
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Sample Lesson 6: Classical Africa and Other Major Civilizations

Theme: Identity

Disciplinary Area: African American Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 2, 3, 4

Standards Alignment:

HSS Content Standard: 10.4

CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Chronological and Spatial Thinking: 1, 2, 3; Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View: 4; Historical Interpretation: 3, 4

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: SL.9–10.5, SL.11–12.5

CA ELD Standards: 1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 1.10

LESSON PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW:

Students will explore the classical African backgrounds of African Americans, perhaps giving them the first information about the origin of African civilization. They will examine the beginning of writing, mathematics, architecture, and medicine in the Nile Valley civilization, specifically Kemet, Nubia, and Axum. Students will also be introduced to other major African civilizations such as ancient Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Yoruba, Kongo, and Zimbabwe. Students will conduct research on numerous topics surrounding the emergence of cultural forms, music and dance, political organization, art, and philosophy in the Nile Valley cluster of civilizations, as well as in the Western and Southern African civilizations. Students will be exposed to African philosophers such as Ptahhotep, Imhotep, Akhenaten, and Merikare. Among the themes of this course will be the origin of the universe, that is, the creation myths from ancient Kemet, the ethical concept of Maat as an African cultural concept and its use as a philosophy underpinning social development. Maat represents balance, truth, harmony, and justice. Female and male roles across ancient African society were based on the principles of Maat. Women played central leadership roles in classical African civilization. Students will be asked to think about how the people of Axum built stelae as examples of historical memory.

Key Terms and Concepts: civilization, culture, philosophy, architecture, Maat, Nile Valley

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to ...):

- Understand the importance of culture to African values and beliefs
- Develop an understanding of and analyze the classical history of African people
- Identify how African classical cultures set the models for future civilizations in terms of philosophy, architecture, medicine, spirituality, and mathematics
- Understand the relationship to Africa of all people and the nature of world development from an African perspective, which challenges the particular racial constructions of enslavement, colonialization, and imposition on African women, men; and children; thus, students will be able to deconstruct racial imaginations regarding their common humanity

Essential Questions:

1. What were the antecedents to the Classical African civilizations? Use references to archaeological creations such as Inzalo Y'Langa, or Adam's Calendar, as a point of departure to examine the ancient past of Africa.
2. How did Africans in the Americas and many in Africa lose sight of their contact with their own classical past? How was it erased, distorted, and colonized?
3. What is the point of today's modern African Americans making links to their African cultural past?

Lesson Steps/Activities:

1. To access this lesson, have the students think of something in today's society that came from Africa. Prompt them with the Washington Monument (show an image if possible), then show an image of the obelisks of Egypt and Ethiopia (in Aksum, also spelled Axum). Show them the pyramid on the back of the dollar bill, and let them know it is an African architectural design. Think of other connections, for example, the calendar and the 24-hour day.
2. Begin the lesson by discussing why Inzalo Y'Langa, popularly named Adam's Calendar, is called the oldest human-made structure in the world. Show on the map where it is located in Southern Africa. Point out that even if it is not more than 100,000 years old as suggested, it is still older than the Great Pyramid on the same continent and Stonehenge in England.
3. On the map of Africa point to the Nile Valley and explain that the Nile River, the earth's longest, flows through only one continent, Africa. Explain to the students that the Nile River runs down to the Mediterranean from the interior of Africa around Uganda and Rwanda, almost touching the other great river of Africa, the Congo.

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4. Engage students in a study of the history of the Sahara Desert, the world's largest, showing how it was not always a massive desert and that humans in the past occupied it for thousands of years.
 5. Divide the students into three groups, and assign each group a civilization to report on (e.g., Kemet, Nubia, Axum). Each group is responsible for researching the following:
 - a. Describe the region where the civilization is located by stating on which continent it is found, its chronology, that is, when it was developed, and its major contributions that could be considered permanent. Identify the people who may have been influenced in language, customs, and traditions by this civilization.
 - b. Allow the students to choose one of these cultures—Yoruba, Zimbabwe, or Asante—and ask them to write a two-page narrative of the history of the people.
 - c. What were the borders, as far as scholars are concerned, of these civilizations? What other kingdoms, empires, or nations were connected to them?
 - d. Show evidence of the impact of these civilizations in contemporary life in the United States that might be invisible to most people. Do you see pyramids anywhere? For example, the American dollar has a pyramid on it. Anywhere else? What does the Washington Monument look like when you think of ancient Axum or Kemet?

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection:

- Students will research examples of American and European museums that have African art. Have students write about the Boston Museum Nubian collection, the Brooklyn Museum Egyptian collection, or the University of California, Los Angeles African art collection.
- Students will complete their own collages of photos and information they have learned from reading materials. Ask them to divide into three groups, where some students will be producer-designers, some will be scriptwriters, and others will present the information to the class.

Materials and Resources:

Print Sources:

Asante, Molefi Kete. 1994. *Classical Africa*. Saddle Brook, NJ: Peoples Education Holdings.

Asante, Molefi Kete. 2000. *The Egyptian Philosophers*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.

Asante, Molefi Kete. 2019. *The History of Africa*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bauval, Robert, and Thomas Brophy. 2011. *Black Genesis*. Rochester, VT: Bear and Company.

Videos:

Senegal: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link32>

Adam's Calendar: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link33>

Ancient Egypt: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link34>

Kush: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link35>

Axum: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link36>

Yoruba: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link37>

Great Zimbabwe: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link38>