

Gold in Ghana

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Keywords Gold, Ghana, Akan, Goldweights, Balance Scale, Natural Resources

Overview In this lesson, students will be able to explain how gold (a natural resource) has shaped, defined, and symbolized Ghana's history and culture. Students will be able to explain how gold has helped and harmed Ghana's economy and people. Finally, students will create thematic art inspired by Ghanaian brass goldweights.

Essential Questions

- How can a resource be both helpful and harmful?
- How is it evident that gold is an important part of Ghana's history and culture?

Intended Grade Level K-5th (adapt slides as needed for younger students)

Intended Content Areas Social Studies

Standard Alignment with NC Standards

Social Studies-

K.B.1.1 Identify cultural practices in local communities and around the world.

1 B.1.1 Identify cultural practices and traditions in local communities and places around the world.

1.G.2.2 Explain the various ways people impact the physical environment in different regions around the world.

2.E.1 Understand how the availability of resources impacts economic decisions.

3.B.1.1 Explain how the values, beliefs, and cultures of various indigenous, religious, racial and other groups contribute to the development of local communities and the state.

3.E.1.2 Explain how the natural resources of a region impact the production and consumption of goods in local communities.

3.G.1.3 Explain how movement of goods, people, and ideas is impacted by the geography of a place or region.

5.H.1.6 Explain the significance of national symbols and traditions from various perspectives.

1.1.7 Construct claims in response to compelling and supporting questions.

1.1.8 Accurately use information from sources when making claims.

1.1.9 Make inferences from information in sources.

Science-

1.E.2.1 Summarize the physical properties of Earth materials, including rocks, minerals, soils and water that make them useful in different ways.

1.L.1.3 Summarize ways that humans protect their environment and/or improve conditions for the growth of the plants and animals that live there (e.g., reuse or recycle products to avoid littering).

Visual Arts-

K.CX.1.4 Recognize key components of art from different cultures.

1.V.1.2 Create original art that expresses ideas, themes, and events

1.CX.1.1 Recognize how visual arts are used in customs and traditions of various cultures.

1.CX.1.2 Identify images in art as depicting something old (historic) or new (contemporary).

1.CX.2.2 Identify connections between art and concepts from other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts.

2.V.2.3 Create art from real and imaginary sources of inspiration.

2.CX.1.1 Exemplify visual arts representing the heritage, customs, and traditions of various cultures.

2.CX.2.2 Understand relationships between art and concepts from other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts.

3.V.2.3 Create art from realistic sources of inspiration.

3.CX.1.2 Understand how art documents the history of the local community.

3.CX.2.2 Understand how to use information learned in other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts in visual arts.

4.CX.2.2 Apply skills and concepts learned in other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts, in the visual arts.

5.V.2.2 Use ideas and imagery from the global environment as sources for creating art.

Materials

- [Resource Slides for Classroom Use](#)
- Background informational articles:
 - ["Neocolonialism and Suppression in Ghana's Gold Sector"](#)
 - ["West African Gold: Out of the Ordinary"](#)
 - ["Gold Weights from Ghana"](#)
 - ["Illegal Gold Mining Boon Threatens Cocoa Farmers"](#)
 - ["Traveling Political Models: The Ghanaian 'Seat of State'"](#)
 - ["Ghana's Presidential Seats and Sword of State"](#)
- Balance scale or online version
- Paper, crayons, pencils
- [Balance Scale template](#) if needed

Suggested Length of Time 60 minutes

Prior Work to be Completed

Background knowledge of balance scales helpful

Procedures

- Ghana became independent from European colonial rule in 1957 but before that it was called the “Gold Coast.” Why do you think that was?
- People from Portugal came to what is now Ghana in the 15th century. The Portuguese found so much gold between the Ankobra and the Volta rivers that they called the area “da Mina”, meaning “The Mine”. In 1482, the Portuguese built the first trading fort castle in the Gold Coast at Elmina (“the mine”) that focused largely on gold and slavery. The Dutch, Danish, and English later arrived to further exploit human and natural resources in the Gold Coast and many more forts were built on the coastline to ensure access to gold.
- Gold has been extracted in Ghana for centuries with Obuasi being the center of gold mining, and Ghana is one of the leading producers of gold in Africa. Large commercial companies (big mine is AngloGold who has owned the gold mine since 1896 with much of profits from Ghana’s mines being taken out of the country) mine the majority with heavy machinery but about 35% is extracted by small-scale mines many of whom operate without a valid license. While large commercial mining certainly is detrimental to the environment, the small-scale miners cause disproportionate environmental harm and degradation when compared to the larger miners (mainly because they typically use widespread surface mining that doesn’t fill in pits or employ more dangerous extraction methods that contaminate water and soil).
 - Show students images in Slide 4 and ask what they are of: the orange area is the Ashanti region with Obuasi being the center of gold mining. In the right hand image, the yellow areas are areas where gold mining occurs. Point out to students the proximity to forest reserves. The following slide shows the effects on the landscape.
- Gold mining has occurred for centuries and will continue in Ghana. Gold has been prominent in many aspects of Ghanaian culture for a very long time:
 - Chief’s regalia at the National Museum in Accra
 - Golden Stool of the Ashanti
 - Seat of State or Asesegwa (The Seat of State was crafted in the early 1960s by Kofi Antubam out of sese (a white tropical wood) and stands over 7 feet tall and is decorated with adinkra symbols and the Black Star. The seat was later covered in gold dust. The base of the seat is reminiscent of an Ashanti stool).
 - State Sword (also designed by Kofi Antubam and made of pure gold with adinkra symbols on it. A bearer precedes the president into parliament with the sword on special occasions. The president swears allegiance to Ghana on the sword, a tradition used by Akan leaders.)

- Pistis Ghana, a fashion house based in Accra, creates gowns with strips of kente that often have golden threads woven in it.
- Akan Gold Weights (made out of brass and used to weigh gold nuggets or gold dust. They were made from around 1400-1900 and often were in geometric shapes or of important Akan symbols and proverbs.)
 - Show students some images of these weights and ask them what they think they are. Then show the students an image of a balance scale. What do you think these brass items are now?
 - Explain how these weights work with a physical balance scale or with [this online version](#) or [this online version](#)
- Students will now create their own set of brass weights. Your set should have a theme: animals, nature, book characters, sports, plants, etc. Students can just draw their set of brass weights on one sheet of paper or consider having them cut them out to have a tactile set. As another option, consider having students draw a set of weights on one side of a balance scale pan and having what it equals in weight on the other side of the balance scale using [this template](#).

Optional Extension Activities or Adaptations:

- Have a balance scale and weights for the students to practice with and predict what objects will be heavier, lighter etc.
- Give students the option to build their set of gold weights out of lego or playdo instead of drawing them.