

# Countries Around the World™

## Mali

### Program Summary

Meet Aïcha. She and her family live in Bamako, the capital of Mali. Join Aïcha as she takes a taxi to an outdoor market after a day at school. On the way there, Aïcha passes by two structures that represent Mali's past and future, respectively: the Independence Monument, which celebrates Mali's independence from France in 1960, and the Tower of Africa, which symbolizes the need for African unity. Once at the market, Aïcha introduces us to aspects of Mali's economy and population when she browses among various items crafted by some of the different tribal groups in Mali, such as the Bambara, the Soninke and the Dogon. Next, we see the importance of family unity in Mali when Aïcha returns home to spend time with her extended family by sharing a meal and some green tea before listening to a *griot* sing a song about her family's history. After praying in a local mosque, Aïcha takes a boat up the Niger River to the village of Segoukoro to visit her cousin. While there, Aïcha tours the section of Segoukoro that houses the chamber hall and tomb of Biton Mamary Coulibaly, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century king who founded the Bambara Empire.

### Country Information

- **location:** Western Africa; bordered by Algeria, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal
- **capital:** Bamako
- **official language:** French, but Bambara is spoken by 80% of Malians
- **type of government:** republic
- **total area:** approximately 1.24 million sq km
- **climate:** subtropical to arid with varied seasons; hot and dry (February to June), rainy, humid and mild (June to November) and cool and dry (November to February)
- **terrain:** mostly flat to rolling northern plains covered by sand with savanna in the South and rugged hills in the Northeast
- **natural resources:** includes gold, phosphates, kaolin, salt, limestone, uranium, gypsum, granite and hydropower
- **industries:** includes food processing, construction, and phosphate and gold mining
- **agricultural products:** includes cotton, millet, rice, corn, vegetables, peanuts, cattle, sheep and goats

### Vocabulary

**Sahel** — An increasingly dry geographic area in Africa that acts as a transitional zone between the Sahara Desert and the more tropical savannah in the South.

**Bambara** — A group of agricultural people who live in Mali. It is also the name of the language that they speak.

**dourouni** — A form of public transportation in Mali that resembles a minivan and carries multiple passengers at once.

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**CFA franc** — The currency of Mali and several other African nations.

**banco** — A type of brick that is made from a mixture of mud, cow dung, straw and wood.

**Animism** — The religious belief that natural objects, natural phenomena and the universe itself possess souls with consciousness.

**Tuareg** — A nomadic, Berber-speaking people who live in North Africa.

**Moors** — A term used to describe people of mixed Berber and Arab descent, which eventually came to be used to reference all Muslims who conquered the Iberian Peninsula in 711 C.E.

**Fulani** — A pastoral, largely Muslim people who inhabit parts of West Africa from northern Nigeria to Mali.

**Soninke** — Also "Sarakole." A Mande-speaking people who live in parts of West Africa, including Mali and Senegal. The Soninke were the founders of the ancient empire of Ghana.

**Dogon** — A group of indigenous people who live in the mountains of central Mali.

**boubou** — A long, loose-fitting African garment that is worn by both men and women.

**griot** — A storyteller in Western Africa who perpetuates the oral tradition and history of a village or family.

**pirogue** — A canoe that is made from a hollowed tree trunk.

**Segoukoro** — The "old town" section of Segou, a town along the Niger River in southwestern Mali.

**mosque** — A Muslim place of worship.

### Pre-viewing Discussion

- Lead a discussion about how climate affects where and how people live. Begin by having students talk about how the weather in their area affects their lives. Expand the conversation with questions, such as: How would you have to adapt your lifestyle if you lived in a place that was really hot? What about a place that was really cold? How do people who live in such extreme conditions adapt to the climate? Would you like to live in a place like that? As they prepare to watch the program, instruct students to watch for references to how climate affects people living in Mali.
- Distribute outline maps of Mali to the class. Have them label the capital city and other major cities in addition to the neighboring countries. Questions to ask include: Where are the majority of the cities located? Why do you think they are located there? How might climate be a factor in their locations? How might geography be a factor in their locations?
- Lead a discussion on what makes places different from each other. Begin by having students brainstorm a list of things that they think make places unique. Follow up with questions, such as: How is climate a factor in defining an area? How are land formations or bodies of water factors? Are people a part of making a place unique? How? How would you characterize the place where you live? What makes it unique?

### Follow-up Activities

- In the ancient kingdom of Mali, gold was a highly-valued commodity, but there was something that was even more valuable — salt! In fact, salt is more than just a common food seasoning; salt has played a major part in the history of the world, from the ancient Roman and Chinese civilizations to the American Revolution and Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March. Students can discover more about this amazing compound by reading Mark Kurlansky's *The Story of Salt* (Penguin, 2006). Then, students can make a classroom display dedicated to salt. The displays can feature fact posters, pictures and illustrations, time lines, maps, dioramas, models of salt's molecular structure and even science experiments. Have students take turns presenting their display contributions to the class.

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- From the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Mali was the site of a great and powerful empire that boasted two powerful and influential kings: Sundiata and Mansa Musa. But through the stories and songs of the *griots*, Sundiata and Mansa Musa have been transformed from mere mortals into mythical, legendary figures in the centuries since their reigns ended. Share the history of the empire of Mali and some of the stories of these two powerful kings by reading Khephra Burns' *Mansa Musa: The Lion of Mali* (Harcourt Children's Books, 2001) and David Wisniewski's *Sundiata the Lion King* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999), to the class. Then, students can track these stories' elements of plot, setting and character by completing story maps for them. An interactive tool for making story maps can be found at [www.readwritethink.org/materials/storymap/index.html](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/storymap/index.html). After discussing the story elements, students can write and illustrate their own stories about Sundiata and Mansa Musa based on their understanding of these Malian rulers. As an extension, students can pretend they are *griots* in the Mali Empire and write songs based on the stories of Sundiata and Mansa Musa and perform them for the class.
- Engage students in a comparative study of Mali and several other West African nations. Begin by dividing the students into small groups and assign each group an area of focus (e.g., population, food, climate, wildlife, etc.). Then, task each group with finding facts about two other West African nations to compare with Mali. Students can organize their findings with various graphic organizers, such as posters, charts, graphs and Venn diagrams. Each group can share its graphic organizers with the class.
- Before Muslim traders brought Arabic writing to West Africa, the people of Mali relied upon *griots* to keep their histories alive by retelling them and passing them from generation to generation. A *griot* is a kind of a historian whose job it was to keep the historical traditions of society alive through stories of leaders and heroes. Invite students to assume the roles of *griots* and write songs, stories or poems in honor of someone they admire. Encourage students to take turns presenting their "oral histories" to the class.
- Celebrate Mali in verse by having students write acrostic poems using words associated with Mali, like "Bambara," "*griot*" or "Sahel." For help on how to write an acrostic poem, visit [www.poetryteachers.com/poetclass/lessons/acrostic.html](http://www.poetryteachers.com/poetclass/lessons/acrostic.html). Encourage students to share their poems with the class. As an extension, students can create collages featuring pictures of the different things they wrote about in their poems.
- Students will have fun creating their own "From Here to Timbuktu" board games about traveling across Mali to reach the fabled, ancient city. Divide students into small groups and, using pieces of cardboard and various craft materials, have each group design and fashion its game board to resemble the landscape of Mali and the location of the city of Timbuktu while inventing the rules for the games. The games can include facts about Mali and Timbuktu, like the importance of the Niger River, and may even include playing pieces that resemble the caravans of nomadic tribes who traveled across the desert to reach Timbuktu! Once they have finished making their boards, students can take turns playing each other's games. Students may find Larry Brook's *Daily Life in Ancient and Modern Timbuktu* (Lerner Publishing Group, 1999) useful in finding information about Timbuktu.
- Students can build dioramas that depict the geography of Mali, such as the Sahara Desert, the Sahel and the Niger River. Students can include various aspects of Mali's geographic regions in their dioramas, such as the wildlife and vegetation found there and how humans have adapted to living in these regions. Students can write fact sheets to accompany their dioramas. Display the dioramas in the classroom.
- Students will have fun learning all about Mali by creating their own question and answer books. Begin by dividing the class into small groups and assigning each group a topic to cover, such as climate, history, food or wildlife. Once they have finished creating their books, students can use the material from their question and answer books in a classroom trivia game about Mali. An interactive tool for making a question and answer book can be found at [www.readwritethink.org/materials/flipbook/](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/flipbook/).

## Suggested Internet Resources

- [www.peacecorps.gov/kids/world/africa/mali.html](http://www.peacecorps.gov/kids/world/africa/mali.html)  
This child-friendly site provides basic facts and information about Mali.
- [www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/religion/Islam.htm](http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/religion/Islam.htm)  
The students of Woodlands Junior School in England present basic information about Islam.
- [mali.pwnet.org/index.htm](http://mali.pwnet.org/index.htm)  
This site provides information about Mali, including its history, people and geography. It also includes a photo gallery of the different places and people in Mali.
- [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)  
The CIA World Factbook web site presents detailed and up-to-date information on Mali and many other countries. Topics include geography, people, government, economy, transportation and communication. On the main page of the CIA site, click on the "World Factbook" link.

## Suggested Print Resources

- Mitchell, Peter. *Peoples and Cultures of Africa: West Africa*. Facts on File, New York, NY; 2006.
- Shuter, Jane. *Ancient West African Kingdoms*. Heinemann Library, Chicago, IL; 2002.
- Weintraub, Aileen. *Sabara Desert: The Biggest Desert*. Rosen Publishing Group, New York, NY; 2003.

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