typically live in only one country. Some Yoruba people, for example, live in Nigeria. Other Yoruba live in Benin. No matter where they live, the Yoruba feel a closer connection to other Yoruba people than to Nigeria or Benin.

**Languages**

When West African countries achieved independence, the majority held on to the European language that had been used most in business and government during the colonial period. The European languages—English, Portuguese, and French—became the official languages of West African countries. In some cases, Arabic is also an official language.

Most ethnic groups retain their traditional languages, and many use that language more than they do the official European language. In some places, European and African languages have intermixed to form a **pidgin**language. A pidgin is a simplified language used by people who cannot speak each other’s languages but need a way to communicate. Sometimes two or more languages blend so well that the mixture becomes the language of the region. This is called a **creole** language. Crioulo is the language spoken most often in Cape Verde. It is a creole language, part Portuguese and part African dialect.

**Religion**

Islam was introduced to North Africa in the A.D. 600s, and it spread southward with trade. It was well established in many parts of West Africa long before the arrival of Christian missionaries from Europe. Today, a sizable portion of West African populations are Muslim.

In some countries, however, Christianity is just as dominant as Islam, or more so. Even in countries where Christianity or Islam is dominant, many people still practice traditional African religions. These religions have their own rituals and celebrations that tie communities together. The beliefs are not written on paper but passed on from one generation to another. Often, the people believe in a supreme creator god and are **animists**, which means they believe in spirits—spirits of their ancestors, the air, the earth, and rivers.

**Settlement Patterns**

West Africa had few large towns until the colonial period. Even today, the most common settlement patterns in West Africa consist of scattered villages. Villages represent the homesteads of **extended families**, or families made up of parents, children, and other close relatives, often of more than two generations. The size of the villages and the population density depend on how much human activity the land can sustain. Water is an issue in the northern parts of West Africa, so populations are small and spread out.

Most of the largest cities in West Africa are capital cities, like Bamako, Mali, which more than tripled in population between 1960 and 1970, when droughts caused people to migrate from the countryside. The largest city in West Africa is Lagos in Nigeria, with an estimated 10.5 million people. Lagos was Nigeria’s capital until 1991; Abuja is now Nigeria’s capital city.

***Determining Central Ideas*** What are two ways traditions have survived in West Africa?

**Life and Culture in the Region**

***Why are traditions more important in rural areas of West Africa than they are in West African cities?***

A variety of cultures thrive in West Africa, some of them traditional and some contemporary. Countries in the north—such as Mali, Mauritania, and Niger—are more influenced by the culture of North Africa than are their neighboring countries.

**Daily Life**

West Africa, with its complicated history and rich mixture of ethnicities, has a diverse culture. English or French may be the language of the cities, or of business and politics, but hundreds of other languages are still spoken. People in cities are more likely to wear Western-style clothing and to live and work in Western-style buildings. Far from the city, many people retain the traditions of their ancestors. These people are more likely to wear traditional clothing. Life in rural villages is built around the extended family. In cities, the **nuclear family**—parents with their children—is the more common family structure.

City dwellers are far more likely to deal with a wide variety of people over the course of a day than are rural dwellers. Capital cities teem with people from different ethnic groups, races, and countries. They are more likely to speak the official language because that is the language they all have in common. In rural areas, ethnicity and tradition are still important. Devotion to traditional values keeps those languages and cultures alive even as the country is changing. The downside is that ethnic pride sometimes results in conflicts between neighboring ethnic groups.

**The Arts**

West Africans have created numerous unique and important works of art in many artistic fields. Traditional artwork, such as carved masks from Nigeria and Sierra Leone, are world famous. Another well-known traditional art form is **kente**, a colorful, handwoven cloth from Ghana. One of West Africa’s most important artist-figures is the griot, a musical storyteller who is part historian and part spiritual advisor.

Dance is the most popular form of recreation in West Africa. Workers use dance to celebrate their skills and accomplishments; professional guilds have their own dances. Dance is used for its healing qualities, but people also dance to popular music in clubs.

West African music blends a variety of many sounds, combining traditional and modern instruments. The Arabic influences of North African music mix with the music of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as with American and European rock and pop music.

West Africa has produced some of the world’s finest writers. The most widely read of all African novels is *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe of Nigeria. Senegal’s first president, Léopold Senghor, was a famous poet and lecturer on African history and culture.

***Identifying Point of View*** Select an artistic field that you think best shows the culture of West Africa, and explain why you believe it does.

**Challenges Facing the Region**

***How did West African countries build up so much debt?***

Many West African countries face serious problems. To improve their situations, they must deal with these challenges and more: bad economies, corrupt governments, out-of-control population growth, disease, and poorly funded schools.

**Government and Economics**

The European powers that colonized Africa built the colonies’ economies on a few key resources, such as petroleum, gold, peanuts, or copper. The**infrastructure**, or underlying framework of the colonies, was built around those key resources. Once the colonies achieved independence, it became important for them to develop a variety of different industries. Otherwise, any drop in the world price of a key resource would greatly affect a country’s economy. Many foreign governments invested money in developing the industrial base of the new African countries. In many cases, money from the loans was not used wisely. As a result, the invested money did not yield high returns. West African countries were not only dealing with struggling economies but also faced enormous debt.

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have declared that no poor or developing country should have to pay a debt it cannot possibly manage. Debt relief has been important for countries such as Ghana, which suffered from bad economic choices and political instability. Ghana is now a model for economic and political reform in West Africa. Nigeria benefited from debt relief as well, and was able to pay off the remainder of what it owed in 2006.

A major challenge for the region is that, as the population grows, the demand for food and jobs grows. An economy does not have a chance to grow if it cannot meet the needs of a growing population.

**Health and Education**

Thirty-four million people in the world are living with the HIV virus, and 22.9 million of them live in sub-Saharan Africa. Dealing with such a large number of HIV-infected people presents several challenges. The first challenge is to supply health care to the growing number of people who carry the virus. The second challenge is to reduce the number of new HIV infections, usually through education. The third challenge is to deal with the families and communities hurt by AIDS-related deaths.

West Africa has a high birthrate, and the population is growing quickly, but life expectancy is still short compared to other parts of the world. Health care is an issue in large cities, but it is an even greater issue in rural areas.

The population of West Africa is young. For West Africa to have a sound future, educational systems must effectively prepare young people for economic and social development. A lack of education funding means that some countries cannot afford to make updates or improvements to their schools.

***Analyzing*** Why is education such an important issue for the future of West Africa?

**LESSON 3 REVIEW**

**Reviewing Vocabulary**

1. How did the*infrastructure* of West African colonies lead to poor economies when they became independent countries?

**Answering the Guiding Questions**

1. ***Analyzing*** What are the advantages of a pidgin language?
2. ***Describing*** What is one potential downside to preserving traditional values in rural West Africa?

**4.*Identifying*** What are three major challenges to fighting AIDS in West Africa?

**5.*Narrative Writing*** Select a West African country and write a letter to the government of the country about the importance of investing in education. Explain how education will help solve the problems discussed in this lesson and how it will help preserve West African culture.