Maggie's Weekly Lesson Pack!

Name _____

Date _____

Reading in the Content Areas: Social Studies

Before you begin this social studies article, it is important to set your purpose for reading. One of the ways you can do this is to decide if you are reading to learn something, to enjoy something, or maybe just to find one specific fact. This is a social studies article, so your purpose is likely ***to learn something***.

The next thing you should do is to read the title. Ask yourself if you already know something about this subject. Go ahead and do that. Write anything you already know on the lines below.

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As you read, see if your background knowledge helped you to better understand a concept or idea.

Take a look at the title again, *Africa's People of the Cliffs: The Dogons. Y*ou should ask yourself questions the title brings to mind. What kinds of things do you think you will learn about in the article? Remember to use the words, who, what, when, why, where, and how. These words will help you to ask good questions. Write 4 questions on the lines below.

1. _____

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2. _____

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Your mind is ready! You are set to give your full attention to the Dogon people of Africa. As you read, see if you can answer any of your questions.

Africa's People of the Cliffs: The Dogons

Did you also know that Africa is one of the biggest continents in the world? It is so big that the United States, Europe, and India could all easily fit inside of it! Because Africa is SO big, many different

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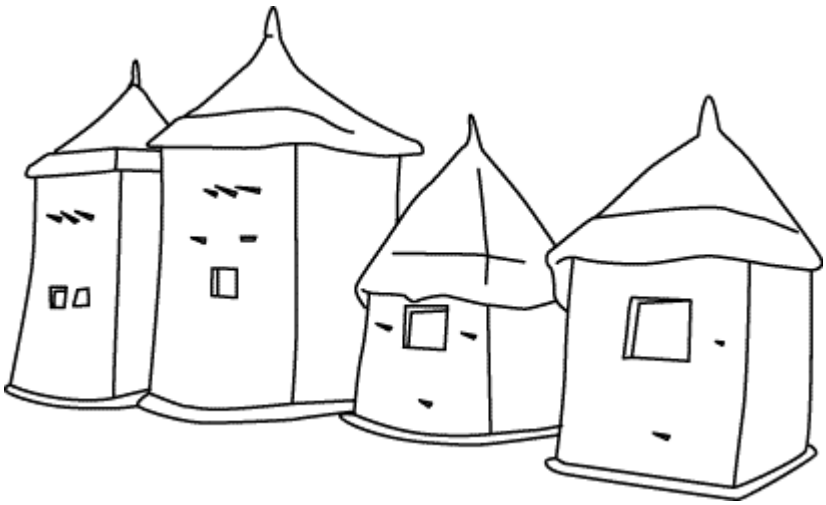
types of people live there. One of the oldest known groups of people are the Dogons.

The Dogons live in Mali and Burkina Faso, right in the bend of the Niger River. About 400,000 people currently make up this nation of Dogons. They live in 700 small villages that spread out over 15,000 square miles. The Dogon people are known as the cliff-dwellers of Africa. That is because their villages are located along high cliffs. You might wonder why people would choose to make their homes near cliffs. This seems like a very difficult place to settle. But the cliffs offered protection from attackers. The Dogons could easily see attackers. The cliffs made it easy for the Dogons to defend themselves. They worked together to protect each other in the days when wars were common. The cliffs also served another purpose. The culture of the people was not easily influenced by outsiders. It is only in recent years that newly built roads have brought tourists to the land of the Dogons.



The main area of each Dogon community is called the village. Each village includes a large meeting place for all of the people. Around this common area are the Dogon homes. They are made with stones and mud. These homes are very interesting. They are often made to look like the shape of a human being! If you were to look at a Dogon

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community from up in the air, it would like hundreds of large anthill mounds!

Today there are many important villages. Some of these villages are now turning into urban areas. Tourists visit the villages to see the beautiful masks and elaborate dances of the Dogon people. But many of these traditional ceremonies and dances have been changed to please the tourists. Some traditional dances have not been performed for years.

For centuries the Dogons made traditional colorful masks and used them for elaborate ceremonies. The masks are very important in Dogon culture. There are between 65 and 78 different types of masks. These masks represent humans, animals, spirits, and the universe. One incredible mask, called the Sirige mask, represents the stars. Each village has a group of men who make up a Society of Masks. This society is called the Awa. Members of the Awa use the masks in dances and ceremonies. This traditional ability has been passed down from father to son. But now this cultural knowledge is starting to disappear.

The Dogon people have also been known for their grain farming. Every year they throw a huge grain harvesting festival. There are several nights of music, food, and dance. The Dogons also raise cattle, sheep, and goats in their villages. They are known as good hunters too. The men cooperate to make sure there is enough food for all the people of the village.

The Dogon people have always been a peaceful people who care about each other. They believe in working together as a community. Groups of men work the fields together and women help

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each other. The Dogon people also easily welcome strangers. An unknown person is not viewed with mistrust. Rather a stranger is welcomed as a guest. In the Dogon language there are many words of welcome. Today visitors are welcomed into the land of the cliff-dwellers. The question is will these visitors change the rich cultural heritage of the Dogon people?

Thinking About It

Were any of your questions answered by the article? What things do you still want to know about the Dogons of Africa? Where could you go to find out?

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Applying What You Know

Imagine you are a reporter visiting the Dogon people. What questions would you ask them? Write 5 of your questions on the lines below.

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5. _____

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