

# CONTEXTUALIZATION—MANSA MUSA

## Preparation

- Watch [Crash Course World History: Mansa Musa and Islam in Africa](#) (or read the transcript, available on the video web page)

## Purpose

You have been introduced to the historical thinking practice of contextualization, and now you'll deepen your understanding of this practice by considering the conditions that existed that allowed Mansa Musa to embark on a 3,000-mile journey in the fourteenth century. This will help you learn that context may not just be about the events of the historical time—a common misconception—but that context can involve other factors and underlying causes.

## Practices

### *Causation, reading*

You'll use your causation skills to examine the time period in which Mansa Musa lived and traveled and determine what historical events or processes allowed for his wealth and his journey from Mali to Mecca. In addition, you'll use your close reading skills to pull out the necessary information from the video and primary source excerpt.

## Process

In this activity, you'll watch the Crash Course World History video about Mansa Musa and read the primary source excerpt to pull out information about Mansa Musa and his travels. You'll use this background information along with the event cards to complete the Contextualization Tool, which is included in the Contextualization—Mansa Musa worksheet.

First, a thought experiment:

Imagine that you live in Los Angeles, California, and you want to take a once-in-a-lifetime road trip to Disney World in Florida. Oh, and along the way, you want to pick up your best friend, who lives in Chicago. So, what do you need to make road trip, which is over 3,000 miles? You want to travel in style, so you buy a Tesla Model X SUV. In fact, you have so much style, you buy 80 of them just to haul your stuff. And you also have an entourage of 12,000 people to help you along the way! Expensive trip, right? No worries—you happen to be the richest person who ever lived, worth about \$400,000,000,000. No, that's not a typo: that's FOUR HUNDRED BILLION dollars! If you were a country, you would be twenty-eighth in terms of GDP (gross domestic product) all by yourself. That would put you ahead of countries like Norway, the United Arab Emirates, and Singapore. How's that for some contextualization! We won't even talk about the impact your spending spree had on Chicago—it was LEGENDARY! Fun to imagine, isn't it? But the truth is, Mansa Musa, the king of Mali, made a trip just like this in the early fourteenth century. How was such a thing possible?

After reading through the paragraph above, your teacher will either hand out or have you download the Contextualization—Mansa Musa worksheet. Then, as a whole class you'll watch *Crash Course World History: Mansa Musa and Islam in Africa*. As you watch the video, take brief notes on the life of Mansa Musa, including information about his reign, his faith, and his travels. Next, you'll read the primary source excerpt that is included in the worksheet with your class. As you read or listen, think about the environmental and cultural factors that enabled Mansa Musa to embark on his journey.



# CONTEXTUALIZATION—MANSA MUSA

Then, using your notes from the video and reading, you'll work together in small groups to complete the Contextualization Tool. First, write the date and location of the historical event and then divide the event cards between broad and narrow context. You'll share your broad and narrow context with the class by placing your event cards on the funnel on the board. Be sure to share your reasons for categorizing your event cards as broad or narrow context. You are allowed to move any event cards that you think were placed incorrectly by the prior group, but you must provide justification for doing so. After your group has moved any of the previous group's event cards, you can place two of your event cards that are not already up on the funnel and explain your reasoning to the class. Then, return to your group to answer the remaining questions on the tool.

Finally, you'll have a class discussion about the environmental and cultural context that enabled Mansa Musa to embark on his journey.

Your teacher will collect your worksheets to assess how your contextualization skills are progressing.

# CONTEXTUALIZATION—MANSA MUSA

## PRIMARY SOURCE EXCERPT—MANSA MUSA

Mansa Musa (c. 1280–c. 1337 CE) traveled from the capital of the Mali kingdom in Timbuktu through Egypt on his hajj to Mecca. On this journey, he brought nobles and servants along with camels loaded with gold and other gifts. West Africa and the kingdom of Mali were rich in gold and sat along the crossroads of trade that extended from West Africa across the Sahara to East Africa and beyond to the Mediterranean, Silk Road, and Indian Ocean trade routes. By about 800 CE, much of northern Africa including the kingdom of Mali had begun converting to Islam. Many of the early converts to Islam in these regions were merchants and elites, including the rulers of many empires and kingdoms. As a result, networks of faith and trade connected many Afro-Eurasian peoples into a global community of interaction.

**Source:** Levtzion, Nehemia and JFP Hopkins. *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011 (pp. 269–273).

*From the beginning of my coming to stay in Egypt I heard of talk of the arrival of this sultan Musa on his Pilgrimage and found the Cairenes [people of Cairo] eager to recount what they had seen of the Africans' prodigal [extravagant] spending. I asked the emir [ruler] Abu ... and he told me of the opulence [wealth], manly virtues, and piety [faithfulness] of his sultan. "When I went out to meet him [he said] that is, on behalf of the mighty sultan al-Malik al-Nasir, he did me extreme honour and treated me with the greatest courtesy. He addressed me, however, only through an interpreter despite his perfect ability to speak in the Arabic tongue. Then he forwarded to the royal treasury many loads of unworked native gold and other valuables. I tried to persuade him to go up to the Citadel to meet the sultan, but he refused persistently saying: "I came for the Pilgrimage and nothing else. I do not wish to mix anything else with my Pilgrimage." He had begun to use this argument but I realized that the audience [with the sultan of Egypt] was repugnant [offensive] to him because he would be obliged [required] to kiss the ground and the sultan's hand. I continued to cajole [persuade] him and he continued to make excuses but the sultan's protocol [rules] demanded that I should bring him into the royal presence, so I kept on at him till he agreed.*

*When we came in the sultan's presence we said to him: "Kiss the ground!" but he refused outright: "How may this be?" Then an intelligent man who was with him whispered to him something we could not understand and he said: "I make obeisance [this bow] to God who created me!" then he prostrated [bowed] himself and went forward to the sultan. The sultan half rose to greet him and sat him by his side. They conversed together for a long time, then sultan Musa went out. The sultan sent to him several complete suits of honour for himself, his courtiers [nobles], and all those who had come with him, and saddled and bridled horses for himself and his chief courtiers ...*

*This man [Mansa Musa] flooded Cairo with his benefactions [gifts]. He left no court emir nor holder of a royal office without the gift of a load of gold. The Cairenes made incalculable profits out of him and his suite in buying and selling and giving and taking. They exchanged gold until they depressed its value in Egypt and caused its price to fall. ...*

*Gold was at a high price in Egypt until they came in that year. The mithqal<sup>1</sup> did not go below 25 dirhams<sup>2</sup> and was generally above, but from that time its value fell and it cheapened in price and has remained cheap till now. The mithqal does not exceed 22 dirhams or less. This has been the state of affairs for about twelve years until this day by reason of the large amount of gold which they brought into Egypt and spent there. ...*

<sup>1</sup> The *mithqal* was a uniform measure of weight in the Islamic world. This equaled about 4.25 grams (a little over an eighth of an ounce) and was used as a common weight for precious metals such as gold.

<sup>2</sup> A *dirham* was a unit of currency in the Islamic world.

# CONTEXTUALIZATION—MANSA MUSA

Name: Date: 

## Contextualization Tool

**Directions:** Respond to each of the prompts below.

1. Write the date(s) and location(s) of the historical event being studied.

2. Take the event cards and divide them up into broad and narrow context.
3. Place them on the funnel in their appropriate location. Be prepared to explain your placement.
4. Write one to two sentences that describe the broad context.

5. Write one to two sentences that describe the narrow context.

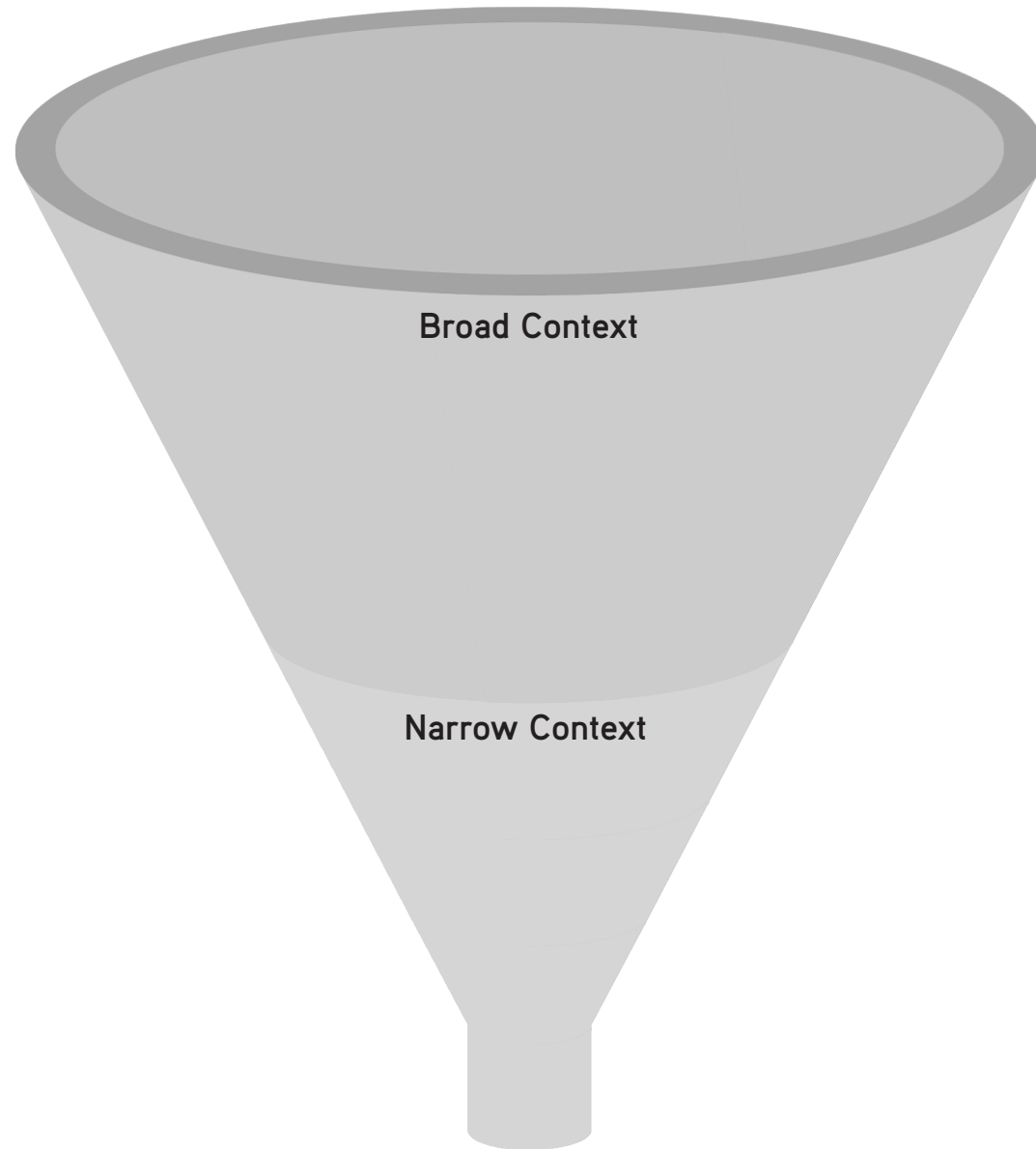
6. Write one to two sentences analyzing how the broad and narrow context help you better understand the historical event.

- **Broad:** Does the context represent broader themes, trends, events, eras, or regions related to the historical development at hand? Does it represent a long-term (underlying) cause or contributing factor?
- **Narrow:** Does the context represent themes, trends, events, eras, or regions that are more closely tied in time/place to the historical development at hand? Does it help us see the short-term (immediate) causes or contributing factors?

# CONTEXTUALIZATION—MANSA MUSA

Name:

Date:



Historical Event/Development

---