

State Building in Africa

Duration

One or two class sessions of approximately 40 minutes each

Resources

1. Study Guide



2. Worksheet



3. Homework



Objectives of Lesson

- To identify how and why states in Africa developed and changed over time
- To read a historical source with speaker, audience, and context in mind

College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- Topic 1.5 State Building in Africa (p. 44)
- Unit 1 Learning Objective J: “Explain how and why states in Africa developed and changed over time.” (p. 44)
- AP® Historical Thinking Skill 3: Claims and Evidence in Sources (p. 14)
- AP® Historical Thinking Skill 4: Contextualization (p. 14)
- AP® Reasoning Process 1: Comparison (p. 15)

Student Activities

- Close reading of a historical source (either in class or for homework)
- Class discussion of how and why states in Africa developed and changed over time
- Practice for recognizing point of view, tone, and perspective in historical documents

How to Use This Lesson

This lesson is organized around materials related to Great Zimbabwe. The kingdom of Zimbabwe was an important historical state in Africa from the 11th century to the 15th century. It was notable for many reasons, such as its strong control of the gold trade and its impressive stone architecture. Exploring the historical legacy of Great Zimbabwe poses an interesting challenge for students of AP® World History because the state did not leave

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any written sources that reflect the Zimbabwean perspective. The only written resources that describe the kingdom of Zimbabwe are from European explorers who recorded their perspective of the state using ethnocentric or biased language.

This lesson has been designed to help students practice recognizing point of view in sources and stimuli. Each document represents the point of view, and ultimately the biases, of its author. A concentrated lesson on point of view helps to ensure that students can recognize and address the biases of the sources that they use to support their argument.

The best way to begin this lesson is to distribute the study guide that explains how recognizing and analyzing source point of view can improve a student's grade on the exam. The study guide specifically focuses on the DBQ because this is a weighty area of the exam in which understanding point of view can significantly affect a student's total points. This study guide includes a breakdown of the scoring criteria that could be affected, as well as a series of tips on how to identify the inherent biases of a source. Students should be encouraged to keep the study guide as a reference aid as they prepare for the exam.

We have provided a worksheet to help put these ideas into practice. The goal for this part of the lesson is to ensure that students have the opportunity to explore identity, perspective, reliability, and tone while also learning about the kingdom of Zimbabwe.

You can conclude by assigning the included homework.

Historical Context

Great Zimbabwe was the capital of the Kingdom of Zimbabwe, a major trade empire in East Africa. No written sources survive that were produced by the inhabitants of Zimbabwe. All written records of the Kingdom of Zimbabwe were recorded from outsider perspectives. The most famous description is from *Decades of Asia* by João de Barros (used in this lesson), which was published in 1552. It records the experiences of Portuguese explorers in India and Asia.

European explorers marveled at the construction of large stone walls that both encircled the city and were used to construct the royal palace. At several points the walls reached over 36 feet high. They were constructed using a dry-stone technique that did not employ mortar. In terms of technology, the walls of Great Zimbabwe were an engineering marvel. European explorers did not expect to find evidence of a technologically advanced situation in East Africa, so they struggled to explain the walls in their texts. This is a good opportunity to discuss how all explorers in Units 1 and 2 often saw the lands that they encountered in an ethnocentric manner. There are some questions discussing this

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on the worksheet, but you can also expand the conversation into a more robust discussion of Eurocentrism in world history based on the interests of your class.

As a political state, not much is known about the kingdom of Zimbabwe. It most likely had a centralized political authority, possibly a monarchy, with the seat of government at the palace. Archaeological evidence suggests that it was an important trade hub linked to the cities on the Swahili coast. Gold and ivory appear to have been the most popular exports, although there is also some evidence that the Zimbabweans exported cattle.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the kingdom began to enter a period of decline beginning in 1450 CE. Historians posit multiple different explanations for the decline of the state. One theory is that the state began to decline when trade routes shifted to the north after the local gold mines were exhausted. Another explanation focuses on climate change because this would have caused water shortages and possible famine in the area. The last hypothesis is that the kingdom declined in much the same way contemporary states declined; overextension and political instability caused internal divisions that were so severe that the government collapsed from the inside.



SOAPSTONE BIRDS ON PEDESTALS. ZIMBABWE

Several soapstone bird sculptures were found in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe. While the exact symbolic meaning of the birds is unknown, they are thought to have religious significance.

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Point of View

As you work through the documents provided for the DBQ, the most important thing to realize is that every document has a point of view. Historical documents always reflect the opinions of the author. The documents provided for you on the DBQ, like all historical documents, are NOT statements of fact. As such, you need to acknowledge point of view in your argument.

In order to earn full points for document use, you need to acknowledge how or why a document's point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience is relevant to an argument.

ANALYSIS AND REASONING (0–2 Points)	
1 POINT	1 POINT
<p>For at least three documents, explains how or why the document's point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience is relevant to an argument.</p>	<p>Demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt, using evidence to corroborate, qualify, or modify an argument that addresses the question.</p>
<p><i>To earn this point, the response must explain how or why (rather than simply identifying) the document's point of view, purpose, historical situation, or audience is relevant to an argument about the prompt for each of the three documents sourced.</i></p>	<p><i>A response may demonstrate a complex understanding in a variety of ways, such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Explaining nuance of an issue by analyzing multiple variables</i> • <i>Explaining both similarity and difference, or explaining both continuity and change, or explaining multiple causes, or explaining both cause and effect</i> • <i>Explaining relevant and insightful connections within and across periods</i> • <i>Confirming the validity of an argument by corroborating multiple perspectives across themes</i> • <i>Qualifying or modifying an argument by considering diverse or alternative views or evidence</i> <p><i>This understanding must be part of the argument, not merely a phrase or reference.</i></p>

Source: AP® European History Course and Exam Description, 2019.

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There are four aspects of any document that you can use to incorporate a discussion of point of view into your overall response.

1. Identity

The most basic method to acknowledge point of view is to identify the author in the course of discussing the document's contents.

Example: Cetshwayo, the Zulu king, spoke out against the presence of British military troops in Zululand.

2. Perspective

The second method is to acknowledge the factors that could shape an author's perspective. Many different aspects of a person's experience contribute to their perspective on a topic. By highlighting how the author's occupation, gender, class, political position, nationality, or personal history could influence the document, you are acknowledging the role of point of view in the historical document.

Example: As a white imperialist in South Africa, Cecil Rhodes helped engineer legal systems that disenfranchised the black population. Given this background, it is not surprising that he spoke very dismissively of any people who were non-European.

3. Reliability

One of the challenges of the DBQ is that you may be given sources that vary in reliability because the test writers can draw from a wide range of materials. You can show that you understand the power of point of view by weighing the reliability of each type of source. For example, would you consider government propaganda more or less reliable than a personal diary? What about a newspaper article?

Example: Since the personal diary of the Christian missionary who lived through the Boxer Rebellion was never intended to be published by its author, it can be assumed to be a relatively reliable account of the events the missionary lived through.

4. Tone

Finally, you can acknowledge and analyze point of view by addressing an author's tone. Authors often use tone to make a point through humor, satire, diction, or political commentary. You can demonstrate your understanding of point of view by explaining how the tone of the document shapes its message.

Example: As a notable satirist, Mark Twain used dark humor to criticize the activities of American imperialists in the Philippines.

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State Building in Africa

Instructions

For the passage below, write one or two sentences that highlight different aspects of point of view. Compare your response to the sample response shown.

There are other mines in a district called Toróa, which by another name is known as the kingdom of Butua*, which is ruled by a prince called Burrom, a vassal of Benemotapa, which land adjoins that aforesaid consisting of vast plains, and these mines are the most ancient known in the country, and they are all in the plain, in the midst of which there is a square fortress, of masonry within and without, built of stones of marvellous size, and there appears to be no mortar joining them. The wall is more than twenty-five spans in width, and the height is not so great considering the width. Above the door of this edifice is an inscription, which some Moorish merchants, learned men, who went thither, could not read, neither could they tell what the character might be. This edifice is almost surrounded by hills, upon which are others resembling it in the fashioning of the stone and the absence of mortar, and one of them is a tower more than twelve fathoms high.

The natives of the country call all these edifices Symbaoe, which according to their language signifies court, for every place where Benemotapa may be is so called; and they say that being royal property all of the king's other dwellings have this name...

*Butua was located in the kingdom of Zimbabwe

Source: Extracts from *Decades of Asia* by João de Barros, a Portuguese colonial official, published 1552

IDENTIFYING POINT OF VIEW

1. Identity
2. Perspective
3. Reliability
4. Tone

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Identity

Write or type your response in this area.

Check your response: *Who is the author of this passage? What do you know about the role of the Portuguese in Africa in the 15th century? What does the writer's identity add to our understanding of the piece? Why do all of these things matter?*

Sample Response:

João de Barros, a Portuguese official, is impressed by the stone architecture in the kingdom of Zimbabwe.

Perspective

Write or type your response in this area.

Check your response: *Is there anything in this person's background that would shape their perspective on the topic? How do factors like personal history, nationalism, gender, or occupation shape their point of view?*

Sample Response:

As a Portuguese official, João de Barros would have supported Portugal's policy of expansion and exploitation of Africa. European expansion into the continent had ethnocentric rationales. The European explorers did not expect to find fully developed states in Africa. When they did, they often expressed their surprise and disbelief.

Reliability

Write or type your response in this area.

Check your response: *Can this source be trusted? Why or why not? Who was its intended audience? Are we part of that intended audience?*

Sample Response:

The passage is part of João de Barros's account of Portuguese expansion. It is intended to educate the Portuguese audience at home about the realities faced by explorers in Africa. It can be assumed that the audience back home

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would have marveled along with João de Barros at walls so high and so well-constructed.

Tone

Write or type your response in this area.

Check your response: Finally, you can acknowledge and analyze point of view by addressing an author's tone. Authors often use tone to make a point through humor, satire, diction, or political commentary. You can demonstrate your understanding of point of view by explaining how the tone of the document shapes its message.

Sample Response:

The text records João de Barros's disbelief at finding the technological marvels of the kingdom of Zimbabwe. This tone of disbelief has two separate effects. The first effect is that it highlights how little Europeans knew about African states. The second is that it emphasizes the ethnocentrism that permeated the work of so many European explorers.

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Instructions

For the passage below, write one or two sentences that highlight different aspects of point of view. Compare your response to the sample response shown.

When, and by whom, these edifices were raised, as the people of the land are ignorant of the art of writing, there is no record, but they say they are the work of the devil, for in comparison with their power and knowledge it does not seem possible to them that they should be the work of man. Some Moors who saw it, to whom Vincente Pegado, who as captain of Sofala, showed our fortress there and the work of windows and arches, that they might compare it with the stone work of the said edifice, said that they could not be compared with it for smoothness and perfection. The distance of this edifice from Sofala in a direct line to the west is a hundred and seventy leagues, or thereabouts, and it is between 20° and 21° south latitude. There are no ancient or modern buildings in those parts, the people being barbarians, and all their houses of wood.

Source: Extracts from *Decades of Asia* by João de Barros, a Portuguese colonial official, published 1552

Identity

Write or type your response in this area.

Perspective

Write or type your response in this area.

IDENTIFYING POINT OF VIEW

1. Identity
2. Perspective
3. Reliability
4. Tone

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Write or type in this area.

Reliability

Write or type your response in this area.

Tone

Write or type your response in this area.

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