






# Textiles in Ancient Mali

## Overview:



Students will learn that textiles can reflect how geography and culture influence the development of civilizations.

## Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

-  **Describe** the process of turning the cotton plant into cloth.
-  **Explain** how Muslim culture influenced textiles and dress in the Mali Empire.
-  **Identify** plants that are used to dye fabric (in the garden or in general).

## Preparation:

-  For the activity you have the option to let students create their own block prints with potatoes and kitchen knives. If your students are not ready to work with knives, you can prepare the block prints in advance.
-  Prepare paints and pieces of fabric cut into individual strips.










## Vocabulary:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  textile  |  Muslim      |
|  Sahara   |  Islam       |
|  Sahel    |  appliqué    |
|  Savannah |  calligraphy |



## Learning Activities:

- I. Presentation: The Influence of Geography and Culture on What We Wear (15 min.)

## Materials:

-  Map of African Vegetation Zones
-  Examples or photos of stamped cloth or Malian textiles
-  A cotton plant or photo
-  Plants that can be used as natural fabric dyes (e.g., amaranth, dandelion root, fennel, etc.)
-  Potatoes
-  kitchen knives (optional)
-  tempura paint
-  Plain pieces of cotton fabric
-  Smocks or aprons



## On the Board:

-  Student Reflection Questions
-  Vocabulary

## Suggested Snack:

-  Djablani, Malian Ginger Juice: <http://allrecipes.com/recipe/229320/malian-ginger-juice/>

## Other Resources:

-  Making potato block prints: <https://anmm.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/potato-print/>
-  Background info on Malian textiles: <http://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/topic-essays/show/26>

- A. Show students a picture of, or an actual, cotton plant. Ask if they know what it is and where it grows.
  - B. On the “Map of African Vegetation Zones” show students the Sahara Desert, the Sahel, and the Savannah in Sudan. Discuss the climate in each area.
    - The *Sahara* is the largest desert in the world.
    - The *Sahel* is the zone between the Sahara Desert (to the North) and the Savannah in Sudan (to the South).
    - *Savannahs* are grasslands with few trees in tropical and subtropical areas with long rainy seasons.
  - C. Tell students that cotton is native to West Africa (among other places in the world).
    - Small villages formed in the savannah areas near rivers because it was good for raising crops. These included edible crops such as cowpeas and yams, and cotton to make cloth.
    - It provided the perfect climate for cotton, with a long wet season followed by a long dry season. Plus, there were many trees to make looms for weaving with their branches.
    - During the Mali Empire, from 1230-1600 CE, most farms were small and tended by extended families.
    - Farmers would rotate cotton with other crops to add nutrients to the soil and create a healthier, more stable food supply.
    - Today, most of the cotton grown in that region is still raised on small family farms.
  - D. Malians grew and then processed cotton by removing the seeds and spinning it into thread.
    - They often dyed the thread with pigments from local plants, such as flowers, or decorated plain woven fabric with stamping patterns.
    - Geometric patterns were common, but also there were animal and plant designs.
  - E. Explain to students how looms are used to turn cotton into cloth.
    - First cotton seeds are removed from the fibers.
    - Then, cotton is combed to straighten the fibers to make soft, untwisted rope called “sliver.”
    - Then, on spinning frames, yarn is made from the sliver. It rotates the fibers many times until yarn is spun.
    - Then, yarn can be woven into fabric on looms.
  - F. Show pictures of looms.
  - G. Show pictures of Malian textiles.
2. Activity: Garden Tour and Cloth Making (25 min.)
    - A. Bring students into the garden and show them live cotton plants.

- B. Then, show students items from the garden that can be used as a dye: sorrel, hibiscus, amaranth, mud, marigolds, dandelions, fennel, hollyhock, etc.
  - C. In the classroom or designated work space give students potatoes cut in halves, or pre-made potato block prints.
  - D. Instruct them how to turn their half potato into a block print. This step can be done in advance by the teacher, or if students are comfortable using knives they can create their own stamps. See Other Resources for a link to a guide on how to create potato block prints.
  - E. Distribute tempura paint and small pieces of white cotton cloth. Students can share their block prints to create a design. Tell students that they can use the garden as inspiration to create plant, animal or geometric designs.
3. **Snack:** Serve Djablani, a traditional Malian drink. We suggest using less sugar than the recipe calls for, or trying a different sweetener, like honey. (5 min.)
  4. Have students answer the Reflection Questions in their garden journals. (5 min.)

### Student Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever thought about how your clothes are made and dyed? What surprised you about the process?
2. Think about the culture and geography of where you live. How do you think these factors influence the kind of clothes people wear?

### Assessment Questions:

1. What crop was used to make cloth in the Ancient Mali Empire?
  - **cotton**
2. Briefly explain the process of turning cotton into cloth.
  - **First, cotton seeds are removed from the fibers. Then, cotton is combed to straighten the fibers to make soft, untwisted rope called “sliver.” Then, on spinning frames, yarn is made from the sliver. The frame rotates the fibers many times until yarn is spun. Then, yarn can be woven into fabric on looms.**

### Standards:

#### Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

### Photo Credits:

Loom Photo from:

“African Textile Resources.” Adire African Textiles.

[http://adireafricantextiles.blogspot.com/2012\\_01\\_01\\_archive.html](http://adireafricantextiles.blogspot.com/2012_01_01_archive.html)

Malian Textiles Photo from: “Out of Africa: Stunning Sub-Saharan Textiles. Designers Collaborative.

<http://designerscollaborativenyc.com/out-of-africa-stunning-sub-saharan-textiles/>

Painting Textiles Photo from: “Mud Cloth/Bogolon.” The African Fabric Shop.

<http://www.africanfabric.co.uk/fabrics-textiles/large-textiles-cloths>



# Natural Vegetation in Africa

