

LESSON 3C | Grades 5-12

The Great Mali Empire

Lesson Duration: 3 Class Periods (approximately 50 Minutes) for Each Section



OVERARCHING QUESTIONS

1. Where are we going?
2. Where are we now in our understanding of this topic?
3. Why are we trying to discover more?
4. How will we get there?
5. How will we know we have arrived at any new understandings about this topic?

OBJECTIVE:

This lesson will explore Mali. The lesson will allow students to learn about the Mali culture as well as the Manden Charter, Mansa Musa, Sundiata Keita, and Timbuktu. During this lesson, students will demonstrate their understanding of the material by identifying and understanding the vocabulary related to the lesson; read and respond to the background information about Mali culture; and conduct research to find similarities and differences between the Mali Empire and other cultures.

STANDARDS/ESSENTIAL SKILLS:

All of the standards listed below are directly related to or can be closely connected to this lesson. Depending on the direction the teacher wishes to focus the lesson, these standards provide a foundation for teachers to adapt and implement a standards-based curriculum approach.

KEY INTEREST APPROACH STATEMENT AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What is a charter?
2. How was the charter preserved over times?
3. Why is it important for people to know about the Manden Charter?
4. How would you describe the Mali Kingdom during this timeframe?
5. What is significant about the ways in which Munsu Mansa ruled?
6. Why are parts of Africa often overlooked in social studies lessons?
7. What is the other name for the Manden Charter?
8. Who is credited with pronouncing the Manden Charter?



BACKGROUND INFORMATION: THE GREAT MALI EMPIRE

We usually think of the Magna Carta as the first document to encapsulate any sort of human rights. However, the Kurukan Fuga Charter, also known as the Manden Charter, is its contemporary and, according to at least one scholar, may even predate it.

In 2009, the charter was added to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. However, the charter wasn't written down. Instead, it was passed down orally from one generation to the next. This went on for centuries, illustrating West Africa's rich oral tradition. This may sound like news since most social studies and history programs teach little about the kingdoms of Africa. Of course, we know about ancient Egypt — one of the most influential civilizations in history. But not much is said about the great kingdoms of sub-Saharan Africa such as the kingdom of Kush, the kingdom of Axum, the Land of Punt, the Mali Empire, the Songhai Empire, and the Great Zimbabwe kingdom — of which little is known.

At the founding of the Mali Empire, the Manden Charter was born. Sometime in the 1200s, a great warrior named Sundiata Keita pronounced it. Though Disney takes credit for the moniker, Keita was the original "Lion King." After calling for a rebellion, he



raised an army and squashed his sovereign's forces, consolidating the empire and eliminating the state of Old Ghana.

At the site of Kurukan Fuga, meaning "clearing on a hard rock," situated between what is now Guinea and Mali, the resplendent Keita assembled a group of wise men, the chiefs of the various clans. These included Sumanguru Kanté, king of Sosso, whom he had just defeated at the battle of Kirina. After the charter's declaration, it was passed down through griots, or bards, the famed storytellers of the region and keepers of the culture. This is a family affair, and stories and other items are passed down still today



Mali manuscripts

from father to son. The spoken document, which has also been called a constitution, contains a preamble and seven chapters. It speaks on social peace, the sanctity of human life, women's rights, the right to an education, food security, and even to self-expression. The charter gives equal rights to citizens, including women and slaves. The aim was to provide peace and social stability. It advocated diversity and spoke of abolishing slavery and, in this case, the razzia, or raid.