Updated: Unit 3 Ancient West African Civilizations (7th Grade)

Content Area: **Social Studies**
Course(s):
Time Period: **MP3**
Length: **8 weeks**
Status: **Published**

Targeted Standards

6.2.8.HistoryCC.1.c	Describe how the development of both written and unwritten languages impacted human understanding, development of culture, and social structure.
6.2.8.HistoryUP.3.b	Compare the status of groups in the Ancient World to those of people today and evaluate how individuals perceived the principles of liberty and equality then and now (i.e., political, economic, and social).
6.2.8.CivicsPI.4.a	Analyze the role of religion and other means rulers used to unify and centrally govern expanding territories with diverse populations.
6.2.8.GeoHE.4.a	Explain how geography influenced the development of the political, economic, and cultural centers of each empire as well as the empires' relationships with other parts of the world.
6.2.8.GeoPP.4.a	Explain why the Arabian Peninsula's physical features and location made it the epicenter of Afro-Eurasian trade and fostered the spread of Islam into Africa, Europe, and Asia.
6.2.8.GeoPP.4.b	Assess how maritime and overland trade routes impacted urbanization, transportation, communication, and the development of international trade centers (i.e., the African caravan and Silk Road).
6.2.8.GeoHE.4.c	Explain how the geographies and climates of Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas influenced their economic development and interaction or isolation with other societies.
6.2.8.GeoGI.4.a	Determine how Africa's physical geography and natural resources presented challenges and opportunities for trade, development, and the spread of religion.
6.2.8.HistoryCC.4.b	Explain how and why the interrelationships among improved agricultural production, population growth, urbanization, and commercialization led to the rise of powerful states and kingdoms (i.e., Europe, Asia, Americas).
6.2.8.HistoryCC.4.f	Analyze the role of religion and economics in shaping each empire's social hierarchy and evaluate the impact these hierarchical structures had on the lives of various groups of people.
6.2.8.HistoryCC.4.g	Evaluate the importance and enduring legacy of the major achievements of the people living Asia, Africa (Islam), Europe and the Americas over time.

21st Century Skills: Career Readiness, Life Literacies & Key Skills

9.4.8.GCA.1	Model how to navigate cultural differences with sensitivity and respect (e.g., 1.5.8.C1a).
9.4.8.GCA.2	Demonstrate openness to diverse ideas and perspectives through active discussions to achieve a group goal.
9.4.8.TL.3	Select appropriate tools to organize and present information digitally.

Rationale/Goals

This unit introduces students to the rich history, cultures, and achievements of the great civilizations of West Africa. Students will explore the rise and development of the empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, examining how geography, trade, leadership, and cultural exchange contributed to their success. The unit also highlights the importance of African traditions, including oral history, religion, family life, art, music, and storytelling, helping students develop a deeper appreciation for the diversity and complexity of African societies.

Through the study of historical figures such as Sundiata Keita and Mansa Musa, students will analyze how leadership and innovation shaped powerful kingdoms and influenced regions far beyond Africa. They will investigate the role of the trans-Saharan trade routes, the spread of Islam, and the importance of cities such as Timbuktu as centers of learning and commerce.

This unit encourages students to challenge common misconceptions about Africa by recognizing its long history of sophisticated governments, thriving economies, and vibrant cultural traditions. By examining primary and secondary sources, maps, artifacts, and historical accounts, students will strengthen their historical thinking skills while making connections between the past and the modern world.

Essential Questions: Main Essential Question

How did the civilizations of West Africa shape the history, culture, and economy of Africa and the wider world?

Essential Questions: Guiding Questions

Lesson	Essential Questions
Ghana	1. How did geography influence the development of the West African kingdoms?
	2. Why were gold and salt important to the success of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai?
	3. How did the trans-Saharan trade routes connect West Africa to other regions of the world?
	4. What factors contributed to the rise and fall of the Ghana Empire?
Mali	5. How did Sundiata Keita unite and strengthen the Mali Empire?
	6. Why is Mansa Musa considered one of the most influential rulers in world history?
	7. How did Islam influence the government, culture, education, and trade of West African empires?
	8. Why was Timbuktu an important center of trade, learning, and scholarship?
Songhai	9. How did the Songhai Empire expand and become the largest West African empire?
	10. How did leadership, trade, and cultural exchange contribute to the success of West African civilizations?
	11. What similarities and differences existed among the empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai?
African Traditions	12. What role did oral traditions and griots play in preserving African history and culture?

13. How did African traditions, including music, art, storytelling, and family life, strengthen communities?

14. What evidence demonstrates that West African civilizations made significant contributions to world history?

15. How do the achievements and traditions of ancient African civilizations continue to influence the modern world?

Vocabulary

People	Terms	Places/Events
	Africa	Events:
	West Africa	Rise of the Ghana Empire
	Sahara Desert	Development of the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes
	Sahel	
	Savannah	Spread of Islam into West Africa
	Niger River	Rise of the Mali Empire
Sundiata Keita	Ghana Empire	Battle of Kirina
Mansa Musa	Mali Empire	Sundiata Keita's Rise to Power
Sunni Ali	Songhai Empire	
Askia Muhammad	Kingdom	Mansa Musa's Reign
Ibn Battuta	Empire	Mansa Musa's Hajj to Mecca
Leo Africanus	King	Growth of Timbuktu as a Center of Learning
Abu Bakr II	Emperor	Rise of the Songhai Empire
Griots	Sundiata Keita	Sunni Ali's Expansion of Songhai
	Mansa Musa	Rule of Askia Muhammad
	Sunni Ali	Fall of the Songhai Empire
	Askia Muhammad	Moroccan Invasion of Songhai
	Trans-Saharan Trade	Growth of Oral Traditions and Griot Storytelling
	Trade Routes	

Places

- West Africa
- Sahara Desert
- Sahel Region
- Niger River
- Ghana Empire
- Mali Empire
- Songhai Empire
- Timbuktu
- Gao
- Djenne (Jenne)
- Kirina
- Mecca
- North Africa
- Mediterranean Region
- Atlantic Ocean
- Trans-Saharan Trade Routes
- University of Sankore

Content/Enduring Understandings

Topic: Ghana Empire

Content

- Location and geography of the Ghana Empire in West Africa
- The role of the Sahara Desert, Sahel region, and Niger River in Ghana's development
- The importance of the gold and salt trade

- The growth of trade networks and the role of merchants
- Ghana's government, military, and taxation systems
- The wealth and influence of Ghana as an early African empire
- Factors that contributed to the decline of the Ghana Empire

Enduring Understandings

- Geography and natural resources influence the growth and success of civilizations.
- Trade networks can help societies gain wealth, power, and connections with other cultures.

- Strong governments develop systems to organize, protect, and manage growing civilizations.
- Civilizations rise and decline due to a combination of economic, environmental, and political factors.

Topic: Mali Empire

Content

- The rise of the Mali Empire under Sundiata Keita
- The expansion and organization of the Mali Empire
- The importance of the gold trade and trans-Saharan trade routes
- Mansa Musa's leadership and contributions
- Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca and its impact on Mali's reputation
- The growth of Timbuktu as a center of trade, education, and Islamic scholarship
- The role of Islam in Mali's government, culture, and education

Enduring Understandings

- Effective leadership can help civilizations expand and achieve great accomplishments.
- Cultural exchange through trade spreads ideas, beliefs, and knowledge.
- Education and scholarship contribute to the development and success of societies.
- African civilizations made significant contributions to world history through trade, learning, and innovation.

Topic: Songhai Empire

Content

- The rise of the Songhai Empire as a major West African power
- The importance of the cities of Gao and Timbuktu
- Sunni Ali's military expansion and leadership
- Askia Muhammad's improvements to government, trade, and education
- The role of Islam in Songhai society
- Songhai's economic success through trade
- Causes of the decline and fall of the Songhai Empire

Enduring Understandings

- Empires grow through strong leadership, economic strength, and effective organization.
- Governments must adapt to challenges in order to maintain power.
- The exchange of ideas and beliefs can influence the development of civilizations.
- Even powerful civilizations can decline because of internal problems and outside forces.

Topic: African Traditions and Culture

Content

- The importance of oral traditions in preserving history
- The role of griots as storytellers, historians, and cultural keepers
- African music, dance, art, and storytelling traditions
- The importance of family, community, and social relationships
- Traditional African beliefs and the influence of Islam
- African architecture, craftsmanship, and artistic achievements
- The importance of preserving cultural heritage

Enduring Understandings

- Culture helps people preserve their history, values, and identity.
- Traditions are passed from generation to generation through stories, art, music, and customs.

- Every society develops unique ways to express beliefs, values, and experiences.
- Studying different cultures helps us appreciate the diversity and achievements of human civilizations.

Unit Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that:

- The civilizations of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai were complex societies with advanced governments, economies, and cultures.
- Trade, geography, leadership, and cultural exchange were important factors in the development of African civilizations.
- African traditions have preserved history and continue to influence cultures today.
- The achievements of African civilizations are an important part of world history.

Skills

- compare and contrast
- use maps
- describe
- determine
- explain
- evaluate
- analyze
- use evidence
- use geographical models
- compare
- use primary and secondary sources
- identify
- cite information

Learning Targets (examples)

Topic 14 Lesson 1: Ghana

- Students will be able to explain how the geography of West Africa influenced the development of the Ghana Empire by examining the importance of the Sahel region, Sahara Desert, and Niger River in supporting settlement, agriculture, and trade.
- Students will be able to analyze how Ghana's location allowed it to become a center of trade by connecting the resources of West Africa with merchants from North Africa and the Mediterranean region.
- Students will be able to interpret maps of ancient West Africa to identify Ghana's location, major trade routes, and important geographic features that shaped the civilization.
- Students will be able to describe the structure of Ghana's government and explain how rulers maintained order, controlled trade, and protected the empire.
- Students will be able to explain the role of Ghana's king in managing the empire by examining leadership, decision-making, and relationships with merchants and neighboring societies.
- Students will be able to evaluate how strong leadership and organization contributed to Ghana's success as one of Africa's first great empires.
- Students will be able to describe daily life in the Ghana Empire by examining the roles of farmers, merchants, soldiers, rulers, and other members of society.
- Students will be able to explain how trade connections influenced the culture of Ghana through the exchange of ideas, beliefs, technologies, and traditions.
- Students will be able to recognize the achievements of the Ghana Empire and explain its importance in the history of Africa and the world.
- Students will be able to explain the factors that contributed to the rise of the Ghana Empire, including geography, trade, resources, and effective government.
- Students will be able to analyze the reasons for the decline of the Ghana Empire by examining the impact of environmental changes, shifting trade patterns, and outside challenges.
- Students will be able to evaluate how civilizations change over time by using evidence from Ghana's history to explain why powerful empires can rise and fall.

Topic 14 Lesson 2: Mali

- Students will be able to explain how the Mali Empire developed and expanded by examining the leadership of Sundiata Keita and the importance of geography and trade.
- Students will be able to describe how the gold trade and trans-Saharan trade routes contributed to Mali's wealth and power and explain how trade connected Mali to other regions of the world.
- Students will be able to analyze the impact of Mansa Musa's leadership by explaining how his wealth,

pilgrimage to Mecca, and support of education increased Mali's influence.

- Students will be able to explain the importance of Timbuktu as a center of trade, learning, and Islamic scholarship and recognize its contributions to African history.
- Students will be able to describe how Islam influenced Mali's government, education, architecture, and culture while recognizing the diversity of beliefs within the empire.
- Students will be able to evaluate how leadership, trade, and cultural exchange helped the Mali Empire become one of Africa's most powerful civilizations.

Topic 14 Lesson 3: Songhai

- Students will be able to explain how the Songhai Empire rose to power by examining its location along the Niger River and its control of important trade cities such as Gao and Timbuktu.
- Students will be able to describe how trade and natural resources contributed to Songhai's growth by explaining the importance of gold, salt, and trans-Saharan trade routes.
- Students will be able to analyze the leadership of Sunni Ali and Askia Muhammad by explaining how their military strategies, government reforms, and policies helped strengthen the empire.
- Students will be able to explain how Islam influenced Songhai society by examining its impact on education, government, trade, and culture.
- Students will be able to describe the importance of Timbuktu as a center of learning and scholarship and explain its role in preserving knowledge and ideas.
- Students will be able to evaluate the factors that led to the decline of the Songhai Empire by analyzing the effects of internal challenges and outside conflicts.
- Students will be able to explain how leadership, trade, and cultural exchange contributed to Songhai becoming one of the largest and most powerful empires in West Africa.

Topic 14 Lesson 4: African Traditions

- Students will be able to explain the importance of oral traditions in African societies by describing how stories, songs, and histories were passed from one generation to the next.
- Students will be able to describe the role of griots in preserving African history and culture by examining their responsibilities as storytellers, historians, and keepers of traditions.
- Students will be able to analyze how African art, music, dance, and storytelling reflect the beliefs and values of different communities.
- Students will be able to explain the importance of family, community, and ancestors in traditional African cultures and how these relationships shaped daily life.

- Students will be able to compare traditional African beliefs and the influence of Islam in West African societies by examining how different belief systems shaped culture and traditions.
- Students will be able to recognize the importance of preserving cultural heritage by explaining how African traditions continue to influence societies today.
- Students will be able to evaluate how traditions, storytelling, and cultural practices help societies maintain their identity and connection to the past.

Resources (Savvas My World Interactive: World History Copyright Savvas Learning Company LLC. 2023)

Topic	Lesson	Subtopics
Topic 14: Africa Civilizations	Lesson 1: Ghana week of Feb 8th	*Main Focus* - The African Landscape -The Rise of Ghana -The Growth of the Ghana Empire *Additional Focus* -Niger and Senegal Rivers -Natural Resources -Gold and Salt Trade
	Lesson 2: Mali week of Feb. 15th and 22nd	*Main Focus* -Rise of Mali -Mali at its peak -Songhai takes over Mali
		Main Focus

		-The Kingdoms of Kush and Axum -Christianity Grows in East Africa -East African City States *Additional Focus* -King Ezana -Swahili Culture -Blending of Cultures
Lesson 3: Trading States of East Africa (Songhai)	week of Mar 1 and 8th	
Lesson 4: African Traditions	week of March 15-22nd	*Main Focus* - Society in West African Empires -African Religions -Key Features of Africa's Culture
Lesson 4: Amistad	week of April 5th	Main Focus • See Unit Link for NJ's Curriculum Guide and Lessons for Amistad • https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I705ddof0hyMIdsin47UMV8VkWj11pX7/view
(See rationale, goals, guiding questions and learning targets below)	-	
Benchmark Review/Benchmark	Week of April 12th	

Supplemental Activities

- Savvas textbook
- Timelines
- Maps
- BrainPop
- EdPuzzle
- Nearpod
- National Geographic
- Metropolitan Museum of Art
- TED-Ed
- PBS Learning Media
- Smithsonian Learning
- Library of Congress
- History Channel Learning Videos
- Kahoot/Blooket Games
- Reading passages, Readworks, NewsELA

Evidence/Assessment

- chucked tests/quizzes
- writing
- primary source analysis
- benchmark assessment
- image analysis
- map and chart analysis
- warm ups
- exit tickets

Interdisciplinary Connections

- Technology

- 8.1.8.DA.1: Organize and transform data collected using computational tools to make it usable for a specific purpose.

Arts

- 1.2.8.Cr1a: Generate a variety of ideas, goals and solutions for media artworks using creative processes such as sketching, brainstorming, improvising, and prototyping with increased proficiency, divergent thinking, and opportunity for student choice.
- 1.2.8.Pr6a: Analyze and design various presentation formats and tasks in the presentation and/or distribution of media artworks.
- 1.2.8.Re7a: Compare, contrast and analyze the qualities of and relationships between the components and style in media artworks.
- 1.2.8.Re8a: Analyze the intent and meanings and context of a variety of media artworks, focusing on intentions, forms, and detect bias, opinion, and stereotypes.
- 1.2.8.Cn10a: Access, evaluate and use internal and external resources to inform the creation of media artworks, such as cultural and societal knowledge, research and exemplary works.

Math

- 7.EE.B : Solve real-life and mathematical problems using numerical and algebraic expressions and equations.

Language Arts - Various literacy activities and strategies.

- NJSLSA.R1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences and relevant connections from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- NJSLSA.R2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- NJSLSA.R4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- NJSLSA.R6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- NJSLSA.R7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- NJSLSA.R8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- NJSLSA.R9 Analyze and reflect on how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- NJSLSA.R10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently with scaffolding as needed.
- RL.7.1. Cite several pieces of textual evidence and make relevant connections to support analysis of

what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- RL.7.2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RL.7.9. Compare, contrast and reflect on (e.g. practical knowledge, historical/cultural context, and background knowledge) a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.
- RL.7.10. By the end of the year read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems at grade level text-complexity or above, scaffolding as needed.
- RI.7.1. Cite several pieces of textual evidence and make relevant connections to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RI.7.2. Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RI.7.3. Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).
- RI.7.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- RI.7.5. Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.
- RI.7.6. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.
- RI.7.7. Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium's portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).
- RI.7.8. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.
- RI.7.9. Analyze and reflect on (e.g. practical knowledge, historical/cultural context, and background knowledge) how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.
- RI.7.10. By the end of the year read and comprehend literary nonfiction at grade level text-complexity or above, with scaffolding as needed.

Science

- MS-ESS3-2: Analyze and interpret data on natural hazards to forecast future catastrophic events and inform the development of technologies to mitigate their effects.
- MS-ESS3-3: Apply scientific principles to design a method for monitoring and minimizing a human impact on the environment.

Intersections of History

Black:

- African civilizations
- Ghana, Mali, and Songhai
- Sundiata Keita and Mansa Musa
- African kings and leaders
- Gold and salt trade
- Trans-Saharan trade
- Timbuktu and African scholarship
- Islam in Africa
- Griots and oral history
- African traditions and culture
- African family and community
- African contributions to world history

Women:

- Women in ancient civilizations
- Women as leaders
- Women in government and society
- Women's roles in family and community
- Women and religion
- Women and agriculture
- Women and trade
- Women as keepers of traditions
- Women in African cultures