



Ethnic Studies Lesson 4A:

African Americans and West African Kingdoms

TOPIC:

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

GRADE LEVELS:

11-12

TIME:

1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Themes:

2. History and Movement

Values and Principles:

3. Center and place high value on the precolonial ancestral knowledge, narratives, and communal experiences of Native People/s and people of color and groups that are typically marginalized in society.
4. Critique empire building in history and its relationship to white supremacy, racism, and other forms of power and oppression.
5. Challenge racist, bigoted, discriminatory, and imperialist/colonial beliefs and practices on multiple levels.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)**

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas. (RI.11-12.2)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)**

Analyze the causes and consequences of European exploration and expansion in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. (7.11)

Analyze the influence of African kingdoms and the trans-Saharan trade on the development of Islamic civilization and African societies. (7.4)

Analyze the political, social, economic, and cultural impacts of the transatlantic slave trade on Africa, the Americas, and Europe. (8.7)

Lesson Purpose

Students will research West African kingdoms and their connection to the transatlantic slave trade.

Essential Questions

What were the major West African kingdoms, and what was their connection to the transatlantic slave trade?

How has life changed for African Americans in the United States over the last 250 years?

Materials

[Unit 4 KWL Chart](#)

[PBS, Why Do We Say “African American”?](#)

[New Jersey State Bar Association: The Ghana Kingdom](#)

[National Geographic: The Mali Empire](#)

[PBS: Timbuktu](#)

[BlackPast, Songhai Empire](#)

[National Geographic, The Kingdom of Benin](#)

[BlackPast, Kingdom of Oyo](#)

Vocabulary

African American
Black

Ghana Empire
Mali Empire
Timbuktu
Mansa Musa

Songhai Empire
Kingdom of Benin
Kingdom of Oyo

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, present the [unit 4 KWL chart](#) to the class. Ask students what they already know about African American history in the US. Make sure to note what questions they have and would like to pursue as well. Let students know that unlike Native Americans and Latinos/Hispanics, African Americans were not originally from North America and did not come voluntarily.

Step 2:

- As a class, ask students what they believe the proper terminology is for referring to modern African Americans. Have students watch [PBS, Why Do We Say “African American”?](#) (video 8 minutes, 26 seconds). While students are watching, they should take notes on how the terminology of referring to an African American has changed over time. When students have completed the video, as a class, have them share their notes. Help students understand that the class will be using African American and Black American interchangeably and that Black should be capitalized.

Step 3:

- As a class, ask students what they know about the kingdoms of West Africa. Form five student groups. Students will research their kingdom in order to create a five-slide slideshow using a technology of the

class's choice. The slideshow should include location, population size, years of empire, and major facts of interest. Students may need to use additional resources, but students should cite their sources carefully.

- Ghana Empire, [New Jersey State Bar Association: The Ghana Kingdom](#)
- Mali Empire, [National Geographic: The Mali Empire](#) and [PBS: Timbuktu](#) (video 5 minutes, 52 seconds)
- Songhai Empire, [BlackPast, Songhai Empire](#)
- Benin Empire, [National Geographic, The Kingdom of Benin](#)
- Oyo Empire, [BlackPast, Kingdom of Oyo](#)
- When students have completed their research, have students present their slideshows. As students listen, they should take notes on what factors show the sophistication of these kingdoms. Ask students to speculate on why so many of these kingdoms collapsed in the 19th century.

Step 4:

- As a class, ask students this lesson's questions, "What were the major West African kingdoms, and what was their connection to the transatlantic slave trade?" and this unit's question, "How has life changed for African Americans in the United States over the last 250 years?" Add what has been learned as well as questions for follow-up to this unit's KWL chart.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

As time permits and for homework, have students watch [OER Project, Impact of the Slave Trade: Through a Ghanaian Lens](#) (video 14 minutes, 47 seconds). As students watch, they should take notes on the impacts of the slave trade on Ghana. Students should write a long paragraph and note any information that surprises them.

Additional Readings and Resources

"After George Floyd, Where Do We Go From Here?—Debate between Coleman Hughes and Osita Nwanevu."

Paragraph, July 10, 2020. <https://www.pairagraph.com/dialogue/69bbe8cbb5a34fc380ad6d639dd3964f/1>

[OER Project, Impact of the Slave Trade: Through a Ghanaian Lens](#)

Sowell, Thomas. *Conquests and Cultures*. Basic Books, 1998, chap. 3.

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 183–224.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 4A: KWL Chart

KNOW	WONDER	LEARNED
<i>What do we think we already know about this topic?</i>	<i>What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.</i>	<i>After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.</i>