

A Hidden History: The West African Empires Before the Atlantic Slave Trade

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INTRODUCTION

Fondren Middle School is located in the southwest section of Houston, Texas. It provides a rigorous curriculum that reaches beyond traditional boundaries. The magnet program offers exceptional opportunities, such as complete training laboratories where students learn graphics, digital imaging, and animation. Fondren is the only middle school in HISD to have an annual trip to Big Bend National Park every spring where the students can learn about ecology, biology, and geology. Fondren is a Title I school: 55% are African American, 41% Hispanic American, 2% Asian American, 1% white, and 1% other. 71% are at-risk, and 91% receive free/reduced lunch. We also have 81% in the Pre-AP program.

OBJECTIVES

SS.6.2B- Describe the economic, social, and/or political impact of individual and group achievement on the historical and contemporary countries or societies of a given region.

SS.6.3B- View, determine the utility, and interpret various types of maps, graphs, charts, and other geographic tools to pose and answer questions about geographic distributions and patterns in world regions.

SS. 6.5B Identify how human and physical geographic factors affect the ability of a country/group to control territory and shape domestic and foreign policy in a given region or country.

SS.6.2A Explain the significant contributions of historic and contemporary individuals and groups from selected societies, cultures, or regions.

SS. 6.18D Identify examples of art, music, and literature that have transcended the boundaries of societies and convey universal themes.

RATIONALE

I teach middle school Pre-AP history. Pre-AP classes are designed to prepare every student for college by teaching higher level thinking skills. The teachers are trained with strategies and tools they need to teach with every day. These students are advanced in their learning. The purpose of this class is to prepare the students for AP history classes and college level classes and to help them become self-reliant. This Pre-AP history class is a rigorous program which includes text-based reading, random pop quizzes over the reading (both primary and secondary sources), essays, research papers, notes, and other learning activities.

When I started this seminar, “Ancient Times to the Atlantic Slave Trade Era,” I was immediately pleased, for this was one of my passions that I wished to research more. As a World Culture 6th grade teacher, we have limited resources to teach African Empires before the slave trade. This unit is geared toward the 6th grade World Culture and geography students. Many of our students know very little about African history. That is my reason for preparing this unit, and this component will focus on the history and culture of the Great Sudanic Empires of

Africa before the commencement of the Atlantic slave trade to the Americas. The history taught only shows a limited picture of what they want us to know and teach our students. The students will do a research unit where they will have an opportunity to look at videos and television specials and interview other students from these areas in Africa.

We will look at the history of the last one-thousand years or so: first the ancient Ghana Empire, second the Mali Empire, and third the Songhai Empire.

UNIT BACKGROUND

In this unit we will focus on three West African empires: Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. Each of these was located in the Western Sudan. This is a broad area stretching in an east-west direction across West Africa, south of the Sahara desert, and north of the rainforest regions to the far south. Each of these empires gained their wealth through trade across the region, as well as that carried into North Africa (i.e., the Trans-Saharan trade) and that reaching deeper south into the rainforest. The most traded items were gold, salt, cola nuts, copper, clothing, jewelry, and slaves. One important theme in this history is the coming and adoption of Islam, as well as ongoing conflicts with Muslim nomads from the north. Also important is the history of higher education in the Western Sudan. There was a university at Timbuktu, with great architecture built by the Africans and a book trade. These books “were valued as much as salt – and salt, being then a rare commodity, was valued as much as gold” (Gates 112).

John Reader, author of *Africa: A Biography of the Continent*, states, “Ancient Ghana was the first source of West African gold to be exploited by the trans-Saharan trade” (286). Ibn al-Faqih, an Iranian, wrote:

It is said that beyond the source of the Nile is darkness and beyond the darkness are waters which the gold grow...to the town of Ghana is a three-months’ journey through deserts. In the county of Ghana gold grows in the sand as carrots do, and is plucked at sunrise. (Reader, *Africa: A Biography* 286)

Ghana: Empire of Gold

The Ghana Empire was located in what is now southeastern Mauritania and western Mali. This great trading state was very active from 300 C.E. until the mid 1000s. During this time they traded with the Berbers to the north and the West Africans living in the forest regions to the south. Basil Davidson (*West Africa before the Slave Trade*) stated that its rulers called Ghana Wagadu. The name Ghana came into being because of one of the king’s titles, was “Ghana” or “war chief”; each king after that was known by his name and also by the title of Ghana. Another title was *Kaya Maghan*, meaning “lord of the gold” (26-27).

Ghana experienced many years of peace and economic growth because of its wealth in iron and gold. Early evidence of ironworking was found as early as the sixth century B.C.E. in northern Nigeria. In all of the empires, blacksmiths and smelters were believed to have magical powers. This was because they were able to transform a simple raw material (iron ore) into a useful and wealth producing product (iron tools). They were called the “First Sons of the Earth” (McKissack and McKissack 22). These West African blacksmiths had a closed and secret society and their skills were passed down from one generation to another. This meant that you had to be born into the family of blacksmiths to be eligible for the training in this field (Ross). The ironworkers were divided into three groups: The blaster; the blacksmiths; and the precious metals and jewelry workers. The best gold found was for the king and only the gold dust went to the people (McKissack and McKissack 22-23).

In Ghana, the king's role was to organize trade with the Berber merchants of the Sahara and keep a good relationship with them, as well as being a religious leader and a representative on earth of the founding ancestors of his people, the Soninke (Davidson 27).

There are many legends about the religious beliefs of Ghana, and one of them is Ouagadou-Bida. During the eleventh century, the official religion of Ghana was Ouagadou-Bida, the serpent – spirit. Ouagadou-Bida was a holy spirit that lived in a Sacred Grove of Ghana. This Holy Spirit protected the kingdoms. The legend states that Ouagadou-Bida required a sacrifice. The sacrifice was a beautiful girl who gave her life to continue protection for the people. One year a beautiful girl named Sia was chosen, but she was engaged to a great warrior named Amadou Sefedokote. He was upset about the sacrifice and plotted to stop it, so he hid behind a tree and waited for Ouagadou-Bida to appear for the sacrifices. When Ouagadou-Bida appeared, Amadou cut off his head, but Ouagadou-Bida (the spirit) grew another head. Amadou did this seven times, and each time Ouagadou-Bida grew a head. It was only after the seventh one that the spirit died. Amadou Sefedokote and his beautiful bride-to-be rode off into the sunset. The people of Ghana were very upset when they heard the news. Without a spirit to protect them, harm would come upon this kingdom. Crops begin to dry up, animals died, and a drought came. The people became nomads who traveled from place to place (Curry).

Ghana and other states like it began to invent new methods of living together and raising money to pay for a governing system, and mostly to produce wealth. Al-Bakri, an Arab traveler, wrote that “the empire of Ghana had two main sources of raising revenue; the first was an import and export tax like the one we use today, and the second one was what we call a production tax that was only applied to gold” (Davidson 27).

One of the most important trade items was gold. It was traded to faraway lands, especially the Mediterranean, but also was used to make jewelry for the local population. The King of Ghana controlled the trade in gold by keeping all the nuggets for the state and allowing miners and traders to retain all gold dust (McKissack and McKissack 22-23).

Trade in gold and other products originally took place through a system of silent bartering. This was a form of trade where Berber traders laid out what they wanted to trade, then made their announcement by beating on the drum and leaving. Then Soninke miners would come and look at the merchandise and place what they thought it was worth and leave. If they accepted the price, they would take it and leave; if not, they would go away and come back for another round. Although some of these miners were sometimes captured in conflicts, they never told where the gold mines were located (Mann 23, 26).

Salt was another economic product, and it was taxed to bring in more wealth. The salt was used to keep food from spoiling and was used in cooking to give the food a special taste. The most important dietary use was to help in the hot, dry climates. It was used to replace what the body loses in heat in the desert. The salt trade was taxed by demanding one gold coin for every donkey-load of salt that came into the region, and two gold coins for every donkey-load of salt that went out of the region (“Al-Bakir: Glimpses of Ghana”). Most of the salt in this area came from mines at Taghaza, located in the Sahara Desert. Extracting salt from the ground was a difficult task. Most of the people who worked there were sent there as a death sentence for being war captives or criminals (McKissack and McKissack 84).

Salt and gold were not the only things traded on the Trans-Saharan Trade route. Silver, honey, ivory, jewelry, tools, metals and leather goods, livestock, cloth from Ghana, and rare birds were also traded. Slaves were traded as well; these tended to be individuals from outside the Ghana Empire who had been captured in battle or criminals who were expelled from local societies (McKissack and McKissack 26).

Camels were used for transportation because they could drink over 100 liters of water one session and this could last up to nine days traveling in the hot desert. They could tolerate the heat better than any other animal. They adapted to the desert by having two rows of eyelashes, hairy ears, two humps on their backs, and nostrils that could open and close for the desert heat and sand. The camels could also go several days without eating. The camel was an ill-tempered animal that would bite, spit, kick, run away, and even refuse to move at times. Most caravans would hire a special trained person to manager the camels (McKissack and McKissack 27).

As was the case with all the empires discussed here, the Niger River served as a key transportation route. It is the third largest river in Africa and forms a boomerang shape that baffled the European explorers who thought it was part of the Nile River. It is over 2,600 miles long through Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria and flows into the Gulf of Guinea. It has a northbound section called the Joiiba and a southbound called the Quorra. All along the watery highway are many islands, inlets, and small villages which served the large number of traders plying their wares (Reader and Lewis 191-192).

While Ghana was expanding its wealth, a new development happened on the Arabian peninsula. This was the invention of a new religion called Islam. Islam was revealed by its founder Muhammad, beginning around 610-611. The word "Islam" comes from the Arabic root "slm" which means "peace" or "surrender." The new religion spread quickly through trade, cultural exchange, and jihad or holy wars. Muslims had expanded and conquered vast regions of the world, including North Africa. Ghana's first contact with Islam was through the Arab merchants and North African Berber traders who converted to Islam. Also Ghana witnessed its first written language with the arrival of Islam (Gates 136-137).

Around 1050 Berbers from the Mauretanian Sahara invaded Ghana. The Berbers wanted a share of the gold from Ghana and did not think that the non-Muslims of the Sudan should be wealthier than themselves. Their movement took a religious form, for its leader was an Islamic scholar named Abdullah Ibn Yasin. He created a religious center called a hermitage and encouraged his followers to wage a "jihad" against the people of Ghana, saying they were too "pagan." By 1087 the Ghana Empire had fallen (McKissack and McKissack 40).

The last ruler of Ghana had power over only a few provinces. After the fall of Ghana, Islam continued to spread into the Sudan through trade, cultural exchange and sometimes jihads (holy wars). It was during this period that the Soninke people were first exposed to a written language (McKissack and McKissack 11-17).

The military was organized by the emperor. These soldiers were some of the cream of the crop, respected by all and paid well. Each male was expected to serve in the military at least one month out of the year and bring his own weapons. The special troops were to maintain peace and order throughout the empire. The color and the length of their uniforms showed their rank. Besides taking care of the empire, they were a special force that served as bodyguards to the emperor and his family, and other important people. These soldiers were hand-picked because they had to be honest, brave, intellectual, and courageous in case of an attack on the Emperor (McKissack and McKissack 33).

In 1054 the Almoravid (Muslim people of the northern Sahara who established political dominance over northwestern Africa and Spain) came and took over the Ghana Empire and devastated their property and government (Davidson 34, 242).

Mali: The Rise of Sundiata and Rule of Mansa Musa

After the Empire of Ghana fell, a smaller kingdom comprised of Sosso peoples and headed by the king named Sumanguru Krina began to come to power. It was this king that Sundiata, the most renowned emperor of the Sudanic empires, had to battle. Sundiata was a member of the Mande-

speaking Mandinka (Malike or Mandingo) that ruled for many years and prospered after his establishment of the empire. Sundiata's empire, also known as the Mali Empire, stretched across a large geographic area, from the dry steppe of the Sahara to the dense rainforest of the West African coast (McKissack and McKissack 46; Davidson 39-40).

According to *Sundiata Epic*, an epic poem that has been recited and retained from twelfth century Mali, Sundiata was the fruit of a prophecy which foretold his coming as a liberator of Mali (Niane). His father was a King named Nare-Maghan, and his mother Sogolon Kedjou of Do, a hunchback. Sundiata was not able to walk until he was about seven years old and was teased by his stepmother (Sassouma Berete) and her son Dankaran. The Keita griots of Mali preserved the history of Sundiata for centuries. The story tells us that Sundiata and his mother were favored by the king, which some believe was the reason Sassouma Berete, the king's first wife, began her reign of terror on Sundiata and his mother (Niane).

After an attempt on his life, Sundiata escaped with his mother to Mema where the king took him in and trained him as a warrior. Through these skills, he was able to conquer numerous kingdoms in the region and place himself as Emperor or "King of Kings." Sundiata ruled the Mali Empire about twenty-five years. Sundiata made Niani, his birthplace, the capital of his empire. He depended on the structure already established to build his empire by making generals from his own age group. By keeping the former kings and chiefs in place, he was able to rule the empire with very little conflict. Sundiata set up a partnership called "joking relationships" between the clans to teach them how to treat each other as kin. He was believed to have done more for the people than all of the kings and remains a legendary hero for the people of the Sudan today. After Sundiata his sons Uli, Wati and Khalifa ruled (McKissack 55; Wisnicwski).

Mali's empire grew even more powerful under the leadership of Mansa (or King) Sakuru; he ruled from about 1298-1308. Mansa Sakuru was the sixth Mansa of the Mali Empire. Born a slave, Sakuru had been freed during the reign of Sundiata. He extended the empire's borders along important trade routes. Ibn Khaldun, one of the great Arab travelers and writers of the 1400s, wrote that the "the nation of Sudan stood in awe of Mali, and the merchants of North Africa traveled to his country" (Davidson 42).

After Sakuru's reign came the rule of Mansa Kankan Musa, who ruled Mali from 1312 until his death in 1337. Mansa Musa (*Musa* meaning *Moses* in Arabic) was the grandnephew of the grandson of the emperor Sundiata. He pushed to acquire more lands and stretched the empire to its greatest geographical span. One of his most important conquests were the salt mines at Taghaza in the Sahara desert, which were the source of Western Sudan's lucrative trade in salt. Mansa Musa was skilled at using his power to promote peace and power. By this time Muslim traders had spread Islam across West Africa, but most of the rulers kept their cultural religious practices. Mansa Musa later accepted this new form of religion, and many of his officials were Muslim foreigners. Most of his people were not Muslims; he allowed diverse religious practices to flourish during his reign. The new emperor based his system of justice on the Koran, the Muslim holy book. He later made a pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the holy cities of Islam (Burns; Davidson 42-43).

On this journey Mansa Musa took great wealth, including 500 slaves carrying six-pound staffs of gold each. He arrived in Cairo in July 1324 after eight months of traveling. He also brought with him one hundred camels, each carrying three hundred pounds of gold. A hundred more camels with food, clothing, and other supplies, as well as thousands of people, were included in his caravan. All of this wealth made a lasting impression in every region it passed. It is said that he deposited so much gold in Cairo that the local economy took twelve years to recover. Because of his achievements and wealth, the Empire of Mali became world-renowned and respected. Many foreigners came to visit the empire, including the famous Arabic traveler named Ibn Khaldun. He travelled to Mali in the mid-fourteenth century and wrote that "the

nations of Sudan stood in awe of Mali, and the merchants of North Africa travelled to this country” (Davidson 42). It is from his work *The Kitab al-Ibar* that we are able to gain glimpses into what Mali was like in these times.

On his way back home from Cairo Mansa Musa stopped at Gao, and he took Prince Ali Kolon and Prince Sulayman Nar back to Niani as royal hostages. They grew up to become great warriors, and after Mansa Musa died and Mansa Maghan took over, the brothers were in position to make a break for home, and they wasted no time in doing so. Learning of their father’s death, Ali Kolon had enough support to oust the ruling king and take control. He declared Gao free, and this was the beginning of the downfall of Mali (McKissack and McKissack 87).

Before returning home, Mansa Musa journeyed upstream to the famous trading city of Timbuktu. Caravans went to Timbuktu from all points of the horizon. Timbuktu is located at the southern edge of the Saharan Desert within walking distance of the Niger River. The Tuareg traders of the Sudan had established this town originally under Mansa Musa; however, it became an important intellectual center. After his trip to Cairo, Mansa Musa persuaded the writer and architect Abu Ishaq es Saheli to return with him. This famous architect is credited with designing the great mosque of Jenne. Leo Africanus, a famous writer, described Timbuktu as a city of intellectual life. In Timbuktu, he says, “there are numerous judges, doctors and clerks, all receiving good salaries from the king” (Davidson 93).

For the common people of the Mali Empire, life had a very regular pace. Family life was centered on the children. Their mothers trained children until the age of twelve. Boys were circumcised at twelve with other boys who turned twelve at the same time. Girls mostly did the housework, helped with the little children, and worked in the garden. If the family could afford it or if a boy was talented enough, he was sent to school in one of the famous cities of Gao or Timbuktu to study or learn a trade under a master apprentice. Other boys would join the military to help their families. The men hunted and did most of the farming, while the women did the harvesting of the food. The tools they made included axes, hoes, and bows and arrows. The women made the pots and baskets and tended to the chicken and other poultry. In some clans the uncles on the father’s side of the family was called the big father. The youngest uncle was called the little family and the same for the maternal aunts. The cousins were called brothers and sisters. (McKissack and McKissack 67).

Songhay: The Empire Restored

The Songhay or Songhai Empire was first established in the middle Niger region after the fall of Mali around 1400. This area was occupied by people who were divided into two clans or families, the Sorko, “Masters of the River,” and the Babibi, “Masters of the soil” (McKissack and McKissack). Songhay was centered in a fertile region with great waterways and squeezed in between the Tuareg Berbers in the northwest and the Mossi, agriculturalists in the southeast. Because of this location, they had to fight constantly to survive. The Songhay Empire would eventually dominate all of the territories previously held by Ghana and Mali, and the warrior-king who led Songhay through its early period of leadership was Sunni Ali Ber, which means “Ali the Great”. Sunni the Great came to power in Gao in 1464 (McKissack and McKissack).

One of Sunni Ali’s greatest achievements was the development of a large standing army, headed by himself. His court followed him wherever he went on horseback, and he always rode at the head of his army. His army was comprised of well-trained and professional soldiers, divided into cavalry and infantry. Each soldier was protected by padded armor and armed with spears, swords, and poisoned arrows. The cavalry mostly came from noble families and were alert and ready to move on a moment’s notice. The Songhay army studied the people it conquered; they learned their way of government, customs, laws, legends, and myths. Basil Davidson, author of *West Africa before the Colonial Era*, described Sunni Ali Ber as one of the great Sudanic

military leaders whose energy and ambition kept him in the saddle and always fighting. Because of his great skills in fighting, he knew no other way to unite the Western Sudan except by conquering with ruthless skills (Davidson 52-53).

Sunni Ali gained control of Timbuktu and drove out the Tuareg who had controlled the city since 1433. The city had been strictly Muslim for a long time and was a center of Islamic learning. It also hosted an immense trade in books, which were gathered around the world and recopied in Timbuktu. Sunni Ali Ber accused the inhabitants of Timbuktu of being disloyal to the empire and was determined to take the city back. After gaining control of Timbuktu, he led his army to another city in the region called Jenne, which was the market center for trade in gold, kola nut, ivory, and other products from the forestlands. The inhabitants of Jenne were fierce opponents; the siege lasted seven years; on the seventh day of the seventh month of the seventh year, Jenne finally fell to Sunni Ali's troops (McKissack and McKissack 53).

Sunni Ali drowned in 1492, the year Christopher Columbus sailed to the Americas: he was thrown from his horse in a river. Sunni Ali's son Baru succeeded him as the emperor. Baru was unique in that he refused to follow Muslim tradition and pray five times a day; instead he preferred to do all of his prayers at once and refused to declare himself a Muslim. The Muslim leaders called this sacrilege and overthrew him. Because of this, a general named Askia Muhammad Toure became the leader of Songhay in 1492. Askia was a Soninke captive raised as a Songhay. As his first act in power, he welcomed back the Muslim leaders to Timbuktu, Jenne, and Gao, which helped trade increase. In 1495 he made a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina taking with him one thousand infantrymen and five hundred men on horseback and camel. He also took three hundred pieces of gold, which were used to pay his expenses, give as alms, and buy merchandise to take back with him (Davidson 52-53; McKissack and McKissack 94).

After returning home, Askia called for a jihad against all non-believers in Songhay. His empire became so large that he put into place a centralized government and appointed governors to manage the five provinces which reported directly to him. His word was the absolute power of the empire, although it is said that he always listed to several points of view before making a decision on any subject. He frequently consulted Islamic judges and scholars on how to best govern his empire. One of them was Al-Maghili who is credited with introducing Sufism to the Empire and spreading the idea of Mujaddid or "Renewer of Islam" that later became an important theme in the history of the empire (McKissack and McKissack 98).

Askia had a commander for the navy and one for the army, a minister in charge of navigation and fishing, one as head of tax collecting, and another leader in charge of property. There was also a minister in charge of the foreigners and one for the forests. Each town had an appointed mayor (McKissack and McKissack 99).

Askia built up the three cities of Timbuktu, Gao, and Jenne. Timbuktu became one of the wealthiest markets of the trans-Saharan trade route. It was located in a good position for trade, but it was in a bad location to defend itself. Many wells flourished in this region with sweet water. Corn, cattle, milk, and even butter were in abundance (Davidson 57; McKissack and McKissack 102). Askia was also a great supporter of the arts. Famous for its trade and schools of learning, many came to Timbuktu to study law, history, mathematics, astronomy, and cartography. Students were attracted from countries as far away as Egypt, Northern Africa, and the Middle East. Askia invited great writers to Songhay as well, such as Tarikh al-Fettash, who wrote a history of the Western Sudan, and Leo Africanus, the first person to write an eyewitness account of the Songhay Empire. This book, titled *A History and Description of Africa and the Notable Things contained Therein*, was published in 1526. Leo Africanus wrote about his travels to Timbuktu, "Here are many shops of such as artificers and merchants, and especially as weave linen and cotton and cloth" (McKissack and McKissack 105). He also wrote that, "The

inhabitants, and strangers living there, are exceeding rich, that the king had both of his daughters wed unto rich merchants” (McKissack and McKissack 105).

The city of Gao was located 250 miles southwest of Timbuktu. Its location right off the river Niger made it valuable to the Trans-Saharan trade. Horses bought in Europe for ten ducats sold for forty ducats apiece. This city was the capital of the powerful Songhay Empire for over a hundred years (Davidson 57; McKissack and McKissack 102).

Jenne, the third city founded like Timbuktu soon after the eleventh century, is known as the middleman city between the traders and Western Sudan. It was through Jenne that the great caravans traveled with gold and other goods to North Africa and into the forestlands. One importance of Jenne was its association with the spread of activities of the Mandinka traders; they went into the forestlands buying and selling as agents. Jenne was located in a safe position because it was encircled by floodwaters from the Niger River. The people of Jenne built high walls for protection from floods and its invaders. Leo Africanus and al-Kati both agreed that Jenne was a well-known medical center. They agreed that the physicians there were well advanced in medical practices and research. Women were given the advice to space their children, having them every three years apart. The mosquito had been isolated as the main cause of malaria, and one advanced practice of physicians was the removal of cataracts (Davidson 57).

Askia Muhammad ruled Songhay for thirty-five years. He expanded the empire as far west as Segou and northeast to Air. He gave Songhay an administrative system, which marked new advances toward a centralized state, during his reign. As Askia Muhammad’s health began to fail him, his son Musa revolted, and the king was put under house arrest. Askia died at the age of ninety-seven on March 2, 1538. Songhay never was the same after this. The Moroccans from the north obtained arms years later and attacked. Even though the salt trade continued for a while, they could not find the source of the gold. In the 1600s most of the nobles had been absorbed into other local cultures. By the 1800s the Songhay Empire had dwindled to a small homeland along the Niger River, where a number of communities live today (McKissack and McKissack 111).

CONCLUSION

The first and most influential empire of West Africa that we will study is Ghana. The kings were known as the “King of Gold.” The emperors’ power rested on the gold trade. The Arab writer Al-Bakri, who visited Ghana around 1065, wrote these words describing what he saw, “When the king gives audience to his people, to listen to their complaints and to set them to rights, he sits in a pavilion around which stand ten pages holding shields and gold-mounted swords” (“Al-Bakir: Glimpses of Ghana”). The people of the Western Sudan controlled the passage of gold to the Mediterranean world. It was gold that built the powerful Ghana Empire. This territory lay to the north and northwest of the upper Niger River area.

After the fall of Ghana, the Empire of Mali rose. Many other leaders tried to take control; one great leader was Mansa Musa who ruled from 1312 until he died in 1337. He converted to Islam and made a pilgrimage to Mecca, a journey that brought him world-wide fame because of the gold he took with him.

The third and final empire we will study is the Songhay, in which the boundaries were greatly expanded and a new trading center was developed at Gao. The most ambitious ruler, named Sunni Ali, spent a lifetime at war. After him came Askia Muhammad who more closely followed the teaching of Islam. He also made a pilgrimage to Mecca. The Moroccan soldiers invaded Songhay in the 1600s and won the battle because they had guns. There were two reasons for this war: one was military and the other commercial. Firearms were now the weapon of choice of the Moroccans, and it produced much destruction for the people of the Western Saharan who were using bows and arrows.

The students will enjoy this unit because of all of its excitement and the deep history they will learn. They will learn that local and long distance trade was made possible because of the advances made by the people. They will learn that in the 14th century much of the gold in Europe and the Middle East came from the Western Sudan, carried over the Sahara by camels and oxen. Most of all they will learn of the great heroes who help shaped the continent of Africa.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan One: The West African Kingdom/Empire Passport

Objectives

SS.6.2.B Describe the economic, social, and or political impact of individual and group achievement on the historical and contemporary countries or societies of a given region.

SS.6.3B-View, determine the utility, and interpret various types of maps, graphs, charts, and other geographic tools to pose and answer questions about geographic distributions and patterns in world regions

SS.6.5B Identify how human and physical geographic factors affect ability of a country/group to control territory and shape domestic and foreign policy in a given region or country.

Focus

Each student is required to complete a passport for this unit. This project will serve as part of the student's overall grade. The project will include the empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and the Ancient Kush.

Directions

1. Your passport will need a blue cover. See the sample passport from Ms. Nwoke.
2. Your name, birthdate, and address will go under a picture of you. If you do not have a picture, Ms. Nwoke will take one of you.
3. All pages must be done neatly, printed or typed.
4. List the name of each empire on separate pages.
5. You will write the approximate date of each empire's beginning and its location.
6. State the empire's major economic resources.
7. Write a brief summary of the leader of the empire at this time.
8. Include any map received from your teacher or draw your own copy for this passport.
9. Look for ways how human and the geographic boundaries and features changed with each leader.
10. Ask questions if you're not sure about something.
11. I will give you time to work on your project, but you must complete it on your own.
12. Extra time to work on the project will be Tuesdays and Thursdays after school 4:05-5:05.

Materials

Colored construction paper; scissors; stapler; map pencils; markers; crayons; ruler; picture of you; maps of ancient empires of Africa.

Lesson Plan Two: The Great Emperors of Mali

Objectives

SS.6.2A Explain the significant contributions of historic and contemporary individuals and groups from selected societies, cultures, or regions.

SS.6.3B- View, determine the utility, and interpret various types of maps, graphs, charts, and other geographic tools to pose and answer questions about geographic distributions and patterns in world regions.

SS. 6.5B Identify how human and physical geographic factors affect ability of a country/group to control territory and shape domestic and foreign policy in a given region or country.

Focus

Students will be divided into groups to write a skit (no more than 10 minutes) to be presented to the class about each of the emperors during the Empire of Mali. Sundiata 1235-1260, who founded the empire; Mansa Sakuru 1298-1308, who extended the Empire; and Mansa Kankan Musa 1312-1337, who also extended the empire, but made a journey to Mecca.

Directions

1. Students will be divided into groups to work on a skit. They will write all important features about each emperor to trace his life during his time.
2. The teacher will also provide resources and books on the emperors.
3. Costumes can be brought by the students or provided by the teacher.
4. The skit must include how the salt and gold influenced the Empire.
5. Each group will decide on what job each person will take.
6. On the scenery, students will create a map of the Empire and the travels of each one of the emperors who traveled outside of his empire.

Materials

Pens, pencils, and paper to write with construction paper for scenery and backdrop; costumes for characters; rocks to be colored gold for nuggets; large cardboard to make animals; temper paints for painting.

Lesson Plan Three: Paper Mache Mask and Tools

Objective

SS. 6.18. D. Identify examples of art, music, and literature that have transcended the boundaries of the societies and convey universal themes.

Focus

Each student is required to complete an art project of paper maché. Students will research each of the Kingdoms and make a paper of either a mask of one of the emperors or paper maché of a tool or ironwork they have come across in this lesson.

Materials

One-galloon plastic milk jugs for each student making a mask, balloons, (the ones that can be easily shaped into an object), an assortment of paints, (Check with your art teacher to see if acrylic or temper paint is best to use with your students), lots of newspaper, flour, 3 or 4 boxes of salt, paper towels, scissors, craft knife (only the teacher can handle this).

Directions

1. Teacher and students will collection empty milk jugs for the mask.
2. Cut newspaper into strips 6 to 8 inches long and one to two inches wide.
3. Mix one part flour to two parts water; add ½ box of salt to keep from molding.
4. Cut the milk jug in half from the top to the bottom, leaving the part with the handle to serve as the nose.
5. With the teacher or adult help cut the eyes any shape you want to.

6. Next, the students will begin to lay the foundation of paper mache. Dip the newspaper strips in to the mixture one strip at a time. Continue until the first lay is completed. Let it dry for 24 hours.
7. Continue to add a second layer angled in another direction from the first one. Follow this process until you have 4 to 5 good layers.
8. Decorating your mask after drying will be the fun time. You may want to paint a solid layer of color first then proceed to shape your Emperor's face.
9. Students making tools and ironwork art can use a balloon to shape their object and lay the layers of paper mache until it is shape the way they one it.
10. Students will write a brief summary of their paper maché. They can be used in the skit.

Lesson Plan Four: Venn Diagram

Objective

SS. 6.2A Explain the significant contributions of historic and contemporary individuals and groups from selected societies, cultures, or regions.

Materials

Several copies of the two books: *Sundiata: Lion King of Mali*, by David Wisniewski, and *Mansa Musa: The Lion of Mali* by Khephra Burns.

Directions

1. Students will begin by reading the stories of two great Emperors Sundiata Keita and Mansa Musa (*Sundiata: Lion King of Mali* and *Mansa Musa: The Lion of Mali*).
2. Students should look for positive character traits about both Emperors and make a comparison.
3. Students will draw a Venn diagram and label it, Sundiata, both in the middle, and Mansa Musa for the last one.
4. As a class fill out the similarities between the two rulers. Example: both were Muslim.

Lesson Plan Five: Family Tree

Objective

SS. 6.2A Explain the significant contributions of historic and contemporary individuals and groups from selected societies, cultures, or regions.

Focus

In Africa, as well as other parts of the world, family loyalty was a bond that held a society together. The students will create their family tree with the help of their family.

Materials

Have several different copies of family trees, pencils, pens, and paper. Computers will be available for research.

Directions

1. Talk to your older relatives about their older relatives to start your research.
2. Gather names and dates of special events they can remember.
3. Look through the family Bibles and other records.
4. Have your parents or other family members look at the county register's office for birth records, death records, and marriage licenses for family member names.
5. Look at old photos and check special contributions made by family members; also look at clubs and organizations.

6. Don't forget to keep good records. Your children and grandchildren can use this in the future.
7. In putting your tree together, start with your name at the top and your parents next; then add your sisters and brothers.
8. Continue down the tree as far as your information can go.
9. Do one parent's complete tree on different trees. This way you want get the information mixed up.
10. Have fun gathering your information.

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