**Name:**

**Section:**

**Diversity of Africa WS**

**Cultural Geography**

Historic Cultures
The African continent has a unique place in human history. Widely believed to be the “cradle of humankind,” Africa is the only continent with fossil evidence of human beings (Homo sapiens) and their ancestors through each key stage of their evolution. These include the Australopithecines, our earliest ancestors; Homo habilis, our tool-making ancestors; and Homo erectus, a more robust and advanced relative to Homo habilisthat was able to walk upright.

These ancestors were the first to develop stone tools, to move out of trees and walk upright, and, most importantly, to explore and migrate. While fossils of Australopithecines and Homo habilis have only been found in Africa, examples of Homo erectus have been found in the Far East, and their tools have been excavated throughout Asia and Europe. This evidence supports the idea that the species of Homo erectus that originated in Africa was the first to successfully migrate and populate the rest of the world.

This human movement, or migration, plays a key role in the cultural landscape of Africa. Geographers are especially interested in migration as it relates to the way goods, services, social and cultural practices, and knowledge are spread throughout the world.

Two other migration patterns, the Bantu Migration and the African slave trade, help define the cultural geography of the continent.

The Bantu Migration was a massive migration of people across Africa about 2,000 years ago. The Bantu Migration is the most important human migration to have occurred since the first human ancestors left Africa more than a million years ago. Lasting for 1,500 years, the Bantu Migration involved the movement of people whose language belonged to the Kongo-Niger language group. The common Kongo-Niger word for human being is bantu.

The Bantu Migration had an enormous impact on Africa’s economic, cultural, and political practices. Bantu migrants introduced many new skills into the communities they interacted with, including sophisticated farming and industry. These skills included growing crops and forging tools and weapons from metal.

These skills allowed Africans to cultivate new areas of land that had a wide variety of physical and climatic features. Many hunter-gatherer communities were assimilated, or adopted, into the more technologically advanced Bantu culture. In turn, Bantu people adopted skills from the communities they encountered, including animal husbandry, or raising animals for food.

This exchange of skills and ideas greatly advanced Africa’s cultural landscape, especially in the eastern, central, and southern regions of the continent. Today, most of the population living in these regions is descended from Bantu migrants or from mixed Bantu-indigenous origins.

The third massive human migration in Africa was the African slave trade. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, more than 15 million Africans were transported across the Atlantic Ocean to be sold as slaves in North and South America. Millions of slaves were also transported within the continent, usually from Central Africa and Madagascar to North Africa and the European colony of South Africa.

Millions of Africans died in the slave trade. Most slaves were taken from the isolated interior of the continent. They were sold in the urban areas on the West African coast. Thousands died in the brutal process of their capture, and thousands more died on the forced migration to trading centers. Even more lost their lives on the treacherous voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.

The impacts of slavery on Africa are widespread and diverse. Computerized calculations have projected that if there had been no slave trade, the population of Africa would have been 50 million instead of 25 million in 1850.

While Africans suffered greatly during the slave trade, their influence on the rest of the world expanded. Slave populations in North and South America made tremendous economic, political, and cultural contributions to the societies that enslaved them. The standard of living in North and South America—built on agriculture, industry, communication, and transportation—would be much lower if it weren’t for the hard, forced labor of African slaves. Furthermore, many of the Western Hemisphere’s cultural practices, especially in music, food, and religion, are a hybrid of African and local customs.

Contemporary Cultures
Contemporary Africa is incredibly diverse, incorporating hundreds of native languages andindigenous groups. The majority of these groups blend traditional customs and beliefs with modern societal practices and conveniences. Three groups that demonstrate this are the Maasai, Tuareg, and Bambuti.

Maasai peoples are the original settlers of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. The Maasai are nomadic pasturalists. Nomadic pastoralists are people who continually move in order to find fresh grasslands or pastures for their livestock. The Maasai migrate throughout East Africa and survive off the meat, blood, and milk of their cattle.

The Maasai are famous for their striking red robes and rich traditional culture. Young Maasai men between the ages of 15 and 30 are known as moran, or “warriors.” Moran live in isolation in unpopulated wilderness areas, called “the bush.” During their time as moran, young Maasai men learn tribal customs and develop strength, courage, and endurance.

Even though some remain nomadic, many Maasai have begun to integrate themselves into the societies of Kenya and Tanzania. Modern ranching and wheat cultivation are becoming common. Maasai also support more tribal control of water resources. Women are pressuring the tribe for greater civil rights, as the Maasai is one of the most male-dominated societies in the world.

The Tuareg are a pastoralist society in North and West Africa. The harsh climate of the Sahara and the Sahel has influenced Tuareg culture for centuries.

Traditional Tuareg clothing serves historical and environmental purposes. Head wraps called cheches protect the Tuareg from the Saharan sun and help conserve body fluids by limiting sweat. Tuareg men also cover their face with the cheche as a formality when meeting someone for the first time. Conversation can only become informal when the more powerful man uncovers his mouth and chin.

Light, sturdy gowns called bubus allow for cool airflow while deflecting heat and sand. Tuaregs are often called the “blue men of the Sahara” for the blue-colored bubus they wear in the presence of women, strangers, and in-laws.

The Tuareg have updated these traditional garments, bringing in modern color combinations and pairing them with custom sandals and silver jewelry they make by hand. These updated styles are perhaps best seen during the annual Festival in the Desert. This three-day event, held in the middle of the Sahara, includes singing competitions, concerts, camel races, and beauty contests. The festival has rapidly expanded from a local event to an international destination supported by tourism.

The Bambuti is a collective name for four populations native to Central Africa—the Sua, Aka, Efe, and Mbuti. The Bambuti live primarily in the Congo Basin and Ituri Forest. Sometimes, these groups are called “pygmies,” although the term is often considered offensive. Pygmy is a term used to describe various ethnic groups whose average height is unusually low, below 1.5 meters (5 feet).

The Bambuti are believed to have one of the oldest existing bloodlines in the world. Ancient Egyptian records show that the Bambuti have been living in the same area for 4,500 years. Geneticists are interested in the Bambuti for this reason. Many researchers conclude that their ancestors were likely one of the first modern humans to migrate out of Africa.

Bambuti groups are spearheading human rights campaigns aimed at increasing their participation in local and international politics. The Mbuti, for instance, are pressuring the government to include them in the peace process of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mbuti leaders argue that their people were killed, forced into slavery, and even eaten during the Congo Civil War, which officially ended in 2003. Mbuti leaders have appeared at the United Nations to gather and present testimony on human rights abuses during and after the war. Their efforts led to the presence of U.N. peacekeeping forces in the Ituri Forest.

**Political Geography**

Africa’s history and development have been shaped by its political geography. Political geography is the internal and external relationships between various governments, citizens, and territories.

Contemporary Issues
Managing inter-ethnic conflict continues to be an important factor in maintaining national, regional, and continent-wide security. One of the chief areas of conflict is the struggle between sedentary and nomadic groups over control of resources and land.

The conflict in Sudan’s Darfur region, for example, is between nomadic and sedentary communities who are fighting over water and grazing rights for livestock. The conflict also involves religious, cultural, and economic tensions. In 2003, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), groups from Darfur, attacked government targets in Sudan’s capital, Khartoum.

The SLA and JEM were from different religious and cultural backgrounds than the government of Sudan. The Darfurians were mostly Christians, while the Sudanese government is mostly Muslim. Darfurians are mostly “black” Africans, meaning their cultural identity is from a region south of the Sahara. The Sudanese government is dominated by Arabs, people from North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The SLA and JEM were mostly farmers. They claimed their land and grazing rights were consistently being trespassed by nomadic Arab groups.

The Sudanese government responded violently to the attacks by the SLA and JEM. Many international organizations believe the government had a direct relationship with the Arab Janjaweed. The Janjaweed are militias, or independent armed groups. The Janjaweed routinely stole from, kidnapped, killed, and raped Darfurians to force them off their land. The United Nations says up to 300,000 people have died as a result of war, hunger, and disease. More than 2.7 million people have fled their homes to live in insecure and impoverished camps.

The international community’s response to this conflict has been extensive. Thousands of African Union-United Nation peacekeepers remain in the region. Other groups have organized peace talks between government officials and JEM, culminating in a 2009 peace deal signed in Qatar. The International Criminal Court in The Hague has issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

As a result of ethnic conflicts like the one in Darfur, Africa has more internally displaced people (IDPs) than any other continent. IDPs are people who are forced to flee their home but who, unlike a refugee, remain within their country’s borders. In 2009, there were an estimated 11.6 million IDPs in Africa, representing more than 40 percent of the world’s total IDP population.

Regional and international political bodies have taken important steps in resolving the causes and effects of internal displacement. In October 2009, the African Union adopted the Kampala Convention, recognized as the first agreement in the world to protect the rights of IDPs.

**1. List reasons explaining why Africa is so diverse:**

**2. List Advantages and Disadvantages of living in a continent where many cultures are represented:**

**3. How does this reading connect to the activity you completed in class today?**