

Scramble for Africa

Objective: An introduction for Students to understand the purely economic and arbitrary motivations of the European powers in the colonization of Africa. It should be followed by a more in-depth study.

Procedure: Students should be generally aware of the economic resources of Africa as well as the physical geography of Africa—climate, landforms, waterforms, vegetation.

If room space allows, place the desks in a circle on the outer limits of the room. Divide the class into seven groups: Portugal, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Spain and Italy. Groups do not need to be the same size. You may choose to have varying sizes based on the amount of holdings listed below. You may also choose one person to represent Liberia and one to represent Ethiopia.

Use a 26 foot long piece of yarn to “draw” an outline map of Africa in the middle of the room. Use the same color yarn to mark the equator. Use 4 feet for Madagascar.

Distribute the following lengths of yarn as well as the rules sheet to each country:

Ethiopia and Liberia: 2 feet and 1 foot

Portugal: 9 feet

England: 26 feet

France: 22 feet

Belgium: 4 feet

Germany: 12 feet

Spain: 6 feet

Italy: 6 feet

Each country (in the order above) will “mark” their territory taking as much land as they are allowed of the best “property.” They should follow the rules on the sheet attached. As they work, give a narration to provide context of what happened following the Conference of Berlin. When Italy reaches the map, ensure that they actually invade Ethiopia to simulate the Battle of Adwa.

Upon completing the task, debriefing is important. All students will look over the map and determine who got the most and who got the best land. Discuss what their criteria was for taking land. Also, be sure to discuss why it was that the European powers were carving up the continent like this—what say did the original inhabitants have in the Scramble? Display an ethno-linguistic map of Africa to show how various groups were divided by political boundaries (ie. Turareg, Hutu...). Also, show a map of Africa in 1914 at the height of independence.

Follow-up:

Use contemporary African fables and poetry to display the African perspective on imperialism. (Or excerpts from African textbooks.)

Read Rudyard Kiplings poem, White Man’s Burden.

Compare colonialism in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Look at African coins—they often have traces of the colonial past—schillings, francs etc.

Student Hand-out

Rules Sheet

Directions: It is the latter part of the 19th century. You are entering a scramble for colonies in Africa. In order to participate in this race, you must carefully consider the

geography of Africa. Countries will be claiming colonies in the order below and with the special considerations listed. Your goals are to get the best land, minerals and resources that you can. Remember to choose places that will be easy to manage from a great distance, that will be profitable, or at least useful. No-one may choose Ethiopia, since it is an independent kingdom that is several thousand years old. Or Liberia since it was an independent nation founded by freed American slaves in 1847. Good Luck!

1. Portugal- You are the first to explore Africa; however, you are allotted only two 4.5 ft. strips on the coastal areas. You wouldn't want to explore too far inland due to diseases you have no medicines to combat. This does not bother you much, since you primarily want good ports to help with your trade in the Far East. So locate your ports where they will do the most good for the Far East trade. All ports you choose must be below the equator.
2. England- You've got it made! You get 26 ft. of yarn with which to claim territory. You can divide this up in any way that you want and can go anywhere that you want. You are a powerful nation with the greatest navy in the world, so go for minerals, ports, anything. Because you are interested, however, not only in getting rich, but also in founding permanent colonies for your expanding population, 11 of your feet of your yarn must be in good farming or grazing areas.
3. France- You get 22 ft. of yarn with which to claim what you would like, after England is through. It may not be below the equator on the map. But this is no problem since you want areas that are close to Europe and France so that you can administer them easily.
4. Belgium- You get only 4 ft. to claim what you would like. You need to make sure that any territory you claim is located on or around the equator.
5. Germany- You came into the scene late because you were not unified as a country until 1871, but once you are ready, you will really go. The problem is that despite all of your eagerness and new power, there isn't much left for you. Do your best! You get 12 ft.
6. Spain- You have come to Africa later than most other major colonizers because you have spent most of your effort in Central and Southern America. However, you do get 6 ft. anywhere north of the equator.
7. Italy- Due to your late unification, you have also come into the race late and are not terribly powerful. You can take what you find left over. However, here is a hint for you. The area marked, "off limits of the Kingdom of Ethiopia" is run, so you hear, by a weak African king. You may take it from him if you want to fight for it. No one else may do this. After all, they are too busy with their own colonies. You get 6 ft.