

Imperialism Role Play Activity

- 1.** Provide background information on imperialism.
- 2.** Put students into groups of 5. Give each student a role play card (Great Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, Portugal) and a different-colored marker. Explain that they will each need to take on the role of country listed on their cards.
- 3.** Hand out the "Getting Started" directions for the students. (see attached)
- 4.** Have the students read through the role play cards and answer the accompanying questions on the "Getting Started" page.
- 5.** Based on the directions on the "Getting Started" page, have students divide up Africa on a big poster map.
- 6.** Once students are done, compare maps and share how they divided as a class.
- 7.** After sharing, ask students the following questions in a class discussion.
 - a. What problems did you face and have to deal with?
 - b. How did you feel once you had accomplished dividing up Africa?
 - c. How would that feeling compare to the feelings of Europeans at the time?
 - d. How would you feel if this was done to your country?
 - e. Did you even consider the feelings of Africans?
 - f. Did you think about what groups you were dividing up or putting together into a country?
- 8.** (Introduce how this can lead to genocide→get into Rwanda/Burundi)

IMPERIALISM ROLE-PLAY

Getting Started...

1. Read through your role play card, and then answer the questions below to help you get into the mindset of your country.
 - a. Which country are you?
 - b. How powerful is your country?
 - c. Who are your friends, if any?
 - d. Who are your enemies, if any?
 - e. What do you want in Africa? (land, particular regions, resources, etc.)
2. As soon as everyone in your group is done, examine the three maps showing vegetation zones, the location of major metals and minerals, and the locations of important commercial crops.
3. Each person in your group should have a different-colored marker. As a group, divide up Africa amongst yourselves using the information above and your own thoughts regarding what areas you think your country would want/be able to obtain.
 - a. Your group will have disagreements about who gets what areas. As a group, you will need to work through these and perhaps make compromises to make everyone happy.
 - b. It may be easiest to draw in borders in pencil first and then use the markers to color in your respective areas.
 - c. Make a key at the bottom of the map to show what color represents each country.
 - d. Be prepared to share why you divided Africa in the way that you did!

IMPERIALISM ROLE-PLAY

YOU ARE GREAT BRITAIN.

You are the leading imperialist power in Europe due mainly to your dominance of the seas with your superior navy. You have a long history of colonization. You also have control of India and Australia. The route to India through the Suez Canal (in Egypt) is very important and is to be protected at all costs.

Egypt is of the utmost importance. The Suez Canal cuts through the northeast corner of Egypt, connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and subsequently, the Indian Ocean. It was completed in 1869. The leader of Egypt, Ismail, bankrupted the country, so European creditors then took control. This was to be a joint British-French venture.

There was a revolt in 1881 to throw the Europeans out. France was unable to respond because of their loss in the Franco-Prussian War. Your country invaded and occupied Egypt on the pretext of "restoring order." You assured the other European countries you were only temporarily occupying Egypt. This appears to upset the status quo, and other countries have become jealous and started focusing more on the colonization of Africa. As time has gone by, you have become concerned that other European powers want to acquire control of the Upper Nile Region. If another country did take control, it could use "modern" engineering methods to divert the White Nile, bringing desolation to Egypt and thus disaster to Britain.

Portugal is of concern since it has displayed an interest in the southern region of Africa. Maintaining control of the "country" of South Africa is a vital concern for you, no matter what country is involved. However, you are quite aware that Portugal is not a strong European power any longer.

The Congo (Zaire) River area is also a concern for you. In 1884, you and Portugal signed a treaty allowing you the navigation rights for your commercial interests. Portugal gained political control of the mouth of the river. Every other nation condemned the treaty, and it failed. France and King Leopold of Belgium now assert their claims to the river territories. You have become very concerned about your commercial interests there.

The government also controls Heligoland, a tiny island off the German coast and used it as a naval base.

Your colonial policy is that of "indirect rule." It is a type of government that is based on European styles, allows some self-rule, uses local leaders for government positions, and has the goal of creating future African leaders. Thus, your intention is to prepare your colonies for independence, but not in the near future.

IMPERIALISM ROLE-PLAY

YOU ARE BELGIUM.

The Belgian Parliament is not interested in colonial adventures. It sees the disadvantages outweighing the advantages. However, you have become jealous of French and British colonial moves. Therefore, your King Leopold takes it upon himself to become a colonial power. He uses his own money to finance the colonial movement. Once done, he needs to export products from the colonies to recoup his investments. For a time, he was unsure of how to do this.

In 1878, King Leopold met Henry Stanley, who wanted to open up the Congo (Zaire) River Basin for commercial interests. Stanley was looking to the British for financial support but the British were not interested. King Leopold was able to persuade Stanley to accept his backing.

King Leopold established an International African Association, with him in charge, for "humanitarian" reasons. The stated objective of this organization was to further exploration and advancement of humanitarian concerns in Africa, especially the Congo River area. The target area was the south-central part of Africa where there were no competing claims by the other European powers.

Unbeknownst to King Leopold, France had sent in a man who established a treaty with African leaders. Thus, they were claiming land just north of the river where Stanley was. This has led to an increasing rivalry with France. Also, Great Britain and Portugal signed a treaty dealing with the Congo River. This treaty gave Portugal political rights to the mouth of the Congo River and Great Britain the navigation and commercial rights to the river. You, along with other European countries, condemn this treaty.

Your colonial policy is directly controlled by King Leopold. He does whatever it takes to realize a profit. His men resort to flogging, mutilation, and killing to get the African to do what they want. Belgian control is known to be the most ruthless and bloody of all the European powers.

IMPERIALISM ROLE-PLAY

YOU ARE GERMANY.

You are the leading power in Europe. You just won a war with France (1870-1871). This led to a fall in power for France and a tremendous increase in power for Germany (Prussia). You are a land power but NOT a sea power.

Your leader, Otto von Bismarck, is not interested in establishing an overseas empire. He only wants to dominate Europe. However, others within the country, specifically those with commercial and banking interests, as well as religious interests, force Bismarck to change. These other interests have made it an issue of national pride and dignity; therefore, Bismarck cannot do otherwise. He proclaims protectorates over the areas where German missionaries are active.

Great Britain is your main threat to power in Europe. You are afraid that Great Britain will gain economic and political power through Africa and thus, attain more power in Europe. Therefore, you side with *France* whenever it has a confrontation with Great Britain. You use Egypt as a dividing issue between France and Great Britain since Great Britain essentially out-maneuvered France to get control of Egypt.

Your interest in France is also self-serving, as it maintains your political status in Europe. You want to keep France occupied elsewhere, namely Africa, rather than in Europe. You want to keep the area of Alsace-Lorraine (in Europe), which you took as a result of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871.

Your colonial policy is to maintain a highly centralized administration. German administrators in the African colonies are responsible to the chancellor who is responsible to the emperor. You do not include the indigenous Africans in the government you establish.

IMPERIALISM ROLE-PLAY

YOU ARE FRANCE.

France is only second to Great Britain in imperialist domination. In 1870-1871, you fought the Franco-Prussian War with Germany (Prussia) and lost. You are a distant 3rd in power in Europe itself behind Germany and Great Britain. The government stabilized in 1879 and began to behave aggressively around the globe, particularly in Africa. Many blame you for the "scramble for Africa."

Due to the loss to Germany, you lost the region known as Alsace-Lorraine (in Europe). You also cannot feasibly get into a power struggle with anyone, especially your historical enemy, Great Britain. Germany comes to your aid and ends up siding with you in most disputes with Great Britain. This contributes to heightened tension in Europe.

With the support of Germany, you turn your attention to Africa. Again, you do not want to come into conflict with Great Britain. Through negotiation with African chiefs, you acquire the land on the north side of the Congo (Zaire) River. This causes conflict with King Leopold of Belgium because he wants the same land. The British and Portuguese had signed a treaty giving the Portuguese political power over the river and the British economic power over the river. You, along with other European powers, denounce this treaty.

Your colonial policy is one of assimilation. You believe in the superiority of French culture. Your goal is to create an "Overseas France." If the people of the colony accept and adopt French culture, they will have all the rights of a Frenchman. In Africa, this happens on a more limited basis because of your country's elitist ideas, especially in terms of education possibilities. You are not educating the people of the colonies in French ways; therefore, there is no combining of cultures.

IMPERIALISM ROLE-PLAY

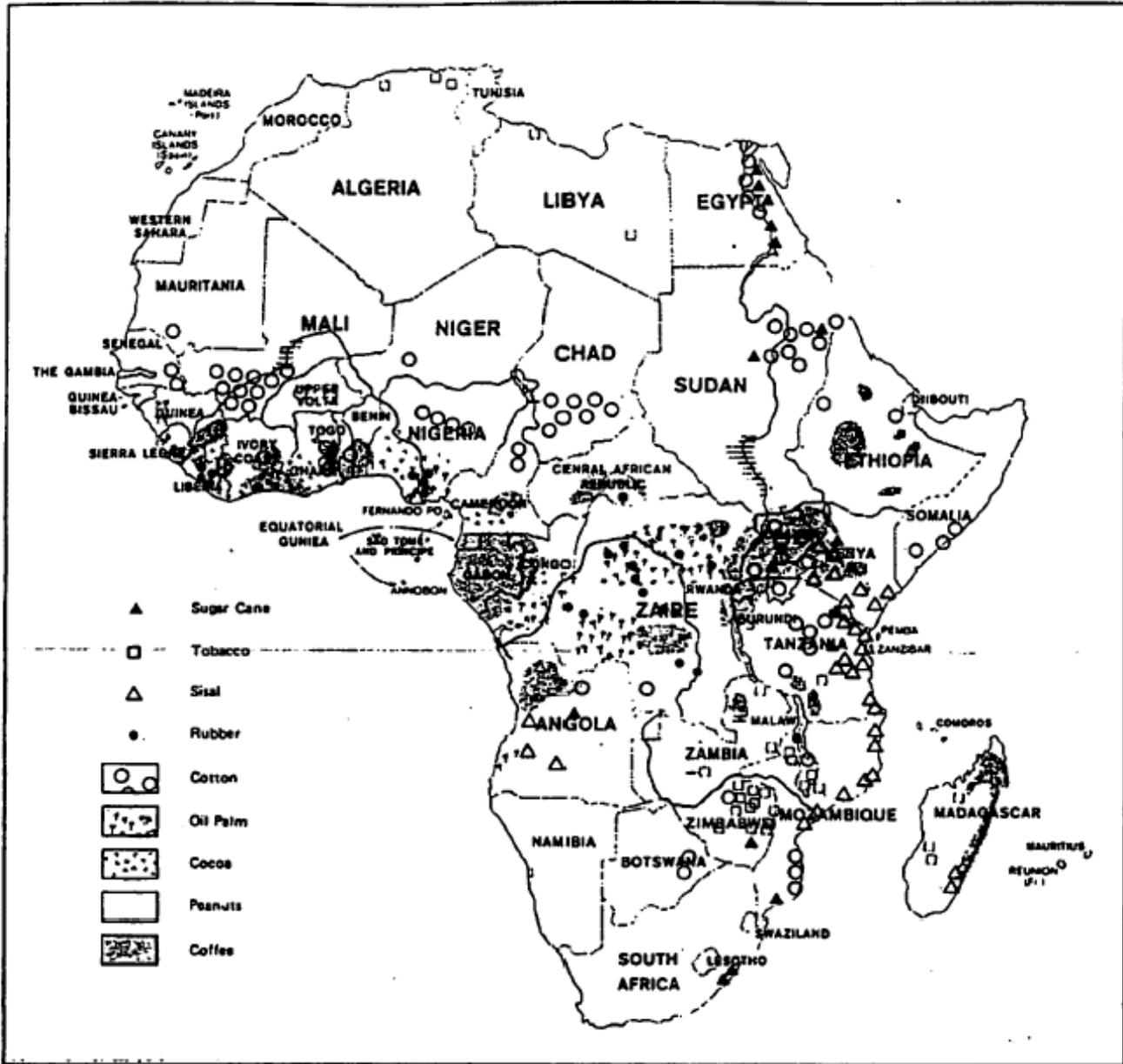
YOU ARE PORTUGAL.

By the 1800s, you had lost your status as a European power. Your successes came early in the 1400s-1500s with your many explorations. You established trading posts at various points along both the east and west coasts of Africa. You are aware you lack many necessities of a modern diversified economy. Therefore, you pursue a policy of economic exploitation in Africa. You buy raw materials for a low price for your industries and then sell the manufactured goods for a much higher price.

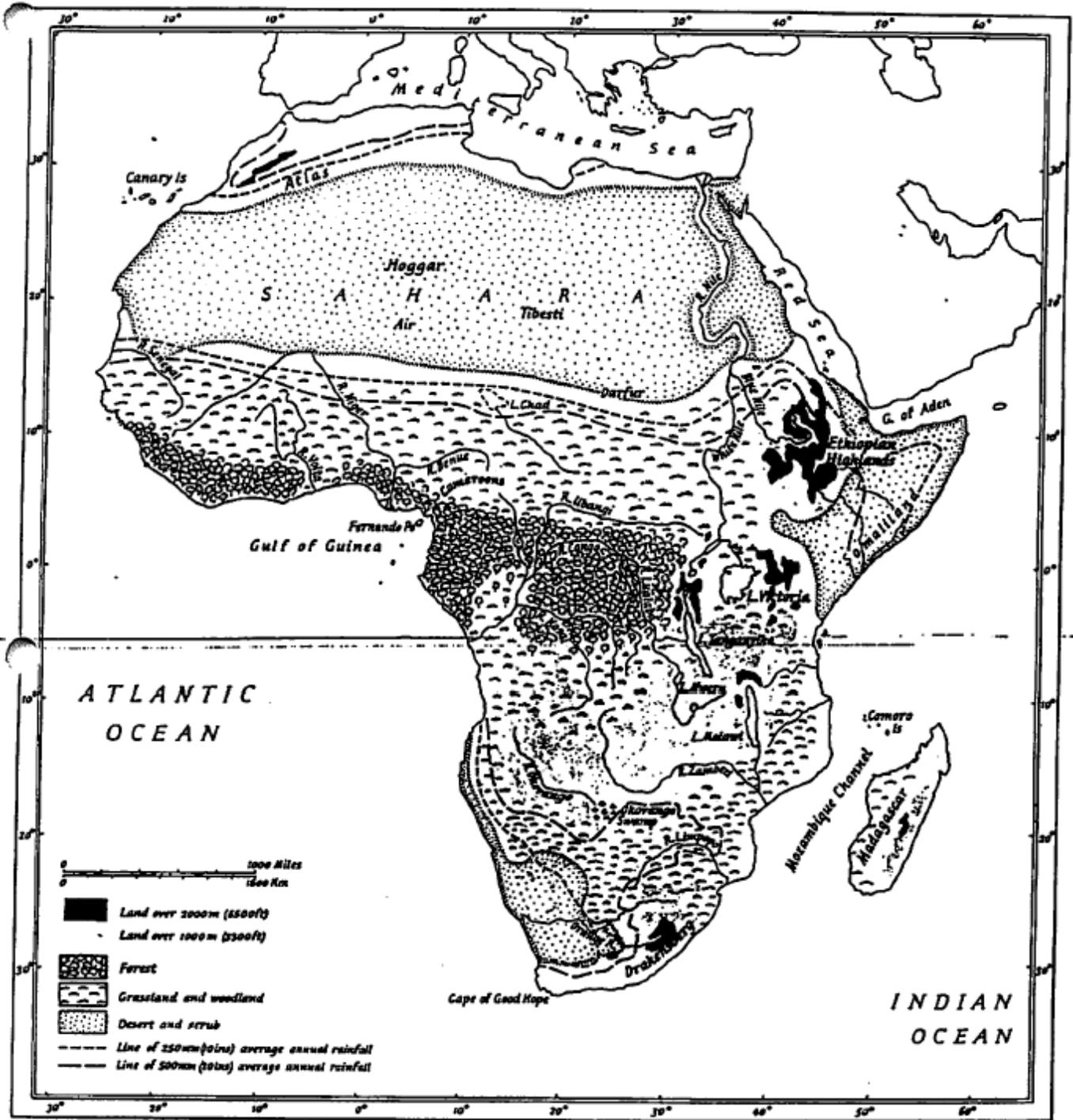
You are interesting in claiming colonies within Africa. But, again, you know your ability to do this is tenuous. However, you do claim the area around the Congo (Zaire) River based on the actions of your ancestors within the old "Kongo Kingdom." This includes the mouth of the river as well as some inland areas. Great Britain opposes this move because of commercial interests and the movement of trade items. To solve this conflict, you sign a treaty with Great Britain giving you the political power over the river basin and Great Britain the navigation and commercial rights. Thus, you both are happy and get what you want. But the rest of the countries of Europe are not happy, and a huge outcry begins.

Your colonial policy is one of assimilation. This policy becomes known as "Overseas Portugal." You expect all peoples of your colonies to speak Portuguese. The problem, however, is the lack of money for educating the people in the ways of your culture and language. Your treatment of the Africans is strict and harsh.

LOCATIONS OF SOME IMPORTANT COMMERCIAL CROPS



Upper Volta now Burkina Faso
Ivory Coast now Côte d'Ivoire



1 Africa: Principal Geographical Features, Rainfall and Vegetation

AN Atlas of African History
 by J.D. Fage
 1978

