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## ABSTRACT

While a single lesson plan cannot fully explore the variety and complexity of African life, in this lesson students can gain insight into the lives of some black women in Sub-Saharan Africa by adopting a perspective that is in part traditional, based on the arts of African village life, and in part postcolonial, based on the work of African women writing in English and French today. Students first examine a selection of traditional African artworks that portray women within precolonial family and community life. Then students explore the literature that women have created in postcolonial Africa and present a report on one writer, profiling her career and writing and commenting on the part that traditional values play in her work. (This second part of the lesson can be presented in English or French.) The learning objectives of the lesson plan are: (1) to learn about the role of women in traditional African village life; (2) to understand the contextual nature of artwork within traditional African village life; (3) to become familiar with women writers of postcolonial Africa; and (4) to examine how the traditions of village life influence postcolonial literature. The lesson plan also contains the subject areas covered in the lesson, time required to complete the lesson, the skills used in the lesson, the grade level (6-12), and lists of the standards developed by professional or government associations that are related to the lesson, as well as activities to extend the lesson. (RS)

# Women in Africa: Tradition and Change [Lesson Plan].

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## Women in Africa: Tradition and Change

### Introduction

While a single lesson plan cannot fully explore the variety and complexity of African life, in this lesson students can insight into the lives of some black women in Sub-Saharan Africa by adopting a perspective that is in part traditional, based on the arts of African village life, and in part postcolonial, based on the work of African women writing in English and French today. Students first examine a selection of traditional African artworks that portray women within precolonial family and community life. Then students explore the literature that women have created in postcolonial Africa and present a report on one writer, profiling her career and writing and commenting on the part that traditional values play in her work. (This second part of the lesson can be presented in English or French.)

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SEARCH EDSITEMENT

### Learning Objectives

(1) To learn about the role of women in traditional African village life; (2) To understand the contextual nature of artwork within traditional African village life; (3) To become familiar with women writers of postcolonial Africa; (4) To examine how the traditions of village life influence postcolonial literature.

### Lesson Plan

**1** 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](#) 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

SUBJECT AREAS ▶

[Literature: World](#)

[Art: Visual Arts](#)

[History: World: Africa](#)

GRADE LEVELS ▶

6-12

TIME REQUIRED ▶

One to two class periods

SKILLS ▶

- visual art analysis
- research skills
- summarizing and presenting information
- critical thinking
- Internet skills

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT ▶

[NCTE/IRA List of Standards for the English Language Arts](#)

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; ([more](#))
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g.,

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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, Section 1](#)]
- **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, Section 2](#)]
- **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.

**2** 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

- philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. ([more](#))
- 3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. ([more](#))
- 4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. ([more](#))
- 6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts. ([more](#))
- 7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. ([more](#))
- 8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. ([more](#))

#### **National Geography Standards**

- 10. The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of earth's cultural mosaics ([more](#))
- 17. How to apply geography to interpret the past ([more](#))
- 18. How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future ([more](#))

#### **National Council for the Social Studies**

- 1. Culture ([more](#))
- 2. Time, Continuity, and Change ([more](#))
- 3. People, Places, and Environments ([more](#))
- 4. Individual Development and Identity ([more](#))
- 5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions ([more](#))
- 9. Global Connections ([more](#))

#### **National Standards for Arts Education**

##### **Visual Arts**

- 3. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas ([more](#))
- 4. Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures ([more](#))
- 6. Making connections between visual arts and other

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 hairstyles 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?

**3** Against this background, have students explore how some 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 student research and report on one contemporary African woman writer, 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. Some writers whom students might want to investigate are listed here with an indication of whether they write in French (F) or English (E):
  - **[Ama Ata Aidoo \(E\)](#)**
  - **[Mariama Ba \(F\)](#)**
  - **[Calixthe Beyala \(F\)](#)**
  - **[Ken Bugal \(F\)](#)**, pseudonym for Marietou Mbaye
  - **[Maryse Conde \(F\)](#)**
  - **[Tsitsi Dangarembga \(E\)](#)**
  - **[Nafissatou Diallo \(F\)](#)**
  - **[Buchi Emecheta \(E\)](#)**
  - **[Aminata Sow Fall \(F\)](#)**
  - **[Nozipo Maraire \(E\)](#)**
  - **[Annette M'Baye \(F\)](#)**
  - **[Tess Onwueme \(E\)](#)**
  - **[Yvonne Vera \(E\)](#)**
  - **[Myriam Warner-Vieyra \(F\)](#)**
  - **[Liking Werewere \(F\)](#)**

disciplines ([more](#))

### **[American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages](#)**

- 1.2** Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics. ([more](#))
- 1.3** Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics. ([more](#))
- 2.1** Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied. ([more](#))
- 2.2** Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied. ([more](#))
- 3.1** Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language. ([more](#))
- 3.2** Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through foreign language and its cultures. ([more](#))
- 4.2** Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own. ([more](#))

### **[View your state's standards](#)**

- At the **African Studies WWW** website, students can click "Africa Web Links," then "Women Issues" for a link to the Association of African Women Scholars website, which has a "Literature" link on its homepage that leads to a variety of resources (all in English):
  - Click African Writers: Voices of Change for an overview of African fiction that includes background on Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta.
  - Click Francophone African Poets in English Translation for an overview that includes a link to background on Annette M'Baye and translated excerpts from her verse.
  - Under the heading "Postcolonial & Postimperial Literature in English: Africa" there are individual links to extensive background on Ama Ata Aidoo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Buchi Emecheta, and Yvonne Vera.
  - Under the heading "Post Colonial Studies: African Literary Figures" there are individual links to background on Tsitsi Dangarembga.



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