

Ibn Battuta Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
What was the Muslim world like in the 1320s?

Materials:

- Ibn Battuta PowerPoint
- Copies of Documents A-C and Guiding Questions
- Graphic Organizer and Suggested Answers
- Map of North Africa and Middle East (teacher provided)

Common Core State Standards Alignment (pp. 61, 65-66 of Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects): RH #1 (Gr. 6-12), RH #4 (Gr. 6-10), RH #6 (Gr. 6-8), RH #8 (Gr. 6-12), RH #9 (Gr. 6-8), WST #1 (GR. 6-12),

Plan of Instruction:

Note: Ideally, students should have some experience categorizing historical information by whether it is political, economic, social/cultural, or environmental before doing this lesson.

Although this is a longer lesson, it can be shortened in several ways. Depending on students' reading abilities, the Guiding Questions for Documents A and B can be omitted. Also, to reduce the amount of reading, Ibn Battuta's accounts in Documents A and B can be divided up between groups of students in a couple of ways. You can assign specific places to different groups of students (Tripoli, Syria, etc.) or you can assign specific context categories to different groups of students (political, social, etc.).

1. Use the PowerPoint slides to establish background on Ibn Battuta and introduce the inquiry.
 - a. Slide 1: Title slide.
 - b. Slide 2: Ibn Battuta. *In 1325, a young explorer named Ibn Battuta left his home in Morocco to make a ritual pilgrimage, called a haj, to the holy Muslim cities of Mecca and Medina.*
 - c. Slide 3: The *Rihla*. *Battuta continued to travel and explore for the next three decades. When he returned home in 1355, Battuta described his travels to the scholar Ibn Juzayy, who wrote them down in The Rihla, which means "the journey." Although some historians have questioned its accuracy, Ibn Battuta's Rihla has remained a resource for historians to learn about the Muslim world in the 1320s.*
 - d. Slide 4: Central Historical Question. *Today, you will use selections of Ibn Battuta's writings to investigate and answer the question: What was the Muslim world like in the 1320s?*
 - e. Slide 5: Evaluating Evidence. *To do this work, we must carefully consider the documents we are using to understand the past. What does it mean to*

evaluate evidence? As historians, we try to understand what happened in the past by looking at different accounts about the past. For each account that we examine, we need to consider what useful information it provides about the time period that we are studying. We also need to remember that one account is never enough information to understand what happened in the past. That means that we must consider the limitations of each document that we examine and think about what other information we might need.

2. Hand out Document A, map, Guiding Questions and Graphic Organizer.
 - a. Before students begin reading the document, you should provide an overview of Battuta's travels on the map.
 - b. In pairs, students read Document A and answer Guiding Questions.
 - c. Share out responses.
3. Model how to fill out the chart for Cairo. Show students how they can make inferences from specific details. For examples with entries from other cities, see Suggested Answers for suggestions.

Example: In the first sentence of his Cairo entry, Ibn Battuta says that Cairo was "the mother of all cities and the seat of Pharaoh the tyrant." Because he says tyrant, I know that Egypt wasn't a democracy at that time, so I can write "Lack of democracy" under political. He says it is the "mother of all cities," which allows me to infer that it was one of the largest cities Ibn Battuta ever saw. I can write "likely a population center" for social. Ibn Battuta also described 36,000 boats travelling up and down the Nile carrying goods. This tells me that these boats were probably involved in trading, so I can write, "Nile supported trade" in the economic box. Finally, Ibn Battuta seems impressed at the number of madrasas and the quality of the hospital in Cairo. This tells me these educational and medical facilities were probably quite well developed in Cairo. So I can write "Cairo likely a key cultural and intellectual center with colleges and hospitals" in the social/cultural box.

4. Hand out Document B.
 - a. In pairs, students read Document B and answer Guiding Questions.
 - b. Students share out their responses.
 - c. In pairs, students complete Graphic Organizer for Damascus, Mecca, and Baghdad.
 - d. Share out what students noted about life in the Muslim world in the 1320s.
5. Final descriptions.
 - a. Students write 4-5 sentences describing what they can infer about life in the Muslim world in the 14th century.
 - b. In pairs, students share descriptions.
6. Hand out Document C.
 - a. In pairs, students read Document C and answer Guiding Questions.

- b. Share out responses.
7. Discussion: Today, we used Ibn Battuta’s descriptions of his travels in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to get a picture of the Muslim world in the 14th century. Historians have argued that Ibn Battuta may have made up at least some of his account. Can we still rely on Ibn Battuta’s account to learn about the context of the Muslim world in the 14th century? Why or why not?
- Make sure that students recognize that we might not want to rely on him because now we don’t know what’s real and what’s made up.
 - On the other hand, Dunn points out that Ibn Battuta seems to have copied his accounts from earlier sources, so perhaps we simply want to look at his account as a secondary source. And, we do know that Ibn Battuta did travel extensively during this time. Plus, Dunn argues the Bulghar account (not the accounts students read in Documents A and B) is the only one that is definitely false. Moreover, Dunn only points out these inaccuracies in a footnote, which is not a prominent part of a history book.
 - In the end, stress the fact that there is no right answer about the appropriate use of this source and that historians often have to make tough decisions about what a source can and can’t be used for. Rarely, if ever, are accounts of the past based on single historical sources.
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Citations

Documents A-B

“Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354 in “Internet History Sourcebooks,” Fordham University. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1354-ibnbattuta.asp>

Document C

Dunn, Ross E. *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.