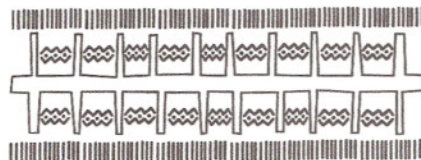


Africa

Land

The continent of Africa is the second largest continent after Asia. It covers about 11,700,000 square miles (30,300,000 sq km). Climate and geography have significantly shaped African history and culture. Even today these factors are a hindrance and a barrier to the free movement of people.

The continent itself is an immense plateau broken by narrow mountain ranges and coastal plains. The longest river in the world, the Nile, flows through northeastern Africa. The world's largest desert, the Sahara, is also found in the northern section. Some of the densest rain forests in the world are found in the southwestern Congo region. Much of the continent is grassland inhabited by a diverse animal population.



People

More than 680 million people live in Africa, about 10 percent of the world's population. The continent is divided into more than 50 countries. Twenty or more different ethnic groups might live in one country! This means that Africa is home to thousands of different ethnic groups, each with its own unique language, traditions, religion, and way of life.

Today, many parts of Africa are becoming more and more urbanized. In major metropolitan areas, people drive cars, have televisions and computers with Internet access, and have opportunities for higher education. Yet, about three-fifths of the African population live in rural areas. Their traditions and cultures have remained unchanged over the centuries. People in rural areas use the resources of the land in many ways. Some, like the Maasai of the savanna, are cattle herders. The Tuareg tribe have traditionally been nomadic, traveling across the Sahara; however, some Tuareg have now become semi-nomadic or sedentary. Another group of people, called Pygmies, survive in the rain forests by hunting and gathering forest plants and fruit.

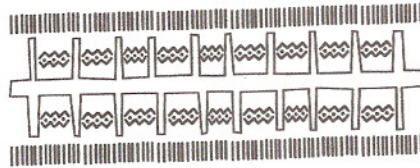
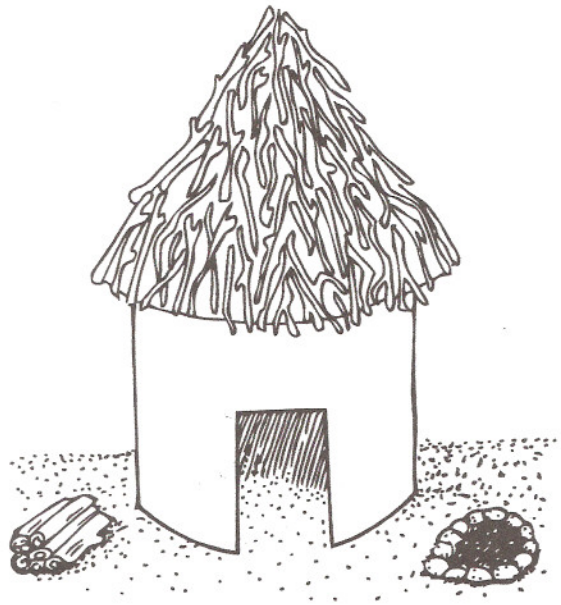
When European traders first began buying from Africans, they wanted gold and ivory. They soon found it more profitable to buy and sell African people. This practice resulted in more than 12 million men, women, and children being taken from their homes and sold into slavery.

Africa

Villages and Cities

Many African homes are built from earth, wood, grass, animal hides, and skins. Homes may be in cities, villages, towns, or isolated in farmlands. In the desert, the home of a nomad is a movable tent made of leather stretched across a framework of poles. Pygmies of the rain forest build dome-shaped frameworks of saplings covered with leaves.

Africa is also home to enormous cities teeming with European-style buildings.



Art and Culture

The earliest known African art are the drawings and paintings on smooth rock that survive in caves and rock shelters across the Sahara. Baskets are woven everywhere in Africa, and often beautifully decorated. Plates and bowls created in the home are often decorated, and items made for use in worship ceremonies are valued for their appearance. Objects used in the homes of kings and chiefs—stools, chairs, headrests, bowls, cups, trays—are finely carved and decorated. In some parts of Africa, utensils and figures are carved from a very soft stone called soapstone.

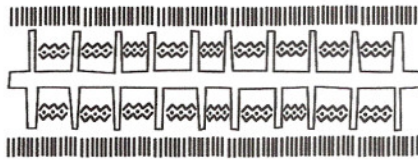
Sometimes the walls of mud houses are covered with drawings and paintings. Music and dancing are valued parts of daily life. Members of secret societies use masks and clothing of grass or raffia in ceremonial dances. Many African songs are work songs, sung while the soil is hoed or grain is ground into flour. Children have many kinds of singing games with clapping and jumping.



African Village

Most large cities in Africa have homes and apartments that resemble those in European cities, but a large part of the African population lives in traditional homes. The types of houses in which people live depend upon the region and the climate.

Some roofs are now being replaced with corrugated metal when it is available. In Chad, the homes have walls made with grass and mud, topped with thatched roofs. The Dogon tribes from Mali build their houses of woven straw and mud. Nomadic tribes like the Masaai construct their houses of sticks, mud, and cow dung. Whenever they need to move, they simply take the houses apart to move with them. Along the coast in West Africa, people of several countries live in similar houses built of mud or mud-covered branches, with thatched roofs.



Project

Make a replica of an African thatched roof village.

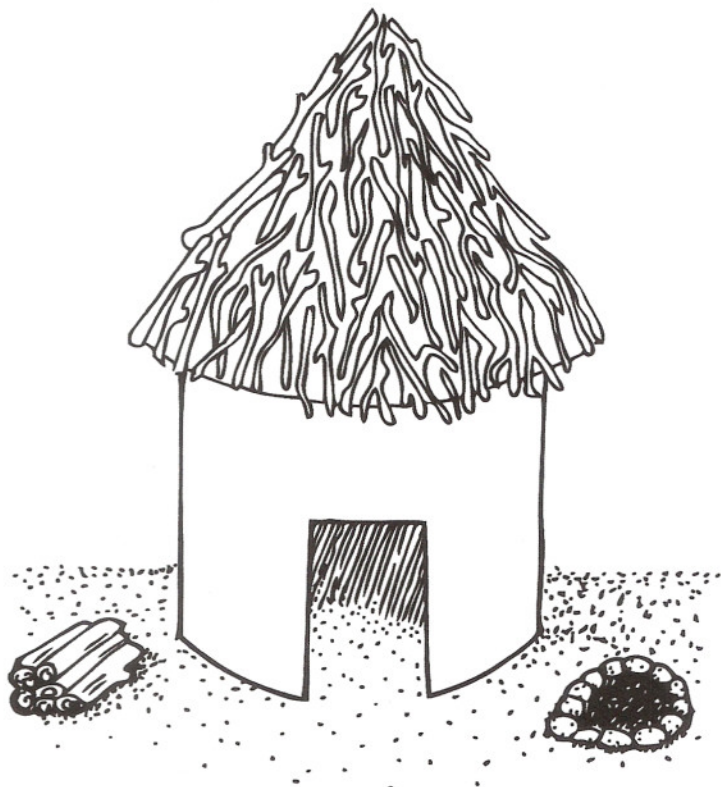
Materials

- round oatmeal boxes
- brown and green construction paper
- clay
- different colored tempera paint
- scissors
- small sticks, dirt, rocks, and grass
- white or tan construction paper
- paintbrushes

Directions

1. Cut the oatmeal box in half. Cut out a door. Paint it tan or brown.
2. Make a cone from white or tan construction paper for a roof and glue it on the top of the oatmeal box.
3. Use green and brown paint to decorate the roof, or cover with straw or small sticks.
4. Arrange huts on a covered table top. Decorate the village with sticks for a wood pile and rocks for a cooking fire. Place dirt and grass throughout the village.
5. Make village people out of clay. Paint the clay figures to show different types of African dress.

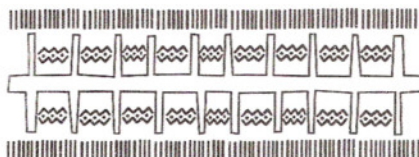
6. Use dirt and grass to make a field for growing crops, and clay to make a herd of cattle.
7. Make trees for the village with green and brown construction paper.



Geography

At the extreme northwest and southeast of Africa are young mountain ranges. However, most of the continent consists of vast flat lands or plateaus. Deserts cover nearly 40 percent of the continent. The Sahara of northern Africa is the largest desert in the world. *Savannas*, or grasslands, cover another 40 percent of the continent. The savannas reach from south of the Sahara to the Congo Basin.

The remainder of the continent consists of rain forests, located primarily in the Congo Basin and in parts of Western Africa. Narrow mountain ranges and long winding rivers also add to the rugged terrain of the African continent.



For the Teacher

Project

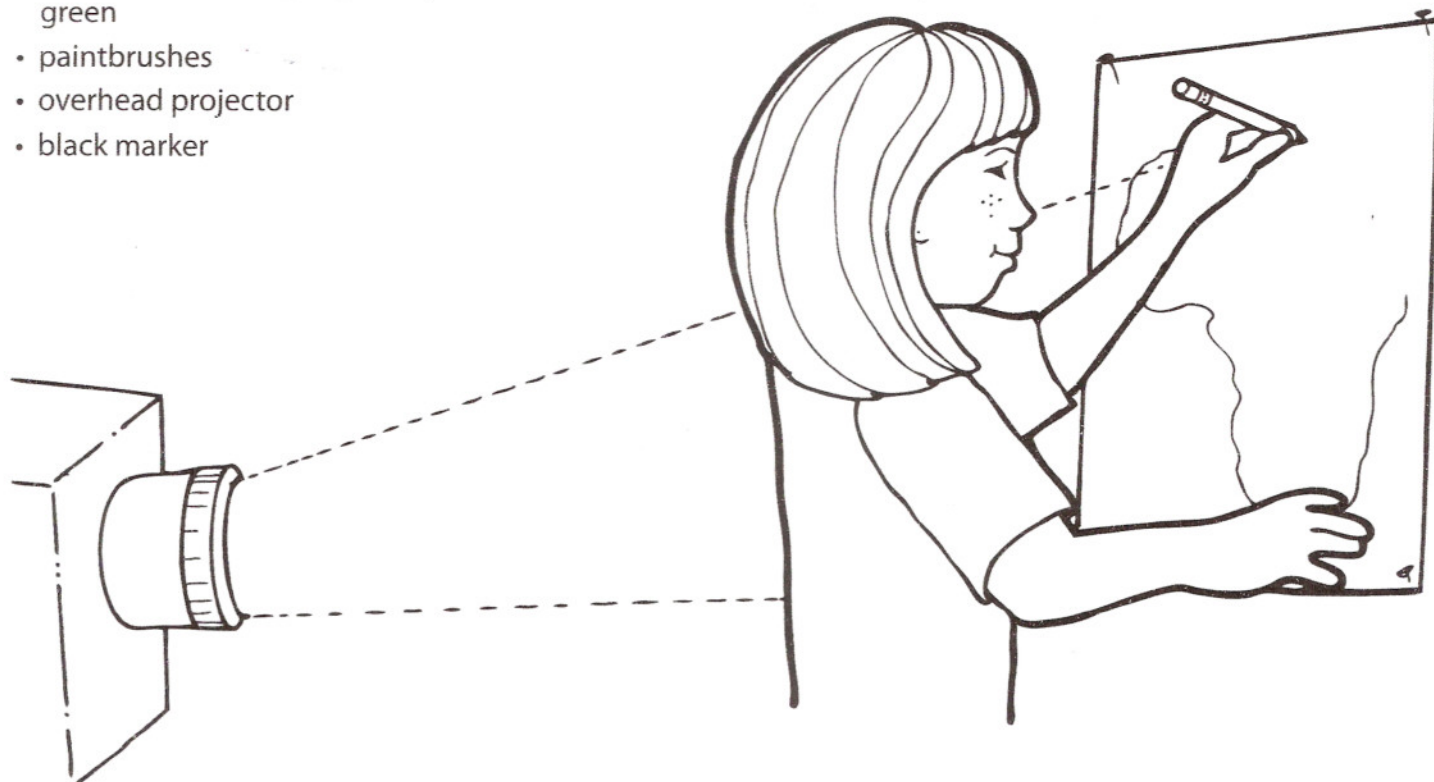
Create a cooperative mural that illustrates the topographic regions of the African continent.

Materials

- white butcher paper
- topographical map of Africa (page 7)
- scissors
- tempera paint in light green, yellow, and dark green
- paintbrushes
- overhead projector
- black marker

Directions

1. Tape butcher paper to the wall and use an overhead projector to magnify the map of Africa. Trace onto the butcher paper.
2. Lay the large map on a table or the ground and have students paint the topography of Africa on the map. Use yellow for the desert, light green for the grassland, and dark green for the rain forests.
3. Cut out and display on the bulletin board for use in the animal activity that follows.



Africa

