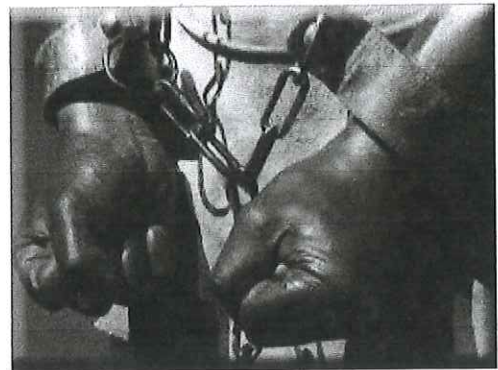


West Africa before the European slave trade

Name: _____

Many Europeans thought that Africa's history was not important. They argued that Africans were inferior to Europeans and they used this to help justify slavery. However, the reality was very different. A study of African history shows that Africa was by no means inferior to Europe. The people who suffered the most from the Transatlantic Slave Trade were civilised, organised and technologically advanced people, long before the arrival of European slavers.



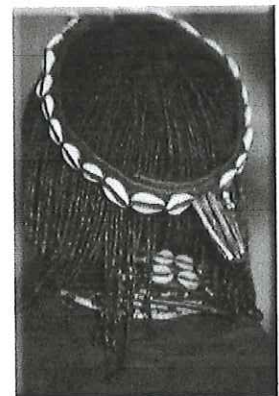
Egypt was the first of many great African civilisations. It lasted thousands of years and achieved many magnificent and incredible ideas in the fields of science, mathematics, medicine, technology and the arts. Egyptian civilisation was already over 2000 years old by the time the city of Rome was built.

In the west of Africa, the kingdom of Ghana was a vast Empire that spread across an area the size of Western Europe. Between the 9th and 13th centuries, it traded in gold, salt and copper. It was like a medieval European empire, with a collection of powerful local rulers, controlled by one king or emperor. Ghana was highly advanced and prosperous. It is said that the Ghanaian ruler had an army of 200,000 men.

The kingdoms of Benin and Ife were led by the Yoruba people and sprang up between the 11th and 12th centuries. The Ife civilisation extends back as far as 500BC and its people made objects from bronze, brass, copper, wood and ivory. Studies of the Benin show that they were highly skilled in ivory carving, pottery, rope and gum production.

From the 13th to the 15th century, the kingdom of Mali spread across much of West and North-East Africa. At its largest, the kingdom was 2000 kilometres wide and there was an organised trading system, with gold dust and agricultural produce being exported north. Mali reached its height in the 14th century. Cowrie shells were used as a form of currency and gold, salt and copper were traded.

Between 1450-1550, the Songhay kingdom grew very powerful and prosperous. It had a well organised system of government, a developed currency and it imported fabrics from Europe. Timbuktu became one of the most important places in the world.



Detail of a headdress made from cowrie shells, which were used as currency.

*Courtesy Greg Davis
National Geographic
Creative photography*

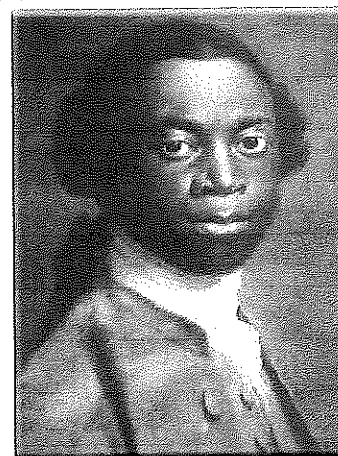
Libraries and universities were built and it became the meeting place for poets, scholars and artists from other parts of Africa and the Middle East.

Forms of slavery existed in Africa before Europeans arrived. Some countries in the African continent had their own systems of slavery. People were enslaved as punishment for a crime, payment for a debt or as a prisoner of war. However, African slavery was different from what was to come later.

- Most enslaved people were captured in battle.
- In some kingdoms, temporary slavery was a punishment for some crimes.
- In some cases, enslaved people could work to buy their freedom.
- Children of enslaved people did not automatically become slaves.

Extract taken from The Abolition Project:
http://abolition.e2bn.org/slavery_41.html

Either listen to or your teacher will make an audio clip of the early life of a slave, the agriculture of the time, the clothing worn, the dance and music and the march to the coast to be sold available for you. The audio extracts are taken from the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano, "The Life of Olaudah Equiano" written in 1789: http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/slavery/africa/olaudah_africa.aspx



Olaudah Equiano

QUESTIONS:

1	Egypt	A	Traded in gold, salt and copper; a collection of powerful rulers who were controlled by one king or emperor.
2	Kingdom of Ghana	B	Had organised system of government, a developed currency and it imported fabrics from Europe.
3	Kingdom of Benin	C	Cowrie shells were used as a form of currency and gold, salt and copper were traded.
4	Kingdom of Mali	D	This civilisation was already over 2000 years old by the time the city of Rome was built.
5	Songhay Kingdom	E	People were highly skilled in ivory carving, pottery, rope and gum production.

1.1.

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

2. State whether forms of slavery existed before the Europeans arrived in West Africa. Give a detailed explanation to justify your answer. (5)

3. Give your opinion of the following sentence, stating whether you agree or disagree and then support with evidence from the passage. (5)

“Many Europeans thought that Africa’s history was not important.”

Answer sheet

1-1-

1. 1 - D 2 - A 3 - E 4 - C 5 - B

2. Forms of slavery existed before the Europeans arrived in West Africa in a number of forms. Some countries in the African continent had their own system of slavery.

- People were enslaved as punishment for a crime
- Payment for a debt
- As a prisoner of war / most enslaved people were captured in battle
- In some cases, enslaved people could work to buy their freedom
- Children of slaved people did not automatically become slaves

3. Varied answers, based on the passage.