

THE YORUBA OF WEST AFRICA

Mark It on the Map

Have students turn to the map on page 7 and locate the continent of Africa. Then have them focus on West Africa and Yorubaland: the countries of Nigeria, Benin, and Togo. Have students turn to pages 4–5 and cross-reference the areas they found on the page 7 map with the area shown on the pages 4–5 map. Use the maps for reference as you read the issue.

Introduction

Ask students if any have studied the Yoruba previously. Let those who have share their experiences with the rest of the class. Turn to the pronunciation key on page 2. Ask if any students write a language other than English. Ask those who do if their language uses accent marks. Have them (or you) explain how accent marks affect the pronunciation of a word. Then have them practice by reading aloud the map names on pages 4–5. Use the pronunciation chart as a reference as the class proceeds through the issue.

Vocabulary

dialect	terra cotta
sorghum	monolith
prostrate	cira perdus
oriṣa	cassava
divination	savanna
egúngún	taboo
ọba	diaspora
ethnographer	

Questions for Discussion

- To what and to whom does “Yoruba” refer—past and present?
- Among the Yoruba, what traditions emphasize respect for parents and elders?
- Who was Oduduwa? What role did he play in Yoruba society?
- What role does the king of Ifẹ play in Yoruba society? Why? What do the Yoruba call him?
- What is the importance of an ọba’s crown? How is the crown made and who wears it?
- What is the *cira perdus* or “lost wax,” process?
- Why is “talking” an appropriate adjective to describe the drums used by the Yoruba people?
- Why did Oyo become an important trade center? What products did Oyo’s people export?
- How do the Yoruba balance city life and village life? Be specific with your answer and give reasons why this trait is part of the Yoruba culture.

Writing Workout

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- Write an essay explaining your interpretation of the Yoruba proverb on page 2. Give personal examples to support your explanation.
- Make a list of an ọba’s responsibilities. Explain how these responsibilities help him keep peace and harmony.
- Look closely at the artworks on pages 18, 21, 22, and 23. List words you might use to describe the figures illustrated, with a reason for each. Then write what you think the distinguishing features of these images are.
- Look closely at the drum on pages 24–25. Write a paragraph describing the drum to someone who can’t see it.
- Make a list of the uses of cassava.
- Choose the three images in the issue that best symbolize for you the Yoruba of West Africa, and write an essay explaining why they do.
- How did the slave trade affect the Yoruba of West Africa? Be specific with your answer.

Think About It

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- Have students read the paragraph about the Yoruba language and dialects on pages 4–5.

Ask them to think about the English language and its “dialects.” Make a list on the board of expressions and greetings that are common to various areas of the country. Ask for any differences in vocabulary between American English and British English. Example: In the United States we say “line”; in England, they say “queue.”

- ➔ Discuss what factors contribute to the formation of a dialect. Follow-up: Have students create a class dialect.
- ➔ Study the “bronze” head on the front cover (and on page 21). What marks this work of art as a masterpiece? In what ways does it illustrate the artistic skill of its creator?
- ➔ Make a list of the factors that have directly influenced Yoruba civilization, with a statement of how each did so. (Examples: slave trade, introduction of Islam and Christianity, Western-type education.)
- ➔ Read Wole Soyinka’s poem on page 39. What do you think he is attempting to say?

Play the Part

Divide the class into groups. Have one group create a skit about Moremi (page 14). Have another group be the actors in the skit, and a third group make the necessary props. Invite another class to attend the performance.

Get Into Art

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- ➔ After reading the article “Yoruba: A World Civilization” on pages 4–9, divide the class into five groups and assign each group one of the following topics: land and language, art and music, family life, decline of Yoruba civilization and diaspora, Yoruba today. As you read the issue, have each group note information about its topic. Then have each group visually represent its information (using texts and illustrations). Make the groups’ works into a collage.
- ➔ Divide the class into two groups. Have one group read the story of Oduduwa on pages 10–11 and illustrate Oduduwa’s creation of a home for gods and humans. Have the second group read about Oyo on pages 27–29 and illustrate the founding of Oyo. Have each group present its story to the other group. Follow-up: In a roundtable discussion, have the students compare and contrast the stories and their importance in Yoruba culture.
- ➔ Using the details given in “A Preference for City Life” on pages 33–36, illustrate a traditional Yoruba city.

Comparing Cultures

Students may complete one or both of the following activities:

- ➔ Ask students what civilizations they have studied. List each on the board. Next to each, have the students tell what they know about the religious beliefs practiced by each civilization. After reading about the religious beliefs of the Yoruba, what similarities did they discover? What are the unique characteristics of Yoruba religious beliefs?
- ➔ Compare and contrast Yoruba naming customs with those in the students’ families.

Working With Words

Have the students read “Fun With Words” on pages 30–31. Then have them write a sentence with each word, accompanying each with an explanation of why the word is properly used in the sentence. Have them make sure each explanation ties in the word’s roots.

Research Projects

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- ➔ Bring in books about dyeing cloth and tie-dyeing using traditional methods. If possible, bring books that tell of the Yoruba process known as adire-eleko. Research how the dyes are made, how they are used, and how the crafters create designs. Report findings to the class.

- ➔ Assign students to research Wole Soyinka and his poetry. Ask them who he is and when and for what he won the Nobel Prize for literature.
- ➔ Have students research Alfred Nobel and the award named after him. Have them report on how the prizes started and who awards them, in what fields they are given, and when and where the prizes are given.

Just for Fun

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- ➔ Make a talking drum by following the directions on pages 25–26. Then see if you can actually make it “talk.”
- ➔ Make your own cassava by following the directions on page 45.
- ➔ Read “Yoruba Names and Customs” on pages 40–43. Give yourself a Yoruba name. Explain why you chose the name and the significance of each part. (Do the same for family or friends.)

Follow These Footsteps

Oduduwa
Oranyan
Wole Soyinka