**Name:**

**Block: Mansa Musa Transcript**

**Teacher:**

First, let’s turn to written records. Oh, right. We don’t have very many, at least not written by Sub-Saharan Africans. Much of African history was kept safe by telling stories rather than writing things down.  
  
These days, we tend to think of writing as the most accurate and reliable form of keeping records. And we’ve already said that writing is one of the things that makes a country modern, this suggests that people who don’t use writing aren’t normal. That idea is simply crazy. But:  
  
1. If you need any evidence that it’s possible to make amazing stories without writing, let me direct your attention to two famous books you will read in high school called the Iliad and the Odyssey (two really old but important book), which were written and memorized by poets for hundreds of years before anyone ever wrote them down.

1\*

2. You think that talking and not writing anything down is backwards and not modern but here you are, listening to me!   
  
But we do have a lot of interesting records for some African kingdoms, including the legendary story of Mansa Musa. By legendary I mean some of it probably isn’t true, but it sure is important. Let’s go to the Thought Bubble.  
  
So there was this king Mansa Musa, who ruled the West African Empire of Mali, and in 1324-ish he left his home and made the hajj, a trip to the city of Mecca that all Muslim should make.  
  
He brought with him a group of over 1000 people, some say 60,000, and, most importantly, 100 camel loads of gold. I wish it had been donkeys so I could say he had 100 ass loads of gold, but no. Camels….  
  
Right, so along the way to Mecca, Mansa Musa spent freely and gave away lots of gold. Most famously, when he reached the city of Alexandria, at the time one of the most important cities in the world, he spent so much gold that he caused people to lose their jobs because the value of money went down dramatically. (He basically made gold worthless in Alexandria.)  
  
He built houses in Cairo and in Mecca and as he traveled through the world, a lot of people saw and returned to Europe with rumors of Mansa Musa’s ridiculous wealth, which helped spread the story (stories) in the minds of Europeans that West Africa was a land of gold. The kind of place you’d like to visit. And maybe, you know, in five hundred years or so, begin to steal from.

2

3\*

So what’s so important about the story of Mansa Musa? Well, first, it tells us there were African kingdoms, ruled by fabulously wealthy African kings. Which undermines one of the many stereotypes about Africa, that its people were poor and lived in tribes ruled by chiefs and witch doctors. Also, since Mansa Musa was making the hajj, we know that he was:  
  
A. Muslim, and B. a Muslim who took his religion seriously.  
  
And this tells us that Africa, at least western Africa, was much more connected to the parts of the world we’ve been talking about than we generally are led to believe. Mansa Musa knew all about the places he was going before he got there, and after his visits, the rest of the world was sure interested in finding out more about his homeland.  
  
Mansa Musa’s pilgrimage journey also brings up a lot of questions about West Africa, namely, what did his kingdom look like and how did he start to follow the religion of Islam? The first question is a little easier, so we’ll start with that one.  
  
The empire of Mali, which Mansa Musa ruled until the year of 1337, was a large part of West Africa, running from the coast hundreds of miles into the middle of the continent, and including many important cities, the largest and best-known of which was Timbuktu.  
  
The story of this Empire becoming Muslim is a bit more complicated. There are a group of North Africans called Berbers had long traded with West Africans of Mali. The Berbers offered salt in exchange for West African gold.

4

5\*

**\*A Muslim is someone who practices the religion of Islam.**

Right, so anyway the Berbers became Muslims very early and Islam spread along trade routes between North and West Africa. The kings soon became Muslim because it made them look important but also connected them to the wealthy Berber traders.

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**Directions:** The questions below correspond with the “big numbers” in the reading above. Underline or highlight where in the reading you found the information to answer the question. Then, use the highlighted text in your writing.

1\*. Why are there not a lot of written records from ancient kingdoms in Africa? How are people who don’t write down their history usually seen?

2. What does John Greene mean when he uses the word legendary?”

3\*. What did Mansa Musa do on his trip to Mecca? After hearing stories of Mansa Musa, what did Europeans think about Africa?

4. What is important about the story of Mansa Musa?

5\*. What did the Berbers trade their salt for?

Much of African history was kept safe by telling stories rather than writing things down.

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Europeans began to think that…

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