



# World History Studies Weekly



## Good as Gold!

When Europe was in its Dark Ages, Africa had several prosperous kingdoms. What we now call West Africa held the kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhai (also spelled Songhay). From A.D. 800-1600, these powerful kingdoms gained control of the booming Sahara Trade. This trade network connected Timbuktu in the African west to Cairo, Egypt, and the kingdom of Kush in the north. It also stretched across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy.

What goods do you think Africa traded? What did Africans have that made them wealthy and made others want to trade with them? The answer is a material that is just as desired today — gold. The African countries, known presently as Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, were rich with gold. The men dug the gold-laden soil and the women washed and separated the gold from the dirt. The result was gold dust. Africans safely transported this gold dust to markets across the vast Sahara Desert by using the hollow quills of feathers.

We know why people wanted gold—it was valuable, as it is today. But what did the West Africans need for the gold they traded? West Africa is a very hot place to live. People would sweat a lot, and their bodies would need to replenish, or replace, the salt

that was lost in their perspiration. You will read more later about how the body uses salt. Without salt, you can die. Salt meant life to the Africans. Would you trade an ounce of gold for an ounce of salt? You probably wouldn't because gold is much more valuable than salt today. But back then, people did trade gold for salt!

The Sahara Desert has large deposits of salt, especially at a place called Taghaza. Trade routes for this gold-salt trade flourished between the

West African kingdoms and the eastern Saharan Muslim civilizations. It was on this Trans-Saharan trade route that camels transported caravans, large groups of people and goods, across a harsh environment. These caravans endured horrible heat, brutal sandstorms, lack of water, getting lost and robbery attempts.

Goods that were traded in addition to gold and salt included cotton cloth, beads, copper, dates, pottery, ivory, ostrich feathers and kola beans (yes, think cola

sodas). And something else was traded between the people—ideas. They also exchanged customs, foods and ideas such as the Arabic writing system and the Islamic religion.

In this issue we will learn about some of these African Kingdoms and the great Sahara Desert. Climb atop a friendly camel and journey through these ancient kingdoms.



### Connections

## Morocco's 156-Mile Footrace

If you've ever run a mile, you know how difficult it can be to keep going until the end. You get sweaty, tired and might have a hard time breathing. Now imagine running 156 miles.

It sounds impossible, but every year people gather in Morocco, North Africa, to compete in a six-day super marathon. Called the Marathon des Sables (Marathon of Sands), this event takes place in the boiling Sahara desert where temperatures can reach up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the middle of the day. This footrace is considered the toughest on the planet.

The race is the equivalent of six regular marathons, back to back. Competitors in the race must put everything they need to survive in a backpack, which they have to carry throughout

the duration of the race. The backpack contains a sleeping bag, flashlight, compass, lighter, whistle, knife, poison remover, signaling mirror, survival blanket and food. Running 156 miles is bad enough, but imagine running the race carrying a backpack while facing extreme temperatures!

People who wish to enter must register, after which their names are placed on a waiting list. It may not sound like the kind of thing you'd want to volunteer for, but hundreds of people do.

New registrants have to wait for up to three years on the waiting list before they are allowed to race. Many of them race to raise money for charity. Because the race is dangerous (people have died in the past), only trained athletes enter to compete in the toughest race in the world.



photo by CIMBALY/PERMDS2010

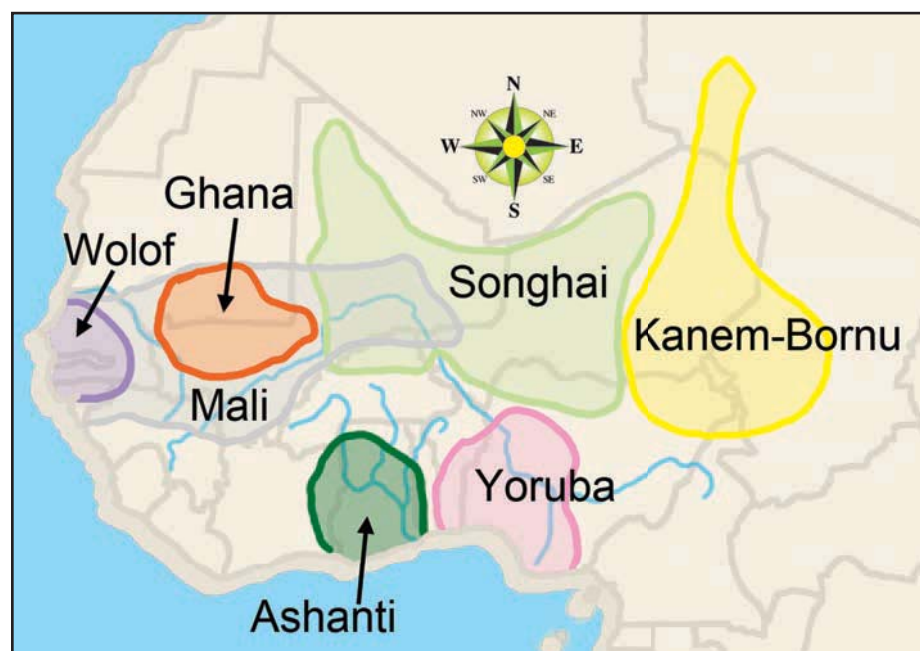


African history dates back thousands and thousands of years. It is on this continent that archaeologists say the earliest humans originated. Some people believe the earliest humans lived in the Great Rift Valley of East Africa. We have already studied the ancient Egyptians. In this issue, we will study kingdoms of ancient Africa.

## Kush

The kingdom of Kush (also known as Nubia) was in what is now called Sudan. The Kushites traded with the ancient Egyptians and with the people of Mesopotamia and ancient India. Eventually Egyptians conquered the Kush kingdom around 1550 B.C., and Kush didn't gain independence again until about 715 B.C. Like the Egyptians, the Kushites used hieroglyphics, practiced mummy making and dressed in a similar way. Eventually, the Kushites became more like the people south of the Sahara Desert. The Kush kingdom was important to the African region because it was considered the iron center of Africa. Iron made the Kushites very wealthy.

Trees were needed to fuel the fires to make iron. Unfortunately, the number of trees dwindled because they were not replanted often enough. Traders started to look elsewhere to get their supply of iron and the importance of the Kush kingdom declined. Fortunately, Kushites also had other products like ivory and incense that they could sell. And, Kushite leaders looked to the area past the Sahara Desert for new trade routes. It was around A.D. 750 that Kushite traders trekked on camels across the



# African Kingdoms

Sahara Desert to look for people in West Africa to buy their goods. This was the beginning of the Trans-Saharan trade route.

## Ghana

Ghana was the first of the more powerful kingdoms to rise in West Africa, around A.D. 300. Be aware that if you look on a current world map and find the country of Ghana, this is not where the ancient kingdom existed. The kingdom was located a couple hundred miles away near a "V" made by the Niger and Senegal rivers. These rivers can be found on a current map of Africa.

Around A.D. 300-1000, the kingdom of Ghana was a powerful empire. The kingdom didn't have gold mines or salt deposits. What it did have was the area between the gold and salt mines in Africa. One Ghanaian king saw that he could control the trade route. He ordered his soldiers to guard and protect traders' caravans—for a price. Charging traders for safe passage was how Ghana became so powerful.

One important king, King Tenkamenin (A.D. 1037-1075), would often go out to visit with the people of his kingdom and listen to their comments. He also allowed different religions to practice in his kingdom. King Tenkamenin was more democratic and tolerant than other Ghanaian kings, and the empire of Ghana declined soon after his death. Much of our knowledge of Ghana comes from griots, Ghanaian storytellers who pass on the traditions and tales of ancient Ghana through generations.

## Mali

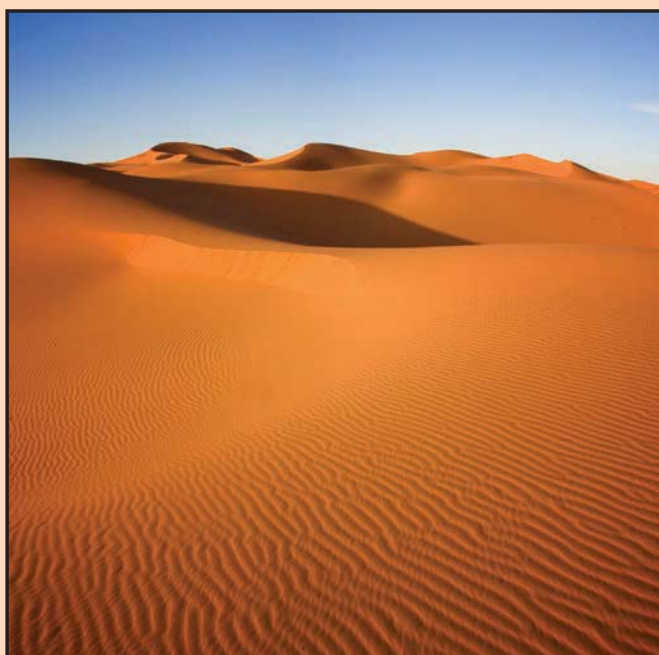
The second powerful empire of Africa was Mali. It gained power around A.D. 1300 after Ghana declined. Gold was found outside the trade routes of Ghana, so those routes could be bypassed and traders no longer had to pay to travel through Ghana. It was under King Sundiata Keita that Mali became very powerful. (Sundiata means "lion prince.") Later, Sundiata Keita's grandson, Mansa Musa, helped bring the kingdom of Mali to the attention of North Africa, the Middle East and European countries. He did this by making the city of Timbuktu a center of learning and a center for the Islamic religion. With Mansa Musa's death in 1337, the kingdom of Mali declined.

## Songhai

The Songhai traded fish for other goods with the kingdom of Mali. As Mali weakened, the Songhai began taking over the Malian lands. In A.D. 1464, a strong leader named Sonni Ali used a great army to take over other areas of Africa, including the city of Timbuktu. Warriors in canoes traveled the Niger River and took control of all river regions and the river

## Sahara Desert

According to scientists, the Sahara Desert is the second largest desert on Earth. (Antarctica is the largest. Surprised? Look it up!) The Sahara is also the hottest desert in the world. It is about the size of the United States. It covers one-third of the continent of Africa. There are two mountain ranges in the Sahara—the Atlas Mountains and the Ahaggar Mountains. The Sahara receives less than 3 inches of rain a year. Many years, there's no rain at all. Archaeologists say the Sahara wasn't always a desert. They have found thousands of rock paintings in the West African Sahara. These are pictures of elephants, rhinos and other animals that no longer live in the region. Scientists believe the Sahara was home to many animals about 3,000 to 8,000 years ago. Then the dry period came. Today, scientists study the Sahara with satellite photography and say the desert actually



## World Regions

grows miles and miles during some years and shrinks back miles and miles other years.

People have traveled through the Sahara Desert for thousands of years, despite sand dunes as high as 600 feet, blowing winds and extreme temperatures as hot as 136 degrees F. Nomadic people tend sheep and goats and travel through the Sahara with their camels. Throughout the Sahara are oases, places with water, trees and some fertile land. However, these oases can be several days of travel apart from each other.

The harsh environment is home to foxes, hyenas, jackals, antelopes and badgers. Many of the animals of the Sahara are nocturnal, active only at night, and avoid the extreme day temperatures. Some actually burrow into the sand to find shade during the day. Frogs, lizards, cobras and chameleons are also found in the desert.



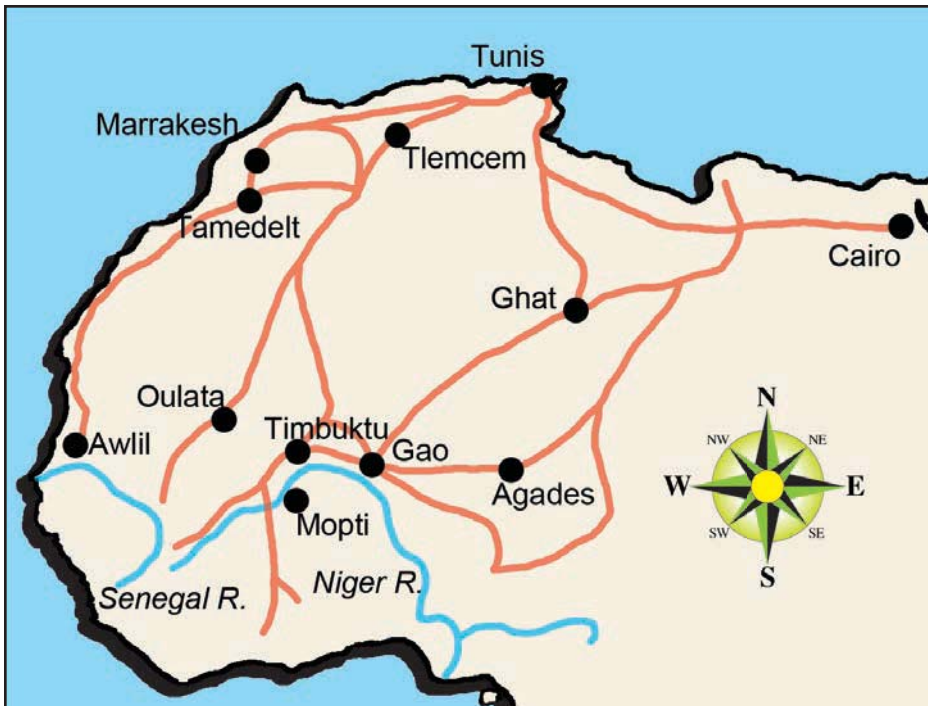
# World Biography

## Emperor Mansa Musa

A great leader of the West African Kingdom of Mali, Mansa Musa ruled from A.D. 1312-1337. He built ancient Mali into one of the largest empires in the world and made Timbuktu a great city of trade and learning. Mansa Musa believed strongly in education, so he built schools throughout his empire. He also built libraries after collecting books from all over the region. Mansa Musa built beautiful mosques, or places of worship, in which to practice his Islamic faith. As a Muslim, Mansa Musa also went on a pilgrimage, a holy trip, to the Islamic city of Mecca, between A.D. 1324 and 1325. The emperor took 60,000 people with him on his journey. It is said that his caravan included 80 camels, each of which carried 300 pounds of gold. Along the way to Mecca, Mansa Musa gave much of the gold away to the poor. In fact, he gave away so much gold that in Egypt the value of gold greatly decreased for many years after his visit. After his death, Mansa Musa was remembered for his generosity and kindness.

Few outside of Africa knew about Mansa Musa when he first became emperor of Mali. However, his pilgrimage to Mecca changed that.

Mapmakers in the 1300s added the Kingdom of Mali to their maps. Another result of his travel was that European leaders learned of Mansa Musa and all of the gold. European rulers then became more interested in the African continent (and its gold).



trade. Eventually, the Songhai Empire would become the largest empire in West Africa, controlling both the salt and gold mines.

After Sonni Ali died, Songhai had a civil war and people fought for control of the kingdom. Askia the Great (Askia means “forceful one”) became the leader soon after the war. He was also called Mohammad because he adopted the Islamic religion. Under Askia’s rule the city of Timbuktu became more famous. People came from all over Europe and Asia to attend the university in Timbuktu. The Songhai Empire declined in 1591 when the Moors invaded with cannons and guns. The Songhai, with spears, swords and bows and arrows, were no match for the Moors’ weapons.

### Other Kingdoms

There were also other, less powerful kingdoms in Africa. One was the Benin kingdom of the rainforest, which was famous for its bronze artwork and wooden crafts, like masks. When Europeans came to the area, the Benin traded with the Portuguese and the Dutch. The kingdom of Benin existed for many years until the British took it over in the 1800s. Today, the Benin people are independent once more and live in the country Nigeria.

Another kingdom, Saba (or Sheba) had a queen named Makeda who traveled to the land of the Israelites about 1005 B.C. She was called the Queen of Sheba by King Solomon, ruler of the Israelites. Makeda had heard about the wisdom of Solomon and visited him to ask questions and learn from him. She brought tons of gold as a gift to give to King Solomon. Makeda also brought back many gifts to her country from the Israelites. One such gift was Judaism, the Israeli religion.

### This Week's Question

## Why are camels called “ships of the desert?”

Travelers in the Sahara Desert have used camels for a long time. They got the nickname “ships of the desert” because they were so helpful with transporting large amounts of goods and people through this unfriendly region. Everything about a camel makes it able to withstand a desert’s harsh environment. Camels have powerful legs that help them carry heavy loads—up to 1,000 pounds! Even with such heavy cargo, they can travel up to 25 miles a day (averaging 3 miles per hour). Have you looked at a camel up close? They have long, thick eyelashes. The lashes keep blowing sand out of their eyes. Camels’ thick eyebrows and large eyelids also keep away the sun’s harsh glare. Their humps store food (not water) when there isn’t much available, and they can go without water for up to a month. Camels’ thick lips are tough enough to munch on bushes with thorns, and their thickly padded feet protect camels when they walk on hot sand. Would you want to ride a camel through the desert?

### Trades & Technology

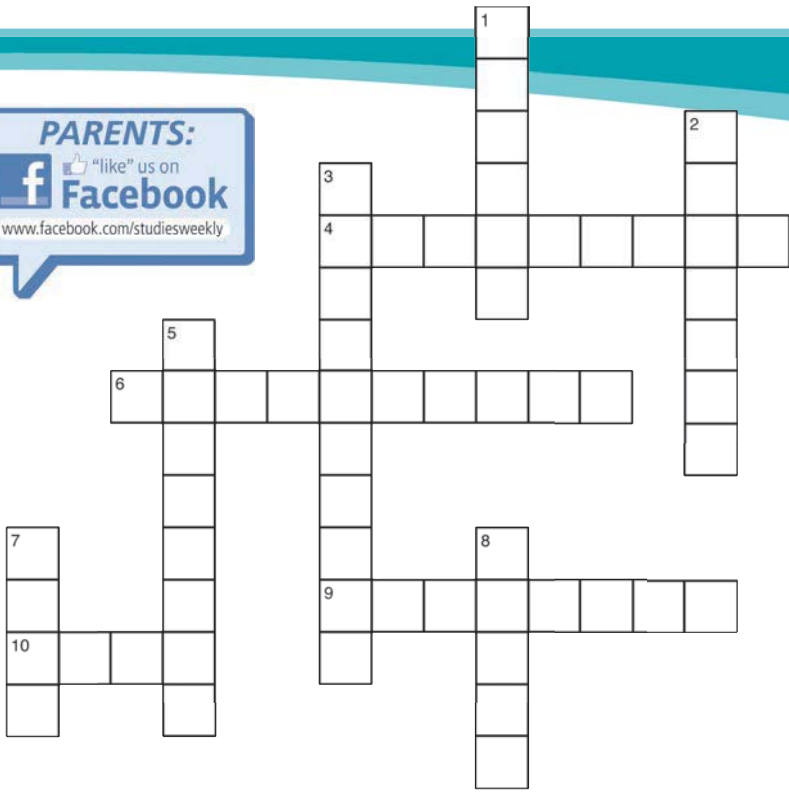
## Salt

Gold, silver, rubies, diamonds, salt. Which does not fit with the others? You’d probably say salt, because it isn’t as valuable as the others. Would you believe that at one time, salt was very precious? Salt is important to the body. It helps our muscles move, our stomach digest food, and our cells get nutrients. When we perspire, salt leaves our body. In a hot climate like the Sahara, people needed to eat salt to replace the salt they lost when they perspired.

Desert dwellers traded gold equally for salt. People in Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal worked in gold mines. People in West Africa worked in salt mines. Traders moved back and forth between these areas exchanging these two important products. Trading caravans began crossing the Sahara around the 7th century. They traveled from Northern Africa near the Moroccan-Algerian border to the gold region of the Ghana Empire. In addition to gold and salt, cultural ideas spread with these caravans. Can you think of something we have in the United States that comes from another culture?



Name \_\_\_\_\_



**ACROSS**

- 4. animals that sleep during the day and are active at night
- 6. a holy trip
- 9. large groups of people and their goods
- 10. traded equally for gold in ancient West Africa

**DOWN**

- 1. storytellers who pass on traditions and stories
- 2. one of two mountain ranges in the Sahara
- 3. largest desert in the world
- 5. center of learning and Islam in ancient Mali
- 7. also known as Nubia
- 8. a ship of the desert



As you read this week's lesson, circle or highlight all proper nouns with any color pen or highlighter. This will help you find some of the crossword answers and get ready for this week's test.

# North Africa

## Mapping & Charting

Use the map to help you answer the following questions:

1. The Kingdom of Songhai was located near where the countries of Niger and Burkina Faso are located today. What is the capital of Burkina Faso? Which of the two countries is farthest west? Does the Niger River flow through Burkina Faso?

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2. Find the country of Mali. What important river is found in Mali? The capital city is also found along this river. What is the capital of Mali?

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3. In which northern African country is the Ahaggar Mountain range found?

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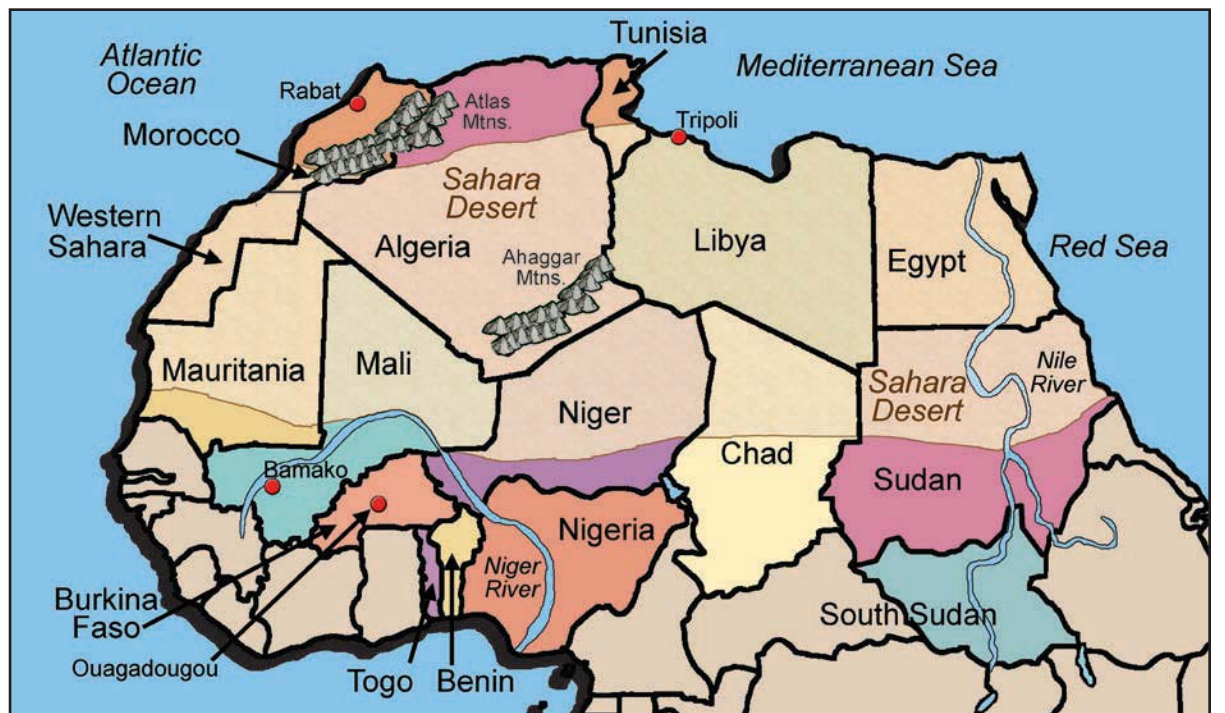
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4. In which countries are the Atlas Mountains found?

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5. The kingdom of Benin developed near the rainforest of the Guinea coast. Which countries border the country of Benin?

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7. Some trade routes went from Benin to the city of Tripoli on the Mediterranean Sea. In which country is Tripoli found today?

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8. The Kingdom of Kush was found in present day Egypt and Sudan. Which body of water do both countries touch? Which river flows through both countries?

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6. Morocco borders which body of water? What is its capital city?

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### Language Arts Connection

Reread an article about a key historical figure or event from this week's magazine. Use any color to circle or highlight details about the person or event. Analyze the details and write a paragraph about how the author introduced and expanded information in the article. (CC ELA RI.6.3)

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