Name: _____ Date: _____

Timbuktu and Its Handwritten Libraries

Circle group

Timbuktu is a city in the African country of Mali. It sits at the edge of the Sahara desert. Long ago it was a busy crossroads for traders. Camel caravans carried salt across the desert. Merchants brought gold and grain from the south. Goods traveled, and so did ideas. Timbuktu became famous for learning.

Hundreds of years ago, scholars and students met in the city. There were no printing presses, so books were copied by hand. Scribes wrote on paper brought from far away. They made ink from natural things. Some pages had bright colors. The books were about math, medicine, stars, history, law, and poetry.

Families treasured these manuscripts. Many were kept in homes and passed from parents to children. Many thousands are still here today. Old paper is fragile. So workers repair the pages and take photographs. They keep them in special boxes. The boxes guard against dust and damp.

Historians read the books to learn how people in West Africa studied the stars and treated illness long ago.

Questions

1. Where is Timbuktu?

_____

_____

2. What did camel caravans carry across the desert?

_____

_____

3. Why were books copied by hand?

_____

_____

4. What are two subjects the manuscripts were about?

_____

_____

5. Why did a trading crossroads become famous for learning?

_____

_____

6. Why do workers keep the manuscripts in special boxes?

_____

_____

Words to know

caravans: groups of travelers and animals crossing a desert together
scholars: people who study a subject very closely
scribes: people who copied writing by hand
manuscripts: books or papers written by hand
fragile: easy to break or damage

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Timbuktu and Its Handwritten Libraries

Triangle group

Timbuktu is a city in the African country of Mali, on the edge of the Sahara desert. Long ago it was a busy crossroads where traders met. Caravans of camels carried salt across the desert. Merchants brought gold and grain from the south. Where goods travel, ideas travel too. Timbuktu became famous for learning.

Hundreds of years ago, scholars and students gathered in the city. There were no printing presses, so every book had to be copied by hand. Skilled scribes wrote on paper brought from far away. They used ink made from natural materials, and some pages were decorated with bright colors. The books covered mathematics, medicine, astronomy, history, law, and poetry.

Families treasured these manuscripts. Many were kept in private homes and passed down from parents to children. Today, many thousands of them survive. Because old paper is fragile, workers repair the pages, take photographs of them, and store them in special boxes to protect them from dust and damp.

Historians read the manuscripts to learn how people in West Africa studied the stars, treated illness, and solved problems long ago. Each page is a window into the minds of scholars of long ago.

Questions

1. Where is Timbuktu?

_____

_____

2. What did the camel caravans carry across the desert?

_____

_____

3. Why did scribes copy books by hand?

_____

_____

4. What are two subjects the manuscripts covered?

_____

_____

5. Why did a trading crossroads become famous for learning?

_____

_____

6. Why do workers store the manuscripts in special boxes?

_____

_____

Words to know

caravans: groups of travelers and animals crossing a desert together
scholars: people who study a subject very closely
scribes: people who copied writing by hand
manuscripts: books or papers written by hand
fragile: easy to break or damage

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Timbuktu and Its Handwritten Libraries

Square group

Timbuktu is a city in the African country of Mali, located on the southern edge of the vast Sahara desert. In earlier times it was a bustling crossroads where traders from many regions converged. Caravans of camels hauled salt across the desert, and merchants brought gold and grain from the lands to the south. Wherever goods travel, ideas travel as well, and Timbuktu grew renowned as a center of learning.

Hundreds of years ago, scholars and students gathered in the city in great numbers. Since there were no printing presses, every book had to be copied by hand. Skilled scribes wrote on paper that had been carried from distant lands, using ink made from natural materials, and some pages were decorated with brilliant colors. The books covered mathematics, medicine, astronomy, history, law, and poetry.

Families cherished these manuscripts. Many were kept in private homes and handed down from parents to children over generations. Today, many thousands of them survive. Because old paper is so fragile, workers carefully repair the pages, photograph them, and store them in specially made boxes that protect them from dust and damp.

Historians study the manuscripts to discover how people in West Africa examined the stars, treated illness, and solved problems long ago. Every page offers a window into the minds of scholars who lived centuries before us.

Questions

1. Where is Timbuktu located?

_____

_____

2. What did the caravans of camels haul across the desert?

_____

_____

3. Why did every book have to be copied by hand?

_____

_____

4. What are two subjects that the manuscripts covered?

_____

_____

5. Why did a bustling trading crossroads grow renowned as a center of learning?

_____

_____

6. Why are the manuscripts stored in specially made boxes?

_____

_____

Words to know

caravans: groups of travelers and animals crossing a desert together
scholars: people who study a subject very closely
scribes: people who copied writing by hand
manuscripts: books or papers written by hand
fragile: easy to break or damage

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Timbuktu and Its Handwritten Libraries

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Timbuktu and Its Handwritten Libraries

Easier · 171 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 5.1

1. In Mali, at the edge of the Sahara desert.
2. Salt.
3. There were no printing presses.
4. Any two of math, medicine, stars, history, law, and poetry.
5. Ideas traveled along with the goods, so people shared what they knew.
6. Old paper is fragile, and the boxes guard against dust and damp.

Triangle: Timbuktu and Its Handwritten Libraries

This passage · 196 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 7.1

1. In Mali, on the edge of the Sahara desert.
2. Salt.
3. There were no printing presses.
4. Any two of mathematics, medicine, astronomy, history, law, and poetry.
5. Ideas traveled along with the goods, so people met and shared knowledge.
6. Old paper is fragile, and the boxes protect it from dust and damp.

Square: Timbuktu and Its Handwritten Libraries

Harder · 222 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 9.7

1. In Mali, on the edge of the Sahara desert.
2. Salt.
3. There were no printing presses.
4. Any two of mathematics, medicine, astronomy, history, law, and poetry.
5. Ideas traveled along with the goods, so people from many regions shared their knowledge.
6. Old paper is fragile, and the boxes protect it from dust and damp.