

Timbuktu: A Hidden Treasure



Where do you think of when you think of the greatest cities or countries in the world? Did you know one of the most important cities in the world was Timbuktu? This famous city still exists today. It is now part of a country called The Republic of Mali near the **Sahara Desert**. This very old city has been around for nearly 1,000 years! It was once part of the famous African Empires of Mali, Ghana, and Songhai. From the 12th century up until the 1500's, Timbuktu was so grand, some people thought it was an imaginary place made up by travelers.

Timbuktu was famous for its many libraries during a time when libraries were few. In some parts of the world, libraries didn't exist at all. It was also famous for its fine schools and universities. During a time when there were few universities to attend, people travelled from around the world as far away as Europe to visit the African land of Timbuktu. They wanted to attend the universities there and see the land's greatness with their own eyes. Near or far, people dreamed of finding a way to make it to this wonderful place in Africa.

Timbuktu was not only famous for its schools, it was known around the world for its riches. Timbuktu held great amounts of gold and salt. Salt was a seasoning almost all people needed during the time of Timbuktu's **peak**. It was used to preserve foods such as meat from spoiling. This is because there were no refrigerators to keep food fresh for long periods.

Timbuktu's most prized items, though, were not its gold nor was it their salt. Books were their greatest wealth! Books on Islam, books on astronomy,



books on history, books on science, books . . . books . . . books! Timbuktu was the place to be if you wanted to learn about the world.

The school in Timbuktu that carried nearly one-million books was called the University of Sankoré. If you visited the school, you would discover that it was inside the Sankoré Mosque.

The University of Sankoré had several schools, not just one. Each school had its own principal who was also a **scholar** or teacher. Some of the subjects taught at the school were Islamic studies and Quran. All students had to learn Arabic and memorize the Quran at the university. Most of the books that were written at the University were written in Arabic. Arabic was the **major** language during Timbuktu's **reign**. In Arabic, students learned about surgery, astronomy, math, chemistry, geography, history and many other useful subjects.

Job skills were taught at the University of Sankoré, as well. If you ever thought about starting your own business, you could have learned how in the business class there. Do you know anyone who builds houses or other buildings? They could have learned how at the University of Sankoré. Farming, fishing, and loads of other skills were learned in this famous school. It has been said that the universities in America, Britain and other Western countries discovered how to run their schools by getting ideas from the University of Sankoré.

A student spent about 10 years to earn the highest degree at Sankoré. In order to receive an invitation to the graduation celebration, students had to have excellent Islamic character the entire time they attended school.

Those who graduated from the University of Sankoré were known around the world as being first-class in whatever area they studied. When these educated scholars wrote their own books, people knew the books would have information worth learning about.

Today, Timbuktu and its fabulous university are no longer famous. The books that brought tons of guests to the grand city are now hidden treasures.

Literally!

When other countries came to fight the people of Timbuktu and take over their land, the **inhabitants** worried that their books would be destroyed. So they hid them away . . . for centuries! The **descendents** of the teachers who taught at Sankoré, now own these paper treasures. Some buried the books in desert caves. Others hid them in rooms under the ground.

Maybe someday you can visit Timbuktu and find some of the paper treasures hidden there—and make Sankoré famous again!



Name _____

Vocabulary Definitions.....

1. **descendent** – from an ancestor
2. **inhabitant** – person who lives in a certain place, resident
3. **literally** – exactly
4. **peak** – highest point
5. **reign** – time in power, time of major importance
6. **Saharah Desert** – the biggest hot desert in the world covering most of northern Africa
7. **scholar** – student who earns high grades, person highly intelligent in a specific area
8. **superior** – better, above average, higher in position

Vocabulary Practice.....

With a partner, answer the questions below.

1. Describe the character of the **inhabitants** of Jannah.

2. What subjects might a **scholar** of Islam study?

3. We are all **descendents** of which prophet? _____
4. Name an animal that might live in the **Saharah Desert**.

5. Name something children are **superior** at doing. _____

Name _____

Questions About *Timbuktu: A Hidden Treasure*.....

1. What country is Timbuktu in today?

2. To what three empires did Timbuktu once belong?

3. Why did people from near and far want to come to Timbuktu?

4. Why was salt so important during Timbuktu's peak?

5. What was Timbuktu's greatest wealth? Why do you think this became their greatest wealth?

6. What do you think is your countries greatest wealth? Do you think it is more important than Timbuktu's greatest wealth? Why, or why not?

7. What was the name of Timbuktu's university? What did people learn there?

8. What would you study at Sankore? Why?

Name _____

Prepositions.....

A **preposition** is a word that shows location or relation to an object

- The book is **on** the shelf. The book is **under** the table. The book is **near** the bed.

Prepositions often have nouns after them. A preposition with a noun after it is called a **prepositional phrase**. Notice the prepositional phrases below:

- The book is **on the shelf**. The book is **under the table**. The book is **near the bed**.

Read these common prepositions: after, in, on, to, from, by, for, with, under, of, at, between, around, from, down, beneath, into, near, far, over, onto, across

A. Underline the prepositional phrases in the sentences below.

1. Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.
2. Ahmed is hafiz of Quran.
3. The library is around the corner.

B. Use a prepositional phrase from the box, to complete each sentence.

on the mouse	into the class	down the slide
on the pool	across the yard	out the window

1. Aisha slid _____
2. The teacher walked _____
3. The patient cat pounced _____
4. The paper airplane flew _____

C. Write a sentence with each prepositional phrase.

1. around the Kaba _____
2. in my room _____
3. on Friday _____
4. with a pencil _____

Name _____

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Write About It

In your own words, explain why Timbuktu was an important city?
