

Cristina Kessler Workshop: Let's Preserve a Memory ©2010

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Learning Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Describe ancient Timbuktu and its importance in Islam's academic history.
2. Describe the roles and activities of boys and girls in Timbuktu today.
3. Discuss the ancient manuscripts of Timbuktu, regarding the wide variety of topics and the attention to detail in producing them.
4. Adopt the role of family, community or cultural historian and record something the student deems important.
5. Create a document in the style of ancient manuscripts and preserve it using modern techniques.

Guiding Question:

Why is it important for cultures to protect written historical documents such as the ancient manuscripts of Timbuktu?

Essential Questions:

1. What are the Timbuktu manuscripts?
2. What types of information are recorded in the Timbuktu documents?
3. Why are the main characters in *Trouble in Timbuktu* so committed to protecting the manuscripts?

I. Classroom Activities



Materials Needed

- Chapters 1, 2 and 11 from *Trouble in Timbuktu* by Cristina Kessler
- "Timbuktu, the Untold Story." *Timbuktu Foundation*. <http://www.timbuktufoundation.org/missionvideo.php> Accessed 10/26/2010.
- "Ancient Manuscripts from the Desert Libraries of Timbuktu." *Library of Congress Exhibition*. July 25, 2003. Accessed October 8, 2010. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/mali/mali-exhibit.html>



A Poem on Islamic Law
The author of this poem is instructing students of Islamic law about the rights of orphans and married women. Sayyid al-Mukhtar ibn Ahmad ibn Abi Bakr al-Kunti al-Kabir. *Ussidah* (Poem). Loaned



Islamic Saints
Sufis (Islamic mystics) form an important element in Islamic society. The author provides an explanation of their mystical doctrine and practice. ... *Nuhuri Hizb al-Rajim* copied 1858. Loaned by the Mamma Haidara Commemorative

- 4-6 replicas of Timbuktu Manuscripts pasted on pieces of cardboard with the English descriptions on the back.

Activator

Divide the class into 4 to 6 groups. Pass out the replicas of the Timbuktu manuscripts with the Arabic writing face up. Tell the students not to turn the replicas over until directed. Ask them: "What do you think these objects are? Discuss your ideas with your group-mates. Then we will share our ideas with the class." Tell the students to turn the replicas over and read the English description. Ask the students to share what they have learned from the translations. Tell them they will learn more about these manuscripts in *Trouble in Timbuktu*, a novel by Cristina Kessler, who they will meet at the Library of Congress on Friday, November 5th.

Procedure

1. Read to the students or have the students read Chapters 1, 2 and 11 from *Trouble in Timbuktu*.
2. Discuss the questions from Teacher Handout: Questions and Answers.
3. Tell students they are going to record information that they believe is important to keep. When they visit the Library of Congress they will learn how to preserve the information they have recorded.
4. Students can interview someone or record a story, poem, song, or essay that they or someone else has produced. If the information is not original they need to acknowledge the source.
5. Direct students to create a handwritten draft manuscript of their information.

Suggested Interview Topics

- **Personal history:** Tell me about a personal accomplishment that you treasure. Interview teachers, friends, teammates, family member.
- **School:** Tell me about a special school event or memory that you treasure. Interview principal, teachers, classmates...
- **Family:** Tell me about a special event your family's history that you treasure. Interview parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings...
- **Country:** Tell me about something special to record about your country. Ask parents, guardians, teachers...
- **Community:** Tell me about something special in the community that should be remembered and documented. Interview neighbors, church members, school mates...
- **Historical Event:** Tell me about an event that occurred in the past that you believe is significant.

Assessment

- Proofread and return the draft manuscripts to the students. Tell them to make necessary changes.
- Students will share their manuscripts with their classmates.

II. Library of Congress Activities

Materials Needed

- Handwritten draft manuscripts created by the students in the classroom
- The Library of Congress will provide the following*
- Examples of the type of manuscripts students will be asked to produce

Sheets of antique paper

Scissors

1 pen per student

Archive quality acid-free plastic sleeves

Colored pencils to be shared

Activator

Author Cristina Kessler will show a PowerPoint with music from Mali and photos of Timbuktu, the Sahara, the Niger River, and life in Mali in general.

Procedure

1. Ask students to re-write their information on antique paper and decorate it. As models, they can use the ancient manuscripts of Timbuktu and the designs and borders on many manuscripts. They can trim edges to make them look older or not decorate them at all. The important thing is that the manuscript must be hand-written and not a computer product.
2. Direct students to date and sign the documents. In 50 years, the name and date will authenticate the manuscripts and they will become historical documents.
3. Show students how to place the manuscript in an acid-free, archival quality plastic sleeve for preservation.
4. Discuss the best places to store their manuscripts.

Extension

- Encourage students to begin recording family, community, personal or school events and history on a regular basis. Each student will receive additional sleeves and pieces of paper for future documents.
- Invite the students to showcase their manuscripts, Saturday, November 6th at the National Museum of African Art during the Children's Africana Book Awards Ceremony.

Teacher Handout: Questions and Answers for *Trouble in Timbuktu*

1. Who are the foreigners in the book and what do they say that alarms Ahmed?

Answer: The foreigners are two Americans, Griff and Trudy.

Breaking back into English Trudy turned to Griff. "Aren't they the cutest? They look just like a set of bookends." Griff snorted. "That's what they look like, all right." Then he whispered, "And with any luck we'll need some bookends for the manuscripts...if we get them..." (Pg. 7)

2. What does Griff tell Ahmed that clearly upsets the young Bella boy?

Answer: "We'll pay you well," Griff said as he pushed a 100 CFA note at Ahmed. "Take this now and if tomorrow is good, then maybe you can help me with some other things too." Griff cocked his head to the side, eyeing Ahmed closely. "I am a bit of a collector; maybe you can help me." (Pg.8)

Ayisha realizes just how upset her twin is when he says, "Ayisha, I don't trust them. He asked about the manuscripts, Ayisha. He sounds like he's planning to take some from here." (Pg. 10)

3. Why is Ayisha so upset by this news?

Answer: Shaking her head, she said in disbelief, "But Ahmed, he can't just go to the market and buy one. He'd need a local person to help him find one. Yes?" Eyes wide Ayisha asked, "Could that be what he wants? Does he want you to be the person who helps him find some ancient manuscripts?" They both knew that the foreigners would have to steal the ancient manuscripts to get them. And anyone who helped them would also be a thief. (Pg. 11)

4. What secret advantage does Ahmed have?

Answer: Ahmed just went on. "I usually tell people what languages I speak, but these two never asked. They wanted to speak French, and they didn't ask if I spoke English, so I didn't tell them. They talk to each other (in English) as if I'm not there." (Pg.14)

5. What are the ancient manuscripts of Timbuktu about and how old are they?

Answer: Ahmed said, "May Allah forgive me – I started bragging. I told him they were about science, religion, world peace, diplomacy, astronomy, physics, conflict resolution, geography, history, law. Anything you can think of, I told him, these scholars wrote about it, some 400 to 600 years ago..." (Pgs. 16 and 17)

6. Why are Ahmed and Ayisha so worried about someone stealing manuscripts?

Answer: He shook his head. "They are the kind of people Alhaji Musa told us to watch out for. He told us to beware of anyone, especially foreigners, with too much interest in our national treasures, especially our ancient writings. We are all protectors, Ayisha." (Pgs. 17-18)

7. What do Ayisha and Ahmed decide to do?

Answer: Ahmed nodded as his sister said, "It's not your fault they came to steal. But we will stop them! We will become our own little police force."

"That is good Ayisha, I like it." His voice suddenly grew louder and stronger, "Let's make a pledge to protect all the ancient manuscripts of Timbuktu from all thieves. The holy ancient papers of Timbuktu." (Pg. 18)

8. Where do they take the Americans to see the ancient manuscripts?

Answer: He held out his hand and said, "I am Khalid Aziz, curator of CEDRAB, the Centre de Recherches Historiques Ahmed Baba." This is a center that preserves and displays ancient manuscripts in Timbuktu. (Chap. 11, Pg. 142)

9. What does Khalid Aziz tell Griff are the major threats to the manuscripts?

Answer: "These fragile papers are victims of dust, bugs, temperature changes and even vibration... The climate is not their only enemy, for many disappear into the black market of private collectors and sellers." (Pg. 143)

10. Why does the curator think it is important to preserve these documents?

Answer: Khalid said, "We are collecting as many as we can, by purchase or trade, or even just a promise of storage, for these manuscripts show the world that Timbuktu was once a learning center where scholars discussed every topic important to mankind." (Pg. 143)