**The Geography of Africa**

* Geography is the study of the earth’s surface, land, bodies of water, climate, peoples, and natural resources.
* Africa is the world’s second largest continent.
* It is home to 52\* countries, 1,000 different languages, and 800 million people.
* The one thing that all African nations have in common is their reliance on the land’s physical characteristics, which affect where people live and the type of work they do.
* The continent can be broken into many different regions: the **Sahara,** the **Sahel**, the **savannah**, **deserts,** and the **rainforests**

**The Sahara**

* The Sahara is the world’s largest desert.
* Deserts are areas that typically get only fewer than 10 inches of rain a year.
* The Sahara Desert is covered with sand dunes, rolling rocky hills, and wide stretches of gravel that go on for miles and miles
* The Sahara divides the continent into two regions: North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa
* The Sahara covers an area the size of the United States.
* Very few people are able to live there.
* In the few places where there is water, an oasis (a small place where trees are able to grow and where people can live with grazing animals and a few crops) can be found.
* Such places are rare in the Sahara Desert.
* Many consider the Sahara one of the most difficult places to live on earth.

**Atlas Mountains**

* act as a barrier between the desert, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean.

**People of the Sahara**

* Most of the people who live in the Sahara today are nomads meaning they move from place to place, usually traveling by camel, looking for water or food.
* Nomadic tribes often trade with each other as they try to fill the needs of their group.
* These desert nomads were the ones who led the caravan trade across the Sahara in the years before airplanes and desert vehicles were available.
* Hundreds of years ago, gold and salt came across the Sahara on the backs of camels from central Africa to markets along the Mediterranean coast.
* Trade goods from the coast then made the return journey.
* Even today, there are parts of the Sahara that are virtually impossible to get across without a camel.
* Some of the nomadic tribes who live in the Sahara have been there for centuries.
* Today many of these tribes are finding it difficult to make a living in traditional ways, and many have settled down to live in small villages and towns where they can find steady work.

**What Can Grow in the Sahara?**

* Despite its harsh environment, the Sahara is home to a number of plants that can tolerate desert conditions.
* Those areas that do get a little rainfall or that have access to underground water often have grasses and shrubs as well as palm trees, olive trees, and cypress.

**The Sahel**

* The Sahel is a strip of dry grassland south of the Sahara.
* Its climate is semi-arid, meaning that it gets more rainfall than the desert but still receives very little.
* At one time, enough rain fell in the Sahel to raise crops.
* Because it depends on farming, the Sahel region can be devastated by bad weather.
* In the 1970s, the area suffered a drought.
* Almost 200,000 people died from starvation.
* The famine prompted many people to give up farming and move to the cities.
* However, the region’s cities are too poor to accommodate the population increase.
* Many people continue to live without electricity, running water, or proper sewers.
* The desert gradually took over the farmland the people left behind.
* Desertification is the process of once fertile farmland turning into desert.
* Desertification reduces the amount of crops that can be grown, increases starvation, and maintains poverty.
* The word Sahel means “border” or “margin,” and this is the region that borders the Sahara.
* It is a region between the desert to the north and the grasslands and rainforest to the south.
* The Sahel is relatively flat with few mountains and hills.
* While there is more rain than in the Sahara desert, rainfall in the Sahel varies from year to year, ranging from 6-20 inches.
* Vegetation is sparse in the Sahel, and grasses and shrubs are unevenly distributed.

**People in the Sahel**

* A majority of the people living in the Sahel follow traditional ways of making a living, herding animals and living semi-nomadic lives.
* They move when water and grass run out for their animals.
* Others practice subsistence farming, meaning they grow just enough food for their families.
* Some grown peanuts and millet to sell in the market places, but undependable rain makes farming difficult.
* Many of the countries in the Sahel have rapidly growing populations.
* This is a problem since food and water are often scarce.

**The Savanna**

* Closer to the equator, the climate becomes hot and features both rainy and dry seasons.
* Savannas cover the regions just north and south of the rainforests that lie along the equator.
* Savannas are hot, dry grasslands.
* In a savanna, grass is tall and thick.
* Trees are short and scattered.
* The most famous savanna is the Serengeti, a migration areas for 1.5 million animals like buffalo, gazelles, and zebras.
* The Serengeti includes parts of Kenya, where people rely on the land for their livelihood.
* About one-third of the country is grazing land for cattle, goats, and sheep.
* Many Kenyans make a living growing coffee and tea, which are the country’s major exports.
* Many of the wild animals associated with Africa live in the savannas.
* Although the soil is rich, farming is the savannas is limited because of disease-carrying insects.
* Usually there is not enough water to sustain trees and forests.
* Grasses and grains like wheat, oats and sorghum grow in the region, too.
* The African savanna is the largest in the world.
* It covers almost half of Africa.
* When the summer rains come, the savanna is green and the grass is thick.
* During the winter dry season, the grasses turns brown and grass fires occur.
* These fires are part of the natural cycle of life in the savanna.

**People in the savanna**

* The biggest threat to the African savanna is the increasing number of people.
* The increasing population in Africa has put pressure on people to open more land for farming and ranching.
* Every year, more savanna grassland is fenced in and plowed for crops.
* Expanding farmlands mean less land for the animals.
* Some countries, like Kenya and Tanzania, are working to set aside large areas of the savanna as national parks and game preserves.
* The savanna regions of Africa have faced pressure from the growth of towns and cities and the need for highways to connect urban areas.
* As roads are built through isolated savanna wilderness, natural animal habitats disappear.

**Rainforest**

* Along the equator lies the Congo Basin, home to the world’s second largest tropical rainforest (the Amazon is the largest).
* Rainforests are found in parts of the world that are warm and humid and usually in an area near the earth’s equator.
* Part of the rainforest is in Ghana, an agricultural and mining nation.
* Ghana’s most profitable crop is cocoa.
* It also has a long history as a gold and diamond exporter.
* Poorly maintained roads make transportation difficult in Ghana, which has slowed the growth of the timber industry.

**The People of the Rainforest**

* For most of Africa’s history, the rainforests have been home to small groups of people who lived by gathering food from the forest or living on small subsistence farms.
* They lived simple lives that had little impact on their environments.
* In the 1800s, that changed when European nations discovered the riches in the rainforests.
* Land was cleared for great plantations, including those that harvested rubber for Europe’s industrial revolution.
* Thousands of the people who had lived in the rainforests were forced to work on these plantations and their traditional ways of life began to disappear.

**Rainforest Today**

* Today, the rainforests continue to be destroyed, but now the cause is commercial logging.
* This destruction of the rainforest is called deforestation.
* Timber cutting businesses also need roads and heavy equipment to get the trees they cut to cities.
* These roads destroy more of the natural environment.
* Deforestation leads to the extinction of species of both plants and animals.
* Extinction means that those species no longer exist anywhere in the world.
* Destruction of the forests contributes to soil erosion and desertification.

**Great Rift Valley**

* In East Africa, Earth’s crust is slowly being pulled apart. This causes hills, long lakes, and wide “rift valleys” to form.
* The area where it is being pulled apart in Africa is called the Great Rift Valley

**Atlas Mountains**

* This mountain range separates the temperate coastal areas of Morocco, Algeria, & Tunisia from the harsh Sahara Desert.

**Lake Victoria**

* It is the largest lake in Africa and the second largest freshwater lake in the world (only Lake Superior is bigger).
* It extends into three countries: Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya.
* Lake Victoria is very important to Tanzania.
* It provides a living for many fishermen and attracts millions of tourists each year.

**Kalahari Desert**

* Thanks to underground water supplies, grass, shrubs, and a number of wild animals manage to live in the Kalahari Desert

**Egypt**

* Egypt is connected to Asia by the Sinai Peninsula, which makes it an important trade center.
* One of the most populous areas of the Sahara region is Cairo, Egypt.
* The Suez Canal allows transport through the peninsula.
* The Nile River, which is the world’s longest river, provides another important waterway for transportation people and goods,
* It also provides a source of irrigation for agriculture.