

EAST TO WEST: AFRICA'S INFLUENCE ON MEXICO

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Purpose: In order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between peoples of ancient Africa and ancient MesoAmerica, students will participate in the following lesson to determine the impact on modern society.

Teaching Level: The following activities are appropriate for grades 7-12

Geographic Standards:

1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.
3. How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on Earth's surface.
6. How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.
9. The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface. 12. The processes, patterns and functions of human settlement.
17. How to apply geography to interpret the past.

Objectives: Upon completion of the following lesson, students will be able to

1. relate in written or oral form the African presence in the ancient Americas, specifically, in MesoAmerica,
2. identify a picture or other form of the Colossal Heads of Olmec,
3. express an opinion of the materials researched regarding the relationship of the peoples of ancient Africa and ancient MesoAmerica,
4. talk about the Olmec culture,
5. map the region where the Olmec culture resided, and
6. identify personal misperceptions/perceptions about this aspect of history.

Materials Required

- pictures of the Colossal Heads of Olmec
- copies of the book *The Ra* by Thor Heyerdal
- copies of the book *They Came Before the Mayflower* by Van Sertima
- clay or playdough
- sculpturing tools or popsicle sticks
- a copy of the *In Search of Aztecs* video
- a copy of the *In Search of the Mayans* video
- blackline maps of MesoAmerica
- world maps /atlases depicting Africa, the Atlantic and MesoAmerica (maps should show ocean currents, trade winds, seasonal weather trends, physical characteristics ...)

Procedures

1. If possible, divide the students into two groups; each group will be responsible for reading one of the books, *The Ra* and *They Came Before the Mayflower*. Or have a student in each group

read a chapter and report on the contents of said chapter to their group. After two weeks, each group will present their book to the other group. Or the teacher can prepare a report on the contents of each book that will guide the students' research but not their opinions. Both books explore the African presence in the Americas and the plausibility of ancient Africans traveling to ancient MesoAmerica before Europeans. Each book should be outlined by the student groups with a brief explanations of each chapter and with key points/dates/locations highlighted.

2. View both videos: In Search of the Aztecs and In Search of Mayans. Discuss the videos in relation to the information gathered from the two books. Create a large outline on a flipchart or bulletin board paper to link all key points (dates, locations, weather, ocean currents,...).

3. Display the pictures of The Colossal Heads of Olmec; distribute background information on the Olmec culture in outline form or allow the students to research the Olmec culture at the resource center. Discuss the relationship of the pictures to the videos and the books.

4. Students should write questions that they would like to ask the ancient Africans and MesoAmericans about their lifestyles, economics, meeting, travel,...

5. Students should color in the region dominated by the Olmec culture on a blank map of MesoAmerica. Students should also indicate possible travel routes, from Africa to Central America using the maps and atlases available.

6. Take one day, each student should create their own Colossal Head of Olmec. Display the final products around the school with paragraph descriptions.

7. Students should then write an essay on their perceptions / misperceptions of "what" has been researched.

Adaptations / Extensions: As a follow-up activity, students should research current cultures residing in the ancient Olmec sphere of influence. Have the students create a list of influence of cultural exchange on the peoples of this region, both present and past, on local and global cultures.

<http://www.iupui.edu/it/geni/home.html>