**STEP BACK:** *Where am I starting, and where do I want to go?*

This is an example of how the **Guiding Principle 2 Planning Questions** can be applied to a specific Topic (set of related content standards) from the 2018 Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework*.* It illustrates one possible way these questions might be answered as they relate to this Topic, as well as possible resources to support critical, inclusive, and responsive instruction. Readers should keep in mind that this example was created in consultation with historical experts and resources, and thus reflects greater depth than teachers might initially be able to provide without additional research.

This example should be used in conjunction with the **Guiding Principle 2 Quick Reference Guide**, which provides important context about how these planning questions relate to high-quality history and social science instruction and how they can be used as part of thoughtful unit planning.

**What content is included in this Topic? What prior knowledge and beliefs do students have about this Topic? What narratives was I taught about this topic, and what biases might I have about it?**

**Topic 6.T4 at a Glance**

**6.T4a: Geography**

1. Physical geography of Africa
2. Political geography of Africa
3. Effects of geography on settlement, population, economy

**6.T4b: Selected Societies, c. 100-1000 CE**

1. Role of Axum and East African societies in spread of religion
2. Swahili coastal societies
3. West African cities and empires
4. Trans-Saharan trade

*This topic can be found on pp. 91-92 of the* [*2018 History and Social Science Framework*](https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/hss/2018-12.pdf)*.*

* Physical geography of Sub-Saharan Africa, including challenges like drought and desertification
* States and societies in the region c. 100–1000 CE: Axum, the Swahili Coast, Timbuktu, and Ghana
* Students have previously learned about Islam and Christianity, but may not associate those religions with Africa
* Student have learned about ancient Egypt, but traditional curricula do not draw much connection to sub-Saharan Africa; however, southern Egypt was deeply connected to civilizations in Ethiopia and Sudan
* Students may have very little prior knowledge about this time period: African history is rarely centered in traditional curricula, and popular images and stereotypes of African societies may present the continent as uncivilized and primitive

**How might this Topic present the possibility for problematic messages or** [**curricular violence**](https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2020/ending-curriculum-violence)**? How and when will I partner with students to learn about their experiences of the curriculum?**

* [Brenda Randolph](https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2008/i-didnt-know-there-were-cities-in-africa) in *Tolerance* magazine: stereotypical representations of Africa contribute to a racist view of Black Africans today, fuel ignorant treatment of first-generation African immigrants, justify foreign policy that marginalizes the needs of African nations
* Words and images can easily and unintentionally reinforce negative stereotypes (representing the region with wild animal motifs, using ahistorical/inaccurate words like “[tribe](https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2001/the-trouble-with-tribe),” speaking of “Africa” as an essentialized monolith rather than investigating diversity of societies and civilizations)

**What is my goal in teaching this Topic? What do I want students to learn about themselves, the past, and the world? What essential questions, skills, knowledge, and enduring understandings are at the heart of this Topic?**

* Appreciation for the vibrant and diverse societies of medieval sub-Saharan Africa: the religion, politics, and social structures were just as sophisticated and innovative as those in other regions of the world. More broadly, recognition that these civilizations are neither “exotic” nor “underdeveloped,” but demonstrate many of the same themes as other civilizations we’ve studied, while also being complex and distinctive societies
* Understand the unique ways that African societies adapted to the challenges of their environment, as well as the way in which they were part of a broader global network
* Critically examine Eurocentric depictions of Africa, question why the richness of these societies is so often ignored, and develop an understanding of how the way that we tell someone’s story can promote or undermine stereotypes

**REFLECT, RECONSIDER, AND PLAN:** *What is my current practice, and what would I like to do differently to be more inclusive, critical, and responsive?*

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| --- |
| **INCLUSIVE*****My instruction should incorporate and center a diversity of historical perspectives, voices, and narratives.*** |
| **Reflect:** What is the dominant narrative about this Topic? Whose voices and experiences are typically centered? |
| * Africa is often portrayed as a backwards or primitive society in Western media, including some traditional curricula
* The continent is typically seen through European eyes; oral traditions of the region mean that historians have fewer written sources reflecting African voices from this time period
* If the wealth and complexity of societies like Ghana or Axum are examined, narrative may present these places as separate and isolated from the rest of the world, rather than part of a web of connection and trade
 |
| **Reconsider:** What and who is marginalized or missing in that narrative? Whose voices should be included to tell a more holistic and complete story? |
| * Center Africans’ role in their own development: e.g., in 6.T4b.1, study [indigenous religions](http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/curriculum/unit-three/module-fourteen/) in depth to understand the robust belief systems that existed prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity
* Note the archaeological evidence that traces [Ghana](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/big-history-project/agriculture-civilization/first-cities-states/a/the-ghana-empire-1) and [Axum](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/big-history-project/agriculture-civilization/first-cities-states/a/aksum-1) to civilizations stretching back a thousand years—these civilizations are rooted in Africa, not dependent on the ideas or innovations of other civilizations
* Students could learn more about the power available to women in this time period within 6.T4b.3, including the role of “queen mother” in West Africa (which has been a [vehicle for expanded women’s rights today](https://centreforglobalequality.org/news/formidable-queen-mothers-ghana/))
 |
| **Plan**: What instructional approaches can I use to fosters student engagement with these voices and experiences? How will I ensure these voices and perspectives are included equitably, not marginalized? |
| * Discussion of geography and adaptation in Africa in T.64a.3 can be a way to center the voices of contemporary African innovators such as [William Kamkwamba](https://www.ted.com/talks/william_kamkwamba_how_i_harnessed_the_wind?language=en#t-330602) or [Wangari Maathai](https://www.plt.org/educator-tips/words-to-live-by-tribute-wangari-maathai/)
* Center African agency by [bringing in more diverse types of evidence](http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/activity-one-page-2-how-do-we-know-africa-has-a-history-engage/) beyond textual sources (e.g., [goods traded in the medieval Sahara Desert](https://caravansofgold.org/exhibition/) in 6.T4.b.4; [Swahili language](http://www.ebeckman.org/workshop-presentations/swahili/) as evidence of cross-cultural interaction in 6.T4b.2)
* Explicitly direct students’ attention to the language used to describe Africa in dominant narratives and question its connotation (see [Appendix A in Boston University African Studies Center’s “What Do We Know About Africa?” lesson plan](http://www.bu.edu/africa/outreach/teachingresources/geography/curriculum/wdwk2/))
 |
| **CRITICAL*****My instruction should challenge students to consider how identity and social position shape people’s perceptions of events, and encourage honest and informed discussions about power, prejudice, and oppression.*** |
| **Reflect:** Where and how is the role of identity and social position (race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc.) typically addressed in this Topic, if at all? |
| * Identity and social position rarely discussed explicitly in this topic
* Religion: spread of Islam and Christianity leads to discussion of (in)tolerance and cultural mixing
* Social class: students look at the roles of/relationships between kings, merchants, farmers, and enslaved people
* Common misconception that [Africa was separated into “tribes”](https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2001/the-trouble-with-tribe) that persist into the present; in reality, idea of “tribe” is a construct that was created and reinforced by colonial rule
 |
| **Reconsider:** How else did people’s intersecting identities and social position shape their experiences within this Topic? Where was prejudice and oppression present, and how was it reinforced or challenged? |
| * Many empires were strikingly pluralistic examples of syncretism and coexistence ([Al-Bakri](http://users.rowan.edu/~mcinneshin/5394/wk05/albakri.htm) describes the mingling of Islam and indigenous religion in Ghana; [Bible was translated into the Ethiopian langauge of Ge’ez](http://www.library.fau.edu/depts/spc/JaffeCenter/collection/books_as_aesthetic_objects/geez_bible.php))
* Swahili coast during study of 6.T4b.2 another example of cultural and ethnic mixing: Swahili recognized difference and hierarchy but [did not think in modern racial terms](https://mass.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/pbs_org14_wondersaw_soc_5/wonders-of-the-african-world-the-swahili-coast-racial-distinction/)
* Swahili coast was part of a [larger network of Islamic slavery](http://medievalslavery.org/africa/source-burzug-ibn-shahriyar-on-slave-trading-from-the-east-african-coast/); discussions of this could examine the [Zanj rebellion](https://www.britannica.com/event/Zanj-rebellion) of African slaves in Iraq. Extended discussion of the nature of enslaved people’s social position available in [Stilwell’s *Slavery and Slaving in African History*](https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/slavery-and-slaving-in-african-history/CC7C91E6FB1A4AF64C063AA41208E595)
 |
| **Plan:** What instructional approaches will empower students to engage in meaningful and [brave](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/back-school-2020-building-community-connection-and-learning/activities-remote-hybrid-start/brave-spaces) conversations about identity, power, oppression, and resistance within this Topic? |
| * Could introduce Topic with explicit deconstruction of stereotypical images and stories: e.g., Wainaina’s satirical [“How to Write About Africa”](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/05/22/725808622/binyavanga-wainaina-tells-us-how-to-write-about-africa) could facilitate discussion about how Africa is typically portrayed and why, and what the effect is
* Trans-Saharan slave trade in 6.T4b.4 can be [compared with the trans-Atlantic slave trade](http://www.pbs.org/wonders/Episodes/Epi3/slave_2.htm) students have already learned about to better understand nuances of oppression and power (like the later slave trade, enslaved Africans were treated as outsiders or property and often experienced violence; unlike trans-Atlantic trade, African slave trade not based on race and enslaved people did not experience “social death”)
 |
| **RESPONSIVE*****My instruction should offer all students opportunities to connect their multiple identities and experiences to their study of the past.*** |
| **Reflect:** Do my students typically see their identities reflected in this Topic? If so, which students and how?  |
| * Some Black students may have ancestral roots in Sub-Saharan Africa due to history of American slavery; others may have immigrated from the region more recently
* More broadly, this is one of the few Topics in the world geography sequence that focuses primarily on Black individuals; depending on how material is presented, Black students could walk away from the unit with a conception of themselves/their heritage as either rich, vibrant, and innovative or as marginalized, exotic, and primitive
 |
| **Reconsider:** What other opportunities does this Topic present for my students to see their multiple identities reflected in the Topic, or explore aspects of their identities more deeply? |
| * Black students can see themselves represented positively through a more inclusive approach to this Topic that discusses the way in which Sub-Saharan Africans in the present and past display innovation, creativity, and adaptation to environment (e.g. [development of pastoralist lifestyles](https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/27/science/african-pastoral-archaeologists-rewrite-history-of-farming.html))
* All students can learn more about their identity through explicit examination of how history is constructed and told: What stereotypes have students heard in stories about their own or their ancestors’ experiences and where did those come from? (see, e.g., [this lesson plan on stereotypes and storytelling from Teaching Tolerance](https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/stereotypes-and-tonto))
* Examination of cultural blending in 6.T4b.1–3 can strengthen students’ awareness of cultural mixing in their own lives
 |
| **Plan:** What instructional approaches can I use while teaching this Topic to provide students with opportunities to make connections to their own identities and experiences? |
| * In examining the role of oral sources such as griots throughout 6.T4.b, students could [collect oral history](https://edsitement.neh.gov/teachers-guides/oral-history-educational-experience) of their own; this communicates value of oral history as a source of historical evidence, introduces them to the work historians do, deepens their understanding of their community
* To challenge exoticization of Africa, Boston University has an [activity](https://www.bu.edu/africa/files/2016/04/US-Africa-Connections-Bingo_2016.pdf) that allows students to see the ways in which their lives in America have been influenced by Africa and African history
* In general, students can be challenged to find points of commonality and similarity between their culture and those they study within Topic 6.T4b to counter “othering” tendency in dominant narratives about Africa; images like those from the [Everyday Africa Instagram account](https://www.instagram.com/everydayafrica/?hl=en) can be helpful here
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