

African Kingdoms: Enrich your KS3 History curriculum

OUP, Sam Evans

Good evening and a very warm welcome to this Twitter space hosted by OUP Secondary. We are excited to welcome you to this discussion on teaching African Kingdoms at key stage three and with me this evening as you all have heard, our Aaron Wilkes, Katie Amery, and Teni Gogo and we're looking forward to a really interesting conversation this evening.

Aaron Wilkes

Firstly, some introductions. I'm Aaron Wilkes. I'm a teacher of 25 years (goodness me where's that gone?) in the classrooms. I'm the PGCE history lead at the University of Warwick. I work for BBC Bite Size, BBC Teach and I'm a textbook author for OUP - Oxford University Press at Key stage three and key stage four. Really the focus of today is the groundbreaking work OUP is doing on the new key stage 3 depths study series more of that later, obviously now to the important people Teni Gogo and Katie Avery, the co-authors of OUP's new key stage three textbook African Kingdom. So we'll start with Katie, Katie Avery, history teacher of almost 20 years. Katie's currently head of department at West Kirby Grammar is. That about 14 years and counting, yeah.

Katie Amery

Definitely counting.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah. OK. Also, lead subject based mentor for History, ITT at Liverpool Hope I trained at Liverpool Hope I think you did as well didn't you Katie.

Katie Amery

It did, yeah, it was a wonderful place of rain, yeah.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah. Other stuff you do. So publications you're writing for the for a new book, *What is History Teaching Now* and it's edited by Rachel Ball and our very own Alex Fairlamb. Yeah. Big interest in museums and co-producing things with the local community are now developing content for lessons I know you work with Colin McCormack, isn't it on materials for historic England Secondary schools programme and at the moment Toxteth Uprising, 1981 gatherings of oral testimonies year 9-12 students. Is that right?

Katie Amery

Yeah, that's right. Yeah, we did an interview with BBC Radio Merseyside about our work with that so far last night. So that's coming along really nicely, yeah.

Aaron Wilkes

So. So you're on A roll? With speaking on these things.

Katie Amery

Not really.

Aaron Wilkes

And of course Teni Gogo. Teni Gogo, history teacher trained at Cambridge Uni. Spent much of a career exploring mediaeval African kingdoms, which is apt and Black British history. She has written for Teaching History, Harper Collins, BBC as well as delivering workshops for students, CPD for early career experienced history teachers and you're currently post grad at University of Oxford Action Research Fellow for the Empire, Migration and belonging project. Is that right, Teni?

Teni Gogo

That is me.

Aaron Wilkes

So Teni and Katie, you've been working in particular on the new key stage three student book for OUP African Kingdoms, which is part of a series of four. The British Empire one is out first in a few months time, April 2023. Then there's African kingdoms your one in June '23. *Fight for Rights in modern Britain* is out in July '23 and then the *Migration Nation* is in August 2023. Now I've been overwhelmed. I know we've talked about it before, that the interest in these books has been huge. Really, really positive. So it a general question really. Where? Why? Why do you think there's been so much interest in the sorts of books?

Katie Amery

Yeah. I just think there's a real drive and a real kind of passion from history teachers to deliver on diversity. I think most of us had a massive wake up call in 2020 and you know, I personally should have had one before, but it really made me think about, you know, the curricula provision that we provide for students. And we want to hear a range of different voices. And it all ties in with this. And idea of decolonising the curriculum and looking at things from a range of different lenses. So obviously Teni and I are focused on African kingdoms because we want to kind of, you know, deconstruct this Western myth of African history not existing before Europeans arrived. And we don't want students first interaction with Africa to be centred on the transatlantic slave trade. We want to make that clear really through this publication. But I think that the OR the books are so important. And just giving teachers a really accessible way of making a lot of different diverse groups in society. So, you know, from women to LGBTQ plus figures making representation routine in our history lessons. Cuz I think that you know, I certainly have neglected to do that for a really long time. And I think these books are going to create kind of the ideal channel to do that.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah, I think that's a really solid point about the idea of representation should be routine. I think that's really important. Yeah. Teni did you want to pick up on anything at all?

Teni Gogo

Yeah, I think it's been, it's been like particularly African kingdoms and looking at diversifying, but really decolonising the curriculum, I think. It's been something that people are interested in or looking to, but I think 2020 was a real big point where people maybe might have thought about it, but it really like pushed that change needed to happen. So I think like when we're talking about the youth and the kids, what they're they've now got access to so much information just scrolling for hours on TikTok. And I think it's very important that like in our class they are getting this information first in a really rigorous, challenging and like thoughtful and careful way. So not that they're just getting, I guess what would be quote unquote the traditional narrative at school than having to look for it elsewhere. But our classrooms, a place where they're getting a really well rounded, rigorous and, like Katie said, it's not just getting that representation in tokenistic ways and you know, teaching the slow trade and teaching civil rights, but getting them to see lots of different people's histories and really rich and valuable ways.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah, yeah, I think. That's a really good shout. We've said it many times. We say it at OUP a lot when we meet, you know, we know, don't we? As teachers, that young people should feel represented in the story they learn about and the literature they read and we know don't because we see it all the time that that students benefit from seeing their identities represented in those content. And this is something that we've worked really hard. I know you guys have as well.

Aaron Wilkes

With you're working on African Kingdoms specifically, so sort of a general open question. You touched on it a little bit earlier, Katie, but I'm just wondering whether either of you can develop that a little bit. Why should we study African Kingdoms in particular. What are students gaining from it? Why? They'll be teachers listening here, you know, that will be thinking, you know, why? Why should my school? Why should I make space for it?

Katie Amery

Yeah, I think it is difficult and I think that, you know, designing a key stage 3 curriculum is a real challenge for teachers. And I know that African Kingdoms don't appear on the national curriculum, you know, which Teni and I think is a travesty, really. We've alluded to the fact that, you know, students first encounters with Africa should not be the transatlantic slave trade, and both Teni and I feel really passionate about that that we've got a moral imperative to make sure that students you know understand that Africa, much like Europe, had a really rich and fascinating past and Africa was a really kind of wealthy and globally connected nation. And I think that it's fascinating as well. You know, just going through this process of, you know, I focused on Benin and Mali, you know, exploring these kingdoms and uncovering lots of different stories and user material culture is a great way of doing history. And it challenged my preconceptions about Africa, and I think it challenges our students preconceptions. I think there's loads of interesting stories and I just think that you know. We didn't really take well to this content and it grips them and like it has Teni and I and I think that they can learn a lot about being great. His stories and it helps them to understand why the world is the way that it is today.

Teni Gogo

Yeah, I think and definitely like even beyond just representing students. So I know there's like people looking to teach it, but their classrooms aren't necessarily diverse. So you might not be teaching in a city you might be in a really rural area, and I think beyond like trying to reflect your students cause African Kingdoms might not reflect your students. I think if we're just talking about teaching, quote unquote Good history and we're looking at teaching across key Stage 3 globalised history and connections across the world, I think. It's a massive gap for you to not touch on African kingdoms if you're trying to teach, say, year seven about trade in the Middle East or don't talk about the spread of Islam into mediaeval West Africa. You're just leaving out huge gaps of time, so it's not necessarily we're suggesting taking out a whole half term in certain places, but it's just about. Trying to give your students as well-rounded a view as possible and often the way that these would mediaeval African kingdoms touched on so many different areas. It's really important that where they fit into the link your students are getting that experience.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah, I think that's a I think that's a really good shout and like you've mentioned that, you know, African kingdoms can be just a vehicle for good history. You know, we want, we students to be able to do those sorts of things, don't we? We want them to ask perceptive questions. We want them to be able to think critically and to weigh up evidence and to sift arguments and to develop perspective and judgement and this textbook allows them to do that. Just to explain you mentioned it earlier, Katie, you said that you've done, you've done Mali. So there are 4 case studies, if you like. There's the Kingdom of Mali, the Kingdom of Songhai, the Kingdom of Benin, and the Kingdom of Asante.

Another question really. What year group might study African kingdoms? I mean, the key stages three textbooks where would it best fit perhaps?

Katie Amery

Yeah, I mean I I think it, you know it can fit with any year group really I can just give you a couple of examples of where we've integrated Marley and Benin at West Kirby. So I think a lot of year 7 curriculums focus on the Middle Ages and monarchy and the Middle Ages. And I think that that the approach that we've taken towards monarchy is quite a global one, so our students look at King John and Eleanor of Aquitaine and Mansa Musa of Mali and Pachacuti of the Inca Empire and Genghis Khan. And I think that's a nice little introduction, you know, into mediaeval African kingdoms. And they learn about the wealth of Mansa Musa that had to Mecca and they have a look at the Catalan Atlas that I think most history teachers have seen the picture of Mansa Musa holding the Golden Nugget and I think that's a really kind of nice segue in, you know for year 7 to learn about African Kingdom. Year eight, we look at Benin and so we do that following our study of the English Civil War. So we kind of do a comparison really, you know, what England was like in the 17th Century and the kind of golden Age of Benin in the 17th century. And we've woven in some work that our local museums done the World Museum in terms of working with the local community and giving more kind of sensitive signage to the objects that they've got in their Benin collection. Even that were looted in 1897, but I know that Teni's got some kind of good ideas for how to weave the insert to all the year groups as well. So I can pass over to her now.

Teni Gogo

Yeah. So, year eight, looking at year eight kind of in the emergence of the transatlantic slave trade and construction of race, we start that with looking at a different W African Kingdom. So getting them to see that actually it wasn't kind of a homogeneous area where everything was the same at the same values, so getting them to see trade that happened between nations, and even addressing that existed within Africa and then comparing it to chattel slavery across the Atlantic, which is picked up in the textbook as well. African Kingdoms tend to get stuck a little bit in year seven and year eight. But the Ashanti Kingdom could go quite nicely into year 9 because the Ashanti British War, the Anglo Ashanti Wars go into the early nineteen 1900s. It fits quite nicely with year nine. You're opening the 20th century and depending on the organisation you've done with year eight, you can open year nine looking at that, looking at Britain's role outside. But also, as I know, more schools are looking to kind of incorporate inquiries about decolonisation. And if you're looking at those early nations being decolonised, for example, Ghana, there's so many links to draw back. So if you're kind of not sure where things fit that you wanted a flashback or connections to other places. If you're looking at decolonisation of Ghana, there's so many links back to the Kingdom of Ashanti and being able to look at really big key figures that influence that independence movement. So that's a couple of ways that you can throw it through all the way into the end of key stage 3.

Aaron Wilkes

That's lovely. That's yeah. And we and we kind of know, don't we? We know from really experience that. That dropping those little threads in in year groups and then picking the threads back up again really seems to work. You know, it's a way of getting students to bite and just to fit things together into that big picture that that, that really works well in a history classroom. So getting on to the book in particular, we mentioned there are four case studies. What would you say have been the particular challenges of writing this book?

Katie Amery

I mean, Teni and I actually had a good chat over the weekend. It has been really difficult to write, you know, just because of the nature of the sources and the evidence that we've been working with and there isn't, you know, one kind of definitive guide to African history that you can rely on. So you're having to piece together lots of different fragments of evidence. And that can be bits of material culture, like the Benin bronzes, and it can be accounts from. You know Arab scholars. Kind of snippets from brios and this focus on oral history and then European encounters. So I think it's been quite a rigorous and difficult process trying to reconcile all those different aspects and bring them together in this textbook. But I think that's why this textbook's is gonna be so useful for teachers, because we're time poor and we can't be kind of trailing through articles on. You know J store. And reading every bit of literature there is about African Kingdoms, but I think that this textbook's going to be helpful in terms of drawing people's attention to really useful sources that highlight important stories. But getting it together in one place and making it accessible. But yeah, it has been challenging just because of the nature of history. You know, it's a different way of doing history. I would normally just pick up a textbook or a piece of scholarship when I'm introducing myself to a new topic and read that, but we've had to go about it in quite a different way, which has been really rewarding. But it's been, you know, it's been difficult and it's been time consuming, but I'm really, really proud of what we've managed to achieve.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah, the stuff you've found is sensational. I mean, the book, we've we're seeing the proofs now, aren't we? And look stunning. But I've been in this game quite a while. And I've seen most places where you get things from and sources and how things work and the stuff that you. Found was made by. Jaw drop. At times it really has.

Teni Gogo

Yeah, I'd definitely say. I think finding the sources and putting together the stories has been the most difficult, I think, but all the reasons that like we want our students to engage with it because it's difficult, different, it's getting them to look at a different way that history is constructed in getting them to see that history exists beyond written sources has equally been the biggest chance and putting it together in a way that's successful in the classroom. So I do really hope that I guess all the work on our end saves loads of teachers.

Aaron Wilkes

You've done, you've shifted through some work guys. So building on that a little bit and I know it's something you speak a lot about, when we talk the sources, but what about, you know, the historical scholarship on African kingdoms? What? What's the current state of this? How's it perhaps changed in recent years? You know, what impact might it have had on teaching of African kingdoms? I'm wondering if you could sort of reflect on that a little bit.

Katie Amery

Yeah, I think that a lot of teachers are familiar with the work of Toby Green, and I think that he did a series of lectures with Nick Dennis and Trevor Getts, you know, during lockdown that were brilliant for teachers to help them kind of engage with something that's really quite complex and new to them. But certainly Toby's book, *A Fistful of Shells*, has been really important in terms of. Helping teachers to get an insight into just how fascinating African history is and helping to kind of give a fresh account of Africa and demolish this Western idea that Africa had no history before the Europeans arrived. So I think that Toby Greene's work has been brilliant. I also think that Gus Casely Hayford's work is fantastic. He's done a great little Penguin ladybird guide to Timbuktu. You know, that's great for teachers to look at and he's got a series on Amazon Prime that you can get for a pound, you know, called. Lost kingdoms of Africa and there's loads of great podcasts out there. I mean, Teni and I were talking at the weekend about Greg Jenner, and *You're Dead to Me*. And there's a great episode on months and months there. So I think the scholarship is improving and there's more out there, but it's still, you know, lots of different fragments and it's hard to piece all those together. But I think a lot of progress has been made.

Teni Gogo

Hmm yeah, I definitely agree. I think there's lots of changes, especially. At a higher education level. So when you're looking for resources or these interpretations, you're finding so many more, like masters, dissertations and PHD's and students looking at all of these things and producing so much great work and hopefully now it's we're seeing it's starting to trickle down into schools.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah, cause I think some teachers will be probably pretty nervous about teaching something that they're not familiar with. I think that's probably a thing I hear about a little bit, but you know, there's a very there's a familiarity with the tried and tested topics, isn't that so?

This will be a brand new topic and I think some teachers will be a little nervous, weren't they? They're they're dipping their toe into an area that they're not sure about. And I suppose that's the point you're making, isn't it? You've done the leg work for the teachers. Is that a fair?

Teni Gogo

We're hoping the book does the legwork, so I think there is something. Comfortable about having a textbook that gives you narratives that kind of gives you a time because each of the kingdoms has a timeline, they have maps, all things that I think teachers are generally familiar with.

Katie Amery

Yeah, yeah.

Teni Gogo

So hopefully what the textbook does is make African kingdoms feel familiar, even though it's not something they've talked before. It's in a format that I think a lot of teachers will be used to and hopefully give them the confidence to start really delivering that in their classroom.

Katie Amery

Yeah. And we've broken it down into kind of 12 different enquiry questions that I think you could quite easily kind of figure out where to slot in your curriculum. And I think that they kind of guide you through in a really nice way. So there's a couple of evidential inquiries in there that I think are, you know, great for your sevens cuz I think they say great things about objects and they're able to kind of look at a wide range of sources and understand how historians construct African history. But I think the inquiries themselves could just be transferred very easily from the textbook into the classroom and you know. I hope we've done the legwork. We do make this kind of a nice transition for teachers.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah, it's certainly. Yeah. You certainly have as someone that's been editing it. I know I've worked closely with Abby Goodman on this and I know someone that's edited it. It makes sense that pattern that the way that it's laid out really, really. Works well. Thank you guys. Credit to you guys for shaping and...

Katie Amery

Thank you.

Aaron Wilkes

Shaping the content, is there anything else you wanted to add guys? Is there anything that you wanted to pick up on?

Katie Amery

I know that quite a lot of schools, even at key stage two, you know, I've got a good interest in things like Benin and Mali and, you know, and Songhai and Ashante. So you know, I would encourage as well you know primary school teachers, you know and I'm kind of good mates with Emmy Quinn and she's really interested in Benin, for example. And she delivers a unit on civilizations to her year five classes and I think you know that this book is really kind of I think that it's good for kind of transitional period you know year 5,6,7,8. So you know, I just think there's a lot of really good content in here that we hope that that teachers will find really helpful.

Aaron Wilkes

He exploded. Brilliant. Work has gone on in primary schools, and again we talked about picking up threads within key stage three, didn't we?

Katie Amery

Yeah, yeah.

Aaron Wilkes

But also, you know, students will be able to see some things that they will have done at key stage two as well I guess.

Speaker 5

Yeah, I think I'll definitely add as well for anybody who maybe already teaches African kingdoms. I still definitely encourage you to have a look just because, like Katie said, it's structured in so many different inquiry questions and in talking about threads and how it fits, it might be that we've got an inquiry question in there that actually better fits with your curriculum, more flows in the way you needed to or the way you approached it the first time. You just haven't quite been able to figure out how you can better fit that into the global picture you're building that hopefully one of the suggestions that we have there really helps that kind of final piece as the curriculum is always shifting.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah, certainly. Thank you. Thank you. Sam, did we have we managed to get any questions?

OUP, Sam Evans

We do have a question. We have someone asking how have you personally found introducing these topics with your students?

Teni Gogo

I think I must say every time we've introduced it, they absolutely love it. I do often find that depending on where I'm teaching and the demographic, that hasn't really changed. I know that sometimes people expect maybe if the students feel it represents them more, but students of all backgrounds have really, really enjoyed it because it's something that they know of but don't actually know much about and they do want to know. More about it, so rather than just kind of seeing clips here and there and saying, oh, Madam, is this true? Is this true? Is actually they get to have that conversation in the classroom and they really enjoy having that space and being able to look at different sources and fitting that into their history, understanding knowledge.

Katie Amery

Yeah, I mean, I definitely second that. So we've just come to an end of this kind of global mediaeval monarchy study, and we do a little exercise where students have to get their parents to fill in a postcard at home. You know about the different models that they've looked at. And we always get these kind of brilliant comments and was reading some just on. And I you know about Mansa Musa. Oh, I had no idea that Africa was this wealthy. I hadn't heard of this man before. You know, it's been fascinating to hear about what my daughter's been learning, and I just think the students really find it interesting. And you know, it really tends to kind of, you know, captivate them and it gets them hooked. And if you can weave those threads in through to 7 to 9. You know, it can really help to to make them really good historians because of the processes it encourages.

Teni Gogo

Yeah. And they always love to know that, like Mansa Musa is not the end of the story. So the year eights were absolutely loving that when they learned about it in year seven and they were like, oh, we thought was the only one. And know that there was more and others that they could look at was. [unintelligible] They kind of thought Mansa Musa was just the one off moment in year seven, but seeing that that's a thread through and they brought in so much more. When we then went to look on all the other went on to look at all the other connections elsewhere.

Aaron Wilkes

Fantastic. Thanks guys. Is there. Anything else, Sam? That's popped in.

OUP, Sam Evans

Someone just asking. Where should a teacher new to African history go to get started?

Katie Amery

Well, they should buy your book, I think.

Nick Dennis has done some absolutely brilliant work on this and I wanted to mention him before, but I'd forgotten actually, but he has a website called African Kingdoms and there's lots of great clips on there, there's some PowerPoints and there's different resources on there that I think are a really nice kind of channelling to learning about this. So I think, the work of Nick Dennis is great, but I do think just little things like there's a BBC podcast. I think it's a history of the world in 100 objects. You know, there's a great 10 minute episode on one of the Benin bronzes, and I think that's, you know, a brilliant introduction as a teacher, that that's new to it.

Teni Gogo

Yeah. And also there's a - you can get it online, it's free, it's a PDF - I think it's David Conrad's mediaeval empires of West Africa or something like that. If you Google that, it will come up. It's not too long. The book, and it has some short snippets of each different Kingdom. It's not set out necessarily in the most teachable way, but if you're a teacher looking for just some foundational knowledge. In addition to the textbook, obviously that has some nice short ways of looking at the rulers, looks at the people and just gives you that little in. Also, there's that A-level unit and I know A-level seems to vary, but there is an e-book that you can get online for the OCR African kingdoms. It's actually very accessible.

Teni Gogo

So even if you're it's even. Yeah, because we were passing it back and forth between us so much.

Katie Amery

Yeah, it's really good.

Teni Gogo

Yes, that that's actually a nice way and as well, depending on what you're looking at and all of these things are super accessible, easy to get into and our teachers don't have the most time, but hopefully they're all helpful.

OUP, Sam Evans

That's really helpful. Thank you. And we do have Simon is requesting to ask questions.

Caller, Simon

I was just, I mean, if you were to reflect on cause you've seen the final version and we're all very, very eager to, which would be the pages, the double page spread, that you are most excited for people to see.

Katie Amery

And I was having a look at the first proofs of Benin earlier and I've we've got an inquiry question there about what was so mighty about Benin.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah, yeah.

Katie Amery

And there's a lovely artist interpretation. You know, what Benin City would have looked like and it's labelled and it's kind of just in the early stages now. But I think that that is the thing that I'm most kind of captivated by at the moment, and I can't wait to see what the final version looks like. It's little things like in Benin City, they had street lamps, you know, over 200 years before Britain, oil lamps and the way that the city was designed was really kind of intricately thought out and gives a lot of insight into just how advanced you know the mathematics and the architecture was at the time. So I'm dead excited about this spread about Benin city and what that's gonna look like.

Aaron Wilkes

Yeah, have a look through it.

Teni Gogo

Definitely. I think my favourite has to be - I don't know if it counts as a spread cause it's like 4 pages- but we've got an inquiry on why Ashanti was a symbol of power. So a leader in the Ashanti Kingdom. And I think it's by far my favourite cause you've got. It's just going into the 20th century, so we're able to get photographs of her, but able to use like Ashanti proverbs in its sources we're able to use like money

sources, we've got wax symbols. We've got museums that still exist. So it's like it feels so tangible, real and relatable for them that I think those final spreads coming together and that spread particularly has so many different types of historians. So where like I know there's lots of articles.

written about what? Didn't think historians look like we've got, like, young men. We've got older men, we've got young black women like it's an inquiry to challenge so many preconceptions.

Aaron Wilkes

Thank you guys. And like I say, African kingdoms is due out in June 2023. We are very nearly. British Empire comes out the month before, and then the other two books *Fight for Rights* and *Migration Nation* comes. They come out in July and August. I think it's OUP. Just contact them and they'll be able to put you right with inspection copies, etcetera, etcetera, Sam, I think. We're done, Sam.

OUP, Sam Evans

Brilliant. Thank you very much. Great discussion this evening.

Aaron Wilkes

Thanks. And I just thank Teni and Katie. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for that. Great to talk to you.

Katie Amery

Oh, thank you.

OUP, Sam Evans

Thank you so much, Aaron, Katie and Teni for such an interesting discussion this evening. And thank you to everyone for listening and you can follow us @OUPsecondary for updates. As Aaron mentioned, African kingdoms is coming out on the 1st of June. There are sample pages that are going to be available next week and we are offering a 10% discount on pre-orders of the new depth study books and use the promotional code KS3 history. If you have any further questions that we haven't answered today, we have got through a lot. Please tell us. We're going to sign off now. Send you a. Wave goodbye. Enjoy the rest of your evening, everybody. Thank you. Very much.

Aaron Wilkes

Take care. Bye.