

UNIT 7 WORLD GEOGRAPHY LESSON 1

Summary

- In this lesson, students will read "Sahara: Land of Shifting Sand" (pp. 32-39) to learn how the Sahara's landscape and climate impact people who live there.

Social Studies Background

The Sahara is a subtropical desert located in northern Africa. It covers 8.6 million square kilometers, or about 25 percent of the continent. It is the largest desert in the world.

The Sahara contains many different types of landforms, including green oases, rock-covered plateaus, and steep mountains. But it is best known for its sand dunes.

Sand dunes cover about 25 percent of the Sahara's surface. They can grow up hundreds of meters high. Winds cause them to shift a few meters each year. If the wind is violent enough, it can move a dune 20 meters in a single day.

During a sandstorm, Sahara winds can blow up to 100 kilometers per hour. That is strong enough to send sand across the Atlantic Ocean. This sometimes causes sunsets on Florida's eastern coast to be tinted yellow.

Despite its dry climate, the Sahara is home to about 4 million people and a host of animals, which have adapted to survive the heat and lack of water. There are also more than 1,600 species of plants growing in this vast desert.

ENGAGE

Encourage students to flip through the article and turn and talk with a partner to discuss what they see. Invite students to ask questions or share what they already know about the Sahara.

EXPLORE

Instruct students to examine the photo on pages 32-33 of their Readers. **Ask:** *If you lived in the Sahara, which of these two locations would you rather be near? Why?* (Students will likely choose the top photo because of the water.) Brainstorm ideas about what it would be like to live in the Sahara.

EXPLAIN

Point out to students the Sahara was shaped by thousands of years of weathering and erosion. But it wasn't always the hot, dry desert that it is today. **Ask:** *What was the Sahara like 10,000 years ago?* (Parts were full of grass, low bushes, and people.) *What caused it to change?* (desertification) Have students turn and talk as they discuss what desertification is and how this process played out in the Sahara. (Desertification is the change from grassland to desert. Scientists think it occurred in the Sahara due to a gradual, natural change in Earth's orbit around the sun that changed weather patterns.) Challenge students to explain how desertification affected people who lived in the Sahara in the past and how increased rainfall now could impact the region in the future.

ELABORATE

Invite students to read the National Geographic article "Unseen Sahara" (www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2009/10/fezzan/) to learn about Libya's remote Fezzan region, where ancient societies thrived and collapsed as the rains came and went. Have students conduct research to learn how climate still affects people's lives in the Sahara.

EVALUATE

Have students complete the **Content Assessment** for this lesson. Encourage them to share and compare their results in small groups.

CONTENT ASSESSMENT: Africa, Lesson 1

Describe what the Sahara was like at different times in history.

10,000 years ago
4,000 years ago
Now

How do the Sahara's landscape and climate affect people who live there now?

How could increased rainfall affect life in the Sahara in the future?
