

Mansa Musa Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
Was Mansa Musa the richest person ever?

Materials:

- Mansa Musa PowerPoint
- Copies of Document A: Blog Post
- Copies of Document B: Catalan Atlas
- Copies of Document C: Al-Umari
- Copies of Guiding Questions

Plan of Instruction:

- 1) Do Now: Read Document A: Blog Post
 - a. Explain to students that they are going to begin the day by reading a short blog post from *The Huffington Post*.
 - b. Provide source information: *This is a blog post from October 17, 2012.*
 - c. Explain that students will now read the post and answer three questions:
 - i. *What was the main point of the blog post?*
 - ii. *What are two claims made by the post?*
 - iii. *What evidence does it use to support these claims?*
 - d. In pairs, students read the post and answer the questions.
 - e. Share out.

Note: Students should identify that the blog post's main point is that Mansa Musa, the Emperor of Mali in the Middle Ages, was the richest person of all time. Students should also note that the evidence for this blog post comes from the websites Celebrity Net Worth and Encyclopedia Britannica.
 - f. Ask students if they find this to be a trustworthy account of Mansa Musa.

Note: Push students here to consider the reliability of Celebrity Net Worth and Encyclopedia Britannica as historical sources. Where the latter, as a vetted publication, presumably has a degree of reliability, the former, like many online websites, is questionable.
 - g. Explain that historians often consult multiple documents when investigating the past. *Today we are going to further explore Mansa Musa. In particular, we are going to think about three questions: Who was Mansa Musa? How do we know about him? And, was he the richest person ever? To do this, we are going to begin with some background information about Mansa Musa. Then we are going to look at two historical sources.*
- 2) PowerPoint on Mansa Musa: Historical Background Information
 - a. Slide 2: Mansa Musa (1280-1337). *Musa I was the tenth Mansa, or emperor, of the Manden Kurufaba, or Mali Empire, located in Western Africa. Musa reigned from 1312-1327 CE.*

- b. Slide 3: Mali Empire. *Mansa Musa's empire consisted of parts of these present-day countries: Mali, Gambia, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Niger, and Mauritania.*
- c. Slide 4: Mansa Musa's Wealth. *Mansa Musa built his wealth from gold and salt mines, both of which were extremely valuable. The Mali Empire was strategically situated on trade routes throughout Africa.*
- d. Slide 5: Mansa Musa's Reign. *Musa I was also a devout Muslim. In 1324 he made his hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca. This pilgrimage is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Mansa Musa returned from his hajj with the architect Ishaq El Teudjin, who built several buildings, including the Djinguereber Mosque, which became one of three mosques of the University of Timbuktu. Mansa Musa also ordered the creation of several libraries and supported education in the Qur'an. Under Mansa Musa's reign the Malian empire reached its greatest size. His cultural legacy is seen in Mali to this day.*
- e. Slide 6: Central Historical Question. *Today you are going to analyze two documents and use them to help evaluate the claims made in The Huffington Post and answer the Central Historical Question: Was Mansa Musa the richest person ever? In particular, you will be practicing the skill of corroboration. In order to develop hypotheses about the past and to create historical accounts, historians always compare, or corroborate, multiple sources of evidence.*

Note: You might refer to the SHEG corroboration classroom poster (<http://sheg.stanford.edu/corroboration-poster>) here.

3) Continue with the PowerPoint.

- a. Slide 7: Document B: The Catalan Atlas, 1375.
 - i. Ask students: *What do you think this is? Where do you think it is from? When was it made?*
 - ii. **Note:** The lines in the Catalan Atlas represent trade routes. Notice that various routes meet in Mali.
 - iii. Share out and discuss student responses.
- b. Slide 8: The Catalan Atlas. Pass out copies of the Catalan Atlas and Guiding Questions.
 - i. In pairs, students answer the Guiding Questions.
 - ii. Share out responses.

4) Pass out Document C: Al-Umari.

- a. In pairs, students read the document and answer the Guiding Questions.
- b. Share out responses.

5) Discussion:

- a. *Based on all of this evidence, how would you describe Mansa Musa? What type of person was he? Who thinks he was the richest person ever? How might we further investigate these questions?*

- b. *Were the claims made in The Huffington Post about Mansa Musa accurate?*
 - c. Return to the question “Why do you think the blog post was written?” that was posed in the Guiding Questions. A possible issue to raise with students at this time is that many websites create blog posts and articles about sensational topics based on meager evidence or unreliable sources. Because of the captivating headlines, many users will go to the page. An increase in visitors to their website means they can sell more ads. Point out to students that not all sources that have ads are unreliable (in fact, it’s hard to find a newspaper without them), but that webpages with sensational headlines that cite little evidence or unreliable sources may require extra scrutiny.
 - d. *What evidence from the documents suggests that Mansa Musa was the richest person ever? What are the limitations of each of these documents?*
 - e. *What further types of evidence would help you to continue investigating whether Mansa Musa was the richest person ever? What are some challenges in locating such evidence?*
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Reference:

Niane, Djibril Tamsir. *New Encyclopedia of Africa*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Mansa Musa." Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2008.

Citations:

Document A

The Huffington Post. "Mansa Musa Of Mali Named World's Richest Man Of All Time; Gates And Buffet Also Make List." The Huffington Post. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/17/mansa-musa-worlds-richest-man-all-time_n_1973840.html.

Document B

Abraham, Cresques. "Catalan Atlas Legends: Panel III ." The Cresques Project. <http://www.cresquesproject.net/catalan-atlas-legends/panel-iii>.

Document C

Hopkins, J. F. P., and N. Levtzion. *Corpus of early Arabic sources for West African history*, pp. 267-271. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.