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# Ancient and Medieval Africa

*Mr. Donn and Maxie's Always Something You Can Use Series*

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# Preface

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I am a teacher. With “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) being the law of the land, and with every teacher required to help raise test scores on standardized tests, we are all looking for ways to improve our teaching. Today there are national Common Core State Standards for teaching, as well as various state standards that students are expected to meet. Maybe your state or school district has exit exams students are required to pass. Your circumstances may be different from mine but we all have the same goal in mind: to help our students reach their goals.

The Mr. Donn and Maxie’s Always Something You Can Use series was written in part because when I went looking for help as a new teacher, there was nothing there. The lessons you are about to use are ones that I have used in the classroom myself, with input from my colleagues, friends, students, and especially my wife.

I currently teach in an urban school with all its challenges and difficulties. I teach both language arts and social studies. I have been in various levels of secondary school, grades 6–12.

Focus: This book, and the rest of the books in the series, are for teaching ancient history. Each book is a separate unit that deals with each of the different ancient civilizations. Within each unit there are various types of lessons. Each unit will contain vocabulary lessons, writing lessons, and activity lessons. The variety will hopefully keep all your students involved, entertained, and learning.

In *Classroom Instruction that Works*, Marzano et al. list ten research based strategies. The ancient history series uses these ten strategies, as well as other concepts, ideas, and strategies, to build lesson plans and instruction around. For those who are unfamiliar with Marzano et al., here is a quick recap of those strategies:

- Identifying Similarities and Differences
- Summarizing and Note Taking
- Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition
- Homework and Practice
- Nonlinguistic Representations
- Cooperative Learning
- Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback
- Generating and Testing Hypotheses
- Cues, Questions and Advanced Organizers

These strategies and concepts are embedded into the lessons. You won't find a place where it says, "We will now use the strategy of Cooperative Learning." Instead you will find cooperative learning within the lesson. An example of this is in the Ancient China unit: students are divided into groups, and each group chooses or is assigned one of the dynasties. That group is given an opportunity to research, create a presentation, and then present their product to the class. Their product is then placed in the classroom for all to see, share, and use. The teacher monitors progress and deadlines. This same project includes Marzano's strategies of "Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition," "Nonlinguistic Representation," and "Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback."

The Mr. Donn and Maxie Always Something You Can Use series also uses ideas and concepts to help make teaching and learning enjoyable—ideas such as "Word Walls," which help build vocabulary, various writing ideas to stimulate interest in writing, and games, pictures and graphic organizers to increase efficiency and retention.

We worked very hard to bring you the best ideas we could to make history a subject that students would want to learn.

# Ancient and Medieval Africa

## Introduction

---

### Kush—Ghana—Mali—Songhay—Benin

**Subject:** Civilizations of Ancient and Medieval Africa, and the Trans-Sahara Trade Route

**Time Frame:** Four weeks

**Level/length:** The unit below on Kush, Ghana, Mali, Songhay, and Benin was written with seventh graders in mind, but can easily be adapted for grades 5–9. Each civilization is presented as a stand-alone unit. The unit is composed of 12 lessons. Some lessons are mini-units and will take longer than one class period to complete. Lessons are based on a 55-minute class period, or they can be adjusted to fit any time frame. Activities are varied and include classifying, abstracting, map work, dramatizing, writing, reading, speaking, researching, interpreting, cooperative learning, and other higher-level thinking activities.

**Unit Description:** This unit explores the development of the Trans-Sahara Trade Route beginning with the ancient Kingdom of Kush/Nubia; moving to the Sudanic Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay; and ending with the kingdom of Benin in Nigeria. Lessons include Geography, Government, Daily Life, Religion, Inventions, Sahara Desert, Camels, Caravans, Trans-Sahara Trade Route, Gold for Salt, The Lion’s Whisker, Anansi Tales, Fabric Symbols, African Masks, Griots—The Storytellers, Sundiata the Hero, Mansa Musa, Specialized Professions (Witchdoctors, Caravan Traders, Kings), Rise of Islam, African Proverbs, and more!

**Rationale:** In view of the latest government guidelines on education with “no child left behind,” all units were developed to meet standards applicable in most states. Lessons are designed to address various learning styles and can be adapted for *all* students’ abilities. Units are designed to fit into an integrated curriculum.

**Ongoing project/graphic organizers:** Using bulletin boards or wall space as graphic organizers supports critical-thinking activities and fits the theme of the unit. At the end of the unit, each “board” (graphic organizer) should be completed and will support the final activity. To complete each board, students will need to be directed to add information as it is discovered in your unit study.

#### Appendixes:

- Appendix One: Sweet Potato Cakes (cookies)
- Appendix Two: Map of the Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, Songhay, and Benin
- Appendix Three: Helpful Web Pages
- Appendix Four: *Portugal Finds a Short Cut to India*. After teaching the unit in this book, if your class is moving next to learn about the rise of the slave trade in Africa, this lesson works well as a transition.



# Setting Up the Room

---

## Graphic Organizers:

### Word Wall

*Design:* This is consistent for all units, but each has its own look. An outline map of Africa would work well, as this unit covers several ancient and medieval African kingdoms.

*Key Words:* Words you will probably wish to include on your word wall as you discover them in your unit of study are: Continent, Africa, Mediterranean Sea, Sahara Desert, Nile River, Niger River, Atlantic Ocean, Red Sea.

*Use:* Once a week, have your students pick a word, define it, and then use it in a sentence. Use the word wall to fill in short periods of time throughout the unit.

### The Oasis Trading Post

*Design:* Put a sign above an open wall area marked OASIS or TRADING POST.

*Use of this area:* Use the table and wall area to post papers with no names, and stack copies of reproducibles and homework assignments for pick up by students who were absent.

### Doorway Into Class: Trans-Saharan Trade Route

*Design:*

- Put a sign above your door saying AFRICA.
- Beneath that, place a sign that says: THE TRANS-SAHARA TRADE ROUTE. Make it look like a desert with waves of sand and the colors you use. You might wish to add one small, off-centered oasis to your sign.
- Cut some camels using brown-colored construction paper. Camels need to be facing the same way. (Please see end of this unit for a pattern you can use.) Place camels up one side and down the other side of your doorframe. Every three to four days, reverse your camel direction by leaving your camels in the same location, but flip them, so that they face the opposite direction. Do not mention the camels coming and going along the Trans-Saharan Trade Route. Some students will notice—some will not.
- On the first day of the unit, your doorway should include a sign that says Kush/Nubia. Facing your doorway, this sign should be positioned on the east coast of Africa—the right side of your doorway.
- As you proceed with your unit, add other kingdoms as they are “discovered” on the left side of your doorway. First, add Ghana. Then, add Mali. Add Songhay. Finally, add Benin.

Closing Class Each Day: We like to close class each day with a sentence or two that reminds students what we are studying. With this unit, you might choose to close your class each day with a wise nod, and in a soft voice, say: “Until next time, remember ... (pause) ... (recite an ancient African proverb).” A proverb is suggested at the end of each daily lesson.

Lesson One:

# The Geography of Africa

---

Time frame: One class period (55 minutes)

Includes: Geography of Africa, World Continents and Oceans

## Preparation:

- Daily Question. Use overhead projector or write question on the board.
- World Atlas (one per group), maps of the world
- Overheads: Both maps listed below. You will need to copy these reproducibles onto your own transparency paper to create overheads.
- Reproducibles:
  - The Geography of Africa*
  - Blank Outline Map of the Continents of the World (no labels)*
  - Blank Outline Map of Grassland, Rainforest, and Desert Regions of Africa (no labels)*

Daily Question: "Is Africa a country or a continent?"

Open Class: Meet your class at the door.

Say: "Welcome to Africa!"

## Activity: Briefly Introduce the Next Unit

- **Ask:** "What pops into your mind when you think of Africa?" (Get some answers.)
- **Say:** "Africa is a huge continent. It's almost four times the size of the United States. It has rainforests, grasslands, miles and miles of coastline on the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and is home to the largest desert in the world, the Sahara Desert. Today, over 1000 languages are spoken in Africa. In ancient times, Africa was the home of some of the most advanced civilizations in the world."

## Activity: Is Africa a Country or a Continent?

- **Ask the daily question:** "Is Africa a country or a continent?" (Get some answers.)
- **Say:** "Those of you who said Africa is a continent are right."
- **Ask:** "What is a continent?" (Get some answers. Have one student look up the definition of a continent in the dictionary and read it aloud. Modify the student definition if necessary.)
- **Ask:** "Does anyone remember how many continents there are in the world?"
- **Say:** "The answer is seven: Africa, Asia, Antarctica, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America."
- Handout: *Blank Outline Map of the Continents of the World*
- Hand out atlases or maps of the world, or have students turn to the appropriate page in their textbook. They can work alone or in pairs.

- **Say:** “Your job is to label the seven continents and four oceans of the world.” (Give them some time.)
- Use the overhead projector. As a class, label the seven continents and the four oceans of the world. Make sure students understand that the Atlantic Ocean is on one side of Africa and the Indian Ocean is on the other. (Later on in the unit, your students will learn that the Portuguese discover they can sail down the Atlantic coast of Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope, to reach the Indian Ocean, and from there, the trading seaports of India.)
- Have students compare their answers to the labels added to the overhead projector. Have students make changes on their handout as needed.
- **Ask:** “Ranking the continents by size, which is the largest?” (Asia)
- **Ask:** “Which is the second largest?” (Africa)
- **Say:** “Africa is a big place!”

#### **Activity: The Geography of Africa**

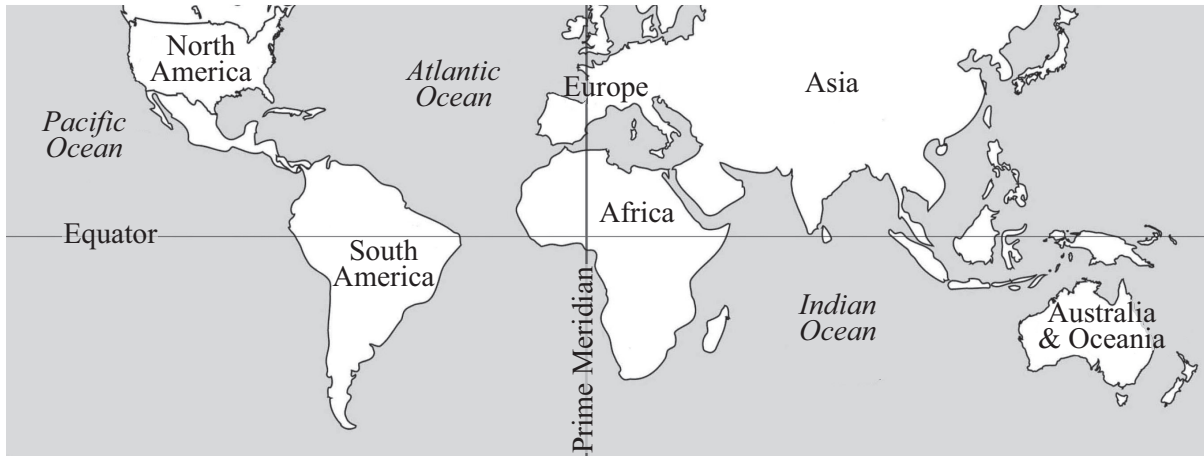
- Handout: *The Geography of Africa*
- Read and answer questions.
- Use the overhead projector. Place the *Blank Outline Map of Grassland, Rainforest, and Desert Regions of Africa* on the overhead projector.
- Point to various places on the map and ask, “What is this? And this?” Have students identify various vegetation regions of Africa.
- Handout: *Blank Outline Map of Grassland, Rainforest, and Desert Regions of Africa*
- Have students create a map key and color in their maps.

**Close Class:** “That’s all the time we have today. See you next time on the continent of Africa.”

Name:  
Date:  
Class:  
Period:

---

## Geography of Africa



**Africa is the second largest continent:** Africa is huge. From north to south, Africa is 5200 miles long. If you started in Alaska, you would have to travel down the coast of the United States, through Mexico, and all the way into Central America to travel 5200 miles. At its widest point, Africa is nearly as wide as it is long. Africa is three times the size of the continental United States. It's the second largest continent in the world. (Asia is the largest.)

**Rivers:** Africa has five huge river systems. The biggest three, in order of size, are the Nile, the Congo, and the Niger.

**Oceans:** In spite of its size, Africa has few natural harbors. If you wanted to visit Africa by boat, you would have to hunt for a safe place to land. Without a safe harbor, powerful ocean currents could slam your boat into the rocks along the coastline. The Atlantic Ocean borders Africa to the west, the Indian Ocean borders Africa to the east, and the Mediterranean borders Africa to the north. The Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet to border Africa to the south. Africa is nearly completely surrounded by water.

**Neighbors:** Africa's closest neighbors are Europe and the Middle East. Until the Suez Canal was built in the 20th century, Africa was connected to the Middle East by a natural land bridge. If you look on some small maps, it looks like Africa is also connected to Europe by a land bridge. This is not so. At its most narrow point, where these two continents are close together, there is still about a 30-mile gap of water at the Strait of Gibraltar, the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea.