

# Lesson Plan: The Great Bend Adventure - A Journey Down the Niger River

## Materials Needed:

- Computer or tablet with internet access
- Access to Google Earth or another interactive online map
- A short, engaging video about life on the Niger River (e.g., from National Geographic, BBC Earth, or a travel documentary - search for "Niger River life" or "Niger River boat journey")
- Notebook or paper
- Pen or pencil
- Optional: Colored pencils or markers for drawing

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## Lesson Details

**Subject:** Geography

**Topic:** The Niger River: A Lifeline in West Africa

**Student:** New (Age 13)

**Time Allotment:** 60-75 minutes

## 1. Learning Objectives

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

- Trace the unusual boomerang-shaped path of the Niger River and identify the three primary countries it flows through (Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria).
- Explain the geographical significance of the "Niger Bend" and the Inland Niger Delta.
- Describe at least three ways the river is vital to the people, economy, and ecosystems of West Africa.
- Apply this knowledge by creating a fictional travel journal entry from the perspective of someone traveling on the river.

## 2. Alignment with Standards

This lesson aligns with core geography curriculum standards, specifically focusing on:

- **Human-Environment Interaction:** Understanding how human populations depend on, adapt to, and modify the physical environment (e.g., using the river for farming, fishing, and transport).
- **Place and Region:** Identifying the physical and human characteristics of a major world region defined by a river system.

## 3. Instructional Strategies & Lesson Activities (Step-by-Step)

### Part 1: The Mystery of the Boomerang River (10 minutes)

- **Activity:** Open Google Earth and zoom in on West Africa, but do not show the river's name. Show the distinct "bend" of the river in Mali.
- **Teacher's Script:** "New, look at this satellite image. We see a massive river here in West Africa. Looking at its path, it starts near the Atlantic Ocean, heads away from the ocean deep

into the Sahara Desert, and then makes a sharp turn and heads back down to the Atlantic. Why do you think a river would do that? What would you expect it to do? Let's make a prediction."

- **Goal:** This hook sparks curiosity and encourages critical thinking about geography before providing any answers. It frames the river as a puzzle to be solved.

## Part 2: Charting the Course (20 minutes)

- **Activity:** Using Google Earth, trace the Niger River's full path together.
  1. **Source:** Start in the highlands of Guinea, showing how close it is to the ocean.
  2. **The Inland Delta:** Zoom in on the area in Mali where the river spreads out into lakes and marshes. Discuss why this "inland delta" is a green oasis surrounded by the dry Sahel region.
  3. **The Great Bend:** Follow the northernmost point of the river near the historic city of Timbuktu. Explain that this bend is a geological feature—the river used to flow into an ancient lake here before it was "captured" by another river system that pulled it south.
  4. **The Journey South:** Follow the river through Niger and into Nigeria.
  5. **The Niger Delta:** Zoom in on the vast delta where the river finally empties into the Atlantic Ocean, showing the network of streams and its importance for Nigeria's oil industry.
- **Goal:** To build a strong mental map of the river's path and introduce key geographical terms and locations in an interactive, visual way.

## Part 3: A River of Life (15 minutes)

- **Activity:** Watch a short (5-7 minute) video showcasing life along the river. Look for scenes of fishermen, farmers using irrigation, boats transporting goods and people, and wildlife.
- **Discussion:** After the video, discuss the following questions:
  - "Based on the video and our map tour, what are the most important 'jobs' the river has for the people living there?" (Guide the discussion toward farming, fishing, transportation).
  - "How would life in a country like Mali, which is landlocked and partly desert, be different without the Niger River?"
  - "What kind of animals did you see or might you expect to see living in or near the river?" (Hippos, crocodiles, fish, birds).
- **Goal:** To connect the geographical features to the human and ecological importance of the river, making the information relevant and relatable.

## 4. Creative Application & Assessment

### Activity: The Explorer's Journal (15-20 minutes)

- **Prompt:** "Your task is to become an explorer. Imagine you are on a journey down the Niger River. Write a one-page journal entry about a day on your trip. You can be a modern-day adventurer with a camera or a 19th-century explorer seeing it for the first time. Your entry must include:"
  1. **A Specific Location:** Mention where you are on the river (e.g., "paddling through the inland delta," "passing the legendary city of Timbuktu," or "navigating the busy delta in Nigeria").
  2. **A Geographical Observation:** Describe something you see related to the river's geography (e.g., "the sheer scale of the great bend," "the lush green of the flooded plains," or "the bustling port where goods are traded").
  3. **A Human or Environmental Interaction:** Describe an interaction you witness (e.g., "watching Bozo fishermen cast their nets," "bartering for food at a riverside market," or "spotting a pod of hippos at dusk").
- **Assessment:** This creative writing piece serves as the summative assessment. It allows New

to synthesize all the information from the lesson (path, features, importance) and apply it creatively, demonstrating true understanding rather than just memorization. The quality of the entry is judged on the accurate inclusion of the three required elements.

## 5. Differentiation and Inclusivity

- **Support:** If writing is a challenge, provide a journal template with sentence starters like: "Today, my journey brought me to..." or "The most amazing thing I saw was..." A word bank with key terms (Sahel, delta, irrigation, Timbuktu, fisherman) can also be helpful.
- **Extension/Challenge:** Ask New to research a specific historical figure associated with the river (like the explorer Mungo Park or the ruler Mansa Musa) and write the journal entry from their perspective. Another challenge could be to draw a small map of the section of the river they are writing about to accompany the journal entry.

## 6. Wrap-up & Closure (5 minutes)

- **Activity:** Have New read his journal entry aloud.
- **Review:** Briefly recap the main points. "So today, we solved the mystery of the boomerang river, saw how it creates a green oasis in the desert, and learned why it's a lifeline for millions of people. Your journal entry did a great job of bringing that journey to life!"