

## **African Heroes: Replacing a Lost History for Youths of the African Diaspora**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Davis High School is located in the northwest section of Houston, Texas. It is the only Houston Independent School District School that offers a magnet program in culinary arts. It gives the students preparation in not only restaurant careers but also hotel management in conjunction with the University of Houston hotel management program.

Davis High School is a Title One school, meaning that these students are economically disadvantaged, with 88% of Hispanic origin, 11% African American, 1.23% white Americans. Currently, 80% are at-risk, 14% are in special education, and 70% receive free or reduced lunches daily. The school prides itself on preparing its students for advanced placement programs.

This is my fifth year at Davis. I have gotten to know my students and what their background has offered them so far. They are generally impoverished and at risk of failing each year, and may eventually drop out. My heart goes out to my African American and my Hispanic students. Their self-esteem is frequently low, and their futures look negative and dim when you ask them what they are planning to do after high school. Never having seen successful parents and grandparents, they are more likely to have low self-esteem. They need to see a good picture of themselves and their heritage and feel that it is wondrous. Hispanics have it a bit better because they are in the locality of their ancestors and can see, hear, and read stories about their past. Not so for my young African Americans. Humans all need to feel better about themselves and their culture:

The tendency to ascribe superiority to one's own class, ethnicity, or cultural traditions is certainly not limited to Europeans but rather appears to be a universal trait of human societies. For example, even within the African traditions... we see similar efforts at elitist reframing based on class biases. (Hilliard 3)

As I've searched for ways in which to present my students their history and heritage, I came across this seminar: *African History: Ancient Times to the Atlantic Slave Trade Era*, presented through the Houston Teachers Institute. I found the subject matter informative and the timeline perfect for putting together a unit of lessons that would assist my students. It not only facilitated lessons for next year's classes for my students but also made me get out of my comfort zone. I read more than I have ever done in subject matters that I would never have chosen for myself. The last time I remember reading about African history was in high school! This prompted me to learn about the rich inheritance and the history that never has been talked about in regular history classes. There were many eye openers for me, as the seminar took me back to my childhood in Nigeria and helped me realize the importance of it. I know that my students will benefit from my research, but I must say that I am better for it. The seminar enriched me and recaptured the essence of being proud to be an African, and that is what I wish for my African American students. Certainly the Hispanic students will gain more respect for Africa as they too are touched by the African culture in music, food, customs, and fashion.

## OBJECTIVES

### Texas Assessment Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for Reading

#### 110.47 b (b)

- (2) The student reads with fluency and understanding in increasingly demanding texts. The student is expected to: (A) Read silently for a sustained period of time; (B) Read orally at a rate that enables comprehension; and (C) Adjust reading rate according to purpose for reading.
- (3) The student reads for different purposes in varied sources. The student is expected to: (A) Read to complete a task, to gather information, to be informed, to solve problems, to answer questions, and for pleasure; and (B) Read sources such as literature, diaries, journals, textbooks, maps, newspapers, letters, speeches, memoranda, electronic texts, technical documents, and other media.

#### 110.47 b III

- (5) The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies. The student is expected to: (C) Determine and adjust purpose for reading such as to find out, to understand, to interpret, to enjoy, and to solve problems; (G) Summarize texts by identifying main ideas and relevant details; (I) analyze and use text structures such as compare/contrast, cause/effect, and chronological order.
- (9) The student reads to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to: (A) Compare text events with his/her own and other readers' experiences; and (B) Recognize and discuss literary themes and connections that cross cultures.

### Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for World History 113.33.17

- (17) Citizenship. The student understands the significance of political choices and decisions made by individuals, groups, and nations throughout history. The student is expected to evaluate political choices and decisions that individuals, groups, and nations have made in the past, taking into account historical context, and apply this knowledge to the analysis of choices and decisions faced by contemporary societies.
- (21) Culture. The student understands the roles of women, children, and families in different historical cultures. The student is expected to: (A) Analyze the specific roles of women, children, and families in different historical cultures; and  
(B) Describe the political, economic, and cultural influence of women in different historical cultures.
- (25) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology. The student is expected to: (C) Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions.

## RATIONALE

My unit is about African heroes. Students tend to be enchanted with the notion of acts of heroism, and their appreciation of heroes can be seen in their voluminous collections of super-hero toys, books, and games (Batman, Superman, *etc.*) Students should be aware that real heroes have played pivotal roles in the long journey the human race has taken, and there have been many real

heroes in Africa as well. As an African teaching in U.S. schools, I have found it especially sad that African American youths are not taught about their ancestors on the continent of Africa. Most of the information out there is about slavery, and that is why strong emotions about the topic can easily be stirred. The result of all this teaching on only the slave trade passes down a negative legacy that is not helpful to African American youth, since it is a story of degradation and human suffering. To be considered a second-class citizen for more than three hundred years without being given any knowledge of their ancestors' glorious past in Africa creates low self-esteem.

As I see it, this has manifested itself in the unsettled situation that still exists today, for many of my African American students believe that they cannot excel. I believe that if they could only see past the negative and see the awesome heritage that belongs to them it would greatly help. Africa is rich with stories of people who survived hardship and oppression and succeeded in creating amazing cultures and traditions.

Africa has a rich history and a rich cultural background that this generation of young people, especially African Americans, and really all students, need to know. It is important information; the story is not currently being told, and we are poorer for it. Let's look at Black History Month celebrations. We celebrate the struggle, endurance, and suffering of African American slaves. We look to Martin Luther King, Jr., his dedication, and the death of this great African American leader. But, what about the history of African Americans prior to being here in the United States? What does the average student know about their heritage? Students have abiding interest in cultural differences, and in most classrooms today there are a least three or four countries represented. It is very helpful for students to have an opportunity to investigate the differences and to realize that manifestations of these variations did not just spring full-blown from the ether but are rooted in a natural and organic process that can be traced and understood.

What are the basic differences between African philosophy and beliefs and the Western mind? What has been lost by not knowing the past? The passing down of stories, the honoring of elders, the richness of keeping traditions – all are being lost during this impersonal modern era.

In seeking to understand African culture and, indeed, all human cultural achievements, literacy is not the sole measure of intellectual worth. The absence of literacy in a society does not preclude wisdom and a reverence for knowledge. The retainers of knowledge were the griots or praise-singers, who remembered and recited one of the most beautiful oral traditions of all times, the story of Sundiata, who was the founder of the Mali Empire. This empire was created and rose to greatness under Sundiata, whose symbol was the Lion and who was referred to as the "Lion King." He united the scattered people of Mali over a twenty-five year period (1230-1255). Ironically, students today know only of the "Lion King" as a cartoon character about an animal hero in the savannas of East Africa.

I believe it is important for all Americans to be aware of different cultures, to understand that different people have different values regarding life, death, common knowledge, and wisdom. Because of their long sojourn in America, many African Americans are not able to access their past; they had to assume the prejudices of modern western culture and beliefs about Africa. How can we help them reconnect? This is the tantalizing endeavor I have undertaken wholeheartedly in creating this unit. To introduce to my students African heroes of importance, I selected two women and two men who were of African royalty. Not all heroes are male, and many students lack an appreciation for women as fighters and warriors. Most students are aware of the Greek myths of Artemis, the goddess who reigns over chastity and hunters, but many have little to no knowledge of the warrior queen Nzingha from Angola or the wise Queen of Sheba. There have been no power toys or dolls made in their honor that have major distribution or wide commercial appeal in the United States; thus, many young African Americans are deprived of wonderful role

models for their very powerful positions as future heads of households and major determiners of a race's future course in history.

Because children tend to be enchanted with the notion of heroes, and because they often have a fascination with cultural differences such as "exotic" and "strange" customs, I believe the unit will lure them into interesting and informative discussions that teach them about African history, culture, and beliefs. It is important for students to learn that the present day did not just spring up spontaneously, and that many cultural traits may be derived from an African heritage. This may initiate lots of curiosity and research. Their attention can be riveted by clothing, customs and foods. The unit will include these additional curiosities so as to interconnect with the school's emphasis in the culinary arts as well as introduce African heroes.

## **UNIT BACKGROUND**

### **Ancient African Beliefs and Philosophy**

African history prior to the Atlantic slave trade era has been largely misunderstood or unknown to the Western world. This has occurred because Westerners were not interested in knowing or preserving the past of the people they were trying to oppress and exploit. However, there is much history to be found regarding the ancient past of African people, especially through archeology and oral traditions. Much of what we know of Mali's past comes from oral histories passed down from one generation to the next by griots, or bards, whose profession it is to memorize and recite events of the past. Known as "keepers of memories," every village, clan and royal family had griots to chronicle lineages and histories (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts).

Africa has always been a land of many nations and languages full of disparity and very, very complex. There were empire-building civilizations that controlled their social orders through a chain of command that depended on each other through favors, spiritual offerings, acceptance, and the showing of a deep respect for each higher order's position in the realm. As early as 1352, Arab travelers to the region noticed this. Ibn Battuta, for example, remarked about the peoples of the empire of Mali that:

Blacks are the most humble of people in the presence of their king and the most excessive in the mortification they practice before royalty... When a king summons one of them during his audiences, that man undresses and dons rags, removes his turban and puts on a dirty cap and rolls his trousers and roves nearly up to his knees. He advances with the humility and demeanor of a beggar. He falls to the ground on his elbows. He prostrates himself as he listens to what the king is saying... When the Sultan addresses his council, those present remove their turbans as he talks. (Hilliard 121)

African traditions are very ingrained in showing respect for elders, whether they are chiefs, sultans, ancestors, grandfathers, or fathers. Curiously, this is one of the deeply ingrained beliefs that all Africans, regardless of their location, nation, or religion, share alike.

African institutions or governing bodies encompass all of their beliefs in that they consult with their spirits prior to discussing issues with all governing elders and governors. Consulting and agreement is the focus for each new action proposed by the King. Rulers usually have assigned governor-type rulers for their many lands; in turn the governors provide homage to their chief in bringing their goods. The governors have homage gifts brought to them by their subjects. It is not considered feudalism because all homage gifts are in sync with gratifying and pleasing their gods as well as keeping the peace with their rulers.

One of the tenets of African philosophy that extended throughout the civilized historical versions of the continent was a balance of assets in managing people. Many Europeans faulted

this and didn't understand the philosophy, thus forcing their way of managing and destroying slowly the African traditions:

In the order of balance, one did not make decisions until all affected by the decisions were in agreement (African kingdom) and gave their consent sometimes with what appears to be the traditional European handshake. Many do not understand that there was a unified system of African beliefs about human relations including one's relationship to his or her government. The point here is that these sneering remarks by an eminent British historian revealed to me an entirely new field of research. That lecture led me into the study of one of the most significant developments in the entire history of the black race: an ancient system of democracy (existing before Greece) evolved from a continent-wide constitution that governed the whole African people as a single race. (Williams 26)

Passing down the culture is very important to all Africans. Their children learn about who they are and where they come from. It is a very sacred observance and one of Africa's distinguishing practices. Although there are many differences in religion and traditions, this custom is shared by all. Particularly in Mali, legendary stories and the learning of lessons are brought out by the storytellers called "griots," meaning keepers of memories. Every village, clan and noble had their own griots to keep their particular line of heritage and history. It is an important profession and responsibility. Not only do they memorize the facts and details of the families, but also they are considered entertainers because they tell of the past through music, dance, drama and poetry.

### **Sundiata, the Lion King of Mali**

Historians believe that Sundiata came to rule Mali around 1230. He created an empire famous for its riches, with its capital at Niani, a center of all kinds of trade:

The griots, fine talkers that they were, used to boast of Niani and Mali saying: "If you want salt, go to Niani for Niani is the camping place of the Sahel caravans. If you want gold, go to Niani, for Boure, Banbougou and Wagadou work for Niani. If you want fine cloth, go to Niani, for the Mecca road passes by Niani. If you want fish, go to Niani, for it is there that the fishermen of Maouti and Djenne come to sell their catches. If you want meat, go to Niani, the country of the great hunters, and the land of the ox and the sheep. If you want to see an army, go to Niani, for it is there that the united forces of Mali are to be found. If you want to see a great King, go to Niani, for it is there that the Son of Sogolon lives, the man with two names." (Niane 82)

The Epic of Sundiata is an oral tradition that has been passed down from more than eight hundred years, telling the story of the great hero Sundiata and his unusual rise to power. His story is still a source of pride among all Malians, and his importance as ruler and unifier has given him a larger role in African history as one of the most important heroes of all times. In this section I would like to retell the story of Sundiata, so that readers will have a sense of just how wonderful the Epic of Sundiata is. This story is available in its original form or shortened children's versions of the tale.

The Epic provides a vision of Mali in its state of infancy. It was a region with many different peoples, all speaking languages of the Mande family, but a people without unity. The land was rich in resources, but there was a great deal of warfare and volatility. According to the epic, Maghan Kon Fatta – the father of Sundiata – was known for his good looks and was loved by his people (Hilliard 299). The story goes that one day the king and his kinsmen were sitting under a tree and saw a hunter coming towards them. The hunter's bow and arrow shone in the sun and attracted the kinsmen's curiosity. He saluted the king, bowed, and introduced himself as a hunter

from Sangaran. Immediately he was presented and offered a doe's leg to the king as homage (Hilliard 299).

Maghan Kon Fatta gave an approving nod and a griot that was present among the kinsmen noted that Sangarans are the best soothsayers. With this being said, the hunter pulled out his cowry shells and threw them on a sitting mat. Noticing that the hunter was left handed and that this could mean evil or brilliance in predicting the future, the griot mentioned this to the king (Hilliard 300). Saying nothing, the hunter picked the shells up and threw them again. The Sangaran hunter read the prediction: "Oh King Maghan, you will encounter two hunters and a woman coming towards your city... The woman is very ugly and hunchbacked. This woman must become your wife for she will bear your successor. This child is very special. He will be the king that will be known forever and make your lands legendary" (Niane 6). The hunter then left the King with this heavy prediction.

Many days passed and two hunters and a woman walked towards Maghan as he sat under the same tree with his kinsmen. The three bowed and the elder spoke and said that they came from the land of Do. "We have been instructed to bring this young girl to you, and feel that she is worthy to be a King's wife. Her name is Sologon Kedjou" (Niane 6).

As the king looked at her in disbelief, he saw that she was indeed ugly and hunchbacked and remembered the soothsayer's prophecy. King Magham already had a wife, Sassouma Berete, but to have no dispute from any of his people, he ordered to have a traditional wedding with all the ceremonial customs included (Hilliard 303). Obviously Sassouma was not amused even though the people celebrated and cheered. Sassouma's jealousy became a problem for the king when a child was born from the second wife. Sologon bore Sundiata, the hero of this story.

Sundiata was not a healthy child. He could not walk or speak until he was seven years of age. He was mocked by all the royal family, including Sassouma, the king's first wife. She wanted her son to be the successor. While the king's sons were very young, a ruthless ruler, Sumanguru, came in and killed the king and lords but exiled Sundiata as he saw no threat from such a handicapped child (Niane 16-28). Living in exile, Sundiata met a blacksmith that made some iron braces that straightened his legs. Sundiata grew to be a strong hunter and a leader. He went back, led his people to revolt against Sumanguru, and won. The people were struck with his return and hailed him as successor, Lion King of the Mandinka (Niane 47-54).

Anywhere in Africa, Sundiata is portrayed wearing the garment or simbon of a hunter. His legacy is to be known as a strong but down-to-earth warrior king, never wearing the garments of flamboyant rulers. He commanded so much admiration from his people that he is alive and well in stories that are sung today; he is considered the father of Mali (Niane 84). At the end of his rule, Sundiata had amassed over 1,000 miles from east to west restoring the trade route controlling the gold and salt trade from 1200-1500 A.D. Cultivation and the weaving of cotton also became famous, initiated in Mali. He consolidated many of the Mandinke/Malinke clans, unifying the country with its center, Niani. At the height of his empire, the lands included parts of present day Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger (O'Toole 22).

### **Makeda or Sheba, Queen of Ethiopians**

Most of black history has been suppressed, imprecisely told, or ignored by Western civilization, as Westerners saw Africa through their own cultural values and not the actual facts (Hilliard). But the persistence of some tales has had the power to overcome any efforts by others to stamp them out. One of these historical figures is Makeda, Queen of Sheba (Saba) and/or Ethiopia. It is not historically clear if she was from Ethiopia or South Yemen (Saba), for both regions claim her as their own. At many points in the past the two regions were united as one state. In Ethiopia she is seen as the founder of the royal lineage, since she gave birth to Menelik, the first emperor.

Makeda was a legendary black beauty who had enormous power and the confidence of her people, the Ethiopians. She was revered for her virginity and the keeping of Ethiopian traditions. She was one of the most influential women of her times. Her story has been told throughout the centuries, how the Queen, having heard about the God of the Israelites, came to seek wisdom and truth so that she could become a better leader, but instead was finally tricked into giving up her chastity. She had heard of the legendary king through Tamrin, her merchant and servant. He told her stories that intrigued her about Solomon the king. He had great wisdom, and she heard how he administered judgment and did what was just, and she heard of the magnificence of his kingdom. The people there did not deceive each other, and no one took anything that belonged to another away. This seemed hard to believe to Sheba. She wanted to receive this wisdom and was prepared to offer Solomon many, many gifts in order to learn from him (Powell).

She left Ethiopia for a voyage to the Hebrew Kingdom, accompanied by a caravan of seven hundred and ninety-seven camels, donkeys, and mules, bearing gold, spices, and precious stones. King Solomon was astounded by this great woman and her people offering such riches for his great knowledge. He was especially amazed by her wish to learn how to rule justly. Because of this, he built her a throne by his side and a special apartment to accommodate her while she was in his country (Powell).

Before she left her country to seek this wisdom she said unto them, "Hearken O ye who are my people, and give ye ear to my words. For I desire wisdom and my heart seeketh to find understanding. I am smitten with the love of wisdom and I am constrained by the cords of understanding; for wisdom is far better than treasure of gold and silver, and wisdom is the best of everything that hath been created on the earth... Wisdom is the best of all treasures. He who heapeth up gold and silver doeth so to no profit without wisdom; but he who heapeth up wisdom – no man can filch it from his heart. (Hilliard 250)

During her stay Queen Makeda was so inspired by Solomon's wisdom and charm that she renounced her traditional worship of the Sun and Moon and converted to worshipping the God of Israel. During her stay in Israel, Solomon fell in love with Makeda. He provided extravagant meals and entertainment in her honor (Powell).

Nevertheless, the Jewish monarch wished to plant his seed in Makeda, so that he might have a son from her regal African lineage. To this end the shrewd king conspired to conquer the affection of this young queen with whom he had fallen in love. (Powell)

After some time Makeda announced that she was ready to return to her country. So Solomon threw a superb farewell dinner at his palace. The menu featured a lot of hot and spicy foods that would cause anyone to become sluggish and thirsty. The party ended very late, and the king invited the Queen to stay at his palace. The Queen agreed as long as they slept in separate beds so she would remain chaste. So Solomon agreed that this would be acceptable as long as she promised not to take anything from the palace (Powell).

In the middle of the night, Makeda was thirsty and looked around for a vessel to drink water. She was caught drinking from the cup and Solomon tricked her into relinquishing her virginity because she took from the water of the palace. There are many versions of this story and how Solomon gained a son from the Queen of Sheba. Some say the son's name was Menelik (meaning how handsome he is). Another version says that they married and would travel back and forth to meet each other. The child Menelik would become king of Ethiopia and Saba, and from then on every firstborn son would be sent to Ethiopia to be Menelik's counselors and officers. Each ending is as varied as the next. No one really knows the reaction of the people, but it is said that this is how Judaism came to Ethiopia, thus preparing it for the arrival of the Christian religion. Even today it is believed that Menelik brought back the holy Ark of the Covenant, which is said to be housed in an Ethiopian Christian church today. Many Ethiopians today still declare that they

are descendants of King Solomon since it was the royal marriage of Solomon and Sheba that created their ruling dynasty (Powell).

### **Nzingha, Queen of Matamba, West Africa**

A true warrior, Queen Nzingha was the ruler from a country called Angola in the southwestern portion of Africa. There is much to this courageous woman and leader that has prompted historians to say that she was one of the first to advocate a feeling of what it was to be an African and to talk about rights as an African (“Nzingha”).

From the time she was very young, she was a great hunter. Nzingha’s ability to stalk and subdue animals was legendary. She performed this “feat” or task better than her brother Mbandi, who became king of his people before she took the throne. As part of her education as a young princess, Nzingha was taught archery and hunting. She did so well at these skills that she would often take her sisters on the hunt with her to train them.

Because she was so skilled at doing so many things, she was not much loved by her brother Mbandi. Her father favored her and took her wherever he went to do his kingly duties. Obviously, there was a rivalry going on between Nzingha and her brother. Any time Mbandi would challenge Nzingha, she would get the best of him and embarrass him; therefore, she was banned from any contests with her brother. However, the people loved Nzingha and loved seeing her fight. Her brother was a concern for her people while he reigned as monarch. Mbandi joined the Portuguese in supplying them slaves while it looked like a profitable move. He later regretted siding with the Portuguese as it became less and less of a good thing. During this time Nzingha was allowed back into the royal compounds to please the people of Mbundu. In 1623 her brother died, and she became the Queen of the Ndongo people (“Nzingha”).

Nzingha was not only athletic and strong but also very intellectual and an excellent diplomat. She was chosen to negotiate a trust with the Portuguese, and when the Portuguese broke that peace agreement, Nzingha went on the war path. During these confrontations she became a member of the ethnic “Jagas,” a militant group that formed a human shield against the Portuguese slave traders (“Nzingha”).

She defeated the Portuguese in many battles even though they overran her capital for about a year before she could reclaim it. The city of Cuanza was taken over by the Portuguese and ruled by a puppet king, King Philip, before the real queen, Nzingha, came back a year later.

Being a shrewd politician, Nzingha formed an alliance with the Dutch to assist her people in defeating the Portuguese. She even adopted Christianity to ease the Dutch fears of the African customs.

For thirty years, this fearless queen fought off the Europeans and helped former slaves reclaim their homelands. Nzingha died at the age of 80 and was not succeeded by anyone else of her determined spirit. To this day, her memory lives on in the oral traditions of the Angolan people who have not forgotten their Great Warrior Queen, Nzingha of Angola (“Profiles and Facts: Queen Nzingha”).

However, her great spirit and courage should serve as inspiration for young women and men who are looking for meaningful images upon which to build their self-confidence. Today she is remembered in Angola for her diplomatic acumen, great wit, and intelligence, as well as her brilliant military tactics. A major street in Luanda is named after her, and a statue of her has been placed in Kinaxixi on an impressive square. Angolan women are often married near the statue (“Nzingha”).



## **Askia the Great, also known as Muhammad Touré**

Askia was the king of the Songhai Empire in the fifteenth century and became one of the kingdom's greatest rulers. The Songhai Kingdom at its height was huge. This empire covered countries that are now partially represented by Mauritania, Ghana, Gambia, Volta, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Northern Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Niger, and others. Askia was a Muslim subject of the conqueror Sunni Ali (Williams 204). Askia rose through the ranks under Sunni Ali to become a great general and leader. Many of his followers loved him because he made sure that their needs were taken care of and fought alongside his warriors (Williams 209). He was fearless and demonstrated his courage as an example to the men he led into battle.

Under his leadership, the empire grew. He expanded his control over lands that were resistant to Sunni Ali. Even though he was a great warrior, he understood the advantage of having an educated population. The nation flourished as a center for all things learning, culture, and trade:

Leo Africanus, a famous traveler and writer who visited Timbuktu during the reign of Askia Mohamed, wrote the following of the city's intellectual life: "In Timbuktu there are numerous judges, doctors and clerics, all receiving good salaries from the king. He pays great respect to men of learning. There is a big demand for books in manuscript, imported from Barbary. More profit is made from the book trade than from any line of business." Under Askia Mohamed's rule, scholarship and Islam were once again revered and supported, ushering in a new era of stability that led to Timbuktu's sixteenth-century golden age. ("The Songhai Empire")

Askia created a mighty and vast nation through the expansion of trade with Europe and Asia. He set up standardized trade procedures that increased the traffic and merchandizing of goods in his lands. Encouraging learning and literacy, Askia insured that all of his institutions of higher education produced the most famous scholars. Therefore, he supported the development of many different schools and expanded the number of scholars working at the great school, Timbuktu. This school's popularity and fame extended into Europe and Southwest Asia and attracted scholars from all over the known, historic world (Williams 204). Despite its distance, scholars came:

The eminent scholar Ahmed Baba, for example, produced many books on Islamic law, which are still in use today. Mahmoud Kati published...two history books which are indispensable to present day scholars reconstructing African history in the Middle Ages ("Askia Mohammad I").

Comparatively, European knowledge and active learning had been substantially impeded because of many reasons, but primarily due to the fall of the Roman Empire. Europe was just beginning to pull out of the Dark Ages after having engaged in the medieval crusades in which many travelers went to Southwest Asia and took back knowledge that had been stored in the Muslim countries (Williams 209).

Even though Italy had already benefited from the contact with Muslim countries, England was in a pre-Tudor period and had not experienced the great Renaissance. It was not until the reign of Elizabeth I from 1558- 1603 that England flourished (Williams 209). This monarch can be compared to Askia in style and vision.

As a great military leader, Askia conquered many different areas; however, he did not try to rule all of these vast areas. He divided the kingdom into provinces and ruled through what essentially would be considered governors (Hooker). He arrived at his decision after consulting the Islamic rulers of Southwest Asia and disagreeing with them on how to run his domain. He chose instead to follow traditional African ways of governing. This method caused his kingdom

to prosper rather than becoming top heavy and dictatorial. This is the way most African rulers presided over their people and it stems from a most ancient and traditional manner that his subjects would appreciate since that protocol comes from revering the old gods. Askia was respected for keeping many of the old African traditions even though he had accepted the Muslim religion himself.

The Glencoe *World History* textbook says that Askia was the last great ruler of the Songhai Kingdom and that after his departure the kingdom declined gradually until the Moroccans laid waste to the strongholds and took over the salt and gold trades from what were the ancient kingdoms of Mali (201). If examined closely, one will notice a shift in the way that these succeeding rulers conducted their governance and the way that Askia did his. Even though he did not assume the rituals of the ancient worlds of African thought, he allowed it to guide his interactions with his people (201).

Askia, who ruled under this format, did not use all protocols of the ancient traditional ways such as asking for insights given by the African Gods or Elders. He had to rule by educated guessing, called analysis these days. However, he did, as stated before, choose to rule by using the African method of delegation and democracy, which helped him tremendously in holding his kingdom together the many years he reigned. Askia the Great lived to age ninety-six, a very long life for those times. His son, Askia Musa, took over when his father was eighty.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson I: The African Heritage and Philosophy**

#### ***Objectives:***

113.33. 4- Through introduction, reading and research, Students will build a foundation specifically in African history; geography; economics; government; citizenship; culture; technology and society. The content, as appropriate for the grade level or course, enabling the students to:

Understand and identify the ways of African philosophy; compare and contrast the ways of spirit, culture, and philosophy to the same in Europe and, if time permits, as compared to modern living; analyze the ways of African governing systems prior to the 1600s; describe and discuss the different roles of its citizenry especially the roles of men and women, economically and culturally; and analyze the valuable inherent riches of Africa, technology and society, summarizing this all in the many available formats, such as drawings, maps, graphs, vocabulary listing, Venn diagrams, bubble maps, etc. of their choice for their organizer.

110.47. Through reading, research and writing, students will build a graphic organizer and prepare a presentation for the class. Instructions will include word comprehension strategies and vocabulary to ensure that high school students have an opportunity to read with competence, confidence, and understanding. Students are given opportunities to locate information in varied sources, to read critically, to evaluate sources, and to draw supportable conclusions. Students learn how various texts are organized and how authors choose language for effect. All of these strategies are applied in texts that cross the subject fields. For high school students whose first language is not English, the students' native language serves as a foundation for English language acquisition and language learning.

After the reading process the student will use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation; interpret and create databases, research outlines, bibliographies, and visuals including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps; and transfer

information from one medium to another, including written to visual and statistical to written or visual, using computer software as appropriate.

Student Objectives while doing activities:

- To compare divergent cultures, customs and philosophy
- To compare and contrast what students knew about Africa and what they know after research and reading.
- To appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of a culture mostly unknown
- To enhance self-esteem of students from African-American Culture

**Activity:** (6 Weeks)

- a. Adopt an African Country
- b. Proverbs and the Wisdom of Mali, and
- c. Presentation

After introduction from your instructor, readings, discussions, and research; prepare a graphic organizer using any and all manners of creating the report that includes:

Adopting an African Country, research its early history and tell about these particular items: African philosophy, culture, and society, and the African system of kingdoms, honor, and respect.

Answer the following questions:

What is different about African thinking that you didn't know prior to your research and that you have been impressed about?

What were the roles of African women and of African Men in their society prior to 1600?

Choose and explain the structure and meaning of a chosen African proverb, the ways that proverbs reflect the culture that created them. Prepare a presentation for the class.

**Vocabulary:** griot, bard, taboo, deity, tribute, sorcerer, caste

**Materials:** in-house library books and internet research, paper, pen, scissors, glue, and construction paper.

List of African Proverbs to choose from (retrieved from Virginia MFA website:

[http://www.vmfa.state.va.us/mali\\_geo\\_hist.html](http://www.vmfa.state.va.us/mali_geo_hist.html)):

- A. One who damages his neighbor's reputation damages his own.
- B. One camel does not make fun of the other camel's hump.
- C. No matter how long a log stays in the water, it does not become a crocodile.
- D. The child who does not respect the traditions of his elders will never eat at the elders' table.
- E. If you refuse the elder's advice, you will end up working the whole day.
- F. Talking to you is like pouring water on the back of a duck.
- G. The hunter in pursuit of elephants does not stop to throw stones at birds.

**Lesson II: African Heroes**

**Objectives:** The student reads with fluency and understanding in increasingly demanding texts. The student is expected to: (A) Read silently for a sustained period of time; B) Read orally at a rate that enables comprehension; and (C) Adjust reading rate according to purpose for reading.

**Activity:** (2 weeks)

Reading: *Sundiata, an Epic of Old Mali* by D.T. Niane

Discussion questions to pose to the class:

How is story telling an important factor of African History? What kind of skills does one have to have to tell stories and skills of the one's that receive the stories?

How important is sorcerer in this story?

If you were King Maghan, would you have believed the prediction? Justify your reason.

If you were a handsome king, would you have married the ugly hunchback princess if someone had predicted that she would be the only one to bear your rightful successor?

Since Sundiata became a legendary king and united the nation of Mali, would you have had the courage to do what he did even though he was a crippled, disabled child?

What did the blacksmith do for Sundiata?

How did the royal family treat Sundiata throughout the story? What can you tell me about the lack of respect there? Are there any African teachings that you can see here?

**Vocabulary:** soothsayer, clan, griot, simbon, cowries

**Lesson III: “Makeda, Queen of Ethiopia, and Nzingha, Queen of Matamba, West Africa”**

**Objectives:**

110.47 b (2) and (4) – See complete objectives in the Objective section of the narrative.

Student Objectives while doing activities:

To compare divergent cultures, philosophy, and respect protocols of Ethiopia and Israel.

To find similarities and differences in myth and reality, as one reads the various renditions of the legend.

To discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a culture, Kings and Queens.

To discuss what kind of decisions can a Queen or King make today.

**Activity A:**

Reading: “Makeda, Queen of Sheba,” Chapter 45 from *Intellectual Traditions of Pre-Colonial Africa* by Hilliard (2 weeks)

After reading the version of Sheba from Hilliard excerpt, the student will research and find another version to present in discussion to compare and contrast what is the most plausible ending.

Discussion questions to pose to the class:

What did Queen Makeda value more than anything?

How did she feel about the offerings she had for Solomon?

Do you feel that he fell in love with her or did she fall in love with him? Explain.

Do you think that Makeda saw that Solomon was tricking her to be his lover or do you think she knew what she was doing?

Why do you think Menelik want to go back to Ethiopia compared to staying in Israel with his father?

Essay: If you are asked to go for a couple of months to learn from your hero? What would you want to learn and who would that person be? And why is that person your hero?

Student Web Sources and Materials:

“Makeda, Queen of Sheba: Sheba Prepares for Solomon”

<http://www.windweaver.com/sheba/Sheba3.htm>

*The Afrocentric Experience*

<http://www.swagga.com/queen.htm>

**Activity B** – (2 weeks)

Reading: “Nzingha: Warrior Queen of Matamba, Angola, Africa, 1595” (*The Royal Diaries*) by Patricia McKinsey

Student Objectives while doing activities:

- To compare divergent cultures
- To find similarities and differences in myth and reality
- To appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of a culture mostly unknown
- To enhance self-esteem of students from African-American culture

After reading the version of Nzingha excerpt, the student will research and find another version to present in discussion to compare and contrast a well-known Greek mythological hero and God figure to Nzingha. In discussion the students will read about Artemis, and others who are researched in order to do the comparison. Students can research other Greek mythological gods to African Heroes to compare and contrast to Nzingha, the Queen.

Introduction to Artemis and myth:

Artemis was the goddess of chastity and of the hunt. She was famous for her incredible aim and ability to bring down even the most deadly beast. Artemis’s brother was Apollo who could not hunt as famously as she could. She lived a good deal of her life in the woods, chasing down wild animals. She was a great warrior who even once killed the only man she loved.

Artemis was noted for her fight to help the needy and less fortunate or weak ones in her world. She did not even like to see women in the pain of childbirth. This Greek goddess was the daughter of a great king. He was the king of the gods, Zeus. He loved her so much that he gave her great independence and a wealth of weapons to use for her hunts.

Materials:

- Venn diagram
- Illustrations of Artemis/Diana
- Illustrations of Nzingha
- Famous myths of Artemis/Diana
- Descriptive Biography of Nzingha
- Pens, paper, drawing markers and pencils

Discussion questions to pose to the class:

- Now that you know about several African Heroes, how do you feel about African History?
- Do you see any difference between African heroes and Western culture’s heroes?
- What importance to history do you see now?
- How important is journal writing now that you’ve read about Nzingha?

**Vocabulary:** Archery, Angola, Cuanza, Matamba

**Activity C** – (2 weeks)

Reading: Excerpt copies of Shillington, Kevin. *History of Africa*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Internet Reading:

“Askia Mohammad I.” *Wikipedia*. April 18, 2008  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Askia\\_Mohammad\\_I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Askia_Mohammad_I)>

“The Songhai Empire: The Golden Age of Timbuktu.” *History.com*. 30 Jun 2008  
<<http://www.history.com/classroom/unesco/timbuktu/goldenage.html>>.

Student Objectives while doing activities:

- To compare Ancient African culture and philosophy with Muslim ways
- To read, comprehend and analyze heroes
- To appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of a culture mostly unknown
- To enhance self-esteem of students from African-American culture

Three Sessions: 30-minutes

*First 30-minute session: Discovery and Comparison*

Students are handed two maps: England from 1493 – 1528 and Songhai during the same period. These maps will have blank lines drawn over them with general terms underneath each line, for example, blank line: form of government underneath; blank line: amount of wealth underneath. The teacher will call out different facts about each country and have students pencil in which country is described by the numbers or other information being called out.

After a discussion and re-alignment of facts to the correct country, students will develop and color in graphs from each set of facts to see which country is out performing the other in which areas. This assignment will be graded.

*Second 30-minute session: Reading Comprehension and Analysis*

Students will read in small groups, report their findings to other class member groups, and answer questions about Askia the Great and his reign. The answered questions will be turned in and graded.

*Third 30-minute session: Comparison and Synthesis*

Students will review the components of a hero and find synonyms for each characteristic listed. In small groups, students will share their synonyms with other members. Individually each student will write sentences about Askia the Great, using the characteristics and one of the synonyms gathered from the group activities. The sentences will be handed in and graded.

Materials:

- Maps of Europe during the same period of time as Askia’s rule
- Paper and color pencils
- Ruler for drawing bars and graphs
- Chart on the characteristics of a Hero

**Lesson IV: Cooking the Cuisine of the African Empires**

***Objectives:***

Texas Assessment Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for Reading  
110.47 b (b) 3, 4 – See complete objectives in the Objective section of the narrative.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for World History  
113.33.17 25 c Social studies skills. – See complete objectives in the Objective section of the narrative.

***Activity:*** (2 weeks)

Students will research a plant and write and prepare a presentation that will show the other students how West African cooking has influenced other cultures. They will have additional time to prepare dishes from the West African cooking sources they find.

List of Plants that make a unique contribution to sustaining life in Mali:

Rice, Millet, Peanuts, Okra, Baobab, Onions, Cassava, Potatoes, Ginger, Eggplant, Maize, Carrots, Acacia, Tomatoes, Yams, Wheat, Cucumbers, Cram-cram, and Cauliflower.

Discussion questions to pose to the class:

How do food sources such as plants impact have had on our human culture?

How do available resources impact a culture?

What seems to be the most important staple in the Malian diet?

Which plants have the widest variety of uses? Can you think of additional uses for them?

Did you find a piece of folklore or a superstition about the plant?

Find the Latin and French names of the plant (official language of Mali).

Student Internet suggested sources:

USDA Plants Data base: <<http://plants.usda.gov>>

West African Vegetable homepage: <http://www.wam.umd.edu/~mathewasc/link.htm>

Fieldtrip: Students will work in teams with the culinary instructor to create some of the African dishes that have been researched and presented in class.

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A student friendly encyclopedia that depicts the life of Askia Mohammad I. and his influence in creating the largest western African empire called Songhai.

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Book on traditional African customs before the slave trade and the external influences that changed traditions on the continent of Africa.

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“Nzingha of Ndongo and Matamba.” *Wikipedia*. February 12, 2008

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- "Profiles & Facts Queen Nzingha of Angola (1583-1663)." *African American History*. 2005. Know Your Black History. Feb 12, 2008.  
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- "The Songhai Empire: The Golden Age of Timbuktu." *History.com*. 30 Jun 2008  
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## Supplemental Sources

### Teacher Resources

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### Additional Student Resources

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 <<http://www.windweaver.com/sheba/Sheba3.htm>>.  
 Website is rich in graphics as well as the written story, friendly and well organized.  
 Students can navigate around well to obtain information for their research.