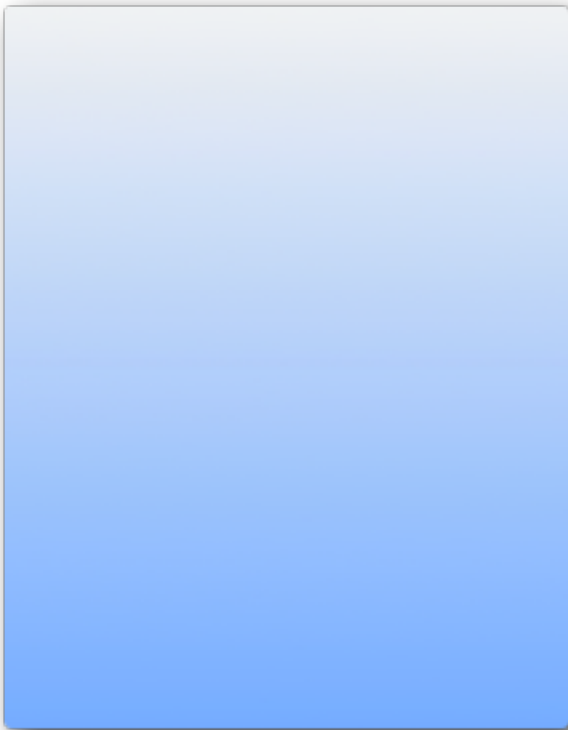


Introduction to Africa

The continent of Africa is far away from North America. How the lives of the North American Indigenous Peoples, Africans, and Europeans came together in the 17th century is a very important part of United States history. It is important to learn about each of these groups and how they lived before interacting with one another in the Western Hemisphere.



Interactive 2.2 How Big Is Africa?

If you and a friend could trade with each other for something you both wanted and the other person

had, what would you trade? Is the value of those products similar? Would you ever consider trading gold for salt? Why or why not? Well, in ancient African **empires**, which were a variety of territories and groups controlled by one government, that is exactly what they did.

Africa is a huge continent, the second largest of the seven. Today, Africa contains over fifty countries and hundreds of cultures. There are also more than 2,000 languages that



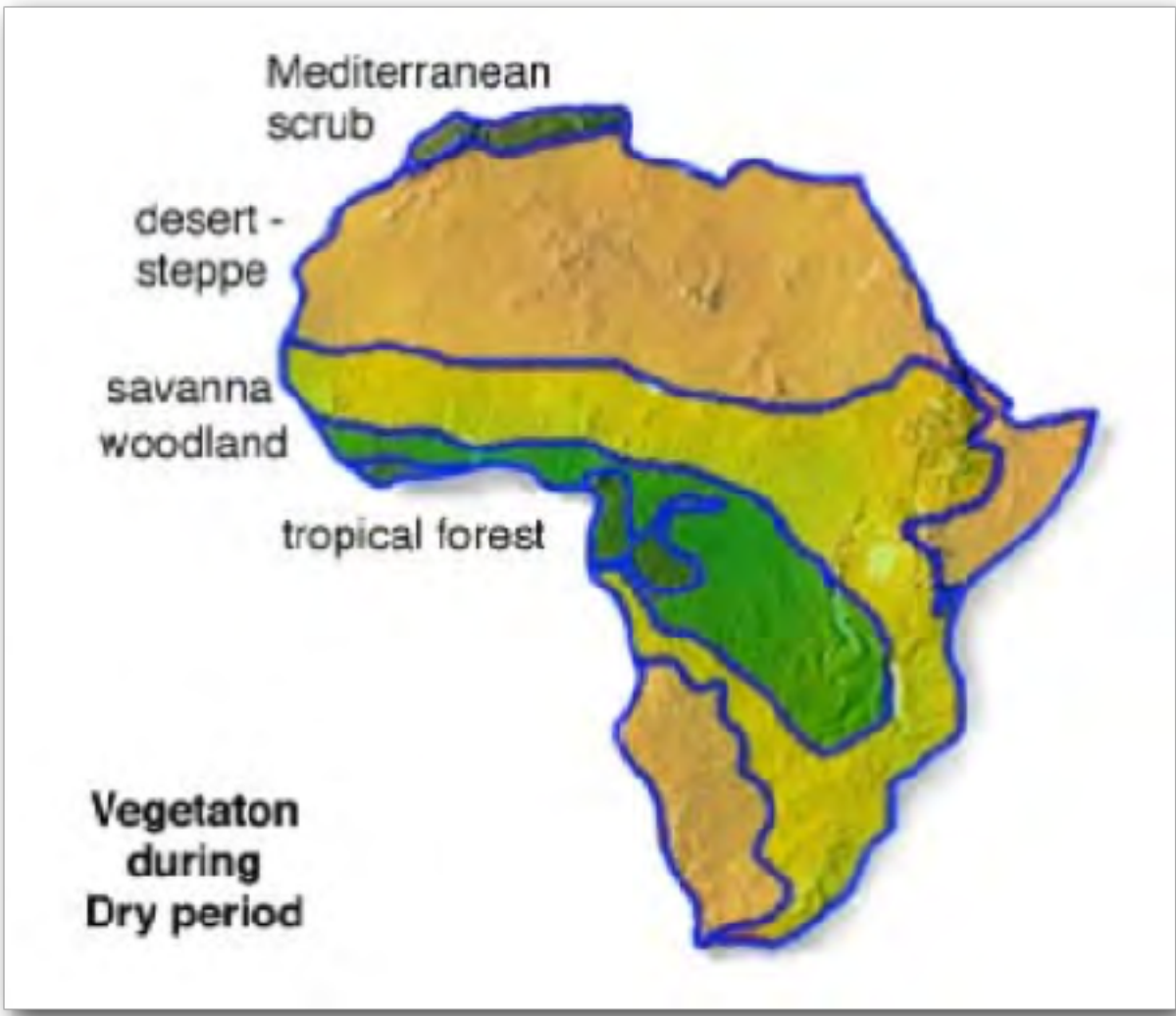
To give you an idea of how big Africa is, follow this link to see how many countries can fit inside of it.

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are spoken there now. Africa has a deep history with evidence of the earliest humans being found there. There are five regions in Africa, but Western Africa is going to be our focus.

Western Africa is home to three different major vegetation regions. These regions all played an important role in the development of early African empires. The northern vegetation region of West Africa is the Sahara desert, the world's largest hot desert. The southern part of West Africa is quite the opposite. There lies the **tropical rainforest**, which is a forest in a tropical area that has lots of rain and is very hot from being near the equator. In between the Sahara desert and the tropical rainforest is the **savanna**, a region with tall grasses and a few trees. Savannas have a short rainy season, and therefore often

experience droughts. Droughts occur when there is a lack of rain (dry weather) that is harmful to crops. These diverse vegetation regions led to the rise of three empires.







The Rise and Fall of an Empire

Remember one of the initial questions about trade - would you think that anyone would ever trade salt for gold? People of Western Africa would and they did. Salt was an abundant resource in the Sahara

desert. It was used to preserve food, which was necessary for those who lived in the rainforest of southern West Africa.

Gold, on the other hand, was an abundant resource in the tropical rainforest. It was a valuable resource because it was desired in Europe and Asia. There was so much gold in the rainforest that it wasn't very valuable to those who lived there. Since these people needed salt to preserve their food and had a lot of gold, they could trade what they had for what they needed. This trade of goods built an **interdependence**, the quality of mutually relying on others, among groups in Western Africa.

How do you imagine that people were able to trade resources? They had to cross vast expanses of land to be able to trade with

each other. Crossing the Sahara Desert presented challenges, because of the extreme heat and lack of water. That kind of travel became easier using camels. Regular trade routes grew and at the center of those trade routes was Ghana. Look on the map

of Africa to see where the empire of Ghana developed.

Ghana rose in power around the year 700 C.E. (A.D.) and was located between the desert and rainforest in the savanna region. It was directly between the two sought-after resources: gold and salt. The early kingdom (not to be confused with the current country, Ghana), had started long before year 700. The people there traded goods and

farmed in their small villages made up of family compounds. These families would join together to listen to **griots**, storytellers responsible for remembering and telling about an area's history. Because there was no written language, **oral history** was important. Oral history is information that is passed down by speaking and is not always written down.

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Within these villages, Africans mined iron ore and used it to build tools for farming and weapons for fighting. These weapons, along with its location, gave Ghana an upper edge in defeating smaller, weaker groups in its rise to power.

Because they were located near two valuable resources, they soon began to control the trade. They taxed traders that came into Ghana with goods to trade. In exchange, Ghana offered traders a safe environment. Ghana soon became wealthy from these taxes and used the money to strengthen their army.

As traders from different areas came to Ghana, they brought with them new ideas and beliefs. Most traders that came across the Sahara desert were Muslims. A **Muslim** is someone who follows and believes the **Islamic** religion. Islam is a major religion of the world, with the belief that there is only one god and that Muhammad was his most important prophet. Ghana started to use and incorporate some of these religious beliefs and ideas into their culture.

Around the year 1100, Ghana started to decline. It was hurt by a severe drought, coupled with an attack from an outside force. A new leader came to power in Ghana, but was easily defeated by the ruler of Mali, who was called Sundiata. Mali soon took over the empire that was once Ghana.

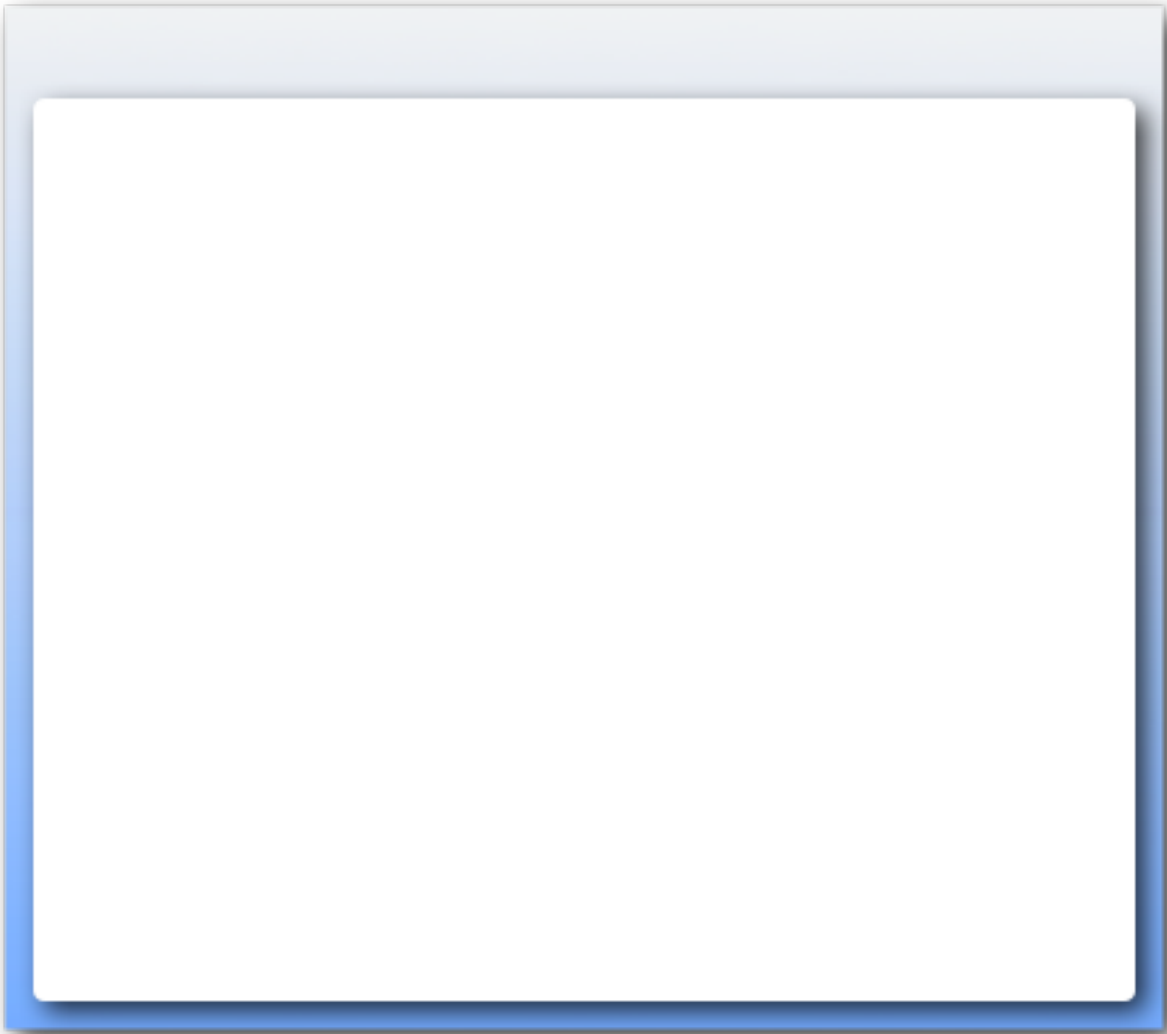
Suggested Extension Activities

Student Activities:

● Visit the following websites to learn more about Ghana:

- ○ <http://africa.mrdonn.org/ghana.html>
- ○ http://www.ducksters.com/history/africa/empire_of_ancient_ghana.php

● Create a classroom timeline of important events that tells the story of Ghana. Be sure to give not only dates, but also the important things that happened. Draw pictures to go with these events. You could also create an interactive one by going here: http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/timeline_2/.



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Section 5

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

- 1. How did the location of the three empires impact the cultural and economic development of each?**
- 2. What led to Mali's growth and demise as an empire?**

Vocabulary:

pilgrimage

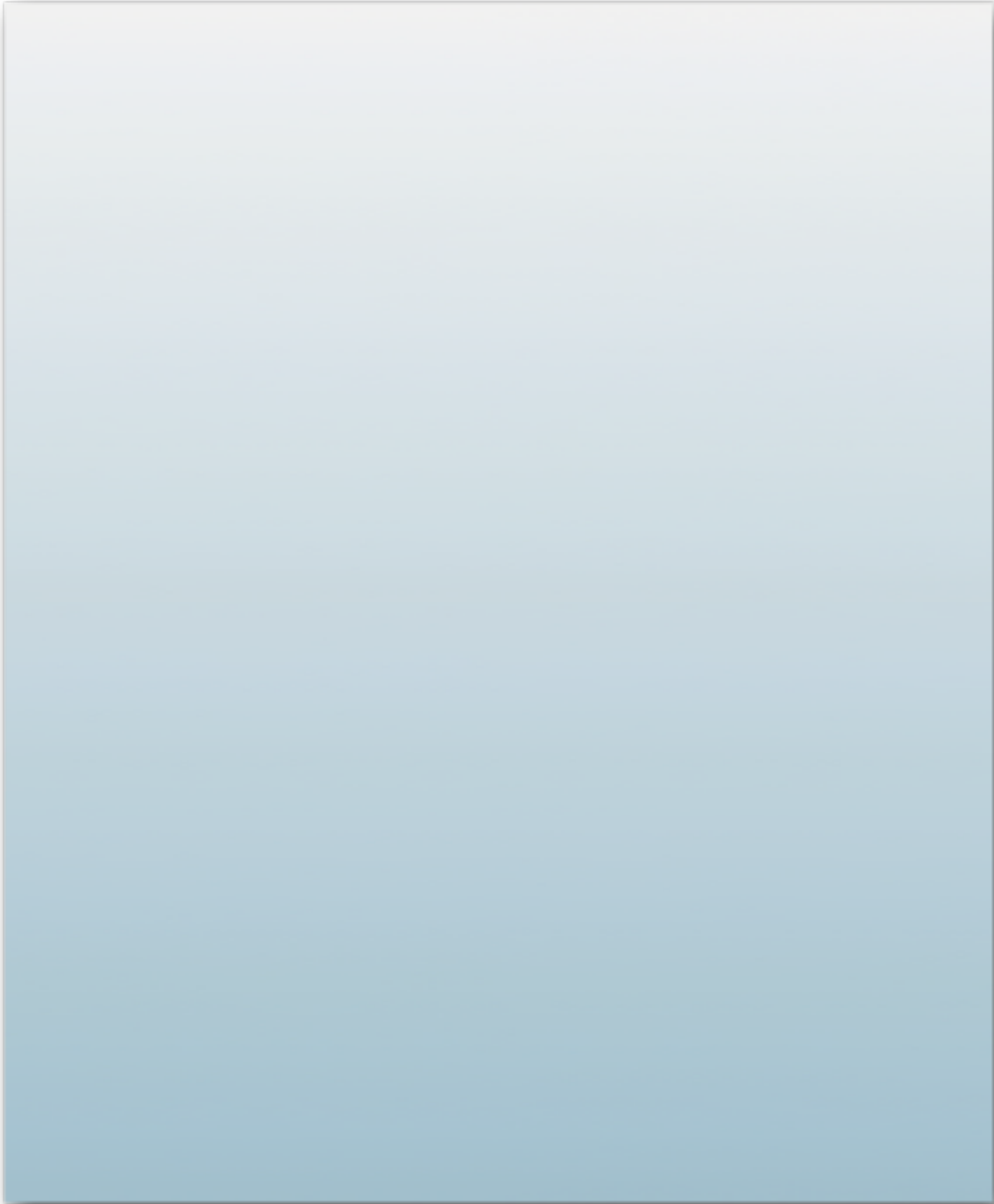
A New Empire Rises

As Ghana fell, a new empire, Mali, came to power. Mali rose as a powerful empire around the year 1200. It began as a small city-state of Ghana, but when Mali's leader, Sundiata, led a rebellion against Ghana, they took over the territory and power that was once Ghana's. Once Mali (under Sundiata's

rule) came into power, they acquired even more land and took over the gold and salt trade that Ghana once controlled. Trading was expanded to include Egypt. This helped increase Mali's wealth and this wealth helped them to strengthen their army. Look at the map below to see how Ghana and Mali together became the single empire of Mali.

The most famous ruler of Mali was Mansa Musa. Mansa Musa was a strong ruler who used Mali's money wisely. He built up the army, but also built up the empire. The popular city, Timbuktu, was enhanced and became a place to learn. People would come to study medicine, astronomy, or mathematics. He also adopted Islam and went on a pilgrimage to the city of Mecca in Southwestern Asia. A **pilgrimage** is a journey to a sacred place. Mansa Musa's pilgrimage brought a lot of attention and trade money to Mali.

After Mansa Musa died, Mali struggled. Weaker rulers came into power and the empire began to decline in the year 1400. This presented the opportunity for smaller kingdoms to attack and rebel, thus weakening the empire further.



Eventually, Mali lost control of the trade routes and fell out of power.

Suggested Student Activities

Student Activities:

- To explore more about Mali, visit the following websites:

- http://www.ducksters.com/history/africa/empire_of_ancient_mali.php

- ○ <http://africa.mrdonn.org/mali.html>

- ○ <http://www.livebinders.com/play/play?id=787442>

- Create a classroom timeline of important events that tells the story of Mali. Be sure to give not only dates, but also the important things that happened. Draw pictures to go with these events. You could also create an interactive one by going here: http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/timeline_2/.



The map above shows the ancient empire, Mali. What do you notice when you compare and contrast the map of Ghana with the one from Mali in the previous section?

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Section 6

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. How did the location of the three empires impact the cultural and economic development of each?

2. What led to Songhai's growth and demise as an empire?

Another Power Comes into Control

The decline of Mali led to the rise of Songhai. Songhai was a small kingdom that had been ruled by Mali. After Mansa Musa's death, the people of Songhai were not happy with the new rule. Under their leader, Sonni Ali, they took over what was once Mali around 1400. Sonni Ali took over the trade routes and created a huge army for Songhai. He expanded the territory and Songhai became much larger than Mali.

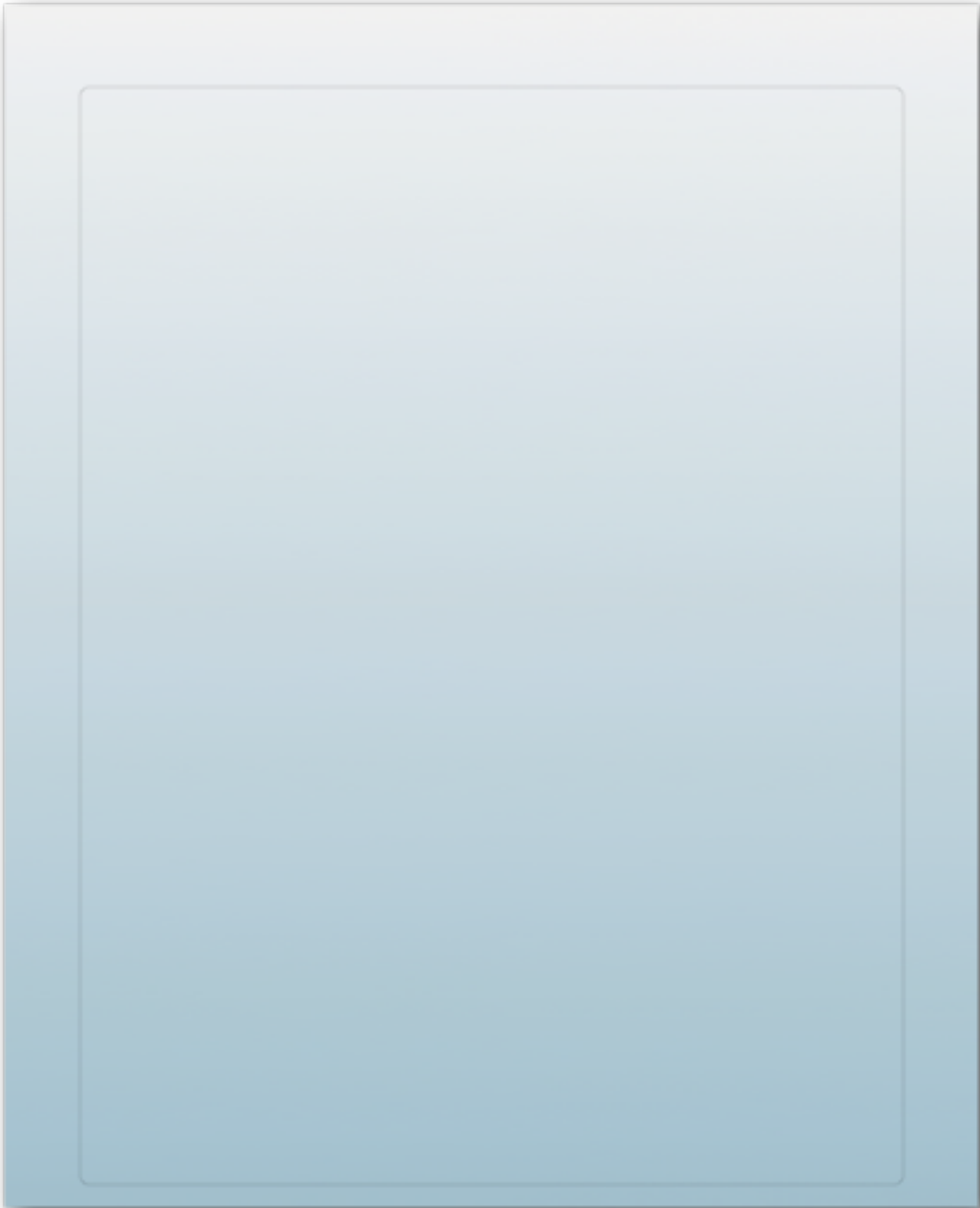


Interactive 2.3 Sonni Ali

Songhai thrived for many years - expanding territory, encouraging learning, and continuing to offer a place of study for Muslim scholars. However, once Sonni Ali died, his son became ruler and he was quickly overthrown by Askia Muhammad, a military leader. After this, Songhai struggled with poor leadership. The poor leadership led to a civil war among kingdoms within the empire and Songhai became difficult to manage and control. Once weakened by fighting and drought, an army from North Africa came in and invaded Songhai. Like the two previous empires, Songhai fell apart.

*Learn more about Songhai leader Sonni Ali at this website.
(Requires internet connection)*





Suggested Student Activities

Student Activities:

- **Visit the following websites to learn more about Songhai:**

- ○ <http://africa.mrdonn.org/songhay.html>
- ○ http://www.ducksters.com/history/africa/songhai_empire.php

- Create an analogy comparing the fall of Ghana to the fall of Mali and the rise of the next empires.

- Create a classroom timeline of important events that tells the story of Songhai. Be sure to give not only dates, but also the important things that happened. Draw pictures to go with these events. You could also create an interactive one by going here: [http:// www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/ interactives/timeline_2/](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/timeline_2/).

The map above shows the once powerful empire,
Songhai.