



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1998 Volume II: Cultures and Their Myths

African Myths and What They Teach

Curriculum Unit 98.02.03
by Roberta Mazzucco

The unit entitled "African Myths and What They Teach" is written specifically for students in grade three and can be extended down to grade two or up to grades four and five. It could be easily connected to a social studies unit on Africa that would be a part of the third grade curriculum on Communities.

Ultimately I hope that this unit will introduce my students to some new and exciting literature. African mythology is a logical area for study in my classroom since at least half of my classroom is African American and others in the class share partial ties to that heritage. While this is not the only justification for selecting this material, I hope that it will instill interest and connection with many of my students.

At first I had hoped that many of the stories would be available in children's books; however, most are in collections and probably the teacher will have to duplicate the myths and/or rewrite some to suit his/her needs. I assume that in using the unit most teachers will be introducing and reading the stories for the children.

The bibliography lists a number of sources for myths and related stories, but again individual teachers will need to peruse what is available and choose what is right for their students. I have limited my mention of individual myths to three or four of each type which I felt were unique and most representative of what is in the literature. Most of the stories are very short and my unit in no way precludes the reading of more myths. As a matter of fact, as one reads more of the stories it is hard not to want to add just one more to the reading list.

The Unit will follow the outline given below. There is a lot of room for individual teachers to expand or contract the size and scope of the unit, depending on the level of the class and the amount of time available.

Background

Where is Africa?

What are the geographical conditions like in Africa?

Myths

What is a myth?

How do folk tales, and fables relate to mythology?

Some main types of myths

Creation and Death

Trickster Myths

Humans and Animals

Lesson Plans: What are some integrated activities for this unit?

Bibliography

Background

During the background phase of the unit the objective is for students to understand where Africa is and how its geographical characteristics affect the people and the stories that were told. The most difficult thing for younger students to understand is that Africa is not one big country but is in fact one of the seven continents. Africa is not one culture or people, but a myriad of peoples and tribes that now live mostly in the modern world with isolated pockets of people living the old ways of generations long ago, still following the old traditions and keeping alive the old beliefs and myths.

In fact Africa is one of the largest land masses on the earth. It covers more than thirty million square kilometers, or almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total land on the earth.¹ The terrain is a combination of desert and dry land. Modern Africa has many large cities and metropolitan areas however, years ago the land was inhabited by many different tribes and peoples with different beliefs and customs. These different cultures produced myths that reflected those beliefs. The myths which we encounter today are rooted in a belief system and lifestyle that many African people no longer follow. Yes, there are groups of tribes that still live in the primitive ways, but the majority of African countries are modernized.

In the matter of religion most of Africa now embraces either Islam(North and West Africa, Sudan and Somalia) or Christianity(Central and Southern Africa).² For Some Africans this change was consensual while in others it was forced. Very few of the countries of Africa retain their devotion to the traditional religion or culture of their ancestors.

The African people and culture have survived in very difficult geographical conditions. A lot of the land is dry desert and wilderness. Most of the inhabitants were nomadic tribes who wandered this hostile territory. The Sahara is the largest of the continent's deserts. It covers over sixteen million square kilometers. Other deserts include the Kalahari, Namib, Tarkana and Somali. The central part of Africa has tropical forests. It is here that the myriad of exotic animals exists on the continent. From hippos to leopards, chimps and the numerous varieties of birds, reptiles, and fish, the central part of the continents is the picture most of us form in our mind when we think of Africa. The West side of the continent is a Savannah, or grassy plain - sometimes dry and dusty.³

It is from this geography and the culture that sprang from it that the African myths evolved. Living in such a

land with such a precarious relationship with nature, the Africans developed a keen respect for all living things and the land itself. That respect is imbedded in their myths, and stories which serve a vastly greater purpose than entertainment. They contain key elements to understanding the culture and its customs and beliefs.

What is Myth?

Here I think it would be helpful to discuss myth and its meaning and how it is important in the culture of a nation. From the beginning of the seminar most of us were trying to come up with a definition of myth. We all knew instinctively what it was but found ourselves confused when we tried to differentiate between myths, tales, folk stories, and fables. We agreed not to be picky about definition but to pursue all types of stories which might illuminate the nature of the beliefs and customs of the culture we were studying.

Most of us were familiar with Greek Mythology which presents a coherent set of gods and goddesses. However, other mythologies such as African did not present a consistent set of characters, although many of the tribes tell similar stories. This makes the material more difficult because the stories often crossover into what would be considered folk tales and fables. However, I still didn't have a feel for how to incorporate the materials until I read some of the conversations of Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers from "The Power Of Myth." I believe that Campbell offers a way to view folk tales and fables as related to mythology.

In the conversation Moyers and Campbell begin discussing the difference between myth and folk tales. Campbell sees myth as a higher form of story. "The myth is for Spiritual instruction... Civilizations are grounded in myth."⁴ Campbell speaks about four functions of myth:

Mystical Function - myths help the individual; to realize the mystery of the universe and how awesome it is.

Cosmological Function - this is the aspect which science is concerned with. I may know the scientific principle of flight but it still doesn't really explain it. In other words, explaining the universe but keeping the mystery. 3. Sociological Function - myth supports and validates the rules of a certain society.

Pedagogical Function - myths help to teach us how to live our lives.⁵

Basically, Campbell sees myth as the highest form of a culture's ideals and beliefs. The folk stories of the common man are more for entertainment, although they too help in a lesser degree to explain the larger mythology of a certain society. True myth has a holier and more revered place than folk tales or fables. These stories are for the young to begin to initiate them into the cultural beliefs of their society.

To further explain his point Campbell uses the idea of the temple, the palace, and the town. No matter what civilization you study you will find this hierarchy.

As Campbell sees it, each level generates part of the myth and keeps it alive. In his words, no matter what level you are dealing with in a society they are all "operating in the same symbolic field." This field is based on

the common experiences of people in the community. “Myths are so intimately bound to the culture, time, and place that unless the symbols, the metaphors are kept alive by constant recreation through the arts, the life just slips from them.”⁶ I believe that this helps to put into perspective the relationship between myth, folk tales, legends, and fables. Each in its own way is an instrument to help instruct average citizens and mostly the young on the traditions of the society and how they are to behave within that society. Fables help to teach us little morals, lessons we learn as children about dealing with other people and how to understand human nature. In presenting this material to young children I believe this instructional aspect of myth and its lesser forms is something that children can relate to.

Creation and Death Myths

The most widely found myths in African culture are those dealing with creation. When we speak of creation it is not with the same meaning as that of a scientist who would speak of the first cause of the universe. African creation myths usually take it for granted that the earth exists. They may tell about the earth being fashioned out of some material that is available but, there is never an attempt to look beyond the existence of the world. In some fashion the world always existed for the Africans.

For this section I have chosen three myths: “ Sa and Alatangana”⁷ from Guinea; “How Humans were Scattered”⁸ from the Yoruba culture; and the Yao (eastern shores of Lake Malawi) story of creation.⁹

In “Sa and Alatangana,” Sa is the god of death who creates a home from the mud. When the god Alatangana comes to visit he complains that Sa has a dirty house and he should fix it up. Alatangana banishes Sa and his wife and only daughter until he fixes it up by adding vegetation and animals. Sa is pleased and the two become good friends. Eventually Alatangana falls in love with Sa’s daughter. He asks to marry her but Sa keeps stalling. He doesn’t want to lose his daughter. Alatangana realizes this and elopes with Sa’s daughter. They go far away to escape Sa’s anger. They have a happy life and a large family of fourteen children but four girls are white and three are black, and four boys are white and three are black. Also each speaks a different language which Alatangana and his wife cannot understand. He goes to see Sa. Sa tells him that he has caused this because of the anger he felt toward Alatangana and his daughter for marrying. He goes on to tell them that they must have the white children marry with each other and the black children marry with each other. Then the earth will be populated by many tribes of black and white people. Alatangana does this.

However the children of Alatangana still have to live in darkness since there is no light. Alatangana again wants to ask his father-in-law Sa for help. This time he sends the red toutou and the golden cock: the earliest risers of all the birds. Sa listens and tells them that light can only be called by musical sounds. Then he teaches them the correct sounds. When they return to Alatangana he becomes angry and is about to kill them when both birds begin to cry out to heaven for help. At that moment the air is filled with song and the first light of day comes. Alatangana is happy and apologizes to the birds. The sun makes its journey each day on the route Sa orders. The sky is not dark at night for the moon and stars and planets come out at night. Sa realizes he has done much for Alatangana. Sa goes to him and tells him that he has given him and his children much while Alatangana has taken Sa’s only child away. In payment Sa will snatch one of Alatangana’s children whenever he desires as payment. All of this comes about because Alatangana did not paid the bride-price for Sa’s daughter. Alatangana knows he is wrong and must consent and so death is introduced to humanity.

This myth is interesting first because it is a well told and vivid version of creation. It not only explains the

making of the earth but how different races developed, how light came to be, and why we are subject to death. I think students can get into this story since it is very rich with ideas. The story really gives students a chance to discuss the very basic idea that we share a common origin and we are in fact brothers and sisters. In the story Sa punishes his daughter and son-in-law by making their children different colors and speak different languages. Why is it a punishment to be different in this story? How would you react if suddenly your brother or sister changed colors or spoke a different language? Would they still be your brother or sister? Sa does all of this because he is angry. What do you think of Sa? Why do we often hurt people we love when they make us mad? Alatangana is supposed to be a god. Why doesn't he oppose Sa? Who is more powerful?

In this story Sa also introduces death. What would happen to the earth if no one died? Could our earth hold all of those people and provide them with the resources to live? Sa takes the children but it doesn't say what happens to them. What do you think happened to them? What do you think happens when we die?

While diversity is a punishment in the story of Sa and Alatangana, in the second myth "How Humans were Scattered" diversity is treated in a very different way. Here people are living on earth and eventually become bored because they are the same. They ask God if they can be made different. Some want to have different color skin. Some want to speak differently, while some want more land or to be more clever. Finally God becomes angry. He tells the messenger from the people that they should be happy because there is nothing to fight or argue about: they are all equal as God intended. When the messenger goes back to the people they tell him to tell God that if he doesn't change his mind they will turn away from him. God finally relents and each person gets their wish and so from that time on there has been suspicion, greed and envy in the world.

In this story sameness is equal to boredom. It would be interesting to explore with students what they feel about this question. Why don't we want to be different? The young are especially subjected to fads and trends which they are pressured into following. Most of you make your parents buy you certain sneakers or cut your hair in a certain way? Why is that important to you? How is it to be different? In the story everyone gets tired of being the same. If you were one of the people in the story what thing would you change about yourself? Would you rather be taller, or smarter, or richer?

The god in this story feels that being the same will make people happy. He can't understand why they want to be different from each other. Why is it good that all people are not alike? What would it be like if we were all the same? Would we be bored? It would be interesting to take each student and have their classmates suggest some positive characteristic that they have that makes them different. It could be their smile, their ability in math or art, their kindness, their athletic ability, etc.

In the third story of creation by the Yao the God Mulling is driven to heaven by mankind. At first there are no humans, only Mulling and the animals. Everything is peaceful. Then one day the chameleon decides to fish in the river. On the first day he catches a good catch and eats well. On the second day he finds nothing in his trap but a tiny man and woman. The chameleon takes them to Mulling who tells him to release them and let them walk the earth. The chameleon watches them grow to the size people are now. Then they rub two sticks together and make fire, which spreads to an uncontrollable forest fire that threatens all the animals. The man and woman next kill a buffalo and cook it. Mulling is upset that the humans are destroying his creation. All the animals run away. The chameleon goes into the high branches of a tree and the spider climbs so high it disappears into the sky. The spider throws down a line to Mulling who also climbs up into the sky where he remains. Thus God is driven from earth by the evils of mankind. Here the God Mulling is himself confounded by his creation. His only reaction is to run away.

It is interesting that this early African myth has man and woman emerging from the water which is now

thought by most scientists to be the place of origin for the earliest life on earth. Mostly due to the importance of water in their lives it is not surprising that they incorporated this into myth.

This story brings up the notion of free will because even god is puzzled by the behavior of the man and woman. Why doesn't god stop the man and woman? Does he act the way other gods have in the stories we read? Does god control the people in the story?

This myth makes us realize the power of humans over the land and how we can be forces for good and/or evil. The man and woman make fire and cook food but they also set the forest on fire and almost destroy the world. Why do we say that people have to take care of the world? How should we do that?

Along with creation of the earth there are many stories of interest about the sun and moon and sky. The Wute of Cameroon tell of the early days when the sun and moon were good friends.¹⁰ Both shine with equal radiance. One day the sun suggests that the both sun and moon along with their families should take a bath in the river. The sun suggests that each family take turns and that he would go upstream where he could have some privacy. He tells the moon that when he sees the water boiling he will know that the sun is in the water. Then he leaves but he has no intention of doing what he had said. When the sun and his family are out of sight he tells his family to cut dry branches off the trees, set them on fire, and throw them into the river. When the moon sees the steaming water he thinks that the sun has taken his bath and he goes into the water. When the moon comes out he is quite pale and has lost most of his heat. When the sun appears he laughs that now he is brighter than the moon. The moon, seeing that he has been tricked, decides to take bloody revenge. Some time later there is a great famine. The moon suggests that he and the sun kill all their children and wives because they can no longer feed so many people. The moon says that he will go upstream and when the sun sees the blood in the river he will know that the moon has killed his family. The moon does not kill his family. When he is out of sight he has his boys throw red clay into the river until the water turns red. When the sun sees the red water he kills all of his family. Now he remains alone in daytime shining brightly, while the moon seems pale and cool, but is surrounded by his wives and many children.

In a story by the Chaga who live in Tanganyika the sun and moon are husband and wife who live on earth.¹¹ The sun often visits where the water lives. One day the sun asks why the river never visits him at his house. The river replies that sun's house is too small for him and his family, and they would probably drive the sun and moon out of their home. It just so happens that at this very time the sun and moon are building a new house. The sun asks the river if he will visit if the new house is bigger. When the new house is completed the river comes to visit. He is still skeptical but doesn't want to disappoint his friend. So the river comes in and flows bringing in many fish and rats and water snakes. The water level reaches knee deep. The river asks the sun if he still wants to have all of the river's family visit. The sun insists that it is all right and so more water flows in and the water level rises. The sun and moon are forced to climb onto the roof to keep dry. But this is still not all of the river's family. Again the river asks if the sun wants all of his people to come. Not to go back on his word the sun said they are all welcome. The river continues to flow now rising to the top of the house. The sun and moon are forced to go right into the sky where they remain to this day.

These two stories can lead to a discussion of the nature of friendship and trust. In both stories we have supposed friends. We see in the first that the sun and moon can really not trust each other. In actuality they are envious of each other. Students can easily relate to how a good friend today can abandon you very quickly. Discussions might concern what are some of the qualities we look for in a friend? Can we be friends with someone we cannot trust? What makes us feel jealous? What can we do to stop that feeling?

In the second story the sun is really a bit too polite. Are there times when we have to say no to a friend? How

do you think the river would have felt if the sun and moon stopped him from visiting? What does it mean to give our word? The sun and moon are now in the sky do you think they are still friends with the river?

There is also a great opportunity to use this story as a bridge to some science lessons on the sun and moon. Do we believe the explanation that the myth gave us about the sun and the moon and how they got into the sky? Do we believe that the sun and moon can talk like the characters in the story? Why do you think the Africans made up this story? Did anyone ever tell you a story (myth) to explain something? What about the tooth fairy and Easter bunny? Did you once believe them? Why do we keep telling these stories? Should we do away with myths? Why are they important?

In a third story the story of thunder and lightning is told.¹² Again the two main characters dwell on the earth. Thunder is an old mother sheep and lightning is her only son a handsome ram. Lightning has a quick temper and when he gets mad he flies into a rage and destroy houses and field. He is so strong he could uproot trees and crops. When his mother finds out she yells at him with her loud voice. Of course over time the people become fed up with this behavior and speak to the ruler about the ram's behavior. The two are asked to live at the end of town. The problem still continues. The ruler is forced to have the mother and son banished from the town. They go into the woods and cannot go into town again. On the way out of town lightning sets the woods on fire which starts a terrible fire. This time the ruler meets with his advisors. They decide that the only thing to do is to throw both of them high into the sky. So mother and son are sent into the sky to live, however, the people still are not rid of them. Lightning still loses his temper and fires down fire to the earth and his mother still can be heard scolding him.

Here again powerful forces of nature are cloaked in the guise of animals with human characteristics. The Africans probably didn't have a clue as to the scientific explanation of what caused thunder and lightning. It would be interesting to have students write a few lines about what they have been told about the origins of thunder and lightning. I know from past conversations that most have been told stories such as, god is throwing things around heaven, he's shaking out a rug, or he's bowling. Why did your parents tell you these stories? Why didn't they tell you the scientific reason? Did you believe the story? How did you feel before and after you heard the story? Do you still believe it?

Not only does this story lead into possible science topics but it also unlocks the concept of metaphor and simile. We try to introduce students to these ideas and how they can be incorporated into their writing to increase detail through comparison. This story nicely offers obvious comparisons of temper to lightning and a powerful voice to thunder. It is a good place to begin or continue the discussion.

Trickster Myths

As in most cultures African mythology is filled with stories of animals. Many are what is termed trickster tales where an animal or insect is gifted with cunning and continuously confounds the limits set by the gods. In Bantu Africa (East, Central and southern Africa) and the western Sudan, the trickster is the hare; in West Africa (Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone) it is the spider; and in Benin, Nigeria the trickster is a tortoise.¹³

For this section of stories I have chosen to begin with an uncharacteristic story "How the Tortoise Grew a Tail"¹⁴ in which the tortoise is not in the wrong. The tortoise is a guest at the home of his friend the boa. The boa wraps his tail around the bowl of food when he eats and unknowingly keeps the tortoise from being able

to eat. The tortoise leaves angry and hungry. When he gets home he decides to teach his friend a lesson. He weaves himself a tail from grass and sticks it on with tree gum. Then he invites the boa for dinner and proceeds to do the same as the boa wrapping his tail around the bowl. The boa who is unable to reach the food suddenly realizes what he did to his friend and is ashamed. The lesson from this story is “We learn from our friends to be short, and we also learn to be tall.”

This story also fits in with the sun and moon stories about friendship and how we often offend others without realizing what we are doing. What does the Boa do that was rude to his friend? Did the boa intentionally keep his friend from eating? Should the tortoise have just forgotten what happened? What would have happened? Do you think that the boa and tortoise are still good friends? What does the moral mean in this story? Is the story really about the animals or is this really about humans?

Perhaps the most well-known character in Western Africa is Anansi the Spider. Perhaps the most famous story is Anansi Owns All Tales That Are Told.¹⁵ In it Anansi the spider goes to the Sky God and wants to buy from him all the stories that are told. The Sky God tells him that many people have wanted to own the stories but the price is high. He wants three things: the hornets, the great python and the leopard. Anansi agrees and goes home. There he takes a gourd and puts a small hole in it. He then throws some water on himself and the hornets. Then he sits inside and tells the hornets they should get into the gourd so they will not get wet. When the hornets do this Anansi plugs up the hole with some grass. He takes the gourds to the Sky God and goes on to his second quest.

This time he cuts down a long bamboo pole and some strong vines. When he comes upon the python he tells him that he has been arguing with his wife about whether the python is longer or shorter than the pole. Anansi thinks the python is longer and stronger and gets the python to let himself be measured. In order to stretch himself out as far as possible the python allows Anansi to tie him to the pole and wrap him with the vines. The python is now caught and Anansi brings him to the Sky God.

Finally the leopard is left. Anansi digs a pit and covers it with brush. The leopard falls into the pit and Anansi offers him help. He first bends a tree toward the ground and ties it so it won't move. Then he ties another rope to the bent tree top and tells the leopard to tie the other end to his tail. After the leopard does this Anansi cuts the rope holding the bent tree and the leopard is lifted up by his tail into the air. Anansi then kills the leopard and takes his body to the Sky God. The Sky God is impressed with his feat and gives all stories over to Anansi so that whenever anyone tells a story he must pay homage to Anansi the spider, who is the owner.

What does it mean to “own” a story. Why would Anansi want to own them? Does the Sky God really want the hornets, python and leopard? Does he really believe that Anansi can do what he asks? If you owned all the stories would you sell them for three animals? Do you sympathize with the victims or not? If not, why not? If Anansi is a trickster should he be thought of as a hero?

All of these trickster tales are interesting because most have a moral and they are easily comparable to fables from other cultures. Discussion about the character of the trickster and the moral lesson can be used to stimulate children's writing either in reaction pieces to the moral or attempts at some simple fable writing of their own.

Humans and Animals

In the final category of myth that I would like to discuss, animals and humans appear in stories sometimes explaining things in nature or just do heroic deeds. In the second part of the story concerning Mokele, he is grown and wants to know why the sun doesn't rise in his village.¹⁶ He decides to go and purchase the sun for his father. While he is making preparations for his journey, many of the animals ask to go with him for they have powers he can use. So he sets off with the tortoise, kite, wasps, etc. in his boat. When he reaches the village where the sun is hidden he asks the chief if he can buy it. The chief does not want to say no, fearing the animals, so he gets Mokele to stay while they figure out a fair price. The chief has one of his daughters brew up a poisonous drink. He then tells her to give it to Mokele. Meanwhile the wasps have heard the conversation and warn Mokele. The chief's daughter is in love with Mokele and cannot kill him, so she throws away the poison. The tortoise and kite steal the sun from its hiding place and the kite takes the sun up into the sky. Mokele and the chief's daughter escape just in time from the village and return to Mokele's home where they are married. Mokele is hailed as a hero.

This is one of many myths where the main character goes on a quest. What makes Mokele a hero? Would he have survived without the help of the animals? What characteristic of each animal helped Mokele in the story? Why do you think the animals help Mokele? What does it mean if the sun doesn't rise in your village? Why is Mokele's journey necessary? Why would someone want to keep the sun from shining on other villages?

The Finding of Fire¹⁷ is another story in which a human being gains knowledge that indeed is crucial to all other beings. In this story a hunter notices a light in the woods which he has never seen before. He goes to discover what it is and finds a fire which speaks to him and tells him he may stay but the hunter must feed him limbs and branches from trees nearby. After feeding the fire the man is helped to catch a hare and then fire tells him how to roast his dinner. The man is impressed and vows never to eat raw meat again. He also decides that he wanted to take the fire home with him. The fire refuses and tells the hunter that he cannot travel and must stay there. When the hunter leaves he returns home and tells his wife about what happened. She asks him for more of the meat and so the hunter makes frequent trips back to the fire. The wife tells another man about the fire and he goes to watch the hunter and sees how he feeds the fire. The man grabs a burning branch that is on fire determined to take it with him. As he runs the fire scorches his hand and he drops the branch. There ensues a large fire that destroys much of the village. The people escape across the river. When they return they discover the roasted meat, and that their clay pots have hardened from being in the fire. The hunter after hearing what happened goes back to the original fire which tells him that fire can be useful if used properly and that he will help people by cooking their food, pots, baking their porridge so they can have pancakes and melt iron so they can make weapons.

This story tries to explain where the habit of cooking food and cooking clay pots comes from. In this story, as well as that about thunder and lightning and the Yao creation myth, there is the mention of the destructive force of fire. Students might compare how fire is used in the three stories. It is important for students to realize that like drought, a fire can have a devastating affect on animal and plant life especially in the plains areas of Africa. It is a good opportunity to review some common sense rules about fire prevention and school fire drill procedures.

The story tries to answer some very basic questions about things we take for granted. It more importantly tells us that people are responsible for fire. We are the only living things that make and utilize fire. As with most things fire offers us benefits and it can also be a means of destruction. It would be interesting for students to

try to list important ways we use fire.

The stories recounted here are only a fraction of those available to readers. There are a number of ways they can be connected to other areas in the curriculum. Following are a few lesson plans illustrating how the stories can be used in an integrated curriculum.

Lesson Plan #1 *Where is Africa?*

Objective: Students will be able to identify and locate the continent of Africa on a globe or map.

Materials: globe and/or world maps, copies of outlines of the seven continents

Procedure:

1. Explain that there are seven major land masses covering the earth which are called continents. Show children each continent and where it is on the globe and/or a flat map.
2. Give children a copy of a world map showing the continents and have them label the continents.
3. Make cardboard outlines of the continents and use them as flash cards to review the shapes of the continents with the class on a daily basis.

Lesson Plan # 2 *Where do these stories come from?*

Objectives:

1. Students will locate on a classroom map of Africa the place of origin of the myths/stories being read in class.
2. Students will see that the peoples of Africa and their stories are widespread.

Materials:

Large map of Africa showing the countries labeled
markers
pieces of construction paper for labeling

Procedure:

1. Teacher will make a large class map of Africa with the countries outlined. The map should be hung on a bulletin board or wall.
2. As stories are read the teacher will identify where the story comes from and what people it originated with.
3. Students will help to label the map with a card giving the title of the story and the people it comes from.

Lesson Plan # 3 *What are some of the Animals of Africa?*

Animals are an intricate part of the African stories but this activity could be used after reading the adventure of Mokele who is helped by the animals to capture the sun.

Objective:

Students will do research on one of the African animals/ insects mentioned in the myths and stories: lion, elephant, giraffe, tortoise, rabbit, kite, chameleon, lizard, toad, leopard, red buffalo, baboon, wasps, etc.

Materials:

Encyclopedias

Books about animals and insects

Procedure:

1. After reading some of the stories have students brainstorm animals that have been mentioned in the stories and other African animals that they already know.
2. Ask students to come up with some questions that they would like to have answered such as what do they eat?; what kind of shelter do they live in?; and what size are they when full grown? Make a worksheet for students asking a few simple questions. Students work on finding the answers to the research questions. Students can compose a paragraph with their information and/or make it part of a class book or individual book on African animals. Allow children time to do drawings or tracings of their animal. Let children share their reports with the rest of the class.

Lesson Plan # 4 *What are the major rivers and lakes of Africa?*

Objectives:

- 1.Students will explain the necessity of water to the African tribes.
- 2.Students will research facts about the major rivers and lakes with the aid of the teacher and library media specialist.
- 3.As part of their research students will have a graphic organizer (provided by the teacher). The organizer should include places for students to list information on the length, size and location (what country or countries does the river run through or the lake cover. It might also include a blank map of Africa so that the students can draw the river/lake in the correct spot.
- 4.Depending on the ability and time allowed for this activity students may be assigned to do all of the locations or just one. They might then share information with the rest of the class. Students could also do this in cooperative groups.

Materials:

Graphic organizer (made after class discussions)
blank map of Africa with countries outlined
reference books such as books on Africa, rivers and lakes, world atlases, Internet sites that might be relevant.
List of major rivers: Nile, Congo, Senegal, Niger, Logone, Kwango, Juba, Scebeli, Zambezi, Limpopo, and Oranje, and lakes: Victoria and Malawi.

Procedure:

Brainstorm with children why water is important to human beings. Children should know that water is the one thing no person can live without. We must have water to drink and for growing crops.

Tell children that water is very important to the African tribes especially in the desert areas. Many

times there are droughts during which little or no rain occurs. This might be one reason that the people felt there must be a divine power over water. Also the fact that the water provided a means of transportation and food.

Have students suggest information that might be useful to gather about the lakes and rivers in Africa. Teacher can then compose a graphic organizer and have students begin their research on another day.

4 When the students are finished gathering their information (this activity could take a few weeks depending on scheduling time in the library), have students report their findings and add information to their maps where necessary.

Lesson Plan #5 *Dramatizing the Myths*

Many of the stories are very simple and students can make masks and simple props to use in their performance. Most of the stories lend themselves to reenactment or pantomime. This type of performance could be part of a larger culminating activity at the end of the unit.

Objective:

Students will show their understanding of the plot of a story by acting out the basic plot.

Materials: art supplies for making costumes/masks and scenery script of the story to be reenacted (teacher will need to write this up unless it is strictly pantomime)

Procedure:

Students will choose a story or stories to reenact.

Students will work on making animal masks and costumes to go along with the story.

3. Students will act out the basic plot.

Lesson Plan # 6 *Why does the Sun shine brighter than the Moon?*

This lesson can be used with any of the stories that spoke about the Sun and Moon.

- Objectives:
1. Students will demonstrate that the moon does not shine but reflects light from the sun.
 2. Students will learn that the sun is a ball of gases that is continually burning.
 3. Students will learn that the moon is not hot but actually a cold body with no heat generating source at all.
 4. Students will be able to explain the differences between what the myth tells us and what the scientific facts are.

Materials: A darkened room lamp with the shade removed to act as the sun ball or other round object to represent the moon

Procedure:

1. Put the lamp into the middle of a darkened room.
2. Have a student stand with a ball about 10 feet away.
3. Students should observe that while they can see the ball it is not as bright as the lamp(sun). The only reason we can see the ball(moon) is because the light from the bulb is reflecting off the ball. The moon does not generate light it is a cold place. We only see it in the sky because it reflects the sunlight.

Lesson Plan # 7 *Writing a Fable*

Objective:

To have students write a fable

Materials:

pencils

papers

Procedure:

It should be remembered that any writing assignment like this especially for younger children will need to be done over a number of days.

1. Students will have heard many myths and fables.
2. Students will be familiar with the fact that most fables have characters who are animals with human characteristics. They also teach a certain moral which is clearly spelled out at the end of the story.
3. The teacher should have listed some of the morals and proverbs around the room so that students become familiar with them.
4. As a class the students should write a story together guided by the teacher. The class should pick a moral to be taught in the story and then an animal or animals to be characters.
5. Students then need to come up with an action that shows the character does not follow the moral and what happens.
6. When the stories are complete they can be shared with the rest of the class and can be gathered into as class book for each child to have a copy. It is a good idea to put a copy or two in the class library for children to read after the unit is complete.

Lesson Plan # 8 *Let's make a Fetish!*

Objective: to make a fetish (a medallion made by many African tribes to help ward off evil spirits.)

Materials: hardening clay
different shaped cookie cutters (some students may want to do activity without a guide
string/ yarn to hold the fetish around the neck
paints

Procedure:

- 1.Explain to students that fetishes are medallions worn by many African tribes which were thought to ward off evil spirits and bring good luck.
- 2.Give students hardening clay and allow them cookie cutters of shapes or let them design their own figure. Make sure they leave a place where a hole can be made so the piece can be strung on yarn to make into a necklace.
- 3.Children can let the piece harden and then paint.

Lesson Plan #9 *The Golden Stool*

Objective: to have children experience the Ashanti custom of each tribesman having their own stool which is their seat alone. When they have council meetings each man would bring his own stool . In this case each child will be allowed to decorate their desk chair.

Materials:

crepe paper in various colors
construction paper of different colors
markers and crayons
glue and tape
glitter

Procedure:

1. Explain the importance of the stool in some African tribes.
2. Tell students that in class having and being in their chair is very important.
3. Allow students to work on their chair making sure that they must not put anything permanent on the chair.

It should be noted that stickers and other labels which cannot be easily removed should be avoided. Simple tape or masking tape should be used to add any decorations to the chairs.

Students can make fancy name plates to put on their chairs as well as tissue flowers, etc.

Lesson Plan #10 *What do the Africans Eat?*

This activity could be done in conjunction with the culminating activity in the unit. In many of the stories different foods are mentioned such as corn, yams, nuts, berries, pancakes, couscous, etc.

Objective: To let children taste some of the foods which are part of the African culture as a way of appreciating our differences and similarities.

Materials:

food items mentioned above

plates

plastic forks, spoons

if possible a hot plate or other device for cooking and/or heating

previously prepared foods

Procedure:

1. Students can brainstorm foods mentioned in the stories.
2. A team of students can be sent to the library media center to research some of the native foods.
3. The class should come up with foods that are available as part of a class buffet.
4. The teacher should with parents help prepare a small buffet of foods. Students can enjoy these while listening to groups of children dramatizing some of the stories. Parents may also be invited if possible.

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The book which is based on the PBS special in which Moyers spoke to Joseph Campbell about his life long study of mythology. The conversations took place in 1985-1986. Campbell died in 1987.

Courlander, Harold. *A Treasury of African Folklore* . New York: Marlowe & Company, 1996.

This is an extensive and unique collection of myths, tales, traditions and beliefs of the various peoples found in Africa.

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Knappert, Jan. *Kings, Gods, & Spirits from African Mythology* . New York: Peter Books, 1986.

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This is a book of stories from the Ashanti and Hausa peoples of Africa. The author retells stories she heard as a child. There are some nice accompanying drawings by Lou Turechek.

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This along with the Courlander book offer a very comprehensive look at the many stories from Africa.

Notes

1. Jan Knappert, *Kings, Gods, & Spirits from African Mythology* , (New York: Peter Books, 1986) pg. 11

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