WORLD HISTORY PROJECT

1200 UNIT 2:
## The Global Tapestry
1200 to 1450 CE

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# Unit 2 Overview

In the year 1200 CE, most people lived local lives, and communities differed dramatically from place to place. But from 1200 to 1450 CE, new connections forged larger and larger networks. New connections among societies transformed communities around the world. In Afro-Eurasia, these patterns of growth and interconnection were most prominent, but similar patterns emerged in other parts of the world, like the Americas and Oceania.

**0:01**

*Kim Lochner and Colby Burnett in conversation. Their videos are filmed separately and shown next to one another on the screen*

Okay check this out: Worlds Together, Worlds Apart.

Is that a new Rihanna song?

It's the theme of this unit and we're the ones introducing it.

Oh, I get it! I'm in North America and you're way over in Australia... Worlds apart, but this video brings our worlds together thanks to globalization. When it's three in the afternoon for you, for me, it's nine o'clock the next morning. But, we're both sharing the light of the same sun.

"When the sun shine, we shine together". Rihanna, from "Umbrella"? Never mind...

**0:40**

Hi, I'm Kim Lochner.

And I'm Colby Burnett. We're introducing Unit 2: The Global Tapestry from 1200 to 1450 CE. In the last unit we explored the power of narratives. How we tell a story and how we contextualize it changes our understanding of that story. In Unit 2 we're starting the story of this course in the year 1200 CE.

*Montage of artwork from around 1200 CE depicts people with farm animals and dining at a large table. Another montage shows a map showing trade routes, and a battle scene.*

In 1200 most people lived local lives, disconnected from distant societies. The ways that people governed themselves and the things that people believed in varied dramatically from place to place. But, from 1200 to 1450, there were dramatic expansions in networks of exchange that began linking different regions together. Trade, conquest, and systems of belief brought diverse and distinct communities together in new ways.

**1:36**

*Interactive map of Afro-Eurasia. The map demonstrates trade routes that connected cities and empires.*

Absolutely. And nowhere was this change more pronounced than in Afro-Eurasia. That's the huge landmass made up of Africa, Europe, and Asia. Other parts of the world, like the Americas, Austral-Asia, and the islands of the Pacific Ocean featured similar patterns of growth and interconnection. But Afro-Eurasia had denser and larger populations, so connections increased most dramatically there. In the 13th century, there was more trade along Afro-Eurasia trade networks then ever before. A string of cities spread from the Pacific coast of Asia through the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, the African and European Mediterranean, and the Atlantic coast of Europe. They traded goods, money, and ideas across a vast network of overland trade routes. The power of the mighty Mongol Empire ensured order over much of this network. In the Indian Ocean, the spread of Islam helped connect distant ports and merchants through shared belief.

**2:40**

The expansion of trade networks created new patterns of production and distribution as economies shifted to provide goods for long distance trade and travel. Along with those shifts, new communities were created, and old ones were transformed. Now, Kim has some great unit questions to share, so let's check in with her.

Thanks Colby. Don't forget that each unit has a short list of big questions to think about. For Unit 2 we ask, "What were the similarities and differences among societies in different parts of the world?", "What caused the expansion and contraction of trade networks during this period?", "How did networks of

exchange connect societies, and how were communities changed by these connections?" They say a rising tide lifts all boats and that's a pretty apt metaphor since it was especially true in the Indian Ocean trading system. We have plenty of archaeological evidence that trade expanded in this period and there's even some economic data to back that up.

### 3:52

*Chart shows an extreme increase in the global GDP*

*A zoomed-in chart shows the global GDP increasing dramatically from the year 1000 CE; before that it remained mostly the same (appearing flat.)*

This chart measures the growth of world GDP, or, Gross Domestic Product, which is one of the main ways economists measure the wealth of a country. Here we see that the global GDP has risen a lot in the last 2000 years. Most of that growth happened very recently, in the last century or so.

If we zoom in closer, we see that for the millennium from 1 CE to 1000 CE, GDP didn't change very much. But then, from 1000 to 1500 CE the global GDP more than doubled.

### 4:29

*Artworks show painted depictions of people in battle on horseback.*

*Detailed paintings of trading cities featuring many elaborate, interconnected buildings.*

A big part of this change was the expansion of long-distance trade. That expansion transformed networks and systems of production and distribution. But it also reshaped communities around the world. For one example, let's travel to the coast of East Africa. By the 13th century, several powerful merchant city-states emerged here in a region called the Swahili Coast. (message ping) Oh, a message from Colby. "Let me do the Swahili Coast". Alright.

Okay, in earlier periods the Swahili Coast was a lot like the inland communities of East Africa, agricultural, fishing, and pastoralist societies. But after Arab merchants started coming to this region, locals turned to trade. Large trading cities with tens of thousands of people developed. Cities like Kilwa, Malindi, Lamu, Sofala, Pemba, and Mombasa developed cultures and economies that were very different from their inland neighbors. The rulers and merchants of these coastal cities really wanted to improve their trade contact with Arab merchants so they converted to Islam. They took Arabic names, built huge, stone mosques, and claimed ancestry from earlier Arab or Persian travelers.

### 5:49

*Video footage of great stone mosques*

Foreign merchants from the Islamic world, India, China, and elsewhere all journeyed to the Swahili Coast, some making it their permanent home. With their cultural and economic connections to the Bantu speaking world and their growing role in the Indian Ocean trade, these Swahili city-states connected two worlds. As the Swahili cities were integrated into larger Indian Ocean trade networks, this created a distinctive culture that blended parts of Arab, Persian, Indian, and East African culture. Kiswahili, the Swahili language, is closely connected to the Bantu language group of East and Central Africa. But, it is also written in the Arabic script and borrows many words from Arabic and Persian. Coins from the Swahili city-states were made in the same style as those of the Arab Empires with the sultan's name inscribed in Arabic. These coins have circulated throughout the Indian Ocean trade and archaeologists have found them as far away as the coast of Australia.

### 6:57

You said the A-word!

Okay, fine, your turn.

Now, although those coins made it all the way back to my backyard, our story is still in East Africa. The expansion of long-distance trade also changed inland communities. The merchants of the Swahili Coast acted as middle men between their inland neighbors and the merchants of the Indian Ocean.

*An interactive map shows trade networks between the cities along the coast and the cities that are more inland*

They traded for gold, ivory, and enslaved people provided by their neighbors in exchange for goods from afar, like, Chinese silks. Trade with coastal cities enabled the rise of some powerful inland African states like Great Zimbabwe.

**7:44**

*A map of the Swahili coast zooms out to show trade networks expanding all around the world.*

The rise of the great Swahili merchant cities is just one example of the impacts that growing networks had on local communities. As Indian Ocean and Silk Road trade shifted and expanded, other long distance trade networks proliferated too. Across the Sahara Desert, the Mediterranean Sea, the Mississippi Valley, Mesoamerica, the Andes Mountains, and the islands of the Pacific Ocean, trade routes extended, connecting different communities.

*Painted depictions of a busy trading port and of transport and agricultural technologies*

These denser webs of trade allowed more goods, people, and ideas to travel faster and more easily. New technologies circulated improving navigation and shipbuilding, agriculture, and animal husbandry. Also, systems of belief, especially Buddhism and Islam were spread through trade networks.

**8:41**

*A sinister painting of a grim reaper-like character, representing the Black Death. Other paintings show mass death by the plague.*

Better trade connections also made it easier for some unwelcomed travelers, meaning diseases, to spread rapidly. In 1347 the major Afro-Eurasia trading systems collapsed. The immediate cause was the Bubonic Plague, a disease known as the Black Death, which ravaged Eurasia and North Africa in the 14th century. In a world that had half a billion people, the plague killed somewhere between 75 and 100 million people as it spread from East to West. Populations recovered slowly in the years that followed.

**9:22**

*Montage of artworks that depict trade routes.*

The Plague spread devastation and death along the very trade routes that had been the source of new prosperity. Fortunately, Eurasian societies and networks were able to recover. By the mid 15th century, trading among African, Asian, and European societies was again growing. By 1450, networks across Afro-Eurasia were denser than ever and new voyages by Portuguese sailors along the coast of West Africa were pioneering new oceanic trade routes that would eventually create a single, global economy. Yet, even then, many parts of the world remained largely separate. Despite increasing connections between communities, for most people, patterns of life remained local.

**10:09**

*Kim and Colby in conversation*

So, we're making this video in the middle of a global pandemic and now we're talking about the Bubonic Plague?

Modern, right? Well, there's more sun left in your day than mine, so that's nice. Yeah, but it's tomorrow here, so you're still enjoying yesterday's sun and haven't even started this one yet.

We can't keep doing this. (music playing)