Ghana: A West African Trading Empire

Overview
In this lesson, students learn why trade moving through Ghana and Mali resulted in the growth of these kingdoms. In an Experiential Exercise, they role-play the African trade in gold and salt, exploring how it made Ghana a powerful kingdom.

Objectives
Students will
• identify the trans-Saharan caravan routes through the kingdom of Ghana.
• describe how trade in gold and salt led to the growth of Ghana and Mali.
• explain silent bartering.
• describe the government of Ghana.

Materials
• History Alive! The Medieval World and Beyond
• Interactive Student Notebooks
• Information Master 13 (1 transparency)
• Student Handout 13A (copied onto yellow paper; 1 for every 2 students, plus 1 extra)
• Student Handout 13B (copied onto yellow paper; 1 for every 2 students)
• sheets of white paper
• scissors
• masking tape
Preview
Have students complete Preview 13 in their Interactive Student Notebooks, and have three or four share their answers. Expect that most students will refute the proposition. Point out that the value of most goods is based on how much of the goods are available (supply) and how many people want them (demand). Tell students that in this lesson they will learn that salt was as valuable to people living in West Africa as gold is to Americans today. They will learn how the trade in salt and gold led to the growth of two powerful kingdoms in West Africa.

Graphic Organizer
1 Introduce Chapter 13 in History Alive! The Medieval World and Beyond. Tell students that in this chapter they will explore the kingdom of Ghana and learn about the role of trade in the rise of West African kingdoms. Have them read Section 13.1. Make sure they understand the meanings of the boldfaced key terms, which are defined in the Glossary. When they have finished, ask, How do we know about the kingdom of Ghana? When did the kingdom of Ghana begin? How might Ghana have become a kingdom?

2 Introduce the graphic organizer. Ask students to examine the illustration on page 145. Ask, What do you see? Only one of these people traveled. Which one is it? (the man with the camel) What is the camel carrying? (salt) In what direction is the camel traveling? (south) What is the man in the southern part of West Africa holding? (gold) Who might the figure in the center be? (the king of Ghana) Explain that students will use this graphic organizer to help them understand how trade enabled West African kingdoms, such as Ghana and Mali, to become powerful and wealthy.

Reading for Understanding
Ask students to read Section 13.2, which describes the government and military of the kingdom of Ghana. Have them complete Reading Notes 13 for this section; use Guide to Reading Notes 13 to check their answers. Then explain that they will now participate in a game to learn how Ghana became such a wealthy kingdom.
Experiential Exercise

1 **Arrange the classroom and prepare materials.** Copy *Student Handout 13A: Gold Tokens* and *Student Handout 13B: Salt Tokens* as listed in the materials. Cut enough gold tokens from one copy of *Student Handout 13A* to distribute one to half the class. Divide the room into four areas as shown at right. Tape five labels—*North Africa, Sahara Desert, Taghaza, Ghana, and Wangara*—in the appropriate places. Place two desks in Ghana and two near Taghaza.

2 **Assign roles.** Assign two students to be salt miners in Taghaza (a city in the Sahara) and two to be Ghana officials, and have them sit at the appropriate desks. Divide the remaining students into two equal-size groups. Designate one of the groups as North African traders and the other as Wangaran gold miners, and have them sit on the floor in their assigned areas. Explain that Wangara is a gold-rich region south of Ghana. (*Note:* Historically, the salt miners in Taghaza were slaves of Arab merchants. In this activity, they will be referred to as *salt miners.*)

3 **Have students prepare for the game.**
   - Distribute a copy of *Student Handout 13A* to the Wangaran gold miners and a copy of *Student Handout 13B* to the North African traders. Have students cut out their tokens.
   - Have each of the North African traders keep three of their salt tokens, write their names on the others, and give these labeled tokens to the Taghaza salt miners. Explain that the tokens given to the salt miners represent salt that they will “mine” during the game. The tokens kept by the traders represent salt they have already acquired in Taghaza.
   - Give each North African trader one of the gold tokens you’ve prepared.
   - Give each Wangaran a sheet of paper, and ask them to place these on the floor before them.

4 **Introduce the game.** Explain that students will now play a game that will demonstrate how trading was conducted between North African traders and Wangaran gold miners. Explain that the traders and miners will be competing in the game as individuals. The winners will be the North African trader who ends the game with the most gold tokens and the Wangaran gold miner who ends with the most salt tokens.

5 **Guide students through the game once.** Have them play a practice round. (*Note:* Do not reveal the historical analogies, given below, to students at this time.) Follow these steps for playing the game:

   **Step 1: Traveling to Wangara.** The North African traders crawl across the Sahara Desert. When a trader reaches Ghana, he or she gives one gold token to a Ghana official and then walks to Wangara and finds a Wangaran gold miner with whom to trade. As the North African trader approaches...
the Wangaran, the Wangaran turns his or her back. (Note: Crawling across the desert represents the difficulty of trans-Saharan trade. Payment of the gold token to the Ghana official represents the tax Ghana charged goods coming into and out of Ghana. Turning their backs represents the system of silent barter North African traders and Wangarans conducted.)

**Step 2: Making and accepting the first offer.** The North African trader and the Wangaran gold miner practice making and accepting the first offer. (Note: Remind students that gold and salt tokens will be returned after this practice round.)

- The North African trader places one or more salt tokens on the paper behind the Wangaran. Then the North African trader turns his or her back and claps.
- The Wangaran turns around, examines the offer, and places one or more gold tokens next to the salt tokens. Then the Wangaran turns his or her back and claps.
- The North African trader takes the gold token(s), leaves the salt token(s), claps, and leaves.
- The Wangaran picks up the salt token(s).

Emphasize that students may not talk during the trading. They must turn their backs after an offer has been made, and they must clap to indicate that some decision has been reached. (Note: Clapping represents the beating of drums announcing that a trade offer had been made.)

**Step 3: Making a counteroffer.** Explain that if either the North African trader or the Wangaran gold miner is unhappy with the first offer made by the other, he or she can make a counteroffer. Project *Information Master 13: Making a Counteroffer*. Have students place the salt and gold tokens they previously traded back onto the sheet of paper. State that the North African trader is not happy with the Wangaran’s offer. Have students practice the options listed. When they understand how to make a counteroffer, have them return the tokens they have traded. (Note: Although the game allows only one counteroffer per trade, silent barter actually sometimes continued for several days.)

**Step 4: Getting more salt tokens.** Explain that after North African traders have traded their three tokens, they can get more salt tokens for trading by going to Taghaza. They may then return to Wangara through Ghana. However, they will have to pay one gold token to the Ghana official for every three salt tokens they move through Ghana. They cannot get more salt tokens than they can pay taxes on, and they cannot get more than they have available to them (with their names on them) in Taghaza. (Note: This is analogous to how traders paid Ghana a tax whenever they moved goods through Ghana.)

Project *Information Master 13*, which also reviews the rules for trading, throughout the game for students to refer to.
6 Have students play the game independently. Allow them to play for 20 minutes or until a few students have no tokens left with which to trade. (Note: If students have difficulty distinguishing who is clapping, have students whisper their names when they clap. Also, you may wish to have the Taghaza salt miners write a “receipt” for salt issued that traders must show to the Ghana officials for tax purposes as they travel through Ghana. This will prevent students from trying to “smuggle” salt through Ghana.)

7 Declare the winners. Have the North African traders count their gold tokens and the Wangaran gold miners count their salt tokens. Declare the winners to be the North African trader and the Wangaran who have the most of their required tokens. Also ask the Ghana officials to report how many gold tokens they collected.

8 Debrief the activity. Ask, How did you feel during the activity? How were the students representing Ghana able to get gold? Why were traders willing to pay this tax to Ghana? What problems did you encounter when you could not talk with the person with whom you wished to trade? Why might North African traders and Wangaran gold miners have used a method of trading that involved silent communication?

### Reading for Understanding

1 Prepare students to read Section 13.3 by connecting the reading to the Experiential Exercise. Ask, What did the tokens in the game represent? (gold and salt) How were the hardships of crossing the Sahara shown? (by having students crawl)

2 Have students read Section 13.3 and complete the corresponding Reading Notes. Use the Guide to Reading Notes to check their answers.

3 Repeat the process for Sections 13.4 and 13.5. Use these questions to prepare students to read each section by making connections to the Experiential Exercise:
   - Section 13.4: Ask, How do you think Ghana became wealthy? How was this shown in the game?
   - Section 13.5: Ask, Why do you think students were not allowed to talk to each other? What did the clap mean?

4 Have students read Section 13.6 and complete the corresponding Reading Notes. (Note: Most of this lesson focuses on the benefits of West African participation in trans-Saharan trade. After students complete this section of Reading Notes, consider examining the costs involved as well. Students might discuss how Ghana’s accessibility to outsiders also brought invaders or how Ghana’s increasing wealth stimulated the population growth that depleted the kingdom’s natural resources.)
Processing

Have students complete Processing 13 in their Interactive Student Notebooks. Here are examples of statements they might include:

- **North African trader:** “I reap huge profits by buying gold for just some salt. I don’t have to fear bandits because Ghana protects the trade routes.”
- **Wangaran:** “I’m really happy to exchange my gold, which is of little value to me, for salt that I need to survive. Silent bartering allows us to trade with people who speak a different language. It also protects the secret of where our gold mines are located.”
- **King of Ghana:** “I have become wealthy because I demand gold from North African traders each time they enter and leave my territory. I use this gold to build up my army, which protects me and allows me to conquer other territories.”

Assessment

Masters for assessment follow the next page.


9. B; Students should place Taghaza and a symbol representing salt mining somewhere in the desert, and Wangara and a symbol representing gold mining somewhere south of Ghana.

10. The bulleted points can provide a rubric for this item.
Online Resources
Further resources for Lesson 13: Ghana: A West African
Trading Empire can be found at Online Resources for *History Alive!
The Medieval World and Beyond* at www.teachtci.com/historyalive/.
- Investigating Primary Sources: Account of Ghana by Abu Ubayd
  Al-Bakri
- Unit 3 Internet Connections: The Culture and Kingdoms of West
  Africa

Options for Students with Diverse Needs
See page 454 for tips on adapting this lesson to meet the
needs of
- English language learners.
- learners reading and writing below grade level.
- learners with special education needs.
- advanced learners.
Fill in the bubble beside the best answer to each question.

1. Arab scholars described Ghana as a
   ○ A. land of enchantment.
   ○ B. land of gold.
   ○ C. land of kings.
   ○ D. land of taxes.

2. What is one way the king of Ghana preserved his power?
   ○ A. He maintained a large army.
   ○ B. He fathered many sons.
   ○ C. He wore colorful robes.
   ○ D. He held court every week.

3. Because of its location, what role did Ghana play in North African trade?
   ○ A. salt merchant
   ○ B. gold miner
   ○ C. middleman
   ○ D. consumer

4. Which of the following factors increased trans-Saharan trade?
   ○ A. the growth of cities
   ○ B. the introduction of camels
   ○ C. the discovery of salt
   ○ D. the population increase

5. If you came from the southern forests, you traded to get what necessary resource?
   ○ A. gold
   ○ B. koala nuts
   ○ C. leather
   ○ D. salt

6. Ghana made money on trade by
   ○ A. taxing traders.
   ○ B. selling gold.
   ○ C. buying camels.
   ○ D. mining salt.

7. Why did the Wangarans trade silently?
   ○ A. because they had no spoken language
   ○ B. to keep their gold mines’ locations secret
   ○ C. to have power over those with whom they traded
   ○ D. because they disliked other traders

8. The empire of Ghana fell, in part, because of
   ○ A. a loss of resources.
   ○ B. an increase in corruption.
   ○ C. a weak king.
   ○ D. a failing economy.
Use your knowledge of social studies to complete the item below.

9. If you were to complete the map below to show North African trade with West Africa in about the year 1,000, which of the following would you do?
   A. Place Taghaza south of Ghana and Wangara in the desert.
   B. Place Wangara south of Ghana and Taghaza in the desert.
   C. Place Taghaza on the coast of North Africa and Wangara south of Ghana.
   D. Place Taghaza in the desert and Wangara in northern Ghana.

Label Taghaza and Wangara in appropriate places on the map. Then draw a symbol for the type of mining—either salt mining or gold mining—done in each area.
Follow the directions to complete the item below.

10. In the time of the West African empires, people made difficult journeys to trade with each other. Today the journeys are easier: 18-wheel trucks carry goods along paved highways, and truck stops provide places to rest, eat, and visit with other truckers.

Imagine that you have gone back in time and stopped at a “camel stop” along a West African trade route. You overhear two drivers talking. One is heading south, the other north. By listening in, you learn a lot about geography, trade, and travel. Write part of the conversation you overheard. Include these two things in the conversation:

- one exchange about the cargo each driver is hauling
- one exchange about traveling through Ghana
If the North African trader or the Wangaran gold miner is unhappy with the first offer made by the other, he or she can make a counteroffer. Follow these guidelines:

North African trader, if you aren’t satisfied with the Wangaran’s first offer… **leave the gold and salt.**

Wangaran, if the gold and salt are still there, you can… **add more gold tokens or leave the same number of gold tokens.**

North African trader, if you aren’t satisfied with the Wangaran’s counteroffer… **take your salt, leave the gold, and find another Wangaran with whom to trade.**

Remember these rules for trading:

1. North African trader, if you are happy with the offer, pick up the gold and leave the salt. Find another Wangaran with whom to trade.

2. Clap and then turn your back after every offer.

3. North African traders can return to Taghaza for more salt tokens if they run out. However, they must pay one gold token to Ghana for every three salt tokens they transport through Ghana, and they cannot redeem more tokens than they originally had.
Read each of Sections 13.2 to 13.6, and complete the notes.

13.2 Ghana’s Government and Military
Around the image of the king of Ghana, draw and label three things that show the wealth and power of the ruler.
To show the king’s wealth, students might show him with a large gold nugget or wearing gold jewelry or decorate his cap with gold. To show his power, they might make him appear as the head of an army, a judge, or a religious leader.

13.3 Trade: The Source of Ghana’s Wealth
1. On the camel’s back, draw salt and two other products a North African trader might bring to trade in West Africa. Label the products. In the Wangaran’s basket, draw and label three products the people of the southern forest areas brought to trade with the North African traders.

2. What two factors led to the growth of trans-Saharan trade?
The two factors that led to the growth of trans-Saharan trade were the introduction of the camel and the spread of Islam.

3. Why was travel across the Sahara difficult?
Travel across the Sahara was difficult because the journey was long and travelers could lose their way or be unable to find water.
13.4 The Gold-Salt Trade

Fill in the voice bubbles. Have the North African trader explain why salt was important to the people in the West African forest. Have the Wangaran explain why gold was important. Have the king explain how Ghana became wealthy through trans-Saharan caravan trade.

Salt is needed to replace salt lost through perspiration. It also keeps food from spoiling, the people like its taste, and cattle need it.

Gold is important because it is used to make coins and to purchase silk and porcelain from China.

Trade made Ghana wealthy because Ghana taxes goods coming into and out of the empire. Taxes help pay for armies to protect the kingdom and to conquer other territories.

North African trader
Wangaran gold miner
King of Ghana

13.5 The Exchange of Goods

Fill in the voice bubbles for the North African trader and the Wangaran. Have each explain what he does during silent bartering.

I spread my goods out along the river. I beat a drum to tell the Wangaran I am making an offer, and then I leave. If the Wangaran leaves enough gold dust, I take it and leave. If not, I leave my goods there until he makes an offer I can accept.

When I see the goods left by the North African trader, I leave what I think is a fair amount of gold dust. If the trader does not accept my offer, I add to the gold dust until both of us think we have a fair deal.

North African trader
Wangaran gold miner
13.6 The Decline of Ghana and the Rise of Mali

On the map of West Africa, write two reasons why the kingdom of Ghana declined.

- Muslim warriors called Almoravids attacked Ghana and seized its capital city.
- Ghana overused its natural resources.