Western Africa

The Empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai
Early Peoples’ Way of Life

- People in early West Africa lived as an extended family in one household
  - Extended Family: Parents, Children, and close relatives

- For a long time, West African people lived as hunter-gatherers

- Eventually people began to develop new technologies and advanced cultures

- This led to a surplus, which led to trade
  - Two popular resources that were traded were gold and salt
Ghana

Weapons from Ancient Ghana – Made from Iron
Ghana Controls Trade

• An early group of people in West Africa were the Soninke
  – They banded together for protection around the year \(750_{\text{CE}}\) – the beginning of Ghana

• Ghana learned how to work iron, making them very strong

• Ghana traded with people to both the North and South
Silent Barter

• Ghana traders used the Silent Barter method of trading
  – Silent Barter: A process in which people exchange goods without contacting each other directly

• Silent Barter:
  – Salt traders left slabs of salt on the riverbank. Later on, gold miners left what they thought was a fair amount of gold. This was a peaceful process that also kept the locations of the gold mines a secret.

• Ghana used its iron and resources from trading to become a powerful empire
Ghana Builds an Empire

- **800 CE** – Ghana controls the trade routes in West Africa
  - All trade passed through Ghana
  - The Ghana army kept the routes safe
  - Every trader that passed through had to pay a tax
Ghana Builds an Empire

• The people of Ghana also had to pay taxes, and so did people Ghana conquered.
• Common people were only allowed to own gold dust.
• Royalty owned ALL of the gold nuggets.
  – This made sure the king was richer than everyone else.
Expansion of the Empire

- Ghana used its powerful army to conquer other small groups
- The Ghana king Tunka Manin brought Ghana to its height in 1060 CE
  - Tunka Manin was said to have been one of the richest people in the entire world
- Tunka Manin was actually the nephew of the previous king
- Kingship in Ghana went from Uncle-to-Nephew, not Father-to-Son
Ghana’s Decline

- Eventually the Empire of Ghana will begin to decline for three main reasons
  - Invasion: North African Muslims called Almoravids
    - Almoravids invaded in 1076 CE and weakened the Empire
    - Almoravids took away many trade routes from Ghana
  - Overgrazing: Almoravids brought in a lot of cattle
    - This cattle ate all of the grass, which left nothing for Ghana
    - Ghana lost a lot of resources because of the loss of grass
  - Internal Rebellion: People of Ghana rebelled
- 1200 CE – Ghana Empire collapses
Mali

Artifact in the shape of an animal used during religious ceremonies
Mali

- As Ghana was declining, a new power was rising: Mali
- One of the first leaders of Mali was Sundiata
  - Sundiata conquered many groups, including the remains of Ghana in the 1230s CE
Sundiata: The Lion King

• Sundiata gained control of all trade routes in West Africa
  – This made his empire very powerful

• Sundiata focused on making agriculture in his empire better
  – He introduced cotton to West Africa

• Sundiata gave himself a new title: Mansa
Mansa Musa

• Mali’s most famous ruler was a Muslim named Mansa Musa
• Mansa Musa brought Mali to its greatest power in the 1320’s
  – Mansa Musa spread Islam throughout his empire
  – He had many mosques and schools built in Mali
Mansa Musa

- Mansa Musa made Timbuktu an important trade city
- Mansa Musa is very famous for making a pilgrimage to Mecca during his reign
  - This introduced Mali and its riches to the rest of the world

[Image of a building in Timbuktu]
The Fall of Mali

• Mansa Musa’s son Maghan took power after Musa died
  – Maghan was a weak ruler
• Invaders destroyed much of Timbuktu and weakened the empire
• More groups invaded and Mali weakened even more
• By 1500 CE the empire of Mali was gone
Songhai

Tomb of a King of Songhai
Songhai

- During the later years of the Empire of Mali, the Empire of Songhai was growing
- It grew powerful with trade, like Ghana and Mali
  – The capital city of Songhai was Gao
- Mansa Musa had conquered Songhai in the early 1300s
- By 1400, Songhai had rebelled against Mali and gained its independence and began its empire
The Building of an Empire

• Songhai leaders were Muslims, so they traded with other Muslim groups in Africa
  – Trade made Songhai rich and powerful

• One of the most powerful rulers of Songhai was Sunni Ali in 1464
  – Sunni Ali organized the empire and united everyone

• Sunni Ali conquered much of the remains of Mali
Rebellion

• Sunni Ali died in 1492 and his son Sunni Baru took over
  – Sunni Baru was not Muslim
  – The people rebelled against Sunni Baru

• The leader of the rebellion was Muhammad Ture
  – Muhammad will change his name to Askia after the rebellion succeeds
Askia the Great

• Askia quickly became the leader of Songhai in 1493
  – Askia made Timbuktu a great center of learning
• Askia set up provinces throughout his empire to help run things easier
• Askia set up an army to help protect his empire
Songhai Falls to Morocco

- Morocco was a nation to the north of Songhai
- The Moroccan army invaded Songhai in 1591
  - The Moroccans had superior weapons
  - Including the arquebus, an early form of gun
- The Moroccans destroyed Gao and Timbuktu
- The fall of Songhai marks the end of empires in West Africa