

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



Chapter 7, Section 3 (continued)

READ TO LEARN

- **Aspects of African Society** (page 236)

African towns often began as walled villages and grew into larger communities. These towns were the centers of governments. They had markets that were filled with goods from faraway places. Artisans and farmers also lived in these towns. The farmers grew crops in nearby fields.

In Africa, kings were held in high esteem, but they were not as isolated from the common people as they were in other societies. Rulers often held audiences (meetings) to allow people to voice their complaints. However, most people lived in small villages in the countryside and never had an audience with the king.

The basic level in African society was the extended family. The extended family was made up of parents, children, grandparents, and other dependents. They lived in small, round houses made of mud and topped with a thatch roof. The extended families were combined into larger communities known as **lineage groups**. All members of a lineage group could trace their lineage (descent) from a common ancestor. Members of extended families and lineage groups were expected to take care of one another.

Women were usually subordinate to men in Africa, but they were valued because of the work they could do or for having children. Women often worked in the fields, while men tended the cattle or hunted. In many African societies, lineage was based on the mother rather than the father. These societies are called **matrilineal** (societies in which descent is traced through the mother) rather than **patrilineal** (societies in which descent is traced through the father). Women were often allowed to inherit property, and the husband was often expected to move into his wife's house.

In a typical African village, there was a process for educating young people. This prepared them to become part of the community. Both boys and girls were raised by their mothers until they were six years old. From their mothers, they learned language, songs, and their family history. At six, boys and girls went different ways. Fathers took control of their sons' education. Boys learned how to hunt and fish, how to grow plants, and how to clear fields. Girls continued to learn what they needed from their mothers. This included how to take care of the home and work in the fields. As children got older, they took on more responsibility in the community. Young people reached a point where they were expected to enter the community fully. This transition occurred at the time of puberty. It was marked by an initiation ceremony.

Slavery was practiced in Africa from ancient times. Berber groups in North Africa raided farming villages south of the Sahara and took captives. The captives were then taken north and sold throughout the Mediterranean. Slavery was also common in other parts of Africa. Slaves included people captured in war, debtors, and criminals. Slaves were not necessarily seen as inferior. Many

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were trusted servants or were respected because of their special knowledge or talents. But life was difficult for most slaves. Those who worked on farmlands had hard, long hours. Those who worked as soldiers were sometimes better off. Slaves who worked as domestic servants usually had the best lives.

5. What was the process for educating young people in African villages?

• Religious Beliefs in Africa (page 238)

Most African societies shared some common religious ideas. One of these was a belief in a single creator god. Many people believed that that the creator god was merciful and could be appeased by proper behavior. One way to communicate with the gods was through ritual. This was carried out by a special class of **diviners** (people who believe they have the power to foretell events, usually by working with supernatural forces). Many diviners were employed by the king to guarantee a good harvest or otherwise protect the ruler and his subjects.

Ancestors were also important in African religion. Ancestors were believed to be closer to the gods and to have the power to influence the lives of their descendants. Ceremonies dedicated to ancestors were important rituals. Many African religions believed in an afterlife. Ancestral souls would live on in the afterlife as long as the lineage group continued to perform rituals in their names.

When Islam was brought to Africa, it swept rapidly across the northern coast. It was accepted more slowly in the lands south of the Sahara, but by the end of the fifteenth century, much of this area had converted to Islam. Islam had less success in the mountains of Ethiopia, where Christianity continued to win followers. Muslim merchants first brought Islam to East Africa from Arabia, but it did not win many followers there until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In some ways, the beliefs of Islam were in conflict with traditional African beliefs. Islam rejected spirit worship and insisted on the separation of men and women. These ideas were contrary to the beliefs of many Africans and were often ignored. Native beliefs were combined with Islam to create a unique brand of Africanized Islam.

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6. In what ways did the beliefs of Islam conflict with traditional African beliefs?

• African Culture (page 240)

In early Africa, the arts were a means of expressing religion. The earliest art forms in Africa were rock paintings. The most famous examples are in the Tassili Mountains in the central Sahara. Woodcarvings were another important art form. Wood carvers throughout Africa made masks and statues. The carvings often represented gods, spirits, or ancestral figures. Terra cotta (clay) and metal figurines and statues were also made in parts of Africa.

African music and dance often served a religious purpose too. Dances were a means of communicating with the spirits. The words to songs transmitted religious traditions, folk legends, and historical information from generation to generation. Storytelling served the same purpose. Storytelling was usually done by priests or by a special class of storytellers known as **griots**. These storytellers were also historians. Through their stories, they kept the history of their people alive.

7. In what ways did African art, music, and dance serve religious purposes?
