

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Major physical features of North Africa include the Nile River, the Sahara, and the Atlas Mountains.
2. The climate of North Africa is hot and dry, and water is the region's most important resource.

The Big Idea

North Africa is a dry region with limited water resources.

Key Terms and Places

Sahara, p. 350

Nile River, p. 350

silt, p. 350

Suez Canal, p. 351

oasis, p. 352

Atlas Mountains, p. 352

TAKING NOTES As you read, take notes on the physical geography of North Africa. Use the chart below to organize your notes.

Physical Features	
Climate	
Resources	

Physical Geography

If YOU lived there...

As your airplane flies over Egypt, you look down and see a narrow ribbon of green—the Nile River Valley—with deserts on either side. As you fly along North Africa's Mediterranean coast, you see many towns scattered across rugged mountains and green valleys.

What are the challenges of living in a mainly desert region?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Even though much of North Africa is covered by rugged mountains and huge areas of deserts, the region is not a bare wasteland. Areas of water include wet, fertile land with date palms and almond trees.

Physical Features

The region of North Africa includes Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. From east to west the region stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. Off the northern coast is the Mediterranean Sea. In the south lies the **Sahara** (suh-HAR-uh), a vast desert. Both the desert sands and bodies of water have helped shape the cultures of North Africa.

The Nile

The **Nile River** is the world's longest river. It is formed by the union of two rivers, the Blue Nile and the White Nile. Flowing northward through the eastern Sahara for about 4,000 miles, the Nile finally empties into the Mediterranean Sea.

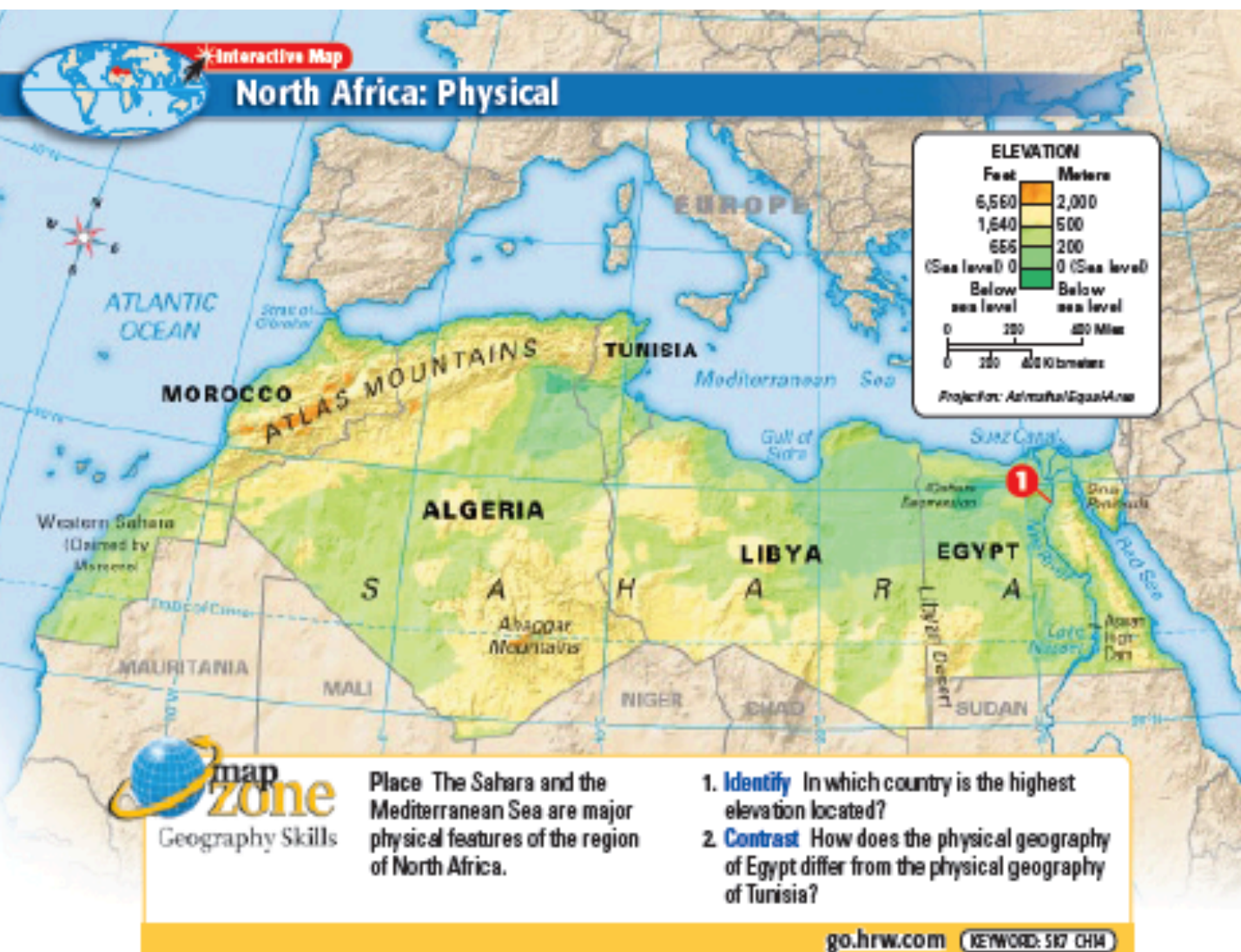
For centuries, rain far to the south caused floods along the northern Nile, leaving rich silt in surrounding fields. **Silt is finely ground fertile soil that is good for growing crops.**

The Nile River Valley is like a long oasis in the desert. Farmers use water from the Nile to irrigate their fields. The Nile fans out near the Mediterranean Sea, forming a large delta. A delta



Interactive Map

North Africa: Physical



is a landform at the mouth of a river that is created by the deposit of sediment. The sediment in the Nile delta makes the area extremely fertile.

The Aswan High Dam controls flooding along the Nile. However, the dam also traps silt, preventing it from being carried downriver. Today some of Egypt's farmers must use fertilizers to enrich the soil.

The Sinai and the Suez Canal

East of the Nile is the triangular Sinai Peninsula. Barren, rocky mountains and desert cover the Sinai. Between the Sinai and the rest of Egypt is the **Suez Canal**. The French built the canal in the 1860s. It is a narrow waterway that connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. Large cargo ships carry oil and goods through the canal.



1 Flowing for 4,132 miles, the Nile is the longest river in the world.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

impact effect,
result

The Sahara

The Sahara, the largest desert in the world, covers most of North Africa. The name Sahara comes from the Arabic word for “desert.” It has an enormous **impact** on the landscapes of North Africa.

One impact of the very dry Sahara is that few people live there. Small settlements are located near a water source such as an oasis. An **oasis** is a wet, fertile area in a desert where a natural spring or well provides water.

In addition to broad, windswept gravel plains, sand dunes cover much of the Sahara. Dry streambeds are also common.

Mountains

Do you think of deserts as flat regions? You may be surprised to learn that the Sahara is far from flat. Some sand dunes and ridges rise as high as 1,000 feet (305 m). The Sahara also has spectacular mountain ranges. For example, a mountain range in southern Algeria rises to a height of 9,800 feet (3,000 m). Another range, the **Atlas Mountains** on the northwestern side of the Sahara near the Mediterranean coast rises even higher, to 13,600 feet (4,160 m).

READING CHECK Summarizing What are the major physical features of North Africa?

Close-up

A Sahara Oasis

The largest desert in the world, the Sahara, spans almost 4 million square miles across North Africa. From ancient times to today, traders crossing the Sahara have relied on the desert's oases. These oases provide water and shade.

Date palms thrive on the banks of this natural spring, which provides water to travelers and irrigated fields.

By carrying supplies, camels help the nomadic Tuareg people travel from oasis to oasis.

Climate and Resources

North Africa is very dry. However, rare storms can cause flooding. In some areas these floods as well as high winds have carved bare rock surfaces out of the land.

North Africa has three main climates. A desert climate covers most of the region. Temperatures range from mild to very hot. How hot can it get? Temperatures as high as 136°F (58°C) have been recorded in Libya. However, the humidity is very low. As a result, temperatures can drop quickly after sunset. In winter temperatures can fall below freezing at night.

The second climate type in the region is a Mediterranean climate. Much of the northern coast west of Egypt has this type of climate. Winters there are mild and moist. Summers are hot and dry. Areas between the coast and the Sahara have a steppe climate.

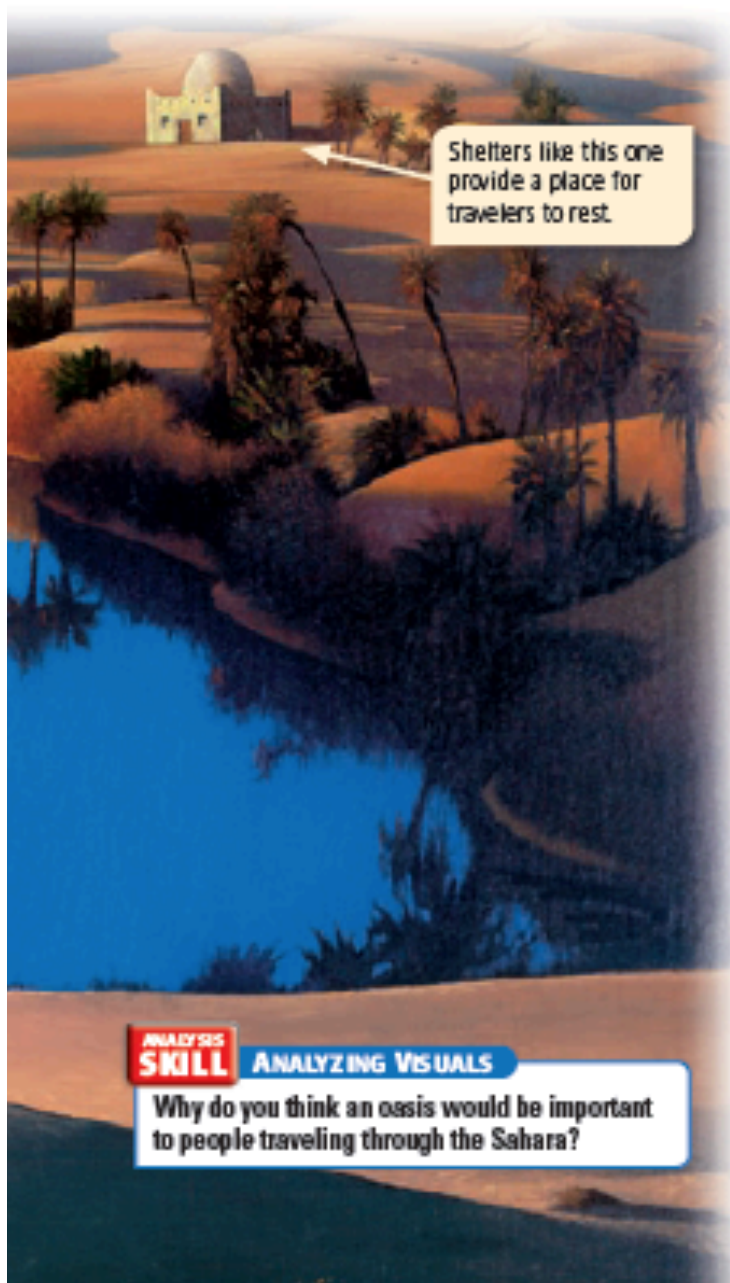
Oil and gas are important resources, particularly for Libya, Algeria, and Egypt. Morocco mines iron ore and minerals used to make fertilizers. The Sahara has natural resources such as coal, oil, and natural gas.

FOCUS ON READING

Summarize the details of what you just read about North Africa's climate.

READING CHECK Generalizing What are North Africa's major resources?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW In this section, you learned about the physical geography of North Africa. Next, you will learn about the history and cultures of the countries of North Africa.



ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING VISUALS

Why do you think an oasis would be important to people traveling through the Sahara?

Section 1 Assessment

go.hrw.com
Online Quiz
KEYWORD: SK7 HP4

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- Define** What is an oasis?
 - Explain** Why is the Suez Canal an important waterway?
 - Elaborate** Would it be possible to farm in Egypt if the Nile River did not exist? Explain your answer.
- Recall** What is the climate of most of North Africa?
 - Draw Conclusions** What resources of North Africa are the most valuable?

Critical Thinking

- Categorizing** Draw a diagram like the one shown here. Use your notes to list two facts about each physical feature of North Africa.



FOCUS ON WRITING

- Writing about Physical Geography** What physical feature will you choose as the subject of your myth? How will you describe this feature? Note your ideas.