African Ethnic Groups

Arab, Ashanti, Bantu, & Swahili
STANDARDS:

SS7G4 The student will describe the diverse cultures of the people who live in Africa.

a. Explain the differences between an ethnic group and a religious group.

b. Explain the diversity of religions within the Arab, Ashanti, Bantu, and Swahili ethnic groups.
This is a group of people who share a common culture.

They are identified on the basis of religion, race, or national origin.

Ethnic groups can have many things in common:

- Shared history, common ancestry, language, religion, traditions, beliefs, holidays, food, etc.
These characteristics have been part of their community for generations.

All of these things make up a common culture that is shared by the members of the ethnic group.

There are several thousand ethnic groups in Africa, but some of the main ones are the Arabs, Ashanti, Bantu, and Swahili.
Ethnic Groups in Africa
Religious Group

• This is a group of people who share a belief system.

• A religious group is identified based on common religious beliefs and practices.

• They believe in the same god (or gods) and have a common sacred text with a specific set of rules about how to live.
Religious groups have many things in common:

- God(s), prophets, prayers, history, sacred text, religious laws, holy days, etc.

- People from different ethnic groups may share the same religion; however, they may be from different cultures.
Religion is part of everyday life in Africa, not separate from it.

Most Africans today are either Muslim or Christian, but traditional religions and customs still play a role in African culture.

Elements of traditional African beliefs are often woven into Muslim and Christian practices.
Most of Africa’s Arab population is found in the countries of Northern Africa.

While the majority of Arabs are in North Africa, the gold and salt trade spread the Arab culture beyond the Sahara into the Sahel region and beyond.
• Arab people began to spread into North Africa in the late 600s, when the first Muslim armies arrived in Egypt.

• Arab armies, traders, and scholars soon spread across northern Africa all the way to Morocco.

• Wherever the Arabs went, they took Islam and the Arabic language with them.
• Arabic was necessary to be able to read the Quran, Islam’s holy book.

• The Arabic language, the religion of Islam, and many other aspects of Muslim culture became part of Africa.
Most Arabs practice Islam, while small numbers of Arabs practice other religions.
- Not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs.

Islam consists mostly of two different groups.

The majority of Muslims practice Sunni Islam, and most others practice Shi’a Islam.
- Sunnis and Shi’a disagree about who is in charge of the Muslim world.
The mosque in Djenne, Mali is the oldest mud brick building in the world.
Religion

- Sunni Islam dominates in most Arab areas, especially in North Africa.

- Shi’a Islam is dominant among the Arab population in most of Southwest Asia.
The term “Arab” refers to an ethnic group made up of people who speak the Arabic language.

Most Arabs, whether they are Muslim or Christian, speak Arabic.
Arab Girls’ School in Egypt
Let’s Review

• The majority of Arab people are found in Southwest Asia and northern Africa.

• The language of the Arab people is Arabic.

• Most Arabs, but not all, practice Islam.
Prior to European colonization, the Ashanti people developed a large and influential empire in West Africa.

Today, they live predominately in Ghana and Ivory Coast.

The total Ashanti population is over 7 million.
In 1701, a meeting of all the clan chiefs in the region was held.

In this meeting, it was said that a Golden Stool was produced from the heavens by a priest and landed on the lap of Osei Tutu, the first king.

The Golden Stool was declared to be the symbol of the new Ashanti kingdom.
Golden Stool of the Ashanti (Replica)
The Golden Stool is sacred to the Ashanti, as it is believed that the kingdom will last as long as it remains in the hands of the Ashanti king.

The Golden Stool is an Ashanti legend and has only been seen by the tribe's royalty.

Only the king and trusted advisers know the hiding place of the stool.
Bells are attached to the side to warn the king of impending danger.
• Ashanti religion is a mixture of supernatural and animist powers.

• Animism is the belief that plants, animals, and trees have souls.

• Ashanti believe in a supreme god who takes on various names depending upon the region of worship.

• They believe lower gods, like spirits, are on earth to assist humans.
• The major dialect of the Ashanti language is called ‘Asante’, or ‘Twi’.

• It is spoken in and around Kumasi, the capital of the former Ashanti empire, and within the current sub-national Asante Kingdom in Ghana.
They live predominately in Ghana and Ivory Coast.

Most speak Twi (or Asante).

The Ashanti religion is a mixture of spiritual and supernatural powers.
  - They believe that plants, animals, and trees have souls (animism).

The Golden Stool legend is very important to Ashanti culture.
BANTU
Location

• Bantu generally refers to nearly 600 ethnic groups in Africa who speak Bantu languages.

• The Bantu people are distributed throughout central and southern parts of the continent.

• Bantu make up about two-thirds of Africa’s population and cover the southern half of the continent.

• The word “bantu” means “the people”.

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In Angola, archeologists have uncovered scratches on rock, massive stone pillars, and tools that place the Bantu people there about 50,000 BCE.

From there, they evolved and spread eastward and southward.

As they spread across the continent, they met many new people, learned new skills, and shared their customs and beliefs.
They intermarried with the people, accepting new traditions and blending them with Bantu culture.

Bantu-speaking people settled as far south as the southern tip of Africa.

The Bantu migration was one of the largest movements of people in Africa’s history.
Religion

• Many Bantu people settled in areas where there was a strong Arab presence and are now Muslim.
• Other Bantu people were influenced by missionary efforts in Africa and are now Christian.
• Whether Muslim or Christian, many Bantu retain their beliefs that precede both those religions.
  • They believe in the power of curses and magic.
There are over 650 different Bantu languages and dialects.

Today, close to 70 million people across the southern half of Africa speak Bantu-based languages and share some part of Bantu culture.
High School Classroom
The Bantu people are found throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

Bantu is a mixture of nearly 600 different ethnic groups combined.

There are over 650 different Bantu languages and dialects.

Bantu practice Islam, Christianity, & traditional African religions.
• The Swahili people mostly inhabit a narrow strip of land along the southern coast of East Africa (in Kenya, Tanzania, & Mozambique).

• Members also live on several nearby islands in the Indian Ocean, including Zanzibar.

• The total population is 1,328,000.
Ancestry

• The Swahili community developed along the coast of East Africa when Arab traders began to settle there and intermarry with the local Bantu-speaking population.

• The group’s name comes from the Arabic word “Swahili,” which means “one who lives on the coast”.
Islam established its presence in the region during the 9th century, when Arab traders made contact with the Bantu people.

The Swahili are all Muslims and Islam has been one of the factors that helped create a common identity for such a diverse group of people.

Since Islam is a way of life, and religious holidays are very important, the Arab culture is a vital part of Swahili culture.
The Swahili speak the Swahili language as their native tongue.

While the Swahili language is considered a Bantu language, there are many Arabic words and phrases included as a result of interactions with early Arab traders.

Many also speak English.
Swahili Islamic School
The Swahili people are found in eastern Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, & Mozambique).

The language they speak is Swahili, which reflects Bantu and Arab roots.

The majority practice Islam.