Amistad Curriculum Grades 6 to 8

Four classroom units with student readings, source inquiry, five day lessons, assessments, teacher notes, and answer guidance.

Curriculum alignment

NJSLS Social Studies 2020: 6.1 U.S. History America in the World, 6.2 World History Global Studies, and 6.3 Active Citizenship at the grades 6 to 8 band. NJSLS ELA 2023: RI.CR.6.1 and RI.CR.8.1 for cited informational text analysis, with grade appropriate argument and research expectations.

Unit alignment

Unit	NJSLS Social Studies 2020	Instructional match
1	6.2.8.GeoGI.4.a	Determine how African geography and resources shaped opportunities and challenges for trade.
2	6.1.8.HistoryCC.4.b; 6.3.8.CivicsDP.3	Examine resistance to slavery and use a historical case to discuss due process.
3	6.1.8.HistoryUP.3.a; 6.1.8.HistoryUP.5.a	Use founding sources and assess Reconstruction Amendments from multiple perspectives.
4	6.3.8.CivicsPD.3	Support a public historical claim with facts and awareness of diverse viewpoints.

Amistad purpose

The units place African and African American people within the central narrative as historical actors. Students investigate African societies, slavery and resistance, the construction of freedom, and the choices that shape public memory. The 2021 Township of Union guide supplies grade band inspiration; the readings and tasks here are original.

Standards references

NJDOE Social Studies: https://www.nj.gov/education/standards/socst/ NJDOE ELA: https://www.nj.gov/education/standards/ela/2023/ Amistad Commission: https://www.nj.gov/education/amistad/about/

Contents

Unit 1 How Does Geography Shape African Societies

Unit 2 How Did Law Make Racial Slavery and How Did People Resist

Unit 3 Whose Rights Did the Founding Documents Protect

Unit 4 What Histories Can We Uncover in New Jersey

Student pages follow. Teacher pages and answer guidance begin after all four units. External source items are named and linked for the teacher to retrieve; students can complete the original readings and tasks printed here.

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Unit 1 How Does Geography Shape African Societies

Grades 6 to 8 Name _____ Date _____

Inquiry

How did location and human choices shape African societies and trade?

Reading one

Africa contains deserts, grasslands, forests, highlands, rivers, and coasts. Those environments affect movement and farming, but they do not determine a society’s destiny. The Sahara could be crossed by organized caravan networks. The Niger River supported farming, fishing, and connections among communities. Along the East African coast, ports linked inland producers with Indian Ocean trade. Map scale matters: a single continental map can obscure regional differences and political change over time.

Reading two

From roughly the eighth through sixteenth centuries, states and cities in western Africa participated in trans Saharan exchange. Gold, salt, textiles, ideas, and people moved through networks involving many communities. Mali under Mansa Musa was one major state, not a stand in for the entire continent. Timbuktu developed as a center of scholarship and commerce. Swahili coastal cities grew through African maritime knowledge and exchange with other Indian Ocean societies. Traders and rulers made choices about routes, taxation, and alliances. To explain these societies, connect physical geography with human decisions and name the time and place.

Source study

Source 1 Smithsonian National Museum of African Art Caravans teacher guide. https://africa.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/Caravans_TeachersGuide.pdf Compare a dated network map with the museum’s explanation. Record the map title and explain whose perspective it represents.

Source 2 Five Themes atlas grid. For one region record location, place, human environment interaction, movement, and region. Add a map key and a sentence distinguishing physical conditions from human decisions.

Document evidence card

Record African trade network teaching map. National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Caravans teacher guide, modern interpretive map. https://africa.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/Caravans_TeachersGuide.pdf

What the record shows The guide maps connections among African regions and wider trade routes. Students can identify the Sahara, coasts, and directions of exchange while asking which time period and communities the map represents.

Limit This modern teaching map is an interpretation, not a map drawn by a historical trader. It cannot show every person who traveled.

Analyze How does the map challenge the idea that a desert stopped all connections?

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Source organizer

Source and date	What it shows	What it cannot show

Text dependent questions

1. Why is one climate description inadequate for Africa?

2. Explain two ways the Niger River or East African coast supported exchange.

3. How did people adapt to conditions and build networks?

4. What does a trade map show, and what important information might it hide?

Five day learning path

Day 1 Do Now: Where and when?. I Do: Model scale, title, and key. We Do: Locate Sahara, Niger, Mali, and Swahili coast. They Do: Draft location entry.

Day 2 Do Now: How did people use environments?. I Do: Model cause without determinism. We Do: Compare river and coast. They Do: Complete place and interaction entries.

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Day 3 Do Now: How did networks move?. I Do: Model direction and exchange. We Do: Analyze Smithsonian map. They Do: Complete movement entry.

Day 4 Do Now: What counts as a region?. I Do: Model evidence based regional claim. We Do: Compare western and eastern examples. They Do: Draft atlas explanation.

Day 5 Do Now: How well does the atlas explain?. I Do: Model map accuracy check. We Do: Peer check five themes. They Do: Submit sourced atlas page.

Assessment

Create a Five Themes atlas page for one African society or trade network with a dated map, legend, two sourced details, and a paragraph explaining geography and agency.

RACE response

Restate and answer the inquiry. Cite specific details from the reading and source study. Explain how each detail supports the answer. For K to 2, an oral explanation or teacher scribed response is acceptable.

Evidence checklist

☐ I answered the inquiry. ☐ I named a source. ☐ I used accurate details. ☐ I explained what the details show. ☐ I checked limits or uncertainty.

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