

# Somali traditional culture and Somali community in Brent Learning Resource

The items in our Somali traditional culture and Somali community in Brent Loans Box and workshop inspire the activities in this learning resource. The items used in the workshop are the same as the ones in the loans box.



Nomadic People: “people that travel from place to place to find fresh pasture for their animals and have no permanent home”

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## Introduction

### Aims of this resource

To enable students to learn about Somali traditional culture and Somali community in Brent

### Learning outcomes

- Pupils will be able to use evidence (photographs of objects and eyewitness accounts) to find out about the Somali community in Brent
- Pupils will be able to use evidence (photographs of objects) to find out about traditional Somali life
- Pupils will be able to talk about the Somali community in Brent

**Please note: If you would like to follow any of the links in this resource to view photos and/or videos, please look at them in full in advance to check that they are suitable for your learners.**

With thanks to Rhoda Ibrahim, co-ordinator of Somali Advice and Forum of Information (SAAFI) for her support. This learning resource was created in 2020.

Brent Museum and Archives offer a wide range of resources including workshops, handling sessions, loans boxes, YouTube videos and PDFs to support you and your learners in a range of topics. Check out our [schools pages](#) and our [online learning resources page](#) for more of our resources. [Join our schools mailing list here](#). You can visit our [website](#) and explore our [online catalogue](#) for details for exhibitions, events and to search for material relating to your local area. [Museum.archives@brent.gov.uk](mailto:Museum.archives@brent.gov.uk)

## Jobs activity

Using the profiles on the following pages, can you match the person to the job that they do in Brent?

1. Who is a Councillor that was first elected in 2010?
2. Who is the Chairman of Brent Somali Community Roots?
3. Who manages a charity called Help Somalia Foundation?
4. Who runs a restaurant in Wembley but was previously a nurse?
5. Who runs the Somali Advice and Forum of Information? She also used to work for the United Nations!
6. Who feels settled in Brent, that 'he lives here, works here and knows the people'?

## Profiles



**Rhoda Ibrahim** runs the Somali Advice and Forum of Information (SAFI) community group in Brent. Her studies brought her to London and the war prevented her from returning. She worked with the United Nations (UN) and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to help Somali people in various countries in Africa and Yemen until 2002, when she began working with Somalis in Brent while bringing up her family.



**Zahra Omer** runs a restaurant in Wembley on behalf of her sons. She is from Mogadishu where she worked as a nurse. She came to the UK in 1995 with her young family.



**Asha Mohammed** was born in Aden, Yemen but her family are from Somaliland. She came to the UK in 1991, settling first in Haringey. She has lived in Brent since 2006. She runs a clothes shop on Wembley High Road.

[Listen to an extract from Asha's story](#)



**Amran Mohamed** was born in Hargeisa in 1954. She worked in the Gulf in the late 1970s and early 1980s and, following the civil war in Somalia, moved to Finland in 1990. She stayed in Finland for 17 years, working extensively with the Somali and other communities in that country and received awards for her work. "I moved from Finland to the UK because I was born when the British Protectorate was in place. My father was working for the British. He was deployed to work as a soldier from the Horn of Africa all the way to Burma."

[Hear an extract of Amran's story](#)



**Councillor Harbi Farah** has lived in Brent for 18 years. Born in Mogadishu, he came alone as a young man in 1992. He manages a charity called Help Somalia Foundation, which delivers services to Brent residents, and was elected to the Brent Council in 2014.

[Hear an extract of Councillor Harbi Farah's story](#)



**Khadar Bile Ibrahim** was born in Somaliland in Hargeisa in August 1965. He originally came to the UK to study civil engineering, following his mother, father and brother, who arrived before him. Prior to that, he spent 14 years working in The Netherlands. When he first came to the UK he was working for a Dutch bank. Now he is a drummer and following a family tradition: his mother has been a singer for over 40 years. He has two children in the UK with him.

[Hear an extract of Khadar's story](#)



**Mariam Marsden** was born in Djibouti and travelled extensively before settling in the UK with her British-French husband.

[Hear an extract of Mariam's story](#)



**Abdi Mohamed Hussein** was born in Burao in Somaliland in 1966. When he was 21 years old, he was given a scholarship to study in Russia. While he was away studying, civil war broke out and he was unable to return home. He came to the UK, where he found life very difficult at first. He found work in security, as a Council Officer, driving minicabs and now works part time with a Somali TV station. He has two daughters living with him in Brent

[Listen to an extract from his interview](#)



**Councillor Abdi Aden** was born in Burao in 1966. He left Somalia in 1989, during the civil war, travelling to Saudi Arabia first and then arrived in the UK in 1990. He came alone and did not know anyone here, spending his first few months in East London before moving to Brent. He became a leader in his community, serving as a Brent Councillor in 2010. He was re-elected in 2014 and then again in 2018.

[Hear an extract of Councillor Abdifatah's story](#)



**Hussein Hersi** is 77 years old. He comes from a small village in Somaliland. He trained as a civil engineer in the USA and came to the UK in 1990 via Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia. He runs the elders and care program, alongside the Red Sea Community Programme in Brent, which provides sport and cultural activities, together with advice, information and support for Somali refugees.

[Hear an extract of Hussein's story](#)



**Hussein Farah** is 53 years old and came to the UK 29 years ago. He has lived in the Brent and Harrow areas for most of his time in Britain. When he first came to the UK he did not know many people but now feels settled in Brent: he lives here, works here and knows the people.

[Hear an extract of Hussein's story](#)



**Omer Yusuf Mohamed** was a khat trader who came to the UK in 1991 from Mogadishu. He previously worked as a bus driver. His family lives in Birmingham. Now that Omer Yusuf has retired, he has moved to be with his family in Birmingham.





**Mohamed Hussein** was born in Somalia and is currently the Chairman of the charity Brent Somali Community Roots in the London Borough of Brent. He was born in 1970 in Mogadishu and came to London in 2001. He speaks four languages: Dutch, Italian, English and Somali.

[Hear an extract of Mohamed's story](#)

## Maps activity

### Map of Somalia

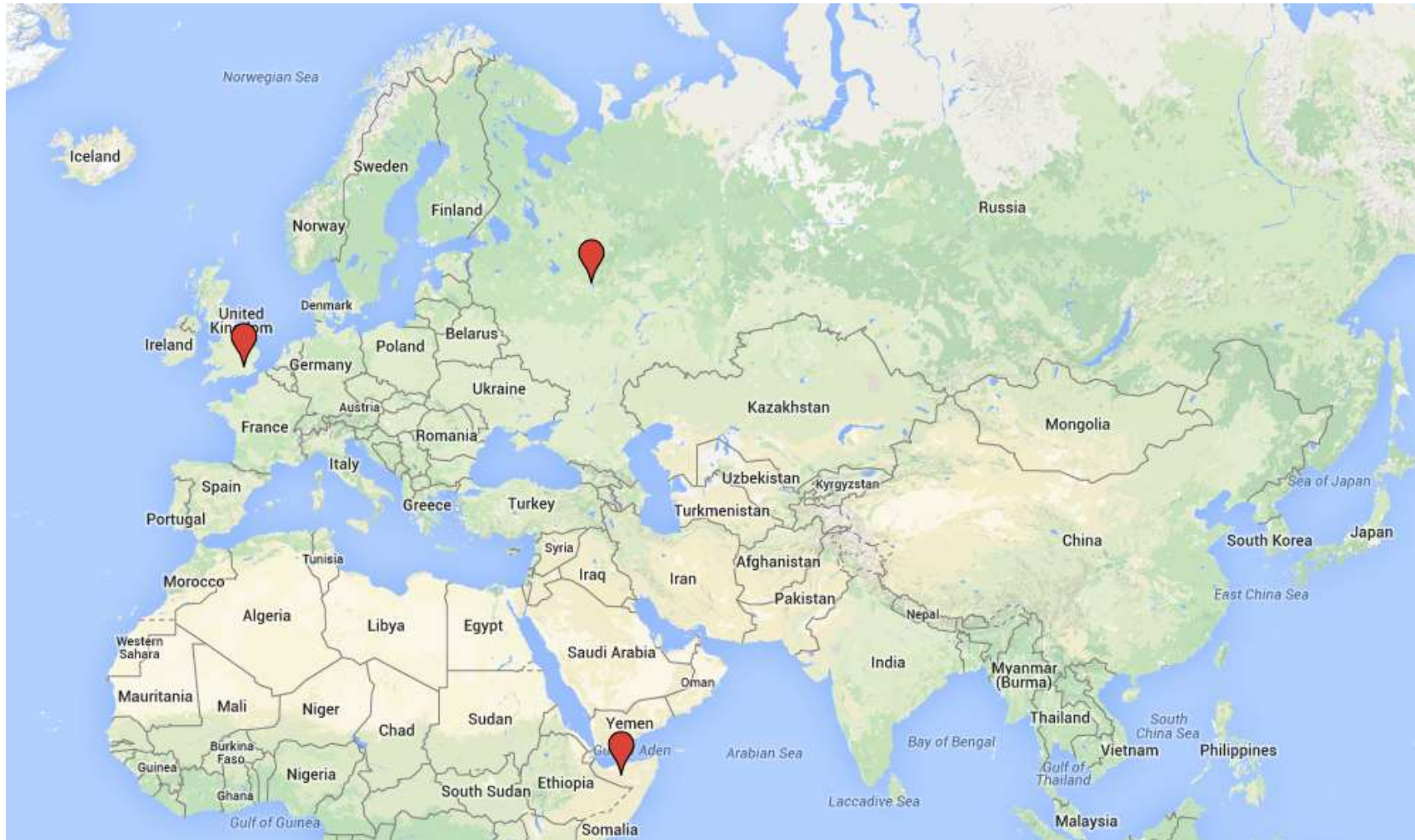
Look at the profiles for these people. Which one matches each of the maps?

1. Abdi Mohamed Hussein
2. Amran Mohamed Ahmed
3. Asha Mohamed
4. Hussein Hersi
5. Khadir Bile Ibrahim
6. Mariam Marsden

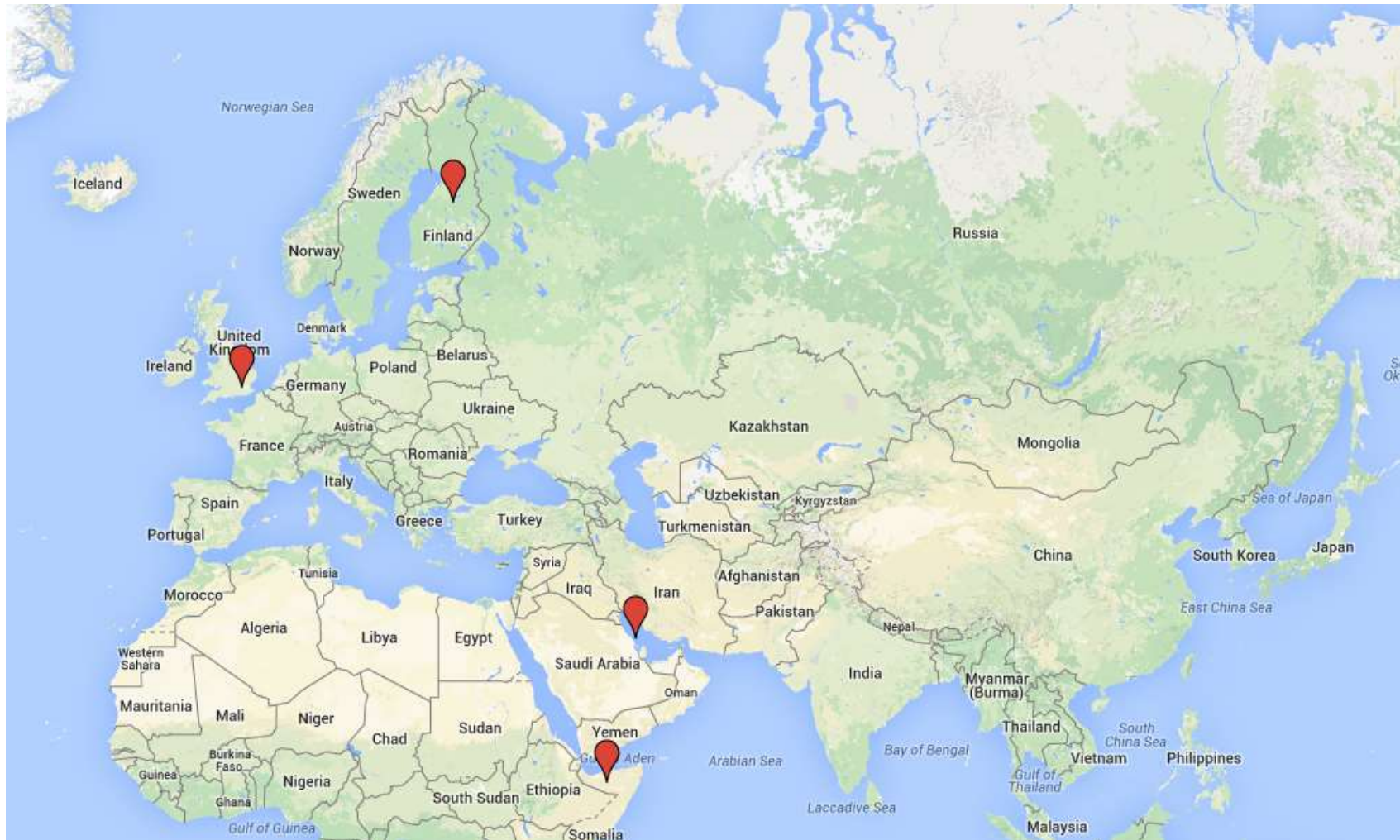


### Answers to map activity

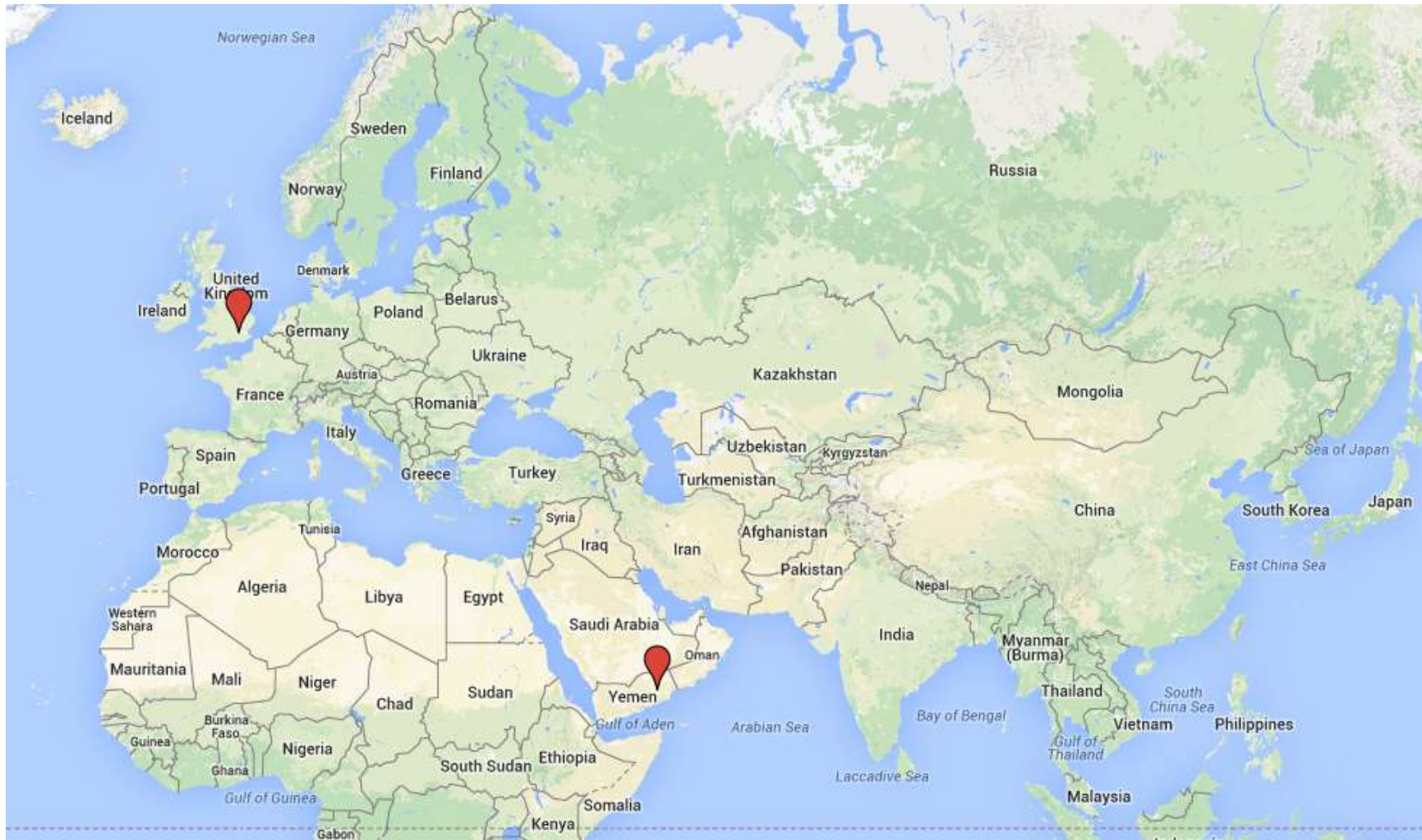
Participant	Country of Origin	Other places	Map
Abdi Mohamed Hussein	Burao, Russia, UK		A
Amran Mohamed Ahmed	Hargeisa	Gulf, Finland	B
Asha Mohamed	Aden, Yemen		C
Hussein Hersi	Somaliland	USA, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia	D
Khadir Bile Ibrahim	Hargeisa	The Netherlands	E
Mariam Marsden	Djibouti	Brighton, London	F



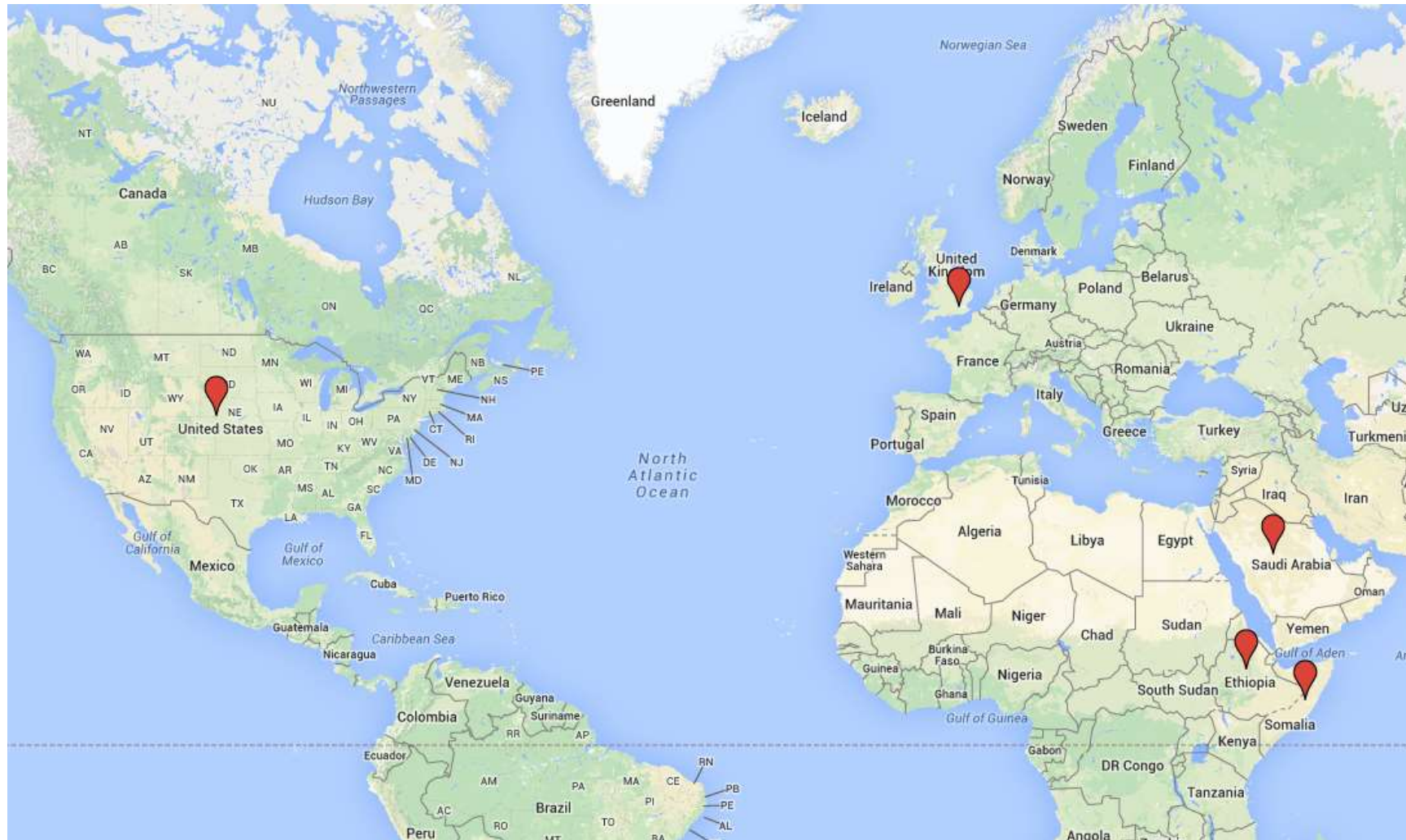
Map A



Map B



Map C



Map D



Map E



Map F



## Handling artefacts activity for use with loans box items

Ask class: Can anyone tell me what a museum is? What do you think an archive is?

- A museum tends to have objects, artefacts. They are old things that tell us about the past but we also collect things from current communities in Brent so that we have a record for the future.
- An archive is a bit like a cross between a museum and a library. It stores documents, letters, reports, books, photographs. Paper things. When you handle objects from a museum, you have to be very careful – why?
- They are unique objects, very old, we don't want to break them, delicate, want other people to enjoy them in the future

Is anybody wearing a watch or jewellery like me? If so, I would like you to take it off – why?

- You might scratch the objects, damage them

You must always hold an object with two hands – why?

- Easier to hold, more stable, less likely to drop it

You should hold the object over your lap– why?

- Laps are soft and the floor is hard, if you do drop it and it is over your lap it is less likely to break.

Hold the object near your lap not high up – why?

- The lower it is the less it has to fall which means it is less likely to break if you drop it.

All of these objects are from the Nomadic Somali people. Can you work out what they all are?

**Aws**

This is a section of Aws (a woven material) used to make an Aqal (hut) by nomadic Somali people.

1. What colours can you see?
2. What do you think it is made of?
3. [Look at these photos to find out how the frame of an Aqal is joined together](#)



## Milk container

This is a container for milk, used by nomadic Somali people.

1. Do you drink milk? If so, where do you get your milk?
2. What materials do you think this object is made of?
3. Who do you think made it?
4. Is it made of one piece or more pieces?
5. How do you think it fits together?
6. How does the handle make it easier for people to use while they travel?
7. [Look at this webpage to find out the Somali name for this object](#)



## Alool

An alool is a fireguard used in aqals (huts) to protect the hut and people from the fire. Pieces of fabric are woven under and over thin branches. The fabric is knotted at either side to keep it secure. An alool can be rolled up and packed easily when people are travelling. The piece in the picture is a small example – an alool would normally be larger to fit round a fire.



1. How do you make your home warm?
2. How can we keep safe around fires?
3. What colours can you see in the alool?
4. Where do you think the fabric came from?
5. How long do you think it would take someone to make an alool this size?
6. [Watch this video to find out about Somali weaving methods](#)



### Model of a camel and her baby

1. Camels are very important to the nomadic Somali people. Why do you think this is?
2. What do you think this object is made out of?



## Camel bell

This object is used with animals so that you can hear them when they move.



1. Which of these animals do you think it is for?



2. [Wood from which tree is used to make bells in Somalia?](#)

## Clothing activity

### Men

**Sarong** designs include colourful checked patterns, criss cross patterns of two or more colours and simple geometric lines. The items in our loans box are long pieces of material.

Material is often sold as one long circular tube of cloth in which case it is called a *macawiis* (pronounced: ma'awiis).

How to wrap a sarong:

- wrap the material round the lower half of the body, bringing the upper edge of the fabric above the level of the navel
- make the hem level with the ankles
- fold in the excess fabric from both sides to the front centre so they overlap
- secure the sarong by rolling the upper hem down over itself.

### Women

The guntiino is for everyday wear, and is a long stretch of cloth tied over the shoulder and draped around the waist. The guntiino can be worn in many different styles and with different fabrics. Start watching about 2-3 mins in (to avoid the introductory chat) - [Video showing how to wear a guntiino](#)

For events such as weddings or religious celebrations like Eid, women wear the dirac, a long (usually ankle length) light, loose-fitting dress usually of at least two colours. It is worn over a full-length half-petticoat. Known as the gorgorad, the underskirt is made out of silk. The dirac is usually sparkly and very colorful, the most popular styles being those with gilded borders or threads.

[Web page with photos of men and women in Somali dress](#)

[Video about a visit to a Somali shopping centre in Minneapolis: exploring clothes, food and skin decoration](#)

[Further information about clothing \(upper KS2 reading level\)](#)

These items of clothes were given to Brent Museum and Archives by Rhoda Ibrahim, who is part of Brent's Somali community. If they are the right size for you, you can try them on very carefully.



Lengths of material to wear as sarongs or guntiino



Young girl's dress.

Red satin gorgorad to wear under a dirac.





Young girl's dress.

## Language activity

1. [Watch this video from 2 mins in and learn some common words in Somali](#)
2. Try out these sentences in Somali:
  - a) English: Somalia is the easternmost country in Africa. It is known as the 'horn' of Africa because the shape of the country looks like a horn.  
  
Somali: Somalia waxay ku taalaa barigaa Africa. Waxan loo yaqaan Geeska Africa waayo waxay u eegtahay qaabka geeska
  - b) English: Many people in Somalia are nomads, which means that they move their homes around when their animals need fresh food to eat.  
  
Somali: Dadka Somalidda badankoodu waa reer guuraa macnaheedu yahay waxay u guuraan meesha xoolahoodu ka helayaan doogga cusub.
3. English: Draw yourself in your own traditional clothes! Somali: Waxad sawirtaa dharka hidahaagga

## Somali beadwork activity

Many of the people who live in Somalia work in agriculture, as either farmers or nomadic herders who are constantly on the move. Both groups have few possessions. Mats such as these are fly and dust covers for water and food containers. However, the decorative tassels on these particular mats suggest that they may have been made as ceremonial or show pieces, to show off the skills of local craftspeople. This group of decorative beadwork mats were collected in the coastal port city of Zeila (known as Saylac in Somalia) on the coast of the Gulf of Aden.

1. What colours, patterns and shapes can you see?
2. Create your own designs inspired by the beadwork in these photos.

