



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2007 Volume II: Voyages in World History Before 1500

An African Pilgrim-King and a World-Traveler: Mansa Musa and Ibn Battuta

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Gone are the days when an elementary-school teacher can devote a neat little cubicle of time to teaching science, geography or history. In order to expose students to these subjects, today's teachers must find creative ways to integrate them into the overall mandated reading/writing curriculum where they can be taught within the basic 2 1/2-hour daily literacy block. Fortunately, that can be made an ideal venue too, because students can properly read and conduct research on topics of interest within such a time-frame.

In this unit I plan to take a unique approach and teach world history by using the travel narrative of the famous 14th century Muslim globe-trotter, Ibn Battuta, who set off to make a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1325 and didn't return home until 29 years later. We will focus on his final journey in 1353 from Morocco to the kingdom of Mali, West Africa and see history unfold before his eyes. Along the way we will gain valuable insights into African and Muslim beliefs of that time and a special focus will be placed on studying the Hajj in all its detail. His travels will provide the larger context for exploring a variety of related topics of particular interest to my young learners including caravan travel by camel, the Tuareg, the hazards of desert travel, and the founder of Mali, Sundiata. Of particular appeal to third-grade students will be the additional unit focus on the very colorful historical figure, Mansa Musa, the great ruler of the flourishing Mali empire (from 1312 to 1337) who was often referred to as 'the Black Moses'. His legendary pilgrimage in 1324 to Mecca by way of Egypt, accompanied by a lavish African entourage, will provide a marvelous opportunity to stimulate student interest in further reading and research.

I have found an absolute wealth of excellent resources, books as well as online sources, which will serve to make history come alive for my young learners. There's so much to cover so let's get on our way. Bring along a full canteen of water, some good walking shoes, and your spirit of adventure!

Introduction

I am an instructional coach for literacy at Barnard Environmental Studies Magnet School. The self-contained class of third-grade students to whom I will be teaching this unit (in small groups) are a heterogeneous group with varying abilities within the eight-to-nine-year-old age range and are primarily of African-American and

Hispanic-American descent. Although I have designed this unit with them in mind, I am confident that it could easily be used by teachers in other intermediate grades as well.

My unit will be interdisciplinary in scope, including history, geography, social studies and computer technology. I have designed it to be used with students doing research on a variety of topics in a small group setting.

I have found some excellent websites on which students can further explore their chosen topics of interest related to the larger subject. The National Geographic Xpeditions website is rich in resources and is geared toward the abilities and interests of third-graders (and older). On this website (www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/10/g35/tgbattuta.html) there is an xpedition lesson plan on Ibn Battuta. Under the heading 'related links' is an wonderful online source entitled 'The Travels of Ibn Battuta--A Virtual Tour with the 14th Century Traveler'. This website, which was prepared by Nick Bartel, a middle school teacher in San Francisco, provides the viewer with a comprehensive tour of all of Ibn Battuta's travels, is accompanied by many interesting links relevant to the subject matter and includes an introduction to Africa and its varied geography and a close-up of Mali, its history and people. There is also a link for a mosque website which describes, through text and pictures, the appearance of a mosque inside and out, Muslim traditions practiced there and basic Muslim practices including the hajj, a highlight of my unit. This website will allow students to actually delve into the lives and travels of the two great African historical figures, Ibn Battuta and Mansa Musa, read further about their exploits and learn about the diverse societies in which they lived and moved.

The lessons in this unit will be introduced five times a week for a period of 30 minutes over a four-month period. I plan to divide my presentation of the material into 3 sections:

- Section I: Preparing for Our Nonfiction Study
- Section II: Traveling with Ibn Battuta
- Section III: Designing a Readers Theater play

Since the bulk of the reading will be nonfiction, this unit will begin with a brief discussion in Section I of how teachers can help their students navigate and get the most out of what they are reading both in books and on the web. I will suggest reading strategies that increase comprehension and that will help students to deepen their understanding of new information and concepts. In Section II we will follow Ibn Battuta on his final journey, listening to his writings taken from both a primary and secondary source and pausing to explore a plethora of related topics along the way. These topics, which I have placed at deliberate points throughout this unit, take the form of questions. In Section III I plan to lead the students through the reading and performance of a Readers Theatre play that I adapted from the story of Sundiata, the founder of the Mali empire, which was written by David Wisniewski. This play will serve as a culminating activity which will be performed for other classes in our school.

Objectives

- 1 To gather and synthesize information when reading informational texts in both book-form and

in online articles.

2 To learn to read maps in order to trace trade and travel routes in North Africa in the 13-14th centuries.

3 To learn about world history through the use of Ibn Battuta's travel narrative.

4 To learn about the Muslim practice of the hajj as well as other customs as practiced by Muslims in the 14th century.

5 To learn about the growth and development of the ancient Mali empire and two of its famous rulers, Sundiata and Mansa Musa.

Strategies

1 To generate questions about one's readings through the use of inquiry notebooks.

2 To learn how to use various features and tools found in informational texts through explicit instruction as well as by using such texts in one's research.

3 To respond in note-form to specific questions related to one's reading through the use of discussion webs.

4 To regularly participate in discussions about unit topics in order to create a better understanding of the information that has been gathered.

5 To learn to skim informational texts for the specific information one is looking for.

6 To learn to navigate website information on the computer.

7 To perform a Readers Theater script adapted from the story of Sundiata.

Meeting New Haven's Literacy Standards

The New Haven school district's emphasis on literacy is targeted in all aspects of this unit. Students will demonstrate strategic reading skills before, during and after reading (Reading/Literature content standard 1.4) as they gather information, use their prior knowledge, develop self-generated questions about their readings and select relevant information to include in specific research topics. Students will demonstrate fluency when reading (Reading/Literature content standard 1.5) as evidenced in the reading of Readers Theater scripts. Students will demonstrate strategic viewing skills (Viewing content standard 5.0) by interpreting and constructing meaning from visual resources such as maps, charts, diagrams, online texts and photographs.

Section I: Preparing for Our Nonfiction Study

The topics explored in this unit--trade and travel and the influence of Islam in North Africa in the 13th-14th centuries as well as the thriving period of the ancient empire of Mali--will all be relatively new to my young students. I plan, therefore, to build and enrich their background knowledge on these topics before we actually begin our study of the key material. Laura Robb justifies this approach by stating: "Preparing students to read, before the reading takes place, improves their comprehension because learners link new information and experiences to prior knowledge and events" (Robb, Laura. *Teaching Reading in Social Studies, Science and Math*. New York: Teaching Resources, 2003, p. 31). Envision, if you will, my students poring over time-lines, maps, National Geographic magazine photographs and an array of picture books on the many topics of interest that so easily branch out from our main area of study. In an effort to further pique their interest, I plan to start the unit with an anticipation guide which requires students to read a series of unit-related statements and decide whether they agree or disagree with them. This activity will generate lots of rich discussion on a variety of topics and it will also motivate my students to delve deeper to find out more about these topics. The anticipation guide can be found in Appendix A of this unit. Lesson Plan I offers a step-by-step approach for using this guide.

I plan to provide a bridge linking fiction to nonfiction by reading aloud the book, *Mansa Musa*, by Khephra Burns. Although this tale of Mansa Musa's childhood is imaginary, it includes interesting snippets of both an historical and cultural nature which provides an ideal segue into our study of Mali and its great ruler. Because the story is long and complex, I plan to break it up into 5 readings so that the students can better digest what they have heard. To deepen their understanding, I will initiate the use of inquiry notebooks (described at length by Laura Robb) where students will pause, reflect and write down their own questions about the particular story segment that they have heard that day. We will use these questions as points of discussion. Lesson Plan II describes how to use these inquiry notebooks.

As my students delve into our nonfiction study, in addition to using inquiry notebooks, they will also participate regularly in using a discussion web (described at length by Robb) where key guiding questions will be written on large pieces of poster board underneath which they will record facts and understandings they have arrived at through their reading and discussions.

Section II: Traveling with Ibn Battuta

Because I will be focusing on Ibn Battuta's last trip from Fez, Morocco to Mali, West Africa which began in 1353, I will be using two main sources as I recount Ibn Battuta's last journey: One is a secondary source by Ross E. Dunn entitled *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta--A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*. The other book is a primary source in which portions of Ibn Battuta's writings relating to his travels to East Africa in 1329 or 1331 and his longer trip to West Africa between 1352 and 1354 have been selected, translated, and edited by Said Hamdun and Noel King in their book, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*. I will read aloud selections from these two sources to my students as we accompany Ibn Battuta on his journey.

Why did Ibn Battuta travel?

Ibn Battuta belonged to the religious upper-class in Tangier, Morocco. We assume, therefore, that he had received an education (both literary and scholastic) of the type that a Muslim theologian would have received. According to H.A.R. Gibb, "it was because he was a theologian and because of his interest in theologians that he undertook his travels at all and survived to complete them" (Gibb, H.A.R. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*. New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2006, p. 3).

At the age of 20, Ibn Battuta left his home in 1325 intent on making a hajj, or pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Arabia. He did successfully complete his hajj but didn't end his travels there. Lucille McDonald uses a very apt quote of our traveler in her book, where Ibn Battuta attributes his desire for relentless travel to a hungry heart (McDonald, Lucille. *The Arab Marco Polo: Ibn Battuta*. New York: Thomas Nelson Inc.,

Publishers, 1975, p.15). Traveling at times by sea but primarily by land (which he preferred), Ibn Battuta covered a distance of about 73,000 miles in 29 years, confining most of his travels "within the cultural boundaries of what Muslims called the Dar al-Islam or Abode of Islam" (Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta--A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*, p. 6). By visiting lands where the sacred law of Islam (shari'a) provided the foundation of social order (either because of dominant Muslim populations or because of strong Muslim leaders), Ibn Battuta was able to surround himself with people of similar values and beliefs known as the umma, or community of believers. That is not to say that he was always accepting of their customs. Indeed, we shall see that he was often quite critical of some of the rituals and practices he observed in different lands.

Dunn suggests that Ibn Battuta was actively involved in four variant "streams of travel" at one time. As noted earlier, he was a Muslim pilgrim joining other believers who were making the hajj. Secondly, being devoted to Sufism (a mystical form of Islam), he traveled in order to visit important Sufi hermitages and to dialogue with Sufi holy men. Thirdly, he was a juridical scholar searching for knowledge as well as for the company of other such scholars throughout the Muslim World, not to mention a job for himself. Fourthly, Ibn Battuta had the necessary mobility to travel as "an educated adventurer" expecting to receive both generous hospitality and lucrative jobs from his hosts in areas of Asia and Africa where Islam was beginning to flourish (Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta--A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*, pp. 11-12). Another significant reason for Ibn Battuta's extended periods of travel was the relative ease of such endeavors due to the stable political conditions at that time found in Muslim lands.

Where did Ibn Battuta travel?

The span of time of Ibn Battuta's travels was 1325-1354. Before focusing on his final journey to Mali, we will spend some time learning about the places he went, the people he met and the adventures he had. There are two children's books about the life of Ibn Battuta which I plan to read excerpts from to my students: James Rumford's *Traveling Man* and Lucille McDonald's book cited earlier. At this juncture, I will introduce the Harcourt Multimedia Biographies website (www.harcourtschool.com/activity/

[biographies/battuta](#)) on Ibn Battuta which provides an account of his travels written at an appropriate reading level for my third-graders. The text is accompanied by numerous links to explore related topics of interest. We will also examine the excellent map of his travels found in the National Geographic article entitled 'Ibn Battuta: Prince of Travellers,' by Thomas J. Abercombie. While tracing the many routes he took as shown on this map, my students will gain familiarity with the locations of the many countries he traversed. Within this article are some beautiful photographs of present-day places that Ibn Battuta once visited. Another interesting map that we will refer to provides the travel routes of both our man, Ibn Battuta, and another famous world-

traveler, Marco Polo, and can be found in *An Atlas of World History* by Gerald A. Danzer.

Additional relevant resources:

The Travels of Ibn Battuta--A Virtual Tour, Chapter Twelve

www.isidore-of-seville.com/ibn-battuta/1.html

www.the153club.org/battuta.html

In 1351, after years of travel to far corners of the earth, Ibn Battuta decided while living in Fez to make a final 1500-mile trip by caravan across the Sahara Desert to Mali, West Africa.

Why did Ibn Battuta decide to undertake this final journey fraught with danger?

There are a number of reasons to consider. The trade routes across the Sahara were more well-established by this time and the caravans were led by highly-paid, experienced Berber guides. He planned to meet up with such a camel caravan in the cooler winter time when travel across the hot, dry desert was more bearable.

Trans-Saharan Trade Routes

Trans-Saharan trade provided a vital link between the Mediterranean countries that needed gold to produce their coins (dinars) with sub-Saharan countries that needed salt in their diet and to preserve and flavor their food. From Mali came other desired commodities including slaves, ivory, kola nuts, cowrie shells (used as currency) and ostrich feathers. With the spread of Islam in the 7th century came an increase in trans-Saharan trade. Over time two main trade routes developed. One ran from Morocco through the western desert to the Niger Bend. A second trade route ran from what is now modern Tunisia to the Lake Chad area. In fact, these routes were relatively short and within them a number of oases were located where the caravan could stop for water. We will also use a map of world trade routes during the time period of 1100-1500 in Danzer's atlas.

What did the slave trade look like before 1500?

The McKissacks in their book, remind us that "Slavery was not a new concept to Africans." (McKissack, Patricia and Fredrick McKissack. *The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994, p.106) Beginning in Ancient Egypt and continuing for hundreds of years, black slaves, primarily from Ethiopia, were sold throughout North Africa. With the spread of Islam into West Africa, came the expansion of the black slave trade across the Sahara Desert.

The North African and Arabian slave trade was a very profitable business. Such African peoples as the Soninke, the Songhay, the Tuareg, the Fulani and the Malinke regularly supplied both the Arabs and later the Europeans with black slaves, some criminals, others captives of war and others prisoners taken from raids in local non-Muslim provinces. Even though it was forbidden by Islamic law to make slaves of free Muslims, it was allowed to enslave those who did not practice the faith or who converted after being captured. Although the value of a slave was not as high as that of gold or salt, there remained a high demand for them. They were used as porters in caravans, as servants in households, as soldiers and as workers out in the fields.

Hugh Thomas tells us in his book *The Slave Trade*, that Ibn Battuta recorded frequently meeting slaves throughout his journey in Africa in the fourteenth century. Although Ibn Battuta regularly registered his outrage at the brutal treatment received by many of the slaves that he saw while traveling, he did not suggest

at any point that this practice be banned. Indeed, he left Africa with six hundred women slaves! (Thomas, Hugh. *The Slave Trade*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 1997, p. 791).

Another reason why Ibn Battuta decided on this journey might have been because he had heard of all the ways that Mali's previous ruler, Mansa Musa, had made Mali a thriving Muslim empire where mosques and palaces designed by a Muslim architect could be found. In fact, Mali sounded like another place within the Muslim fold where Ibn Battuta could interact with fellow believers and perhaps even work as a judge (qadi). While visiting Cairo, Egypt in 1326 Ibn Battuta probably also heard about the elaborate pilgrimage that Mansa Musa had made to Mecca and so he wanted to see for himself the empire of this legendary figure.

Additional relevant resources:

Africa--A Look Back by James Haskins and Kathleen Benson

www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1523100.stm

The History of Emigration from Africa by Catherine Chambers

Mansa Musa's Hajj

Why was Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca so memorable?

Other rulers of Mali had made a pilgrimage to Mecca in the past but none were as memorable or as impressive as Mansa Musa's hajj. According to Dunn, "In the history of medieval West Africa no single incident has been more celebrated" (Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta--A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*, p. 290).

In 1324 Mansa Musa, a devout Muslim, made plans to make his first pilgrimage to Mecca. It took many months for both officials and servants to prepare for this 3000-mile trip from Niani, Mali. They had to collect different animals to use as both beasts of burden and food sources: horses, camels, cows and goats. One hundred camels were each laden with 300 pounds of gold while others carried necessary items such as food and clothing. According to Peggy Pancella, of the 60,000 people included in this caravan, 12,000 were the king's personal slaves. The king's senior wife also brought an entourage of 500 maids. Then there were the many soldiers, doctors, teachers, and griots (storytellers) who were to accompany their ruler on this trip (Pancella, Peggy. *Mansa Musa: Ruler of Ancient Mali*. Chicago, Illinois: Heinemann Library, 2004, p. 17). It was said that Mansa Musa, in an effort to discourage any mutinous behavior in his absence, also brought along officials from each of the provinces in the empire.

Royal drums signaled the start of the hajj that departed from the city of Niani with 500 slaves leading the way, each carrying a gold staff. Near the ruler, who was dressed in fine robes and riding his own camel (some say a horse) were the royal guards and those carrying the flags of his empire. These travelers headed for the city of Timbuktu by way of the Niger River and then traveled eastward across the Sahara Desert. After traveling for about 8 months, they arrived in Cairo where Mansa Musa visited with the sultan, El Malik en Nasir (who reigned during the Mameluke period). From there they headed for Arabia, where it is said people lined the streets to catch a glimpse of this ruler and his elaborate entourage that they had heard so many stories about from merchants and travelers alike.

What are the rituals involved in a hajj?

What exactly did Mansa Musa do while on his hajj in Mecca? As we learned earlier, Ibn Battuta had made his

first hajj in 1325 and spent three weeks in Mecca meeting with holy men and visiting other sacred sites. In his lifetime he would go on to make three additional trips to this holy city of Mecca.

The Hajj

The Qur'an commands that all able-bodied Muslims perform a hajj (pilgrimage) if they have the means to do so. The five pillars of Islam are five duties that Muslims must perform and the hajj is one of them. The other four are: shahadah (the declaration of faith), salah (prayer), zakah (giving money to a worthy cause) and sawm (fasting from daybreak to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan).

1 After arriving in Mecca, a pilgrim walks seven times counterclockwise around the sacred house known as the Ka'ba, which, according to Muslim belief, was built by the prophet Abraham and guarded by Muhammad's grandfather.

2 From there a pilgrim walks or runs seven times between two nearby hills of Safa and Marwah, recalling the story of Hagar (prophet Abraham's wife) who ran in the desert searching for water for her son, Ishmael.

3 The pilgrim next goes to the Plain of Arafat, the place where Muhammad gave his final sermon. Muslims believe that Adam and Eve were forgiven their sins here and so they endure a whole afternoon in the hot sun, praying and asking forgiveness for their sins.

4 The pilgrim then camps overnight in Muzdalifah.

5 It is in Muzdalifah that he gathers stones to throw at three stone pillars that represent the devil and which are located in the village of Mina. This symbolizes Abraham's rejection of the devil. It is here also that an animal is sacrificed to God and the meat is given to the poor.

6 Finally, the pilgrim returns to Mecca and walks around the Ka'ba seven more times.

7 Many pilgrims also travel on to the city of Medina to visit the mosque where the prophet Muhammad was buried (Ganeri, Anita. *Muslim Festivals Throughout the Year*. North Mankato, Minn.: Smart Apple Media, 2004, p. 26)

Upon completing his pilgrimage, Mansa Musa gave away many gifts of money and gold to the residents of both Mecca and Cairo (on his return trip there). In fact, he depleted his supply of gold and had to actually borrow money to purchase supplies for his return trip home. He passed out so much gold that its value in the Middle East fell dramatically. The McKissacks write that according to an Egyptian reporter "the Cairo gold market had been so saturated that it still had not fully recovered twelve years after Mansa Musa's fabulous hajj" (McKissack, Patricia and Fredrick McKissack. *The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa*, p. 62).

There were other long-lasting results of Mansa Musa's hajj. He started new trade routes and encouraged more trade with Muslim traders by bringing back four sharifs (descendants of Muhammad) to live in Mali. He also

established lasting relationships with other rulers whom he had encountered during his hajj. Because he had made his pilgrimage so memorable, many travelers and traders spread the story of the wealthy and very generous king to others. According to Pancella, word spread to Europe and even to parts of Asia (Pancella, Peggy. *Mansa Musa: Ruler of Ancient Mali*, p. 21). It was this pilgrimage that truly awakened other parts of the world to Mali's riches. In 1339 it was Angelino Dulcert of Palma, Spain who designed a sea chart accentuating the location of the Mali empire and referring to its monarch as the Saracen king in whose mines lay an abundance of gold (Thomas, Hugh. *The Slave Trade*, p. 51). A Spanish map created in 1375 called the Catalan Atlas included an illustration of Mansa Musa holding a gold nugget in his hand. Many traders came to West Africa to seek their fortune after seeing this map.

Additional relevant resources:

The Travels of Ibn Battuta--A Virtual Tour, Chapter Two

Muslim by Richard Tames

Muslim Festivals Throughout the Year by Anita Ganeri.

'Pilgrimage to Mecca', by Muhammad Abdul-Rauf (National Geographic Magazine)

In what ways was Mansa Musa a good ruler?

As students learn about the ancient empire of Mali they will see the critical role that its ruler played in its prosperity. In their readings I expect my students will discover that Mansa Musa led his people with strength and tolerance. Although Muslim himself, he respected the traditional African religions that many of his people especially in the countryside, followed and he never forced people to convert to Islam. He was responsible for expanding the empire of Mali, having led many conquests including that of the Ghana empire. Finding himself thus in control of the gold trade, he worked hard not only to maintain but to increase it.

In order to strengthen trade with the Arab world, he made Islam the official religion of the Mali empire. According to David C. Conrad, during the height of Mansa Musa's rule, Mali consisted of much more territory than the empire of Ghana ever had and as a result there were many more resources to exploit (Conrad. David C. *Empires of Medieval West Africa: Ghana, Mali, and Songhay*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2005, p. 40). He divided his kingdom up into provinces, each led by a governor and towns, each led by a mayor. He effectively employed his army to police the trade routes and to keep the peace. Mansa Musa freely spent his wealth in the building of mosques and palaces, using the services of a Spanish Arab architect, Abu Ishaq al-Sahili, who initiated an architectural style new to that region of the world. Mansa Musa also contributed to the development of Timbuktu, which later became a great center of learning and trade. Conrad states that the 25 years in which he reigned, 1312-1337, were "thought of as the golden age of Mali" (Conrad. David C. *Empires of Medieval West Africa: Ghana, Mali, and Songhay*, p. 36).

Additional relevant resources:

West African Kingdoms--Empires of Gold and Trade by Katherine Reece

Ghana, Mali, Songhay by Kenny Mann

The Empire of Mali by Carol Thompson

Mali Land of Gold & Glory by Joy Masoff

Ancient West African Kingdoms: Ghana, Mali & Songhai by Mary Quigley

<http://www.fcps.edu/Kings ParkES/technology/mali>

<http://mali/pwnet.org/history/>.

Ibn Battuta Travels to Mali

Let us now resume our travels with our world traveler. Ibn Battuta spent four months in a town named Sijilmasa waiting for the winter to come and the caravan to arrive. During this time he bought some camels, expecting these 'ships of the desert' to serve him well.

Why are camels so well-suited to desert travel?

It was in the second century A.D. that the camel was first introduced to North Africa. The use of the camel revolutionized travel across the desert at that time. These creatures are well-adapted to desert life. Because of the powerful muscles in their upper legs, they were able to carry heavy loads (more than 330 pounds) for long distances (and at a faster speed than any other beast of burden available at that time) through the desert.

Not bothered by the dry heat of the desert, camels can go without drinking water for up to nine days. A camel uses the fat stored in the large hump on its back to provide energy for its muscles. A camel's eyelashes, ears and nose effectively block out the sand, its bushy eyebrows provide shade for the eyes, and its cushioned feet do not cause it to sink in the desert sands as it walks. Camels are truly amazing animals.

Additional relevant resources:

Camels--Ships of the Desert by Eulalia Garcia

Camels by Judith Jango-Cohen

Camel by Caroline Arnold

www.camelfarm.com/camels_about.html.

Heading Toward Walata

And so the caravan began its trek across the sands of the largest desert in the world, heading for Walata. After 25 days of difficult travel, they arrived in a major salt-mining settlement named Taghaza. Ibn Battuta refers to it as "a village with no good in it" (Hamdun, Said and Noel King. *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*. London: Rex Collings, 1975, p. 23) and describes how the slaves living there mine the salt and load big slabs of it on each camel to be later traded for gold. These slaves live under despicable conditions and are given only dates and camel meat for sustenance. Ibn Battuta recounts his party's continual search for decent drinking water while there, complaining that it was bitter tasting and so often fly-ridden. During his ten-day stay there, Ibn Battuta also relays his experience of sleeping in a house and praying in a mosque both made completely of salt except for the roofs, which were made of camel skin.

The caravan must now prepare for the most arduous part of the journey, a 500-mile stretch across the desert to Walata. Along this route there is only one watering point (Tasarahla). Dunn tells of their great fortune in finding intermittent pools of water left from a winter rainfall that helped sustain them along the way. Having water is of great concern in desert travel, and Ibn Battuta describes how everyone spent time at this oasis repairing their waterbags, filling them and stitching covers on them in order to protect them from the hot desert winds.

Also of great concern, was not getting lost in the desert where one would quickly perish. Ibn Battuta tells us of a man named Ibn 'Adi who lagged behind the caravan after having an argument with another man. Because of all the blowing sands that erased any trails, he quickly lost his way and was never heard from again. It was essential to have a competent guide from the local tribe of the Musafa to act as takshif or scout. His job was to go on ahead of the caravan to Walata and inform the merchants there of their impending arrival so that they could meet them with fresh water. These merchants would prepare a convoy of water-bearers who would travel for 4 days to meet the caravan. Ibn Battuta describes the many dangers such a scout faces, including battling with devils (jinn) and mirages along the way. If the takshif perishes while on his mission to find water, chances are the caravan will perish too.

In what ways was travel across the Sahara Desert hazardous?

According to Simon Scoones, "The Sahara is a place of contrasting landscapes" (Scoones, Simon. *The Sahara and Its People*. New York: Thomson Learning, 1993, p. 5). Fifteen percent consists of sand dunes, another fifteen percent consists of rocky plateaus and seventy percent consists of gravel plains. The northern expanse is a combination of dry coastal scrubland and desert land where there is little evidence of life. In contrast, on a strip of land along the desert's southern edge known as the Sahel, the land is semi-arid and there are areas of dry woodland, dry wooded grassland and even mountain vegetation. Because the conditions are still very harsh there, living things have had to make adaptations in order to survive. Temperatures in the Sahara Desert are often very extreme, rising to 110 degrees Fahrenheit in daytime during the winter season and 130 degrees Fahrenheit during the hot season. However, at night, especially in the winter months, it is often below freezing due to the sparseness of clouds.

Additional hazards that caravans faced as they traveled on the trade routes included horrible sandstorms capable of creating mile-high walls of sand caused by hot harmattan winds (dry, dusty desert Northeast winds in West Africa), nomadic thieves lying in wait along the way, and arduous travel over huge sand dunes. In Scoones' book there is a map showing the oases to be found along these trade routes. According to this author, "Nomads would sometime act as the gangsters of the desert. They were paid protection money for promising safe passage to travelers between oases" (Scoones, Simon. *The Sahara and Its People*, p. 13).

Additional relevant resources:

The Sahara Desert--The Biggest Desert by Aileen Weintraub.

www.lexiorient.com/e.o/sahara.htm

www.danheller.com/sahara.htm

Who were the Tuareg?

The Tuareg are a nomadic people known as 'the nobles of the desert' who live in northern Africa. Being

nomadic, the Tuareg move from place to place to find new sources of water and places for their livestock to graze on. In her book Ann Carey Sabbah explains, "The Tuareg were used to moving about freely without thinking about national boundaries" (Sabbah, Ann Carey. Tuaregs. Mankato, Minn.: Smart Apple Media, 2000, p. 22).

Long ago the ancestors of the Tuareg, known as Berbers, lived along northern Africa's coast. In the 8th century, however, when the Arab invaders conquered North Africa they moved south en masse to the Sahara Desert where their numbers grew and they moved out to other parts of the desert. Sabbah informs us, "By the 14th century the Tuareg were the most powerful people in the desert of northern Africa" (Sabbah, Ann Carey. Tuaregs, p. 21). They were the gatekeepers of the most important trade routes across North Africa and they led many caravans transporting precious goods and slaves across the rugged desert terrain to the Mediterranean coast. It was said that some of their caravans were very large and included thousands of camels, their most prized possession.

Additional relevant resources:

www.calacademy.org/exhibits/africa/exhibit/sahara.

www.pbs.org/wnet/africa/explore/sahara

African Journey by John Chiasson

Arrival in Walata

At the end of April, the caravan arrived safely in Walata and an event occurred there that almost caused Ibn Battuta to head straight back to Fez. Keep in mind that Ibn Battuta was used to being treated quite generously by his hosts and was therefore greatly insulted by the meager offering of anli (millet mixed with honey and yogurt) that his Malian host, a local governor, offered him. He was also put off by the indirect way (through an interlocutor) that this Malian official spoke to him. As Dunn describes, what irritated Ibn Battuta was "this inclination of the Sudanese to combine Islamic practice with regional custom." He felt that Malians should follow normal standards of Muslim protocol and not have "rulers speaking to fellow believers through ritual heralds or entertaining visiting 'ulama with small dishes of porridge" (Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta--A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*, p. 299).

Onward to the Mali Capital

Ibn Battuta, however, did elect to stay (and in fact remained in Mali for 50 days), deciding to travel southward along the Niger River to the capital of Mali to the palace of the king, Mansa Sulayman. Ibn Battuta was not impressed by this ruler, comparing the generous and virtuous ways of his brother, Mansa Musa with his, saying, "He is a miserly king, not much giving is to be expected of him" (Hamdun, Said and Noel King. *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, pp. 34-35). The hospitality gift sent by the king consisted of 3 circular pieces of bread, a piece of fried beef and a container of sour milk! Our traveler had expected much better treatment and says when preparing to receive the king's gifts, "I stood up, thinking they were robes of honour and things of value. . .When I saw them I laughed and wondered a lot at their weakness of mind and their magnifying of the insignificant" (Hamdun, Said and Noel King. *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, p. 35).

Ibn Battuta devised a way to receive better treatment by later presenting himself before the king, boldly criticizing his lack of hospitality over a 4-month period and comparing it with the elaborate receptions that he

had received by rulers in so many other places that he had traveled to. Thus, arousing the king's vain desire to cultivate a legacy, Ibn Battuta asks, "What shall I say about you before the sultans?" (Hamdun, Said and Noel King. *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, p. 36). From then on he was treated better, given a house, an allowance and a supply of gold upon his departure.

Ibn Battuta spent a little over eight months in the capital. Dunn accurately describes his attitude toward the Malian culture as being one of ambivalence. He praised the ruler's government which brought both justice and stability to the empire and he was also very impressed by the piousness with which the Muslim Malians prayed and studied the Qur'an. However, he never became tolerant of the ways in which many Malians continued to practice African traditions. Among the examples that Dunn mentions are the demeaning ways in which the king's subjects bow before him, beating the ground and throwing dust and ashes on their heads, females slaves and servants appearing naked in the court, and royal poets dressed in ridiculous costumes of feathers and bird masks (Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta--A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*, p. 303).

Ibn Battuta's Legacy

In February of 1353, our now-weary traveler began his trek back home and arrived in Fez in January of 1354. All of his travels, including this final journey were later to be recorded by the court-appointed scribe by the name of Ibn Juzayy in the *Rihla*. Sadly, for all of his efforts, Ibn Battuta was not appreciated by his contemporaries during his lifetime. It was only when his *Rihla* was rediscovered by European Orientalists in the 19th century that Ibn Battuta and his momentous undertaking received its due attention. Without it, in fact, we would not have been able to take this journey.

Section III: Designing a Readers Theater Play

For a long time fluency, the ability to read smoothly, accurately and with expression, was a neglected component of a balanced literacy program. Now it has taken center stage because of its strong link to reading comprehension. One of the ways to build fluency is through Readers Theater. Jo Worthy defines Readers Theater as "an instructional approach in which students read a book (or hear a book read aloud) and then perform a play (the book written in script form) by reading the script aloud to an audience" (Worthy, Jo. *Readers Theater for Building Fluency*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2005, p. 12). Readers Theater provides both a purpose for reading (presenting a literature piece to an audience) and an opportunity for students to engage in the beneficial practice of repeated readings (Worthy, Jo. *Readers Theater for Building Fluency*, p. 12). It is great fun and a highly motivating form of reading. The script can be written to accommodate varying levels of reading ability and in that sense allows teachers to provide differentiated instruction to their students.

For this unit I plan to use the tale of Sundiata: The Lion King of Mali, who is credited with founding the Mali empire. Teachers will find a detailed account of this epic story, as told by the Mande people, in Conrad's book (Conrad, David C. *Empires of Medieval West Africa: Ghana, Mali, and Songhay*, pp. 34-35). I have written a Readers Theatre play (See Appendix B) adapted from David Wisniewski's book entitled *Sundiata--King of Mali*, which I plan to have my students perform to a larger audience of students and which will serve as a culminating activity. Alison Black and Anna M. Stave offer many valuable tips on moving from practice to performance of a play in their book *A Comprehensive Guide to Readers Theatre*. A step-by-step description of preparing to present this play is outlined in Lesson Plan III.

Lesson Plan I

Objective: To improve comprehension by piquing students' interest in and focusing their attention on key concepts of the unit before they begin their readings.

Materials: Copies of the anticipation guide (see Appendix A), pencils, chart paper, markers

Procedure:

- 1) Distribute copies of the anticipation guide to each student and say, "On this paper you will find many statements that I want you to read, reflect on and then give me your opinion on. Many of the ideas introduced here you will be reading about later.
- 2) Read and go over the directions found on the top of the guide.
- 3) After the students have completed the anticipation guide, hold a discussion on each point. The teacher records the main points on large chart paper to be displayed in the room and to be revisited regularly throughout the duration of the unit.
- 4) At the unit's completion, return to this guide. Have the students reread each statement and mark their responses in the 'After' reading column. Students will then discuss the reasons for any changes in response that they have made.

(This lesson was adapted from Laura Robb's lesson on pp. 114-115.)

Lesson Plan II

Objective: To encourage students to wonder and ask questions about the unit topics before, during and after their reading.

Materials: Notebooks, pencils, posterboard, markers

Procedure:

- 1) After briefly introducing a subtopic of the unit (i.e., the Tuareg) and allowing students to browse through relevant books and magazines, ask them to pair up and talk together about the subject for 5 minutes. Following this, the students share their ideas with the larger group.
- 2) The teacher then distributes the inquiry notebooks to each student saying, "I'm sure you have been wondering about many of the ideas we have been talking about and you have some questions about what you have seen in the books and magazines that you have been browsing through. Now I want you to write those questions down in this notebook.
- 3) The teacher can suggest such sentence starters as:

I wonder why

I still don't understand

What if

What would happen if

Is it really true that

How did this affect

Can this be compared to

What did other people think about this

4) The teacher then collects the notebooks and writes the students' questions and wonderings on large poster-board, to be used in discussion after a particular reading or as topics for student research.

(This lesson was adapted from Laura Robb's lesson on p. 75)

Lesson Plan III

Objective: To practice expressive reading of a Readers Theater play in preparation for its performance. To use one's voice and movement to entertain.

Materials: Copies of the Sundiata play (see Appendix B) for each student.

Procedure:

- 1) The teacher reads the play aloud providing a fluent and expressive model while the students following along silently.
- 2) In the play's second reading, students read it aloud in a effort to gain familiarity with the play in its entirety.
- 3) The teacher then designates which student will read which part. Each student's play has his/her parts highlighted for easy recognition. The third reading takes place with each student reading his/her own part.
- 4) The teacher then directs students to go off to practice their parts by themselves. Meanwhile, she circulates to listen in and advise. The following aspects should be considered and discussed with the student:

Where will you pause for the purpose of dramatic effort?

What kind of tone will you use?

What are the punctuation marks telling you?

What facial expressions or gestures will help you to express the ideas?

5) As students grow more proficient in reading their lines with expression, the teacher intercedes less.

6) The group then comes back together and the whole play is read in sequence. The teacher encourages the cast of the play to provide feedback and suggestions to each other.

It is important to emphasize that these parts are not to be memorized, that the students hold the scripts in their hands while performing and that no costumes or props are required.

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Appendix A

Anticipation Guide

DIRECTIONS: Read each statement below. In the BEFORE column please put an A if you agree and a D if you disagree. At the end of the unit, you will reread these statements and put your response in the AFTER column.

(table available in print form)

Appendix B

The Story of Sundiata--A Readers Theater Play

Characters:

Narrator 1: Sassouma

Narrator 2: Sundiata

Hunters (2): Balla

Sogolon: Sumanguru

King Maghan: Messengers (2)

Narrator 1: Listen carefully and you will learn the famous story passed down by our ancestors of a great king, brave and true.

Narrator 2: His name was Sundiata and for reasons you will soon find out he was known as the Lion King of Mali

Narrator 1: There was once a powerful king named Maghan Kon Fatta. One day while sitting in court with his advisors, he saw two hunters come walking toward him with a hunchbacked woman walking between them. This scene looked exactly like a dream he had recently had and he felt his heart start to pound.

King Maghan: (gasps and says) What do you want here?

Hunters: (bowing before the king) Oh might king, we come from the land of Do, where a fierce buffalo had destroyed much of our land and placed fear in the hearts of our people. Finally, we destroyed this fearsome creature and our king has sent us to present you with a most powerful gift.

King Maghan: And what gift might that be? I see only a crippled woman standing before me.

Hunters: Your majesty, don't be deceived by appearances. Her name is Sogolon Kedjou and people say that inside of her she holds the buffalo's brave spirit.

Narrator 2: King Maghan thought hard about this woman who stood hunched over before him. She could produce a worthy son, one who had within him the double strength of a lion, like him, and a buffalo, like her.

Narrator 1: And so they were married and King Maghan's love for Sogolon grew and grew. A year later Sundiata was born and the people of the kingdom rejoiced.

Narrator 2: That is, everyone except the king's first wife, Sassouma Berete.

Sassouma: (scowling) Why all this celebration? The king already has a son, my son! It is he who will be the next king!

Narrator 1: But soon Sassouma realized that she could rejoice about something. . .

Sassouma: What's this? The king's new son cannot speak or walk? Ha! He will never be king!

Narrator 2: For seven years Sundiata dragged himself along through the palace. No medicine would heal him and both the king and Sogolon had heavy hearts.

Bella: Your majesty, be patient. Think of the small sprout that has to face many storms before it grows into a strong and sturdy tree. Sundiata will also grow strong, not according to your time-line, but according to his own.

Narrator 1: The next day King Maghan called for his son, Sundiata.

King Maghan: My son, my life is almost over. You are my heir and I want right now to give you a special gift, my griot, Balla Fasseke. Through his stories he will teach you all about the history of our people and the laws of life. Whatever you are destined for, may it come to pass.

Narrator 2: His son then spoke for the first time.

Sundiata: Balla, you are my griot.

Narrator 1: The king sat back in his throne and was satisfied.

King Maghan: (smiling) Now I will prepare my son to be the next ruler. He is ready!

Narrator 2: Very sadly, when King Maghan died, things quickly changed and the council of elders chose not Sundiata but the son of Sassouma Berete to be the next king.

Sassouma: (standing over Sogolon and teasing) Ha! It appears that a walking boy--my son, is a more suitable choice for a king than a crawling lion--your son!

Narrator 1: When Sundiata saw his mother crying he called his griot to him.

Sundiata: Run to the master smith and bring me back an iron rod!

Narrator 2: Balla returned and handed the rod to Sundiata. Slowly and with great determination he lifted himself up to his feet, bending the rod as he did so. Then he pushed it away and stood by himself.

Balla: (shouting) People, make way! You can see now that the lion is walking!

Narrator 1: Sundiata had found his strength and many were amazed. Queen Sassouma became very worried and planned many ways to try and weaken him. When Sundiata was 10 years old, Sassouma sent his beloved griot away from Mali to the court of Sossa, where an evil king named Sumanguru lived. Sundiata felt both angry and sad about losing his friend.

Narrator 2: But life was quickly becoming very dangerous for Sundiata and his mother.

Sogolon: My son, we must leave our home now before we are hurt by the queen. She hates us with all of her heart! When you are grown, you will return to Mali and make everything right again.

Narrator 1: So mother and son left behind all that they knew and loved.

Narrator 2: For seven years they traveled from place to place. No ruler allowed them to stay long on their land because they feared the queen would seek revenge.

Narrator 1: During this time, however, Sundiata grew in wisdom and strength. He never forgot about his long lost friend, Balla, who remained living in Sumanguru's expanding kingdom where people grew more and more unhappy under his harsh rule.

Narrator 2: Sundiata and his mother, who was becoming very tired and sick, were finally allowed to stay in a city called Mema. In fact, the king there grew to admire Sundiata's courage and saw that he would be a great leader one day.

Narrator 1: And so he decided to make Sundiata his heir to the throne and taught him all he knew about government and fighting battles.

Narrator 2: One day two messengers from Mali came to Mema, insisting on speaking to Sundiata.

Messengers: Oh son of lion and buffalo, please come home! The evil sorcerer king Sumanguru has invaded Mali. Our king and queen have run off, leaving our people without a leader to guide them. Come and claim the throne of your father! There is no time to waste!

Sogolon: You must go now, my son, to fulfill your destiny!

Narrator 1: Sundiata left immediately, equipped with half of the army that belonged to the king of Mema. As he journeyed home, he stopped at each kingdom along the way and gathered more soldiers to fight with him. It was said that the horses' hooves from his huge army sounded like thunder for miles around.

Narrator 2: All at once Balla appeared at Sundiata's side.

Balla: (hugging him) I have just escaped from the king's palace. I had hoped that by following Sumanguru's army, I would find you. All these years I have pretended to agree with this cruel ruler and in this way I was able to discover his weakness. (Holding up an arrow) On this arrow's tip is the tana of Sumanguru. It is a charm that this man believes will cause him to lose his power. All it has to do is touch him. Take this into battle with him (hands him the arrow).

Narrator 1: And so he did. When Sundiata saw the sorcerer-king standing on a hill, he drew his bow and let the arrow fly.

Narrator 2: The arrow just grazed Sumanguru's shoulder but it was enough. The evil king saw the tana on it, cried out and galloped away to a dark cave.

Sumanguru: (looking around him, eyes wide with fear) Oh great powers, do not allow me to fall into Sundiata's hands! (He then freezes).

Narrator1: It was then that this sorcerer-king turned into stone and became one with the wall of the cave. He was never seen or heard of again. Without their leader, his army was quickly defeated.

Narrator 2: Sundiata returned to Mali and everyone cheered. All 12 kings who had supported him in battle swore their eternal allegiance to him.

Narrator 1: Sundiata finally spoke.

Sundiata: It was hatred that drove me away from my home because I was looked upon as a weakling, a child who could only crawl and who could never rule. Now I have returned to be your king! From now on, no one shall interfere with the destiny of another. Everyone will find his place in my kingdom!

Narrator 2: And so Mali prospered and grew under the wise and loving leadership of Sundiata, the Lion King.

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