

# African American Voices Lesson Plans

**Lesson Plan:** Outlining Three Great West African Civilizations

**Subject:** World History

**Grade:** 9

**NGSSS-SS:** **SS.912.W.3.9-**  
Trace the growth of major sub-Saharan African kingdoms and empires; Examples are Ghana, Mali and Songhai.



**Description/ Abstract of Lesson:** The students will display comprehension for the rise, decline and major contributions of three West African civilizations using a graphic organizer. The students will conduct research using Internet (and/or Library) sources.

**Objective(s):** Students will:

- Identify the major accomplishments of major West African civilizations and their rulers prior to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.
- Develop a graphic organizer to facilitate historical understanding.
- Develop an appreciation for non-Western cultures and traditions.

**Materials:**

- Internet resources
- Books, magazines and other resources made available by the school media center

**Duration:** 1-2 class periods

**Lesson Lead In/ Opening:**

1. The teacher will instruct the students to close their eyes and envision that they are in West Africa before the advent of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade when trade with the Arabs was thriving. Have them envision the savanna landscape, the mosques and the vast market places where all types of products are sold.

2. Discuss with the students how they felt in their period of meditation.

3. Have them write about their experience in their journals.

**OPTIONAL (depending on maturity and readiness):**

1. While in meditation, explain to the students that it is mid-day Friday and it is time for community prayer. Hundreds of people are lining up to begin prayer.

2. Play the Islamic "Call to Prayer" from <http://www.balaams-ass.com/alhaj/calltoprayer.htm>.

3. Discuss with the students how they felt in their period of meditation.
4. Have them write about their experience in their journals.

**Activity:**

1. Engage the students in a lesson of how three major civilizations flourished in West Africa prior to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade when there were strong levels of trade with the Arabs. The trade was primarily concentrated on gold and salt, however point out that while physical products were being traded, ideas also were being traded. Emphasize how Islam spread into West Africa as a result of this trade; at first accepted by the ruling and higher class and eventually to all levels of society. The three civilizations were:

Ghana	200 BC – 1230 AD
Mali	1230 – 1350 AD
Songhai	1450 – 1618 AD

3. Divide the class into cooperative groups.
4. Either have the groups independently research information on the three civilizations using Internet or library sources or have the students study from packets pre-arranged by the teacher using internet sources.
5. Have the groups organize their research in a full page chart format outlining the time period each civilization flourished, their most noted rulers, their major accomplishments and reasons for decline:

Civilization	Time Period	Most Noted Rulers	Major Accomplishments	Reasons For Decline
<i>Ghana</i>				
<i>Mali</i>				
<i>Songhai</i>				

6. After completing the charts (and after the teacher reviews for correctness), have each group give a presentation on one of the civilizations.
7. (Optional) Post work on classroom wall/bulletin.

**Assessment:**

- Consider cooperation and creativity grades when students work in groups.
- Teacher observation and evaluation of charts. Check for historical accuracy as an indicator of comprehension, grammar, etc.

**Higher Order**

**Thinking Questions:**

1. Why would you suppose that when people hear the term “Muslim” they almost always automatically think of people from the Middle East?

2. Considering that there is a stereotype that all Africans prior to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade were illiterate, in what ways does it affect the ways African culture is viewed amongst us today?

3. How do the constant images of poverty in Africa today (in television, magazines, etc.) affect the way we view the traditional ways of life of African peoples?

4. Considering that there was a vast amount of Gold in West Africa prior to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, do you believe the motives of groups like the Moroccans and the Almoravids for invading West Africa was solely based on religious reasons? Why do you believe this?

5. Mansa Musa became the first West African king to perform pilgrimage to Mecca. While at Mecca his servants were passing out thousands of gold bars as an act of charity. Do you believe Mansa Musa had any other reasons for performing this act? Explain.

**Suggested Books  
In Lesson:**

Mendonsa, E. L. (2002) West Africa: An Introduction to Its History, Civilization and Contemporary Situation, Carolina Academic Press

Davidson, B. (1998) West Africa before the Colonial Era: A History to 1850, Longman

Diouf, S. A. (2000) Kings and Queens of West Africa, Scholastic Library Publishing

**Web Resources:**

**Ghana History and Timeline**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13434226>

[http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/history/ancient\\_ghana.php](http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/history/ancient_ghana.php)

<http://www.tracesofthetrade.org/guides-and-materials/historical/ghana-and-the-slave-trade/>

**Mali History and Timeline**

[http://mali.pwnet.org/history/history\\_mali\\_empire.htm](http://mali.pwnet.org/history/history_mali_empire.htm)

<http://www.learner.org/exhibits/collapse/mali.html>

<http://www.africanlegends.info/>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/sundiata-keita>

<http://www.archeology.org/0011/abstracts/timbuktu.html>

<http://www.timbuktufoundation.org/university.html>

<http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/resources/mali/index.htm>

### **Songhai History and Timeline**

<http://www.jamtan.com/jamtan/fulani.cfm?chap=2&linksPage=219>

<http://www.localhistories.org/aftime.html>

<http://webusers.xula.edu/jrotondo/Kingdoms/Songhay/SongHistNarr.html>