

Name: _____
Date: _____

Trade in West Africa

The civilizations that flourished in ancient West Africa were all based on trade, so successful West African leaders tended to be peacemakers rather than warriors. Caravans from North Africa crossed the Sahara beginning in the seventh century of the Common Era. Traders exchanged gold for something the West Africans prized even more: salt. Salt was used as a flavoring, a food preservative, and as today, a means of retaining body moisture.

The first people to make the trek across the Sahara were the Berbers of North Africa who brought their strict Islamic faith across the desert. The Berbers converted many of the merchants of West Africa to Islam, but most of the common people retained their traditional beliefs. The ancient West Africans, like Native Americans and the Sumerians, believed that many gods existed in nature. They did not accept the Muslim belief in one God.

Merchants and traders in West Africa saw many advantages in converting to Islam

- Literacy spread because belief in Islam encourages Muslims to learn the Quran.
- Many Muslims speak Arabic, the language of the Quran. In time, Arabic became the common language of the merchants and traders of West Africa.
- Strict Muslims follow Islamic law. It is easier to solve disputes when both parties agree on the laws.
- Conversion to Islam opened up new trading possibilities across North Africa and in Arabia. Many Muslims journey to Mecca at least once. This encouraged them to meet new people and discover new cultures.

Answer in Complete Sentences

*1. Why did West Africans tend to be conciliators rather than warriors?

2. Explain why many people in ancient West Africa valued salt more than gold.

3. Write a paragraph that explains why paragraph that explains why merchants and traders in West Africa saw many advantages in converting to Islam. Your paragraph must include a topic sentence, at least two support sentences, and a conclusion that restates but does not repeat the topic sentence.
