Africa: Agency & Resistance Unit 3 Overview: World History II, 10th Grade

Driving Concept 1: Intraregional Interactions

Through this driving concept, students will examine the interactions of people and the movement of ideas and biological or ecological forces within different regional networks across the world in the 14th and 15th centuries. Students will analyze the role of natural resources, access to bodies of water, climate and continental shape on the interconnectedness of different societies. Students will evaluate the impact of trade, cultural patterns, political ideologies and the development or inheritance of different technological and scientific innovations on different societies across the globe.

Driving Concept 2: Convergence, Upheaval and Resistance (1400– 1750)

Through this driving concept, students will analyze the shift from micro to macro networks of human interaction. Students will analyze the impact of increased global interaction on human populations across the world, including the movement of plants, animals, pathogens, technology and people — both voluntary and unjustly forced. Students should analyze different perspectives and sources to evaluate the different motivations for increased trade and interaction.

Essential Question

To what extent did African agency shape both the expansion and destabilization of African societies from 1400 to 1750?

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About This Unit

Unit 3: Africa: Agency & Resistance examines how African societies shaped, responded to, and resisted the global forces of trade, expansion, and enslavement from 1400 to 1750. The unit picks up where Unit 1 left off in regards to the growth of African kingdoms. It begins by exploring how African kingdoms such as the Swahili city-states and the Solomonic Dynasty gained and maintained power through trade networks, religious legitimacy, and regional diplomacy. Students then investigate the transatlantic slave trade, analyzing how limited public knowledge about its African context has shaped historical understanding of its global impact. Through primary sources and scholarly evidence, students evaluate how Africans demonstrated agency—not only by resisting enslavement but also by negotiating, adapting, and asserting power within expanding global systems. Next, the unit turns inward to examine how the slave trade destabilized African societies, altering social structures, weakening political institutions, and contributing to long-term fragmentation and demographic change. The unit ends with an Interactive Timeline Assessment, where students evaluate patterns of continuity and change over time across African societies from 1400 to 1750..

Use the Best Practices Repository for information on implementing every strategy and lesson activity!

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Priority Standards	
2.1	Evaluate the utility of the writings of Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo and Zheng He for understanding the lives and customs of different people across Afro-Eurasia.
2.5	Analyze the impact of the exchange of natural resources, goods, ideas, technologies and religion on at least two different societies across Western Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in the 14th and 15th centuries.
2.12	Evaluate the motivations for European maritime expeditions across the Atlantic Ocean and the impact of ideology, disease, and inherited and revised technologies on systems of enslavement and colonization.
2.16	Evaluate the factors that led to the expansion and solidification of the Islamic kingdoms of Western Africa, Christian kingdoms of Northeast Africa and the Swahili city-states on the eastern coast, and analyze the political, economic and social structures of at least three different countries.
2.17	Analyze different forms of engagement and/or resistance of Africans to European traders (e.g., the fight for independence led by Queen Nzinga Mbande), and evaluate the impact of the transatlantic trade of enslaved people on the social fabric of regions, cultures, family structures and populations across Africa.
2.18	Evaluate primary source accounts of the Middle Passage to analyze the dehumanizing experience forced upon enslaved people and the ways in which individuals worked to maintain humanity and dignity in the face of mass atrocity.

Additional Standards	
2.2	Analyze geographic features of Afro-Eurasia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas and Oceania in the early 1400s, including the impact of native crops, bodies of water, landforms and climate on the development of societies in each region.
2.3	Compare the size and relative isolation of different regional networks across Afro-Eurasia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas and Oceania at the start of the 15th century.

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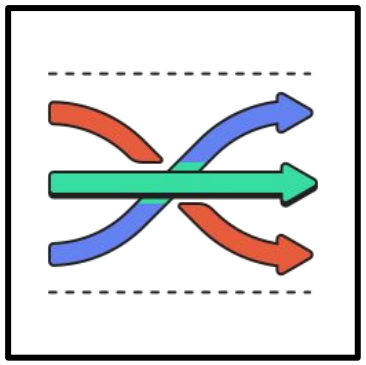
Unit Preview		
Subtopic(s)	***Compelling Question***	***Standard(s)***
Examining African Kingdoms	How did African kingdoms gain and maintain power in the early modern era?	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.16
Slave Trade & Resistance	How did the slave trade shift internal social, economic, and political systems within and between African communities?	2.12, 2.17, 2.18
Assessment: Interactive Timeline		All Unit Standards



Unit Focus Skill: Continuity & Change over Time

Thinking historically means identifying and exploring the reasons behind both what has changed and what has stayed the same within a given time period or around a specific historical event.

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Examining African Kingdoms: Topic Overview

	LESSON 1 (90 MINS)	LESSON 2 (60 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	What insights do archaeological evidence and first-hand accounts provide about the Swahili civilization?	How did political, religious, and economic factors contribute to the long reign of the Solomonic dynasty?
STANDARD(S)	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.16	2.16
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Evaluating Evidence Historical Significance	Causation Continuity & Change Over Time
DO FIRST	Frayer: "City-State" Quickwrite	Frayer: "Dynasty" Notice, Wonder, Think
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Supporting Questions	Advanced Organizer
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE	Swahili City-States Video + Stations	†Document Analysis - Kebra Nagast - (THINKS)
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT	N/A	Causation Graphic Organizer
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket: Triangle, Square, Circle	Unit 3 Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Compelling Question

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Slave Trade & Resistance: Topic Overview

	LESSON 3 (60 MINS)	LESSON 4 (90 MINS)	LESSON 5 (120 MINS)	LESSON 6 (120 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	How has limited public knowledge about the transatlantic slave trade's context affected understanding of its global impact?	What do sources reveal about both the brutality of slavery and the strength of those who endured it?	In what ways did Africans shape—not just react to—the transatlantic slave trade?	How did the slave trade shift internal social, economic, and political systems within and between African communities?
STANDARD(S)	2.17	2.18	2.17	2.12, 2.17
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Contextualization Historical Significance	Evaluating Evidence Historical Significance	Perspective Comparison	Quantitative Analysis Causation
DO FIRST	Frayer: Transatlantic Prediction	Frayer: Middle Passage Notice, Wonder, Think	Frayer: Human Agency A-Z Guide	Frayer: Destabilization Video Reflection
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Inquiry Journal Topic 2: Supporting Questions	Gallery Walk	†Form Assessment - Nzinga Mbemba - PER	†Document Analysis - Slave Trade in Africa - (QUA)
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE	"What is the Context?" - Transatlantic Slave Trade Reading	Slave Wrecks Project Webquest	Expand It! - Nzinga Mbemba and Queen Nzinga	Document Jigsaw
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT	The "Untold American Story" Video Reflection	N/A	Expand It! - Silent Discussion + Elaboration	Inside/Outside Circle
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket: Quickwrite	Exit Ticket: Quote Analysis	Expand It! - Summary	Unit 3 Inquiry Journal Topic 2: Compelling Question

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Assessment: Topic Overview

	LESSON 7 (60 MINS)	LESSON 8 (150 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	***Place-Based Lesson Extension*** *See page 8 for lesson options and view Best Practice Repository for additional information about implementation*	To what extent did African agency shape both the expansion and destabilization of African societies from 1400 to 1750?
STANDARD(S)		All Unit Standards
FOCUS SKILL(S)		Continuity & Change Over Time
DO FIRST		"What is Continuity & Change Over Time?" Guide
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH		Introduction to Interactive Timeline Assessment
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE		Interactive Timeline Research & Planning
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT		Interactive Timeline Creation
CONCLUSION		Unit 3 Inquiry Journal Essential Question

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Place Based Lesson Extension

	LESSON 7 (60 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	
STANDARD(S)	
FOCUS SKILL(S)	
DO FIRST	
OPTION 1 - PODCAST	
OPTION 2 - SYNCHRONOUS PRESENTATION	
OPTION 3 - FIELD TRIP	
CONCLUSION	

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Unit Commentary:

Unit 3: Africa – Agency & Resistance challenges students to analyze how African societies shaped and responded to expanding global systems in the early modern period. The unit applies the historical thinking skill of continuity and change over time to evaluate how African kingdoms asserted power and navigated both opportunity and disruption amid growing intercontinental trade and colonial pressures.

Topic 1 begins by exploring how powerful African kingdoms—such as the Swahili city-states and the Solomonic Dynasty—gained and maintained influence through regional trade, religious legitimacy, and diplomacy. Students examine archaeological and textual sources to understand the foundations of political authority and how internal cohesion contributed to these kingdoms' longevity and resilience.

Topic 2 turns to the transatlantic slave trade and investigates how limited public understanding of Africa's internal dynamics has influenced dominant historical narratives. Through maps, readings, and source analysis, students explore how African individuals and states demonstrated agency in a variety of ways—including cooperation, resistance, and strategic adaptation—in the face of growing European involvement in the region. It continues by deepening the inquiry into internal transformations within African societies caused by the slave trade. Students analyze political fragmentation, economic shifts, and social upheaval resulting from demographic loss, militarization, and increased competition for power. Students will investigate evidence from scholarly and primary sources to highlight how these internal shifts were both a product of global exchange and a cause of long-term destabilization.

The unit ends with an Interactive Timeline Assessment, where students identify and analyze patterns of continuity and change across African societies from 1400 to 1750. This culminating task reinforces the unit's essential question and allows students to synthesize evidence in a creative, chronological format.

Throughout the unit, students apply historical thinking skills—especially continuity and change, contextualization, and evaluating evidence—to develop a more nuanced understanding of African history in the global early modern world. By studying both agency and disruption, students confront oversimplified narratives and gain a deeper appreciation of African contributions and challenges during this era.

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Suggested Readings and Helpful Resources:

For information on:

- The Sudanic African Empires: Ghana / Mali / Songhay & The Swahili City States of East Africa
- The People of the Swahili Coast
- Atlantic Black Box
- Humanity Archive Podcast on Queen Nzinga
- PBS Online Storybook: "The Amazing Adventures of Equiano"
- Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua resource
- Slave Voyages database

Unit Pedagogical Resources:

- What is Continuity & Change over Time? Guide
- What is Continuity & Change over Time? Video
- Recordings: Cultures, Connections, and Communities: Teaching about the Swahili Coast
- The *1619 Project* Curriculum

Museum Component:

- Field Trip: The National Museum of African American History & Culture
  - Exhibit → Slavery and Freedom Highlights Tour

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