

History
Grade 5: Term 2
Topic: The first farmers in Southern Africa

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Unit 1

When, why and where the first African farmers settled in Southern Africa

The first farmers moved in to Southern Africa about 2 000 years ago, they moved there from areas in West Africa like Cameroon. This is why many of the languages spoken in central and southern Africa today are very similar - they are called the “Bantu” languages. These Bantu speaking farmers first settled along the east coast of South Africa.

These early African farmers built houses and villages and kept small herds of sheep, goat and cattle. Cattle were very valuable to them and a person’s wealth was based on how much cattle they owned. People may have moved south for many reasons: for more fertile land, better grazing for their cattle or even conflict with other groups such as the San.

These farmers made weapons and tools from Iron. The first farmers lived in Southern Africa during the Iron Age. (Remember we spoke about the Stone Age and the San). **Iron Age**¹: The time period when weapons and tools were made from Iron.

In this activity, we will be drawing timelines. This is called **chronology**²; when we put events in the order, which they happened.

Activity 1: Timelines

1. In your work books, draw a line 13cm long. Make a small mark every 1cm. Start at the year 2 000 and at every 1cm mark write the next year.

Example:



2. Think of 5 important or interesting things that have happened in your life and add them on to your timeline according to the year it happened. (E.g. When I was born; I started primary school; lost my first tooth.)

¹ Iron Age: The time period when weapons and tools were made from Iron.

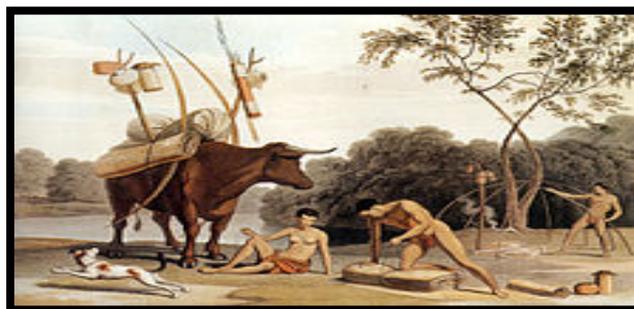
² Chronology: The order in which a series of events happens

3. Draw a timeline to show how long ago the first farmers arrived in Southern Africa.
- Draw a line 20cm long
 - Make a mark at every 1cm
 - Start at the beginning, with 0, and add 100 years at every 1cm. (An example will be on the board).
4. Write the following events, in the correct order, on your timeline:
- 0: Hunter Gatherers had lived in Southern Africa for hundreds of thousands of years.
 - 1652: The Dutch settle in the Cape.
 - 700: Farmers were established in the Eastern Cape.
 - 200: The first farmers had started to arrive. They settled along the Indian Ocean coastline.
 - 1994: First democratic election in South Africa.
 - 1000: Farmers started settling on the Highveld grasslands.
 - 350: The first farmers moved inland along the river valleys from the coast.

If you observe the timeline you can see that the first farmers settled along the east coast in 200CE - they kept close to the sea to begin with and then moved inland. They moved along the fertile banks of the rivers before settling on the grasslands of the Highveld which was excellent for breeding cattle.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the past people in Christian countries used the term BC (Before Christ) and AD (from the Latin word Anno Domini which means After Christ) when they spoke about time. For example, Jesus was born in year 0. Today we use the terms BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) instead of BC and AD.



Unit 2

The first farmers' attitude to the land

Activity 2: Revision

1. When did the first farmers move into South-Eastern Africa?
2. Name two types of animals the first farmers kept.
3. What is the name of the metal the first farmers used to make weapons and tools?
4. Which time period did the first farmers live in?
5. Why did the first farmers move inland?

The Khoikhoi and the San

When the first farmers began to move inland, they started to change the environment they lived in. They chopped down trees and tall grasses and burnt them to use as fertilizer for their crops. This system is called “slash and burn”.

The area that the trees and grass were taken from was cleared to plant crops and build settlements. They planted crops, built huts and walls to keep cattle and protect them. The farmers stayed in an area for a long time so that their crops could grow, but sometimes they had to move to new areas because the land became overgrazed.

Overgrazed³: If the land has too many animals feeding on it then there is no time for the grass to grow back.



Large parts of the Brazilian rain forest are still being destroyed by using “slash and burn” techniques, the destruction of the rain forests is having a terrible effect on the environment.

³ Overgrazed: If the land has too many animals feeding on it or if the same area is grazed for too long then there is no time for the grass to recover and it does not grow back.

Activity 3: Class discussion

1. Do you think the first farmers thought about the environment?
2. What do you think they mainly thought about?
3. Compare the San's attitude towards the environment with the first farmers.
4. Do you think farming land becomes overgrazed today?

The first farmers meet the Khoikhoi and San

The first farming communities had a lot in common with the Khoikhoi herders. Both groups ate shellfish when they lived at the coast, both hunted animals and both needed grazing land for their cattle. The Khoikhoi and the first farmers helped each other in times of hardship. They bartered for things they needed in times of famine or drought. **Bartering**⁴ involves exchanging items or services without using money. The Khoikhoi accepted the first farmers into their communities - they brought iron tools and weapons as well as new farming methods. The Khoi taught the first farmers to make medicine from plants and shared their religious ideas.



Activity 4: Similarities and differences

1. Draw a table in your workbooks comparing the similarities and differences of the Khoikhoi and the first farmers.
2. Make a list of the things each group learnt from each other.

⁴ Barter: To exchange one item for another without the use of money. For example, you can swop your peanut butter sandwich for your friend's pen if he doesn't have food and you have left your pencil box at home.

Unit 3: The Iron Age

First farmers in Southern Africa

Farmers lived differently to hunters and gatherers. They had to stay in one place long enough to plant and harvest their crops. They built permanent homes near their fields.

Archaeologists have found the remains of many iron-age villages. These remains show us that most of their houses were circular and made from either mud bricks with grass roofs or dome-shaped woven from grass.



Farmers lived in large groups and many people were needed to work in the fields. People lived, with their families, in homesteads. Inside the walls of the homestead were huts where the people lived, separate areas to store food, areas to keep the cattle as well as communal areas where people ate or socialized.

The people in farming communities all had different roles and responsibilities. Some people had more power than others. Some villages formed **chiefdoms**⁵ where they had a leader or chief. The whole community would work together at harvest time and help each other when times were hard.

The **Chief**⁶ would control the community's trade with outsiders as well as ensure goods were distributed amongst the community to benefit all. Chiefs often demanded tax which was paid to him for living under his protection.

⁵ Chiefdom: A group of people/villagers that decide to form a bigger group and choose one leader (chief) to manage all the villages.

⁶ Chief: The head person in charge of a group of people/tribe.

Roles of men, women and children

Men and women had different roles and responsibilities. Although the first farmers grew crops and kept cattle, they also had to hunt wild animals. Men and boys were responsible for hunting as well as looking after and tending to the animals and protecting the tribe members from wild animals. Women looked after the crops and took care of weeding in the fields. They also cooked, cleaned and collected water. Children did not go to school; they learnt their roles and skills from adults in the community. In their teenage years, children went through **initiation**⁷ - a ritual to be accepted in to the community. There was always a lot of secrecy around these rituals of initiation.

The crops and livestock of the early African farmers

The first farmers grew two types of crops; **sorghum** and **millet**. These grains could be ground into a powder to make porridge or beer. After the Europeans arrived in the 1500s, the early farmers introduced wheat and maize to Africa. (We eat bread made from wheat and porridge made from maize).

Sorghum:

A type of grain which originally came from Ethiopia.



Millet:

A type of grain indigenous to most parts of Africa.



Grains were stored in baskets above ground or in underground pits. Farmers still had to hunt wild animals to feed their families. The early farmers were **subsistence farmers**⁸.

⁷ Initiation: A ritual or series of rituals that must be performed in order to qualify as a member of a group of people. Many rituals are kept secret from people who are not part of that group.

⁸ Subsistence Farmer: A farmer who makes enough food to provide only for his family or the group he/she lives with.

This means that they only grew enough for themselves. If the harvest was very good, they may have bartered with other groups. The early farmers also grew some fruit and vegetables.

The early farmers kept animals. They kept chickens, sheep, goat and cattle. Eggs, milk and meat from these animals were an important part of their diet.

Cattle

Cattle were a very important part of African farming life. They were important for the following reasons:

- Cattle were a source of meat, milk and leather.
- Owning cattle was a sign of wealth and status in the community.
- Cattle were used for important events, such as slaughtering a cow at a wedding or a funeral.

Cattle were also used for two other important customs.

The Mafisa System:

This was when cattle were lent to other people for breeding purposes, but the owner could take back their cattle whenever they wanted to. The owner could also ask for the milk from their cow. Men who had large numbers of cattle showed their power by lending cattle. The men who borrowed the cattle had to give respect to the people they borrowed cattle from.

Bride-wealth or Lobola:

This was when a husband made a payment to the wife's family, usually paid in cattle. This payment made the marriage official. Today people still pay Lobola as a sign of respect.



Unit 4: Objects of the first farmers

Tools and weapons from iron and copper

The early African farmers used iron to make spear tips, hammers, hoes and axes. They also made ornaments and jewellery from iron and copper. Iron ore is found in rocks in many parts of Africa. The first farmers mined the iron ore and figured out how to turn the ore into liquid metal through a process called **smelting**⁹. The farmers made smelting furnaces - a closed structure to heat the rocks to a high temperature to turn them into a liquid. Skilled men would take the liquid Iron and shape it into tools and weapons. Women were not allowed near the furnaces.



A simple smelter consisted of a hollow in the ground over which a dome-like structure of clay was built. A number of furnace pipes made from reeds went through the clay, which allowed them to make a very hot fire in the furnace without it cracking. The men made bellows out of hide and skin to pump oxygen into the furnace to make the fire burn even hotter.

Activity 5: Revision

1. What is Iron?
2. How is Iron ore turned into Iron?
3. Why was the time when the first African farmers lived called the Iron Age?
4. Why are Iron tools and weapons more useful than stone?
5. What can Iron be used for?

⁹ Smelting: A process whereby rock is heated up and melted so that the metal contained in the rock can be separated from the rock. For example, rock that contains iron is melted so that the iron can be used.

Pottery

Archaeologists have found many examples of pottery made by the first farmers. Clay pots, cups, plates, beads and ornaments have all been discovered. A very famous example of Iron Age pottery is the **Lydenburg heads**. The shattered pieces of seven heads were found and were stuck back together. Archaeologists have discovered they were made in about 500CE. No one is sure what they were used for. They could have been used as ornaments or in ceremonies such as the initiation ceremony into womanhood.



Trade

The first farmers were involved in trading networks inside Africa and with people from other parts of the world. Trading networks are routes where trade happened and along which people travelled to trade. People from the middle-east traded along the east coast of Africa from about 100-200CE. Archaeologists have found seashells, beads and glazed pottery far inland. Traders from India brought the first bananas coconuts to Africa. In return, Africans traded ivory, gold and steel.

Early traders did not use money. They used beads made from ostrich eggshells, iron, gold or glass as a type of money. Salt was trade in bars or cakes and copper traded in thin wire.

