



Africa, Africans, and Film

Curriculum Unit 03.01.02
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Unit Purpose

To understand what impact the Atlantic Slave Trade had on Africa and the African people, through the analysis of literature and film.

Introduction

At one point in recent history, almost the entire continent of Africa was dominated by the continent to the north. Now there are over fifty unique and independent nations in Africa. The processes by which Africa was first controlled by Europe and then by which it liberated itself was a long and complex struggle of forces historical and geographical, external and internal. It is the goal of this unit to examine the conditions of Africa and African society before this period of domination and the effect of this domination had on the African people. Also, this unit will examine how Africa and Africans are portrayed in film. Films from both Hollywood and Africa will be analyzed and contrasted.

Since independence, each individual nation has fared differently, but the results of a quick search ¹ on the internet for "Africa" reveals the tragedy currently being experienced in many regions of the continent. Corruption. Famine. Illiteracy. A.I.D.S. Genocide. The appalling statistics and images from various news sources all lead one to the same conclusion: Sub-Saharan Africa is currently experiencing the worst crises on the globe and is on the verge of human catastrophe. Why are hundreds of thousands of Africans dying in wars every year? How could Africa have eighty percent of all AIDS deaths, and only twelve percent of the world's population? Why haven't the incredible natural resources of some regions of Africa been used to help the people of Africa? What caused the economic stagnation that maintains a fifty percent unemployment rate? Why do only half of Africa's children under ten years old attend school? What nations have succeeded? How could a continent once full of glorious and thriving kingdoms have de-evolved to such a state? ² To begin to address any of these questions that plague Africa today, we need to trace them back to their roots. What happened to derail Africa from its natural progress? The major event that disrupted the natural development

of the African people was the advent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 1500's.

All of Africa can be covered in the unit. More specifically, the history of any region of Africa can be taught using this unit. The vast, rich nature of African geography and history insists that the student of history examine each region separately. The cultural geography of Morocco is incredibly different from that of Congo, for example. And the history and Egypt, Liberia, and South Africa differ greatly from one another. There can be one consistent theme found in the histories of all regions, however, and that is the history of contact with Europeans and their domination and exploitation of the Africans.

As I stated before, almost all of Africa went through this process at some point each in its own unique way. This unit will address those historical themes, using film and literature, as they apply to different regions at different times. On another level, the unit will analyze Africa in Film. The students will compare the treatment of the geography and history of Africa in African film versus that in Hollywood's films.

Academic Setting & Approach

My unit will be taught in a ninth grade "Early World History" class at Wilbur Cross High School. The unit is designed to match our current class schedule. Classes run forty-five minutes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. On Tuesday and Thursday we teach a block period of ninety minutes.

The course is designed for students who are below or on-level readers who may or may not be on their way to college. The primary focus of the class is on history and geography skills, with organizational and developmental emphasis. Historical content is used as a means to develop the necessary learning and study skills that will propel the ninth grade student through the remainder of their high school years.

The class does not rely exclusively on a textbook, but focuses more on primary and other secondary sources. This unit will utilize the arts to teach the human experience. Specifically: poetry, literature, and film. The powerful language of an author or a masterful image from a film can stick with a student for a lifetime, unlike many facts in a textbook. Multiple sources and diversification helps the teacher maintain effectiveness in a block schedule. As a school that uses block-scheduling, Cross naturally encourages its teachers to diversify their approach, as would any school that operates on such a schedule.

The nature of our "Geography Through Film and Literature" seminar fits the needs of a block-scheduled teacher. The seminar will impact my class by expanding my knowledge of the use of film as a learning tool, but more importantly it will give me the tools to help the students to analyze a film from the point of view of history and geography.

Content

Although the course “Early World History” is taught as a thematic survey of the past three thousand years, I often try to often teach the material through a geographic perspective. Using the Five Theme of Geography - Location (Absolute and Relative), Place, Region, Movement, and Human & Environmental Interaction - the class will examine what impact geography had in the development of a civilization. This approach helps students appreciate geography’s role in the prosperity or demise of a society, whether it’s because of proximity to invaders or an issue of natural resources.

For this unit on Africa, the class will primarily focus on the themes of Place, Region, and Movement. “Place” answers the question: what is it like there? The land, the people, and their culture. One of the main objectives of this unit is to establish what Africa was like before the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade. The collective similarities of certain places in Africa create the regions of Africa.

“Region” is a way of classifying a place based on its similar characteristics with other places. My students use the concept of region all the time in daily language when they go “downtown,” to one neighborhood or another, or “down south” or “out west”. This connection to their daily lives should help students understand the idea. Some regions are defined by physical features: sub-Saharan Africa. Other regions are defined by historical circumstance: The Gold Coast. Neither name is very precise, but both provide the student with a way to classify a place. This provides the student with a quick reference as to what that particular place is like within a certain region. With a firm understanding of “region,” the students will know some fundamental differences between Africans from West Africa and those from the Congo River Basin before we actually study the history of either people.

Regional Geography of Africa

Africa can be broken into simple regions, like East Africa or North Africa, but these are often too broad. For the purpose of this unit, Africa will be divided into the following regions: Sahara, Sahel, Ethiopian Highlands, Savanna, Swahili Coast, Rainforest, Great Lakes, and Southern Africa. The names of these regions are based on both ethnicity and physical characteristics, but these regions are defined by their environment.

I will briefly describe the regions, from north to south.

- Sahara - Sahara means desert in Arabic. This is a telling fact because, obviously, it informs us of what it is like there, but also it reflects the ethnic make up of the Saharan region. The Sahara region runs across the north of Africa. It is a vast desert space inhabited mainly Muslims, and the largest region in Africa
- Sahel - A narrow band of semi-arid land south of the Sahara, the Sahel attracted both Arabs looking for gold from Sudan and Europeans looking for slaves from West Africa. The two influences merged with native ones, creating a culturally complex area. The Sahel is widely French-speaking, Islamic and takes its name ("shore") from Arabic.
- Ethiopian Highlands - This region is exactly what it sounds like it is; the mountainous region of east Africa, which is primarily the nation of Ethiopia. This relatively cool, temperate region is one of the most diverse regions in Africa in terms of vegetation, wildlife, and topography.
- Savanna - Africa's savanna region is dominated by big skies and rolling grasslands. It is located

in East Central Africa, where the modern nations of Kenya, Tanzania, and others are located today. This moderate, semi-arid region of Africa is most famous for its wildlife and as the birthplace of mankind.

- Swahili Coast - Named after the language of the indigenous people of the region, the Swahili Coast sits on the shore of the Indian Ocean in East Southern Africa. The language Swahili is a Bantu language, with Omani and Indian words mixed in. The region is incredibly distinct because of its historical contact with Greeks, Indians, Chinese, Arabs, Romans, and others in search of gold, slaves, and other riches. This region is great to use when teaching the theme of movement.

- Rainforest - While rainforests are typically famous for their rich and diverse flora and fauna, the African rainforests, located in the heart of central Africa, are falling silent. Deforestation, slash and burn farming, refugees, and road building are destroying the African rainforest at an alarming rate. Using the theme "human-environmental interaction", students can examine what impact human contact has had in the region. (A great example of human impact on a region is in King Leopold's treatment of the "Belgian Congo" at the turn of the last century - see Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*)

- Great Lakes - The Great Lakes of Africa include some of the largest and most ecologically diverse freshwater systems on the planet. Twisting down the two arms of the Great Rift Valley, the lakes are located in nine countries in East and Central Africa. These lakes have had a tremendous impact on the people who lived near them. The theme of location, and place, can be used to analyze what that impact was. How did the people benefit from living near such lakes?

- Southern Africa - Rich in minerals, this region sits at the bottom of the continent. It is made up of nations such as Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe. These minerals, especially diamonds, lured outsiders to the region. This inevitably led to clashes between indigenous black African and newly arrived white Africans, and eventually to the white domination found in South Africa, and colonial German West Africa and Rhodesia.

Once the concept of region is understood by students, the teacher can use just one as a case study for early African society or the class can take their time researching the physical and human characteristics of many regions. The detailed histories of these regions should provide an opportunity for many other historical and geographical lessons. As I stated earlier, this unit can be applied to any region of Africa. So, regardless of what

region a teacher or class chooses, this unit can be used to study slavery's impact on the region. Although, I would suggest that the Sahel and the Rainforest regions provide the best examples.

Human Geography of Africa

The human geography of Africa is too vast to fall into the scope of these few lessons. Once the teacher chooses a region of focus, he or she should then take the appropriate amount of time to thoroughly examine the society and culture of that geographic region. If there is time to cover all regions of African, the class will appreciate the diverse nature of the African people. It will further reinforce the idea that Africa is not a country, but a vast diverse continent of many countries and many cultures.

Theme of Movement & the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

People, trade, disease, goods, and ideas that enter or leave any one place all fall under the theme of "Movement". The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Triangle Trade are perfect examples to study movement. The Triangle Trade is a term that summarizes the mercantile relationship between the three continents of Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The rum that was produced in New England in the 1600's was shipped to Africa and traded for slaves, which were shipped to the Caribbean and traded for sugar and ingredients for rum. These ingredients - along with guns and other manufactured goods - were then shipped to New England to produce more rum, which would be traded for more slaves. This summarizes the essence of the Triangle Trade. Europeans were often the financiers behind such ventures. This scenario is a great topic to teach the geographic theme of movement, and prompts the students to consider some important questions about movement: Where did the Africans come from? Where did they end up? How did they adjust to the new climate? What effect did their departure have on their land? These are all questions answered through the examination of the theme of movement.

The shipping of slaves from Africa to the Caribbean was known as the "Middle Passage." The Middle Passage was the longest leg of the triangular trade route. Slaves were kept below deck in conditions that were vile. The water and food that they were fed was often tainted. As a result of these and other factors, there was a high mortality rate. Thomas Clarkson's *History of the Rise, Progress & Accomplishment of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* contains excellent ship drawings and blueprints that illustrate the crowded unlivable conditions aboard the slave ships. The journal of slaver Richard Drake provides a graphic account of life aboard a slave ship:

I am growing sicker every day of this business of buying and selling human beings for beasts of burden... On the eighth day [out at sea] I took my round of the half deck, holding a camphor bag in my teeth; for the stench was hideous. The sick and dying were chained together. I saw pregnant women give birth to babies whilst chained to corpses, which our drunken overseers had not removed. The blacks were literally jammed between decks as if in a coffin, and a coffin that dreadful hold became to nearly one half of our cargo before we reached Bahia ³

Another quote from a Dr. Alexander Falconbridge describes a similar scene:

Some wet and blowing weather having occasioned the portholes to be shut, and the grating to be

covered, fluxes and fevers among the negroes ensued. While they were in this situation, my profession requiring it, I frequently went down among them, till at length their apartments became so extremely hot as to be only sufferable for a very short time. But the excessive heat was not the only thing that rendered their situation intolerable. The deck, that is the floor of their rooms, was so covered with the blood and mucous which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughter-house. It is not in the power of the human imagination to picture to itself a situation more dreadful or disgusting. Numbers of the slaves having fainted, they were carried up on deck, where several of them died and the rest were, with great difficulty, restored... 4.

These two excerpts taken from the Smithsonian Institute's online exhibits on slavery ⁵ provide more detail about the Middle Passage. If you allow your students to analyze the first quote they might get the impression that the Middle Passage wasn't all that bad. In fact, the author suggests that the slaves "enjoyed" themselves. The second is a more personal account by one who actually experienced the middle passage.

"The schooners were fitted with bulkheads, in the fashion of regular slavers.... The largest males were packed first in the hold, sitting cross-legged in rows, back to back. They faced each other closely, and a hundred were thus crammed into each schooner under decks. The women and girls were all stowed in one hold. After securing these below, about fifty were tied around the masts and rails of both vessels; and by this time every available foot of space had been covered with black flesh. The slaves are to get two meals a day, of boiled beans or rice; each has a light wooden dish and spoon tied about the neck. The gangs are to come on deck, in fine weather, to dance and enjoy themselves."

- Richard Drake, an Englishman who immigrated to the United States and worked on slave ships from 1807 to 1857. The incidents above took place in May 1808 aboard the *Coralline* .

And:

"After being about 15 days out to sea a heavy squall struck the ship. The poor slaves below, altogether unprepared for such an occurrence, were mostly thrown to the side, where they lay heaped on the top of each other; their fetters rendered many of them helpless, and before they could be arranged in the proper places, and relieved from their pressure on each other, it was found that 15 of them were smothered or crushed to death. The captain seemed considerably vexed; but the only grievance to him was the sudden loss of some five or six thousand dollars."

- Zamba Zemola told his story in *The Life and Adventures of Zamba, an African Negro King; and his Experience of Slavery in South Carolina*, published in 1847.

While both are technically accurate, the latter better provides students with the essential horror of the Middle Passage. Also, by allowing the students to analyze both primary documents it allows them to understand the subjective nature of historical record and the importance of using more than one source.

To reinforce the terrible journey that was the middle passage, the class should view the famous scene in the film *Amistad* which vividly portrays the horrible and tragic details of the Middle Passage. This is a good example of Hollywood's effort to accurately present African history from an African point of view. It also tells the story of Africans for their sake, not as a back drop for another plot; one disconnected from the essence of Africa.

Slavery in the Colonies

As the class follows Africans off their continent and across the ocean, it is worth while to examine the new lives that these enslaved Africans were starting. To generate thoughts and access prior knowledge, the teacher should conduct a "word web" or "chalk talk" activity. Once the ideas and images surrounding the conditions of slavery, the teacher will show any clip from the film *The Patriot* where the lead character is seen interacting with his slaves.

Although the primary focus of this film is on a southern planter's role in the American War for Independence, it glosses over the place slavery had in this man's life. When slaves are shown they are often presented in as content and almost as employees or peers instead of slaves. This film is a typical light treatment of the slavery issue that has plagued American history, historiography, and film for many years. Ask your students, what would people think if they only saw this film's point of view about slavery? Based on this film, how would you describe slavery? Does this new description match the descriptive terms generated by the word web or chalk talk written on the board? This further reinforces the need to use multiple sources when studying history and provided a framework for analyzing later films. Excerpts from this film can be shown as a stark contrast to a film like *Amistad* , or *Sankofa* .

Sankofa is a film about the slave experience from the point of view of a self-absorbed twentieth-century African model. In it, she is transported back to the days of slavery where she has become a house slave on a Louisiana plantation. As a slave, she slowly realizes the importance of resistance to slavery. She eventually returns to Africa more interested in her African heritage than the photo shoot she was whisked away from. This film is a great tool to teach the Atlantic slave trade from an African point of view.

I plan to use the film *Sankofa* when teaching about the Atlantic slave trade and its impact on African society. See Lesson four (4) below for activity. The treatment of slavery this film will be compared and contrasted with the treatment of slavery in popular films from Hollywood.

African Cinema

The development of black African cinema is directly connected to the colonial legacy of the region. The French invested more into the advancement of (Francophone) culture and arts in their colonies than did the British or the Germans. The French have been heavily involved in the production of films over the past century, producing over 21,000 films - twice as many as were made in the U.S.A. They exported cinema to their colonies and financed movie theaters there as well. As a result, the former French West Africa has become the

center of financing and production of black African cinema. Places like Mali, Senegal, and Burkina Faso have become an African Hollywood. The important distinction between Burkina Faso and Hollywood is that in the West African nation they make wonderful movies with very little money or resources, unlike in Hollywood. Herein lies the beauty of black African cinema and what makes it a great teaching tool; the strengths of the films derive from the people and the land. They are made without the potentially distracting million dollar special effects and Hollywood glamour. This allows the viewer to focus solely on the subject of the film: Africa and Africans.

It is essential to understand, however, that this approach to film making is not simply a result of a lack of resources. Leaving their movie theaters and film equipment behind, the French withdrew from their colonies in Africa in the early 1960's. Their departure allowed the cinema of Africa to become African. Black African cinema began with the first black African film, Ousmane Sembene's *Black Girl*, in 1960. It immediately adopted a "cinematic third worldism": films with dominating themes of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism and the peripheral issues that surround them. In his book *Black African Cinema*, Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike explains⁶ what Black African cinema sought to achieve upon emerging from oppressive colonial systems: "(1) decolonize the mind, (2) contribute to the development of radical consciousness, (3) contribute to the transformation of society, and (4) develop a new film language with which to accomplish these tasks."⁷ The cinematic revolution was a revolution of the mind. The film *Sankofa* is good example of this revolutionary consciousness.

In terms of content, prior to my teaching this unit, the class will have explored the following topics: Early River Valley Civilizations, Greece, Rome & Christianity, and Islam. Following this unit: Age of Exploration, Asia, and The Americas.

Modifications

As more and more special education and learning disabled students become mainstreamed into our classrooms, New Haven teachers have to modify their lessons to the new range of skills in their classrooms. One possible modification to the literature portions of this unit is to rely less the lengthier novels suggested and more on short stories or picture books.

Some students can't read as well as others, and some are what is known as visual learners. This modified approach allows all students in the class to appreciate the material. A diversified approach also provides the on-level reader or non-disabled student a new, different, and enriched perspective on the subject. Images can be, and often are, more powerful than the pen.

One excellent literature selection to achieve this goal is the powerful picture book *Bound for America: The Forced Migration of Africans to the New World*. In it, the author explains the history of slavery in Europe and Africa, plus the growth and decline of the New World slave trade, with a storyline that is based on contemporary accounts and full-color and black-and-white drawings from a variety of sources. These emotional images can convey to a special needs student the agonizing experience that slavery was.

A suggestion for an assignment would be to have the student draw their own image of the slave experience based on the story line. Or the opposite. The student can write the story of one of the characters from the

many images in the book. Both assignments force to the student to “be the slave” for a moment and capture the emotions of the slave. In the end, this modified approach can also be used as a form of assessment for the student. Other similar assignments can be used with any modified materials.

Unit Objectives

- To identify the geographic regions of Africa
- To locate selected African countries, countries that will be used as later case studies in the examination the legacy of slavery and colonialism
- To identify and explain the significance of the names of some African nations
- To summarize the evolution of the slave trade in Africa and the New World
- To introduce poetry and film as historical sources
- To describe the triangular trade and the middle passage (film)
- To analyze the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on African society (poetry)
- To illustrate the lives of slaves in the colonies (film)
- To identify consequences of the Atlantic slave trade, for the both the politically, and socially and culturally
- To summarize the impact of European colonization on selected African nations
- To compare the portrayal of the Atlantic slave trade in African films versus films from Hollywood
- To investigate and share some current data related to African nations
- To compare the treatment of Africa in Hollywood movies and African films (film)
- To analyze the geography of Africa through film and literature

Common Performance Standards

Students will...

- Gather historical data from multiple primary and secondary sources.
- Identify the main idea in a source of historical information.
- Identify and analyze various causes and consequences of events.
- Write short narratives and statements presenting historical ideas.
- Demonstrate understanding through written, verbal, visual, musical and/or technological formats.
- Read about and discuss current events

Content Standards

Students will...

1.0 Diversity

- Read, view and listen to multiple sources that reflect the diversity of culture
- Describe and analyze “patriarchal” and matriarchal societies
- Describe, analyze, and assess the development and demise of colonial subjugation including the rise and fall of slavery.
- Analyze ways in which slaves perpetuated aspects of African culture

3.0 Geography

- Read, view and listen to multiple sources concerning geography.
- Explore the geography of early civilizations and its effects on the development of the region.

- Chart the Middle Passage route of trade in slaves, tobacco, rum, furs, and gold.

4.0 Economics

- Examine European imperialism and colonialism on the African, Asian, and the American economies.

5.0 History

- Read, view and listen to multiple sources concerning history
- Formulate historical questions and hypotheses from multiple perspectives, using multiple sources.

Lesson Plans

Lesson # 1

Title: Regional Geography of Africa

Duration: Two fifty minute classes

Objectives - Students will be able to:

- Define the term regions and provide examples
- Recognize the subjective nature of determining regional borders
- Describe the characteristics of the regions of Africa
- Identify and locate the countries within the assigned regions of Africa

Materials: An outline map for each student, colored pencils, reference atlases and maps of Africa.

Opening: Teacher will ask class what “New England”, “the Hill” - or any well known local neighborhood - and “the South Pacific” have in common. The answer is that they are all regions. (Any well known local or global regions can be used as examples)

Activity: To combat the idea that Africa is a singular, uniform place, the class will spend a period breaking down the continent of Africa. The first step will be to identify the regions of Africa.

- After class opens, students will record the definition of the concept of region from the board. They will then be asked to identify some regions in their school, then in their town. Teacher will guide the discussion, prompting students to analyze what defines these regions. Is it the people who live there? The land usage? Economics? Does the class agree on where these boundaries begin and end?
- Class will then add to the definition on the board with their own list of what can define a region - various physical features, ethnicity or culture, economics, local issues - providing examples of each. Teacher should point out that regions can be any size, any student who shares a bedroom with a sibling can relate to that!
- Once students exhibit full comprehension of the concept “region,” class will then break into small groups of four or five.
- Each group will receive a large size outline map of Africa, reference sources, and a set of colored pencils
- Each group member will receive an outline map of the African continent and will be assigned a certain geographic characteristic - cultural, ethnic, and physical, etc.
- Students will then work together to identify those particular regions of Africa, carefully drawing regional boundaries in their maps. Each region will be colored, and a legend will be created to identify the regions. Facts and details about the regions will be explained on the back of the map. These maps will eventually be collected for an individual grade.
- When students return the following day, they will share their individual maps with the groups, and the group will come to a consensus. Then the each group will create a large, professional or creative, regional map of Africa. The map and information will be presented to the class. This presentation will count as a collective grade for the group.

Closure: Class will discuss interesting facts that they discovered while researching their region and listening to others. Teacher will ask class what characteristics are most used to define a region - the answer is physical and cultural.

Assignment: Students will complete map skills worksheet that reinforces lesson on region and introduces the basic physical feature of Africa.

Lesson #2

Title: Human Geography of Africa

Duration: Two fifty minute classes

Objectives - Students will be able to:

- Identify and describe the physical regions of Africa
- Explain the structure of African society
- Summarize the causes and effects of migration

Materials: A Grain of Wheat, God's Bits of Wood

Opening: Teacher will begin by reading a collection of facts⁸ that illustrate the physical and human vastness of the continent of Africa. Students will also record key terms - from textbook - into their notebooks from the board.

Activity:

- Students will read any two different selections that illustrate the essence of African life before contact with Europeans. Half the class will read one, half the other. In their journals, they will complete a recognizing fact and detail assignment. They will record three main ideas from the passage. Then, they will record three details provided to support these main ideas. Students will offer their answers to the class.
- Later, or when they return they following day, each student will pair up with a partner. They will teach each other about the early African society they read about the previous night. Each student will have a set of notes for both societies. Together, they will complete a venn diagram comparing/contrasting the two societies.

Closure: Students who did not contribute at the closure of the prior day's class will offer examples of similarities/differences between early African society and their own.

Assignment: Students will locate and label these societies and others on their maps of Africa from the previous class period.

Lesson #3

Title: Early African Society Through Film

Duration: Fifty minutes

Objectives - Students will be able to:

- Appreciate pre-slavery society in Africa
- Analyze film as a historical resource

Materials: *Yeelen, Sia* , text books, maps of Africa

Opening: Teacher will check for understanding of terms and map skills through a brief guided discussion about daily life in this geography.

Activity:

- Teacher will then introduce the film, *Yeelen* about life in “Eden” Africa, the Africa before European contact. For each scene, the students will take notes on the role of geography in the film. What was the geography like? What impact would this geography play in everyday life? Did we see this in the film? How does this geography compare to the other films? To our own?
- The films will also be used to examine African society as well as geography. The class will use what it sees in the films as examples of early African society, and, with a partner, compare/contrast it to their modern American lives. They will record these similarities and differences in their journals.

Closure: Students will be encouraged to share some of their entries.

Assignment: In the form of a short letter (100 word min), student will write from early Africa to someone in modern America. They will provide a detailed description of the ancient African world they have been transported to, and a prediction of what will become of them. Description and prediction will need to be geographically and historically accurate.

Lesson #4 - Block

Title: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Duration: Ninety minutes (or slightly more)

Objectives - Students will be able to:

- summarize the evolution of the slave trade in Africa and the New World
- describe the triangular trade and the middle passage
- describe the life of slaves in the Americas
- identify consequences of the Atlantic slave trade, for the both the politically and socially and culturally

- compare the treatment of the Atlantic slave trade in African films versus films from Hollywood

Materials: *The Patriot*, *Amistad*, *Sankofa* , “The Second Coming” by Yeats, text

Opening: Class will begin with notes on the board - a summary of the text used - that explains the origins of the Atlantic slave trade.

Activity:

- Students will then read two selected quotes (see above); one from a British observer on a slave ship and the other from a former African king now slave. Each gives a different description of the middle passage. The former describes a scene that is not all that bad; the latter includes those horrific details that are the Middle Passage. A representative from each group will describe the Middle Passage based on what they have read. The class will be asked: how do these descriptions differ? This activity will illustrate how one’s point of view can influence how history is recorded.

- The class will then watch the clip from the film *Amistad* that captures the brutality of the Middle Passage. Which written description does this film clip most resemble? I will apply the idea of “point of view” to film. The class will then examine the depiction of slavery through the use of film. After watching the tragic scene in *Amistad*, we will view a scene from *The Patriot*. In this scene, the hero of the movie Benjamin Martin (played by Mel Gibson) is seen having a warm and caring relationship with his “employees”⁹. In reality, these employees were slaves and their relationship was not as familial. The students would be asked: why would the director distort the facts this way? What purpose does it serve? Is the director obligated to be historically accurate, why/why not?

- The class will conclude with the viewing of the film *Sankofa*. This is an African film about the slave experience from the point of view of a self-absorbed twentieth-century African model. In it, she is transported back to the days of slavery where she has become a house slave on a Louisiana plantation. As a slave, she slowly realizes the importance of resistance to slavery. She eventually returns to Africa more interested in her African heritage than the photo shoot she was whisked away from. The viewing of this film will be concluded during the following class period.

Closure: After the film, I will review all of what we just took in - the facts, the words, the points of view, the images, the emotions. Class will conclude with the reading of a poem by Yeats called “The Second Coming”.

Assignment: Students will be given a copy to reread at home, and they will connect the poem to the experience of slavery.

Lesson #5

Title: Effects of Slave Trade - Guided Discussion

Duration: Fifty minutes

Objectives - Students will be able to:

- Define the geographic term movement and provide examples
- Interpret and analyze poetry as a historical resource
- Demonstrate critical thinking and map skills
- Explain the short term and long term impact the Atlantic slave trade had on Africa and the African peoples

Materials: Yeats poem, a map of the Atlantic Slave Trade (that includes routes destinations and the details of the triangle trade), text, *Sankofa*, *The Patriot*

Opening: Class will open with the reading of Yeats' "The Second Coming."

Activity: Class will break down the poem, phrase by phrase.

Closure:

- The class will end by carrying over the racist notions of the slaver to the idea of Imperialism. After a very brief overview of the pan-African experiences during the Age of Imperialism, the Inquiry Assignment (see assessment) will be explained to the class. Requirements and cooperative learning groups will be established by the end of the period.

Lesson #6 - Block

Title: African Cinema

Duration: Ninety minutes

Objectives - Students will be able to:

- Interpret and analyze film as a historical resource
- Compare and contrast Hollywood's Africa and the Africa presented in African film

Materials: Films - *Tears of the Sun*, *Blackhawk Down*, *Sia*

Opening: Class will begin with a clip from a Hollywood film that depicts Africa in a typically Hollywood way - see annotated film list for descriptions of the above films, teacher can choose any selection for this activity. The options are plenty; any age/class appropriate film can be used. Class will be asked: If you knew nothing, and based your opinions solely on this film, how would you describe the African people. Then follow the clip with another that reinforces that image, but promotes a slightly different but equally degrading point of view.

Activity: After class establishes treatment of Africa in Hollywood's films, they can use the remainder of the block watching the film *Sia*. *Sia* portrays the politics of a mythical pre-slavery African kingdom. It is an excellent film to show students the color and splendor of the African landscape and also the workings of an ancient African society.

Closure: Students should respond to three (3) questions for homework after viewing the film *Sia*: (1) in what region was the film made, and what geographic features did student see in film, (2) what role did geography play in the film, and (3) what did they learn from this film about Africa that they would never have learned from the other Hollywood examples. They should write their answer in the form of a film review, in the end recommending or not recommending this movie to other history students.

Assessments

Assessment 1 - Inquiry Assignment

Objectives - Students will be able to:

- investigate and share some current data related to African nations
- utilize multiple primary and secondary sources in answering an essential question to the inquiry assignment
- explain the significance of the names of some African nations

Activity:

The class will be divided into groups of four, and each group will select an African nation to investigate. Each group will be creating a poster on its country. The poster will be divided into four sections. In the center will be a small map of the country, with the capital and other major cities and physical features labeled. The group will be responsible for creating the map, but each member of the group will provide information for each of the four sections:

- Name origin and information

- Physical and cultural geography
- Significant historical events
- Current data and statistics

After the assignment is introduced, and the groups are established, the class will need to be taken to the school library at least once to use atlases, books, computers, and other necessary resources. Specific sources will be provided to student based upon section of African nation. The students will research the information for their section and complete the poster. The Inquiry Assignment will be explained at the end of Lesson #2, and will probably require two or three class periods to complete (in addition to student collaboration in their own time). Lastly, the groups will present their projects to the class. The presentations should occur just prior to the unit exam.

The students will be graded on: following instructions, visual presentation, content in the four sections, oral presentation.

Assessment - Unit Exam

Objectives - Students will be able to:

- demonstrate mastery of historical and geographical skills
- demonstrate an understanding of content covered in unit

Activity:

Students will take class period to complete unit exam. Unit exam will cover key terms, people, events, and themes of early African history. The exam will also have two short essay questions:

1. Legacy of Slavery question
2. Film Question

Materials

Reading List (see annotated bibliography below)

Teachers List

Black African Cinema , Nwachukwa Frank Ukadike

Black Skin, White Masks , Fritz Fanon

The Colonizer and the Colonized , Albert Memmi

Decolonizing the Mind , Ngugi Wa Thiongo

Orientalism , Edward Said

Student List

A Grain of Wheat , Ngugi Wa Thiongo

God's Bits of Wood , Sembene Ousmane

Things Fall Apart , Chinua Achebe

World History: Patterns of Interaction , McDougal Littell (publisher)

Film List

Afrique , je Te Plumerai, dir. Jean-Marie Teno

- This documentary of Cameroon's oppressive political realities opens with the 1990 publication of a letter to their president. The narration then examines the nation's colonial history. It captures the desires and frustrations of ordinary Africans themselves, a viewpoint rarely bothered with in Hollywood version of Africa (see *Black Hawk Down*, *The Ghost and the Darkness*, or *Tears of the Sun*) This film contains some graphic political violence.

Amistad, dir. Steven Spielberg

- This Spielberg classic is about a slave mutiny onboard a ship that is traveling towards America from western Africa. Much of the story revolves around the trial of the slave who led the revolt. The key scene in terms of this unit is in the middle of the film, as the lead character reflects on his capture and voyage to the "land of opportunity".

Cry Freedom , dir. Richard Attenborough

- The story of Stephen Biko's life and death is told in this movie. It is based on the book *Biko* by South African journalist and anti-Apartheid activist Donald Woods. Woods is the other lead character in the film. It has been praised as courageous. It has been criticized for whitewashing Apartheid and failing in its mission. The students can decide. While telling Biko's story, the film demonstrates the power that the white Afrikaners had over the native black Africans and it chronicles another legacy of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism.

Blackhawk Down , dir. Ridley Scott

- This film tells the story of an attack on U.S. troops in Somalia by Somali soldiers and mobs of civilians. Although the film is incredible to watch and very exciting, it has flaws. Its major flaw is what should be focused on in terms of this unit. Its treatment of Africa is misleading and neglectful. It can provide the class with a perfect example of Hollywood's version of Africa.

The Ghost and the Darkness , dir. Stephen Hopkins

- The land of Africa is beautifully portrayed in this film based on a true story of man-eating-lions that terrorize the people. These people are white imperialists who are trying to build a bridge and become rich. This film's can be best used as an example of the dismissive attitude towards Africans themselves, who are barely represented in the film. Also the film hardly mentions the notion that maybe these imperialist should not be there. This is another good example of Hollywood's Africa.

Lumumba , dir. Raoul Peck

- Lumumba is the story of the rise to power and assassination of the leader of the independent Congo, Patrice Lumumba. Raoul Peck tells an emotional story of the dedicated and tireless leader with a flair for public speaking. The film excellently capture the desire of an African leader who believes in his people's ability to govern themselves and thrive free of their former Belgium colonizers.

Sankofa , dir. Haile Gerima

- This is an African film about the slave experience from the point of view of a self-absorbed twentieth-century African model. In it, she is transported back to the days of slavery where she has become a house slave on a Louisiana plantation. As a slave, she slowly realizes the importance of resistance to slavery. She eventually returns to Africa more interested in her African heritage than the photo shoot she was whisked away from. This film is a great tool to teach the Atlantic slave trade from an African point of view.

Sia , dir. Dani Kouyate

- This beautiful film from the Hollywood of Africa - Burkina Faso - portrays the politics of a mythical pre-slavery African kingdom. It is an excellent film to show students the color and splendor of the African landscape and also the workings of an ancient African society.

The Patriot , dir. Roland Emmerich

- Although the primary focus of this film is on a southern planter's role in the American War for Independence, it glosses over the place slavery had in this man's life. When slaves are shown they are often presented as content and almost as employees or peers instead of slaves. This film is a typical glossing over of the slavery issue that has plagued American history, historiography, and film for many years. Excerpts from this film can be shown as a stark contrast to a film like *Sankofa* or *Amistad* .

Yeelen, dir. Souleymane Cisse

- This is a mythical tale of an ancient time. It tells the story of the Dogon and Peulh and the cosmology surrounding their culture. The films purpose in this unit is to show the geography of the Sahel. There are many long, sweeping shots of the Sahel as the characters carry out the plot.

Webliography

Africa

<http://campus.northpark.edu/history/WebChron/Africa/Africa.html>

http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Home_Page/AFR_GIDE.html

<http://www.africaonline.com/site/>

General

<http://geography.about.com/msub107.htm?once=true&>

<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

<http://www.infoplease.com/countries.html>

Annotated Bibliography

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart* . New York: Everyman's Press, 1958.

- In this classic African novel, written in English, the author explores early African society and culture. In it, Africa is not merely scenery but the central focus. This book will be used by students to understand African culture but also as a contrast to what we often see in western literature and film.

Beck, Roger. *World History: Patterns of Interaction* . Evanston, Illinois: McDougal Littell, 2003.

- An excellent world history text book. It provides a detailed thematic survey of world history, placing an emphasis on the impact geography has on the development of global societies.

Phyllis Raybin Emert (ed.) *Colonial Triangular Trade: An Economy Based on Human Misery* . New York: Discovery Enterprises, 1996.

- An excellent source for an overview of the Triangle Trade and the Middle Passage. Useful for teachers and students, includes many primary documents.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* . New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967.

- Fanon examines and exposes how the colonized have been affected by the colonization. His focus is along lines of race; white and black. This book can be used as an extension reading assignment for more advanced students or enriching reading for any teacher teaching about the issues of race, slavery, or colonization.

Haskins, James. *Bound For America: The Forced Migrations of Africans to the New World* . New York: Lothrop Lee & Shepard, 1999.

- This book explains the history of slavery in Europe and Africa, as well as the growth and decline of the New World slave trade, with a storyline that is based on contemporary accounts and full-color and black-and-white drawings from a variety of sources

Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized* . Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.

- The author explores the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. While explaining the reciprocal nature of the master/servant relationship, Memmi introduces the idea of the "mythical portrait" of the colonized and how this mythical portrait facilitates the domination of one another.

Ousmane, Sembene. *God's Bits of Wood* . Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1962.

- In this novel, Sembene Ousmane evinces the color, passion, and tragedy of the formative years of the late 1940's in the history of West Africa.[RTF bookmark end: 04359095925000] It timelessly points out the dilemmas of the neo-colonial state. This is a novel that teaches the problems experienced by any once-dominated people.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism* . New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

- Orientalism, as the unique field of study of all things orient, is portrayed in this essay as an idea that is based on stereotype, myth, and, inevitably, racist notions. I will apply this concept to the study of Africans. It was the “Orientalist” approach to African studies that often justified European dominance and then New World slavery.

Ukadike, Nwachukwa Frank. *Black African Cinema* .

- Considered the most up to date book on modern African cinema, the author explores the impact between culture and history on the development of black African cinema. An excellent source for an introduction to black African cinema, and also a great tool to help appraise African film.

Endnotes

1 I have a collection of facts I have used of the years, gathered from various sources. A teacher can use any facts that illustrate the vastness of African continent. Facts regarding it size, climates, peoples, nations, languages, etc. The students should come away from the discussion with an understanding of the depth of the topic when one mentions: Africa.

2 For further information see Third Cinema in the Third World: Aesthetics of Liberation by Teshome Gabriel

3 Ukadike, p 77.

4 www.smithsonian.com

5 Colonial Triangular Trade: An Economy Based on Human Misery, p.102

6 Colonial Triangular Trade: An Economy Based on Human Misery, p.4

7 “The shaming tragedy of Africa”, Will Hutton in The Guardian - May 26, 2003

8 Google News Search, March 2003

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