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■ BEGINNINGS

Human life began in Africa. What are believed to be the earliest artifacts of man—stone tools, the remains of human skulls—were discovered by British archaeologists Louis Leakey and his wife, Mary, at Olduvai Gorge in East Africa in what is now Tanzania. After years of finding only ancient animal bones, fossils, and prehistoric tools, in 1959, Mary Leakey unearthed a fossilized hominid skull almost two million years old.

It is now known that Africans were the first people to use fire, make tools, render artistic images, and farm. The oldest mathematical object—called the “Ishongo Bone” after the Ishongo peoples of Central Africa (in what is now

the Democratic Republic of Congo)—is an intricately marked bone that may well be the world’s oldest table of prime numbers. It is believed to be somewhere between 6,000 and 9,000 years old.

Not only did human *life* begin in Africa, but the earliest structures of civilization emerged there. Gathering around the three great African river basins—the Nile, the Niger, and the Congo—early humans shifted from living in scant, disparate bands of nomadic tribes to more complex and localized settlements from which cities and empires grew.

The legendary West African city of Timbuktu,



for example, founded around A.D. 1100, was a city of economic and cultural might—an intellectual, spiritual, and commercial capital—equal to the most historically significant cities in the world: Athens, Rome, Mecca, and Jerusalem.

In 1870, archaeologists uncovered massive elliptical stone walls and other remains of an ancient South African civilization estimated to have existed from A.D. 500 to 1600 in the area of what is now Zimbabwe. (*Zimbabwe* means “stone enclosure.”) Evidence suggests early Zimbabweans smelted gold, carved sculptures, and fashioned pottery. Similar ruins were found in the nearby vicinity of the Limpopo River. As no written records of these cultures exist, the particulars of their decline remain unknown.

In his book, *The World and Africa* (first published in 1947), the late W. E. B. Du Bois, a black Harvard-educated philosopher, historian, and teacher, addressed one of the central ironies of Africa—that the land where language began could not always rely on written records to preserve its story. As Du Bois wrote:

Climate, with sun and ice, gave Europe the opportunity to expand vastly the Asiatic and African invention of written records. Heat and rain made written record in West Africa almost impossible, and forced that land to rely on the memories of men, developed over the centuries to a marvelous system of folklore and tradition.

■ REVIEW QUESTIONS

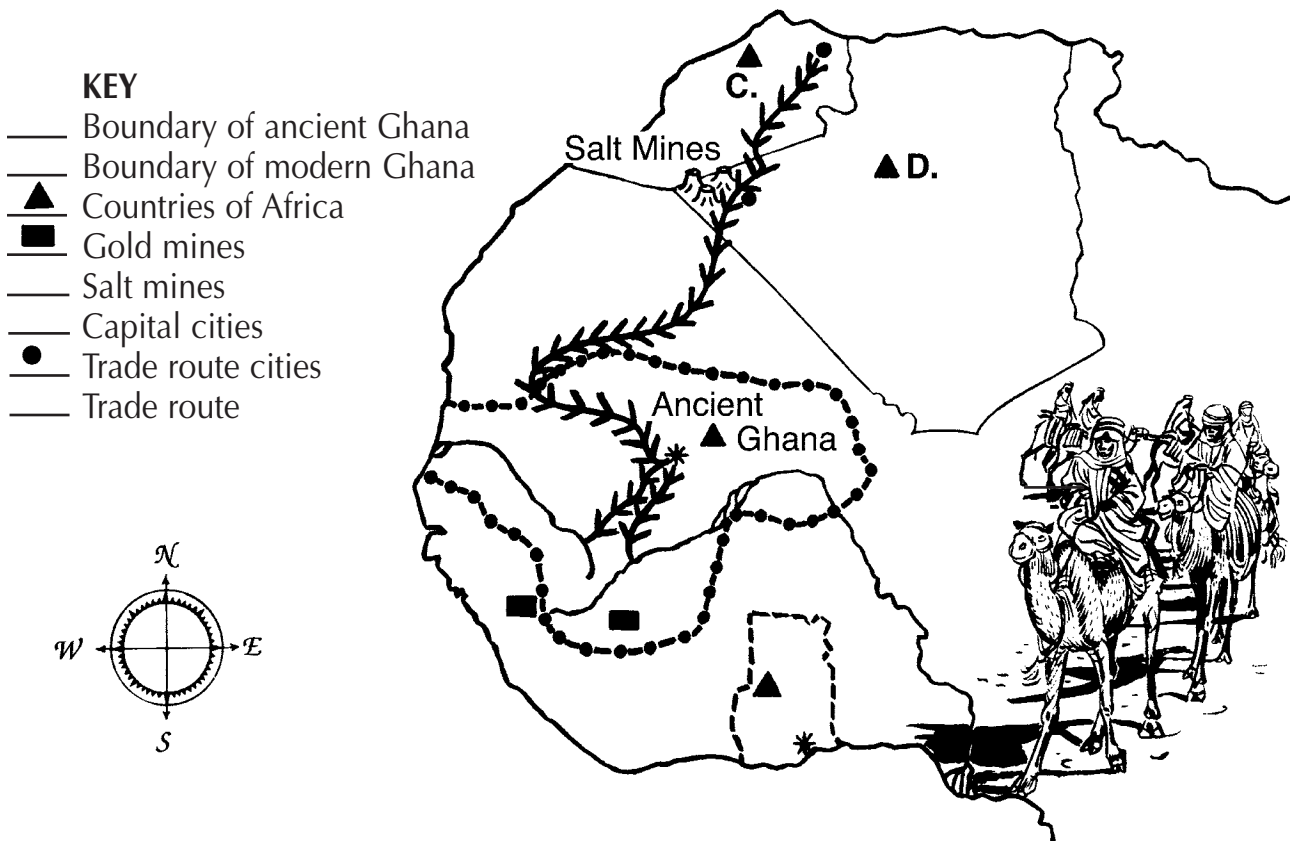
Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Where was the evidence of earliest man found?
2. When did the Ishongo people live?
3. What significant contribution did the Ishongo people make to learning?
4. Where do the descendants of the Ishongo people live today?
5. Why is the city of Timbuktu remembered?
6. What important find was made by archaeologists in 1870?
7. In your own words explain why we know so little of early African history.

GHANA: MAP STUDY

At the most powerful point in its history, Ghana was thought to extend from the Senegal River to the Atlantic Ocean, and southward to the headwaters of the Niger River. This early nation faced the Sahara Desert on the north, and its southern boundary was near the bend of the Niger River.

The trade route started at Sidjilmassa near the Moroccan-Algerian border. It passed the salt region near the village of Taghaza, in present-day Algeria. The trade route crossed the Sahara to the gold regions of Ghana.



MAP EXERCISES

1. Label the following on the map: Niger River; Senegal River; Sahara Desert.
2. Find ancient Ghana on the map. Color its boundary red. Write in its name and the name of its capital city.
3. Find modern Ghana. Color its boundary blue. Write in its name and the name of its capital city.
4. In the space which follows, write the names of the countries which occupy the indicated areas today. (C) _____ (D) _____
5. Trace the path of the trade route from north to south. Color it brown. Label the trade route cities.
6. Complete the key by drawing symbols or using colored pencils.