

Lesson Plans: SS WHis LPQ3 032 Women in Traditional African Societies

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Grade Level : Grade 10

Subject : Reading - High, Social Studies - High

Standards/Assessed Florida STATE FL Social Studies Standard (2008)

Benchmarks: Grades: 9-12

Florida Sunshine State Standards

World History

8: Recognize significant events and people from the post World War II and Cold War eras.

SS.912.W.8.7 Compare post-war independence movements in African, Asian, and Caribbean countries.

Description/Abstract of Lesson: To learn about the role of women in traditional African village life; To understand the contextual nature of artwork within traditional African village life; To become familiar with women writers of postcolonial Africa; To examine how the traditions of village life influence postcolonial arts and culture.

Essential Question-Scope & Sequence: **What was the status of women in colonial African societies?**

Technology Connections and Teacher Materials: www.uiowa.edu/~africart/ Show selected video clip "African Life Today"

Vocabulary: spouse, primordial

Steps to Deliver Initial Instruction: Begin by introducing students to the portrayal of women in traditional African artwork, using the resources available through EDSITEMent at the [Art and Life in Africa Online](http://www.edsitement.net) website. In addition to three-dimensional images of traditional art objects, this website provides a multi-part commentary relating these objects to their context in African village life. All the objects listed below are accompanied by an online explanation of their relationship to the traditional role of African women within the family and community. To access these images, click [Key Moments in Life](#) on the website's homepage, then select the appropriate chapter and use the "Next" link to move forward to the section indicated.

- Fertility Figure (Ghana) -- Shows a woman nursing a child; created to encourage procreation, the central role of women within traditional African rural society. [Chapter: [Newborn/Infancy, Section 2](#)]
- Girl's Doll (Burkina Faso) -- Shows a woman in miniature, with an elaborate hairstyle and the scarification patterns that mark passages in life; represents for the girl the ideal woman she hopes to become. [Chapter: [Childhood, Section 2](#)]
- Sande Mask (Sierra Leone) -- Shows the head of a woman with an elaborate hairstyle and well-fed appearance; represents the Mende ideal of feminine beauty and used to welcome an adolescent girl into the community of women following initiation rituals that mark her passage from childhood to adulthood. [Chapter: [Initiation, Section 6](#)]
- Pot Lid (Congo) -- Shows a pot resting on three stones; does not portray a woman but created as a means for Woyo women to complain to their husbands about problems in the marriage relationship, the message in this case being a reminder that divorce requires only the scattering of the stones that hold up the pot. [Chapter: [Marriage and Eligibility](#)]
- Primordial Couple (Mali) -- Shows a man and woman, the man with his arm over the woman's shoulder; represents the ideal required for procreation, a bond of affection between individuals that is distinct from the family bond created by the payment of "bride-wealth" to obtain a wife. [Chapter: [Marriage and Eligibility](#)]
- Figure Pair (Côte d'Ivoire) -- Shows a large woman and a smaller man, the man with his arm around the woman; created to promote fertility between a couple by invoking the spirit-spouse of the husband and thus helping the family achieve social success. [Chapter: [Adulthood, Section 1](#)]
- Wunkirmian Ladle (Liberia) -- Shows the head of a young woman carved as the handle of a ladle; created to honor a woman who is recognized by other women as the most hospitable in the community, the ladle offers her an idealized portrait of

herself at the moment when she began her role as a wife and mother. [Chapter: [Elderhood, Section 4](#)]

Additional representations of women in traditional African art, which echo many of the images noted above, can be found at the [Detroit Institute of Arts](#) website. Click "Collections" in the righthand menu on the website's homepage, then select "African, Oceanic, and New World Cultures" and under the heading "African Art" click Queen Mothers for images of a mask from Congo, a mother and child sculpture from Cameroon, and a royal portrait bust from Nigeria; then click Men Who Dance as Women for images of masks from Angola, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique.

Guided Practice with Feedback: Have students examine and discuss these images in small groups. After they have reviewed this gallery of African artworks, have them summarize the traditional role of women in African village life in a class discussion.

- Help students recognize that childbearing and childrearing are the fundamental responsibilities of women in this society, and the ultimate measure of their social status. The emphasis on feminine beauty, physical development, and elaborate hairstylings and scarification patterns are all related to enhancing this procreative power. Similarly, the importance of hospitality, health care, and housekeeping are all related to a woman's responsibility for raising children who can in turn procreate and so sustain the life of the community.
- Invite students to compare this view of a woman's role in society with their own. Are there points of contact between the two? Is a Barbie doll equivalent to the doll from Burkina Faso? Are "beauty secrets" part of the passage from girlhood to womanhood in both societies? Is marriage and raising a family a goal the two societies share? What are the differences? What does the students' society expect of women that traditional African village society does not? What expectations in that society are not found in the students' own?

As students view selected video clip "African Life Today", they should look for examples of women's roles in society and note them on paper.

Independent Practice: Students will find modern-day examples from art and literature that show the status of women in western societies. Students should show artifact and provide a short, written analysis of the artifact and it's portrayal of women. Students will also search their World History text to find examples from art and literature that describe the status of women on other cultures. Student should reference page numbers, written analysis of the artifact and it's portrayal of women.

Differentiated Instruction/Small Groups: Divide students into small groups. Ideally each group should include at least one French speaking student. Each group will select 2 names from the list below to research and explore how these women writers have portrayed the lives of women in postcolonial African society -- i.e., during the period since the late 1950s when most European nations granted independence to their African colonies. The aim in this part of the lesson is to help students become familiar with a broad range of present-day African women writers, including, if possible, those who write in English and those who write in French. Have each group research and report on two contemporary African woman writers, using library resources or the EDSITEment resources listed below.

- At the [Lire les Femmes Ecrivains et les Littératures Africaines](#) website, students will find background on more than 100 African women writers, most of whom write in French. Students can click Auteurs on the homepage for an index of writers that indicates the language in which they write. The names of Francophone writers link to profiles in French that sketch the writer's career, describe her major works, usually offer a brief excerpt, and provide links to other Internet resources. Students who do not read French can click "English Version" on these profile pages for a translation that does not include excerpts.

ESE/ESOL Accommodations & Strategies: Distribute students equally in all groups. Use visual images in descriptions. Prepare vocabulary lists.

ESE/ESOL Strategies:

Lesson Closure/Review: Following both individual and group research, students should be prepared to discuss the role of women in both traditional African societies and non-African societies through time. Following class discussion of major similarities and differences, students will write an extended length essay that will describe the role of women in colonial African societies.

Assessment with Clear & Compelling: Independent student research should include: 1. identification of culture (where, when) 2. description of artifact 3. analysis of role of women (analysis should be limited to the artifact, grounded in a reasonable interpretation that is supported by student written argument) Group research assignment should include: 1. description of author(s) selected (when, where) 2. purpose for their style (genre) 3. portrayal of women in their societies

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Date Created : July 11, 2007

Date Modified : November 29, 2011