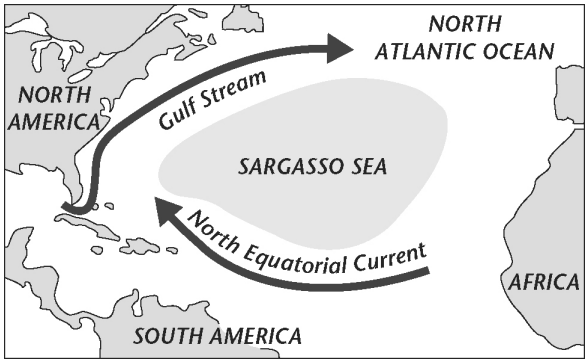
Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Enrich

Currents and Climate

The Sargasso Sea is a unique part of the Atlantic Ocean that is affected by its currents. Read the passage below. Then answer the questions that follow it on a separate sheet of paper.

The Sargasso Sea



The sargasso sea is an oval-shaped region in the North Atlantic Ocean. The Sargasso sea gets its name from the Portuguese word for seaweed. This is because brown seaweed covers most of its surface.

The Sargasso Sea was first described by Christopher Columbus in 1492. He was afraid that rocks might lie hidden below the seaweed and damage his ships. However, it was also the seaweed that encouraged Columbus to continue on his voyage. Because seaweed usually grows close to shore, He thought land must be near. Since Columbus' time, many legends about the Sargasso sea have spread. The seaweed covering its surface was believed to be so thick that no ship could escape from it. Early writers described ancient ghost ships, rotting away as they remained trapped forever in the seaweed.

The legends about the Sargasso Sea are simply that. The seaweed is not thick enough to interfere with the movement of ships. Still, the Sargasso Sea has several unusual features. Its waters are exceptionally clear, allowing light to penetrate as deep as 1 kilometer. In addition, the waters of the Sargasso sea are very calm, warm, and salty.

The unusual features of the Sargasso Sea result in part of its great depth, which averages almost 5 kilometers. The sea's location plays a role as well. it is surrounded by fast-moving currents—the Gulf Stream and the North Equatorial Current—that keep its waters from mixing with the rest of the Atlantic Ocean. The Sargasso Sea also lies in a region where temperatures are very warm. Precipitation is low and evaporation is high in this region.

1. Why do you think early navigators tried to avoid the Sargasso Sea?
2. How do the waters of the Sargasso Sea differ from the waters of the rest of the North Atlantic?
3. What keeps the waters of the Sargasso Sea from mixing with the rest of the Atlantic Ocean?
4. Suggest an explanation for the high salinity of the Sargasso Sea.