

Ghana and the Silent Trade



READING NOTES 13

13.4 The Gold-Salt Trade

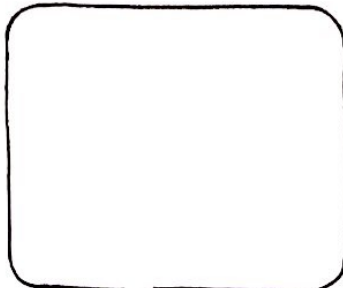
Fill in the voice bubbles. Have the North African trader explain why salt was important to the people in the West African forest. Have the Wangaran explain why gold was important. Have the king explain how Ghana became wealthy through trans-Saharan caravan trade.

Complete Sentences.

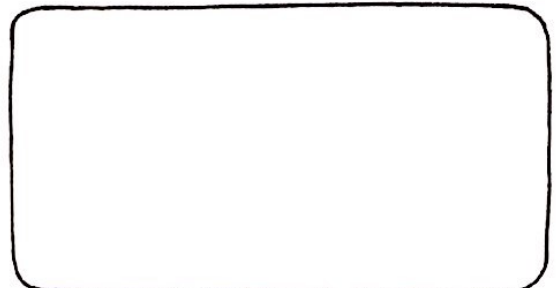
Name
Date
Block



North African trader



Wangaran gold miner

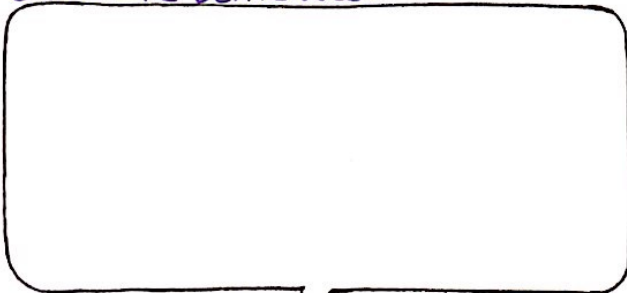


King of Ghana

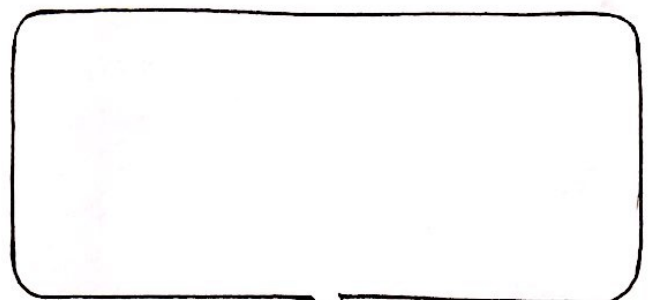
13.5 The Exchange of Goods

Fill in the voice bubbles for the North African trader and the Wangaran. Have each explain what he does during silent bartering.

Complete Sentences.



North African trader



Wangaran gold miner

GHANA AND THE SILENT TRADE

The kingdom of Ghana was said to be “a country where gold grows like plants in the sand in the same way as carrots do, and is plucked at sunset.” The king of Ghana was called “the wealthiest of all kings on the face of the earth on account of the riches he owns and hoards of gold acquired by him and inherited from his predecessors since ancient time.” In fact, the king of Ghana was called “Master of Gold.” This being true, one must question where this wealth came from: An ancient ritual known as the *Silent Trade*.

Now, Ghana never participated in this trade – it **controlled** the trade. The gold came from an area south of Ghana, called Wangara, which scholars place somewhere near the Senegal River. The Wangarans never lost control of their gold to Ghana; they simply needed a location to trade their gold for salt in order to survive. The salt did not come from Ghana but from the Sahara Desert and North Africa. The Arab traders of this region wanted gold as much as the Wangara wanted salt, but both had to pass through Ghana to trade. Ghana thus was in perfect position to serve as the **middleman**. As long as it kept both sides happy, it would be able to control – *and profit from* – the trade.

Amazingly, the Wangarans and the Arabs never came face to face in the trade; they never even saw each other. Instead they conducted what is now known as the *Silent Trade*. Here’s how it worked: When the Arabs arrived in Ghana with their salt (as well as other goods such as silk, copper, and metal pots), they placed it in piles along the river with each trader marking his own pile of goods for identification. They then beat drums to announce the opening of the market. The Wangarans, upon hearing the drums, would sail up the river with their gold and ivory. In the meantime, the Arabs would retreat about a half day’s journey away. When the Wangarans arrived at the market, they would place their gold alongside each pile of goods, based on their estimation of its worth, and then withdraw. If the Arabs were satisfied with the amount of gold left, they would sound the drums again, signaling the end of the barter. If they were not satisfied, they simply retreated once again and waited for the Wangara to increase their payment. This back-and-forth process continued until both sides were satisfied.

Ghana was able to control this – and profit from it – by **providing the services necessary** for this very valuable trade to take place. First, Ghana made certain both parties entered and exited the trade area without threat from bandits or raiders. Their presence also ensured the trade would always be fair. Ghana had one of the largest armies in the world at this time. Because of this it could maintain peace in the area, thereby assuring safe trade for the Arabs and Wangarans. Secondly, Ghana maintained the value of this gold by *limiting the amount that was traded*. “The nuggets found in all the mines are reserved for the king, only gold dust being left for the people. Without this precaution, the people would accumulate gold until it had lost its value.” Ghana, then, stabilized the trade by holding a monopoly over the gold. *In return for these invaluable services, the Arabs and Wangarans would pay Ghana a portion of their profits from the trade – a tax*. Over time these profits grew to be an unbelievable sum.