

*If you only have 30 minutes ...*

Taarab is the signature sound of Zanzibar—an island shaped by centuries of trade, empire and cultural exchange. Trace the roots of taarab to see how music became Zanzibar’s voice of identity and change.

### **Text Mining (8 minutes)**

#### **Task 1: Timeline Reading**

Skim the reading to complete the Timeline of Taarab: Taarab Through Centuries Worksheet.

Fill in:

1. Fill in the missing terms from the timeline word bank that complete each event description.<sup>1</sup>

<b>Timeline Word Bank:</b>			
Bantu people Saad	British	Mombassa	Siti bint
Barghash bin Said	Omani Sultans	Portuguese	Tanga

#### **Task 2: Historical Identification**

Identify and briefly describe two key events from the timeline that significantly influenced:

1. Zanzibar’s religious and political identity.<sup>2</sup>
2. Taarab’s musical evolution.<sup>3</sup>

# Timeline of Taarab

## TAARAB THROUGH THE CENTURIES

11<sup>TH</sup>-15<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY

15<sup>TH</sup>-17<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY

17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Zanzibar is  
inhabited by the

colonize Zanzibar.

seize trading  
centers on the  
African coast from  
the Portuguese.

reigns as last  
sultan to rule  
Zanzibar.

Zanzibar  
becomes a

Protectorate

records taarab  
music in India,  
spreading taarab  
music influence.

Modern taarab  
music blends two  
different styles:



### Text Analysis (18 minutes)

Using your completed timeline and the article, fill in the table below with text-based evidence and thoughtful analysis.

Focus Area	Guiding Questions	Text Evidence (from reading)
Colonial and Religious Shifts <sup>4</sup>	What events reshaped Zanzibar's religious and political identity? How do these shifts appear in the music's themes or settings?	
Cultural Fusion in Music <sup>5</sup>	How does taarab incorporate African, Arab, Indian or European elements? What effect does this layering have on the music's role or style?	
Individual Impact <sup>6</sup>	How did leaders like Sultan Bargash or Siti bint Saad shape the public reach, performance spaces or social power of taarab?	

### Synthesis (4 minutes)

Write a one-sentence thesis that explains how taarab music reflects Zanzibar's history and culture to include the following: 1) a historical or religious shift; 2) a cultural or musical blend; 3) one individual's impact.

### Common Core Standard(s) Met:

**CCRA.R.1** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

**CCRA.R.3** Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

**RH.9-10.3** Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

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1 Timeline answer key: 11th-15th century, Bantu; 15th-17th century, Portuguese; 17th century, Omani sultans; 18th-century, Barghash bin Said; 19th-century, British; 20th century, Siti bint Saad; 21st-century, Mombassa and Tanga.

2 *Event*: The Omani Arab rule in the 17th-19th century, especially the relocation of the capital from Muscat to Zanzibar. This established Islam as the dominant religion and introduced Arab customs, language and instruments.

*Event*: British colonial rule (1890-1963), which brought European elements and educational structures, while reinforcing divisions between mainland communities and Zanzibar's identity.

3 *Event*: Court patronage under Sultan bin Barghash (1870s-1880s), which formalized taarab by importing Egyptian musicians and instruments.

*Event*: East African coastal trade networks (19th century), which brought Indian, Arab and Persian musical elements, enriching the ensemble structure and tonal range.

4 Sample answers: Arab rule established Islam as the majority religion on Zanzibar; British rule created structural divides between Zanzibar and mainland Tanzania, contributing to different identities; The music's themes sometimes reflect Islamic values and ceremonial traditions.

5 Sample answers: Instruments like the qanun, oud and violin reflect Arab and European influences; Rhythms and call-and-response singing connect to East African and Swahili

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traditions; Taarab lyrics blend Swahili poetic forms with performance styles learned abroad.

6 Sample answers: Sultan Barghash helped institutionalize musical training and court music; Siti bint Saad recorded over 150 songs and expanded taarab to include women's voices and working-class Swahili communities.