



# AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS

BACKGROUND UNIT

# Why is it important to learn about early African civilizations?

In 2018, millions of moviegoers flocked to theaters to see Marvel's *Black Panther*. Set in the mythical utopia of Wakanda, the film depicts an African country left untouched by colonization and allowed to thrive in isolation. Although Wakanda is fictional, it raises real questions about the continent: What would have been Africa's trajectory if European colonization had not exploited its people and resources? Might African countries have prospered and become industrial and cultural leaders of the modern world?

Before European conquest in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, African societies were complex, benefitting from continental and global trade that drove robust economies. Similar to the emergence of other civilizations, African kingdoms used their natural resources to maximize commerce and industry, leading to centralized government, social stratification, job specialization and the creation of notable cities and architectural wonders. These societies were also characterized by systems of education, organized religion and rich artistic and cultural expression. Examples of powerful empires, profiled in this unit, include the following:

- **Aksum (c. 1st–8<sup>th</sup> century CE):** Considered as great a power as Rome, Persia and China in its time, Aksum's position on the Red Sea made it an international trading hub. Aksum was the first African society to issue its own currency and to adopt Christianity as its official religion. Aksum's power is exhibited in its stelae, 100 monuments that were the tallest buildings in the ancient world. Each weighed 700 tons and was intricately carved from a single slab of stone.
- **Ghana (c. 6<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century CE):** Known as the "land of gold," Ghana invented gold-mining technology and controlled major gold fields in the region. Its kings, or "lords of the gold," controlled this precious metal, taxing it heavily and bestowing luxurious gifts of it upon allies. The trans-Saharan trade in gold, salt and other goods enriched Ghana and allowed it to centralize power. Arab visitors wrote of a force of 200,000 soldiers, including 40,000 archers.
- **Mali (c. 1240–1645 CE):** Three-quarters of the gold traded to North Africa and Europe during medieval times came from Mali, making it a global superpower. Mali's most famous king, Mansa Musa, capitalized upon this trade, enriching his kingdom and himself—his wealth has been estimated at \$400 billion in today's currency. Mansa Musa invested in universities and libraries throughout Mali that were among the greatest in the medieval world.
- **Kush (c. 1069 BCE–350 CE):** Made rich from the mining of minerals and the development of iron metallurgy, the Kushites had a massive gold-processing operation and a written language based on Egyptian hieroglyphics. Notable art and architecture from the major cities of Meroe, Kerma and Napata include stone temple complexes, pyramids, narrative tomb wall paintings and granite and bronze statues of gods and kings.

→ **Great Zimbabwe (c. 1300–1450 CE):**

Enriched by trade in gold and ivory, the city of Great Zimbabwe was home to as many as 18,000 people, including 2,000 goldsmiths, stonemasons and other skilled craftsmen. Among the 300 structures uncovered there by archaeologists are a hill complex surrounded by a 37-foot-high granite wall, a “Great Enclosure” surrounded by a wall of a million blocks and massive stone towers with sculpted stairways.

Many students will be surprised to learn about the geographic, linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity of Africa, and its rich cultural history. Too often the continent is presented as a monolith, shaped by 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century popular culture. Investigating Africa’s vibrant pre-colonial civilizations can help debunk misconceptions about its power and place in the world, and spark curiosity about the 54 nations that make up Africa today.

# AFRICA'S RICH HISTORY



## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why is it important to learn about Africa's historic kingdoms and vibrant trade?



## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Explore the emergence and history of West African kingdoms and trade.
- Analyze the meaning of a West African fable and the significance of that region's oral tradition.
- Interpret a primary source to learn about the influence of the Kingdom of Mali.
- Annotate a text on the history of the Ghana and Mali kingdoms.
- Create an original salt craft rendering depicting key features of an African kingdom.



## LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



## TIME NEEDED

125 minutes



## MATERIALS

- AV equipment to project an image
- *Map of Early African Civilizations* (one to project)
- *Mansa Musa: Tenth Emperor of the Mali Empire* handout (one to project or copies for small groups)
- *The Ghana Kingdom* (one per student)
- *The Mali Kingdom* (one per student)
- Materials for art project: salt or sand, glue, construction paper, watercolor paint or food coloring, paint brushes, paper plates and cups, colored pencils or crayons



## VOCABULARY

civilization

Ghana

Mansa Musa

empire

kingdom

Sahara Desert

griot/griotte

Mali

stereotype

# Procedures


## PART 1

### Sizing Up Africa (15 mins.)

- 1** Write the following brainteaser on the board: “Which continent has the most countries?” Allow students to discuss in pairs and then have the class take a vote. Share that Africa has the most—54 countries. (Asia has 47, Europe 43, North America 23, Australia and Oceania 14, South America 12 and Antarctica 0.)
- 2** Comment that many people don’t realize Africa is so large, and some think Africa is a country, not a continent. Ask students why they think this may be so. Highlight that stereotypes of Africa as less developed, powerful and important may affect people’s perceptions about Africa’s size. Share some of the following facts about Africa:
  - 778 million people live in Africa (only Asia’s population is greater at 3.67 billion).
  - Africa is three times larger than the United States and has more than twice as many people.
  - It is estimated that more than 2,000 different languages are spoken in Africa.
  - While Africa is known for its deserts, rainforests and grasslands, the continent is rapidly urbanizing; many people live in cities and have never seen large wildlife.
  - Many of the resources we purchase come from Africa, including chocolate, coffee, gasoline, rubber, diamonds and the metals and minerals we use in our cellphones.
- 3** Share that Africa is also home to many of the great civilizations in history. Ask students if they can name any. If they struggle to identify African kingdoms, point out that this too may be the result of biases that have left African history out of many movies, books and other ways we learn about the world.

#### NOTE

A graphic on the Culture Trip website illustrates how vast Africa is by showing how many other countries, and even continents, can fit inside its borders: <http://bit.ly/3i8b1GC>.

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- 4** Project the handout *Map of Early African Civilizations*. Allow students to point out the kingdoms they identified in the previous step. Tell them they will learn about Ghana and Mali during this lesson, and indicate their locations on the map.

## **PART 2**

### **West Africa's Oral Tradition (30 mins.)**

- 5** Write *griot/griotte* on the board (these are the masculine and feminine forms of the term). Explain that griots/griottes are storytellers and counselors in West African culture, and the keepers of important facts and events. They have passed down histories and cultural values for over 2,000 years through oral traditions including folktales, songs and proverbs.
- 6** Tell students that they will explore a folktale about the spider-god, Anansi, that comes from the Ashanti people of Ghana. Explain that Anansi, a popular trickster in West African mythology, acted as a link between humans and the sky god Nyame, who turned his son into a spider as a penalty for his mischief. As a class or in small groups, have students perform the reader's theater adaptation of "Anansi and the Story Box" from Activated Story Theater (the script has seven roles): <http://bit.ly/3njn30V>.
- 7** Debrief the reader's theater activity using some of the following questions:
- What lesson do you think the Anansi story is trying to teach or pass down to the next generation?
  - How are the Anansi stories similar to other tales you have studied from the U.S. or other cultures?
  - Anansi and other West African tales were created to teach and entertain. What fills that role in our culture?
  - What is the value of oral storytelling in a culture or society?
  - What role does storytelling play in our culture, or in your own family?

## PART 3

### The Richest Man of All Time (20 mins.)

8

Refer back to the *Map of Early African Civilizations* and point out Mali. Tell students that Mali was one of the most powerful African kingdoms in history and its most famous emperor was Mansa Musa. Project or distribute the handout *Mansa Musa: Tenth Emperor of the Mali Empire*. In small groups, have students analyze the image by noting their responses to the following questions:

- What kind of document do you think this might be? Who might have created it?
- How is Mansa Musa represented in the image? What does this say about his role?
- What items are shown in the image? What do you think are their importance?
- What places are shown? What do you think they might represent?
- What does the image tell us about the Kingdom of Mali?

9

Gather the class and allow small groups to share some of their observations. Refer to the following information as you discuss the image:

- The image was drawn on parchment using colored inks in 1375 by Abraham Cresques, a Jewish cartographer from Majorca (in today's Spain, then part of the kingdom of Aragon). It was part of the *Catalan Atlas*.
- It shows principal points along the trans-Saharan trade routes in West and North Africa.
- A camel caravan and major trade goods are depicted; goods in that society included gold, copper, iron, horses, salt, textiles, leather, ivory and captive peoples. The trade of gold and salt were key to the empire's wealth.
- The atlas features Timbuktu, an important center of trade and learning, then part of the Mali Empire.
- An inscription on the panel reads: "This Black lord is called Musa Mali, Lord of the Black people of Mali. So abundant is the gold which is found in his country that he is the richest and most noble king in all the land."
- Features of the Mali kingdom included centralized government, a powerful army to aid its expansion, sophisticated cities and vibrant trade.

#### NOTE

The image source is: Abraham Cresques, *Detail from the Catalan Atlas Sheet 6 showing Mansa Musa, 1375*, pen with colored inks on parchment, Catalan Atlas, <http://bit.ly/38H4BSw>.

#### NOTE

The *Huffington Post* article "Mansa Musa of Mali Named World's Richest Man Of All Time" (<http://bit.ly/35DBDAS>) estimates Mansa Musa's worth, adjusted for inflation, at \$400 billion. By comparison, today's richest people are worth \$100–200 billion.

## PART 4

### Worth Its Weight in Gold (60 mins.)

- 10** Distribute copies of the handouts *The Ghana Kingdom* and *The Mali Kingdom*. Read one or both together as a class, or have students read individually or in pairs. Instruct them to circle information that confirms ideas from their image analysis of Mansa Musa. In addition, tell students that they will be creating an illustration representing one important feature of these civilizations. They should underline facts and record margin notes that they think will help them with this task.
  
- 11** Gather the class and allow students to share their thoughts about the most important or interesting features of the Ghana and Mali civilizations. List their ideas on the board. Tell students that they will focus on one feature and create a painting to represent it using one of the most essential goods from these societies—salt. (As an alternative—so as not to waste food—sand can be used in place of salt.)
  
- 12** Have students follow the directions below in order to create their salt/sand paintings.
  - Draw an outline of your scene on construction paper. Add color and details using colored pencils or crayons.
  - Trace the outline with a thin line of glue.
  - Sprinkle salt/sand over the glue. Carefully shake the excess salt/sand into a bin.
  - To add color to the salt/sand, paint it with watercolors or water mixed with food coloring.
  - Give your painting a title and add a brief caption (description).
  
- 13** Display students' artwork and highlight some of themes that demonstrate the significance and complexity of early African societies. Conclude the lesson by discussing some of the questions on the next page.



# Discussion Questions

- 1 Had you heard about the kingdoms of Ghana and Mali before? Why do you think most people know little about African civilizations in history?
- 2 Are you surprised by how wealthy, complex and powerful these civilizations were? Why?
- 3 What stood out to you most about the ways in which these societies were organized or operated?
- 4 Does what you learned match up with what you have heard about Africa in the past? Explain.
- 5 How do stereotypes about Africa and African people affect what we are taught in school or through the media?

## Lesson Extensions

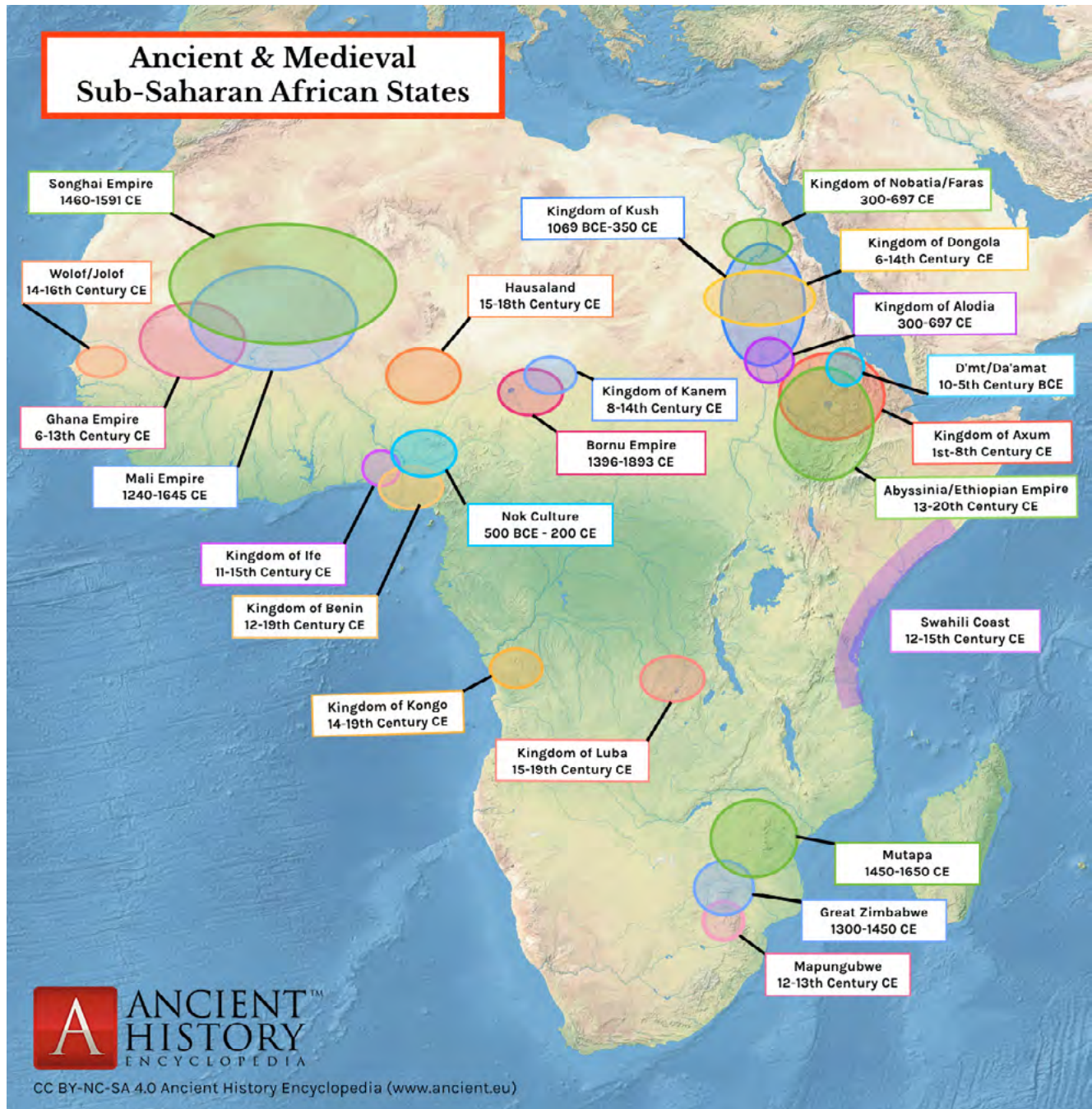
- In small groups, assign students to select and research an African kingdom they have not learned about from the *Map of Early African Civilizations*. Have them create a brief slideshow or create a map or model highlighting key features of the kingdom.
- Assign students to gather significant facts from their study of various African kingdoms and use them to design a crossword puzzle or trivia game. Have students share their puzzle/game with peers or family members and discuss the ways in which African history represents a knowledge gap for many of us.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- + Exploring Africa, "Curriculum," <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/curriculum>.
- + Mr. Donn's Site for Kids and Teachers, "Lesson Plans: African Kingdoms," <https://africa.mrdonn.org/kingdom-lessons.html>.
- + Knight, Margy Burns. *Africa Is Not a Country*. Minneapolis, MN: First Avenue Editions, 2002.
- + Musgrove, Margaret. *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions*. New York: Puffin Books, 1992.
- + Roman, Carole P. *If You Were Me and Lived in...the Ancient Mali Empire: An Introduction to Civilizations Throughout Time Paperback*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016.



# Map of Early African Civilizations



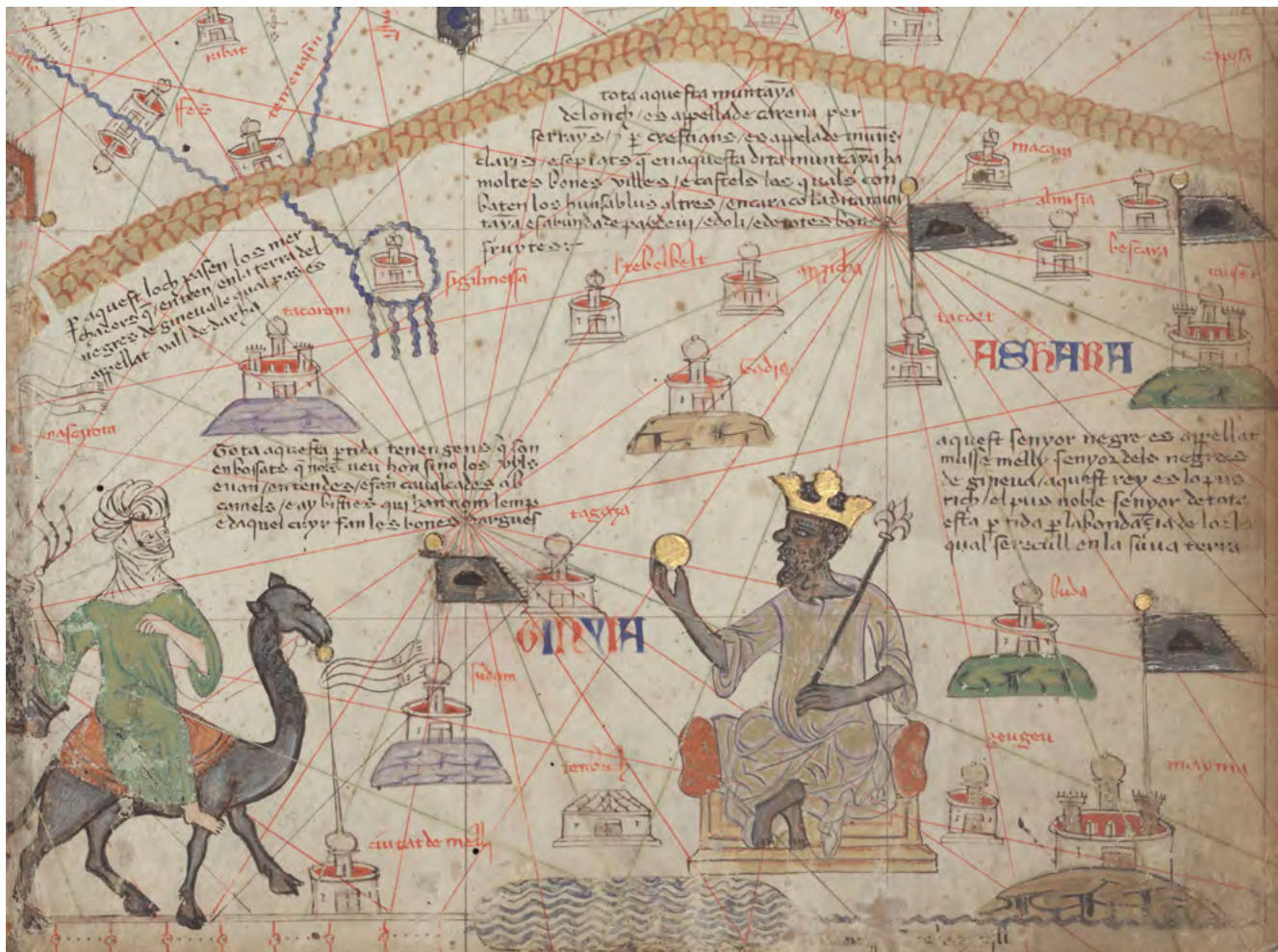
SOURCE: Cartwright, Mark. *Map of Ancient & Medieval Sub-Saharan African States*. Ancient History Encyclopedia. April 12, 2019. Accessed January 12, 2021. <https://www.ancient.eu/image/10453/map-of-ancient--medieval-sub-saharan-african-state>.



# Mansa Musa: Tenth Emperor of the Mali Empire (c. 1280–c. 1337)

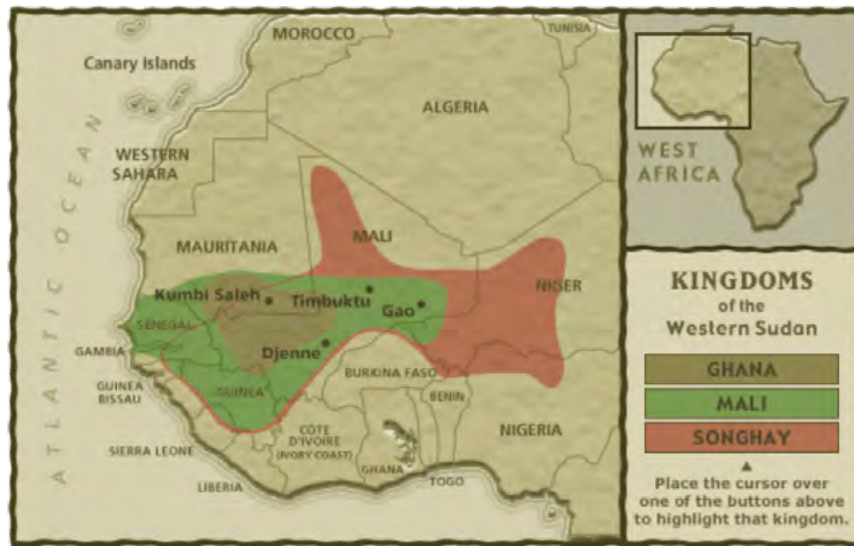
Observe the image closely and record notes in response to the following questions:

1. What kind of document do you think this might be? Who might have created it?
2. How is Mansa Musa represented in the image? What does this say about his role?
3. What items are shown in the image? What do you think are their importance?
4. What places are shown? What do you think they might represent?
5. What does the image tell us about the Kingdom of Mali?





# The Ghana Kingdom (about 700–1200 CE)



Ghana was West Africa's first powerful empire. It was located further north than today's nation of Ghana. Modern Ghana took its name in honor of ancient Ghana.

Ghana was known as the "land of gold." Ghanaians (the people of Ghana) invented ways to mine gold. They controlled three major gold fields. The kingdom became wealthy by trading gold throughout Africa. The kings of Ghana controlled the gold that was unearthed, and were called "lords of the gold." Visitors from Arab countries wrote about expensive gifts given by these kings to their neighbors and trading partners.

Ghanaians traded gold for salt from the Sahara Desert region. They needed salt for its nutrients and to preserve food. Other goods that were traded included copper, ivory, textiles and leather, herbs and spices and foods such as fish, rice, honey and kola nuts. These societies also traded enslaved people. The use of horses and camels at this time helped trade to grow.

The success of Ghana allowed its rulers to build power. They used iron to make weapons and commanded a large army. Arab visitors wrote of a force of 200,000 soldiers, including 40,000 archers. This may have been an exaggeration, but it shows that Ghana's military was impressive. Even though Ghana was powerful, the kingdom began to weaken in the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. This happened after attacks by enemies, many wars and competition over trade routes. The climate also became drier over time and this damaged crops.

The Ghanaians did not have a writing system, so there is much we don't know about this great empire. However, archaeologists are still learning from a site they uncovered, called *Koumbi Saleh*. This ancient town may have been the capital of Ghana and home to more than 40,000 people. It contained stone houses, mosques and a palace complex. It also had a network of wells that provided water for drinking and irrigating crops. The remains at Koumbi Saleh prove that Ghana was one of the most complex and powerful civilizations of its time.

#### SOURCES:

Exploring Africa, "History of Africa During the Time of the Great West African Kingdoms," <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/activity-3-history-of-africa-during-the-time-of-the-great-west-african-kingdoms-expand>.

Khan Academy, "The Ghana Empire," <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/big-history-project/agriculture-civilization/first-cities-states/a/the-ghana-empire-1>.

National Museum of African Art, "Mali Empire and Djenne Figures," <https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/resources/mali/index.htm>.



# The Mali Kingdom (about 1235–670 CE)

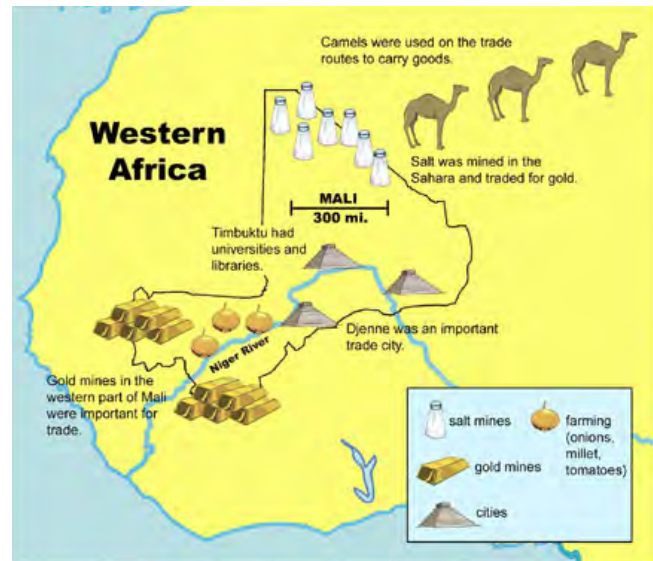
Mali means “place where the king lives.” Its first ruler was Sundiata Keita, or “lion prince.” He led a well-trained army to expand Ghana’s territory and power. Mali grew to include all of the land of Ghana plus gold fields to the south and additional land. It stretched more than 1,000 miles from east to west. It was the largest empire Africa had ever seen and the second largest in the world, after Mongolia.

Niani was Mali’s capital. It was protected by mountains and close to forests and a river. This made it a good place for trade. Mali continued to control the gold and salt trade started by Ghana. It also expanded trade to copper mines. Mali dominated caravans and trade routes—as many as 25,000 camels connected Mali to North Africa. Items that changed hands included ivory, horses, weapons, brass bowls and books. The capture of people to sell as enslaved labor also continued during this time.

Mali’s most famous king was Mansa Musa. He extended the power of Mali and doubled its territory. Mansa Musa taxed all goods that passed through his kingdom. He also bought goods at low prices and sold them at great profits. This helped to make him and the kingdom very rich.

During this time, the religion of Islam was spreading. Mansa Musa made a pilgrimage (journey) to Mecca, an important Islamic city in Saudi Arabia. He brought tens of thousands of people with him and as many as 100 camels, each carrying 300 pounds of gold. Mansa Musa gave away great gifts and impressed the people he met. This increased Mali’s power.

Mansa Musa invited teachers and architects to return with him to Mali. They built mosques and schools in important cities, such as Timbuktu. Great libraries were constructed to hold thousands of



books. The people of Mali were educated in many subjects, such as math, music, law, literature, history, geography and astronomy.

In Mali, cultural life was important. Artists produced pottery and sculpture. Dancers and musicians performed at religious festivals. Songs were written to honor important people, including warriors and hunters. The king even kept a royal orchestra.

Visitors to Mali commented on its justice system, safety and great amounts of food. Like most great empires, however, the Kingdom of Mali eventually began to collapse in the 1400s CE. It was weakened by civil wars, competition over trade and attacks by rivals, such as the Songhai Kingdom. By the mid-1600s CE, Mali was no longer an important power in Africa.

## SOURCES:

Ancient History Encyclopedia, “Mali Empire,” [https://www.ancient.eu/Mali\\_Empire](https://www.ancient.eu/Mali_Empire).

Exploring Africa, “History of Africa During the Time of the Great West African Kingdoms,” <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/activity-3-history-of-africa-during-the-time-of-the-great-west-african-kingdoms-expand>.

“Mali: Ancient Crossroads of Africa,” © by the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Education. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

# POWERFUL AFRICAN KINGDOMS



## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Why is it important to learn about the history of early African civilizations?  
How can learning about early African civilizations counteract stereotypes and biases about Africa today?



## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Consider how stereotypes about Africa have led to knowledge gaps about its people and history.
- Analyze primary sources from an early African civilization and make inferences about its culture.
- Annotate a text about an early African civilization.
- Discuss the disparities between perception and reality when it comes to African people and history.



## LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



## TIME NEEDED

80 minutes



## MATERIALS

- AV equipment for projecting a map image
- *Map of Early African Civilizations* handout (one to project)
- *African Civilizations* handout (one per student)
- *Historian Kits: Kush, Aksum, Mali and Great Zimbabwe* (copies of one kit for each small group)



## VOCABULARY

Aksum (also Axum)	Ghana	Kush
civilization	Great Zimbabwe	Mali
empire	kingdom	stereotype

# Procedures

## PART 1

### Africa's Hidden Past (20 mins.)

**1** Engage students in the brief game “Can You Name Three?” Have them work in pairs or small groups. Direct each team to fold a sheet of paper into four sections and write the numbers one to three in each quadrant. Pose the first question below and allow teams about a minute to propose answers and list them in the first quadrant. Tell them the only rule is that none of their responses can be related to the United States. Continue in the same way with the remainder of the questions, providing examples as needed so that students understand the categories.

- Can you name three powerful civilizations in history, not including the U.S.?
- Can you name three important leaders in history or today outside the U.S.?
- Can you name three major geographical features outside of the U.S.?
- Can you name three major human-made innovations outside of the U.S.?

**2** Ask teams if they were able to come up with three examples for each category and allow them to share some of their responses. Note the parts of the world that most of their responses come from. Ask students how many of their examples come from Africa (presumably there will be few or none.) Discuss why Africa might be underrepresented on their lists and, more generally, when we think of important people, places and contributions to the world. Highlight that stereotypes of Africa as less developed, powerful and important have led to gaps in our knowledge about this diverse continent.

#### NOTE

Africa may not be the only underrepresented part of the world on students' lists. Many other non-Western regions will likely be missing. As a follow-up to this lesson, which focuses on Africa, students may want to investigate other areas of the world that represent knowledge gaps for them, or inquire into the idea of Eurocentrism and why white and European culture is often focused on in ways that exclude a wider view of the world.

## NOTE

Students may be surprised to learn that Africa is a continent (not a country) and just how vast it is. Visual Capitalist's "Mapped: Visualizing the True Size of Africa" includes useful graphics that demonstrate Africa's magnitude. See <http://bit.ly/3ibm9sL>.

3

As a class, brainstorm answers to the "Can You Name Three?" categories related to Africa and list them on the board or a sheet of chart paper. Alternatively, have teams conduct brief research and report back on one important person, place or contribution related to Africa. Point out that Africa has more countries (54) than any other continent and is the second largest in both area and population, making it the site of much rich and important history. Tell students that they will investigate some of this history by learning about one important early African civilization.

## PART 2

### Africa's Powerful Past (at least 60 mins.)

4

Project the handout *Map of Early African Civilizations*. Identify the following four kingdoms on the map and tell students that they will be investigating one of them in small groups: Kush, Aksum (also Axum), Mali and Great Zimbabwe. Ask students what they already know about these civilizations and list facts on chart paper or have students record prior knowledge in their notebooks.

5

Divide students into small "historian roundtable" groups and assign each a kingdom. (Depending on class size, there may be more than one group assigned to each kingdom.) Distribute the handout *African Civilizations* to each student and review it with the class. Tell students they will take notes in each category as they learn about their assigned kingdom.

6

Distribute copies of the appropriate *Historian Kit* handout to each group. Instruct groups to begin with Part 1, which asks them to closely observe and discuss a map, quote, artifacts and remains from their assigned kingdom. After completing this section, direct groups to continue to Part 2, which asks them to read a text and record notes on the *African Civilizations* graphic organizer.

## NOTE

The texts in the *Historian Kits* draw mainly from PBS's *Africa's Great Civilizations* (<http://to.pbs.org/3sgX-ise>). Over the course of six episodes, historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. interviews academics and archeologists and visits key sites to offer a reconstruction of Africa's civilizations. Clips from the series can be used in addition or as an alternative to the texts in the *Historian Kits*.



**7** Choose one of the following options depending on available time:

- (less time) Have each group select one artifact or remain from their investigation that they think best reflects the achievements of their assigned civilization. Form new small groups that have a mix of students who studied different civilizations. Direct students to take turns sharing their artifact or remain and using it as a means to provide a summary of what they learned about the civilization.
  
- (more time) Have each group select one artifact or remain from their investigation that they think best reflects the achievements of their assigned civilization. Instruct them to create a three-dimensional model of the artifact and write a label to accompany it, with key information (i.e., title, dates, materials, names of relevant people, etc.) and a few sentences of descriptive text. Assemble the models into a class museum of African civilizations and allow students time to take a “gallery walk” and record what they have learned.

**8** Conclude the lesson by discussing some of the questions on the next page.



# Discussion Questions

1

Before this lesson, were you aware of any early African civilizations besides Egypt? If so, which ones and what were your sources of information?

2

Why is knowledge about early African civilizations so limited in our society?

3

Why is it important to learn about the history of early African civilizations?

4

As you investigated an African civilization, what new information or ideas most stood out or surprised you?

5

How did your ideas or understandings of African people and nations change as a result of this lesson?

6

Many people hold stereotypes of Africa as poor, weak and remote. What are examples of wealth, power and global connectedness related to African civilizations?

7

Why do so many people think of Africa as a country instead of a continent? What can be done—in schools or the wider society—to challenge incorrect ideas about Africa and its people?

# Lesson Extensions

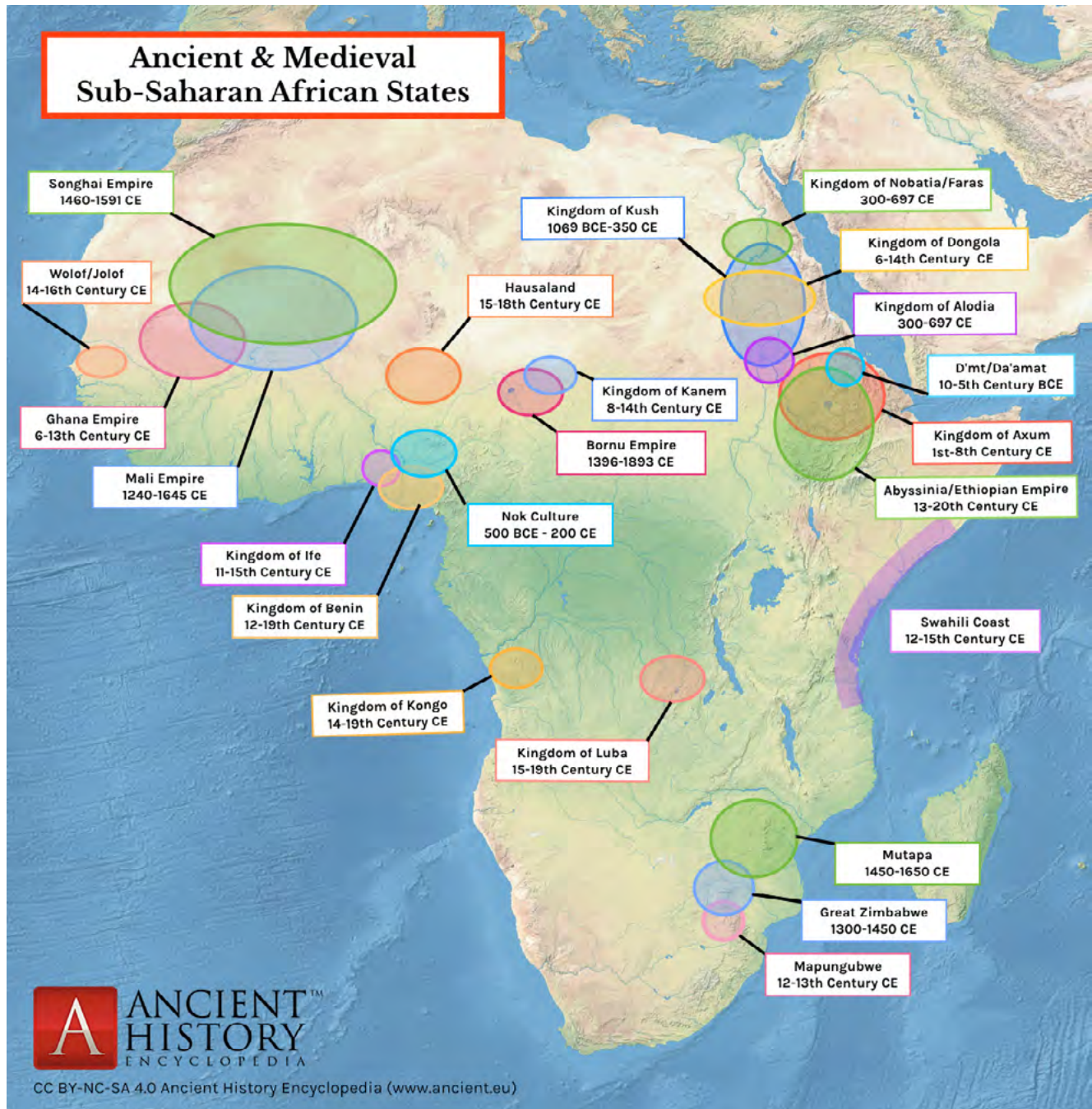
- Assign students to continue their learning about early African civilizations by researching a kingdom they have not yet investigated from the *Map of Early African Civilizations* handout. Have students create a poster or multimedia presentation summarizing their key findings.
- Assign students to research what life is like in an African country today that corresponds with one of the early civilizations they studied (e.g., Mali, Ghana, Sudan, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe). Have them focus on urban as well as rural life, and present on what African cities are like in order to dispel the myth that all Africans live in small villages.
- Share the campaign to challenge misconceptions about Africa launched by the Ithaca College African Students Association: “The Real Africa: Fight the Stereotype,” <http://cnn.it/39rnZC8>. Have students create a brief survey that they can administer with peers to learn what stereotypes people in their school hold about Africa (e.g., Africa is a country, all Africans are poor, etc.) Based on the results, students can design posters to display at school that challenge stereotypes or write an article about it for the school website or newspaper.
- Plan field trips to area museums to further explore African artifacts and history (see sample list below). Invite African studies scholars from nearby colleges and universities to provide a presentation to your school.
  - ➔ Newark Museum: Arts of Global Africa
  - ➔ Princeton University Art Museum: Women and the Arts of Africa
  - ➔ New Jersey Department State Museum (Trenton): Archaeology & Ethnography Department
  - ➔ African American Heritage Museum of Southern New Jersey (Atlantic City)
  - ➔ African Art Museum (Tenafly)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- + Exploring Africa, “Curriculum,” <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/curriculum>.
- + Mr. Donn’s Site for Kids and Teachers, “Lesson Plans: African Kingdoms,” <https://africa.mrdonn.org/kingdomlessons.html>.
- + PBS, “Africa’s Great Civilizations,” <https://www.pbs.org/weta/africas-great-civilizations/home>.
- + We Love Africa. “10 African Civilizations More Amazing Than Ancient Egypt.” September 8, 2019. YouTube video, 3:39. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rojJLRjNYxk>.



# Map of Early African Civilizations



SOURCE: Cartwright, Mark. *Map of Ancient & Medieval Sub-Saharan African States*. Ancient History Encyclopedia. April 12, 2019. Accessed January 12, 2021. <https://www.ancient.eu/image/10453/map-of-ancient--medieval-sub-saharan-african-state>.

# African Civilizations



As you observe and read, record key ideas on the chart below.

**NAME AND APPROXIMATE DATES OF CIVILIZATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Geography

*(What were the advantages of the kingdom's location?)*

## Trade

*What resources and goods powered its economy?*

## Innovation

*What were major achievements in technology, culture, education, etc.?*

## Contact

*What interactions were there with other nations?*

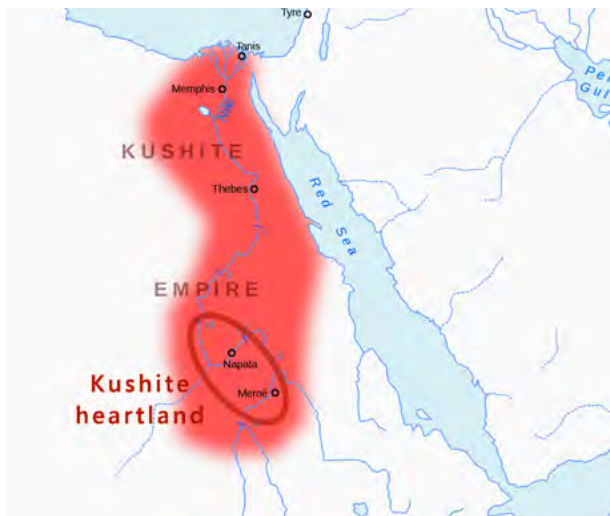


# Historian Kit: Kush

## PART 1

→ **Examine:** Closely observe the map, quote, architectural remains and artifacts.

→ **Discuss:** What might you conclude about this kingdom based on its remains and geography?



Kush was a kingdom in northern Africa in the region corresponding to modern-day Sudan.

See: <http://bit.ly/2KbAl8G>

*“Then the ships were laden with silver, gold, copper, clothing, and everything of the Northland, every product of Syria and all the sweet woods of God’s-Land. His majesty sailed upstream [south], with glad heart, the shores on his either side were jubilating. West and east were jubilating in the presence of his majesty.”*

—Piankhi, ancient Kushite king who ruled Egypt from 744–714 BCE



This large mud brick temple, known as the Western Deffufa, was part of the ancient city of Kerma (in today’s Sudan). These remains from the Kush Empire are from about 2500 BCE.

See: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/waltercallens/3486244425>



Kush pyramids and royal tombs were used for the burial of kings and queens in the wealthy city of Meroe, on the Nile River. They date as far back as 500 BCE.

See: <http://bit.ly/3qhZDBI>



## Historian Kit: Kush (continued)



This stone carving (1st century BCE) is from the temple of Amun in the ancient city of Naqa. It depicts a *kandake* (female leader) from Meroe. Named *Amanishakheto*, she stands between a god and goddess.

See: <http://bit.ly/3oGqWFi>



This piece of gold jewelry was found in the tomb of Nubian King Amaninatakilebte (538–519 BC).

See: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/menesje/47758289472>

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# Historian Kit: Kush

## PART 2

**Investigate Further:** Read the text below to learn more about the Kush civilization. Record notes on your graphic organizer related to geography, trade, innovation and contact with other nations.

The **Kingdom of Kush** thrived for about 1,000 years. Architectural excavations teach us about its history. The planned and complex city of Kerma was built on the southern end of the Nile River. More than 10,000 people lived there and the kingdom enjoyed wealth from its gold. Kush's northern neighbor, Egypt, was a primary customer, buying gold for the pharaohs' elaborate burial chambers. Gold is a metal that does not corrode and was a perfect material for making ornaments to send with the pharaohs into their after-life. Of course, Egypt desired direct control of the gold and, in 1500 BCE, an invasion ended 15 centuries of Kush independence.

For 400 years, Kush existed under Egyptian rule, but still kept its own kings and queens. The Kush city of Meroe became an ironworking center after the technology to process this metal was discovered in central Africa. With new powerful weapons and a strong following, Kush leader Piankhi fought back the Egyptians all the way to the Nile delta in 750 BCE. Kush went on to rule a larger territory than Egypt ever did. Historians refer to this period as "Black Pharaohs of the Nile."

Kush eventually lost its control over Egypt. However, the kingdom enjoyed a golden age in the 5th century BCE as a strong, independent nation with fertile agriculture, vibrant trade up the Nile, wealth in the form of iron and gold deposits and a system of writing.

When Rome conquered Egypt, the Kush kandake (queen), Aminerenas, mounted a five-year attack on Roman Egypt to prevent them from invading Kush.



Pyramid at El-Kurru, used as a burial site by the Nubian royal family of Kush

Having lost an eye in battle, the Roman governor, Petronius, referred to the powerful queen as "One Eye Kandace." Historians know about this campaign from Roman records since no scholar is able to translate the Kush records, carved in Kushite script on stone.

In a PBS documentary on African civilizations, the Harvard historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. asks: "Are you telling me a one-eyed Black woman was able to defeat the most powerful army on the face of the Earth in 23 BC, here in the kingdom of Kush?!" Aminerenas was indeed successful in forcing the Roman Empire to negotiate with her and helped secure Kush independence for centuries to come.

### SOURCES:

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# Historian Kit: Aksum (or Axum)

## PART 1

→ **Examine:** Closely observe the map, quote, architectural remains and artifacts.

→ **Discuss:** What might you conclude about this kingdom based on its remains and geography?



The kingdom of Aksum covered modern-day Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, parts of Libya, parts of Chad and parts of Central African Republic.

See: <http://bit.ly/2KcIVs1>

*“There are four great kingdoms on earth: the first is the Kingdom of Babylon and Persia; the second is the Kingdom of Rome; the third is the Kingdom of the Aksumites; the fourth is the kingdom of the Chinese.”*

—Mani, Persian prophet, 3rd century CE



These ruins are from the ancient port city of Adulis, located on the Red Sea in what is today Eritrea. Adulis was a busy Aksumite seaport from 80 BCE to 825 CE.

See: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Adulis.jpg>



This stela, or monument, was built to honor an Aksum king or other important figure after their death. Stelae were carved from solid blocks of stone in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, some reaching a height of almost 100 feet.

See: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stela\\_aksum.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stela_aksum.jpg)



## Historian Kit: Aksum (or Axum) (continued)



These gold coins are from the time of Ebana, an Aksum king from 440–470 CE.

See: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ebana3.png>



This painting, from 1314 CE, shows the negus (king) of Abyssinia (in today's Ethiopia) granting a safe haven to early Muslims.

See: <http://bit.ly/35AZEbW>

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# Historian Kit: Aksum

## PART 2

**Investigate Further:** Read the text below to learn more about the Aksum civilization. Record notes on your graphic organizer related to geography, trade, innovation and contact with other nations.

Africans and Asians traded on the eastern coast of Africa for 2,000 years. For many centuries, the **Kingdom of Aksum** dominated this trade and was considered as great a power as Rome, Persia and China. Aksum was one of only two ancient African societies to have a written language (Kush was the other). This advanced kingdom dominated the flow of goods around the Horn of Africa, across the Red Sea and into the Arabian peninsula.

Aksum imported copper and bronze goods, silver, gold, olive oil and lime. Its exports included ivory, rhinoceros horns and turtle shells, which were in demand in Asia. The kingdom grew wealthy by controlling the port city of Adulis on the Red Sea. Tariffs or taxes were charged on goods coming into the port from around the Indian Ocean and from interior trade routes. The region also profited from trade in agricultural products and two annual rainy seasons brought an abundance of crops. Traders from all over the Mediterranean world mingled in Adulis.

The sophistication and wealth of the Aksum kingdom is evident in the *stelae*, 100 monuments that were the tallest buildings in the ancient world. The stelae were an engineering challenge. They weighed about 700 tons and were carved from single slabs of stone. Dragging the slabs to the port city Adulis took about three years (it was possible to move the massive slabs only a few yards at a time). Artisans carved intricate patterns and reliefs (raised surfaces) on the stelae over a period of 10 years.



Northern Stelae Park

Aksum's strength was the Kingdom of Kush's downfall when King Ezana invaded Kush in the 4th century CE and took over its gold and iron resources. King Ezana established contact with many different cultures, and converted to Christianity as a result of influence by the nations of Europe.

By the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, Aksum was a global empire. Its vibrant trade increased in response to the Roman Empire's demand for frankincense for use in religious ceremonies. Frankincense came from the bark of trees that grew in Aksum territory. It was difficult to reach these trees in the highlands and strip their bark for the gum resin to make frankincense. Used in perfumes and incense, frankincense was valued as much as gold, and increased Aksum's wealth.

Beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, competition from Arab Muslims for the Red Sea trade networks weakened Aksum. By the late 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, the mighty Aksum Empire had ceased to exist.

### SOURCES:

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# Historian Kit: Mali

## PART 1

→ **Examine:** Closely observe the map, quote, architectural remains and artifacts.

→ **Discuss:** What might you conclude about this kingdom based on its remains and geography?



The kingdom of Mali covered modern-day Morocco, Western Sahara, Algeria, Tunisia, and parts of Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Burkina Faso.

See: <http://bit.ly/2LNyD9m>

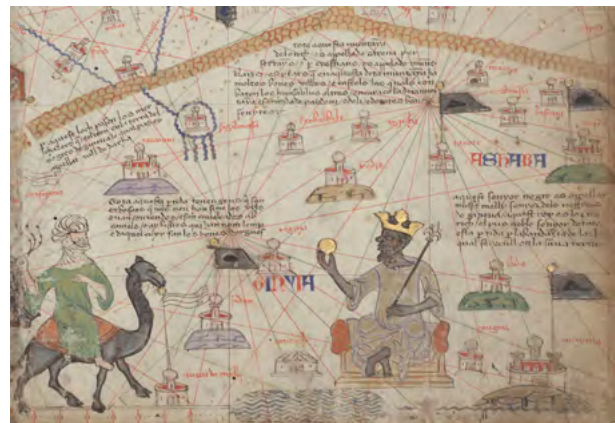


Sankore University and Mosque, in Timbuktu (a city in Mali), was an ancient center of learning built in the 1100s.

See: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/annedavid2012/1299279844>

*“During [Mansa Musa’s] reign, which began in 1307 and lasted twenty-five years, he doubled the land area of Mali. Known as the khan [ruler] of Africa, Musa governed an empire as large as all of Europe, second in size only to the territory at the time ruled by Genghis Khan in Asia.”*

—Patricia C. McKissack, author of *The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa*



This image depicts Mansa Musa, emperor of the Mali Empire (c. 1280–c. 1337). It shows major trade routes and goods. An inscription reads, “So abundant is the gold which is found in his country that he is the richest and most noble king in all the land.”

See: <http://bit.ly/38H4BSw>



## Historian Kit: Mali (continued)



This terracotta (clay) figure from the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century CE depicts an archer. The warrior is dressed in military gear and equipped with a quiver (case to hold arrows) and a knife strapped to his arm.

See: <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/resources/mali/works.htm>



Salt was an important trade item in ancient Mali, used for nutrition, medicine and food preservation. This photo shows salt products in a market in Mopti, in today's Mali. Just like medieval times, salt traveled by camel from the Sahara Desert into Timbuktu, and then to other areas of Mali.

See: <http://bit.ly/2XDHlys>

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# Historian Kit: Mali

## PART 2

**Investigate Further:** Read the text below to learn more about the Mali civilization. Record notes on your graphic organizer related to geography, trade, innovation and contact with other nations.

To understand the influence of the Mali Empire, one must begin in Ghana. The Ghana civilization grew along the Niger and Senegal rivers beginning in about the 6th century CE. It was rich in gold and became an important trade location for merchants from around the region and the northern Sahara Desert. Ghana grew rich by taxing the gold, salt and other goods that passed through its territory. By 800 CE, Ghana and its powerful army dominated the region, a reign that would last for centuries. However, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE, the kingdom began to weaken due to attacks, competition over trade and a drier climate that damaged crops.

In 1235, the powerful leader Sundiata Keita defeated rivals in the region and established the **Kingdom of Mali**. Under King Sundiata, Mali extended the territory that was once Ghana, taking control of the land west to the Atlantic Ocean, east beyond the Niger River and south into the rain forests, including the Wangara gold fields. Mali expanded the gold trade, positioning itself as the “superpower of the medieval world” and growing the trans-Saharan trade of goods, including salt, ivory, textiles, horses, weapons and spices. Trade in captive people was also common, and their enslaved labor was used in salt and gold mines and on farms in the Sahara.

During the Mali Empire, the gold trade reached great heights. Three-quarters of the gold traded to North Africa and Europe during medieval times came from the Mali Empire. European currency (money) was valued by its weight in gold. The nations of Europe melted old Roman coins to increase their gold assets, and depended greatly on Mali for new supplies of this resource.

Successful trade grew under the leadership of Mansa Musa, Mali’s most famous king, and possibly the richest person who ever lived. (His wealth has



Great Mosque of Djenné, 13<sup>th</sup> century

been estimated at \$400 billion in today’s currency.) Mansa Musa invested in West African cities like Timbuktu, and built mosques and schools around the empire. As a religious Muslim, he traveled to the holy city of Mecca (in Saudi Arabia) in 1324. As his caravan of 100 camels and thousands of subjects traveled from Mali to Mecca, Mansa Musa gave away gifts of gold and increased the reputation of his kingdom. He returned to Mali with architects and scholars, who built universities and libraries that housed hundreds of thousands of scholarly texts. The commitment in Mali to education and development surpassed most of the world’s nations at the time.

In the documentary *Africa’s Great Civilizations*, Harvard historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. reflects: “[The] first time I visited Timbuktu and saw those astonishing libraries with their wealth of scholarly texts, I wanted to cry. I grew up being told that Africans never wrote books, yet here was this astonishing treasure trove of extraordinary, hand-written manuscripts. Many of them were religious, but there were also books about math, astronomy and philosophy. I felt incredible pride and vindication [proof of being right].”

The Mali Empire began to decline after the death of Mansa Musa in the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE. It was weakened by civil wars, competition over trade and attacks by rivals. By the mid-1600s, Mali was no longer a major power.

### SOURCES:

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# Historian Kit: Great Zimbabwe

## PART 1

→ **Examine:** Closely observe the map, quote, architectural remains and artifacts.

→ **Discuss:** What might you conclude about this kingdom based on its remains and geography?



The Great Zimbabwe Kingdom covered modern-day South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zaire, Malawi and parts of Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania.

See: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LocationZimbabwe.svg>

*“Among the gold mines of the inland plains between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers there is a fortress built of stones of marvelous size... and one of them is a tower more than 12 fathoms [72 feet] high.”*

—Vicente Pegado, captain of the Portuguese fort of Sofala, in southern Africa, 1531



The “Great Enclosure” of Great Zimbabwe (occupied during the 13<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries) has walls as high as 36 feet and is the largest ancient structure south of the Sahara Desert.

See: <http://bit.ly/3oJCQ0S>



Birds carved from soapstone, found in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, combine human and avian features. They may have symbolized royal authority or the ancestors of the kingdom’s rulers. A similar bird icon appears on the modern flag of Zimbabwe.

See: <http://bit.ly/3ibljmb>



# Historian Kit: Great Zimbabwe (continued)



Complex architecture can be found in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, such as this wooden lintel above a doorway. (A lintel is a beam placed across the openings of doors and windows to support the weight of the structure above.)

See: <http://bit.ly/3nIVDYS>



This coin from Byblos (an ancient city in today's Lebanon) shows the conical tower of Great Zimbabwe, which stood 30 feet high. It may have been a storehouse for grain. Shona rulers often distributed grain to their subjects as a symbol of generosity and protection.

See: <http://bit.ly/38llbka>

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# Historian Kit: Great Zimbabwe

## PART 2

**Investigate Further:** Read the text below to learn more about the Great Zimbabwe civilization. Record notes on your graphic organizer related to geography, trade, innovation and contact with other nations.

The Shona people of southern Africa built great stone cities more than a thousand years ago. One of those cities was **Great Zimbabwe**, which existed from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> centuries CE and had a peak population of about 18,000 people. Great Zimbabwe grew from a farming community into a wealthy center of trade and power due to its nearness to gold fields.

Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, African civilizations enjoyed a “Golden Age,” according to Harvard historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. During this period, more than 500 tons of gold were exported from the East African coast, which would be valued at approximately \$30 billion today. The Zimbabwe Kingdom controlled the flow of gold as well as ivory, harvested from elephant tusks, which was traded on the Swahili (east) coast and from there to the rest of the world. Half of the gold and ivory collected was made available for trade. The other half was kept by the king, making the rulers of Great Zimbabwe exceptionally wealthy and powerful.

There is much that is unknown about the Great Zimbabwe civilization, but there are clues in the 300 structures archaeologists have uncovered in the region.

→ A hill complex surrounded

by a 36-foot-high granite wall suggests that the city was important as both a political and military center. Inside the complex, the king presided over the empire from atop a large boulder shaped like a bird. From there, he ruled on matters of crime, oversaw sacrifices to the gods and participated in other rituals.

- A “Great Enclosure,” known as “the house of the great women,” was surrounded by a wall of a million blocks, held together without mortar. About the size of 1,400 football fields, the enclosure is believed to have been the site of important ceremonies and the place where the wives of rulers lived. Inner walls were built that forced people to walk single-file so the different social classes would be kept from mixing.
- The city contained massive stone towers with detailed decorations and sculpted stairways. It is believed that 200 to 300 members of the highest class in that society stayed in these buildings and were watched over at night by guards standing on walls.
- Ordinary people lived outside the towers and walled enclosures in a “Valley Complex” of huts made from mud and gravel. Skilled workers lived throughout the valley, including potters, weavers, blacksmiths, stonemasons and about 2,000 goldsmiths.
- Among the ruins, archaeologists have found artifacts



Tower of Great Zimbabwe

showing that Great Zimbabwe had contact with many cultures. These items include Chinese pottery, Persian ceramics and glass beads from India.

Great Zimbabwe declined in power beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, after gold sources began drying up and new trade routes weakened the empire’s control over business. Eventually the city of Great Zimbabwe was abandoned. When European explorers found the lost city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they refused to believe that Africans could have created such a complex network of buildings and monuments. Later, archaeologists challenged these prejudices by showing that early Africans had advanced architecture and technology, and their civilizations were as sophisticated as those of Europe and other parts of the world.

### SOURCES:

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# AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS: THE REAL WAKANDAS



## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Why do many Americans have knowledge gaps when it comes to African history? Why is it important to learn about early African civilizations?



## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Consider the meaning of Eurocentrism and its impact, specifically as it relates to knowledge of African history.
- Explore the significance of the film *Black Panther*, and the actual civilizations that influenced the film's setting and story.
- Research one early African civilization, using primary and secondary sources of information.
- Challenge societal perceptions of African history as less important or significant than the history of Western civilizations.



## LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



## TIME NEEDED

At least 90 minutes



## MATERIALS

- AV equipment to project an article
- *Where is "Wakanda"?* handout (one per student)
- *Findings: A Real "Wakanda"* handout (one per student)
- *African Civilizations: Primary and Secondary Sources* handout (one per student)



## VOCABULARY

Aksum (also Axum)	eurocentrism	Mali
civilization	Ghana	racism
colonize/colonialism	Great Zimbabwe	stereotype
empire	kingdom	

# Procedures

## PART 1

### From Fiction to Historical Inquiry (40 mins.)

- 1** Project or distribute the article “Weary professors give up, concede that Africa is a country”: <http://wapo.st/2N31H1L>. Have students read it independently or read together as a class. Make sure students understand that the article is satirical. Discuss it using some of the following questions:
  - What problem do the authors use humor to expose?
  - Why do so many people mistakenly think that Africa is a country? Why is it problematic to think of “Africa’s thousands of cultural groups” as one country?
  - What reasons do the authors point to for this lack of awareness? [They note “*poorly-informed journalism*” and “*Eurocentric educational curricula.*”] What is Eurocentrism and how does it explain why westerners might be unfamiliar with African culture and history?
  - What stereotypes or biases about Africa might contribute to knowledge gaps about this region?
  - What African cultural groups or historic civilizations do you know about? Do you think you have any knowledge gaps in this area? Explain.
  
- 2** Ask students if they have seen the film *Black Panther*. Explain that the film’s setting is the fictional African kingdom of Wakanda, and play the trailer if students are unfamiliar with it: <http://n.pr/3oNZmpC>. Discuss why this film has been so meaningful to Black Americans. Highlight the following ideas:
  - In the film, Black people are depicted as powerful and in charge of their own destiny, not as victims.

- Wakanda is positioned as the only African country that was never colonized; the film imagines a society not tainted by racism and colonialism.
- It presents “blackness as a thing with meaning and with lineage, with value and place.”<sup>1</sup>

**3** Point out that following the film’s release, internet searches for Wakanda soared, indicating that many people think Wakanda is a real place and highlighting knowledge gaps about actual African history and geography. Ask students if they think Wakanda is based on a real society or reveals anything about actual African civilizations.

**4** Distribute copies of the handout *Where is Wakanda?*, and provide students with access to a modern map of Africa. In pairs or small groups, have them use the map and information on the handout to identify actual nations and historic civilizations that may have been the influences for Wakanda. After the exercise, discuss the following:

- What did you learn about African countries, geography or history that you did not know before?
- What surprised you about some of the possible influences behind Wakanda and *Black Panther*?
- Did this exercise pique your curiosity about African history or culture? What more do you want to learn?

## PART 2

### The Real Deal—African Kingdoms (time will vary)

**5** Tell students they will research one early African civilization—a real Wakanda—in order to better understand the vibrant and complex societies that existed prior to European colonization. Divide the class into small research teams and assign each one of the following kingdoms: Aksum (also Axum), Ghana, Mali and Great Zimbabwe. (Depending on class size, more than one group may be assigned to each kingdom.)

<sup>1</sup> Carvell Wallace, "Why 'Black Panther' Is a Defining Moment for Black America," *New York Times*, February 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/12/magazine/why-black-panther-is-a-defining-moment-for-black-america.html>.

**6** Distribute the handout *Findings: A Real Wakanda*, and review the research questions students will be using to guide their investigation. Distribute the handout *African Civilizations: Primary and Secondary Sources*, which provides links to relevant websites. Direct groups to select at least one primary and one secondary source for their investigation. Suggest that students read secondary sources first, as they provide a broad overview of the civilizations, and then proceed to the more-focused primary sources. Provide groups with access to laptops or tablets and allow them adequate time to conduct their research.

**7** If time allows, have students share their findings in small groups comprised of peers who investigated different civilizations. Have them select one category from the *Findings: A Real Wakanda* handout and share a key fact or insight.

**8** Post the following quote from British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, written in 1963:

*Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of Europe in Africa. The rest is largely darkness.*<sup>2</sup>

Ask students to react to this quote (in writing or via discussion) using the following prompt: Based on your research, how would you respond to Professor Trevor-Roper? Have students cite evidence from their investigation to support their ideas.

**9** Conclude the lesson by discussing some of the questions on the next page.

#### NOTE

If students do not have internet access or require less challenging reading material, the middle school lesson in this unit, *Powerful African Kingdoms*, contains handouts on the following kingdoms that can be used for this research investigation: Kush, Aksum (also Axum), Mali and Great Zimbabwe.

<sup>2</sup> Wheatcroft, Geoffrey, "Unscrambling Africa," *New York Times*, May 17, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/17/books/unscrambling-africa.html>.

# Discussion Questions

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- + BBC Sounds. "The Story of Africa." <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/brand/p03njin4f>.
- + CMS Curriculum Companion. "Africa, 400 A.D./C.E.–1500s." <https://www.socialstudiescms.com/africa>.
- + Du Toit, Melanie. "9 Ancient African Kingdoms You Should Know About." Rhino Africa, March 27, 2018. <https://blog.rhinoafrica.com/2018/03/27/9-ancient-african-kingdoms>.
- + McDow, Thomas F. "Searching for Wakanda: The African Roots of the Black Panther Story." Origins. <http://origins.osu.edu/print/5324>.
- + NPR/WNYC. "Black Panther's Mythical Home May Not Be So Mythical After All." February 10, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/02/10/583497786/black-panthers-mythical-home-may-not-be-so-mythical-after-all>.
- + PBS. "Africa's Great Civilizations." <http://to.pbs.org/3sgXise>.

1

What stood out or surprised you about the African kingdom you investigated? What made it a complex civilization and a global power?

2

Had you learned about any of these civilizations prior to this lesson? If so, what were your sources of knowledge? If not, what do you think is responsible for knowledge gaps related to African history?

3

Why is it important to learn about African history?

4

What examples of Eurocentrism have you noticed, for example, in schools, media, politics, etc.? How do Eurocentric points of view impact individuals and the larger society?

5

What would you say to somebody who claims that Africa has contributed less to the world than the United States or European nations?

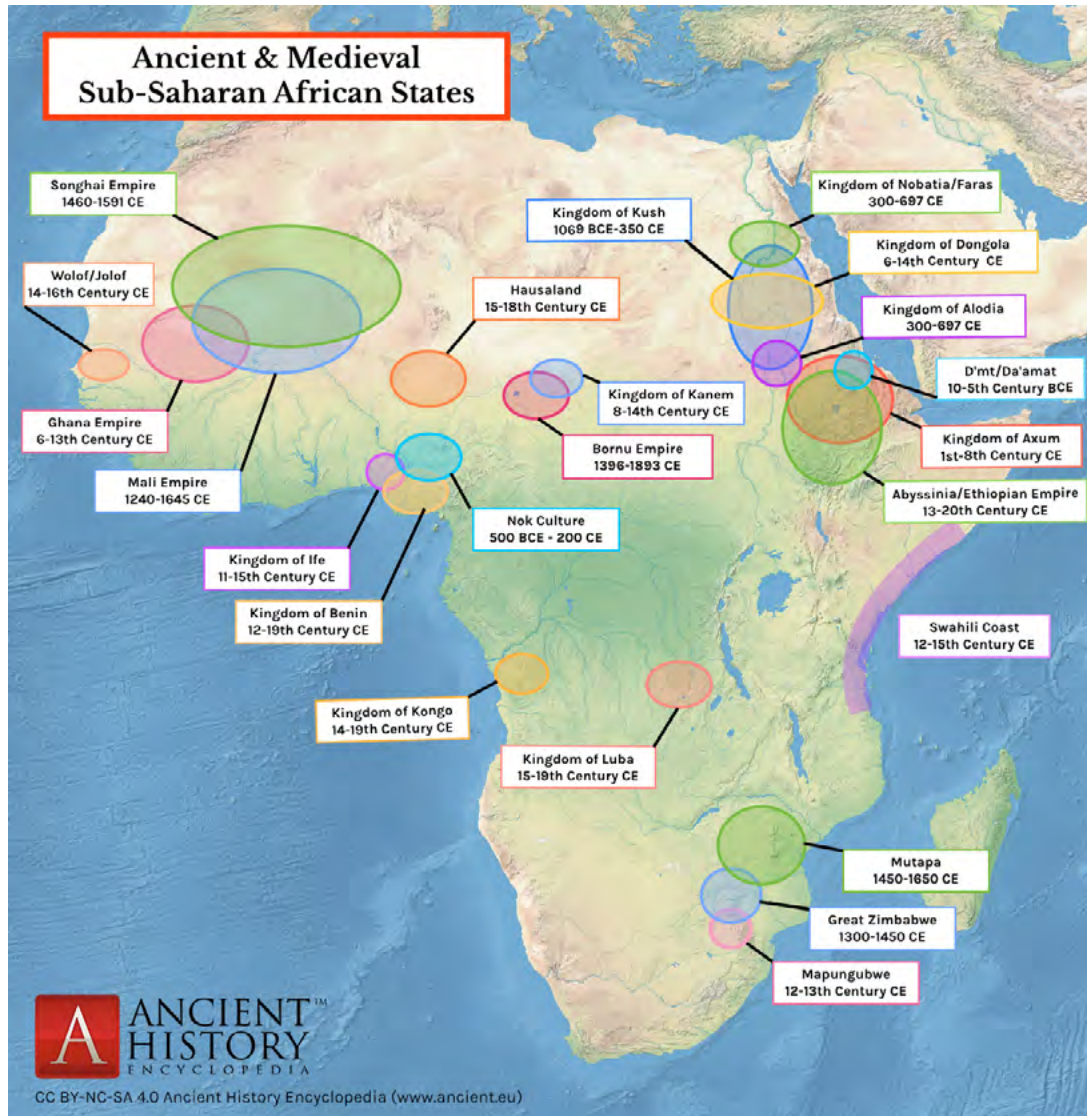
## Lesson Extensions

- Assign students to continue their learning about early African civilizations by researching a kingdom they have not yet investigated. Have students create a multimedia presentation summarizing their key findings.
- Assign students to investigate communities with African populations in their own town, city or state. Have them identify the nations represented, research at least one of those countries or cultures and, if possible, interview someone from the community about their background and experiences.
- Challenge students to examine their history textbooks and evaluate how much "coverage" is devoted to African history and societies as compared to other regions.
- Have students conduct a reader's theater performance of *Sundiata, Lion King of Mali*, about the first king of the ancient empire of Mali: <https://orias.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/sundiatascript.pdf>.

# Where is Wakanda?



Using the information below and a modern map of Africa, mark the possible locations of fictional Wakanda on this map of early African civilizations. Which ancient kingdoms may have been an inspiration for Wakanda?



- A 2008 Marvel series locates Wakanda on the north side of Lake Turkana, near the border of Kenya and Ethiopia. Ethiopia, which remained independent during the period of African colonization, may have been an influence.
- The film's director was influenced by the country Lesotho, which also avoided the worst of colonialism.
- A *Black Panther* writer places Wakanda on the western shore of Lake Victoria, near the border of Uganda and Tanzania. The Tanzanian city of Bukoba could be a real-life parallel to the Wakandan capital, Birnin Zana.
- In 2016's *Captain America*, Wakandans speak in Xhosa, a common language in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Therefore, the nations of southern Africa may have been an influence.
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo was the site of struggle over uranium in the 1960s and is the source of coltan today, a valuable metal used in technology products. Since a plot line in *Black Panther* involves western greed and a desire for African resources, Congo's history may have influenced Wakanda's identity.

MAP SOURCE: Cartwright, Mark. *Map of Ancient & Medieval Sub-Saharan African States*. Ancient History Encyclopedia. April 12, 2019. Accessed January 12, 2021. <https://www.ancient.eu/image/10453/map-of-ancient--medieval-sub-saharan-african-state>.



# Findings: A Real Wakanda

Conduct a close review of at least one primary and one secondary source of information for your assigned civilization. Record notes under each category below, citing evidence from sources where relevant.

**NAME AND APPROXIMATE DATES OF KINGDOM:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## 1 Where was your “Wakanda?”

*Where in Africa was your assigned kingdom located? What are the corresponding modern countries? What geographical features played an important role in the development of the kingdom?*

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## 2 What was your kingdom’s “vibranium” (a critical natural resource in Black Panther)?

*What natural resources or other important products were developed by the kingdom for trade and enrichment? How did the kingdom become economically and politically powerful?*

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## 3 How was the kingdom organized?

*How was it governed? Were there different classes? What types of art or culture were produced? How did ordinary people participate in the society?*





# Findings: A Real Wakanda (continued)

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**4 What contact did the kingdom have with outsiders? How did it spread its influence?**

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**5 When and how did the kingdom decline?**

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**6 Who is the Stan Lee or Jack Kirby (the creators of Black Panther) of your primary source?**

*What kind of document or artifact is this? Who is the creator? Is the point of view from inside or outside the civilization? Is the perspective objective or biased, and how?*

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**7 Additional Notes**



# African Civilizations: Primary and Secondary Sources

KINGDOM	PRIMARY SOURCES	SECONDARY SOURCES
All		<p>Glencoe World History (textbook)</p> <p>→ Chapter 7—Early African Civilizations  <a href="http://icomets.org/wh/chap07.pdf">http://icomets.org/wh/chap07.pdf</a></p> <p>→ Chapter 13—Medieval Africa  <a href="https://bit.ly/39LHzZZ">https://bit.ly/39LHzZZ</a></p> <p><i>Africa's Great Civilizations</i> (PBS documentary)  <a href="http://to.pbs.org/3sgXise">http://to.pbs.org/3sgXise</a></p> <p>9 Ancient African Kingdoms You Should Know About  <a href="http://bit.ly/35Xn5wf">http://bit.ly/35Xn5wf</a></p>
Aksum (or Axum)	<p>Stellae Inscription of King Ezana of Axum  <a href="http://bit.ly/2XVqLKe">http://bit.ly/2XVqLKe</a></p> <p>Kingdom of Axum Artifacts  <a href="http://bit.ly/3iwiTDV">http://bit.ly/3iwiTDV</a></p> <p>Aksum Image Gallery (UNESCO)  <a href="http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/15/gallery">http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/15/gallery</a></p> <p>Exhibit, Simon Fraser University, Museum of Archaeology &amp; Ethnology</p> <p>→ Aksum's Treasures: Reminders of an Ancient Civilization: <a href="http://bit.ly/3iso9x8">http://bit.ly/3iso9x8</a></p> <p>→ Aksumite Stelae: <a href="http://bit.ly/3sKaB4y">http://bit.ly/3sKaB4y</a></p> <p>→ Ge'ez Stele: <a href="http://bit.ly/3sGLMqq">http://bit.ly/3sGLMqq</a></p>	<p>Ancient History Encyclopedia: Kingdom of Axum  <a href="https://www.ancient.eu/Kingdom_of_Axum">https://www.ancient.eu/Kingdom_of_Axum</a></p> <p>Khan Academy: The Kingdom of Aksum  <a href="http://bit.ly/2LSTYmj">http://bit.ly/2LSTYmj</a></p> <p>Black Past: Axum  <a href="http://bit.ly/3iyacOi">http://bit.ly/3iyacOi</a></p> <p>Smart History: The Kingdom of Aksum  <a href="https://smarthistory.org/the-kingdom-of-aksum">https://smarthistory.org/the-kingdom-of-aksum</a></p>
Ghana	<p>Kingdom of Ghana: Primary Source Documents—Writings of Al-Bakri and Hawqal  <a href="http://www.bu.edu/africa/outreach/k_o_ghana">http://www.bu.edu/africa/outreach/k_o_ghana</a></p>	<p>Exploring Africa  <a href="https://bit.ly/3nTHGri">https://bit.ly/3nTHGri</a></p> <p>BBC Sounds—The Story of Africa (podcast) The Ancient Kingdom of Ghana [28:39]  <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p03njw8h">https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p03njw8h</a></p> <p>Ancient History Encyclopedia: Ghana Empire  <a href="https://www.ancient.eu/Ghana_Empire">https://www.ancient.eu/Ghana_Empire</a></p> <p>Khan Academy: The Ghana Empire  <a href="http://bit.ly/3o1n1Se">http://bit.ly/3o1n1Se</a></p>



# African Civilizations: Primary and Secondary Sources (continued)

KINGDOM	PRIMARY SOURCES	SECONDARY SOURCES
Mali	<p>Kingdom of Mali: Primary Source Documents—Writings of Al-Umari  <a href="https://bit.ly/3qBF6rC">https://bit.ly/3qBF6rC</a></p> <p>The Trans-Saharan Trade Network According to the Catalan Atlas  <a href="http://bit.ly/3c4bnU6">http://bit.ly/3c4bnU6</a></p> <p>Smithsonian National Museum of African Art            Mali Empire: Works of Art  <a href="https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/resources/mali/works.htm">https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/resources/mali/works.htm</a></p>	<p>Exploring Africa  <a href="https://bit.ly/3nTHGri">https://bit.ly/3nTHGri</a></p> <p>BBC Sounds—The Story of Africa (podcast)            The Great Empires of Mali and Songhay [28:31]  <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p03njw99">https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p03njw99</a></p> <p>Ancient History Encyclopedia: Mali Empire  <a href="https://www.ancient.eu/Mali_Empire">https://www.ancient.eu/Mali_Empire</a></p> <p>Black Past: Mali Empire  <a href="http://bit.ly/3ituzMg">http://bit.ly/3ituzMg</a></p>
Great Zimbabwe	<p>Library of Congress (archived article)            “Recent Remarkable Discoveries in Rhodesia,” <i>Willmar Tribune</i> (Minnesota), November 30, 1904  <a href="https://bit.ly/39PvLpp">https://bit.ly/39PvLpp</a></p> <p>Great Zimbabwe—Early Written Descriptions and Photographs  <a href="http://bit.ly/390EWnN">http://bit.ly/390EWnN</a></p>	<p>BBC Sounds—The Story of Africa (podcast)            The Kongo and Great Zimbabwe [28:28]  <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p03njw9g">https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p03njw9g</a></p> <p>Ancient History Encyclopedia:            Great Zimbabwe  <a href="https://www.ancient.eu/Great_Zimbabwe">https://www.ancient.eu/Great_Zimbabwe</a></p> <p>Khan Academy: Great Zimbabwe  <a href="http://bit.ly/3sPwjjob">http://bit.ly/3sPwjjob</a></p> <p>Black Past: Great Zimbabwe  <a href="http://bit.ly/2LH6ea9">http://bit.ly/2LH6ea9</a></p>