

Agriculture and Trade in the Old Kingdom of Mali

Standards of Learning

Social Studies: 3.2, 3.4

Objective

Students will:

- Identify Mali on a map
- Identify natural resources of Mali
- Barter using Mali resources

Materials

- Trading cards for each student (visit [newsletter](#) to download)
- Paper lunch bags

Background Knowledge

Located strategically along the trade routes, Mali was one of the most prosperous kingdoms in Africa's history. Its desert-like environment was offset by nearby rivers, allowing for farming and large cities. A prime natural resource in Mali was gold. All gold was considered property of the mansa. Citizens could turn it in for its equivalence in gold dust. This was oftentimes traded for salt, another important natural resource.

This lesson allows students to experience the trade that took place in the Kingdom of Mali. By bartering, students will need to trade their good for the goods of their neighbors in order to have all they would have needed to survive in the times of the kingdom. Put the bags together prior to the lesson, making sure that each bag has different amounts of each item so children have a reason to barter. To foster a discussion about specialization and interdependence, make sure that one person has more gold than anything else, one person has more salt than anything else, etc.

Procedure

1. Begin by identifying the ancient kingdom of Mali on a map. Point out that Mali, like all ancient empires, was located along a river. Rivers provided water for crops and animals, making farming, and then cities, possible. Once a society settled in an area different job specializations would develop to meet the needs of the growing population.
2. Divide students into groups of 3 or 4. Each student will receive one bag of trading cards representing natural resources found in the Kingdom of Mali.
3. Review with students the importance of each natural resource to the Malian people:
 - a. Salt – used to replace the salt lost in the body from sweating and as a way to preserve meats
 - b. Gold – easy to mold and form jewelry, which was worn to show wealth
 - c. Grain – used in cooking, eaten for strength and energy
 - d. Water – necessary for both plants and animals (including people)
 - e. Animals – used for food, clothing, and other products
4. Provide each student with a bag of resources and explain to them that in their bags they will have some of what they need to survive and thrive, but they must barter with the other members of their groups to get everything they need.
5. Allow time to barter.
6. Review with the following discussion questions:



- a. Was there anyone in your group who had a lot of a certain product?
- b. What do we call it when a group or a person focused on producing a lot of one good or service?
- c. What did you have to do to get the things you needed?
- d. How is bartering different from the methods we use today to get the things we want and need?

Extension

Griots are an important part of Malian culture. They were and are the keepers or memories – the storytellers who pass on information and traditions from generation to generation through colorful stories and songs.

Have students write a short descriptive paragraph about their bartering experience. Provide each student with a paper grocery bag that has been cut at the top and sides (so that it can be worn). Allow students time to decorate their bag tunics. Have students wear their tunics and share their paragraphs with the class as though they were telling a story like a griot.

