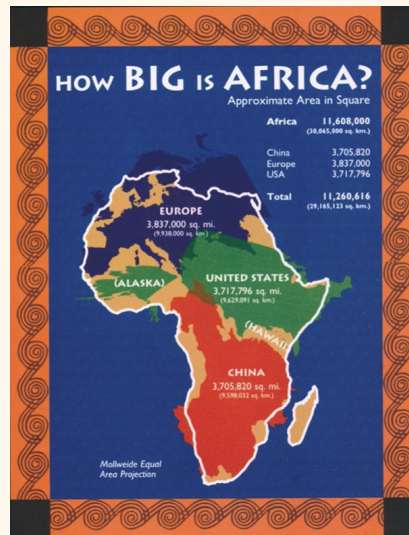


**Boston University African Studies center K-16 Education Program**  
[africa@bu.edu](mailto:africa@bu.edu)

- Come visit us at 232 Bay State Rd to borrow books, DVDs, country kits (Kenya & Ghana) and other materials.
- See [our website](#) for a wide array of teaching resources about Africa.

# Introducing Africa

## APPROACHES for elementary school



If Africa is this big, then how diverse must it be?

## INTRODUCTION

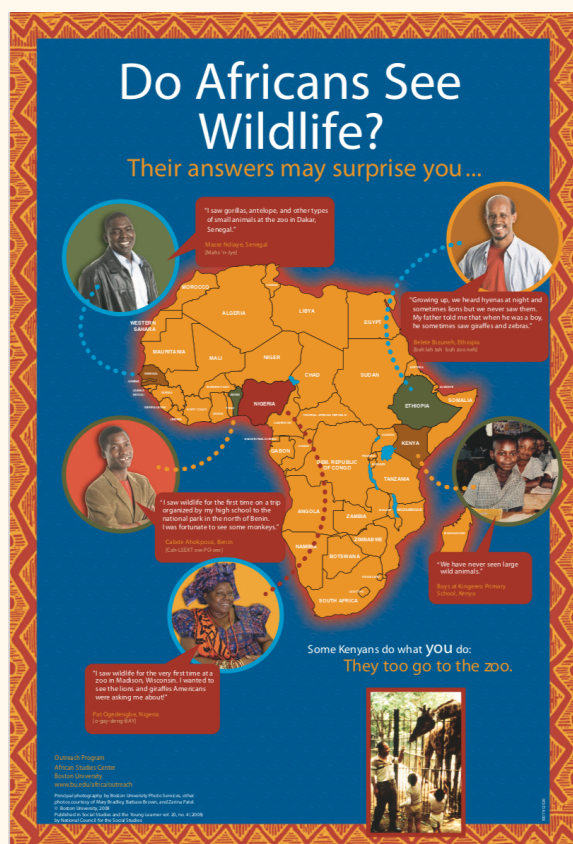
Core principles for introducing Africa at the elementary level are “VVCC” (Voices, Visuals, Connections & Critical Lens):

- 1) Center African voices and African peoples’ experiences (V);
- 2) Engage students in a wide variety of visual experiences that normalize Africa (show cities, technology, books, churches, etc.);
- 3) Promote connections between students’ lives and Africa (C);
- 4) Introduce a Critical Anti-Racist Lens to teaching about Africa (C).

It is crucial that teachers understand that most students in the United States are socialized with reductive and stereotypical ideas about Africa. It is teachers’ responsibility as part of anti-racist

practice to introduce Africa through the lens of diversity, breadth, respect, and reverence, with people the center. See this article [Teaching About African History and Cultures Across the Curriculum](#) to start. Avoid asking students “What do you know about Africa?” as you would in a typical KWL activity, because this will generate a list of long stereotypes about poverty, animals, tribes, needing to help, etc. which can have the effect of reproducing the very stereotypes you seek to dismantle. Instead, ask “What do you know about young African inventors?” or “What do you know about African buildings?” as prompts that generate background knowledge connections without rehashing stereotypes.

## Grade 1&2 Resources



1. [Do Africans see wild animals in Africa?](#) Students could view/read the [Do Africans See Wildlife](#) poster and answer the questions: What countries are people from? Where do Africans see wildlife? Why do you think most Africans have not seen wildlife? [Answers: because wildlife is only one very small aspect of the continent and most people there have never encountered wildlife. 1/3-1/2 of Africans live in cities.] A good (but perhaps complicated) reflection question to ask during discussion: "Is it true that Africa is full of wildlife? Where did we learn that from?" and view [these slides](#).

2. [What continent is it?](#) Showcase Africa's tremendous diversity by showing students the slide show and students have to guess which image is of Africa (the trick is that all of them are Africa!) This is to reinforce the point that there are many very big cities in Africa and very diverse geographies that are similar to theirs (promoting connections).

3. **Research Cities!** Using Google Earth/Google Maps, students research cities; each student chooses one to mark it on a blank map, and 5 most populated cities (because millions of Africans live in cities). Some examples of cities to research are Lagos, Nigeria Kinshasa, DRC; Cairo, Egypt  
A good article for teachers is [“I didn’t know there were cities in Africa!”](#)
4. **Africa is not a country.** Read Maggie Burns’ book with the same title and listen to Africa’s 54 countries is the Arthur song (lyrics are also available):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYh-zW3UkS8> .
5. If you are a Boston-area teacher and you teach about Ghana or Kenya, come visit the Teaching Africa library to borrow country kits of artifacts from these two countries.

### Grade 3&4 Resources

1. Start with the map: [How Big is Africa](#). Students can write about what they see in terms of size and try to answer the questions: Why does size matter? If this continent is that big, what can we expect to be there? The full curriculum guide to go with this map is available for free [here](#).
2. Follow this with an interactive exercise where students can see how many times a chosen country fits into the continent using this interactive [The True Size](#) website (this requires demonstration on how to choose a country and “fit it” into Africa).
3. Research [African UNESCO World Heritage Sites](#) and discover truly awesome aspects of African histories.
4. Research [Young Africans Building a Better World](#) and find out about the lives of amazing young people from the continent.
5. If you are a Boston-area teacher and you teach about Ghana or Kenya, come visit the Teaching Africa library to borrow country kits of artifacts from these two countries.

### Grade 5&6 Resources

1. The Massachusetts 6th grade social studies frameworks 6.T4 and 6.T4b include a focus on the Medieval West African Empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, with a special emphasis on the kingdom of Ghana in 6th grade. Later, the frameworks revisit Mali and Songhai in 9-12 grades world history. A great tool for student research on this history is [the Gold Road](#), an interactive map of the people, places, and items related to the medieval kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhai and explain the role of gold, the region’s

most valuable resource. This resource was collaboratively developed by Howard University and Boston University.

## Books

The go-to place to identify children's books about Africa is [Africa Access](#), which presents reviews on all books published in the last few decades, and the Children's Africana award winning books (CABA) for a list of excellent books published every year. See the all-time winners' list [here](#). When reading books about Africa, use the following checklist with students to assess the quality of various books [Questions to Ask when Reading Texts about Africa](#) and engage students as critical readers.