



Set 1: Historical Gold Trade

Image 1.1 Map of Gold Trade Routes

Caption 1.1:

It's the world's hottest desert. But before the rise of sea travel, the Sahara was Africa's inland ocean, crossed by Berber traders and their caravans of camels. They traded gold from Mali in West Africa for salt, beads, and pottery from the Mediterranean coast.

(262 characters)

Image 1.2 Map of Caliphates

Caption 1.2:

What unified the vast Mediterranean territories controlled by the Muslim caliphates? Gold, and lots of it. Solid gold coins called dinars were the common currency of the realm, fueling demand for gold from West Africa.

(218 characters)

Image 1.3 Image of Mansa Musa

Caption 1.3:

There's charity, and then there's what Mansa Musa did on his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324. The emperor of Mali handed out so much gold along the way that the sudden flood of wealth busted the region's economy.

(208 characters)

Image 1.4 Image of Portuguese Trader

Caption 1.4:

With the Sahara controlled by Muslims, Europeans looking to reach the riches of West Africa took to the sea instead. The routes of Portuguese explorers in the 1400s were soon followed by other Europeans, who traded firearms, textiles, and seashells for slaves, ivory, and gold.

(277 characters)



Set 2: Mami Wata's Journey

Image 2.1 Museum's Mami Wata

Caption 2.1:

Ancient African deity or newcomer? Mami Wata, which means “Mother Water,” is no native African—note her light skin and straight hair. But the snakes around her waist connect her to traditional beliefs in a water spirit common to cultures across the continent and beyond.

(270 characters)

Image 2.2 Photograph of snake charmer, overlaid on map indicating movement from Polynesia to Germany

Caption 2.2:

Mami Wata was real, in a way. Modern images of her as a spirit are based on a Samoan snake charmer, Maladamatjaute, who performed in Hamburg, Germany, in the 1880s. African sailors docked there brought back posters for the show and her image soon melded with ancient beliefs.

(275 characters)

Image 2.3 Image of bottle label, overlaid on map indicating movement from Germany to W. Africa

Caption 2.3:

Mami Wata was so popular in Africa in the 1900s that her persona inspired a German perfumer to create “Mami Water” for the African market around 1920.

(150 characters)

Image 2.4 Image of Indian litho, overlaid on map indicating movement from W. Africa to India

Caption 2.4:

Her snake-charming days in Germany had been over for half a century. But Maladamatjaute's popularity in Africa was still growing in the 1950s when entrepreneurs from Ghana hired the Shree Ram Calendar Company in India to make replicas of the old poster advertising her show.

(274 characters)

Image 2.5 Image of Haitian Drapo, overlaid on map indicating movement to Caribbean

Caption 2.5:

Mami Wata travelled to the Caribbean, where water spirits like her are central to Haitian Vodou, a religion with rituals from several West African cultures.

(156 characters)



Set 3: Colonialism

Image 3.1 Montalboddo map 1508

Caption 3.1:

One of the first printed maps of Africa appeared in 1508 in a book about European voyages to the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The coastline is accurate, but the interior was a mystery to Europeans then—they only knew Africa from sailing along the coast.

(252 characters)

Image 3.2 Map showing Portuguese, Omani, English, Dutch, Danish outposts/port cities ca. 1700

Caption 3.2:

Europeans staked their African claims with coastal forts and port cities, then pushed inward, fighting other Europeans for control of the gold and slave trades. The Portuguese gradually lost out to the Dutch, French, and English, who were willing to trade guns to Africans.

(273 characters)

Image 3.3 Cedit Tercumesi map of Africa 1803

Caption 3.3:

The first atlas in the Muslim world was published in 1803 in Istanbul, then the capital of the Ottoman Empire. It was based on the research of an English cartographer enlisted by the Ottomans to help upgrade their military to Western standards.

(244 characters)

Image 3.4 Map of Omani Empire ca. 1856

Caption 3.4:

Oman, at the mouth of the strategically important Persian Gulf, became powerful enough in the late 1600s to push the Portuguese out of East Africa and build its own empire. In 1730, the sultan of Oman moved his palace to the Swahili island of Zanzibar.

(252 characters)

Image 3.5 Map of European colonialism 1914

Caption 3.5:

European colonialism in Africa exploded in the late 1800s. By 1900, the whole continent except Ethiopia and Liberia had been claimed in the so-called “Scramble for Africa.” The African territories became pawns in the international tensions that would erupt into World War I.

(274 characters)



Set 4: Diversity of Africa

Image 4.1 Map showing diverse world religions in Africa

Caption 4.1:

Christianity and Islam have existed in Africa for hundreds of years, alongside scores of traditional African spirituality and every other major world religion. Today, the vast majority of Africans are Christian or Muslim, sometimes practicing traditional religions as well.

(273 characters)

Image 4.2 Map showing diversity of languages in Africa

Caption 4.2:

Africa is incredibly multi-lingual, with 2,000 different languages—500 in Nigeria alone. Many are creole, blended languages that develop when trade or other interactions bring different cultures together.

(204 characters)

Image 4.3 Map showing diversity of climate/biome in Africa

Caption 4.3:

Africa has some of the wettest and driest regions in the world. It rains all year in the lush equatorial areas in the middle, while dry periods lengthen the farther you move in either direction from the equator, the landscape shifting from forest to grasslands to desert.

(271 characters)

Image 4.4 Map showing size of Africa relative to various countries

Caption 4.4:

Africa can blame the curvature of the Earth for the fact that most world maps show it smaller than it really is—it's not easy to accurately flatten a sphere. In reality, the United States, China, and Europe could easily fit into Africa, currently divided into 55 countries.

(273 characters)



Set 5: Transatlantic Slave Trade

Image 5.1 Overview of slave trade map (eliminate non-Atlantic)

Caption 5.1:

The trans-Atlantic slave trade began in the 1500s, supplying Spanish and Portuguese colonies in South America. By the 1700s, the English dominated the trade, which ultimately carried about 12 million enslaved Africans across the Atlantic while millions more died on the journey.

(278 characters)

Image 5.2 Origins of US slaves

Caption 5.2:

Most enslaved Africans brought to British North America arrived between 1720 and 1780 from West and Central Africa. Britain banned the slave trade in 1807 and patrolled the African coast to enforce the ban. By 1850, most slaves in the United States had been born in America.

(274 characters)

Image 5.3 Image of a slave vessel

Caption 5.3:

Enslaved Africans were the cargo on the brutal “middle passage” of the slave-trade triangle, packed into ship holds better suited for the guns and textiles carried from Europe to Africa or the cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco carried from the Americas to Europe.

(261 characters)



Set 6: World Religions in Africa: Ethiopian Album

Image 6.1 Ethiopian album page

Caption 6.1:

Monks in Ethiopia spent a lot of time “illuminating” manuscripts, like this one from the late 1600s, during the 1,500 or so years when Christian monasteries were the country’s primary centers of learning. Only a few early manuscripts, however, survived the Islamic raids of the 1500s.

(284 characters)

Image 6.2 Spread of Christianity map

Caption 6.2:

The apostle Mark, born in what is now Libya, spread Christianity to North Africa long before the faith reached Europe. The kingdom of Aksum, now Ethiopia, adopted Christianity around 330 CE.

(190 characters)

Image 6.3 Church of Lalibela

Caption 6.3:

Lalibela, a devout Ethiopian king and priest, built 11 remarkable underground churches—hewn from rock—in the 1100s. He hoped his capital, Roha, would be the architectural and spiritual equal of Jerusalem, and legend holds that his church plans were heaven-sent.

(261 characters)

Image 6.4 Image of procession

Caption 6.4:

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is like no other. Its devout believers observe up to 260 days of fasting every year and a multitude of holy days, marked with processions featuring ornate latticework crosses carried atop long poles.

(229 characters)



Set 7: World Religions in Africa: Toni Malau

Image 7.1 Toni Malau

Caption 7.1:

This figure of Toni Malau, the Kongo name for St. Anthony of Padua, blends Christian and Kongo traditions. Likely used in rituals, he's holding a cross and the Christ Child while wearing the netted cape of Kongo nobility.

(221 characters)

Image 7.2 Spread of Christianity

Caption 7.2:

The rise of Islam slowed the spread of Christianity from North Africa, where it had followers since Biblical times. That changed when the Portuguese found sea routes in the 1400s, opening the door to Catholic missionaries. King Nzinga of Kongo was an early convert.

(265 characters)

Image 7.3 Engraving of Portuguese Capuchin monks in W Africa

Caption 7.3:

After King Nzinga of Kongo freely converted to Christianity in 1491, he urged the people of his vast kingdom to do the same—an easy sell, as some aspects of Christian doctrine had been introduced using words that mirrored Kongo beliefs.

(236 characters)

Image 7.4 Early Christian church (NkulumbimbiChurch1549)

Caption 7.4:

Built by angels? That's the legend of Nkulumbimbi, the oldest Catholic church in Africa. It was constructed around 1549 during the reign of the son of the first Kongo king to convert to Christianity.

(191 characters)



Set 8: World Religions in Africa: Qur'an page

Image 8.1 Qur'an page 51.37.21

Caption 8.1:

Muslims believe that the Qur'an was repeatedly revealed from God to Muhammad verbally through the angel Jibrīl (Gabriel) over a period of approximately twenty-three years. In the Middle Ages, illuminated Qur'ans were commissioned by wealthy patrons of the arts.

(261 characters)

Image 8.2 Spread of Islam map

Caption 8.2:

After Muhammad's death in 632 CE, nomad traders spread Islam throughout the Saharan region. By the Middle Ages, a city at the junction of Saharan camel routes and various river routes had emerged as an African center of Islamic learning: the fabled Timbuktu.

(258 characters)

Image 8.3 Djenne mosque

Caption 8.3:

Look past the 1907 architecture of the mosque at Djenne in Mali—way into the past—and you'll understand why it's revered. In the Middle Ages, this was the site of an important center of Islamic learning, where thousands of students studied the Qur'an at madrassas.

(264 characters)

Image 8.4 Library in Timbuktu

Caption 8.4:

The manuscript collection at the university at Timbuktu is a vital record of African history. But the university, once abuzz with 25,000 scholars from across the medieval Islamic world, is imperiled by war and the harsh desert climate.

(235 characters)

Image 8.5 Somali madrassa

Caption 8.5:

The word madrassa simply means "school" and can refer to primary schools, high schools, or colleges. At a typical Islamic school, memorization of the Qur'an is just one course, along with Arabic, history, ethics, and theology.

(227 characters)



Set 9: World Religions in Africa: Prayer Mat

Image 9.1 Prayer mat (Madagascar)

Caption 9.1:

Devout Muslims pray five times a day while facing Mecca. In a mosque, an ornate niche in a wall, called a mihrab, indicates the direction. This small prayer mat, with its image of a mihrab, would have been laid out on the ground in a similar orientation at prayer time.

(269 characters)

Image 9.2 Spread of Islam map

Caption 9.2:

Shortly after the death of Muhammad in 632 CE, his followers fled to Somalia to escape persecution. In the 1500s, Arab traders also brought Islam to the East African coast, establishing trade centers before turning inland in pursuit of ivory, gold, and slaves.

(260 characters)

Image 9.3 Divination sorabe [text-based form of divination]

Caption 9.3:

Madagascar never converted to Islam—today, half the islanders practice traditional beliefs and half follow Christianity. But the local Malagasy language was first written in sorabe, a form of Arabic script, and traditional divination is based on Islamic numerology.

(265 characters)

Image 9.4 Mihrab

Caption 9.4:

Mosques make it easy to turn toward Mecca during prayers: face the mihrab, an arched niche in a wall, and you're facing Mecca. It's usually the most ornate feature of any mosque.

(178 characters)



Set 10: World Religions in Africa: Torah finials

Image 10.1 Torah finial

Caption 10.1:

When a Torah wasn't being used, ornaments like these capped its scroll rollers. The Torah was dictated to Moses by God, according to Jewish tradition, and is lavishly decorated as a show of respect.

(198 characters)

Image 10.2 Spread of Judaism

Caption 10.2:

Jews have lived in North Africa since fleeing to Egypt in 587 BCE. Persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe spurred a wave of immigration to South Africa in the 1800s. In the 1950s, however, many Jews left Africa for Israel.

(221 words)

Image 10.3 Moroccan woman in traditional Jewish dress

Caption 10.3:

Jews came to Morocco after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD, while another wave came from Spain in the late 1400s. Moroccan Jewish traditions draw from the many cultures that have shaped Morocco, including Berber, Arab, Spanish, and French.

(266 characters)

Image 10.4 Synagogue in Morocco (Nahon Synagogue in Tangier)

Caption 10.4:

In the 1950s, there were 17 synagogues in Tangier, serving as the center of community life for some 17,000 Moroccan Jews. The Nahon Synagogue, now a museum, was founded by the head of an important banking family.

(212 characters)



Set 11: Indian Ocean Trade Routes

Image 11.1 Map of trade routes

Caption 11.1:

Arab traders were crossing the Indian Ocean some 1,500 years before the Portuguese plied Africa's Atlantic coast. Arab, Persian, and Indian merchants established trading centers along the East African coast, blending with the local Bantu people to form a distinct Swahili culture.

(280 characters)

Image 11.2 Image of dhow

Caption 11.2:

Traditional dhows, with their single triangular sail, have ferried people and goods across the Indian Ocean for millennia. But they're at the mercy of seasonal monsoon winds, which blow west toward Africa in the winter and reverse course in the summer.

(252 characters)

Image 11.3 Door from Lamu

Caption 11.3:

Lamu Island, off the coast of Kenya, has been a cultural crossroads for centuries. Settled by wealthy Arab merchants, its melting pot of cultures from the African mainland and across the sea is reflected in the distinctive carved doors of many Lamu houses.

(256 characters)

Image 11.4 Group of ivory tusks

Caption 11.4:

Cosmopolitan Zanzibar was the ultimate "spice island" but also did a brisk trade in ivory with North American merchants, which explains the name of Ivoryton, Connecticut, once famous for producing ivory billiard balls, combs, and piano keys.

(241 characters)

Image 11.5 Painting by Mohamedi Wasia Charinda (Tanzania)

Caption 11.5:

The slave trade persisted well into the 1900s in East Africa, where tragic cultural memories remain fresh. In this tingatinga painting, a Tanzanian style created in the 1970s for tourists, slaves and ivory are loaded onto a dhow for Indian Ocean markets.

(254 characters)



Set 12: Historical African Kingdoms

Image 12.1 Map of African Kingdoms—compilation over time

Caption 12.1:

African kingdoms rose and fell on the changing tides of power and wealth driven by agriculture, trade, and technology—until colonialism upended most of them. Some kingdoms survived, however, and still hold ceremonial roles.

(223 characters)

Image 12.2 Plaque—Benin Kingdom

Caption 12.2:

Location, location, location enabled the kingdom of Benin, in the center of major trade routes, to prosper after its founding in 1180. The arrival of European traders in the late 1400s, like these Portuguese, spurred further economic and political growth.

(273 characters)

Image 12.3 Kuba belt

Caption 12.3:

The Kuba Kingdom formed in about 1625 when 19 different ethnic groups united around an outsider. Crops imported from the Americas—corn, tobacco, cassava—helped the kingdom prosper, and the royals still have ceremonial roles today.

(230 characters)

Image 12.4 Ife Head

Caption 12.4:

Oduduwa, the first Yoruba king and founder of the ancient city of Ile-Ife, is a legendary figure known through oral history. His seven offspring founded their own kingdoms, the seven Yoruba nations, which remain united by origin and language.

(242 characters)

Image 12.5 Benin Memorial Head

Caption 12.5:

Amsterdam without the cold and canals? That's what a Dutch visitor thought of the capital of Benin in the 1500s. Enriched by trade and tribute, the royal court supported robust metalwork and ivory carving trades. But a British raid, in 1897, looted Benin of its art.

(266 characters)

Image 12.6 Yoruba Crown

Caption 12.6:

Most Yoruba city-states were ruled by kings, or oba, and a council of advisors. The balance of power varied, but a council could always order the king to abdicate by sending him a symbolic message, usually an empty calabash or a gift of parrot's eggs.

(251 characters)

Image 12.7 Amenhotep III

Caption 12.7:

Early farmers along the Nile River gradually organized into two small kingdoms, which united around 3000 BCE to form "The Two Lands," known today as Egypt. Pharaohs would rule Egypt for thousands of years before crumbling under the expanding Persian Empire in 525 BCE.

(269 characters)

Image 12.8 Ethiopian album page (Ascension image)

Caption 12.8:

Ancient Ethiopia, or Abyssinia, is believed by some to be the world's oldest kingdom. A direct line from the Kingdom of Aksum (founded in the 400s BCE) to the Emperor Haille Selassie (deposed in 1974) is debatable. But even so, Ethiopia has had a remarkably continuous history.

(277 characters)

Image 12.9 Asante Chief's Chair

Caption 12.9:

A stool covered with gold fell from the sky and landed on the first Asante king, Osei Tutu, who unified several Akan chiefdoms in the 1670s. That's the legend of the Golden Stool, still an important symbol of the Asante kingdom and said to hold the soul of the nation.

(268 characters)



Set 13: Ancient Egypt in Africa

Image 13.1 Map—Egypt, Nubia/Sudan

Caption 13.1:

Predominantly Muslim and Arabic speaking, Egypt has been closely tied to the Middle East since the introduction of Islam in the 600s CE. But ancient Egypt, linked to other parts of Africa by the Nile River, shared more with its neighbors to the south.

(251 characters)

Image 13.2 Brooklyn Museum Bust

Caption 13.2:

There's a reason you probably haven't heard of Kush, the ancient kingdom south of Egypt. Ancient Egyptians regarded their neighbors as inferior and passed on that disdain to early archeologists. Classical Greek historians, on the other hand, found a lot to like in Kush.

(270 characters)

Image 13.3 Headrest

Caption 13.3:

Everyday objects from ancient Egypt, like this headrest, are similar to those found in Central and East Africa, suggesting deep ties between the ancient culture and the rest of the continent.

(192 characters)

Image 13.4 Model boat

Caption 13.4:

Egyptian tombs are mini-museums of daily life many millennia ago. They're stocked with models of everyday objects for the dead to use in the afterlife, such as this riverboat, the main mode of transport in a land where roads washed away in the annual flooding of the Nile.

(272 characters)

Image 13.5 Lady Teshat

Caption 13.5:

Wood was good—a status symbol—when it came to coffins in ancient Egypt. Trees, after all, were scarce in the dry, desert land. The wealthy imported hardwood from Lebanon and other forested regions while those of lower status settled for coffins made of pottery or reeds.

(270 characters)

Image 13.6 Clappers
Caption 13.6:

Musical clappers like this set carved from hippopotamus tusks were used like castanets at festivals, and not just for entertainment—the noise of clapping was thought to keep dangerous spirits away.

(197 characters)