**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?*

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/mansamusa-

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**

exceeds

*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 outstripsthat 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.*

**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 Sain 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 inhis 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**

king

a high ranking title; great wealth, especially shown by extravagant living; religious devotion

huge

lowered

*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 sultanMusa on his Pilgrimage and found the people of Cairo eager

to tell what they had seen of the Africans’ extravagant spending. I asked

the emirAbu and he told me of the opulence, manly virtues, and pietyof

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

incalculableprofits 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*

**Al-Umari: Guiding Questions**

1. (Sourcing) Who is Al-Umari? Do you think he is a reliable source of information on Mansa Musa’s pilgrimage to Mecca? Why, or why not?

2. (Corroboration) How does this document compare to *The Huffington Post* blog post and the Catalan Atlas in terms of its depiction of Mansa Musa?

3. (Close Reading) How does the emir Abu describe Mansa Musa to Al-Umari? According to the emir Abu, what traits does Mansa Musa possess?

4. Do you think Al-Umari’s description of Mansa Musa is accurate? Why or why not?