

mini-reports.¹ You might also go over the geography assignment. What follows is a thumbnail sketch of information students may have prepared in their mini-reports.

Mini-reports on Geography of Africa

- Size of the African continent
 - Africa is vast: the second largest continent, second only to Asia. It takes up about one-fifth of the world's land surface. (Africa is big enough to hold three United States within its borders.)
 - Africa boasts the world's largest desert, the Sahara, which extends to an area almost as large as the entire United States.
 - Africa is also home to the world's longest river, the Nile.
- African climate and rainfall
 - Because the equator runs through the middle of Africa, most of the continent is located within the tropics and most areas have either a hot or warm climate.
 - The northern half of Africa is mostly desert or arid. The central and southern areas contain savanna plains and dense jungle regions.
 - The countries south of the equator have the opposite season as the countries that are north of the equator.
 - Though there is little variation between the temperatures of summer and winter, there is a vast difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures. In fact, night is often called the winter of the tropics.
 - The typical rainfall varies widely in various parts of the continent. In some places, there are as little as five inches of rain per year, while other places may receive over forty inches. In Congo, it rains most of the year, resulting in a total of eighty inches of rain.
- Great Rift Valley
 - The Great Rift Valley is a continental rift that stretches from Lebanon in Asia to Mozambique in Africa. The East African Rift is a branch of the Great Rift Valley that begins at the Red Sea. The East African Rift itself has two branches, the Eastern Rift Valley and the Western Rift Valley.
 - The Great Rift Valley holds famous bodies of water, including the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and the Red Sea. Farther south, in the Western Rift Valley branch, lies Lake Tanganyika, the world's second deepest lake.
 - The East African Rift is one of the most famous features on the earth's surface and is easily seen from space.
- Significant African rivers
 - The longest river in the world, the Nile, begins in Uganda and flows north through Egypt and into the Mediterranean Sea. The source of the Nile is in two separate lakes. The White Nile begins at Lake Victoria and the Blue Nile begins in Lake Tana.
 - The Congo River starts in Zambia and empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The Nile and the Congo together drain an area that is larger than the United States.
 - The Niger River is Africa's third largest river, flowing from the highlands in Guinea out to the Atlantic. It is longer than the Mississippi River.
 - The Zambizi River is the fourth largest African river. It flows to the Indian Ocean and is perhaps most famous for its spectacular Victoria Falls.
- Notable African lakes
 - Most of Africa's largest lakes fill the bottom of the rift valleys.
 - Lake Victoria (named after Queen Victoria) is Africa's largest lake and is located in a shallow basin between two chains of rift valleys.
 - Lake Tanganyika is the longest freshwater lake and the second deepest lake in the world.
 - Nyasa, Albert, and Turkana are other large rift lakes.
- Major volcanoes and mountains
 - Most of Africa's mountains are a result of volcanic activity.
 - Mt. Kilimanjaro, in Kenya, is the highest mountain in Africa, with permanent glaciers on its top. It is also a dormant volcano.
 - Two major African mountain ranges include the Ruwenzori Range and the Atlas Mountains. The Atlas Mountains in northern America are a part of the same mountain system as the European Alps.

¹ A mini-report is a small research project. Your student will research the assigned subject and then give a short presentation of his findings in class. This assignment can be wide open; it can but need not be a written report. Your student can compile quotes and material from various sources to support a discussion or Q & A session in class, make a display board, come in character, or read a report he has written. This week, uniquely, we split the suggested topics between History-based and Geography-based topics, so be sure your student looks in both sections of his Student Activity Pages before choosing his mini-report topic.

- Mineral wealth
 - Africa is brimming with mineral wealth.
 - Gold, platinum, diamonds, and gemstones are found in Africa in abundance. In fact, half of the world's diamonds come from southern Africa.
 - Because of the mineral wealth, the mining industry makes up more than half of the total value of Africa's exports. Yet, most of the minerals are found in only a handful of countries. Thus, the mineral wealth is very unevenly distributed.

Mini-reports on Early Civilizations and Culture¹

- Review and summarize early Nile civilizations
 - Among the earliest African civilizations were those that developed in the Nile Valley. These civilizations were sustained by the Nile River, which supported their agricultural economy.
 - Nile Valley civilizations were the first to develop hieroglyphic writing and boasted significant achievements in art, architecture, and agriculture. The famous pyramids are one such achievement.
 - The Egyptian civilizations reached the peak of their power between 1570-1342 B.C. They were eventually invaded and conquered by foreign powers.
 - However, one of these civilizations, the Kingdom of Kush, which had been established south of Egypt by the Nubians, developed and prospered until its decline in the 4th century.
- West Africa: The Kingdom of Nok
 - As the practice of farming developed, settlements formed along the Niger River in present-day Nigeria.
 - Iron working technology was developed within some of these communities, the first being the Nok (whose civilization lasted from the 5th century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D.).
 - The Nok also kept large livestock and cultivated grains.
 - This culture was renowned for its pottery and metalwork.
- Northwestern Africa: Ghana and Mali
 - Around A.D. 750, camels became common means of transportation. As a result, trade routes were developed through the Sahara Desert, allowing cities in the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa to trade.
 - The Ghana Empire gained control of the southern end of the Sahara Desert trade route. The Ghana Empire was rumored to be a "land of gold" because it had exclusive control on the trade of precious metal.
 - This empire traded with Europe for items such as ivory and slaves. However, by the end of the 12th century, the Ghana Empire had declined.
 - In 1240, the Mali Empire was established near the Niger River, which provided fertile land and navigable rivers that could transport their goods north for trade.
 - The Mali Empire held a monopoly over the gold and salt trades. During the 14th century, Timbuktu became Mali's capital. It was a center of learning and trade for people from the Middle East, Europe, and other parts of Africa, who sent their merchants and scholars to Timbuktu.
 - By A.D. 1500, the Mali Empire was in decline.
- The Hausa States and the Bornu Empire
 - East of Mali and south of the Sahara Desert was the strong Hausa Empire, which had been established in A.D. 900. By the 12th century, seven city-states had joined together and shared a common language. By trading among themselves, they became very prosperous.
 - During the 15th century, these states became allied with the Kanem-Bornu Empire, which had been founded in the 9th century by a confederation of Saharan tribes.
- Yorubaland and Benin
 - Although there were some organized states south of the Sahara Desert, they were typically small and isolated, due in part to the tropical rainforests that created barriers between villages and towns.
 - There were a few strong forest states, however, one being the Yoruba Kingdom of Ife located west of the Niger River and south of Hausaland.
 - Begun in 500 B.C., Ife had become an artistic center by A.D. 900. It grew to be the most powerful of the Yoruba kingdoms, reaching its height in the 13th and 15th centuries.
 - Ife became recognized for its bronze, stone and terracotta sculptures, which displayed extremely skilled craftsmanship.
 - In the 15th century, another Yoruba kingdom, Oyo, rose in power.

¹ The information in our outline is based on *The Making of Modern Africa*, by Tunde Obadina.

- The Benin Empire was another powerful and prosperous civilization. In the 1480's, it was visited by Portuguese explorers.
- Mapungubwe Empire
 - Much further south, the Mapungubwe Empire served as an important trading center in southern Africa. It became the center of a trading network that included settlements along the East African coast to China, Persia, Egypt, and India.
 - Due to a significant drought at the end of the 13th century, the Mapungubwe migrated north and settled in the city of Great Zimbabwe, which featured impressive stone buildings and walls. This city became a major trading center and was renowned for its fine pottery, stonework, and sculptures.
- The Kongo
 - The Kongo kingdom was established from a loose federation of several communities that were all ruled by a monarch named Manikongo.
 - The Congo River provided fertile soil for farming and the land was rich in iron and copper ore deposits.
 - The river also allowed the kingdom to establish trading networks. At the height of its power, Kongo was the biggest state in western central Africa.
- The Swahili
 - Along the eastern coast of Africa, a group of settlements formed around the 2nd century A.D. They existed as separate city-states, though they spoke the same language. They spoke Bantu with elements of Arabic, which became what is known as Swahili.
 - Over time, these city-states spread both north and south and traded with Arabs, Persians, Chinese and merchants from India. Many Arab merchants married local African women and a distinct Swahili ethnic group emerged, with strong Islamic roots.
- Religion in Africa
 - The religions of Africa are predominantly Christian and Muslim.
 - Both Christianity and Islam came to Africa from outside Africa itself.
 - Missionaries from Egypt were the first to bring the Christian message to Africa in the first or second century A.D.
 - One of the first Christian churches in Africa was established by the king of Aksum in Ethiopia.
 - The teachings of Muhammad were first taught in Africa in 639 A.D.
 - Islam came to dominate large portions of Africa, including North Africa and the East African coast.
 - In the 14th century, Timbuktu in West Africa became a center of Muslim scholarship.
 - There are also Africans who practice the indigenous African religions, and others who hold to the Hindu, Baha'i and Judaic faiths.