

Social Studies

Genre

An **Informational Essay** is a short composition about a single subject written from a particular point of view.

Text Feature

A **Time Line** is marked with dates to help you see when events happened in history.

Content Vocabulary

origin
bolster
mythological



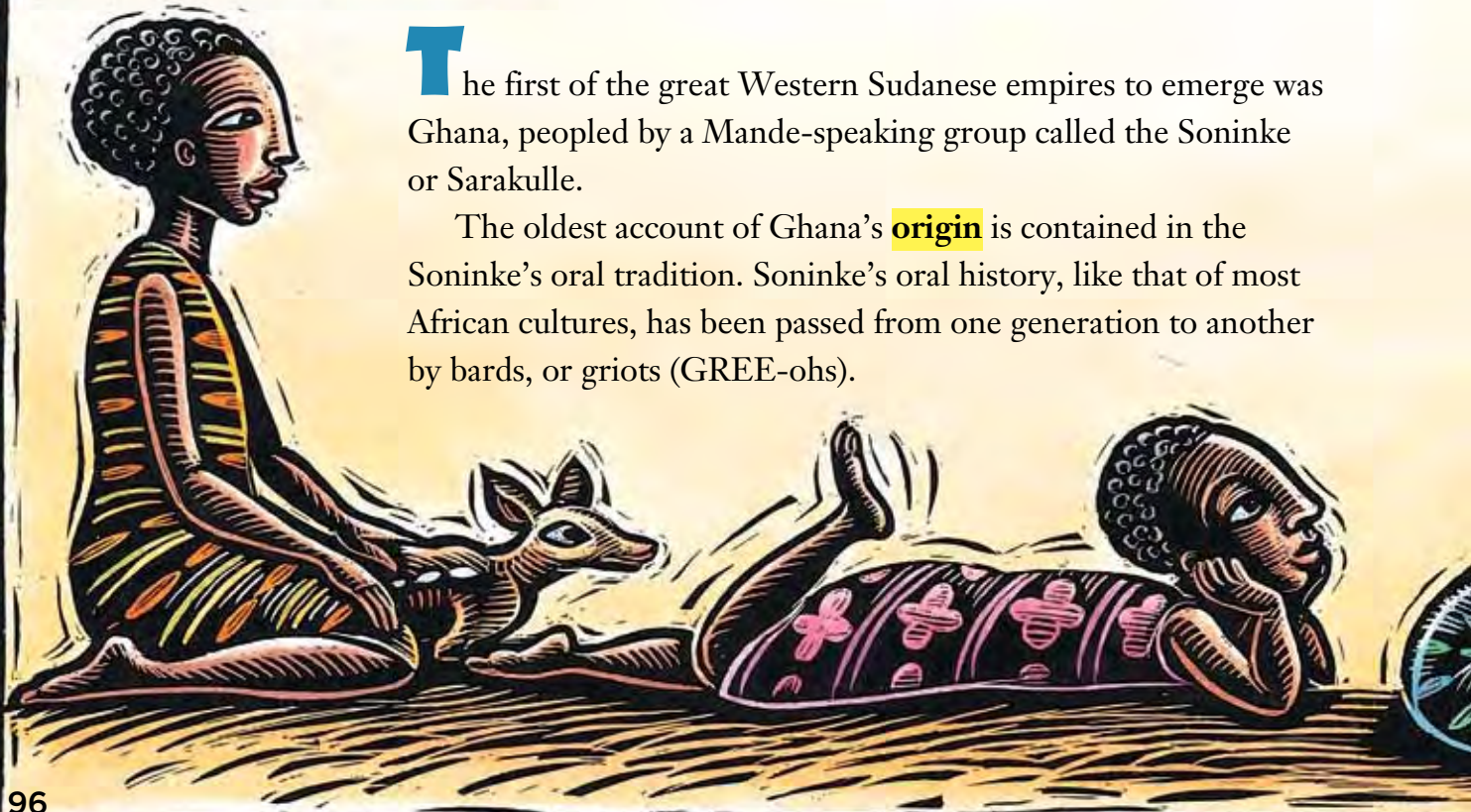
By the 700s, the empire of Ghana was already a major power in Africa. It grew rich and powerful as a source of gold for the Mediterranean world.

THE ORIGIN OF GHANA

by Patricia and Fredrick McKissack

The first of the great Western Sudanese empires to emerge was Ghana, peopled by a Mande-speaking group called the Soninke or Sarakulle.

The oldest account of Ghana's **origin** is contained in the Soninke's oral tradition. Soninke's oral history, like that of most African cultures, has been passed from one generation to another by bards, or griots (GREE-ohs).

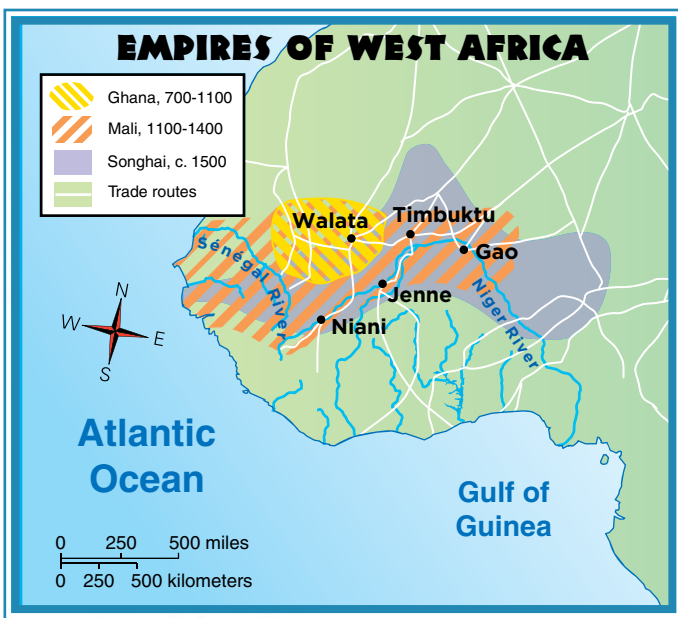
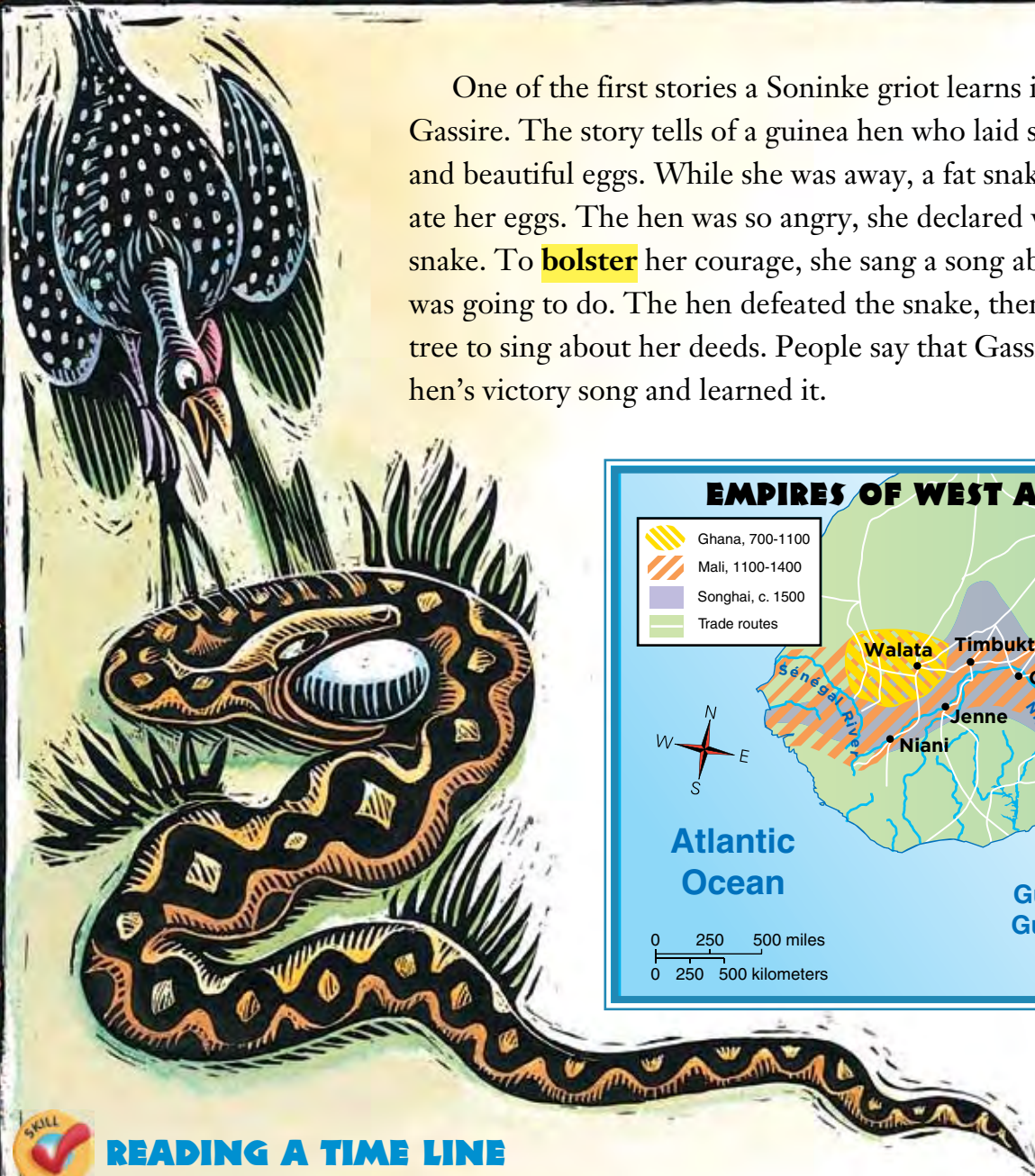


For centuries the griots have combined history, music, poetry, dance, and drama to entertain and teach their audiences. They can be compared with ancient Greek bards, like Homer, who were fascinating storytellers but so much more. Before the Soninke had a written language, the griots were the historians, the keepers of memories. Every village had a griot, and so did every clan. The royal family and other important families sometimes hired a personal griot to record their actions. Griots kept mental records of all memorable events—feasts and ceremonies, royal coronations, births, deaths, marriages, victories, and defeats. Some of their presentations were as long and artful as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

According to legend, Gassire was the first griot from whom all other Soninke griots are descended. He invented the *pui*, which is a poem about a hero, also called a praise-song.

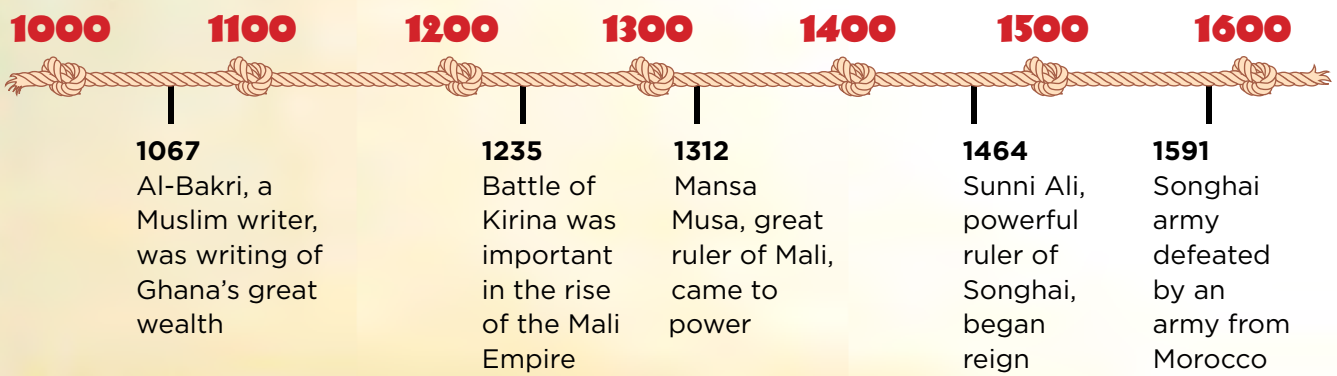


One of the first stories a Soninke griot learns is the pui of Gassire. The story tells of a guinea hen who laid several large and beautiful eggs. While she was away, a fat snake came and ate her eggs. The hen was so angry, she declared war on the snake. To **bolster** her courage, she sang a song about what she was going to do. The hen defeated the snake, then flew to a tree to sing about her deeds. People say that Gassire heard the hen's victory song and learned it.



READING A TIME LINE

A time line is a diagram showing the order in which events took place. This time line shows dates important to the early history of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai.



Historians believe this pui is a **mythological** retelling of Ghana's origin. The hen represents the early Soninke people who overthrew an enemy who was more powerful.

By the middle of the 1000s, Ghana had attracted many rivals who sought to share in the wealth of the gold trade. The new empire Mali (MAH lee) had great influence by about 1250. After 1337 the rulers of Mali grew weaker. They were unable to control the empire and its gold trade. Mali was replaced by an even stronger empire, the Songhai (SOHNG hī). By the late 1490s, Songhai included Mali and parts of present-day Benin, Niger, and Nigeria.



This West African brass weight was used with a scale to measure the weight of gold.

Connect and Compare



1. Use the time line to find the year the Songhai army lost power.
Reading a Time Line
2. Why do you think that the griots are still important today? **Analyze**
3. Why did the pui of Gassire and the narrator in *The Magic Gourd* use animal characters? **Reading/Writing Across Texts**



Social Studies Activity

Research one of the early West African kingdoms. Write and illustrate a fact card using the interesting facts you discovered during your research.



Find out more about griots at www.macmillanmh.com



Writer's Craft

Precise Words

Choose **precise words** to describe your topic and to show how you feel about it. Using colorful words can help bring a poem or other writing to life.

I used the words *friends forever* to appeal to my readers' emotions.

I used words like *long, floppy ears* and *round, pink belly* to help readers imagine what my puppy looked like.

Write a Poem

My Best Buddy

by Jaycee L.

I met you seven years ago at a
stranger's house.
When I looked at you,
I knew we would be friends forever.

Quickly, I ran across the room
And gathered you in my arms.
I petted your long, floppy ears.
I tickled your round, pink belly.
I smelled your sweet puppy breath.

After eight long weeks passed,
You came to live with me.
We ran through the green grass.
We played hide-and-seek.
We swam in the cool stream.

Now you are older and slower,
But you are still there for all I do.
I share my secrets with you.
I spend my happiest days with you.
I will love you forever,
My best buddy.

Your Turn

Write a poem about a lesson you learned or an important friendship. You might write a narrative poem that tells a story. Or you might choose to write a lyric poem that captures the feeling of a friendship or presents a lesson you learned. Be sure to include precise and colorful words to bring your poem to life for readers. Remember to punctuate sentences within the poem. Use the Writer's Checklist to review your poem.



Writer's Checklist

- Ideas and Content:** Did I precisely describe a lesson I learned or an important friendship?
- Organization:** Did I divide my poem into stanzas? Did I use logical line breaks?
- Voice:** Does my poem capture the emotion I feel about my topic?
- Word Choice:** Did I use colorful and **precise words** to bring the poem to life?
- Sentence Fluency:** Did I include complete sentences and a variety of sentence lengths?
- Conventions:** Did I punctuate within the poem properly? Did I check my spelling?