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# TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

## I. UNIT OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE

In 1991, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation sponsored a summer institute for world history teachers on the campus of Princeton University. This program, which focused on the theme of global connections in the era of Columbus, inspired participants to rethink the teaching of world history, especially the pivotal period before and during global contact.

In particular, teachers enjoyed learning about Ibn Battuta. The Muslim world traveler and his adventures provide a wonderful mechanism for teaching the early fourteenth century and painting the era with a broad brush. If teachers enjoy this topic, then that enthusiasm will catch on in the classroom. Students will be able to put themselves into the past and mentally travel with Ibn Battuta as he rides across the steppe, sweeps across the Indian Ocean in a dhow, or crosses the Sahara on a camel. The concept of an Afro-Eurasian zone of intercommunication and of a religiously united region, Dar al-Islam (regions converted to Islam or ruled by Muslims), can provide a focus for study of the entire period 1000 to 1500 C. E. and can prepare the way for investigation of the year 1492 and global contact. The story of Ibn Battuta helps students to understand both *what we know about the past* and *how we know about it*, in terms of both history and historiography.

Map exercises are part of this unit. The initial map work is extensive but worth the effort. Even students with a strong geographic background need to be reminded of place location. Most importantly, students should begin to think of Afro-Eurasia, that is the land mass of Africa and Eurasia together, as one interrelated region in which ideas and goods flowed across vast distances. In a practical way, the map work gives students a chance to improve hand-eye coordination. Next is a summary of the travels and adventures of Ibn Battuta. We have divided the travels into segments in order to focus on particular regions within Dar al-Islam. Suggested activities at the end are designed to develop in students a variety of skills. The subsequent lessons incorporate primary documents into assignments that teach higher order thinking skills. The documents bring Ibn Battuta alive and get the students thinking about how one does history.

## II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit may be presented in connection with such commonly taught topics as Muslim civilization, the Mongol empires, West African kingdoms, Europe in the later Middle Ages, medieval trade and travel, Marco Polo, the Black Death, and the hemispheric context of the European voyages of discovery.

## ***Teacher Background Materials***

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Teachers and students should note that throughout this unit the term “Southwest Asia” is used to designate the area commonly referred to as the Middle East, that is, the region extending from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Afghanistan, including Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula. Egypt is designated separately. This usage is compatible with the National Standards for History.

### **III. CORRELATION TO THE NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS**

**I**bn Battuta: A View of the Fourteenth-Century World” provides teaching materials that address the *National Standards for History*, Basic Edition (National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA, 1996), World History, Era 5, “Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000-1500 C.E.” Lessons specifically address Standard 1 C on the rise of new states and the expansion of Islam, 3B on the significance of Mongol rule, 4AB on the growth of states, towns, and trade in West and East Africa, 5A on the consequences of the Black Death, and 7 on the importance of Muslims and Muslim civilization in mediating long-distances exchanges.

### **V. UNIT OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will understand the physical geography of Afro-Eurasia and the features that connect large parts of this world region.
2. Students will understand the significance of Ibn Battuta’s journey in the context of historical documents and the religious and cultural experience of Muslims within Dar al-Islam.
3. Students will be able to read and interpret maps and primary documents.
4. Students will be able to write cohesive essays as well as verbally analyze the material presented.
5. Students will better understand the tools and dilemmas of the historian in doing research and using primary sources.

**V. LESSON PLANS**

1. Ibn Battuta and His Travels
2. The Geography of Afro-Eurasia and Dar al-Islam, circa 1330
3. Why Can't Everyone Be Like Me?
4. The Historian's Dilemma: To What Extent Can Primary Documents Be Trusted?
5. The Realities of Dar al-Islam
6. Ibn Battuta's Trip to Mali