**Document A: The Kingdom of the Kongo:**

As trade networks multiple and linked all regions of sub-Saharan Africa, an increasing volume of commerce encouraged state building in central Africa and South Africa. In central Africa, the principal states were the Kingdoms of Kongo, Ndongo, Luba and Lunda in the basin of the Congo River. Best known of them was the kingdom of the Kongo, since abundant written records throw light on its experience in early modern times.

The kingdom emerged in the 14th century. Its rulers built a centralized state with officials overseeing military, judicial and finical affairs, and by the late 15th century Kongo embraced much of the modern day Republic of Congo and Angola. In 1483 a small Portuguese fleet reconnoitered the estuary of the Congo River and initiated commercial relations with the Kingdom of the Kongo. They supported the kings with advisors, provided a military garrison to support the kings and protect Portuguese interest, and brought tailors, shoemakers, masons, miners and priests to the Kongo.

The kings of the Kongo converted to Christianity as a way to establish closer commercial relations with the Portuguese monarchy. The kings appreciated the fact that Christianity offered a strong endorsement of their monarchical rule. The new faith was convenient also because the saints of the Roman Catholic Church were similar to spirits long recognized in Kongolese religion. King Nzinga Mbemba of Kongo, also known as King Alfonso I (reigned from 1506-1542) became a devout Catholic and sought to convert all his subjects to Christianity. Portuguese priests in the Kongo reported that he attended religious services daily and studied the bible so zealously that sometimes neglected to eat. The Kongo capital of Mbanza- known to the Europeans as Sao Salvador-had so many churches during the 16th century people referred to it as “Kongo of the Bell”.

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| **Positives for Portuguese** | **Positives for Kongolese** |
| **Negatives for Portuguese** | **Negatives for Kongolese** |

**Document B: Slave raiding:**

Relations with Portugal brought wealth and foreign recognition to Kongo but also led eventually to the destruction of the kingdom and the establishment of a colony in Angola. In exchange for textiles, weapons, advisors, and artisans that they brought to the Kongo, merchants sought high-value merchandise such as copper, ivory and most of all, slaves. They sometimes embarked on slaving expeditions themselves, but more often they made alliances with local authorities in interior regions and provided them with weapons in exchange for slaves. Some of their local allies were enemies of the kings of Kongo, while others were royal subordinates. In either case, Portuguese tactics undermined the authority of the kings who appealed repeatedly but unsuccessfully for the Portuguese to cease or at least to limit their trade in the slaves.

In spite of periodic invasions, Kongo remained strong until the mid 17th century. Portuguese forces aided Kongo in expelling invaders but at the same time they constituted to trade in slaves. Some merchants even settled in the Kongo, took local wives and henceforth looked more after the interests of their adoptive home than their native land. Over time, relations deteriorated particularly after Portuguese agents began to pressure opportunities south of the Kongo. By 1665 Port colonists to the south even went to war with the Kongo. Port forces quickly defeated the Kongolese army and decapitated the king. Soon after, Port merchants began to withdraw from Kongo in search of more profitable business down south.

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| **Positives for Portuguese** | **Positives for Kongolese** |
| **Negatives for Portuguese** | **Negatives for Kongolese** |

King Alfonso Letter: A Close Read

1. What evidence is there to suggest that African leaders sought to make decisions that they felt were in their best interests?
2. Defend the following statement: Trade was the basis of Portuguese relations with Africans, but in the wake of commerce came political, religious and social relations.
3. What were the detrimental effects of the Portuguese presence in the Kongo?
4. What steps did the King take to deal with the problems caused by the Portuguese?
5. What do you conclude was King Alfonso’s conception of the ideal relationship between the Portuguese and his kingdom?