

UNIT 8: AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

Lesson type: Reading
Source: Far Ahead 1ère

LEARNING CONTEXT

In this globalized world it is harder and harder to keep African cultural heritage. In order to involve students in reflecting on the issue, the library of your school has launched an essay competition asking you to discuss what you consider to be the main African cultural legacy.

LESSON CONTENT

Language function	Grammar / structure	Vocabulary
Talking about African culture	Rites are important because they reinforce the connection between the individual and his community.	Passages, transcend, concerns, expectations, custodians, hazards, malevolent, encompasses, bind, ordeal

Brainstorming

1- Do you know a rite of initiation?
2- Have you ever taken part in a ritual of initiation?
3- Share your knowledge with your partner (the name, place, goal etc. of the initiation and if possible, how it happens).

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY

A Nigerian university launched a writing contest. The best five essays will be granted a scholarship to study in the field of African culture. Here is the topic: "Traditional Africa educates the individual through rites of initiation. Are these rites useful today? Give Your opinion in an essay of about 20 lines."

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EXERCISES

TEXT

African ceremonies: Passages

From ancient times, African societies have marked the transitions of the life cycle, from birth to death with rites of passage. Through these "journeys of the spirit", as the West African Shaman and teacher Maildoma Patrice Some has called them, people are able to transcend the everyday concerns of life to connect with their own spirits and with the spirit world. Rites of passage have value for both the individual and the community. Ceremonies that mark the passage of life provide clear definitions of society's expectations of the individual and they give him or her a sense of identity and belonging.

From the moment of birth, an African child is connected to family, community and the ancestors. Many different ceremonies are performed to reinforce these connections, and to prepare children to become the custodians of the culture of their people. Because infant mortality remains high, the people of many African cultures are extremely superstitious during the first few years of a child's life and carry out rituals to protect from hazards.

The Himba of Namibia never leave a baby on its own or never put it down, lest the child be stolen away by some malevolent spirit. The Wodaabe of Niger do not name the child before the 12th birthday so that he or she cannot be identified by the spirit of death. For the Massai babies, ***however***, names are so important that they are bestowed by village elders soon after birth. In all African societies, childhood is a time for learning responsibilities and skills that enable children to contribute to their communities. It is ***nevertheless***, also a time for children to develop creativity through imaginative play. Children are encouraged to take an active part in communal ceremonies and ***thereby*** begin their first steps on a journey that encompasses all the realms of human experience.

As they enter the adult world during their teenage years, African youngsters undergo a variety of initiation rituals. These rites provide individuals with instruction about what will be expected of them during the next phase of their lives. The common experiences that they undergo during the initiation period ***also*** bind the individuals together and reinforce the idea of community. In all initiation ceremonies, a select group of elders takes charge of the sequence of ritual events. To begin their training, initiates often enter a special place, a sacred forest or ritually built house. It is there that they lose their childhood identities and gain their adult selves. After a period of instruction, the initiates undergo an encounter or ordeal that marks the climax of their initiation and the beginning of their new lives.

Adapted from https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/african-ceremonies-passages/QQJgfgg2?hl=en

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Activity 1: Read the text in 1 minute and answer the following questions. (Individual work)

1. Who undergoes the rites of passage in traditional Africa?
2. Why are the rites of passage important?

Activity 2: Read again and find in the text a word or phrase for each of the following meanings.

Example: Passages (title): Change of social status, evolution, transitions, journeys

1- **transcend** (Line 3): to surpass; to go further than the usual limits of something
2- **concerns** (Line 4): worries; problems
3- **expectations** (Line 6): hopes
4- **custodians** (Line 10): guardians
5- **hazards** (Line 12): threats; dangers
6- **malevolent** (Line 14): malicious; wicked; bad
7- **encompasses** (Line 20): incorporates; contains
8- **bind** (Line 25): links
9- **ordeal** (Line 29): suffering; painful experience

Activity 3: Give short answers to the following questions. Justify your answers.

1. What does Maildoma Patrice Some call "journey of the spirit"?
2. What gives the Afican child a sense of identity and belonging in the society?
3. Give the reason why many African cultures are superstitious about the child's life.
4. Give two opposite practices regarding babies.
5. Which roles does childhood play?
6. When does individuals become an adult?
7. What are the outcomes of initiation rites?
8. Which period(s) of the Africans' lifespan is(are) **not** mentioned in the text?

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