

## The Camels of Mansa Musa

The sun is rising and it's time to go. We have many miles to walk to get from the Kingdom of Mali in Africa to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. I am loaded down with gold and jewels. They are heavy, and I am tired already. But I must press on.

Life as a camel in Mansa Musa's entourage is difficult. He is the wealthiest king in history, and he likes to show it off. I am never free of these gold chains.

Mansa Musa makes all of his money in the gold and salt trade. The Kingdom of Mali, which he rules over in Western Africa, controls all the trade routes across the Sahara Desert. His empire commands trade with Europe and the Middle East.

Mansa Musa has over 60,000 people in his entourage too. It's not just us camels going to Mecca. The people come from all the castes in the kingdom. The farmers are the most valued of course, and then the artisans. The fisherman and the scribes come next. Then the civil servants and soldiers. Last are the slaves. There are many slaves coming with us to Mecca.

The line of the kings of Mali goes all the way back to 1235, when Sundiata Keita united the Malinke people and led them to victory over the

Soso. The Empire of Mali has grown, taking over surrounding kingdoms until it became the biggest and most powerful.

The kings of Mali have all been devout Muslims, just like Mansa Musa. But they don't make the people convert. Most people in the kingdom practice a mixture of Islam and local traditions. For many years, Mansa Musa has been wanting to show his devotion to Islam by visiting Mecca. He calls it a pilgrimage. Finally now, in the year 1324, we are ready to go to this holy Muslim city.

I am weary after only one day of the journey, which does not bode well. But I am also excited to see Mecca. Mansa Musa talks of it as a vibrant place full of scholars. He wants to bring back architects and poets to help Mali become more cultured. Most importantly, he wants to bring back teachers to create a university in the glorious city of Timbuktu.

I suspect that he will succeed in doing this. I suspect that Mali will grow even greater under his leadership. I know that the world will be talking about him after seeing his display of wealth on this trip. And so I trudge on in his service. If only gold weren't so heavy.



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NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Mansa Musa was \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. A king of Mali
  - b. A devout Muslim
  - c. The wealthiest king in history
  - d. All of the above
  
2. Who was the first king of Mali?
  - a. Mansa Musa
  - b. Soso
  - c. Malinke
  - d. Sundiata Keita
  
3. Which of the following was NOT mentioned as a reason for Mansa Musa to travel to Mecca?
  - a. To prove his devotion to the religion of Islam
  - b. To show off his wealth
  - c. To trade gold and salt
  - d. To bring back scholars to help Mali
  
4. How do you think the camel feels about Mansa Musa?
  - a. He admires his power
  - b. He resents his demands
  - c. He respects his faith
  - d. All of the above

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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