

IRONMAN

SPRING
2004

TAKING AFRICA TO THE CLASSROOM

A PUBLICATION OF THE CENTER FOR AFRICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
427 GRINTER HALL
P.O. BOX 115560
GAINESVILLE, FL 32611
(352)392-2183
FAX: (352) 392-2435
[HTTP://WWW.CLAS.UFL.EDU/USERS/ALESIE](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/aleslie)



EDITOR/OUTREACH DIRECTOR: DR. AGNES NGOMA LESLIE
WITH ASSISTANCE FROM CORINNA GREENE

LAYOUT AND DESIGN: RENEE RHODES

THE CENTER FOR AFRICAN STUDIES

OUTREACH PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

* The Center is partially funded under Title VI of the federal Higher Education Act as a National Resource Center on Africa. One of 12 resource centers, Florida's is the only Center located in the southeastern United States. The Center directs, develops, and coordinates interdisciplinary instruction, research, and outreach on Africa. The Outreach Program includes a variety of activities whose objective is to improve the teaching of Africa in primary and secondary schools, colleges, universities and local communities. The Following are some of the regular activities which fall under the Outreach Program.

***TEACHERS' WORKSHOPS.**

The Center offers in-service workshops for K-12 teachers about instruction on Africa throughout the school year.

***SUMMER INSTITUTES.**

Each summer, the Center holds teaching institutes for K-12 teachers.

***PUBLICATIONS.**

The Center publishes and distributes teaching resources including Irohin.

***LIBRARY.**

Teachers may borrow videotapes and books from the Outreach office.

***COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL PRESENTATIONS.**

Faculty and graduate students make presentations on Africa to local communities and schools.

***RESEARCH AFFILIATE PROGRAM.**

Two one-month appointments are provided each summer. The program enables African specialists at

institutions which do not have adequate resources for African-related research to increase their expertise on Africa through contact with other Africanists. They also have access to Africa-related resources at the University of Florida libraries.



PAPA SUSSO, A GRIOT FROM THE GAMBIA, VISITS AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASS IN ALACHUA COUNTY.

EDITOR'S NOTE

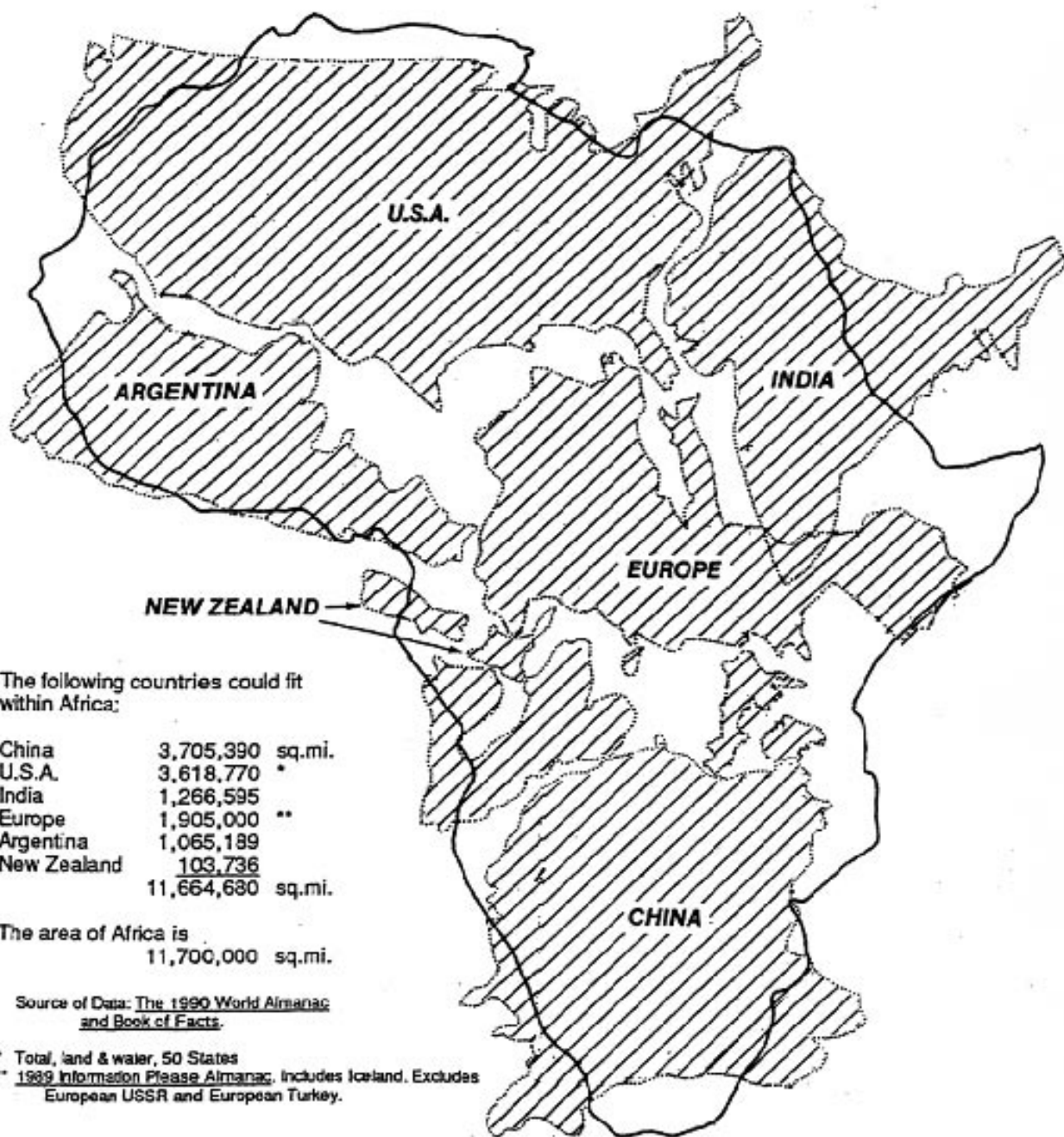
EACH SUMMER, THE CENTER FOR AFRICAN STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA HOSTS A K-12 TEACHERS INSTITUTE. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE INSTITUTE IS TO HELP TEACHERS INCREASE THEIR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AFRICA AND DEVELOP LESSON PLANS TO USE IN THEIR CLASSROOMS. THE CREATIVE LESSON PLANS IN THIS ISSUE OF IROHIN WERE WRITTEN BY PARTICIPANTS IN THE 2003 INSTITUTE. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO USE THESE MATERIALS IN YOUR TEACHING AND SHARE THEM WITH OTHER TEACHERS. WRITE OR CALL THE CENTER FOR AFRICAN STUDIES FOR ADDITIONAL COPIES.

SINCERELY,
AGNES NGOMA LESLIE



BACK ROW: OUTREACH DIRECTOR, DR. AGNES N. LESLIE, CHERYL SMITH, HEATHER CHRISTIAN, JOAN STEVENS, KAREN KING-THOMPSON, KINNAS CLARK, BOB BERGDORF, JOSEPHINE BANDINGA (PRESENTER).
FRONT ROW: LITA HALCHAK, ANTOINETTE D'ASSOMPTION (PRESENTER), SANDRA LOVELADY, NAN-NETTE RANSOM, TRICIA MCCALL BAGBY AND ADE OFUNNIYIN (PRESENTER).

WOULD YOU BELIEVE?

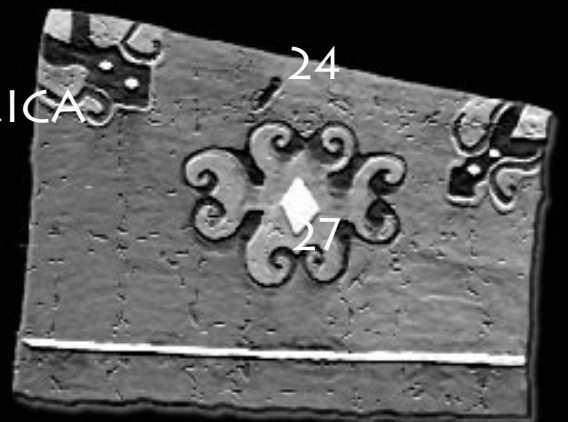


Copyright © 2004 World Eagle/IBA, Inc.
Reprinted with permission from WORLD EAGLE.
1-800-854-8273. All rights reserved.

© World Eagle, Inc. 1990

CONTENTS

AFRICAN HOUSE PAINTING	6
MEANINGS BEHIND THE MASKS OF AFRICA	9
THE PRECIOUS TREASURE OF AFRICA	12
AMERICAN DOLLAR- AFRICAN CONNECTION	14
MERGING RELIGION AND CULTURES: A DIALOGUE WITH THE PAST, A SONG FOR THE FUTURE	18
PROVERBS- AN AKAN TRADITION	20
THE TRUE CIRCLE OF LIFE: AFRICAN RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS OF LIFE	22
REPRESENTATIVE RULE AND CONSENSUS IN PRECOLONIAL AFRICA	24
STAPLE FOODS	27



AFRICAN HOUSE PAINTING

Background

Brightly decorated houses are found throughout Africa. As recently as the late 19th century, Africans in the Lower Nile Valley area, known as Nubia, were known to have painted and decorated their houses. Houses in Nubian villages were typically made of white washed plaster, with vaulted roofs. The entranceways were decorated and painted, usually with geometric and representational themes. In addition to the use of paint, often broken china plates, tin cans and pot lids were placed in triangular patterns on the walls. There are no photos of these decorated buildings, but verbal description tells us that they used themes including fish, birds, flowers, palms, animals, geometric patterns and flag-shaped symbols.

The house decorations were expressions of social status and also expressions of religious beliefs. Some of the plates had hotel names showing where the owner might have worked. The symbolic meaning of the plates was to signify the goal of bringing bread into the house, and the shiny surfaces were believed to repel the “evil-eye,” a belief originating in Upper Egypt. The designs and surface attachments seemed to function as powers and symbols of powers that could prevent and counteract evil. Some designs may reflect things the painters do not have, but desire.

For the Nubians, the exuberant and fantastic imagery and decoration of their houses might express pride for their people, prestige, self-expression, and a desire to make the countryside more beautiful. Their reason for this kind of art seems rooted in tradition and spiritual beliefs, which reflect their need for display, spectacle, self-expression, and changing ways. Ethnic groups in South Africa also known for decorative house painting include the Ndebele, the Basotho, and

the Lesotho people.

The tradition of painted houses for the Ndebele people of South Africa dates back to about 50 years. Prior to this time, house walls were painted with earth-toned colors and often the artist would scratch patterns into the wet plaster using their fingers. It is believed that these early patterns, unlike the more recent painted designs, had sacred powers and may have been made to answer the request made by their ancestors. The Ndebele people prefer to decorate in the winter during dry season because in the summer, the intense rains can destroy the painting and even cause deep holes in the walls.

More recently, the Ndebele’s brightly colored geometric wall paintings are believed to be an attempt to identify themselves, and set themselves apart from other ethnic groups. This attempt at self-expression manifests itself in the colors, motifs and themes used.

In Africa women play a dominant role as builders and designers. They primarily are the ones who do the house paintings. The paintings have symbolic meaning showing their rich culture and ancient art-making traditions.

Politically, these walls were used as signs in the face of the oppressive apartheid regime of



THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF A NDEBELE PAINTED HOUSE IN SOUTH AFRICA. COURTESY [HTTP://WWW.UX1.EIU.EDU/CFRB/PAINTEDHOUSES.HTM](http://www.ux1.eiu.edu/CFRB/PAINTEDHOUSES.HTM)

South Africa, which tried to oppress and demean the black population. As women painters create the wall murals, they depict rituals, announce marriages, show forms of prayer and worship, and often depict themes of protest. For example, women from the Basotho group in South Africa used to paint their houses in the colors of the then outlawed African National Congress Party, black, green and gold. These party colors would have been considered illegal.

Traditionally, the Ndebele women painters pass their skills to their daughters and granddaughters. In the early times, the paint was made from cow dung mixed with different colors of earth clay to produce black, white, red, green and yellow. The paint was applied annually using feathers and bundles of twigs with chewed ends. In more recent times, they use acrylic paints and brushes, which allow more variety in their colors. The earth color paints obtained from clay deposits include some colors that were so difficult to obtain that in the early days women might have to travel as far as 100 miles to find a particular color. They would roll the red, brown and yellow ochre earth into compact spheres, which would dry with little chunks of solid pigment, very similar to our modern dry watercolor paints. Black was made by mixing soot with the dark soil from a nearby riverbank. Some of the women painters have become known throughout the world for their beautiful designs, some of which have been used in advertising for, the car manufacturer BMW, and the airline British Airways.

“The murals are a form of religious art. They honor and please the ancestors to whom the Basotho pray for peace, rain and plenty. If the prayers are successful, the rains arrive and wash away the painting, but the fields, the herds and the families of the land all flourish, fertility and abundance abound. The mud walls of the houses are likened to the fields, and the designs incised into the walls and painted are signs of cultivation, equivalent to the furrows hoed into the earth. Many mural designs refer to flowers and to the plant world, and are signs of fertility. Houses themselves are metaphors for the womb and Creation, when humans emerged from a cave deep in the earth. The symbolism of the houses and the murals are thus intimately related in many ways to the realm of women.” (Van Wyk p.10)

Being primarily abstract, Ndebele murals include such pictorial motifs as animals, light bulbs and even razor blades! They combine sun and tree motifs with letters of the alphabet. Other motifs might include inspiration from children’s school books (for example, a lion may never be seen in real life by the painter, so she would get her idea from a story book), telephone poles, wrought-iron

work, airplanes, staircases and steps. Their geometric stylized shapes rarely include human figures, considered too difficult to render, but rather they use flowers and trees, which are more easily reduced to simplified forms.

Esther Mahlangu is probably the best known of the South African women painters. She was the first to transfer her designs from house walls to canvas, which allows her work to be displayed in galleries around the world. Isa Kabini and Francine Ndimande are two other prominent women painters. Another known artist, Vasi D. Mchunu, says of her work:

“I simply rise up, go to the wall, and start working. I do not need to waste my time drawing sketches and musing over details. As I proceed, I constantly correct any mistakes by hand. Of course my mind is sorting out the images, the patterns, and the colors. I am striving for harmony and brightness.

I decorate the front and the sides of the courtyard in the same manner. Harmony is my watchword...All the shapes are willed by my brain. It is my own creation and I am not imitating anyone. My constant guide is the constant quest for beauty. I always want to paint. This is my love and my will. Unlike other women artists who decorate as a preparation for some occasion or other. Be it a dance ceremony...a wedding...not so with me. If when looking at my children, I am inspired to create designs for each one of them, I simply go to the wall and paint this love for them to see.” (From Interview with Vusi D. Mchunu: “To paint is to express joy” in AmaNbedele, *Signals of color from South Africa*, Ed. Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, Tubingen, Germany, 1991.)

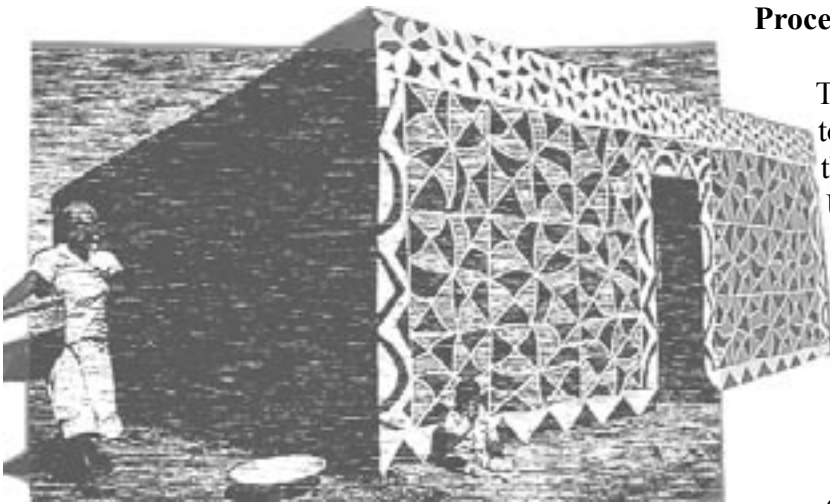
In the present day, undoubtedly, part of the motivation for house mural painting is tourism. Today, visitors to the villages in South Africa will pay for a tour of the painted homesteads. Monetary negotiations vary as to how much is charged for the experience. Some Ndebele will charge by the photograph.

Florida Sunshine State Standards: Visual Arts

B. Creation and Communication

1. The student creates and communicates a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas using knowledge of structures and functions of visual arts.

VA.B.1.2.1. The student understands that the subject matter used to create unique works of art can come from personal experience, observation, imagination and themes;



Procedure

Explain the technique to be used for the painting. They are to make their house as large as possible to fill the white paper. Think about what symbols they might want to include in their house painting. Use chalk to plan the composition. Fill in the areas using colors that they feel will best interpret the symbolic message they might want to present. This lesson would probably require three 45-minute sessions: Session #1 would be devoted to background study and discussion, and beginning the plan for their paintings; Session #2 they would begin painting, and session #3 they would complete their projects.

Evaluation

A critique could be done to describe the symbols used and the colors selected. Compare these paintings to the African house paintings looked at in the earlier discussion.

Questions: Do any symbols look alike? How would you compare your painting technique to that of the African women? Did you use colors similar to the colors used by the African women painters?

References

Courtney-Clarke, Margaret. *Ndebele, The Art of an African Tribe*, 1990.

Powell, Ivor. *Ndebele: A People and Their Art*, 1995.

Van Wyk, Gary N. *African Painted Houses*, 1998.

Ernst, Ed. Interview with Vusi Mchunu, "To Paint is to Express Joy," in AmaNdebele, *Signals of Color from South Africa*, Wasmuth Verlag, Tübingen, Germany, 1991.

Metaphors and Meanings of House: African Painted House Traditions

<http://www.ux1.eiu.edu/~cfrb/paintedhouses.htm>

Esther Mahlangu

<http://www.vgallery.co.za/2001article18/vzine.htm>

African House Paintings:

<http://kidsartworkshop.org/africanhousepainting.htm>

VA.B1.2.1.b. The student creates works of art depicting how signs and symbols convey historical, cultural or personal meaning;

VA.B.1.2.3. The student knows how to identify the intentions of those creating works of art.

C. Cultural and Historical Connections

1. The student understands the visual arts in relation to history and culture;

VA.C.1.2.1. The student understands the similarities and differences in works of art from a variety of sources;

VA.C.1.2.2. The student understands how artists have used visual languages and symbol systems through time and across culture;

VA.C.1.2.2.a. The student recognizes significant works of art and architecture and how they have functioned over time.

Objective

Fifth grade children will gain an understanding of African house painting, why it was done, the symbolic meanings, and what materials were used. They will have an opportunity to create their own house painting.

Activity

Materials needed:

Map of Africa

Pictures of African Painted Houses

Tempera Paint

Brushes

Water buckets

18 X 24 White paper

Yellow chalk

MEANINGS BEHIND THE MASKS OF AFRICA

BY TRICIA MCCALL BAGBY

Introduction: African Masks

When asked about Africa, specifically African art, one of the images that may come to mind is a beautiful, wooden mask. Whether the masks have been seen on the covers of magazines, in documentary videos, or displayed in museums, most Westerners have a concept of the African mask. African masks have intrigued me because each one is unique with a story behind it. My interest in African masks has led me to increase my understanding of their significance and purpose in their natural setting and to provide a meaningful way for others to better understand and appreciate their importance.

The purpose of this project is for the learner to:

△ learn a brief history and meaning behind African masks through examples of how they are used by African peoples;

△ learn the various forms and styles of African masks as well as the materials used in their creation;

△ understand the similarities and differences of African masks and head adornments used in Western society ;

△ gain a better appreciation of African masks and their significance.

Brief History and Meaning Behind African Masks

African masks can be traced back thousands of years. They still play a significant role for many people in contemporary Africa; 1.) Masks are used in many of the traditional ceremonies and are both functional and artistic. 2.)Masks are also used to represent deities, good or evil spirits, mythological beings, and the spirits of ancestors. 3.)Different masks are worn during various occasions: fertility or initiation rites, celebrations, peace and trouble times, funerals, and for entertainment.

One of the most important functions of the mask in Africa is to change the identity of the person who is wearing it. To wear the mask along with the rest of the costume is to replace one's identity. Other identities commonly taken are those of spirits, ancestors, or another

person who is either revered or feared. An example of an identity-changing African mask comes from the Baule peoples of Cote d'Ivoire. Their mask, called the albino, incarnates "*bo nun amuin*—god of the forest" or "*amuin yasua*—men's god." These gods are thought to possess the wearer of the mask and a dance is performed to protect the village, to discipline women, or at the funerals of former dancers and important men.

Another significant function of the African mask is in the transformation of a person in a "rite of passage." Initiation into adulthood, a secret society, marriage, or a person's movement into a higher rank are just some of the examples of ceremonies that marked by a masked performance.

In a "rite of passage" ceremony, the former identity of a person is symbolically replaced with a new identity. One of the few examples where women in Africa wear masks is during a "rite of passage" ceremony performed by the Mende people in parts of Liberia as well as Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea. This group of women, known as the *Sande* society, provides a secluded school and sanctuary for girls to be initiated into adulthood. The masked women officiate the ceremony of the initiates' debut after completing their schooling. The *Sande* women officials are adorned in a black helmet mask known as a *sowei* mask. The term *sowei* stems from Sowo, who is the goddess of water and symbolizes truth and wisdom; a *sowei* is the person who initiates the new inductees and is their leader and teacher.

When masks are used for the purposes of entertaining, it is often during theatrical performances that portray profound ethnic myths. For example, the Dan peoples of West Africa wear a *tankagle* mask to entertain spectators during celebrations.

African Masks: Forms, Styles and Materials

An African mask can be worn in three ways: as a *face mask*, *helmet mask*, or *headdress*. The *face mask* is not directly attached to the dancer's head but is held in front of the face, possibly supported by a stick. A *helmet mask*

covers the entire head and a *headdress* is worn on the crown of the dancer's head and joins a costume that covers the dancer's body. These masks can be oval, circular, rectangular, elongated, heart-shaped, animal or human, and may be any combination of these.

The styles and forms of African masks are influenced by two sources: the social traditions and religious beliefs of the person's group and the individual's own creativity and vision for the mask. Some of the masks are realistic portraits of the people's ancestors and other masks represent abstract concepts like courage, beauty, nobility, and humor. To express these abstract qualities the masks may have exaggerated and stylized features.

The masks are made from a wide range of materials including bronze, leather, brass, copper, ivory, terracotta, fabric, and wood. However, wood is the most commonly used material because of its accessibility and the belief that a tree has a spiritual soul. Masks are often decorated with cowrie shells, beads, animal skins, and bone. Wooden masks are often dyed with pigments created from plants, seeds, vegetables, and soil.

THIS UNIQUE MASK IS FROM THE DAN ETHNIC GROUP OF THE IVORY COAST AND LIBERIA. PHOTO COURTESY OF GENUINEAFRICA.COM



Masks and Mortarboards: Comparing Rites of Passage

Masks are one of the most notable and recognizable symbols of Africa and even though they have been removed from their natural setting they have had an enormous effect on art throughout history. However, when discussing African masks, it is necessary to recognize that they are not isolated objects without a voice, movement, or music, and that they are used to transform the wearer into a tangible presence.

One method used to understand the various functions of something is to compare and contrast it to that which is similar in one's society. Westerners could look at the mortarboard (graduation cap) as a symbol used in their "rites of passage" ceremony, which is similar to how some Africans celebrate their "rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, or from one social rank to another, as in the case of the *Sande* women.

The mortarboard, like an African mask, is not meant

to be worn alone, but is accompanied with music and a processional, speakers, a robe, and diplomas. Family members and friends are present to commemorate the passage of the graduate to a higher academic or social level. Equally important, is the more subtle meaning of the graduate's passage to a more mature, responsible member of society.

Although, the interpretations of these ceremonies differ in their cultural symbols, this comparison shows that we are not that different in our need to recognize and honor the same capstones of life: birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, and death.

Activities:

1. Lead students through a comparative study with African masks and the mortarboard by using a venn diagram.
2. Have the students discuss and write their own comparisons of an African mask and all that accompanies the mask to an object that is familiar to him/her. (for example- a football helmet which is accompanied with the rest of the attire, parades, bonfires, fans, cheerleaders, tail-gating, bands, and the games)
3. Compare and contrast "rite of passage" rituals in Africa, the United States, and around the world.
4. Have the students discuss and write about non-visual masks that we wear at different times to hide feelings and emotions.
5. Have the students make masks to represent themselves. Numerous websites offer creative ways to make masks using various materials.
6. Use a KWL Chart to record the students' understanding of African masks.

References Cited

McClusky, Pamela. *Art in Africa: Long Steps Never Broke a Back*. Princeton: Seattle Museum of Art in association with Princeton University Press, 2002.

Rilly, Claude. *Magical Maces of Africa*. 2001. Culturekiosque Publications, Ltd.
<http://www.culturekiosque.com/art/exhibiti/masks.htm>
<http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/byrnes-africa/trimcgBackground.htm>

Ulrich, George. "Masks." *Lore*, Fall 1989. Milwaukee Public Museum, Inc. 1996.
<http://www.mpm.edu/collect/mask.html>>

Willet, Frank. *African Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 2002.

African Mask History
http://www.rebirth.co.za/African_mask_history_and_meaning.html

Art of African Masks. *Talaria Enterprises Art Community Highlights*. August/September 1998. http://www.talariaenterprises.com/teachsept98_archive.html

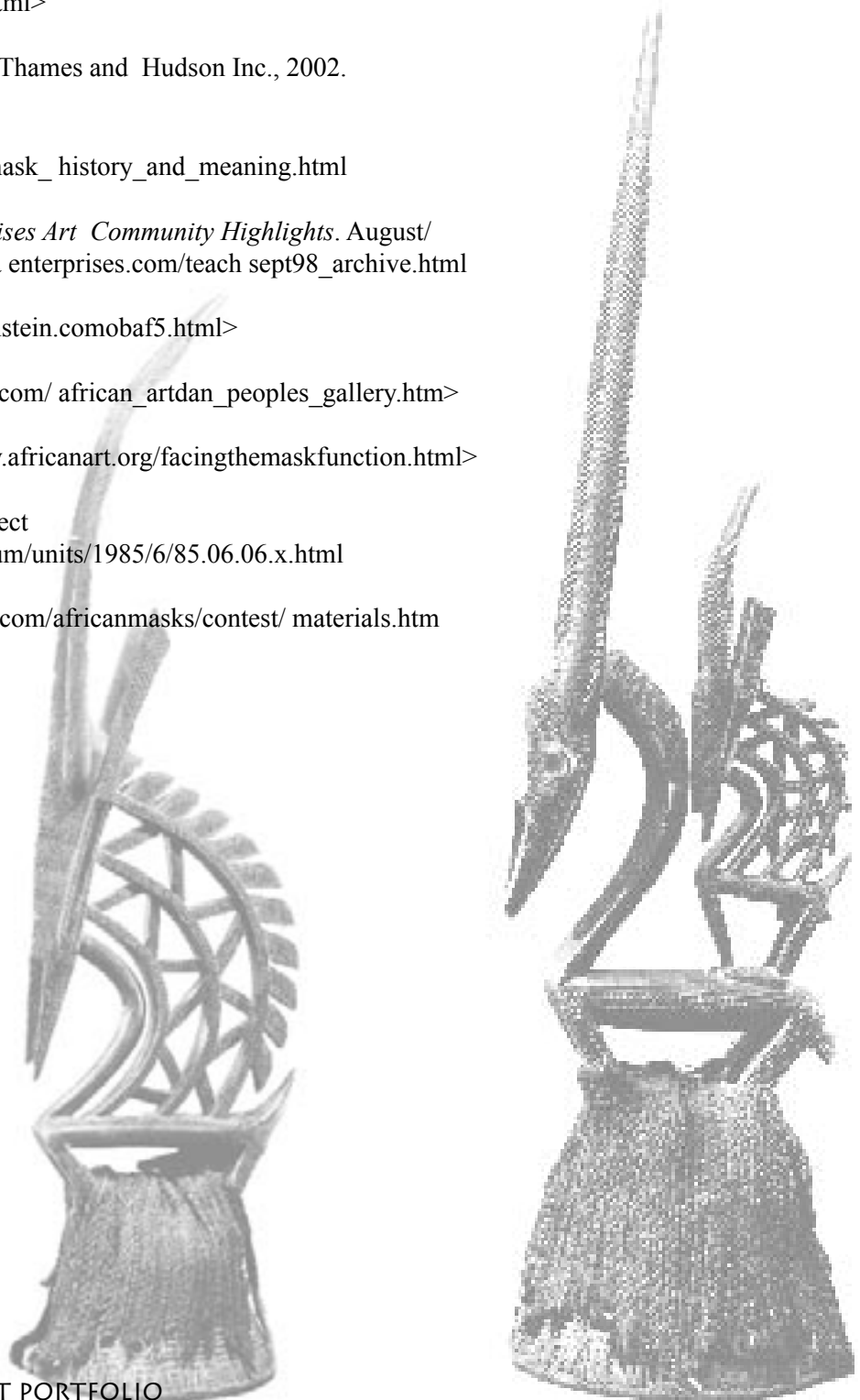
Dan Mask "tankagle" <http://www.bienenstein.comobaf5.html>>

Dan Peoples http://www.ethnographica.com/african_artdan_peoples_gallery.htm>

Facing the Mask - Function <http://www.africanart.org/facingthemaskfunction.html>>

Mask-A West African Ceremonial Object
<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1985/6/85.06.06.x.html>

Mask Material <http://www.artfactory.com/africanmasks/contest/materials.htm>



CHI WARA DANCE CRESTS
FORM MALI ARE MADE
FROMWOOD, RAFFIA, AND
FIBER

PHOTO COURTESY AFRICAN ART PORTFOLIO

THE PRECIOUS TREASURE OF AFRICA

BY KINNAS CLARK

Africa is the second largest continent in the world. The land mass encompasses more than three times the size of the United States. There are a variety of climates as well as a diverse terrain. From the northern borders of Africa, through the Sahara Desert, the ways of life are dictated by the heat and dryness. The eastern coast of Africa is rich and fertile. The landscape includes tropical rain forests, as well as beautiful beaches. The southern region of Africa is teeming with natural resources such as oil, copper, and bronze. The west coast continues in the same rich and fertile producing tradition as the above mentioned three regions of Africa. One of the primary exports and the most treasured metals is gold.

In ancient Egypt, gold was one of the major metals used to portray artwork. The techniques of the goldsmiths alone were astonishing and pleasing to the eye. The Pharaoh or king often was adorned with large amulets, bracelets, statues, staffs, and personal jewelry all made with near perfect precision. One of the most famous kings of ancient Egypt was Tutankahem. The discovery of his tomb almost fully intact provided an opportunity to study the precious artifacts and their craftsmanship. His coffin and burial mask, as well as numerous jewelry pieces were all made of gold, which was considered a sign of beauty, strength, and power.

The Akan of West Africa used gold as a means to express numerous ideals in their culture. The symbol of twin gold crocodiles joined at the stomach depicted the belief of political democracy. This same figure

symbolized unity in two persons as well. The golden art work called the *Akolena* (state swords), symbolize state authority, legitimacy, and power. Gold weights in the Akan were created and, used “like spoken language to honor social and historical events or entities, to express philosophical or religious views, aspirations, and dreams, or simply to ask questions, or express displeasure”

(Nitcki,1982). Gold was also used to display historical and mythical events as well as social values and institutions such as marriage and raising children.

Gold containers of pottery were fashioned to not only beautify, but also edify one’s home. Creations in gold would serve as storage containers even for gold dust itself. Encompassing the usage of gold by the Akan, gold weights served as proverb-like symbols. These symbols allowed the user to express religious beliefs, social relations, and wisdom without voicing a sound. An interesting example would be a pair of golden sandals, (*mpaboa*) which states:

**“Wonni mpaboa ape’bi,
wonni afundora, pe’bi
namne wo wo’bika
wo’seramu,”—**

*If you don’t have sandals,
find some, if you don’t have gun powder, find some, for
there is a score to settle on the battleground.* This phrase usually was a declaration of war. Gold was adorned for fashion displays, as well as to show case power, revealing religious views, and expressions of political views.

The Asante people of West Africa used gold as a way of expressing power in the form of a golden stool that



symbolized unity in their political system. The enormous empire of the Asante included the present day countries of Gyaman, Gonja, Mano Prussi, Akwamu, and Wassa. Gold was a major export to both the north and the south. It was not only used for exporting, but large amounts were used for artwork for the native people. The Asantehene custom was to melt down all of their ornaments and have them re-made annually. Arrayed in portraits as well, an Asante captain was depicted with ornaments of both silver and gold.

In modern African society, gold is still a major export. The continent produces some of the purest as well as the finest gold in the world. From ancient times to the present gold continues to be an expression of one's wealth, social status, religious beliefs, political beliefs.

REFERENCES

Isichei, Elizabeth , *Asante The Gold Coast, The Kingdoms Of Africa*.

Kojo, G.F. Arthur and Rowe, Robert 1998-2001. *Akan Cultural Symbols Project*

Koslow, Phillip, *Ancient Ghana The Land of Gold, The Kingdoms Of Africa*.

Koslow, Phillip, *History of West Africa Since 1800*

McIntyre, L. Lee and D. Roy, Christopher; 1998. *The Art and Life in Africa Project, Art and Life in Africa Online 1998*

Vilbert, J. P. Akan Fetish Gold

A Study of the Akan, (Nitcki, 1982)

<http://www.Egyptian Art.com>

http://www.marshall.edu.akanart/brammoo_abramobe.html, (Leyton, 1979, McLeod, 1978)

<http://www.Nigeria.com>

AMERICAN DOLLAR- AFRICAN CONNECTION

BY SANDRA (MUDIWA) LOVELADY



Objective:

Students will be able to:

- * Define the word symbol,
- * Recognize the symbols used on the U.S. dollar bill,
- * Compare and contrast the meanings of the symbols on the U.S. dollar bill as it relates to ancient Africa,
- * Illustrate that the African origin of humanity extends into the currency of the United States,
- * Recognize symbols located in Washington D.C., which are linked to ancient Africa,

Symbols convey meaning in an instant. Young children recognize the golden arches of a McDonald's restaurant. The American flag represents patriotism in our country. The American bald eagle represents freedom. Symbols are around us everyday. These symbols convey meanings of countless things in our everyday life. They bring vivid images of the object they represent to our minds immediately. Symbols help us connect our feelings to objects or events.

What is money? What do the symbols on the US dollar represent? Today in the United States we are literally surrounded by images or references to money. Entertainers sing about money, people talk about money on the television, we read about money in the newspapers. There are even movies about money. How are the symbols used on the American dollar bill linked to African society?

The founders of the constitution and creators of the monetary system understood the power of African symbolism as it relates to life, liberty, freedom and justice from the spiritual, physical and mental viewpoints. The African philosophy and way of life is all around us.

Anthony Browder states that a Frenchman named Jean Champollion deciphered the Rosetta stone in 1822 and "revealed the mysteries of the Egyptian hieroglyphs which paved the way for the European interpretation of ancient African history. Today, an Afrocentric decipherment of the Great Seal will also shed new light on the establishment of the United States of America and its relationship with African people."

American

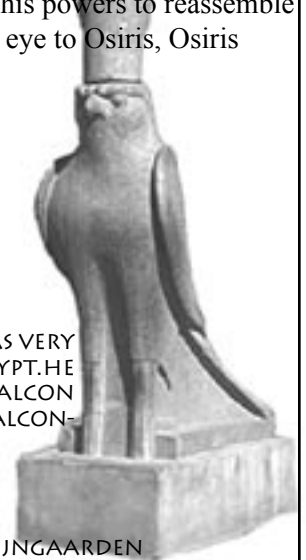
The **American Bald Eagle** is the centerpiece of the Great Seal on the back of the dollar bill.

The bald eagle was chosen June 20, 1782, as the emblem of the United States of America, because of its long life, great strength and majestic looks, and also because it was then believed to exist only on this continent. The eagle was selected as a symbol of freedom.

African Influence

The African symbol for the ancient Egyptian god Horus is the **falcon** and looks strikingly similar to the eagle used on the U.S. seal.

Horus was the falcon-headed solar and sky god from ancient Egypt. He is associated with vitality, health and regeneration. Horus was the son of Osiris and Isis. His right eye was white and represented the sun, his left eye was black and represented the moon. According to Egyptian myth, Set, Horus's brother, killed Osiris. Horus fought Set to avenge this death and lost his left eye in the fight. The god of wisdom and the moon, Thoth, used his powers to reassemble Horus's eye. On presenting Horus's eye to Osiris, Osiris experienced rebirth.



THE EGYPTIAN GOD HORUS WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO ANCIENT EGYPT. HE WAS USUALLY DEPICTED AS A FALCON AS SEEN IN THIS STATUE OR A FALCON-HEADED MAN.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GUIDO VAN WIJNGAARDEN

The All-Seeing Eye

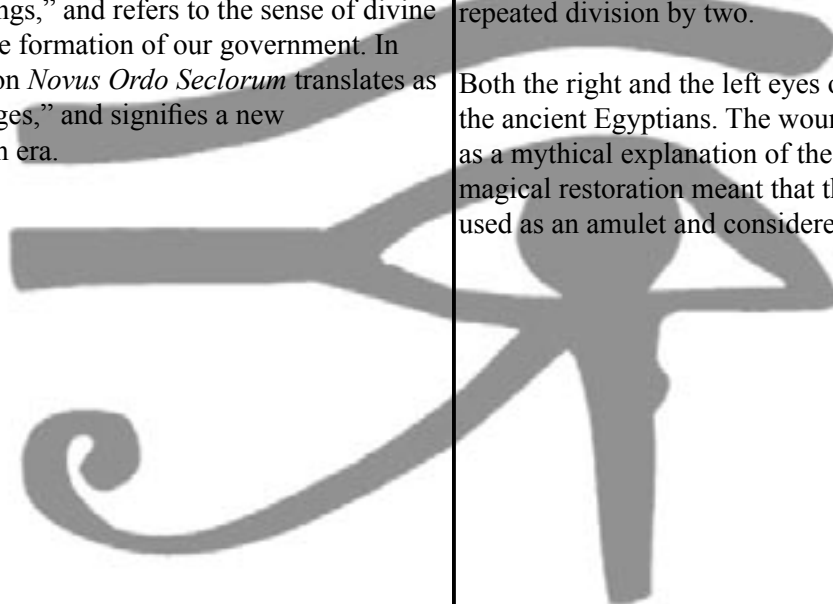
The "All-Seeing Eye" located above the pyramid suggests the importance of divine guidance in favor of the American cause.

The inscription *Annuit coeptis* translates as "He (God) has favored our undertakings," and refers to the sense of divine providence guiding the formation of our government. In addition, the inscription *Novus Ordo Seclorum* translates as "A new order of the ages," and signifies a new American era.

The Eye of Horus

The eye of Horus symbolizes protection and the bringing of wisdom. The eye also symbolizes our ability to see with clarity and truthfulness. The eye of Horus symbol was used in funerary rites and decoration, and after 1200 BC, it was also used by the Egyptians to represent fractions, based on repeated division by two.

Both the right and the left eyes of Horus were depicted by the ancient Egyptians. The wounding of the left eye served as a mythical explanation of the phases of the moon, and its magical restoration meant that the left was usually the one used as an amulet and considered to be the 'Eye of Horus'.



Great Seal of the United States

The Great Seal was first used on the reverse of the one-dollar Federal Reserve note in 1935. The Department of State is the official keeper of the Seal. They believe that the most accurate explanation of a pyramid on the seal is that it symbolizes strength and durability. The unfinished pyramid means that the United States will always grow, improve and build.



American

**American
The Number 13**

The number 13 is represented throughout the dollar bill and other U.S. currency.

- a. Thirteen stars in a constellation above the head of the eagle
- b. Thirteen stripes on the shield
- c. In the right talon of the eagle is an olive branch bearing thirteen leaves representing peace
- d. Thirteen arrows in the left talon of eagle symbolizing war
- e. Thirteen letters in the words *E pluribus unum*
- f. The number thirteen is used thirteen times throughout the seal
- g. Thirteen steps on the pyramid
- h. 13 original colonies
- i. 13 signers of the Declaration of Independence

African

**African Connection
Significance of the number thirteen from an Afrocentric perspective**

Many historians write that the number thirteen represents the thirteen original colonies. However, in his book *From the Browder Files*, Anthony Browder illustrates the significance of the number thirteen. "In masonic, esoteric and metaphysical literature, 13 is the number of transformation. The completion of a cycle is represented by 12, and 12+1 is the transformation of the energy of that completed cycle to a higher, more spiritual level. We see this philosophy expressed in the symbolism of Christ and the 12 disciples, the sun and the 12 signs of the zodiac, King Arthur and the 12 knights of the Round Table, and December 25 and the 12 days of Christmas."

The number 13 deals with astronomy and the 12 positions in the heavens. The time it takes the sun to complete a circuit is called the Great Year (25,827 years). The sun travels to the 12 positions of the zodiac and takes 1/12th of the Great Year to stay in each house (2,152 years). The Egyptian priests studied astronomy and the circuit for two cycles.

Color Green

Growth, nature, prosperity

Color Green

The color Ausar. It is the color of growth in nature and became the symbol of resurrection after death. George G.M. Jones stated in *Stolen Legacy* that the Masons copied the education system of Egypt

Configuration of Dollar

Based on the shape of the Grand Temple of Wast.

Configuration of Dollar

The configuration of the dollar bill takes its shape from the University of IpetIsut (*the most select place*) built by Pharaoh Imhotep III and designed by Amenhotep the son of Hapu. It is also called the temple of Thebes or Luxor.

The Pyramid

Signifies strength and duration. The pyramid is made up of 13 courses that represent the original 13 colonies. The courses combine to form a united structure which represents the concept that "out of diversity comes unity". The flat top of the pyramid suggests that the final courses have not yet been added and that the nation will continue to grow and expand.

THE PYRAMIDS HAVE BECOME ONE OF THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE IMAGES OF EGYPT. AND HAVE BEEN REPRESENTED IN OTHER CULTURES SUCH AS ON THE AMERICAN DOLLAR BILL.

The Pyramid

The top of the pyramid contains the capstone and has a spiritual connotation. It is a symbol of creation and regeneration.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHELLE FOX

References

Bronemannspirs, Karen. *Our Money*. Brookfield, California: Millbrook Press.

Facts about United States Money, (Department of Transportation, 1976, sudocs T 1.40 1976)

Jabade Powell – lecturer, researcher in Taseti African Historical Society.

Lurker, Manfred. *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt: An Illustrated Dictionary*. New York: Thames And Hudson, Inc. 1991.

Maestro, Betsy. *The Story of Money*. New York: Clarion Books, Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Sertima, Ivan, ed. *Blacks in Science: Ancient and Modern*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1983.

Shapiro, Fred R., ed. *Stumpers*, New York: Random House, 1998.

Websites

<http://www.baldeagleinfo.com/eagle/eagle9.html>

www.nhm.org/africa

http://www.samliquidation.com/section_6.htm

<http://www.ustreas.gov/education/faq/currency/portraits.html#q3>

http://www.holisticshop.co.uk/dictionary/eye_horus.html

<http://www.cix.co.uk/~craftings/doll.htm>

<http://www.zulunation.com/USHISTORY.html>

<http://www.greatseal.com>

<http://www.fargonasphere.com/piso/index.html#ComethWithClouds>

<http://www.culturefocus.com/egypt.htm>

<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/triviadollar.htm>

MERGING RELIGION AND CULTURE: A DIALOGUE WITH THE PAST, A SONG FOR THE FUTURE

“Primitive”, “native”, “uncivilized.” These are terms that were used to describe the people of Africa when Western civilization first began breaching the soil of the so-called “dark continent.” This terminology reflected the deeply ascribed ideologies that perpetrated a myth of Western superiority. With this sense of superiority came, no doubt, a desire to *acculturate* and inevitably, through systematic westernization, to control. Thus, it can be argued that the beginning of 15th century acculturation stemmed from a belief that in bringing “civilization” to Africa, greater chance for future survival was being gifted to an otherwise unknowing people. With the advent of colonization, the ideas espoused in early acculturation practices often became laws that led to civil discontent and a loss of traditional values and practices.

Now too, we must recognize that part of the acculturation process involved the infusion of Western religion. The vast influx of Christianity and Islam into Africa has greatly altered the face of community and tradition in many African countries. So we must now examine how a post-colonial Africa, already largely Christian and Muslim, can begin to re-evaluate and repair the mistakes of the past in an attempt to bridge a large gap between perceivable Western ideologies and the rich traditions of Africa’s diverse religions. While the same principles can be applied to Muslim areas of Africa, the following will focus on Christianity and the meritable infusion of the traditional and the modern.

We need to begin this process by understanding that, in conversion to Christianity, many Africans were compelled to surrender the culture that was so deeply entrenched in every facet of their traditional religions.

First, we must begin to transform the acculturation of previous centuries into a newer understanding of inculturation. The difference lies primarily in the sensibility that cultures can and do coexist. We are each born into a culture that is intrinsically part of who we are,

and we cannot rightly suggest that anyone must lay down his or her culture to pick up the mantle of God. Early Christians mistakenly adhered to the theory that religion was culture, when in fact the solidity of a faith often becomes more binding in regards to one’s own communal understanding of his present and his past. “Our imagery and metaphors are meaningful only in the context of what we

experience constantly. Our concepts of time, space, and religions are all tinted by our ecological glasses” (Sarpong 1). Inculturation rests upon the supposition that when two cultures meet, both gain from the encounter.

Family and Community

One of pillars of the Christian faith is the idea of a connectedness to all mankind through the Creator in whom “there is neither Greek nor Jew.” Christianity espouses the idea that we are family and must provide for each other. In the apostle Paul’s writing’s to Timothy, he referred to Timothy as his son. They were not blood related, but united by a commonality and bond of faith and understanding.

However, the model of African traditional religions is far removed. Entire communities participate in rearing a child, and in many African languages, there isn’t even a name for aunt or uncle. They are simply mother and father. Family, its value to society, and its



extended nature are tenets of Christianity that we could strengthen by observing traditional ideals of African religion and moving away from our concentric measuring sticks of value that degrade the family, both natural and spiritual.

The social nature within African traditional religions could also teach Christianity great lessons about the



FAMILIES ARE THE PILLARS OF THE
CHRISTIAN FAITH.
[HTTP://WWW.MESSAGEDOCTRINE.NET/](http://www.messagedoctrine.net/)

participation and involvement of everyone. Traditional religion was not confined to a building, one day a week, and intensely personal; it was a way of life, a system of beliefs that permeated all social spheres and was societal in nature.

Rites of Reconciliation

Perhaps one of the most profound facets of traditional African society can be seen in what is often termed rites of reconciliation. Reconciliation is also central to worship in Christianity and operates on the principle that reconciliation is communal because division affects an entire community, not just the people involved in the dispute. Believers are admonished to seek out one with whom there exists division *before* coming before God in worship.

Among the Zulus, the rite of reconciliation is called “*Ukuthelana amanzi*,” which translates, “to wash each other’s hands.” When an argument occurs, a mediator will invite the parties to cool the heat of anger and hate. Sitting opposite one another, they are given a mixture of cool water, ash, and traditional medicine to wash

their hands. Then, each would be given an opportunity to speak and the mediator would lead them toward forgiveness. Then each would take a sip of the ash-water and spit it over his left shoulder and they would together drink out of a common cup.

A similar ceremony is practiced among the Tsonga. In this ceremony, an herb called *mudahomu* is poured into a shell with water and each of the offenders takes a sip and spits it out. The first recites these words: “This is our imprecation. We have pronounced it because our hearts were sore. Today it must come to an end. It is right that we make peace.”

The second, upon spitting out his water replies: “I was angry but let us make peace and eat from the same spoon and drink out of the same pot and be friends again. They then break the shell and drink beer out of the same cup. (Tlhagale 5)

These cultural observances mimic Biblical principals of forgiveness and the cooling of anger and are not contrary to Christianity, but rather in accordance with it.

The preceding examples are only a few of the ways that Christianity ignored the fluidity of a deeply connected society that had more to offer Western understanding than anyone may ever truly understand.

References:

- Ejizu, Christopher I. “Conversion in African Traditional Religions”
<http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/community.htm>,
Tlhagale, Buti. “Bringing the African Culture Into the Church.”
<http://www.afrikaworld.net/afreltlhagale.htm>,
Sarpong, Peter. “Can Christianity Dialogue with Traditional African Religion?”
<http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/sarpong.html>,
Msiska, Stephen Kauta. *Golden Buttons: Christianity and traditional religion among the Tumbuka*. Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 1997.

PROVERBS- AN AKAN TRADITION

BY LITA HALCHAK

OBJECTIVES:

1.)To build background knowledge of the oral traditional language of the Akan people of Ghana through proverbs; 2.)to discuss the meanings of proverbs; 3.) to collect proverbs from family and friends; 4.)to illustrate proverbs and to create a linguist staff.

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS:

1. The student understands the power of language;
2. The student uses appropriate words to shape reactions, perceptions, and beliefs (figurative language);
3. The student understands similes, metaphors, and alliteration. LAD2.2.1;
4. The student listens attentively to the speaker and responds to the speaker by asking questions, making contributions, summarizing, and reflecting on ideas. LAC1.2.3., LAC1.2.4.& LAC1.2.5;
5. The student creates and communicates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas using knowledge of structures and functions of visual arts. VAB.1.2.1., VAB.1.2.2;

All African societies relied on oral means to preserve their knowledge of the past. Each generation added or subtracted where it saw the need. Jan Vansina defines oral tradition as “verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation.”

Traditional oral language in Africa was and is used for teaching children, preserving family identity, and to explain an individual’s place in the family and community as a whole. People achieved cultural consciousness through oral traditions by learning proverbs.

In traditional oral societies, children saw their relatives face to face and interacted with them daily. A person’s facial expressions, body movement, noise, and gestures added to the spoken word and made a lasting impression on children. They remembered the lesson as well as the speaker.

To be an effective communicator, one must add color to the spoken word. Using similes and metaphors such as proverbs brings a clear message that people can connect to.

The Akan word *kasakoa* means “to twist the language.”

Many proverbs are twisted so people will take some time to think about the lesson or lessons they are intended to teach. Symbols can be found in most proverbs that are short but teach a short message. For instance, “One finger does not catch a fly.” This means that you need more than one and people must work together to get things done. Trees, animals, people, and objects all serve as symbols in proverbs to teach moral and ethical issues. These issues are taken to heart and mind because the words help people decide between right and wrong, good and evil, and justice and injustice. Other proverbs deal with spiritual and religious meanings and dictate what a person can or cannot do in the community. Daily activity centers around proverbs and people seem to find one to fit every occasion and situation, but proverbs must be used for a reason or they will not be effective. Ancestors spoke in proverbs and because of this, it is customary to begin a proverb with, “The ancestors say,” or “The elders say,” to give authority to the words.

OKYEAME (THE LINGUIST):

In the Akan culture in Ghana, a linguist specialized in a variety of speech forms that did not involve many words. These non-royal priests or advisors to the chief would carry, and still do today, tall staffs made of wood covered with gold-leaf decorated with motifs. The bearer of the staff carried the mark of authority wherever he went and acted on the chief’s behalf.

During colonial rule, African chiefs were given staffs by Europeans to control their people. After a while, the chiefs handed the staffs over to the *okyeame* who acted as his translator.

The *okyeame* would translate the chief’s words into the language the people could understand or accept. He spoke eloquently and with confidence as he carried the staff and revealed the chief’s message as he showed the symbol on the staff to depict the proverb he wanted to convey to an individual or to the community.

THE LINGUIST STAFF:

The linguist staff, *okyeame poma*, is the official symbol of the linguist, the one in which he carries out his spiritual

and ritual functions by order of the chief. The typical staff is made of wood and carved in three pieces: two for the staff and one for the finial or ornament.

The staff is usually decorated with geometric shapes, a wisdom knot, and a gilded motif or finial. These motifs may be simple or complex and symbolize the many Akan proverbs that are taught.

PROVERBS:

- * One person depends on another.
- * News is like a bird, it flies quickly.
- * A person should not in his or her need deceive others.
- * Money has wings.
- * When a leopard is desperate it eats weeds.
- * A royal's name is never lost.
- * Every animal eats where it finds peace.
- * One man can not build a town.
- * The one who keeps asking doesn't lose the way.
- * The early bird catches the worm.
- * To the hunter the animal that gets away is always a big one.
- * What I hear, I keep.
- * A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing.
- * All that glitters is not gold.
- * No one says good morning before the rooster.
- * No one measures the elephant's belly before he gathers leaves for it to eat.
- * The cat may have nothing else, but it certainly has agility and swiftness.
- * Because lizard is poor it catches spiders.
- * The road has ears.
- * No one pays for someone's dancing; the dancing pays for itself.
- * The feet go the way of the head.
- * What a man likes he does.
- * A well known person does not cause a disturbance.
- * Friendship spreads the news.

Oba nyansafo The wiseperson
Wobu no be is spoken to
Na wanka in proverbs,
No asem not in plain talk

ACTIVITY:

Students choose proverbs to illustrate or create a linguist staff using various materials such as sticks, branches, paper towel tubes, and clay. Use cardboard or thick poster board for illustrating proverb. After coloring with metallic crayons, cut out and have students tell what they mean.

WRITING:

Students explain why they think we still use proverbs today.

REFERENCES:

- Alemna, Anaba A. *Oral Literature in African Libraries: Implications for Ghana*. Africa Studies Program, Indiana University. Bloomington, Indiana, 1993.
- Andzrejewski, B. W. "Reflections on the Native and Social Function of Somali Proverbs", *African Language Review*, 1968: 74-8.
- Boadi, L. A. *The Languages of the Proverb, African Folklore*. New York: R. M. Dorson, 1972, pp. 183-191.
- Gyekye, K. *Akan Language and the Materialist Thesis, Studies in Language*, Vol. 1 (2), 1977, pp. 237-244.
- Cole, Herbert M. and Doran H Ross. *The Arts of Ghana*. Museum of Cultural History: University of California, Los Angeles, 1177.
- Christaller, J. G. *Three thousand six hundred Ghanaian Proverbs (From the Asante and Fante language)*. New York: Mellen, 1990.
- Mbiti, John S. *Introduction to African Religion. 2nd Ed.* Oxford, England: Heinemann, 1999, pp. 10-59.
- Vansina, J. *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*. Chicago: Aldine, 1980.
- Yankah, Kwesi. *Papers in Ghanaian Linguistics. No.5*. Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 1985.
- Opoku, Kofi A. *Hearing and Keeping- Akan Proverbs*. Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa, 1997.

WEBSITES:

- <http://www.africaonline.com>
- <http://socialstudies.com>
- <http://www.Ghana.com>
- <http://www.africanews.org>

THE TRUE CIRCLE OF LIFE

AFRICAN RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS OF LIFE

BY NANNETTE RANSOM

Introduction

In Africa, elders are considered the vision and wisdom keepers while children ensure the survival of the community. Throughout the continent of Africa life is celebrated through various events, festivals, and rituals. Many people look forward to these to pledge loyalty to their ancestors, for renewal and regeneration.

Pre Birth Preparations

For the *Dagara* people of Burkina Faso in West Africa, childbirth is looked at as a contract between this world and the world of the ancestors or other dimensions. It is important for a couple to go on a healing journey before they attempt to bring a child into the world. Rituals of personal healing may include taking a journey to birth places and to the place where placentas are buried. Such journeys serve as a way to connect with the past and to re-experience what it is like to be a child.

A fertility ritual of giving away something of value follows the healing journey. The woman who wants to have a child gives something of value, such as a cloth or a basket to another woman with a toddler. The man gives away seeds for planting crops or some cereal grains to an old woman or old man. Then a communal giveaway is done in the form of a feast. The couple cooks a large meal and invites all the children from the village to dine with their potential sibling.

Clearing the womb of possible toxic energy

Before a woman conceives, she has to clear herself from whatever weakness she may feel in her femininity and amend any thoughts that may endanger the viability of the womb. Ritual "sweeping" is done to keep her from thinking or feeling negative. With the feathers of a baby chicken and some leaves from the *gnarur* tree, her body is swept from top to bottom, and a prayer is spoken to protect her from negative energy. It is only upon completion of this ritual, that the calling of the child to come takes place.

Fertility Rituals

Traditional indigenous cultures consider conception a sacred act and treat it as such. Many cultures believe

children are gifts and blessings from God. Therefore, their entry into this world must be welcomed in a sacred way. Fertility rituals are performed to invoke the divine mysteries, to shower the couple's life with divine energy, and to bring about a constant sacred energy to ensure the continuation of life.

Some rituals start at the beginning of wedding rituals where a prayer is performed asking the divine mysteries to bless the couple with its fertile energy. At a later time, when a couple starts to hear the call to parenthood, oral rituals are done to invoke the spirit of fertility. Fertility rituals usually take place in caves or at riverbanks. For one such ritual, a shrine to the earth and to the spirit of fertility is erected at the entrance of the cave, decorated with all kinds of child figurines, seeds, eggs, cloths, and fruits. An earthen bed is dug inside the cave, and the elders and midwives then explain the significance of the ritual and the meaning of each symbol on the shrine.

The earth and the cave are symbolic of the womb. A big clay pot of water represents life. The eggs, seeds, and figurines were symbolic of new beginnings and new life. The elders also explain why everything on the shrine is arranged in groups of three, four, or seven: three is the masculine number, four is the feminine, and the seven is the combination of the two, which produces balance and invokes fertility. Ash is sprinkled all around the ritual space to protect it.

After a long invocation, the woman is brushed with some of the eggs, then washed and carried into the cave where she will spend the night in a fetal position. Other women spend the night with her, invoking songs and gently massaging her. (Some, 48-50)

Pregnancy

There is great joy and exuberance when a wife finds out that she is expecting a child. The community welcomes this event with pride, pleasure and satisfaction. An expectant child is one of the greatest blessings of life. If it is the mother's first child, then it assures both families that she is fertile and able to bear children. Once this is known, her marriage is largely secure and her in-laws will treat her with more respect.

Once the word is out, steps are taken immediately to ensure the safety of the baby and the mother during and after the pregnancy. In some parts of Africa people do not allow the expectant mother to do certain types of work like cutting firewood, using knives, drawing water, and so forth. (Mbuti, 87) In other cultures, the expectant mother is forbidden to eat some foods, such as meat killed with poisoned arrows, salt and certain fats.

Many cultures perform rituals and make offerings to thank God for the expectant child, and to pray for the safety of the child and mother. When a Twa (Rwanda) woman discovers that she is expecting a child, she offers a portion of food to God and thanks him for the baby. Oromo women (of Ethiopia) perform a “birth ritual” by singing and beating the skin from a fertile cow.

Hearing Rituals

As the mother-to-be and baby journey together through pregnancy, there comes a time when the elders do a life purpose check with the baby, through what is called a “hearing ritual.” This takes place a few months into the pregnancy. Many people of the community take part in this ritual: the elders, the women, the husband’s mother, her husband’s sister, her own mother and brother, drummers, five gatekeepers, representing the four directions, with the fifth standing in the middle. This ritual begins at dawn and includes singing, praying, and invoking the ancestors and the spirits.

The elders ask the child what it is coming here for, what its purpose is, and why it has come at this particular place and time. They ask what needs to be done to have a space that is conducive to that purpose. They listen very carefully, then set up the space accordingly, and a name is found. (Some, 55). For the Dagara society, knowing a person’s name is to have an access code to that person’s world. A *divination* is always done to make sure that an agreeable name is chosen for the baby, for a name can be a blessing or a curse.

As the ritual ends, the woman regains her body and voice and often feels exhausted from the trance-like state.

Miscarriages

The loss of a baby is devastating, regardless of the culture. It is compared to lightning striking a tree at its core. Losing a child throws a couple into turmoil. It drains them and the community physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

While a woman is miscarrying, she is surrounded by other women of the village who not only support her, but witness and go through the experience with her. This intense grieving ritual allows the mother to go through her pain of loss. It lasts up to seventy-two hours. The whole village joins her in mourning her loss. (Some, 78)



Birth

A mid-wife is always assigned to a mother-to-be. It is her job to supervise each step of the pregnancy. She must be attuned to the woman’s energy. It is as if she becomes pregnant along with the mother. Prayer rituals are performed a few days before the anticipated birth to pray for blessings of the birth process.

Placenta Rituals

In some societies, after the baby is born, the placenta is thrown into a running stream, buried nearby, or dried and kept for later rituals. The disposal of the placenta and umbilical cord is done ceremoniously. In Uganda, it is dried up and kept for a long time with great care. Some people identify their origin by the place where their placenta is buried. A child’s birth, which is celebrated by the whole community, marks the beginning of a lifetime of communal celebrations including puberty, marriage and death. An adult person’s death is celebrated because people believe they continue to impact their societies positively. Thus the circle of life is complete.

REFERENCE:

Some, Sobunfu. *Welcoming Sprit Home: Ancient African Teachings to Celebrate Children and Commnity*, 1999.
Mbuti

REPRESENTATIVE RULE AND CONSENSUS IN PRECOLONIAL AFRICA

BY JOAN STEVENS

Introduction

We begin each new school year with the challenge to create a classroom community that, among other things, fosters respect, encourages learning, stimulates curiosity and creativity, and nurtures the social and individual growth of our students. Central to any community is a system for handling the inevitable conflicts that arise among its members. I also think it's important to have a way for my class to make certain kinds of group decisions. Connecting the methods we use in school to the broader world will give the students an opportunity to apply some of what they have learned and anchor that learning in daily living.

Teaching about representative rule and consensus, as practiced by some traditional African peoples, and about dictatorship and majority rule that we are more familiar with, will help students recognize when each is being practiced in our classroom.

Representative Rule and Consensus in Precolonial Africa

Political organization of traditional African people falls into two general categories: centralized and decentralized. Rulers with centralized authority gained power by inheritance. A few leaders ruled large, economically diverse groups that were highly socially stratified. Claimants to leadership however often engaged in serious battles leaving the state fragmented. (Martin 94)

Peoples with decentralized authority were sophisticated societies, nonetheless, and were at least as stable as the centralized ones. Authority lay with the heads of lineages who worked toward consensus. (Martin 94)

Southern Africa

First we will look at some generalizations about traditional leadership structure in neighboring peoples of two different linguistic groups in southern Africa: the Nguni (Zulu, Swazi, Xhosa, Thembu, Mfengu, Mpondo, and Mpondomise) and the Sotho (Tswana, Pedi, Lobedu, Basotho).

The traditional kingdoms of southern Africa had clear and elite lines of authority. Some had more centralized

power and others were more segmented. An age class system with elder men in positions of highest authority defined power, privileges, rights, duties with rules of succession for male leaders in some groups defined along matrilineal lines. A leader's political power was kept in check by an inner council consisting of trusted people, close relatives and important community members. This inner council discussed issues, represented the community, and could privately reprimand the leader if needed.

The traditional leader worked with his inner council, the council of elders and the village assembly. The village assembly allowed all adolescent males in the community to discuss political, social and economic issues. "The role of traditional leaders in this process of community-based decision-making was to reflect and discuss the opinions expressed in the village assembly and ultimately to suggest and publicly approve a decision of consensus, considering the different opinions and interests of involved persons. Thus, in precolonial societies of Southern Africa the rule of consensus and unanimity have been the central principles of political decision making." (Dusing 78)

West Africa

The traditional **Akan** groups (including Ashanti, Denkyiras, Akims, Akuapims, Fantes, Kwahus, Wassas, Brongs, Nzimas and others) lived in West Africa in adjoining regions of present day Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. The basic political unit was linear consisting of all descendants of one ancestress. A town would have a number of lineages each lead by an elder elected by consensus among males in the lineage based on consideration of his wisdom and rhetorical abilities.

The Akan town was ruled by a council of lineage leaders with a "chief" or *ohene* overseeing that council. The position of "chief" was partially hereditary, partially elected. The general populace was represented by a "chief of young men." This position was unique and unofficial in that it was not related to his lineage and he was not part of the chief's council. This system of

representation provided two avenues for effecting town policies: through the lineage leader and through the leader of the populace.

The Akan ruling bodies made decisions by consensus. “Deliberation in council was informed by two methodological aims: first, to elicit differences of opinion and, second, to iron them out in search of consensus. In pursuit of the first, the freest airing of opinions in council was encouraged. One relevant Akan saying is that: “even a fool is entitled to be heard” (Wiredu 174). The Akan were aware of the nature of differences among people but believed they could be reconciled. “This view of human relations is encapsulated in a remarkable construction of fine art: Two heads of crocodiles are locked up in conflict over food, but they have one stomach. The lesson is that divergent interests arising out of individualized thought and feeling will lead to conflict in society; but ultimately all individuals share a common interest, and this constitutes the natural basis for the possibility of conflict resolution” (Wiredu 172).

Even though majority agreement is easier to achieve than consensus, the Akan deliberately worked for consensus. Current forms of democracy are generally systems based on majority principle. The party wins the majority of seats of the greatest proportion of votes, if the system in force is of proportional representation, invested with governmental power. Parties under this scheme of politics are organizations of people similar tendencies and aspirations with the sole aim of gaining power for the implementation of their policies (Wiredu 187).

The traditional **Dogon** people lived in present day southern Mali in three different geological areas: highlands, a rocky belt and the Seno plain. The first structure built in a traditional Dogon town was a *togu na* (“house of words”), placed in the position of

a head, if the town were to be seen as a person. A *togu na* served several functions including administering justice, fixing the agricultural calendar, emergency interventions (famine, epidemics, natural disasters), a place for meeting, teaching, rest and conversation and, most significantly for our discussion, decision making (Spini 14).

Common elements of the *togu na* in all geological areas include vertical pillars, with carvings of cultural and mythical significance, supporting a roof covered with alternating layers of millet stalks. The height of the roof was low making it impossible to stand upright inside the structure. This structural feature played a significant role in the use of the *togu na*. Significant to our discussion, if a man in the *togu na* gets up in anger he will bump his head, sit down and no longer feel like quarreling.

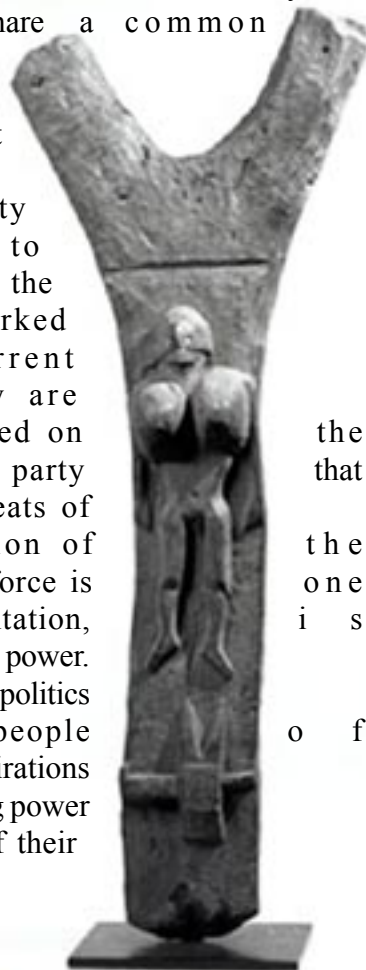
Before entering the *togu na* a man must leave outside his *domolo*, a hook-shaped weapon, symbolic of his virility and therefore otherwise inseparable from the man. This is to honor the fact that fighting and quarrels must be left outside and that only words of peace, wisdom, and justice may be uttered in the *togu na*. (Spini 212, 213)

The *togu na* is constructed with materials available in the geological region in which it was built. The pillars are often made of stones in a truncated cone shape, or in some areas of kile, a hard wood unlikely to be attacked by termites. (Spini 15, 16) Much of the rich oral tradition of the Dogon is represented in the structure and decoration of the *togu na*. The number of pillars is significant because numbers hold meaning to the Dogon and are often represented in the carvings on the pillars along with many other symbols from Dogon lore.

Classroom Activities (Created for first grade)

Overall plan: Over the course of the year learn about various aspects of community in specific precolonial African traditions. Adapt them to our classroom community.

***Griots:** One of the “classroom helpers” will be a griot. First, the class, and eventually the individual student, will summarize events that took place in the classroom or school. The griot will memorize the summary and recite it for the class and perhaps other classes. We can incorporate simple rhyming and rhythm.



the
that
the
one
is
of

***Linguist:** One of the “classroom helpers” will be a linguist. The class will learn some Akan proverbs and their meanings, explore ways to represent them visually; then create a classroom supply of appropriate linguist staffs. The linguist’s job will be to choose the appropriate staff for the message, and then deliver oral messages to the class from the teacher, principal or other adult.

The staff could be made from wrapping paper tubes or paper towel tubes taped together. The top portion will be the representation of the proverb drawn on poster board, cut out with a tab extension at the bottom. A horizontal base can be made from poster board or cardboard and be attached to the staff with tape. The staff can be spray painted gold by the teacher or tempera painted by students.



Decisions: Give the students numerous opportunities to make group decisions by majority vote, one person deciding for the whole group, and by consensus. After experiencing each method, discuss the processes and outcome. Teach about the ethnic groups of precolonial Africa and how they used consensus and why and how it was a part of their way of thinking about life. Teach how we vote in the United States and how in some governments one person decides for everybody. This will be an ongoing process and class discussion throughout the year. Pull in examples from the news (that are appropriate for children this age to discuss) of how decisions are made.

Togu na: After teaching about the Dogon build a *togu na* in the classroom and think of important stories or classroom lore to be represented on the pillars. Think of a number that is significant to the class and think of ways to represent that number on our *togu na*. Students can work in cooperative groups to create pillars or else pillars can be very narrow so that each child can make his/her own. Strips of cardboard can serve as the basic pillars. Simple images representing the classroom lore and the important number can be drawn and then cut from other cardboard and glued onto a pillar to give the carved effect. More cardboard can form the “wooden” part of the roof.

Possible uses for togu na: 1.) Rules about how to behave and conduct oneself inside the *togu na* must be agreed

and attitude about the *togu na*; 3.) Make sure no one is absent for the process; 4.) Rules need to be posted; 5.) The class could make up a song incorporating the rules and the griot could sing it. When a small group or pair of students have to make a decision they can use the *togu na*. It can also serve as a place for sustained silent reading or partner reading.

References

Akyeampong, Emmanuel. “Akan Region, History.” *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*, Vol. 1. John Middleton, ed. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1997.

Cornell, Christina. *The Dogon of West Africa*. PowerKids Press, 1996.

Dusing, Sandra. *Traditional Leadership and Democratization in Southern Africa: A Comparative Study of Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002

Hawthorne, Peter. “A System of Government As Old as the Desert Sands: Talking it up in Botswana” in *Time Europe*, 10 July 2000. www.time.com/time/europe/magazine

Martin, Phyllis M. and Patrick O’Meara, ed. *Africa*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University. Press, 1995.

Middleton, John. “Akan” in *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*, Vol.1. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1997.

Middleton, John. “Dogon” in *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*, Vol. 1. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1997.

Murray, Jocelyn, (ed). *Cultural Atlas of Africa*. Facts on File 1993.

Somolekae, Gloria. *Democracy, Civil Society and Governance in Africa: The Case of Botswana*, in *DPMF Workshop and Conference Proceedings*. www.dpmf.org/democracy

Togu Na: The African Dogon “House of Men, House of Words”. New York: Rizzoli, 1976.

Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African*

STAPLE FOODS

BY CAMILLE KING THOMPSON

Background Information

Food is an important aspect of cultures around the world. The varieties and ways of enjoying food are limitless, but the major foods of a society or group of people are its staple foods. These foods are usually widely grown in a region and are used regularly as part of the everyday diet of a community. Crops become staples when the climate, soil, and other conditions are conducive to the production of that crop. That crop then becomes economically feasible to produce and cheap enough for all in the region to afford. These foods then become ingrained in the culture of a particular ethnic group.

The five main staple crops of the world today are:

Rice - Asia

Corn – North America

Wheat – Asia (The Middle East)

Potatoes – South America

Soybeans – Asia

These crops sustain the lives of millions of people in all regions of the world and each culture has its own unique way of using these foods.

The Sahel region of Africa is the southern fringe of the Sahara Desert. It extends from the eastern African coast to areas of western Africa above the savanna region. This region is credited with the domestication of coffee, sorghum, and watermelon, but sorghum and millet are the indigenous staple food crops grown on a larger scale than any other.

Since the region of the Sahel is on the edge of the desert with limited rainfall the conditions for growing millet are ideal because it is a drought resistant grain. Pearl millet is the variety that is grown in this region because it is the most drought resistant. Pearl millet has been grown in Africa since prehistoric times and it is generally accepted that pearl millet originated in Africa and that it was introduced into India from there. Today pearl millet is grown on 26 million hectares worldwide. A hectare is equal to 100 acres. Millet grain is the basic staple for

farm households in the poorest countries and amongst the poorest people.

Sixty percent of Africa is farmland and three fourths of farmers are involved in subsistence farming. Subsistence farming is when you are only able to grow enough for yourself and your family. Women are responsible for 80% of the agricultural work. They work from 16–18 hours per day and do most of the labor by hand using machetes and hoes. They farm in communal



A FARMER FROM THE SAHEL REGION INSPECTS A
NEW MILLET CROP
COURTESY OF WWW.CGNET.COM

fields to produce their staple crops and store them in communal granaries.

In the Sahel region, millet is consumed in the form of fermented and non-fermented breads, porridges, boiled and steamed like rice, and in alcoholic beverages. The evening meal almost always includes a stiff white porridge called “to,” which is made from millet flour and eaten with a sauce of vegetables or meat. It is also an important ingredient in couscous. In most homes it is ground daily for use in bread making. The straw is valued as a building material, fuel, and livestock feed.

Millet is also grown in Australia, Europe, and the United States, but the usage is very different. In those areas it is mostly grown for use as cattle and bird feed.

In the U.S. millet can be purchased in health food stores and cooked in the traditional African way that is similar to cooking rice. Millet flour is also available as is bread and processed cereals made from millet.

Recipes:

“To” (rhymes with dough)

1 lb millet flour
Water

Bring 2 quarts of water to a boil in a large pot over high heat. Slowly add about a quarter of the flour to the water, stirring quickly and constantly so as not to allow any lumps to form. Allow to cook for 5 minutes stirring constantly. Reduce heat. Remove about a quarter of the flour mixture and set aside in a clean bowl. Add the remaining flour bit by bit about a cup at a time. Stir vigorously each time flour is added. If the mixture becomes too thick to stir, add some of the flour and water mixture that was set aside. The results should be a thick, smooth paste that is too thick to stir.

Cover and cook for an additional ten minutes over very low heat. Remove from heat and serve warm with a sauce or stew.

Boiled Millet

1 cup millet (dehulled)
2 cups water
Salt to taste

Bring water to a boil. Add millet. Boil or steam until tender (20-40 min).

Suggested Lesson Plan:

Objectives:

1. Students will begin to understand the role of agriculture in all societies;
2. Students will understand the concept of staple foods;
3. Students will compare and contrast the usage of grains in African cultures to usage in the U.S.

Suggested Procedure:

1. Introduce the concept of staple foods and list examples of staple foods in the U.S.
2. Discuss the idea that some areas have certain staple foods and the reasons that foods become staples for particular regions of the world.
3. Discuss what millet is and how it is used in Africa. Show an example of millet grain and foods made from millet available in the U.S. Share the recipes that are used in African cultures that use millet.
4. Divide students into groups. Each group should have two tasks; One task is to chart the five major staple foods in the world and their continent of origin. These charts could be for display. The second task would be to compare and contrast the usage of millet in the Sahel region of Africa with the usage in the U.S and the methods of production in each area.

REFERENCES:

Falola, Toyin, Culture and Customs of Nigeria. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000, 97-99.

Sloneker, Lynn L. “Mali” Faces, Feb 1997, 19-28.

Wenzel, Rod H. ed., Project Food, Land, and People. Presidio of San Francisco, 2000, Florida Ag in the Classroom Curriculum, 225-240.

Farmer’s World Network Briefing. Catriona, Lennox, “Holding Up Half the Sky” 2000:
<http://www.fwn.org.uk>

History Link 101, “African Farming Development,” 1997, <http://www.historylink101.com>

Millet, <http://www.wikipedia.org>

Sorghum and Pearl Millet Recipes, 2000
<http://www.icrisat.org>.

The Congo Cookbook