



## **Traveling with Ibn Battuta and the Plague through the Islamic World, China, Europe, and Mexico, 1325-1350**

Curriculum Unit 07.02.11

by Brad Magrey

### **Overview of Unit**

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This is a unit designed for 7th or 8th grade students of mixed ability levels.

However, it could easily be adapted to older students since much of the material is adult reading level. It will appeal to the students' interests and challenge their perceptions of religions and other cultures. It meets many standards of both the Language Arts and Social Studies Curriculums. The unit examines four civilizations in the world within a brief time period, 1325 to 1350. It is set up like a travel adventure, complete with maps, itineraries, pirates, and hardships. It will begin with the travels of Ibn Battuta, the Muslim scholar from Tangiers, and then it will explore other areas of the world that he did not visit. I have designed it for a Language Arts class, heavy on writing requirements, but it could easily be used in Social Studies. The major travel stops are as follows:

- Ibn Battuta at Mecca in 1326.
- Ibn Battuta in Guangzhou, China, in 1346.
- His confrontation with the Black Death in Damascus. We will then move with the plague bacillus to London, in 1349, where it was wreaking havoc.
- The Aztec founding of Tenochtitlan, 1350, in present day Mexico City.

Since I teach in an arts magnet school, there will also be an Arts Connection to each of the four locations. Students will examine various artifacts from the period. These sections could be omitted, but I'm sure they'll increase student interest in the unit.

Along the journey, students will keep a journal; create maps and illustrations; deal with the travel problems of

the period; learn about religions, governments, and social structures of the time; learn what food and accommodations were available; and deal with the hygiene and difficulties of life during this period. Both essential and optional resources are included. For each of the four major stops, I will connect our imaginary destinations to the present, discussing the following issues:

- 1 The politics of modern Mecca and crowd control disasters.
- 2 The problems created by an occupying government.
- 3 The possibilities of plague today, including the AIDS crisis and Ebola.
- 4 The remnants of Tenochtitlan which poke out of Mexico City, and how the building of the city on landfill contributed to the devastating earthquake of 1985.

The entire unit will take eighteen days to complete, but it can easily be broken into three shorter units: Ibn Battuta in Mecca and China, days 2 through 8; the plague in London, days 9 through 11; and the founding of Tenochtitlan, days 12 through 14. One of the unit segments could be incorporated into a larger history unit on England, for example.

Students will gain insight into a life without conveniences or good medical care, as well as increase their knowledge of geography and world cultures while improving their reading, writing, and analytical skills.

## **Historical perspective: why choose this time period for a teaching unit?**

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The early fourteenth century offers a look at a world far removed from Democracy, the only government system most students even remotely understand. It will expose them to Arab kingdoms both past and present. They will see how China evolved into the country it is today. The trip to England will show them a country dealing with a medical crisis. The visit to Tenochtitlan, offering a key contrast to the other three, will expose them to a civilization that developed in isolation and was effectively wiped off the earth in a short period of time.

The intent of this unit is not to spend a great deal of time on government and historical facts, but to give the students a *feel* of what it must have been like to live in the time period, to travel by primitive methods, and to live without modern comforts. I also want to give them a feel for the study of history and geography.

The greatest difficulty, of course, is that history does not do a good job of remembering the common people, since records were generally kept by the literate few, who tended to be upper class, and most writing was about the powerful and the wealthy. Students will need to be imaginative in order to construct journal entries from limited information.

## Rationale

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I teach 7th grade Language Arts at Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School in New Haven. Since 35% of the student body comes from over twenty surrounding towns, it is a school of great ethnic diversity. The student body is roughly 55% black, 25% Hispanic, and 20% white. Within this group, the range of ability is great as well; in every class, I have students reading at far below and far above grade level.

Though these factors rarely manifest themselves as social problems, an obvious fact is that these students come from wildly different backgrounds: affluence and poverty, urban violence and rural tranquility, strong home support systems and very little home support. Students can sit next to each other and have no concept of each other's life style.

Most of the students consider themselves worldly, but they are generally unaware of life beyond their own community, and even the poorest tend to have a snobby, isolationist attitude about the world around them. Generally, they have no concept of a time without Ipods, video games, cell phones, and color TV's. They sit next to each other in class, each vaguely realizing that there's a world outside of their little ones, but never seeming to venture into it. They tend to think that they share no commonality with generations who came before them, or even with people who are even slightly older. It's an attitude that could cripple their ability to grow intellectually. They also exhibit a weak knowledge of geography, politics, social structures, religion (even their own), and economics. With all of these factors, what's a teacher to do?

In spite of these challenges, I have found that students can become very interested in learning about places and times that are foreign to them. I thus decided to take a limited period of time - 1325 to 1350 - and explore selected aspects of four different societies around the world. I chose this time period because Ibn Battuta's travels took place during this time, and, when I looked at different parts of the world, I found that intriguing events were taking place around the globe. This period is also recent enough to provide ample resource material and ancient enough to offer political and social structures which sharply contrast with the world (or worlds) my students know. When we study each time period, activities will include videos, drawings, maps, artifacts and other audio-visual aids which will supply students with solid understanding of the material.

Ibn Battuta struck me as an ideal guide for my students. The Gibbs translation of his travels contains language and incidents which are so colorful, action-packed, and even startling that students can't help being transfixed (for a fine example, see the outrageous cure for snakebite in the lesson plans for day 2). His tales of caravan travel and surviving a shipwreck are equally riveting, and students will enjoy placing themselves in his situation and writing about their adventures.

Although Ibn Battuta's travels will serve as the anchor of this unit, I will include two cities which he did not see - London and Tenochtitlan - because the inclusion of these cities allows students to look at regions of the world with vastly different religions and social structures. The Black Death bacillus will be the students' travel guide from Damascus to London.

This writing centered teaching unit will run for eighteen days, during which the students will construct a journal of their travels around the world, 1326-1350. It will include where they had stayed, how they had gotten there, what they had eaten, what they had done, and what they had discovered. Each of the four major travel stops will have a journal sheet where students will record information about the destination (government, religions, social organization, employment, etc.). Students will be given or read selected

interesting passages that discuss pertinent information for the city, and the information will be discussed. They will then create first person journal entries from a selection of topics. Besides their own writings, the journals will include maps and illustrations of their own creation as well as photos taken from internet or other sources. The finished product will be an organized snapshot of the world in the early fourteenth century. Their learning will be reflected in their observations about other societies and in their ability to connect this knowledge with their own world. Assembling this work in the form of a journal will also give students a sense of ownership of the project.

Before the journey begins, students will be given a travel itinerary, the first for April, 1326, when Ibn Battuta left Damascus for Mecca. They will receive itineraries for the four chief destinations. Not all of Ibn Battuta's travels will be covered, and we will then consider ways he could have possibly gotten to the last two destinations, using the technology of the time. In each of the four major destinations, a connection will be made to the city or area today. The four major stops are listed in the overview and discussed in detail in the lesson plans.

This unit covers a lot of material and ideas, but I believe it affords the students a great opportunity to immerse themselves into times and places distant from their own. In the process, they will gain an appreciation for the fact that life before the age of technology was rough and often precarious. Through written work and testing, they will show that they understand the basic concepts of the unit and demonstrate increased understanding of geography, early cultures, religion, and modes of travel. This is, more than anything, a unit designed to increase their awareness of the world around them, both in the past and the present. It offers a snapshot in time, and they will understand that, even though the world changes drastically, people of all places and times want and need the same things, even if their means of getting them are vastly different.

## Daily Lesson Plans and Activities

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The teaching unit's daily activities are listed below. Some of the video material - and even the written material - needs some editing due to content. Both the Black Death and Aztec films show paintings and illustrations with extensive female nudity - not acceptable in middle school - so films have to be edited, and I note the parts that I use. Mentioning Ibn Battuta's countless wives, concubines, and slave girls is also out of bounds, necessitating censorship of some passages that are otherwise excellent and perfectly usable. One would think that such a pious man, who appreciated modesty in women yet showed such disregard for them on a personal basis, would supply fodder for great conversations, but that can't happen in the seventh grade, at least in Connecticut public schools.

When specific passages from sources are used, the sources are listed at the beginning of each day's activities. I also give daily Do Nows, brief exercises which are designed to settle students down and give them useful information (and whet their appetites) for the day's activities.

### Pretest, Trip Preparation, and Grading Rubric

#### *Day One*

(Resource: [http://novaonline.nv.cc.va.us/eli/evans/his135/EXAMS/map\\_printable.html](http://novaonline.nv.cc.va.us/eli/evans/his135/EXAMS/map_printable.html)). Do Now Question:

Imagine that you are traveling across the desert in 1326. What would you be wearing, and what would you have to protect yourself from the sun? Answer: You would need to be almost completely covered, since sunscreen doesn't exist.

Students will be given a pretest to find out what they know about several terms and geographic locations. Geographic locations they will try to locate on a map (get blanks from novaonline website) will include Mecca, China, London, Damascus, and Mexico City. Terms to define will include caravan, Hajj, Islam, plague, monarchy, bacillus, aqueduct, Buddhism, and other terms. There will also be questions, such as these: what forms of government existed in 1325? How did people travel? What religions existed? They will be given the same brief test at the end of the unit to measure their learning. This will take twenty minutes.

Students will then be given a very brief outline of their journey, and they will be asked to list the items they will put in their backpack, understanding that they will be carrying their backpack around the world and cannot count on assistance in transporting the pack for much of their land travel. They can only take what would be available and suitable at the time. The men would not wear pants, for example, anywhere but in London. No electronics, deodorant, Kleenex, lip balm, sunscreen, or other modern conveniences can go into it. This packing list is used so that students remain acutely aware that during their journey they will lack many of the things that they take for granted. They will complete their list for homework.

### **Destination One: Mecca, 1326**

#### *Day Two*

(Resources: Dunn, *Travels*, pp. 66-9; Azzam, *Valley of Doom*, pp. 2-7; Gibb, *Travels*, Vol. 4, pp. 948-9; <http://geography.about.com/library/blank/blxmideeast.htm>). Do Now question: In 1326, what do you think you might do to save yourself if a poisonous snake in the desert bites you? The question will be answered by the end of the class.

Students will be given yellow paper for their travel journal. There will also be given a cover page, titled *Travel Journal*, which will be divided into four sections labeled Mecca, China, London, and Tenochtitlan. It will be their responsibility to draw a diagram or picture that represents each of the four cities. The journal sheets will be loose colored paper (most of it lined) that they will collect in a folder and ultimately assemble in a binder. The paper is loose because some of the journal entries will be given as homework; realistically, I know that some students will repeatedly lose or ruin all of their work if allowed to take the journal home. They will have school time to assemble the entries. Students will also be told that, periodically through the trip, they will write about the changes which have taken place between the fourteenth century and now. These pages will not be part of their journals, but will be part of the project grade.

Each student will be given a rubric explaining the scope of their project, with grades for journal entries and journal assembly, modern connections, maps, illustrations, and the project posttest.

They will then be given their travel itinerary for the entire trip. The first destination will be Mecca, departing from Damascus in 1326.

Students will get a brief background of Ibn Battuta and the range of Muslim influence in the early fourteenth century. Ibn Battuta was a Muslim scholar who traveled about 75,000 miles in twenty-six years. His travels included the Arab Mediterranean region, northern Africa, China, and many islands. He made a conscious effort to visit only Muslim countries, since that was where he felt most comfortable and was most likely to get

sponsors to pay his way. He would sometimes teach at his various destinations as well.

They will have a map (from the geography website) on which they trace the journey of Ibn Battuta from Damascus to Mecca, and this will be part of their journal. Much of the class period will be spent examining means of transportation in those days, and we will particularly look at caravans to Mecca, including excerpts and quotes from IB's writing, particularly the explanation of a cure for snakebite. In this passage, a merchant named al-Hajj Zaiyan had stuck his hand in a hole and been bitten in the finger by a poisonous snake. Here's part of the passage I would use:

It was cauterized, but in the evening the pain grew worse. He cut the throat of a camel and put his hand in its stomach and left it there for a night. The flesh of his finger dropped off and he cut off his finger at the base (Gibb Vol. IV 949) .

Be sure to note that Islamic medicine was advanced for its day, and that this passage, though intriguing, does not suggest that the Islamic World was primitive.

In addition, quotes will be used to show the perils of caravan travel in the fourteenth century. Dunn's book, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, pp. 66-69, illustrates the difficulty of traveling long distances in hot weather without modern conveniences. Azzam's book for children, *Ibn Battuta in the Valley of Doom*, pp. 2-7, shows the fear pilgrims must have felt on the sometimes-fatal trip through the desert. We will discuss the time required for traveling, as well as the dangers and difficulties.

Students will be given the five tenets of Islam:

- 1 - FAITH - Belief in one God
- 2 - PRAYER - Five ritual prayers must be performed daily.
- 3 - ALMS - Care must be given to the poor.
- 4 - FASTING - Ramadan fasting is required from sunrise to sunset.
- 5 - PILGRIMAGE - If financially and physically able, each Muslim must take part in a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime.

Start the film, *Inside Mecca*. It's a fifty-two minute film; count on getting through just ten or fifteen minutes of it today. You might want to explain that the requirements for Hajj may seem harsh, but that we would discuss that after the film. The only part of the film which a teacher might consider omitting involves the slaughter of lambs. It occurs about ten minutes from the end of the film. While the viewer doesn't actually see throats being slit, it is fairly graphic.

For homework, students will create their first journal entry; it will describe their experience on a caravan:

either the rigors of the trip, a certain event which occurred on the caravan, or their relationships with fellow travelers.

### *Day Three*

(Resources: Dunn, *Travels*, pp. 75-9, Azzam, *Valley of Doom*, p. VI; *Inside Mecca*, National Geographic). Skip Do Now today due to the film length. Complete the film, and then ask if there are questions. Students are likely to react to hygiene issues (since pilgrims go so long without bathing) and then discuss the meaning of faith, and how different people express their faith. Ask them why there were no pictures of God in the movie, and then explain about the lack of idols in the religion, and how the God of Islam has no physical being or appearance. Talk about the concept of having no "graven images" and how Christianity interprets this commandment differently. Then discuss the sequence of the Hajj rituals, passing out a diagram of the process (or doing it on the board might be better). Then discuss *Inside Mecca*, which follows three modern, non-Arab Muslims through their experiences at the Hajj, and talk about the problems they came up against. We will then read brief passages discussing first hand experiences of Ibn Battuta.

For homework, students will write a journal entry about the three most surprising or interesting things they learned about Mecca or Islam, as either a pilgrim or an observer. Why did they find these facts interesting?

### *Day Four*

(Resources: National Geographic, Dec. 1991, pp. 6-49). Do now question: At Mecca, which of these foods could you not eat, and why? Lamb, pork, olives, tomatoes, corn, and onions. Answer: Muslims do not eat pork. Tomatoes and corn could not be eaten because the world outside of the Americas didn't know about them until after Columbus's voyages began over one hundred fifty years later.

Students can view parts of the film *Islam: Empire of Faith* (PBS) if there is a desire to do so. Continue class discussion on *Inside Islam*. Certainly the statements and behavior of the white, blond, fashion-conscious, PhD-holding American pilgrim will produce comments of skepticism, and that should lead to a lively discussion about the nature of faith.

Arts Connection: Use photos from the *National Geographic* Ibn Battuta article to show a great time-lapse photograph of pilgrims circling the Kaaba. Other pictures show how little has changed in some areas over the last seven centuries. Ask students what has changed; discuss the sheer number of pilgrims who attend the Hajj today.

For homework, students will write a second journal entry of an event at the Hajj in 1326. They can write this as either a participant or an observer. Though a person being there as an observer is unlikely, since "infidels" were not allowed in Mecca, I wouldn't (and couldn't) compel a student to see the event from the eyes of a Muslim. They could write about their overall impression or about a certain event; the stoning of the pillars or circling Kaaba seven times would probably be good choices. After seeing the film, I'm sure students will be fascinated by the crowds and by the rituals of the Hajj.

### *Day Five*

(Resources: Dunn, *Travels*, pp. 69 and 77; <http://milnet.com/mid-east-news/Religious-Differences-Sunnivvs-Shiite.html>; <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-history-mecca-deaths.htm>). Do Now question: Shiite and



Sunni Muslims have been warring with each other in Iraq long before the United States got involved. What is the difference between the two groups?

Today, we will examine the clashes between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, both then and now, and the roots of their differences. One option: show a brief passage from the film *Islam: Empire of Faith*, in which the philosophical clash is clearly delineated. The main difference is that Sunni Muslims believe that the first four caliphs - successors to Mohammed - properly took his place as leaders of the religion, and their heirs thus became leaders until the end of World War I, when the Ottoman Empire broke up. Shiites, on the other hand, believe that the legitimate leaders of the faith all descend from Ali, the fourth caliph, who descended directly from Mohammed. The clash between opposing camps, each of which thinks it has God on its side, continues today, both against each other and against outsiders, the "infidels." We will also examine how Mecca regulates its pilgrims today and the problems they have with crowd control, using the britishcouncil website especially. The Dunn book, pages 69 and 77, gives great descriptions of pilgrims bussing to the Hajj sites in modern times:

Many walk, but others travel in buses and cars along the multilane highway which winds out from the city. Saudi government helicopters circle overhead and crowd control experts monitor the proceedings from closed circuit television centers (Dunn 77) .

For homework, students will write their third journal entry, in which they leave Mecca and write what they learned about themselves at the Hajj.

## **Destination Two: China, April, 1346**

### *Day Six*

(Resources: Dunn, *Travels*, pp. 241-61, including map on 256; <http://www.freewebs.com/graham7760/thedarkages.htm>; <http://z.about.com/d/geography/1/0/Q/K/china.jpg>; <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sultan/archeology2.html> ). Do Now question: What do you think sailing ships looked like in the 1300's? Did they have sails or oars or both? Answer: we know they had sails and oars, but we don't know what all of the boats looked like. We know a lot about the Viking ships. A wreck which was found off the coast of South Korea dates from the Yuan Dynasty and tells us a lot about Chinese ships. We really don't know exactly what many of the vessels looked like before the 1400's.

The class today includes a very brief summary of the twenty years between Ibn Battuta's Mecca pilgrimage and his arrival in China, and it's the one big time gap in our travels. Students will be given blank black and white maps ([z.about.com](http://z.about.com)) which they will use to trace his route in China. Some islands will be drawn in as well. The teacher can use the map of page 256 of the Dunn book as the source. This map will become part of their journals. It must be noted that many scholars believe that Ibn Battuta never went to Peking (Beijing), Hang Zhou, and other cities. The class will discuss the factors which make it appear that parts of Ibn Battuta's travels to China were fabricated; they were possibly based on reports from others. This class will, in part, be a discussion of how historical reports may be extremely inaccurate due to intentional misrepresentation, by exaggerating the amount of ground covered, by faulty memory, or by outright plagiarism.

Emphasis will be placed on means of transportation. Students will read passages relating to sea travel, which



was perilous even in the Mediterranean due to both unpredictable weather and pirates, and look at trade routes. The class will read information from the freewebs website. We will also read about Ibn Battuta's attack by pirates, on page 246-7 of the Dunn book:

Caught in the corsair's net, twelve ships suddenly converged on the lonely vessel and attacked at once. Clambering over the gunwales from all directions, the pirates quickly overpowered the hapless crew, and stripped the passengers of everything they had (Dunn 247) .

For homework, students will write journal entry four, in which they write about traveling on a ship in 1346. Their entry will reflect their understanding of travel in the fourteenth century.

### *Day Seven*

(Resources: Dunn, pp. 256-261, [http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/kennewick\\_man.html](http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/kennewick_man.html); <http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/history/yuan/index.htm>). Do Now question: What are Buddhism and Confucianism? Answer: Buddhism is a religion that believes that unselfishness and getting rid of earthly desires will bring you to enlightenment. It might be considered a godless religion. Confucianism involves a series of philosophical and ethical teachings; many do not consider it a religion.

Students will examine China at the time, seeing how the Yuan Dynasty saw the Mongols in charge, and foreigners held all positions of power. The chinatravelguide website has most of the information you need for today; you might want to copy and pass out several relevant pages. Muslims had a particularly great opportunity to get lucrative government jobs and had special privileges. Ibn Battuta was, in many ways, treated better than the natives. The Mongol four-class system, not surprisingly, placed the Mongols on top. Western and Central Asians were second, Northern Chinese were third, and last were the people living in South China. Ibn Battuta encountered Confucianism and Buddhism, which he considered heathen religions.

For homework, students will make a log entry as a traveler, indicating their observations about China and what they think it must be like to live in a government where all the rulers are foreigners. (Students must remember they are writing as foreigners and might be treated better than the native Chinese).

### *Day Eight*

(Resources: Dunn, Travels, pp. 270-273; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/18902.htm>. This U.S.; <http://www.kyrene.org/schools/brisas/sunda/arthistory/china.htm>; <http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/beijing/azureindex.htm>). Do Now: What do you know about the Chinese government today? Answer: Answers will vary, but we will talk about China's population, its one child policy, economy, government, and attitude toward religion. Using information from the listed websites, students will write about aspects of China's present day power and government (start in class, finish as homework).

Art Connection: I will show students pictures from my trip to China, talking about present day government, economy, society, and arts. Good sources for artwork to use are the kyrene and chinaarchitecture websites, though there are countless other websites and books which you might prefer.

## **Out of China to Syria**

Next, the student travelers will move to Damascus with Ibn Battuta, and they will be introduced to the devastation of the plague, and read how he remained healthy in spite of his surroundings. Passages from the Dunn book will be used, and we will again follow Ibn Battuta's travels on a map.

In Damascus, we will say goodbye to Ibn Battuta in good health, and tomorrow, we will hitch a ride with the Black Death bacillus, eventually arriving in England.

For homework, students will finish writing about some aspect of modern China.

## **Destination Three: London, 1349**

### *Day Nine*

(Resources: *Scourge of the Black Death*, The History Channel; [http://historymedren.about.com/od/theblackdeath/a/death\\_defined.htm](http://historymedren.about.com/od/theblackdeath/a/death_defined.htm)) . Do Now question: Imagine that you were living in the 1300's without modern medicine. If a disease came along and killed many people quickly, what ideas might you have about how the disease spread? Discuss answers, which may include punishment, the air, the water, etc.

Students will imagine that they are the plague bacillus. The class will trace its travel from Damascus, using the map from the historymedren website to see its spread. Most interesting is the intentional spread of the disease:

The Tartars besieged the city (of Kaffa) in November (of 1347), but their siege was cut short when the Black Death struck. Before breaking off their attack, however, they catapulted dead plague victims into the city in the hopes of infecting the residents (historymedron website 1) .

There is debate over whether this event actually succeeded in spreading the plague, but there is no question that the plague managed to rage through Europe in the next few years, using both land and sea routes.

The class will then view parts of the film *Scourge of the Black Death*. The film is divided into six sections. I would use "Doomsday Arrives," "Spreading Across Europe," and "Black Rats." Keep in mind that a degree of censorship is necessary for middle school; this film contains many paintings of nude plague victims and mentions how sexual promiscuity was a by-product of the plague. Texts from the internet can easily fill in any remaining holes in the story.

For homework students will respond to the film, answering this question: what were the three most important things you learned about plague from this film?

### *Day Ten*

(Resources: <http://www.medieval-life.net/black-death.htm>; <http://www.insecta-inspecta.com/fleas/bdeath>). Do Now question: what modern diseases have the potential to create plague-like conditions in the future? Talk

about Ebola, AIDS, avian bird flu, etc.

Material from several web sites will be used today, both for historical information and for modern articles on the possibilities of plague in the future. Emphasis will be placed on answering some key questions. How did sanitation of the time contribute to the spread and the virulence of the plague? How did social structures crumble as a result of the plague? How were trade routes a factor? How did doctors at the time explain the disease, and what did they do to try to cure people? The class will also examine how the people, trying to find a cause for the misery, persecuted Jews, and how others became Flagellants. If time is available, we may read articles about the discovery of mass plague graves during the twentieth century.

Art Connection: Show students some paintings, etchings, and architecture from England circa 1350. Include representations of Black Death as a creature, skeleton, etc.

For homework, students will write journal entries, imagining that they are in London at the time of the plague. Though not affected personally, they will write about its affects and their confusion over the deaths around them.

### *Day Eleven*

(Resources: [http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/kennewick\\_man.html](http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/kennewick_man.html); [http://www.humanities-interactive.org/splendors/ex048\\_08e.html](http://www.humanities-interactive.org/splendors/ex048_08e.html)). Do Now: The natives of North and South America have no proven connection to the rest of the world. How would you guess they might have gotten there, and from where? Ask for student responses, and then talk briefly about the possibilities: a land bridge from Asia to Alaska, Polynesian sailors. Mention Kennewick man, found in Washington State, the oldest dated remains on American soil at 8,400 years old.

The class will discuss ways one could possibly travel from England to Mexico. We will examine some of the ships used for transportation at the time.

Our next destination is Tenochtitlan, in present day Mexico City, where the Aztecs are establishing what will become one of the world's largest cities in 1350. There are, of course, no records of anyone from any Eurasian culture traveling to the city, but visiting this city provides us with an opportunity to examine a civilization that developed completely outside the influence of cultures beyond the Americas.

Students will be given a black and white copy of the Cortez map of the city (which is of course much later than our voyage; use humanities-interactive website) and color it for homework. This simple assignment will familiarize them with the layout of the city and prepare them for the next day's film.

Destination Four: Tenochtitlan, in present day Mexico City, 1350

### *Day Twelve*

(Resources: The Aztec Empire, The History Channel; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenochtitlan>; [http://www.common-place.org/vol-03/no-04/mexico city/](http://www.common-place.org/vol-03/no-04/mexico%20city/); <http://www.mexicocity.com.mx/history1.html>; <http://www.differentworld.com/mexico/areas/mexico-city/guide-zocalo.htm>; <http://www.delange.org/TemMayor/TemMayor.htm>; [http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/pohl\\_aztec6.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/pohl_aztec6.html). Information from these sites can be used over the next two days of class). Do Now: The Aztecs often performed human sacrifice. Why do you think they might have done this? Don't discuss answers yet; it will be discussed after the film.

Show the first fifteen minutes of the film and possibly other selected parts. Nudity and gore make parts of this film too graphic for middle school children. Besides, much of the film is concerned with the Spanish Conquest, which begins about 180 years after our visit there.

For homework, students will write a journal entry about their impressions of the Aztec society as an outsider. How are the Aztec religious beliefs and society like and unlike anything that they know?

### *Day Thirteen*

(Resources: Miller, *Art of Mesoamerica* , plus the sites used yesterday). Do Now question: Tenochtitlan developed without any contact with European, Asian, and African civilizations. Still, how is it like them? Answer: It developed cities, had distinct groups like artisans and farmers, fought with others, developed religion, etc.

I will discuss with the students their responses to the homework journal entry and then discuss questions and comments about the film. The class will talk about the puzzling absence of the wheel, except on children's toys. We will then discuss how the city eventually absorbed Lake Texcoco, and we will look at this as an example of early habitat destruction (I would talk about previously lush areas of the Middle East which had long since been destroyed; most students don't realize that habitat destruction is not a modern phenomenon). The class will examine the building of Tenochtitlan, see diagrams of the early structures, and imagine life in the city. Agriculture, trade, and other food sources will be discussed. We will look at pictures from the Miller book, the delange website, plus possibly others.

For homework, students will write a journal entry about anything having to do with the Aztec culture. Ideas might include warring, religion, daily life, their attitude toward their kings, etc.

### *Day Fourteen*

(Resources: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/19/newsid\\_4252000/4252078.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/19/newsid_4252000/4252078.stm)): Do Now question: How do you think building a huge city on top of a filled-in river bed might have contributed to the destruction caused by the 1985 earthquake? The question will be answered later in class.

We will examine the remnants of Aztec culture in Mexico City today. We will look at contemporary articles about Mexico City excavations and discuss how much of Tenochtitlan's history is lost forever under a vast, modern city.

Pass out copies of the relevant news.bbc web pages. We will examine the earthquake of 1985, and students will understand how the construction of Tenochtitlan (and ultimately Mexico City) on landfill rather than solid ground contributed to the devastation caused by the earthquake.

For homework, students will write about what they think Mexico should and should not do to preserve Mexico's past. This is not a journal entry.

Writing / Organizational / Assessment Activities

### *Day Fifteen, sharing day*

Students will be paired up with one technically strong student in each pair. They will read each other's work, using the TAG method to respond (Tell what you like about it. Ask a question. Give a suggestion for

improvement). They will spend class time (and homework time) rewriting selected journal entries.

#### *Day Sixteen, internet day*

Students will use this day in the technology lab to find maps, illustrations, diagrams, and examples of artwork to enhance their journals.

For homework is a final journal entry. Students will select and answer one of these questions. It is due on day eighteen with the rest of the journal:

- 1 What did you learn about the way people behave in a crisis?
- 2 How was life in the fourteenth century harder and/or easier than it is today?
- 3 How have your feelings about religions changed, and what have you learned about religion? If your feelings haven't changed, or if you feel you did not learn a lot, do not answer this question.
- 4 You did not get much hard information to answer this question, but write about what you imagine you as a teenager might have done to entertain yourself in each of your four main travel stops. How is this like and unlike your present forms of entertainment?

#### *Day Seventeen, posttest*

Students will retake the same test they took during day one of the unit, including indicating city and country locations on maps. In addition, they will answer several open ended questions about their destinations and be able to connect the information to modern times.

#### *Day Eighteen*

Journals and essays are due as a package. Class will fill out a questionnaire describing what they liked best and least, what they'd like to learn more about, etc. I will use this information to add or adjust materials for the next time the unit is taught.

## **Summary of Student Journal and Project Requirements**

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Initial materials given: plain and yellow paper, folders, fact sheet blanks for Mecca, China, London, and Tenochtitlan. These four sheets will be included in the journal.

Contents of student journal:

- 1 - Cover with four drawings, one representing each of the four major destinations.

- 2 - List of backpack contents.
- 3 - Entry: Life on a caravan (day 2)
- 4 - Map: Ibn Battuta's travels from Tunisia to Mecca (day 2)
- 5 - Entry: the Hajj in 1326 (day 4)
- 6 - Entry: What I learned about myself at Mecca (day 5)
- 7 - Map: Ibn Battuta's travels through China (Day 6)
- 8 - Entry: Write about traveling by sea (day 6)
- 9 - Entry: Write about life in China under foreign rule (day 7)
- 10 - Entry: Life in London during the plague (day 10)
- 11 - Color the map of Tenochtitlan so that it can be part of the journal (day 11)
- 12 - Entry: How are Aztec society and religion different from anything that you know? (day 12)
- 13 - Entry: Life as a person living in Tenochtitlan. (day 13)
- 14 - Entry: Answer one of four questions about your travels (day 16)

#### Connecting to modern times

- 1 - Response to the film, Inside Mecca (day 3)
- 2 - Modern day China (day 8)
- 3 - Three important things learned from the Black Death film and readings (day 9)
- 4 - What do you think Mexico should and should not do in order to preserve the amazing

past of Mexico City? (day 14)

## Testing

- 1 - Pretest, day one.
- 2 - Post test, day seventeen.
- 3 - Journal due, day eighteen.

## Implementing District Standards

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This unit was designed to meet several standards of the New Haven Language Arts Curriculum for grades 5-8 and the Social Studies Curriculum for grade 7. Keeping in mind that BRAMS is an arts magnet school, care has also been taken to include art and architecture from the various destinations, and artwork is required as part of the travel journals.

Through completion of this unit, students will meet the following Language Arts objectives:

Standard 1.2: Students will demonstrate strategic reading skills before, during, and after specific reading tasks.

a.1 - Establish a purpose for reading.

a.2 - Use prior knowledge as an introduction to the selection.

b.4 - Use graphic organizers, outlines, and graphic aids.

c.1 - Construct meaning through initial understanding and interpretation.

c.3 - Identify important information, characters, settings, events, relationships, and points of view.

c.4 - Select and use relevant information in order to summarize.

c.12 - Demonstrate an awareness of values, customs, ethics, and beliefs included in a selection.

c.13 - Demonstrate comprehension through retelling.

Standard 1.4: Students will demonstrate the previously listed performance standards through a wide variety of reading experiences.



- a. - Students will complete reading comprehension strategies that demonstrate critical thinking and responding skills.
- b. - Students will demonstrate an appreciation for global cultures through visual, written, auditory, musical, artistic, and technological modes.

In addition, this unit addresses many of the common performance standards for social studies. Through this unit, students will:

- 1 - Gather historical data from multiple primary and secondary sources.
- 2 - Explain causes and effects of various events.
- 3 - Write short narratives and statements presenting historical ideas.
- 4 - Demonstrate understanding through written, verbal, visual, musical, and/or technological formats.
- 5 - Watch news shows and documentaries.
- 6 - Formulate questions and hypotheses from multiple perspectives, using multiple sources.

## Afterword

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As this unit was nearing completion, I realized that several of the topics might encourage students to do further research on their own. As I talked about this unit with my students, several areas of interest became obvious. Here are the topics that at least some students said they would like to investigate further:

- Ancient navigation
- The possibility of another devastating plague
- Aztec religion and/or study of individual gods
- Food from the New World
- Evidence of ecological destruction in earlier centuries.
- History of clothing (for example, when and where were pants first used?)

- History of early technology (paper, money, writing, guns)

Since a main purpose of education is to open and expand the minds of

students, this unit can hopefully be a doorway to new worlds of exploration. If it is, then I would consider it a success.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

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Abercrombie, Thomas J. "Ibn Battuta, Prince of Travelers," National Geographic. National Geographic Society, December, 1991.

A brief but fine overview of the scholar's travels, this article features a clear and excellent map, as well as great pictures of the area. Best of all is a time-lapse photograph of Hajjis circling the Kaaba

Anglin, Jay Pascal, and William J. Hamblin. World History to 1648. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1993.

Very concise summaries and timelines of world civilizations. Information is often superficial, but it's easy to find information about major places, events, and governments very quickly.

Azzam, Abd al-Rahman. Ibn Battuta in the Valley of Doom. London: Hood Hood Books, 1996.

This children's book is an entertaining source to show the travails of travel by caravan. Using it in conjunction with quotes from the Rihla also offers good material for the discussion of writer's craft.

Bierhorst, John. The Mythology of Mexico and Central America. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990.

Although I don't directly use material from this book, it is a good of mythology in the Americas and could help students understand the Aztecs.

Dunn, Ross E. The Adventures of Ibn Battuta. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

This book provides an excellent look at the Muslim world in the early fourteenth century, but for quotes from the Rihla other sources are needed.

Durkee, Noura. The Amazing Adventures of Ibn Battuta. Cambridge: Hood Hood Books, 1995.

I used the last few pages relating to Ibn Battuta's travels in China.

Gibb, H. A. R. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, Vol I*. New Delhi, India: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2004.

This book covers Ibn Battuta's first Mecca visit, but not his later travels to China and Damascus.

Gibb, H. A. R. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta Vols. I - III*. New Delhi, India: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1999.

This book contains the previously cited volume and it may be hard to find. Quotes were taken from the other two Gibb sources.

Gibb, H. A. R. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, Vol. IV*. London: The Hakluyt Society, 1994.

C. F. Beckingham completed this last volume of Ibn Battuta's travels after Gibb's death.

Hansen, Valerie, and Kenneth Curtis. *Voyages in World History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, forthcoming 2009.

This book offers further information on the time period, particularly Kennewick Man and Ibn Battuta.

Mackintosh-Smith, Tim. *Travels with a Tangerine*. New York: Random House, 2001.

I did not directly use any of the material in this book, but it is a witty, entertaining look at the Muslim world, comparing what Ibn Battuta saw to the world today.

Miller, Mary Ellen. *The Art of Mesoamerica*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1986.

This is a good collection of artwork, architectural diagrams, and maps of Tenochtitlan and other Aztec cities.

Rumford, James. *Traveling Man: The Journey of Ibn Battuta, 1325-1354*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 2001.

The incredible illustrations in this children's book bring Ibn Battuta to life, though one could question the accuracy of the text. The text is more a series of vignettes of his travel years than a chronological retelling of the Rihla.

Stuart, George e., and Gene S. Stuart, *Discovering Man's Past in the Americas*. National Geographic Society, 1969.

This book offers concise information about Tenochtitlan, but no useful illustrations.

## Websites

[http://www.bookrags.com/Yuan\\_Dynasty](http://www.bookrags.com/Yuan_Dynasty). This is another brief history of the Yuan Dynasty.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-history-mecca-deaths.htm>. Brief summaries of four Mecca stampedes in the 1990's, including the one in 1990 which killed 1,425 pilgrims.

<http://www.common-place.org/vol-03/no-04/mexico-city/>. Although much of this site deals with Tenochtitlan after the arrival of the Spanish, it offers an intriguing examination of the Aztec society.

<http://www.delange.org/TemMayor/TemMayor.htm>. Great photographs of artifacts of Tenochtitlan.

<http://www.differentworld.com/mexico/areas/mexico-city/guide-zocalo.htm>. This site shows modern day Mexico City atop the ruins of Tenochtitlan.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenochtitlan>. This is an easy-to-read site with a lot of information which would interest students in middle

school. Still, some editing is necessary.

[http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/pohl\\_aztec6.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/pohl_aztec6.html). Though I discovered this site when this unit was nearly completed, The Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerica Studies site is maybe the best single site, containing great illustrations.

<http://www.freewebs.com/graham7760/thedarkages.htm>. Interesting information about what we know and don't know about sailing ships in the dark ages.

<http://geography.about.com/library/blank/blxmideeast.htm>. This is the blank map of the Middle East for use during

<http://historymedren.about.com/library/weekly/aapmaps4.htm>. This site has a good colored map and a brief description of the routes by which Black Death spread through Europe.

[http://historymedren.about.com/od/theblackdeath/a/death\\_defined.htm](http://historymedren.about.com/od/theblackdeath/a/death_defined.htm). This site, with many links to specific topics, is a good overview of the Black Plague. The site can be very graphic; you might want to extract information from it rather than let students freely search the site.

[http://www.humanities-interactive.org/splendors/ex048\\_08e.html](http://www.humanities-interactive.org/splendors/ex048_08e.html). Black and white map of Tenochtitlan for coloring.

<http://www.insecta-inspecta.com/fleas/bdeath>. This site gives Black Death information written to be easily understood by middle school students.

<http://www.kyrene.org/schools/brisas/sunda/arthistory/china.htm>. A brief but useful summary of Chinese art.

<http://www.medieval-life.net/black-death.htm>. A brief overview of life in the middle ages.

<http://www.mexicocity.com.mx/history1.html>. This offers a brief history of Tenochtitlan.

<http://milnet.com/mid-east-news/Religious-Differences-Sunniv-Shiite.html>. The extremely pro-US military site is not remotely objective; it does, nevertheless, explain the Sunni/Shiite conflict well, and it explains how the Mideast countries break down politically.

[http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/kennewick\\_man.html](http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/kennewick_man.html). This site offers basic information and photographs of Kennewick man.

[http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/china/late\\_imperial\\_china/yuan.html](http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/china/late_imperial_china/yuan.html). This is a concise, easily readable summary of the Yuan Dynasty.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/19/newsid\\_4252000/4252078.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/19/newsid_4252000/4252078.stm). Here is a good BBC summary of the 1985 earthquake which devastated Mexico City.

[http://novaonline.nv.cc.va.us/eli/evans/his135/EXAMS/map\\_printable.html](http://novaonline.nv.cc.va.us/eli/evans/his135/EXAMS/map_printable.html). Use this site to obtain blank maps of the world for pre- and post-tests.

<http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/beijing/azureindex.htm>. This site offers a wide range of Chinese architectural photos.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sultan/archeology2.html>. This site gives information about the excavation of a Yuan wreck found off the coast of South Korea.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/18902.htm>. This U.S. Department of State seventeen page summary has all you need to know about modern China for the unit.

<http://www.thejadetrade.com/ian/p8d.html>. This is a brief summary of the Yuan and all dynasties are available on this site.

[http://the-orb.net/textbooks/muhlberger/14c\\_religion.html](http://the-orb.net/textbooks/muhlberger/14c_religion.html). This is an interesting summary of religious conflicts in England in the fourteenth century. Some of the information can be tied into the plague years.

<http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/history/yuan/index.htm>. Information about religions, social structures, economy, and culture of China during the Yuan Dynasty is contained at the site.

<http://www.ummah.net/hajj/glance/index.html>. This site has a diagram and a three-page description of the Hajj rituals, but it doesn't explain what several of the words mean.

<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/CIVAMRCA/AZTECS.HTM>. This site discussed the Aztec culture and its relationships with other Mesoamericans. It's useful and fascinating, but offers few details about life in Tenochtitlan.

<http://z.about.com/d/geography/1/0/Q/K/china.jpg>. This blank map of China is for use on day

### **Documentaries (All are available at amazon.com)**

The Aztec Empire. DVD. The History Channel. A&E Television Networks, Documentary AAE-73120, 1997.

This film contains good and relevant coverage of Tenochtitlan and modern excavation of the temple. Students should find the film absorbing, but parts are gory and irrelevant to the teaching unit.

Inside Mecca. Dir. Anisa Mehdi. DVD. National Geographic Video, 2003.

This film offers a fascinating look at three modern Muslims (an Indonesian businessman, an African radio announcer, and an American woman of Irish ancestry) and their experiences participating in the Hajj at Mecca. This film seems safe and non-judgmental. IT certainly conveys a feeling of what it must be like to participate.

Islam - Empire of Faith. Prod and dir. Robert Gardner, Writ. Jonathan Grupper. DVD. Gardner Films, Inc., 2000.

The film supplies a broad overview of Islam, both historically and today. Parts are usable, but this two hour and forty minute movie covers many topics irrelevant to the lessons.

The Scourge of the Black Death. DVD. The History Channel, A & E Home Video, 2005.

This is a good, if simplistic, history of the fourteenth century plague, particularly in England, with a tie in to modern outbreaks of Ebola. Editing is needed for middle school due to nudity in some period paintings and details about sexual promiscuity.

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