

# Lesson 1: Power, Wealth, and Wisdom

## Learning Objectives

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

- Describe the key features and achievements of the Kingdom of Kush and the Mali Empire.
- Explain how these civilisations influenced trade, leadership, culture, and global history.
- Reflect on how ancient African power shapes identity and pride today.

## Key Vocabulary

- Civilization
- Legacy
- Empire
- Trade
- Wealth
- Influence

## Starter – *Beyond Slavery* (10 mins)

### Slide / Board prompt:

“Black history is...”

### Activity:

- Students complete the sentence individually or in pairs.
- Collect answers on the board and discuss patterns.
- Ask: “How many of these are about slavery or civil rights? What else might Black history include?”

### Bridge:

“Today, we’re exploring two powerful African empires that existed long before colonisation, empires that influenced the world through leadership, learning, wealth, and innovation.”

## Teacher Input – *The Kingdom of Kush* (15 mins)

### Key Storytelling Points:

- **Time Period:** c. 1070 BCE – 350 CE
- **Location:** Along the Nile in modern Sudan/Egypt.
- Kush rose as Egypt’s powerful southern neighbour, eventually ruling Egypt as the *25th Dynasty* (“Black Pharaohs”).
- **Powerful queens** (*Kandake*), like Queen Amanirenas, led armies and negotiated with Rome.
- Built over **200 pyramids**, developed their own **writing system** (Meroitic), and became a centre for **iron production and trade**.
- Traded gold, ivory, and goods with the Mediterranean and Middle East.

### Discussion Questions:

- “How does Kush challenge stereotypes about Africa’s past?”
- “Why is the leadership of queens like Amanirenas so significant for this period?”

*Key Message:* Kush shows us Africa’s early power, global influence, and advanced statecraft, centuries before European empires.

### Teacher Input – *The Mali Empire* (15 mins)

#### Key Storytelling Points:

- **Time Period:** c. 1235 – 1600 CE
- **Location:** West Africa (modern Mali, Senegal, Guinea).
- Founded by **Sundiata Keita**, Mali controlled the **gold and salt trade** and became one of the wealthiest empires in history.
- **Mansa Musa** — often called *the richest man in history*, expanded the empire and made a legendary pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324, displaying Mali’s wealth and generosity.
- **Timbuktu** became a world centre of learning, with universities, libraries, and scholars from Africa, the Middle East, and Europe.
- Mali’s trade routes connected Africa with Europe and the Islamic world.

### Discussion Questions:

- “Why was knowledge and learning as important as gold in Mali?”
- “What does Mansa Musa’s story tell us about Africa’s global importance in the Middle Ages?”

*Key Message:* Mali proves that medieval Africa was a centre of wealth, scholarship, and international influence.

### Group Discussion Activity – *Power and Legacy* (15 mins)

#### Instructions:

- Divide students into small groups (3–4).
- Give half a **Kush fact sheet** and half a **Mali fact sheet**
- Students answer on paper or discuss:
  1. What was this civilisation best known for?
  2. How did it gain and use its power?
  3. What achievements still inspire pride today?

#### Share:

Groups briefly present one key point to the class.

*Extension:* Compare the two empires, how were they similar? How were they different?

### Reflection & Plenary – *Our Past, Our Pride* (5–10 mins)

#### Whole-Class Reflection:

- “What surprised you most about these empires?”
- “How does this change how you see Black history?”
- “What lessons can we learn from Kush and Mali today?”

#### Written Exit Ticket:

“One achievement from today that makes me proud is...”

“I stand firm in power and pride because...”

#### Assessment Opportunities

- Participation in group discussion.
- Class answers during Q&A.
- Written reflection (exit ticket) to demonstrate understanding.

#### Teacher Notes & Tips

- Use visuals (maps, pyramids, manuscripts, Mansa Musa’s caravan) to make history vivid.
- Emphasise *global connections*, both empires shaped and influenced the wider world.
- Keep asking: “Why does this matter today?” to link past achievement to present identity.

#### Key Takeaway

Africa’s story is not one of isolation or weakness, it is a story of **power, innovation, leadership, and global influence**. The Kingdom of Kush and the Mali Empire show us that Black history is built on centuries of greatness.