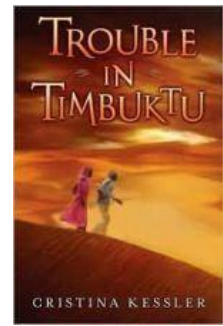


Trouble in Timbuktu: Let's Preserve a Memory

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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. Discuss the ancient manuscripts of Timbuktu, regarding the wide variety of topics and the attention to detail in producing them.
3. Adopt the role of family, community or cultural historian and record something the student deems important.
4. 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Why is it important for cultures to protect written historical documents such as the ancient manuscripts of Timbuktu?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?

Day 1 : The Novel: *Trouble in Timbuktu*

Materials Needed

- *Trouble in Timbuktu* by Cristina Kessler (Chapters 1, 2 and 11)
- 4-6 replicas of Timbuktu Manuscripts pasted on pieces of cardboard with the English descriptions on the back. "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. *Qasidah* (Poem). Loaned by the Mamma Haidara Commemorative Library, Timbuktu, Mali (2)



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

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.

Procedure

1. Read to the students or have the students read *Trouble in Timbuktu*.
2. Discuss the questions from **Teacher Handout: Questions and Answers**. (These questions are drawn from Chapters 1, 2, and 11.) Add additional questions you think are important.

Homework Assignment

1. Tell students to identify information that they believe is important to preserve. They can interview someone or record an original story, poem, song, or essay that they produced.
2. Students should create a handwritten draft manuscript of their information.

Suggested Interview Topics

- **Personal history:** Interview teachers, friends, teammates, family member. Ask: “Tell me about a personal accomplishment that you treasure.”
- **School:** Interview principals, teachers, classmates. Ask: “Tell me about a special school event or memory that you treasure.”
- **Family:** Interview parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, other relatives. Ask: “Tell me about a special event our family’s history that you treasure.”
- **Country:** Interview parents, guardians, teachers. Ask: “Tell me about something special to record about our country or the country of your birth.”
- **Community:** Interview neighbors, church members, school mates. Ask: “Tell me about a special event in the community that should be remembered and documented.”
- **Historical Event:** Interview relatives, other adults: Ask: “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.
- Students will share their manuscripts with their classmates and ask for feedback.
- Students will make any necessary changes.

Day 2: Preserving Information

Materials Needed

Sheets of antique paper	Scissors
1 pen per student	Archive quality acid-free plastic sleeves
Colored pencils to be shared	Handwritten draft manuscripts

Activator

Exemplar: Show students an example of a manuscript that you have created or an exemplar from a previous class (see pages 5-6)

Procedure

1. Ask students to re-write their information in final format 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 the edges to make the manuscripts 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. 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.

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)

Exemplar

On October 18, 2010, Mr. Guy H. Benjamin celebrated his 97th birthday. Benjie was born on in 1913 on St. John, in East End. He is called the patriarch of the island. A school was named after him in Coral Bay in recognition of his extensive contributions to education in the Virgin Islands.

When I asked Benjie what his favorite childhood memory is, he told me, "It is the day my grandmother told me I could be a janitor. I was delighted because that meant I didn't have to haul sand and gravel on a sailboat. I had no idea what a janitor was - but I was happy to know I could be one. Imagine - I ended up Superintendent of Education here in my beloved islands."

Benjie's advice to young people is, "Stay in school as long as you can, to learn as much as possible. Reach for the stars, and always think of the future to make a better world for those who follow."

Christine Jones
Oct. 29, 2010

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