**RAIN FOREST**

Only one-fifth of Africa is actually rain forests. Rainforests have 90 or more inches of rain and a constant temperature in the 80s.  Rainforests are divided into four layers.  The bottom layer, known as the forest floor, is dim, dark, and wet.  The floor is covered by animal debris, twigs, and dead leaves.  One half of the world's insects are located in the rainforest and most are located on the forest floor. The rain forest is home to one of the most deadly insects in Africa called the tsetse fly. This insect prevents most people from settling there because this fly carries one of the continent’s most troublesome diseases—sleeping sickness.  The next layer is the understory.  Small trees, bushes and plants grow at this level.  It is the home of bats, frogs, snakes, and butterflies.  The third layer is the canopy.  The canopy is like a big green umbrella and is home to many monkeys, apes, and exotic plants such as orchids. The last layer is the emergent level.  Butterflies, birds, and a few specific monkeys live at this level.

The Mbuti people of Zaire live in the Ituri forest of Eastern Congo.  This group depends heavily on the animals and plants located in the rainforest.  The Mbuti people don't have a permanent camp, but rather travel through the rainforest as a way of life.  To get the resources they don't have, they trade with the Bantu village.

**SAVANNA**

Savannas are made up of vast grasslands with scattered trees. Savannas cover almost half of Africa (more than 5 million square miles). Savannas are home to large mammal species, including lions, hyenas, zebras, giraffes and elephants. These areas have seasons: cool and dry, hot and dry followed by warm and wet. All savanna areas have a wet and dry season.
Nearer the equator the heavy rainfall during the wet season, and the fairly high total amount of rainfall during the dry season encourages vegetation to grow. Savanna areas are popular with nomads (people who move from place to place). Their method of farming can be beneficial to the environment. Grazing animals are not kept in just one area. They are moved from place to place, allowing vegetation to get better. However, in times of serious drought animals can remove the scarce (limited) vegetation cover. This can cause the soil to erode (wear away). **Desertification** (land turning to desert) occurs in extreme cases. Even though soils are often poor and rainfall erratic (can not be predicted), the savanna is more suitable for farming than forest or desert because they can support livestock such as goats and cattle.

**NORTH AFRICA**

North Africa includes five countries south of the Mediterranean Sea. They include Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. Along the coast of North Africa the climate is Mediterranean, which means it has sunny summers and cool and rainy winters. Away from this narrow coast, the lands are arid (dry) because they touch the northern borders of the Sahara Desert. There are important differences among these nations. For example, Libya is a large country with rich oil resources and very little arable (land good for farming). Tunisia is small and much more agricultural (good for farming), but lacks oil. People of North Africa that live along the seacoast found it easier to travel by ship across the Mediterranean Sea and have contact with people of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. People of North Africa had more contact and exchange culture with the people of other continents more than they did with African people that lived in the **sub-Saharan** areas (below the Sahara Desert) because the desert formed a barrier to travel and communication.

**SAHARA DESERT**

The word Sahara means “empty space". It is the largest desert in the world. The Sahara is more Rock than sand and only receives 4 inches of rain a year, which is why there is very little vegetation that lives in this place. Strong winds blow constantly across the Sahara. In the early summer a special wind, know in Egypt as the *khamsin (*Kam SEEN), creates sandstorms. It blows hot air, dust, and grit into the Nile Valley. In bad years the *khamsin* blows so hard that the Egyptian sky turns orange with flying sand. The oases (plural for oasis) are the only arable land in the desert. An oasis is a hub of water in the desert, often in the form of springs and wells. About 75 percent of the Sahara’s population lives in oases, which make up only 800 square miles. This is extremely important when you consider that the Sahara Desert is 3.3 million square miles. You can fit the entire country of the United States in the Sahara. The Sahara is still expanding today due to **desertification**, which means the fertile land is drying out and becoming desert.

**SAHEL**

The Sahel is a narrow band of semi-arid land. The Sahel separates the Sahara to the north from the tropical rain forests to the south. It is made up of flat, barren plains that stretch 5,400 kilometers (3,300 miles) across Africa, from Senegal to Sudan. The Sahel’s animals and people are constantly scavenging for the scarce water and vegetation resources in this area. The Sahel contains the fertile delta (where a river ends) of the Niger, one of Africa’s longest rivers. Unfortunately, the Sahel’s fertile land is rapidly becoming part of the Sahara desert as a result of drought, deforestation, and intensive agriculture. This process is known as desertification. Even though the Sahara separates the people of North Africa from the people the Sahel, the two groups never entirely lost touch with each other. Over the sea of sand came merchants from the north, bringing salt to trade. They sought to trade their salt for ivory, slaves, and most important of all, the gold that could be found in the Sahel region.