

Examples of an essay plan for the following essay question:

Explain how environmental factors influenced the lifestyle of the precolonial San of southern Africa.

EXAMPLE 1:

INTRODUCTION

Central argument: The natural environment of southern Africa had a significant impact on all aspects of the San way of life.

Outline of main issues to be discussed: Environmental factors (rainfall, vegetation and game); San economy, technology, social organisation, political structure and justice system.



PARAGRAPH 1: Environmental factors

- Low and erratic rainfall
- Sparse vegetation
- Abundance of game
- Naturally occurring plant food for human consumption



PARAGRAPH 2: Economy

- Hunting of smaller and larger game
- Gathering of naturally occurring plant food for human consumption
- No agriculture (crop cultivation) – too little rain
- No pastoralism



PARAGRAPH 4: Social organisation

- Nomadism
- Small group size
- Splitting of groups during times of scarcity
- Flexible structures
- Division of labour
- Egalitarianism (equality)
- Sharing ethic



PARAGRAPH 3: Technology

- Bows and arrows for hunting
- Digging sticks for gathering
- All made from stone, animal bone and other natural materials obtained from the environment





PARAGRAPH 5: Social organisation (continue)

- Shamanism (links with environment, e.g. rain-making function, control of the hunt, association with various wild animals, etc.)
- Rock art (depictions of game)



PARAGRAPH 6: Political structure

- Flexible and informal political structure
- No chiefs and councils
- Both men and women participate in decision-making
- Shamans and experienced hunters provide guidance but are not leaders



PARAGRAPH 7: Justice

- Justice handled one-to-one or family-to-family in view of absence of formal leadership
- Dissatisfied members free to leave the band
- Persistent trouble-makers could be expelled
- No fines or other forms of punishment



CONCLUSION:

- Restate central argument regarding the significant impact of environmental factors on the lifestyle of the San
- Brief summary of main issues: rainfall and vegetation patterns shaping a hunter-gatherer economy, flexible and egalitarian social and political structures and a highly mobile society living in harmony with the natural environment

EXAMPLE 2:

INTRODUCTION: The natural environment of southern Africa had a significant impact on all aspects of the San way of life.

Aspects that will be discussed include environmental factors (rainfall, vegetation and game), the economy and technology of the San as well as their social organisation, political structure and justice system.

PARAGRAPH 1: A discussion of low and erratic rainfall, sparse vegetation and abundant game resources will set the scene for the San hunter-gatherer economy.

PARAGRAPH 2: This paragraph will discuss the hunting and gathering activities of the San, showing why this kind of economy suited the environmental conditions in which the San lived.

PARAGRAPH 3: The stone technology of the San will be discussed next as this is linked to the economic activities that they practised.

PARAGRAPH 4: Here the social organisation of the San, based on their hunter-gatherer economy, will be analysed in relation to environmental conditions. Aspects linked to this main theme are the San's nomadism, fluctuating group size, flexible social structures, division of labour, egalitarianism and sharing ethic.

PARAGRAPH 5: Flowing from the preceding paragraph, and still connected to social organisation, are the connections between environmental factors, shamanism and rock art which will be explored in Paragraph 5.

PARAGRAPH 6: This paragraph will discuss the informal and flexible political structure of San society which suited their nomadic lifestyle and flexible social organisation.

PARAGRAPH 7: The last paragraph in the body of the essay will consist of a brief discussion of the San justice system which reflected a level of flexibility similar to that of their social and political organisation, ultimately shaped by the environmental conditions in which they lived.

CONCLUSION: The concluding paragraph will restate the central argument of the essay – that environmental factors directly or indirectly shaped every aspect of the San lifestyle – and provide a brief summary of the main issues dealt with in the body of the essay: environmental factors, economy, technology, social organisation, political structure and system of justice.