

AFRICA STUDY GUIDE

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

THE LAND

Africa is made up of a series of large steps or **plateaus** (area of flat land at a high elevation, or a mountain with its top chopped off). The edges of these plateaus are called **escarpments**, which are steep, often jagged slopes or cliffs. Rivers crossing the plateaus plunge suddenly down the sides of the escarpments in **cataracts**, or towering waterfalls.

The **Great Rift Valley** stretches from Syria (in the Middle East) to Mozambique in the southeastern part of Africa. A **rift valley** is a large crack in the earth's surface formed by shifting tectonic plates. Millions of years ago, plate movements created the system of **faults** or fractures in the earth's crust within which the Great Rift Valley lies.

In East Africa, the Great Rift Valley forms two branches, with volcanic mountains rising at its edges and deep lakes that run parallel to its length. The main volcanic cones, among them **Mt. Kilimanjaro**, are found along the eastern branch. **Lake Tanganyika**, one of the deepest and longest freshwater lakes in the world, lies on the western branch. To the south is **Lake Malawi**, a mountain-rimmed lake.

Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa and lies between the eastern and western branches of the Great Rift Valley. It is the world's second largest freshwater lake. Lake Victoria is the source of the **White Nile River**. Despite its size, Lake Victoria is relatively shallow.

The **Niger River** is the main water thoroughfare in western Africa. It has its headwaters in the highlands of Guinea, forms a great arc, and eventually meets the ocean on the coast of Nigeria. It is important for agriculture and transportation. The Niger River empties into the **Gulf of Guinea** in the **Atlantic Ocean** through a vast inland **delta**, a triangular section of land formed by sand and silt carried downriver. The Niger Delta extends 150 miles inland and is 200 miles wide.

The **Zambezi River** in south-central Africa also meets the ocean, in this case the **Indian Ocean**, in a delta. However, its course is interrupted in many places by waterfalls. **Victoria Falls** is located on the Zambezi River and plummets 355 feet, about twice the drop as Niagara Falls.

The **Congo River** reaches the sea through an **estuary**, or passage where freshwater from a river meets saltwater from the sea. The Congo's estuary is six miles wide and easily navigated by ocean vessels, making it an important waterway. The Congo River is 2,900 miles long and is the largest network of navigable waterways on the continent.

CLIMATE AND VEGETATION

The African continent is made up of different layers of climate. Refer to the map on page 506 of your textbook and familiarize yourself with the location of each of the climate zones.

Tropical Rainforest Characteristics

- Located near the equator
- Very wet and humid with warm temperatures
- Dense, green vegetation from the forest floor reaching up to the canopy towering above 150 feet up.
- Rains **leach**, or dissolve and carry away, nutrients from the soil

Tropical Savanna Characteristics

- Most prevalent climate zone in Africa
- Alternating wet and dry seasons every six months
- Comprised of vast, tall grasslands with scattered trees
- The **harmattan trade winds** bring hot, dry air and stir up a lot of dust
- African savannas are home to extensive wildlife

- The **Serengeti Plain** is one of the world's largest savanna plains. Wildlife there is protected as part of the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania.

Dry Climate (Desert & Steppe) Characteristics

- Declining rainfall and increasing population is contributing to expanding deserts and dry regions through **desertification**
- The Sahara Desert dominates northern Africa and the **Namib and Kalahari Deserts** dominate southwestern Africa

CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

THE PEOPLE

Sub-Saharan Africa has:

- **The most rapid population growth** in the world (their population is increasing faster than anywhere else on earth)
- **The highest fertility rate** in the world (the number of children each woman has, on average, is higher than anywhere else on earth)
- **The highest birth rate** in the world (the number of babies born for every 1,000 people is higher than anywhere else on earth)
- **The highest infant mortality rate** in the world (the number of babies who die before the age of 1 per 1,000 babies born)
- **The highest death rate** in the world (the number of people dying for everything 1,000 people is higher than anywhere else on earth)
- **The shortest life expectancy** in the world (people live the fewest number of years, on average, of anywhere else on earth)

Sub-Saharan Africa has very **dense** population in urban areas and very **dispersed** (spread out) population in rural areas. This is because much of Africa's land is inhospitable, so more and more people are migrating to areas that can provide necessary resources. This **urbanization** contributes to food shortages, sanitation issues, the spread of diseases (AIDS and others), healthcare scarcity, and high crime rates.

Africa is one of the most ethnically diverse places on earth and more than 800 languages/dialects are spoken in the region today.

THE HISTORY

Tens of thousands of years ago, people were already moving from place to place across Africa to hunt and gather food. Around 2000 B.C., a **dramatic climate change forced Africans to move south**. An area that had once been wet with mild temperatures had become hot and dry and is now the Sahara Desert.

Early African Civilization Run Down (700 – 1600 A.D.):

- **Kush**: They settled along the Nile River and inhabited the area that is now Sudan. At their height, the Kush extended their rule into Egyptian territory. As the Egyptians faded out, the Kush rose up.
- **Ghana**: Very rich civilization known for trading their gold for salt, creating a tax system, and charging tariffs on imports
- **Mali**: Larger than Egypt, their civilization stretched all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. They also traded their gold for salt and established their economic center in the ancient city of Timbuktu.
- **Songhai**: They took over Mali and stretched east until Moroccans from the north overran them. They are also known for trading their gold for salt.

- **Bantu:** They established states in the southeast region of Africa. It is thought that the Bantu migrated and settled across 1/3 of the continent. There are still 150 million Bantu-speaking Africans today.

Colonialism

- Europe, hearing of Africa's wealth, began trading with African empires in the 1200s
- **Slavery** had been going on in Africa long before Europeans entered the picture. *Warring tribes would take prisoners of war and use them as slave labor or trade them to other tribes.* Through traditional trading, Europe found out about the African slave trade and decided to participate. By the 1600s and 1700s, European participation in the slave trade was in full swing. The slave trade increased when Europeans began shipping African slaves to the Americas to work on plantations.
- **Realizing that Africa was rich with natural resources, Europe began to colonize it in the 1800s.** By 1914, all of Africa except Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa were under European control.
- **Colonization brought good and bad things to Africa:**
 - o **Division:** Europeans ignore African objections and created boundaries that often cut through ethnic homelands
 - o **Religion:** European missionaries spread Christianity throughout the region
 - o **Big Business:** Locally centered agriculture was replaced with huge plantations focused on producing cash crops for exporting
 - o **Industrialization:** Europeans developed cities with Western industrial technologies and ideas
 - o **Education:** Local traditions of apprenticeship was replaced by formal, structured education
 - o **Language Issues:** Because so many diverse people were now mingling, new languages emerged, like Afrikaans
 - o **Cultural Losses:** European influences superseded cultural traditions
 - o **Economic Stability:** Commercial farming and industrialization brought economic growth and stability to the region and made Africa an important contributor to the world's economy
- **Independence:** As colonies grew richer, native Africans wanted a say in how the governments were run. Independence movements dominated the mid-1900s. However, **independence had a price:**
 - o African economies had been set up to meet European needs rather than African needs. The Africans now in power didn't have the knowledge or skill on how to refocus their economies on their own people.
 - o When the Europeans ran the governments, they didn't involve the Africans much, nor did they give Africans models for democracy. So when the Europeans were kicked out, the Africans didn't have the knowledge or skill to run their own governments.
 - o Most African countries adopted the political borders that had been set by the European colonists, which divided people of language and ethnic background and combined people with different languages and ethnic backgrounds, contributing to conflicts within the country.
 - o **Nigeria's experience** is one of various tribes coming together to fight for their independence from the British and then coming apart to fight each other once they were on their own. They experienced a violent and

- costly civil war. The war is now over, but religious and ethnic divisions still plague Nigeria today.
- **South Africa** gained independence from the British in 1910. However, the white minority population of South Africa continued to run the government. It imposed a policy of **apartheid**, or separation of races (similar to segregation in the U.S.), on South Africa's black majority and racially mixed peoples. These people were denied political rights and equality with whites in education, jobs, and housing. In the early 1990s, internal unrest and international pressure finally forced South Africa to end apartheid. In 1994, **Nelson Mandela**, the country's most popular anti-apartheid leader was released after serving 27 years in prison and was elected president in the first election based on **universal suffrage**, or equal voting rights for all adult citizens.

THE CULTURE

Music and dancing are very important community cultural activities in Sub-Saharan Africa. The **blues and jazz music** traditions of North America both have roots in the music enslaved Africans brought with them to our continent. Oral Literature or storytelling is also culturally significant. These stories are chanted, sung, or recited. **Oral Tradition**, the practice of passing down stories through generations by word of mouth, is an important source of history for people today.

Most Africans maintain strong family ties. In rural areas, households of **extended families** spanning several generations are common. **Clans**, or large groups of people living together that are all descended from an early common ancestor, are also found within the larger tribal network. In urban areas, a **nuclear family** comprised only of a husband, wife, and their children, is rapidly replacing the traditional extended family lifestyle.

THE ECONOMY

Farming is the main economic activity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- **Subsistence Farming:** Small scale farming that provides primarily for the needs of just a family or village. Most people in the region engage in this kind of farming.
- **Shifting Farming:** Also called **slash-and-burn farming**. A method in which farmers living in a forested area will burn down the trees on a plot of land, plant their crops in the nutrient rich ash-soil, stay for a year or two and then move on to another plot of land where they will again burn down the trees and continue the cycle. These kind of farmers generally move every one to three years to find better soil.
- **Sedentary Farming:** Agriculture conducted at permanent settlements. Common in areas of good soil.
- **Commercial Farming:** Where farms produce cash crops on a large scale
 - **Cash Crops:** Crops that are grown in order to be sold, rather than used by the farmer
 - **Disputes:** Commercial farming causes problems because these plantations take all the best land, making it difficult for small scale farmers to meet their own food needs.
- **Conservation Farming:** Land management and crop rotation techniques that help protect farmland. Currently used in Zambia, but gaining popularity.
- **Challenges:** Farming in Africa can be difficult due to **desertification and lack of technology**

Mining: Dangerous but profitable in various countries in the region

- Gold, diamonds, and gems are mined in South Africa. South Africa is actually the world leader in gold production and one of the world leaders in diamond and gem production.
- Coal, platinum, chromium, vanadium, and manganese are also mined and exported from countries in the region
- Imbalance: Not all countries in the region have mineral resources, causing an imbalance in wealth between countries. Often, even within the countries with the resources, the governments have poorly managed the mineral wealth, so money and development doesn't reach the people who need it.

Industrialization: While many of the region's countries have resources to support a stable economy, **the countries lack cheap energy, capital (money to get things started), and infrastructure (resources like trained workers, facilities, and equipment).**

Many countries of the region receive foreign aid for industrialization, but progress has been slow. Occasionally, money intended for industrialization gets used in different ways that don't necessarily benefit the general population.

Sub-Saharan Africa faces many obstacles toward industrialization.

- Lack of skilled workers
- Lack of education to develop skilled workers
- Power shortages
- Political conflicts and upheavals
- Relying on colonial era trading patterns
- Lack of safe and reliable transportation routes
- Lack of reliable communications

HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT INTERACTION

Hunger: Millions of people in Africa go hungry every day and many Africans die of starvation every year. Unfortunately, some of the causes of starvation are human created. These human created causes are:

- **Desertification:** While desertification can be caused by changing weather patterns and drought, human allowing animals to overgraze land and humans over farming soil also causes desertification. Less available healthy farmland leads to food shortages.
- **Conflict:** If a conflict is going on, economic growth stops, again leading to food shortages for millions.

Rainforest Destruction: The rainforest is home to thousands of species of plant and animal life. However, it is being destroyed at a rate of more than 12 million acres per year from slash-and-burn farming and logging. Such damage changes the climate and destroys animal habitats leading to extinction of some animal species.

Poaching is the illegal hunting of animals for their coats, tusks, horns, etc. Laws protect many African animals, but poaching still continues and is a direct contributor to dwindling numbers of endangered species.

AFRICA TEST OPTIONS

EACH TEST OPTION IS WORTH A TOTAL OF 75 POINTS.
AN EXTRA CREDIT OPTION IS EXPLAINED ON THE BACK.

ALL MAP TEST

If you decide to take the all map test, you will be asked to do the following:

- Label countries and capitals (not all of them. You will be given a map and asked to identify certain indicated countries and capitals. I will not provide you the list of which countries you will be tested on ahead of time. There will be a word bank provided of ALL countries and ALL capitals in Africa, not just the ones on the test.
- Draw in and label the topographical features you drew in and labeled on your homework map, including rivers, deserts, plains, and mountain ranges
- Color in the climate zones of Sub-Saharan Africa. You will need to include a key depicting the different zones.
- Identify certain topographical features or climate zones from a picture, similar to the Memory game we played in class.
- Answer questions about the different features of Africa's physical geography (i.e. Q: What river has its headwaters in Guinea? A: Niger River).

What to study: The Physical Geography portion of the study guide, and your political and topographical maps of the region.

ALL CONTENT TEST

If you decide to take the all content test, you will need to know the following:

- Population characteristics, ancient civilizations, colonialism (good things it brought and bad things it brought), the story of Nigeria and South Africa, cultural characteristics, economics of the region (including challenges of industrialization), and human/environment interactions in the region.
- Test questions will include matching, multiple choice, and short answer

What to study: The Cultural Geography portion of the study guide.

ALL ESSAY TEST

If you decide to take the all essay test, you will need to know the following:

- Big picture topics, including slavery, the legacy of colonialism in the region (good and bad), obstacles facing industrialization, characteristics of early civilizations, methods of agriculture, and the various issues that contribute to conflicts in the region (i.e. arbitrary political borders, race or ethnicity differences, religion, commercial farming disputes, etc)
- Examples of conflict in the region, specifically the stories of Nigeria and South Africa
- You will be given five essay prompts, from which you will answer three. Each answer will be worth 25 points and should be at least 2-3 paragraphs long.

What to study: Specifically the Cultural Geography portion of the study guide, though information from the Physical Geography portion of the study guide may prove helpful as you write.

STANDARD TEST

(A little bit of everything)

If you decide to take the standard test, which will be similar to all the other tests you have taken in this class so far this year, you will need to know the following:

- You will need to have a working knowledge of all the different components of Africa we covered, including topographical features, climate zones and their characteristics, people, history, culture, and economics.
- You will be asked to label some countries on the map, identify some topographical features on the map, and then answer matching, multiple choice, and a few short answer questions.
- You will be given three essay prompts, from which you will answer one. The answer you provide should be at least one detailed paragraph long.
- Because this test covers the biggest range of information, the questions will be more basic and require less detailed knowledge than the other three tests.
- In Mrs. Edman's opinion, this test is the easiest, information-wise. However, it also includes the most variance (map, multiple choice questions, matching questions, short answer questions, and essay). Students who don't necessarily feel strong in all the different question-types should consider taking another test.

What to study? You should study the entire study guide, paying particularly close attention to the terms and concepts that are bold, italicized, and underlined.

EXTRA CREDIT

If you choose to do so, you may take a test in addition to your primary choice for extra credit. From this secondary test, extra credit will be awarded in this manner:

- If you get 90-100% on the additional test: 30 points of extra credit
- If you get a 80-89.9% on the additional test: 20 points of extra credit
- If you get 73-79.9% on the additional test: 10 points of extra credit
- If you get 72.9% or lower, you will not receive any extra credit