

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. 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.

Document A: Blog Post

The following is an excerpt from a blog post that appeared in The Huffington Post on October 17, 2012. It describes a study on the wealthiest people in world history done by Brian Warner, the founder of Celebrity Net Worth, an online publication that investigates the lifestyles of the rich and famous.

Mansa Musa of Mali Named World's Richest Man of All Time; Gates and Buffet Also Make List

You've probably never heard of him, but Mansa Musa is the richest person ever.

The 14th century emperor from West Africa was worth a staggering \$400 billion, after adjusting for inflation, as calculated by *Celebrity Net Worth*. To put that number into perspective – if that's even possible – *Net Worth's* calculations mean Musa's fortune far **outstrips** that of the current world's richest man Carlos Slim Helú and family. . . .

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, when Musa died sometime in the 1330s, he left behind an empire filled with palaces and mosques, some of which still stand today. But the emperor really turned historic heads for the over-the-top extravagances of his 1324 pilgrimage to Mecca.

The trip, which he embarked upon during the 17th year of the monarch's glittering reign, was hosted by the leaders of both Mecca and Cairo and apparently was so brilliant, it "almost put Africa's sun to shame."

Musa's wealth was a result of his country's vast natural resources. The West African nation was responsible for more than half of the world's salt and gold supply, according to *Net Worth*. Of course, the entry also notes that the fortune was also fleeting. Just two generations later, his net worth was gone – wasted by invaders and infighting.

Source: The Huffington Post, *October 17, 2012*.

Vocabulary

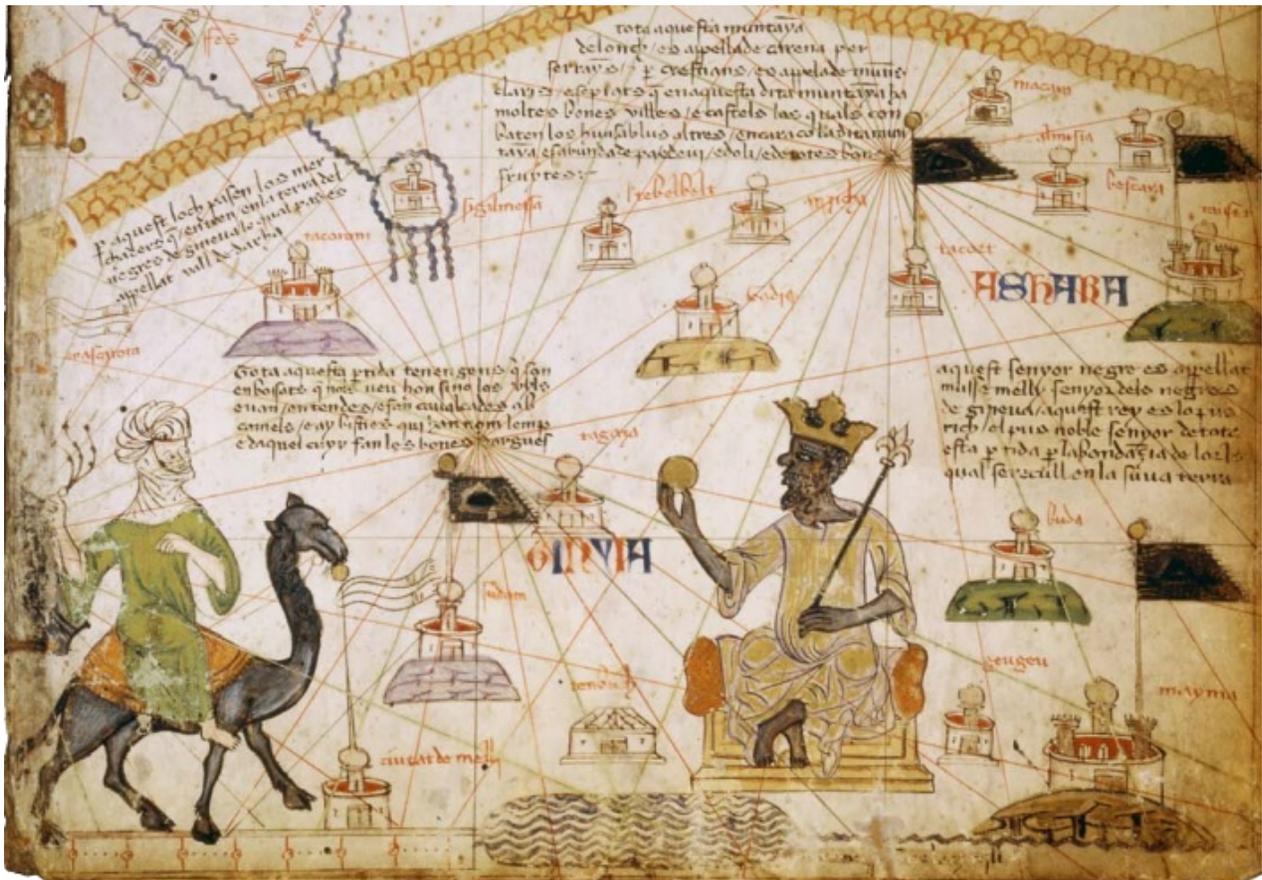
outstrips: exceeds

Blog Post: Guiding Questions

1. (Sourcing) Who created this blog post? When was it created? Why do you think it was written?
2. (Close Reading) What is the main point of the blog post? Identify two claims it makes.
3. (Close Reading) What evidence does it use to support its claims?
4. Do you think the information in this blog post is trustworthy? Why or why not?

Document B: Catalan Atlas

The Catalan Atlas is a medieval map from Spain drawn in 1375 by a mapmaker named Abraham Cresques. Cresques had never visited West Africa but relied on the accounts of travelers and traders to make his map.



“This Black lord is called Musa Mali, Lord of the Black people of Mali. So abundant is the gold which is found in his country that he is the richest and most noble king in all the land.”—*Catalan Atlas inscription*

Source: Abraham Cresques, 1375.

Catalan Atlas: Guiding Questions

1. (Sourcing) What kind of document is this? Who created it? When?
2. (Corroboration) How does the Catalan Atlas compare to *The Huffington Post* blog post in terms of its depiction of Mansa Musa?
3. Do you think this is an accurate depiction of Mansa Musa? Why or why not?

Document C: Al-Umari

Al-Umari was an Arab historian from Damascus, Syria. He visited the city of Cairo in Egypt several years after Mansa Musa passed through there on his pilgrimage in 1324 CE. He then wrote this account of Mansa Musa's visit, as told to him by the people of Cairo.

From the beginning of my coming to stay in Egypt I heard talk of the arrival of this **sultan** Musa on his Pilgrimage and found the people of Cairo eager to tell what they had seen of the Africans' extravagant spending. I asked the **emir** Abu and he told me of the **opulence**, manly virtues, and **piety** of his sultan. Abu said, "When I went out to meet him, Musa did me extreme honor and treated me with the greatest courtesy. He addressed me, however, only through an interpreter despite his perfect ability to speak in the Arabic tongue. Then he sent to the royal treasury many loads of unworked native gold and other valuables. I tried to persuade him to go up to the Citadel to meet the sultan of Cairo, but he refused persistently saying: 'I came for the Pilgrimage and nothing else. I do not wish to mix anything else with my Pilgrimage.'"

Mansa Musa flooded Cairo with his gifts. He left no emir or holder of a royal office without the gift of a load of gold. The people of Cairo made **incalculable** profits out of him and his caravan in buying and selling and giving and taking. They traded away gold until they **depressed** its value in Egypt and caused its price to fall. This has been the state of affairs for about twelve years until this day by reason of the large amount of gold which they brought into Egypt and spent there.

Source: *Al-Umari*, Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises, 1337-1338.

Vocabulary

sultan: king

emir: a high ranking title

opulence: great wealth, especially shown by extravagant living

piety: religious devotion

incalculable: huge

depressed: lowered

