



Djembe Traditions

Prepared by
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GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER

The **GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER** is a nonprofit training center for students, teachers and the community in the area of multicultural, anti-bias education. Using the arts of diverse cultures as a pathway to understanding the various cultural, ethnic and religious groups residing in our community, the Center's staff and teaching and performing artists present on-going classes, workshops, lecture-demonstrations and performances to promote cross-cultural understanding and respect. The overall goal of the **GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER** is to highlight the commonalities of all people while creating experiences in the arts that aid in dispelling myths, dismantling stereotypes and unlearning biases.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the **GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER** is to use the arts of diverse cultures

- To highlight the commonalities of all people
- To promote global awareness and concern
- To develop empathy, understanding and respect for the individual and for all of humanity
- To support our belief that fairness and justice are basic human rights for all

OUR PURPOSE

- To embrace the oneness of all people through multicultural arts programming that will aid in dispelling myths, dismantling stereotypes, unlearning biases and alleviating fears
- To educate and train children, families, artists, teachers, administrators and other community service personnel in anti-bias/multicultural education
- To disseminate information, stimulate dialogue and provide a safe haven for cultural exploration
- To advocate for using the arts to connect children with the inherent beauty of and deserved respect for cultures that might be different from their own
- To connect a diverse array of artists with schools and community organizations
- To empower folk and traditional artists through learning, teaching and performance opportunities
- To establish the Center as a national model for other communities

OUR PROGRAMS

Passport to Understanding School Outreach

Interactive Museum Displays

Assembly Performances

Drum and Dance Residencies

School Concerts

Professional Development for Teachers

Cultural Resources and Consultations

Global Connections Community Outreach

After School Arts Program

Summer Multicultural Arts Camp

Drum and Dance Classes

Community Concerts and Festivals

Multicultural Arts Dialogues

Pathways to Understanding Outreach for Seniors

Community Concerts and Special Events

Classes and Workshops

Fit-at-Fifty Fitness Program

OUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

\$25-individual; \$50-family; \$100-supporting; \$250-sustaining; \$250-institutional; \$500-corporate



The Djembe Drum



The Djembe originated out of the Mali Empire of West Africa, primarily in the countries of Mali and Guinea. It migrated from the core of the Mali Empire to Senegal, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso. It was originally carved by a special class of blacksmiths of the Mandinka and Susu people known as the numu. They were providers of special iron implements and the guardians of special powers. They carved the power-laden wooden masks of various secret societies, as well as the bodies of the early djembes. They performed special ceremonial rites and played the djembe to accompany these ceremonies.

The most famous numu families include the Doumbias and the Camaras. The master drummer who is credited with introducing the djembe to America is Ladji Camara, who toured with Les Ballets Africains in the 1950's, settling in America in the 1960's. He has been followed by many djembe masters who travel the world sharing the rhythms and cultural traditions of West Africa, with one of the most notable being Mamady Keita.

Traditional djembes are carved from a single hollowed out and sculpted piece of tree trunk, taking on a goblet shape. The best sounding djembes are carved from hardwoods such as that of the lenke tree, similar to the American oak tree and chosen for its density, tone and toughness. The drum head of the djembe is made from goat skin, held with three metal rings and tuned through a tension system comprised of braided nylon rope.

Rhythms played by the djembe orchestra in Africa are fluid with much improvisation and a flexible tempo linked to the heat generated by the dancers. Rhythms and dance have purpose, time and place and are molded by the situations in which they are played. Some rhythms honor groups of people; some rhythms honor special occasions or events such as circumcision or harvests; some rhythms are festive and purely celebratory. Drumming in village traditions can last for hours, with the dancers challenging the drummers, controlling their tempo and intensity.

In America, djembe rhythms become set and simplified, directing the dancers rather than relating to their intensity. The village dance circle becomes broken with dancers forming a line. Rhythms and dances from many regions are mixed, as are instruments that are not normally played together, to showcase the variety of music and dance from West Africa. The original context of rhythms and dances are lost in an effort to highlight and share the diversity of the djembe traditions.



Playing the Djembe

The player can play the djembe in a sitting position, tipping the drum forward slightly away from the body. For performance and festivals, the djembe is often worn fastened by a strap so that the player can move around while playing. Sometimes tin rattles are attached to the djembe that sound with every beat on the drum.

There are three basic sounds produced from the djembe by using different hand techniques.

- ♦ The bass beat is a robust deep sound produced by hitting the drum directly in the center with the hand slightly cupped.
- ♦ The tone beat is a mid-range sound created by striking the drum on the edge with the fingers, keeping them together.
- ♦ The slap beat is a crisp, clear, cracking sound produced by striking the drum in the same spot as the tone, keeping the fingers open and hitting the drum more forcefully.



**Drums from Les Percussions de Guinee's North American Tour -
2001-2002 - Sponsored by the Global Education Center**

Djembefola

Masters of the Djembe

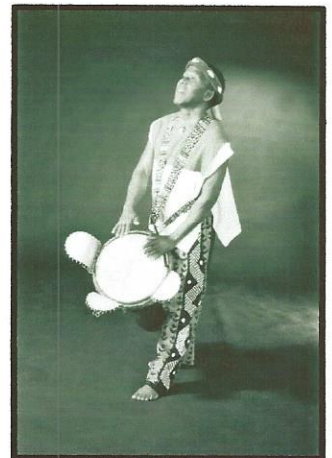
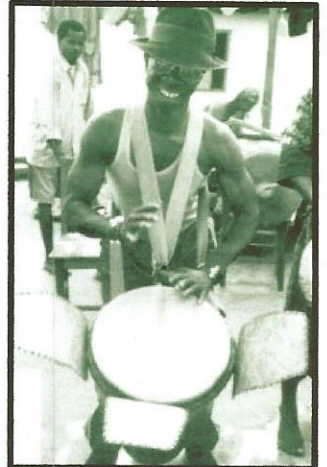
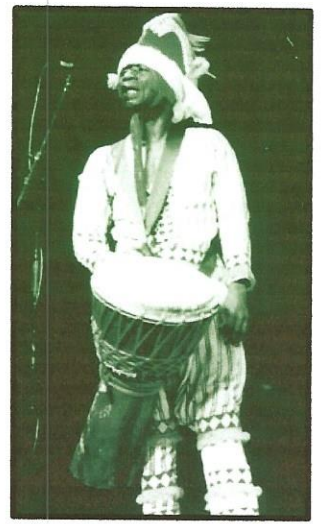
Papa Ladi Camara is credited with bringing the djembe out of Africa and sharing it with the rest of the world. Born in 1923 in Norassoba, Guinea, Papa Ladi's destiny was revealed to his parents before his birth - that he would become one of the greatest drummers the world would ever know. As a teen he joined Les Ballets Africains and toured the world, spreading the power and joy of the djembe. He moved to the U.S. in the late 1960's, where he taught and performed until moving to Senegal in 2001. Papa Ladi Camara returned to the ancestors in October of 2004. He will always be remembered for his contributions to the spread of the djembe in the western world.

Fadouba Oulare was the first djembe player from Guinea to be recognized around the world. Fadouba Oulare was born in 1935 in Felaway, Guinea. At the age of seven, Fadouba began training on djembe with his father Youssouf Oulare. Fadouba grew up playing djembe for folklore and traditional Malinke ceremonies. In 1959, Keita Fodeba, from the ministry of culture, began working with Fadouba to start the first national drum and dance group, Les Ballet Africains. Fadouba was the first lead djembefola of the ballet. After a few years of international tours with the ballet, Fadouba was recruited to perform with the Military Ballet in 1961. He played with this ballet for 20 years. After his ballet tours, Fadouba settled in Faranah, Guinea where he has become world renown for his generous spirit and teaching style.*

Famoudou Konaté is a world-renowned virtuoso of the djembe drum and its orchestra. One of only a handful of initiated Masters of the Malinké drumming tradition, Famoudou is universally respected as one of the world's premiere djembe Drum Masters. He has dedicated his life to performing and preserving the music of his people, helping to elevate the djembe orchestra from its traditional roots to worldwide popularity. Famoudou was born in 1940 near Sangbaralla, a village in the Hamana region of Upper Guinea, the Malinké heartland and the birthplace of the Dunun family of rhythms. A percussive prodigy, he was drumming in community festivals at the age of eight and was soon in demand as a djembefola across the region. From 1959 to 1985, Famoudou was the Lead Djembe Soloist for Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée, touring the world and performing with astounding virtuosity. During this time, Famoudou himself created many of the musical arrangements now common in West African performance groups worldwide.*

Mamady Keita is considered to be one of the world's greatest djembe masters. Born in 1950 in the small village of Balandugu in the Wassolon area of Northern Guinea, Mamady unveiled his talent as a drummer at a very early age. It is said that it was revealed to his mother during her pregnancy that Mamady's destiny was to become a talented drummer who would share the traditions of his people with the entire world. Mamady is staying true to this prediction as he travels the world teaching workshops through his percussion school, Tam Tam Mandingue, and performing with his professional group, Sewa Kan. Mamady's teacher in his early years was Karinkajan Konde, an elder of the village and djembefola, who initiated Mamady into the secrets of the djembe, teaching him the history of the Manding and their musical traditions. Mamady absorbed the teachings of Konde, practicing furiously and following his heart and the blessings of the ancestors to become recognized as one of the greatest djembe players of all time.

*Information from the artists' websites.





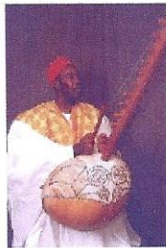
The Bass Drums (Dununs)

The three drums that make up the bass section of the djembe orchestra provide the "melody" or "heartbeat" of the rhythm. Like the djembe, these drums are carved from hollowed tree trunks into a cylindrical shape. The drum heads are made of cowhide on both ends, are played with a stick and often are accompanied by an iron cow bell attached to the drum.

The Kenkeni is the smallest of the bass drums and is the drum with the highest pitch.

The Sangban has a mid-bass tone and is the medium-sized of the the three drums.

Often called the Mother Drum, the Dununba is the largest of the three drums and has a deep bass sound. While it is usually carved out of wood, it is sometimes created out of a large steel barrel.



Baba Djimo Kouyate

The Griots



The dunun drums are often played by the griots, the oral historians who preserve and share the stories and songs of the people. These same storytellers often share their stories through songs and music created on the kora and the balafon.

The Kora is a 21-stringed harp that was created in the 13th Century and used by the griots to share the stories of both ancient and contemporary civilization. It is made of a long wooden stick attached to a half spherical calabash gourd that is covered by a cow or sheep skin. It has 21 strings, 11 for the left hand and 10 for the right. Besides serving as a rich library of traditional songs and stories, the griot has important functions in community life, including counselor and ceremonial leader. The office of griot is inherited, passed on by a father to his eldest son. In most Malinke communities, it is the blacksmiths who carry on these traditions.

The Balafon is the predecessor of today's xylophones and marimbas. Often played by the griots, the balafon is made of a wood chassis on which wood keys are cut at different lengths. Each key has a resonator made of calabash gourds with holes covered by membranes that resonate when the keys are struck with rubber-tipped mallets.

Questions for discussion:

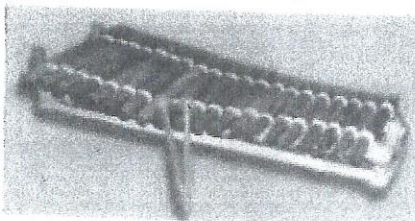
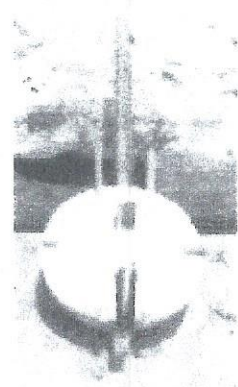
- 1) What is a Diali or Griot?
- 2) Do we have the equivalent in our society?
- 3) Which tradition is richer in culture, the oral tradition or the written? Support your belief with examples from both traditions.

Activities for exploration:

- 1) Write a history of your family or your own life. Share it orally. Use songs, movement and other art forms to add interest and depth to your story.
- 2) Research the oral traditions in other cultures, i.e. Native American, Native Hawaiian
- 3) Study the Mali Empire and note the many traditions that arose out of that Great Empire that are still prevalent in Guinea and other countries of West Africa today

THE INSTRUMENTS

Kora: The kora, invented in the 13th Century, was played in the royal court of the Manding civilization. Considered the instrument of the Diali, or tribal music historian, there is a rich library of traditional songs and melodies for this instrument. The kora is made of a long wooden stick which crosses half a spherical resonating calabash gourd. It is covered with cow skin and has 21 strings.



Balafon: The balafon is the predecessor to the wooden xylophone. Thirteen to twenty-one wood keys of different lengths sit on a rectangular frame. Each key has its own resonator, made of a small calabash. The keys are struck with mallets. The balafon is important to Diali, who lay while reciting praise songs.

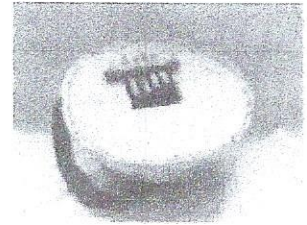
Botte: The botte is a bowl-shaped drum covered with cow skin. It is played with a stick held in one hand and a large accompanying bell played with the other hand, using two rings as beaters.





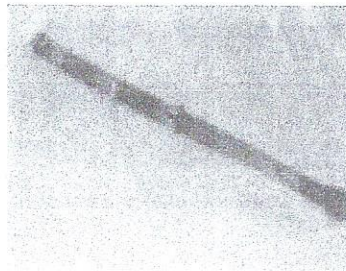
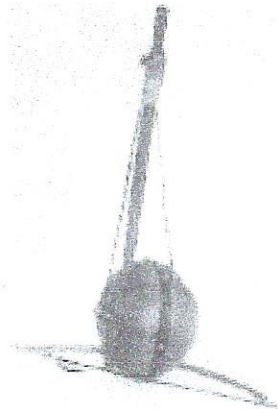
Bolon: The bolon is a kind of bass harp, made of a calabash with a neck made of a bent wooden stick and three strings. It is often played at hunters ceremonies.

Gongoma: The gongoma is made of a half calabash with a hide or wooden sounding board. On the body are four or five metal tongues, which are plucked with one hand while the other hand taps the calabash.



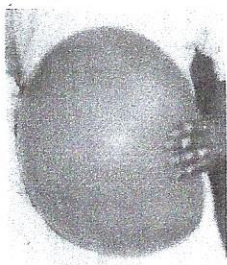
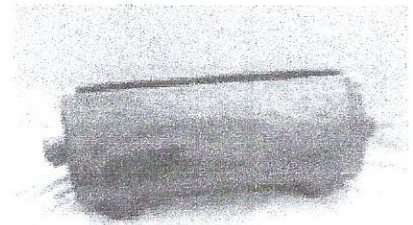
N'goni: The n'goni is a stringed instrument carved from wood to form a canoe-shaped bowl. The top is then covered with goat skin. Five strings produce the sound.

Flute: The flute is made of wood or bamboo, with three or more holes and decorated with shells and leather. The sound is made using a variation of the breath force. Often the player hums into the instrument, simultaneously playing it to produce an eerie, melodious sound.

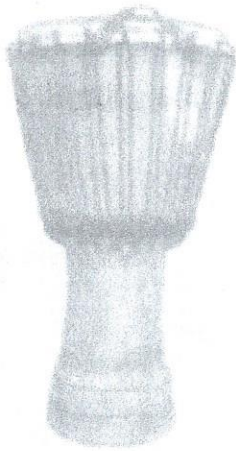


Violon: The violon combines a variety of materials to produce its sound. Wood, twine, brass, leather, and calabash come together to deliver a rich, reedy timbre. The bow is strung with horse hair.

Krin: The krin is a cylinder-shaped melodic drum made of hollow wood. Two sticks striking the log produce the sound. The krin is used in Guinea's forest region to relay messages and is often referred to as a telephone.

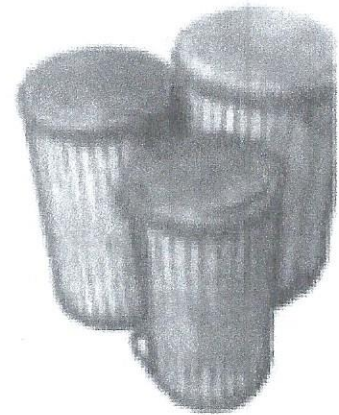


Calabash: The calabash is a gourd that grows on a vine like a pumpkin or squash. Fleshy when harvested, the calabash dries to an extremely hard vessel that has many uses in West Africa and other parts of the world. Many of the instruments from Guinea are made using a full or half calabash.



Djembe: The djembe is the main instrument used in Guinean music. It is played at cultural ceremonies and celebrations. Carved from a single piece of wood, the djembe is covered with a goat skin head and played with bare hands.

Dununs: The three drums that make up the bass section of the djembe orchestra provide the heartbeat or melody of the rhythm. The smallest of the three drums is the **kenkeni**, which produces the highest sound. The **sangban** is the mid-range drum. The **dundunba** (also sometimes called **doundoun**) is the largest, producing the deepest, most resonant sound. The dununs, like the djembe, are carved from a single piece of wood. They are covered with cow hide and played with sticks and accompanying cowbells.



THE DJEMBE ORCHESTRA

The drum, with its bright and charismatic rhythms, occupies a central position in African society. During many festivities, or daily sacred ceremonies, religious or magical/spiritual initiations, the djembe entertains and brings a powerful atmosphere of full participation and the sharing of common experiences. The djembe, as a means of communication, spreads and transmits knowledge and messages, with consistency and coherence, allowing the dancers to express themselves.

In Guinea, the musical panorama is symbolized by the diversity of wonderful rhythms and styles in which perfect harmony becomes a reality. The official cultural policy of Guinea commits to overcoming ethnic barriers by allowing the djembefola (or masters of djembe) to perform, navigating through the rhythms and drumming styles from the different cultural areas of the country corresponding to its four natural regions: Lower Guinea; Mid Guinea; Upper Guinea; Forest Guinea.

Valued and respected worldwide, the master musicians and Diali of Guinea have contributed to introducing their culture abroad with tours such as **The Legends of West Africa** in an effort to break barriers and promote cultural understanding.

The Malinke

The Malinke, also called Mandingo, were once a powerful force in the Mali Empire, with history dating back to the 10th Century. They lived along the Niger River in what is now Mali, a land rich in gold and iron deposits. Under their king Sundiata Keita, they became one of the wealthiest and most powerful empires through their trade relationships with other countries and the development of a strong infrastructure within that empire.

During the 14th Century, the Malinke were ruled by Sundiata's grand-nephew, who added even more wealth and prestige to the kingdom, as he sent massive caravans carrying tons of gold across the trade routes of northwestern Africa. This king, Mansa Musa, ruled with total authority, having the activities of his reign recorded by oral historians. The jeli also negotiated territorial disputes for the king.

Upon Mansa Musa's death, the Malinke saw a decline that sent them into smaller self-governing kingdoms. These smaller kingdoms fell under French control in the early 1900's, as did most of West Africa. Mali gained its independence in 1960, followed by Senegal and Guinea, incorporating the Malinke into the new governments.

Today the Malinke inhabit several countries, but are most concentrated in the river regions of Senegal, Mali and Guinea. Numbering approximately 700,000 many Malinke continue to live in independent territories, ruled by kings who are descendants of ancient royalty. Among the diverse groups, there is a class system based on ancestral lineage, with the most highly regarded being the descendants of royalty. The primary languages among the people continue to be Malinke (Mandingo) and French.

Malinke villages consist of both traditional houses, round with a cone-shaped roof, and more modern houses, which are square and built with mud blocks and tin roofs, each housing large extended families. The Malinke have a patriarchal society, with a typical household consisting of a husband and wife, children and the husband's parents and grandparents. The eldest male is recognized as the head of the household.

Malinke women typically stay at home grinding and storing grain, cooking and caring for children, while the men tend to farm and fish. Their land is very fertile, allowing them to raise grains, beans, rice and vegetables. They trade with people of other cultures to gain other food sources, such as dairy products.

The Malinke are known for their colorful batik and tie-dyed fabrics and their leather goods. These items are traded with other cultures. Traditional dress is still seen in small villages; the Malinke living in cities most often wear western style clothing.

Although their original religion involved the worship of nature and ancestor spirits, most Malinke practice Islam today. The Malinke king during the 11th Century converted to Muslim and opened the Malinke's prosperous trade routes during his pilgrimage to Mecca, helping Mali to become a key region in the Islamic world during the Middle Ages.

Dance, music and folk songs are vital to Malinke rituals and entertainment. The drum, the balafon and the kora are essential instruments for creating rhythms and melodies to accompany song and dance. Two drums originating from the Mali Empire include the djembe and the djun. The jeli, following the traditions of the poets of long ago, continue to record and express the history and stories of the Malinke. Their djembe traditions live on through the mastery of artists such as Mamady Keita, Famadou Konate, Madou Dembele, Les Percussions de Guinee and Les Ballets Africains.

MASKS IN WEST AFRICAN CULTURE

Masks are believed to reveal the traditions and thought systems of traditional tribal cultures. Every mask has a particular meaning, with only those who have been initiated in a mask's secret ceremonies knowing the mask's myths, rituals and meanings. The appearance of some masks is restricted to a select few, with the viewing of a mask by an unauthorized person believed to bring ill to the viewer.

A mask is a "symbol of mystical transformation" with the person wearing it becoming the being it represents. Masks are usually worn by men, although there are masks that are matriarchal by nature. Masks are believed to carry the essence of a spirit, showing itself through the mask, the costume and the wearer, with its purpose being to draw attention to the energy of the spirit.

Masks are important in the daily rituals of African society, such as in the following circumstances:

- Initiation rites
- Harvest festivals
- Purification rites
- Hunting traditions
- Farming traditions
- Protection
- Transmitting messages to the people
- Public appearances of secret societies

Regardless of the purpose of the mask, the appearance of a masked dancer in a village is always exciting. Traditional rhythms and dances usually accompany such appearances.

Information from **Mamady Keita: A Life for the Djembe** by Uschi Billmeier

Questions for discussion:

- 1) How are masks used in our society?
- 2) Do you see any similarity between their use in our culture and in West Africa?

Activities for exploration:

- 1) Explore the masks of various indigenous cultures, such as Hopi and Zuni Indians, the Maori of New Zealand, etc.
- 2) Create a mask that captures the essence of an important tradition in your life.

KAKILAMBE

Country of origin: Guinea, Boke Region

People of origin: Baga

Kakilambe is a rhythm that evolved out of a traditional dance of the Baga people in the western part of Guinea, performed at the annual appearance of the Kakilambe mask. This important mask, which appears only once a year, is considered to be a protection against evil spirits and, when interpreted by a priest of Kakilambe, reveals the future.

On this special day, the mask appears from the forest, accompanied by the priests joining the people who have gathered in welcome. The people bow as the mask rises to five meters in height. A member of each family holds a rope that is attached to the mask. The priests and male elders dance around the mask to a fast rhythm. A priest receives the mask's predictions, revealing them to the people as the rhythm becomes slower and softer. He shares the mask's information about the year's harvest, the health of the people, and similar interests of daily life.

SORSORNET

Country of origin: Guinea, Boke Region

People of origin: Baga

While Sorsornet is a popular rhythm for dancing today, its origins are tied to the Sorsornet mask that is protector of the village. It is considered to bring such good luck to the people that it has gained an almost holy status. It is kept in the forest, brought among the people only on occasion.

Sorsornet is a protector against evil, summoned by the guardian of the mask when someone has severe problems. The Sorsornet rhythm is played as the revered mask moves through the village.

Kakilambe



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GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER

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HARVEST RHYTHMS

While harvest rhythms have evolved into some of the most popular rhythms at festivals, they are also some of the easiest to improvise with students of all ages. All cultures can relate to the planting, nurturing and harvesting of the food that we all consume; and the sharing of harvest traditions are a great way to bring the arts into your teaching of ecology and environmental connections. Below is information about a traditional harvest rhythm called Kassa. Even if you know nothing of the traditional steps associated with this rhythm, it is easy to have children create their own dance mimicking typical harvest movements.

KASSA

Country of origin: Guinea, N. E. Region

People of origin: Malinke

In the Malinke language, the word *kassa* means not only the grain attic but also the grower; it is also the name of a rhythm that accompanies the harvest. At this time, the peasants set off to work in the fields, which are often far removed from the village. They set up a camp where they will stay for as much time as necessary. Girls go with them to prepare their meals. The drummers follow the workers from field to field, playing Kassa as they go. The drums can be heard the whole day long; from time to time people dance before them. Once the work is finished, the workers' return to the village is the occasion for a great feast called *kassala don*.

Song

Get up grower,
The meal has arrived.
Get up, best of growers,
The meal is there.

Information taken directly from **Sila Laka** CD by Mamady Keita

Questions for discussion:

- 1) What are some harvest celebrations we share in our society?
- 2) What purpose do harvest celebrations serve?

Activities for exploration:

- 1) Create a dance reflecting some actions necessary for planting and harvesting.
- 2) Describe the traditions of a harvest celebration that your family shares.
- 3) Compare harvest celebrations around the world as well as celebrations that involve food as an important component (i.e., Thanksgiving, Kwanzaa, Passover, Eid ul-Fitr).

SUNU **(Sounou, Sunun)**

Country of origin: Northern Mali, bordering Mauritania
Kayes region of Mali
Border region between Guinea and Mali

People of origin: Kagoora, descendants of the Bamana
Kakolo, Maraka, Bambara

Sunu is a popular rhythm that takes its name from a beautiful young girl named Sunu Mamady, who lived in pre-colonial times in the village of Sagabari. She was much loved in her village and was invited to participate in all celebrations, where her grace and beauty as a dancer were much appreciated. Sunu rhythm was created in her honor by a djembefola troupe in her village and was played and danced to celebrate good harvests. Young girls would demonstrate their grace, beauty and femininity; young boys would demonstrate their strength, vigor and athletic prowess (Karambe Diabate).

Today Sunu is considered to be a rhythm of celebration that is played at marriages, baptisms and on traditional feast days (Mamady Keita). It is still a dance performed by both men and women to rejoice after a bountiful harvest (Mamadou Kante).

Songs: ***Meyaee, Meyaee, Meyaee sunubeniima***
Meyaee, Meyaee, Meyaee sunubeniima
Meyaee, Meyaee, kaluyafo londo
Kaluyafo, Kaluye n'dyarabi fee Konakry
Meyaee, Meyaee, Meyaee sunu beni maa

The Sunu dance suits you well, Meyaee (a girl's name)
Say hello to my friends in Conakry for me (Mamady Keita)

RHYTHMS FOR RITES OF PASSAGE IN WEST AFRICA

The biggest and most decisive event in the life of an adolescent is his or her initiation in the community of the tribe. Mamady Keita (p. 44)

In traditional village life, children are raised by strict social rules. Very young children are educated by mothers and other women at home, branching out to small group interaction with their peers at age three or four, as they explore their villages. Older children assume responsibility for the younger ones, expecting their obedience and respect, as they try on their duties as useful citizens in the village.

The formal initiation into the community begins around seven years of age. Children are taught traditional values and ideas as well as the responsibilities of moving from childhood to adulthood. Their initiation ends with the circumcision, making them full members of the community.

While many traditions have changed in modern society, especially in the cities, puberty remains a festive occasion for celebration, with many of the traditional rhythms designated for specific rites of passage still played as part of the rituals.

Information from **Mamady Keita: A Life for the Djembe** by Uschi Billmeier

Questions for discussion:

- 1) What are some rites of passage in our society.
- 2) What purpose do rites of passage serve in society?

Activities for exploration:

- 1) Describe a rites of passage tradition that is meaningful in your family.
- 2) Explore rites of passage in different cultures.
- 3) Create a new rite of passage and design a ceremony for celebrating it.

DUNUNBA – THE DANCE OF THE STRONG MEN

Dununba refers to a family of traditional Malinke rhythms. They are all related to a dance that was originally performed only by men as a way to settle disputes and determine superiority between different groups of men within the village, hence the name *The Dance of the Strong Men*.

The social life of adolescents and adults continues to evolve around their group, as determined by age, defined below:

Baratigi – older men, 20 – 25 years of age

Baramakono – younger men, 15 – 20 years of age

Tired of being patronized by the older men and eager to enjoy more rights and decision-making freedoms, the Baramakono challenge the Baratigi by giving the gift of ten cola nuts, a symbolic gesture of the challenge.

A Dununba celebration involving the entire village is organized for the dance battle. Traditionally, the dancers wore specific clothing – wide pants and headbands – and carried both an ax and a whip. The groups formed two circles, moving into rows, facing one another as the fight begins. The dancers beat one another with the whips until one of the groups surrendered, sometimes ending with great bloodshed.

Today the dununba festival is more playful, involving mock fighting. Dununba has evolved into a popular rhythm that is played throughout Guinea and other parts of West Africa.

SOKO

Country of origin: Guinea, Faranah Region

People of origin: Malinke

Soko is a rites of passage rhythm, traditionally played before the circumcision. In traditional village life, the elders determine the date of the circumcision, then the children travel from village to village to announce the event to their relatives. Upon the arrival of the children in the village for their rite of circumcision, Soko is played to welcome and honor them.

Today, most circumcisions occur in the hospital after infants are born; however, the initiation celebrations continue as important events in the lives of children.

Information from **Mamady Keita: A Life for the Djembe** by Uschi Billmeier

POPULAR RHYTHMS

Many rhythms are popular at celebrations and festivals that are an important part of life in Guinea. These rhythms are played whenever there is a gathering of people to celebrate and dance. Festivals may mark holidays; seasonal activities, such as harvest or end of Ramadan; family celebrations, like weddings or baptisms; and spontaneous celebrations of life.

Questions for discussion:

- 1) Can you name songs or music that are tied to specific events?
- 2) Would these events feel the same without these traditional songs?

Activities for exploration:

- 1) Take a traditional song or piece of music and change its meaning by using it in a different fashion, or
- 2) Think of celebratory traditions in your family that are tied to specific holidays and design an appropriate festival to honor it

DANSA

Country of origin: Mali, Kayes Region

People of origin: Kassounbe

Dansa is an example of a traditional rhythm that has evolved over time into a popular rhythm, played at most festivals. It is played for all types of celebrations and enjoyed by all people.

KUKU

Country of origin: Forest Guinea and Ivory Coast

People of origin: Manian

Kuku is a popular rhythm at festivals. Traditionally, it was played when women returned to the village after a day of fishing. Originally, Kuku was played solely on the djembe. It has evolved into a very popular rhythm that is played on djembe and dunun.

Information from Mamady Keita: **A Life for the Djembe** by Uschi Billmeier and
Rhythms and Songs from Guinea by Famadou Konate and Thomas Ott

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Oral traditions shared by Mamady Keita during his residency at the Global Education Center, October, 2004.

Oral traditions shared by Famoudou Konate during his residency at the Global Education Center, July, 2008.

Oral traditions shared by Bolokada Conde during his many residencies at the Global Education Center.

Programming of the Global Education Center is made possible with annual funding from Metro Arts: Nashville Office of Arts and Culture, Tennessee Arts Commission, and National Endowment for the Arts.

School outreach support is received from The Nissan Foundation and The Memorial Foundation, as well as through contracted services from individual schools and school systems.



Guinea

Study

Guide

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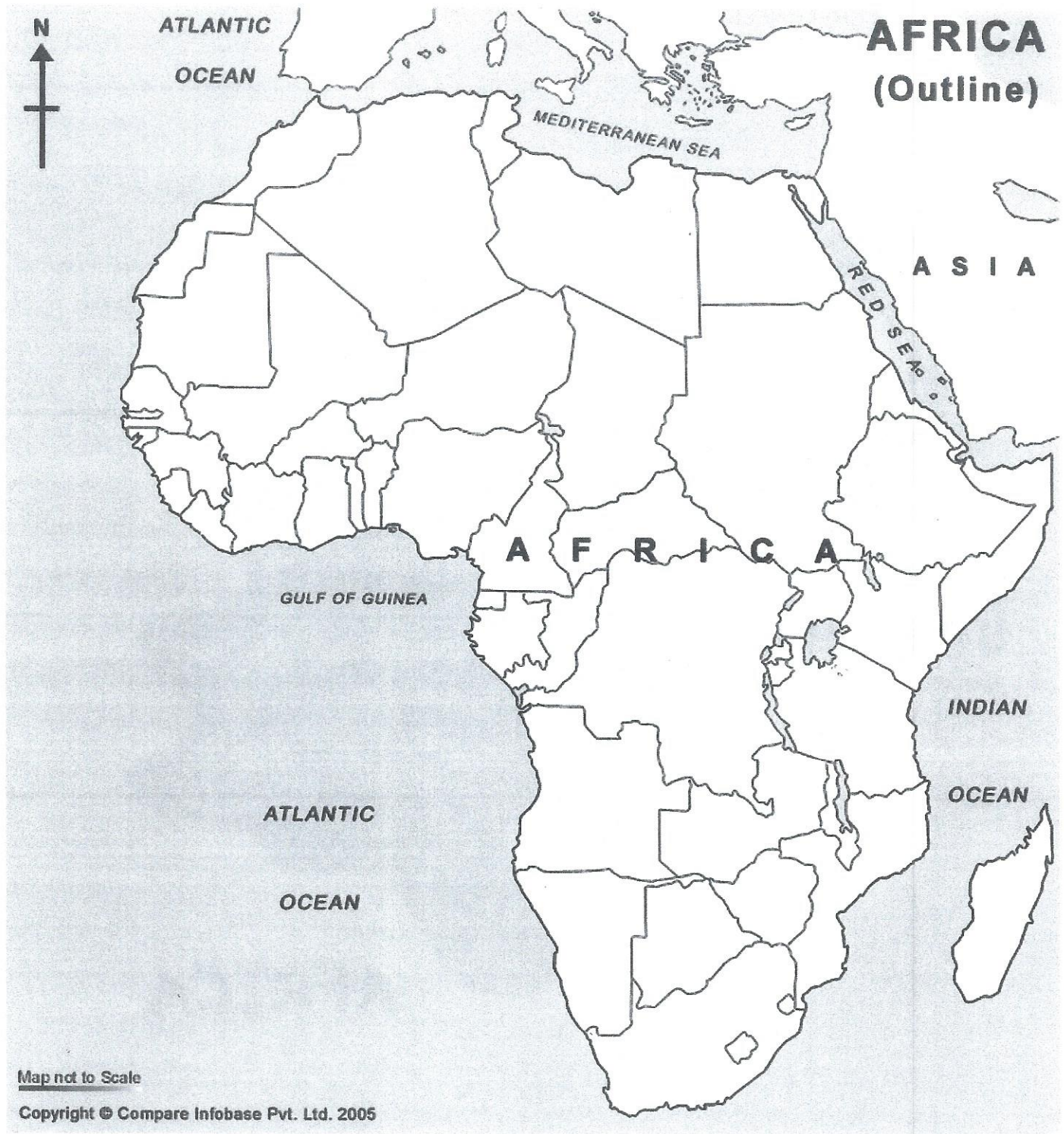
Map of Guinea





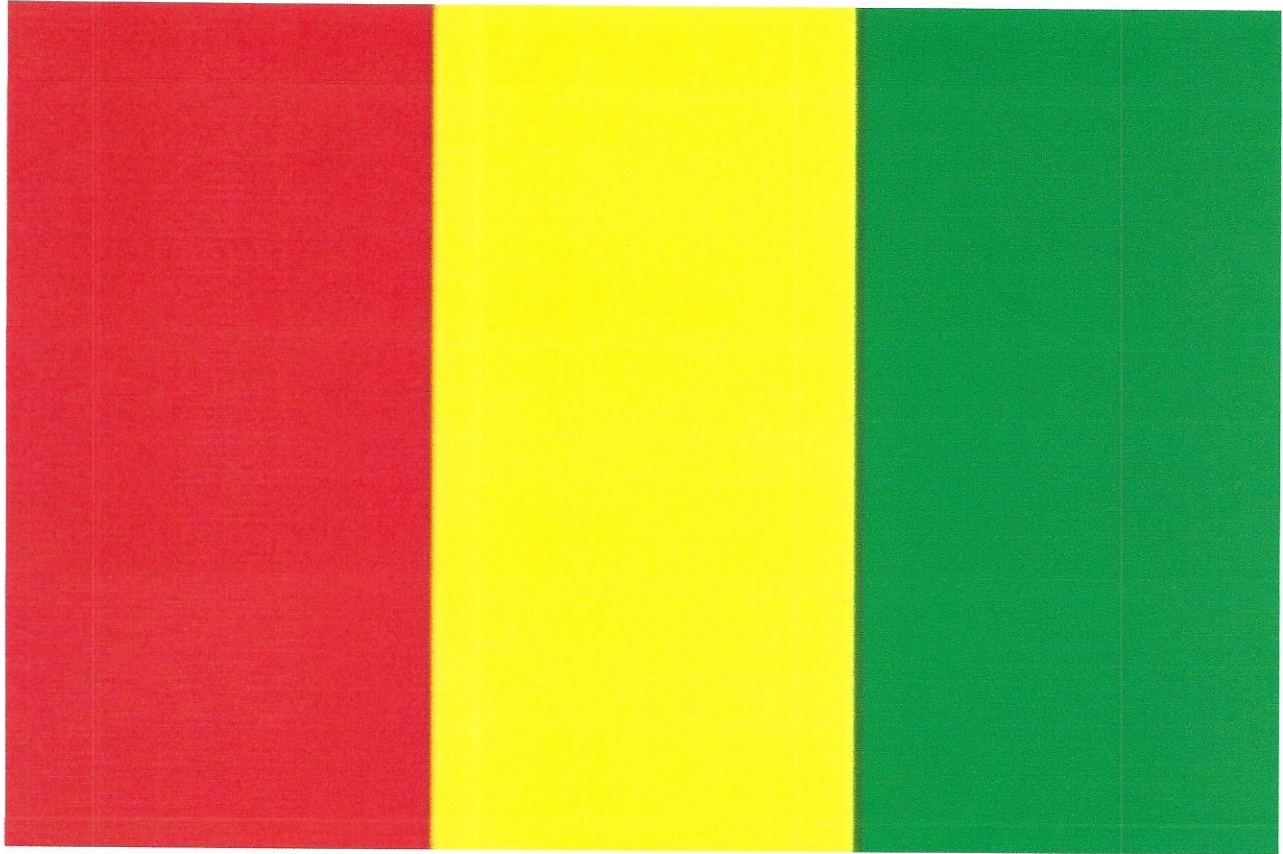
MAP OF THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA

Find Guinea on the map. Color it green.



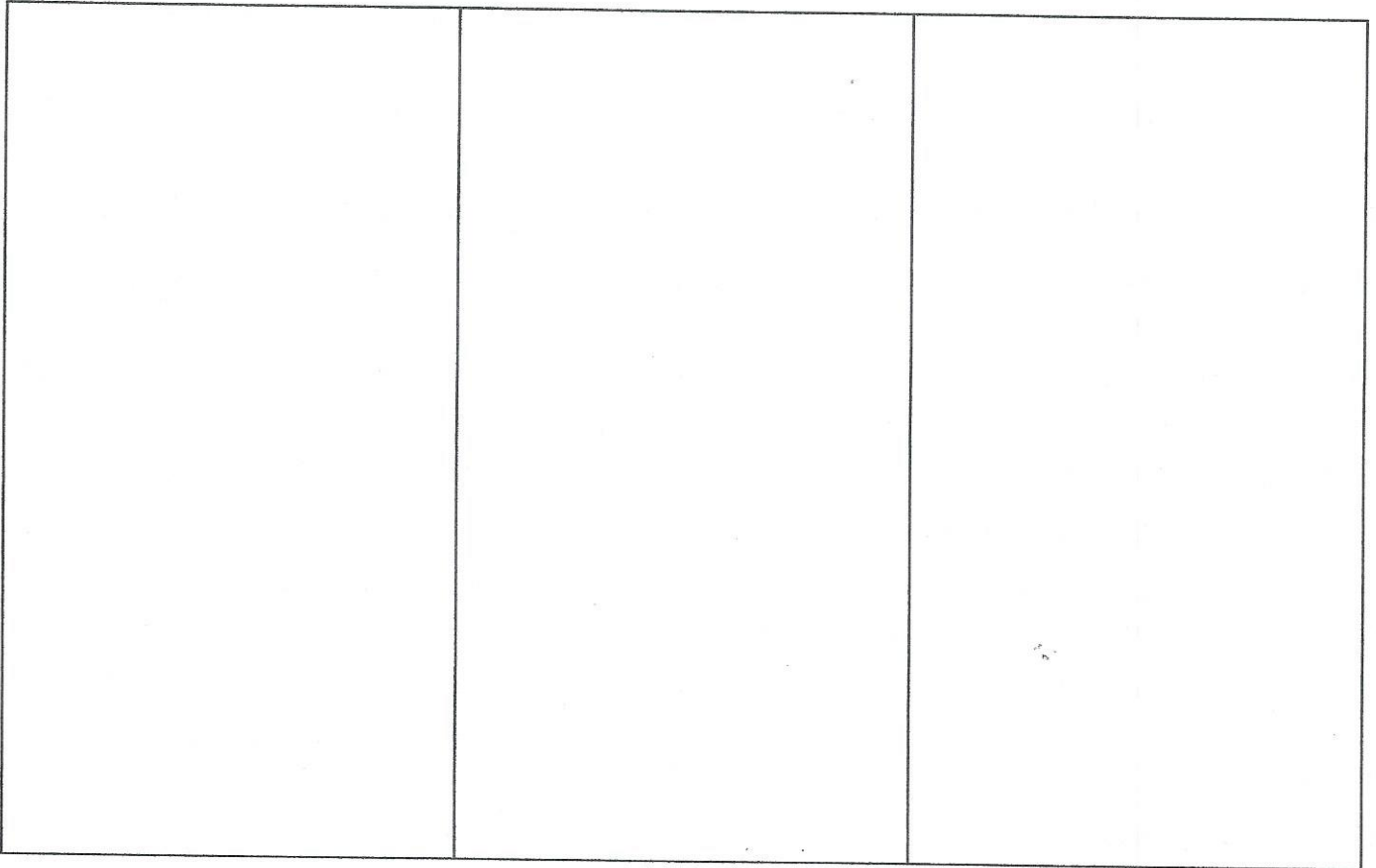
THE FLAG OF GUINEA

The national flag of Guinea was officially adopted on November 10, 1958. The flag features the Pan-African colors of red, yellow and green.



Flag Title

Color the flag of Guinea.



Geography of Guinea-Grades 1-5

Guinea is located on the Atlantic Coast of West Africa and is bordered by Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The country is divided into four geographic regions: Lower Guinea (on the coast), Middle Guinea (right next to Lower Guinea), Upper Guinea (the mountainous region), and Forest Guinea (a rain forest region). The Niger, Gambia, and Senegal Rivers are among the 22 West African rivers that have their origins in Guinea. Most of Guinea has a tropical, hot, humid climate with a rainy season lasting from May to November. Conakry's (Guinea's capital city) year-round average high is 85 °F, and the low is 74 °F. Its average annual rainfall is 169 inches. Upper Guinea has a shorter rainy season.

Geography Facts

Area - comparative: slightly smaller than Oregon

Border countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone

Climate: generally hot and humid; monsoonal-type rainy season (May to November) with southwesterly winds; dry season (December to April) with northeasterly harmattan winds.

Harmattan - an extremely dry, dusty wind from the Sahara that blows toward the western coast of Africa between November and April.

Terrain: generally flat coastal plain, hilly to mountainous interior

Elevation extremes:

lowest point: Atlantic Ocean 0 m

highest point: Mont Nimba 1,752 m

Natural resources: bauxite, iron ore, diamonds, gold, uranium, hydropower, fish

Natural hazards: hot, dry, dusty harmattan haze may reduce visibility during dry season

Environment - current issues: deforestation; inadequate supplies of potable water; desertification; soil contamination and erosion; overfishing, overpopulation in forest region

Geography of Guinea-Grades 6-12

Guinea is located on the Atlantic Coast of West Africa and is bordered by Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The country is divided into four geographic regions: A narrow coastal belt (Lower Guinea); the pastoral Fouta Djallon highlands (Middle Guinea); the northern savanna (Upper Guinea); and a southeastern rain-forest region (Forest Guinea). The Niger, Gambia, and Senegal Rivers are among the 22 West African rivers that have their origins in Guinea. The coastal region of Guinea and most of the inland have a tropical climate, with a rainy season lasting from May to November, relatively high and uniform temperatures, and high humidity. Conakry's year-round average high is 29 degrees C (85 °F), and the low is 23 degrees C (74 °F); its average annual rainfall is 4.3 metres (169 inches). Sahelian Upper Guinea has a shorter rainy season and greater daily temperature variations.

Geography Facts

Area: total: 245,857 km

Area - comparative: slightly smaller than Oregon

Land boundaries: total - 3,399 km

Border countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone

Coastline: 320 km

Climate: generally hot and humid; monsoonal-type rainy season (May to November) with southwesterly winds; dry season (December to April) with northeasterly harmattan winds.

Harmattan - an extremely dry, dusty wind from the Sahara that blows toward the western coast of Africa between November and April.

Terrain: generally flat coastal plain, hilly to mountainous interior

Elevation extremes:

lowest point: Atlantic Ocean 0 m

highest point: Mont Nimba 1,752 m

Natural resources: bauxite, iron ore, diamonds, gold, uranium, hydropower, fish

Land use:

arable land: 2%

permanent crops: 0%

permanent pastures: 22%

forests and woodland: 59%

other: 17% (1993 est.)

Natural hazards: hot, dry, dusty harmattan haze may reduce visibility during dry season

Environment - current issues: deforestation; inadequate supplies of potable water; desertification; soil contamination and erosion; overfishing, overpopulation in forest region

Languages of Guinea

French is the official language of Guinea, although many other languages are spoken. Some of the regional languages include: Kissi, Kpelle, Maninkakan, Pular, Susu, Toma. Bambara, Bandi, Krio, Malinke and Soninke. In all there are 36 languages in Guinea. Of those, 34 are living languages and 2 are extinct.

Susu is one of the most common languages. Below are some Susu words.

English	Susu	Pronunciation
yes	io	ee-oh
no	ade	ah-day
okay	awa	ah-wah
Are you having a good day? nah-moo-nah	Tana mou na	Tah-
Yes, I am having a good day. nah	Tana yo mou na	Tah-nah-yo-moo-
thank you	i n'wali	ee-n-wah-lee
no problem	sese mara	Say-say-mah-rah
I like drums. rah-fahn-mah	Tam-tam rafan ma	tom-tom-
I like oranges. ay rah-fahn-mah	Lefore rafan ma.	Lay-fore-
I like fish. Hanukah)-rah-fahn-mah	Yekhe rafan ma.	Ye-he (h like in
I like rice. rah-fan-mah	Bande rafan ma.	Bahn-day-
good-bye	Won guesse gue	won-guess-say-gay
mother	n'ga	n-gah
father	baba	bah-bah
child	di	dee
house like in hanukah)	bankhi	bahn-hee (2 nd h

THE CHIEF WHO WAS NO FOOL



"Help me," the old man begged. "My neighbor has stolen from me."

The paramount chief gladly listened. It pleased him that others recognized his wisdom. "What exactly is the problem?" questioned the chief.

"My neighbor stole my goats. I'm a

poor man, too poor to replace them."

"And what do you have to say?" the chief asked the man's neighbor.

"I don't know what he is talking about," answered the neighbor. "I have many goats but none of them belong to this man."

This would not be an easy problem to settle. The paramount chief would have to rely on his wisdom. It was the kind of problem he enjoyed the most.

"I have a test for you," announced the chief. "Whoever passes the test will own the goats. Go home until you can answer this for me. I want to know what is the fastest thing in the world. Do not return until you have my answer."

The two men left shaking their heads. Who could answer that question?

The old man repeated the question to his daughter, Ziah. She was as beautiful as she was wise. Right away, she whispered the answer that would please the chief. The old man returned to the chief the following morning.

The chief was surprised. "You already have an answer for my question?"

"Yes," replied the old man, "it was not difficult."

"And what is the fastest thing in the world?"

"Time," answered the old man. "We never have enough of it. It always goes too fast. There is never enough time to do all that we want to do."

The answer amazed the paramount chief. He wasn't sure if he himself could have answered the question as well. "Who helped you? Who gave you these words?" demanded the chief.

"They are my own words, my own thoughts," lied the old man. "There is no one else who helped me."

"If you are not telling the truth, I will punish you," warned the chief.

The old man was too afraid to continue the lie. "It was my daughter, Ziah, who gave me the words," he confessed. "She is a very wise woman."

"She must be!" thought the chief. "I would like to meet this woman."

Not long after that the old man presented his daughter Ziah to the paramount chief. If the chief was amazed with her wisdom, he was captivated by her beauty.

"You are indeed a wise and lovely woman. I would be honored to have you as my wife. Will you marry me?"

The honor is mine," smiled Ziah.

Although the chief was pleased, he was also concerned about having such a wise wife. He did not want her to interfere with the problems brought before him. He didn't want to share this honor with anyone, not even his wife.

"Everything in my house is yours," declared the chief. "I only have one rule for you. You must never involve yourself with the problems brought before me. This is your only warning. If you break this rule, I will send you from my house."

The chief's new wife only smiled at his command.

Things went well for quite some time. The paramount chief continued to hear people's problems while Ziah kept herself busy without becoming involved. Usually she agreed with his decisions.

One day, however, the chief gave one of his puzzles to two boys who argued over a sheep. Ziah knew she shouldn't help the boy who really owned the sheep, but he was so upset. She finally asked him to explain his problem.

"The chief asked for the impossible," he sighed. "He gave us an egg and said that whoever could hatch the egg by tomorrow would own the sheep."

Ziah knew she shouldn't help but the solution was so obvious. "Take some rice to the chief," she instructed. "Tell him to plant it today so that in the morning you will have rice to feed your chicken. He will know that it is just as impossible to grow rice in one day as it is to hatch an egg that quickly."

The boy ran to the chief with the rice. He said exactly the words he was told. The chief was not impressed; he was angry! "Who told you this? Who gave you the rice?" he ordered. "These words are too wise for one so young."

"They are my own words, my own thoughts," said the boy too afraid to speak the truth. "There is no one else who helped me."

"If you are not speaking the truth, I will punish you," warned the chief.

"It was Ziah!" cried the boy. "She knew you'd understand the wisdom."

The chief, furious his wife had broken his only rule for her, called her before him and scolded, "Didn't you know all that I have is yours? You have broken the only rule I had for you. Now, go back to your father's home."

"Before I go, may I fix you one final meal?" asked the woman. "Then, I will take what is mine and go."

"Yes," answered the chief. "Make whatever you want. Take whatever you want. Just be sure that you do not remain here tonight!"

Ziah prepared the chief's favorite meal. She served it with a generous amount of palm wine. Before the meal was finished, the chief became very drunk and quietly fell asleep. Ziah's plans worked exactly as she had hoped.

With her family's help, she carried the paramount chief to her father's home. They placed him on a bed and he slept soundly through the night. In the morning the chief's voice boomed throughout the house. "Where am I? What am I doing here?" he demanded.

Ziah entered the room and grinned. "You said I could take whatever I wanted from your house. I wanted you and so I took you."

"You are certainly a wise woman," smiled the chief. "Come return with me to our home. Only a fool would send away such a woman."

"And you, my chief, are no fool," whispered the clever wife.

The Chief Who Was No Fool



BLACK SNAKE

AND THE

EGGS



"My eggs!" cried Chicken. "One of my eggs is missing! Yesterday I had twelve eggs and today there are only eleven."

As Chicken fled her nest to find Rooster, she had no idea that she was about to lose more eggs. Just out of view of the nest, the thief patiently waited for Chicken to leave her eggs again. Black Snake crept slowly and quietly up to the nest. He eyed the eggs and quickly swallowed one.

Black Snake smiled to himself. His plan had been so simple and had worked so well. He swallowed

another egg. It slid far down his long throat before his muscles crushed the fragile shell. "I'll be back later for another delicious egg, Chicken," hissed Black Snake as he slithered away. "Thank you for another fine meal."

Meanwhile, the frantic chicken lead Rooster back to her nest. "Why would someone take one of my eggs?" she clucked.

"Are you sure you counted correctly? Maybe you just thought you saw eleven eggs?" suggested Rooster.

From the expression on Chicken's face, Rooster knew he shouldn't have asked that question. She glared at him and said, "You know I can count. See for yourself. How many eggs are in my nest?"

"One, two, three," began Rooster. He frowned and stopped counting out loud.

"What's the matter now?" questioned Chicken. "Are you afraid to admit you're wrong?"

"No, it's nothing like that at all," responded Rooster. "Something is very wrong here. There are only nine eggs."

"What? Nine Eggs!" cried Chicken. "What is happening? Who would do this to me?"

The next few days were just terrible for Chicken. She worried constantly about her remaining eggs. She tried to stay with her eggs at all times but it wasn't possible to always be with them. Sometimes she had to leave to get food or take care of her other chicks. No matter why she left, the same thing always happened. One or two eggs disappeared each time.

"Someone is watching me very closely," cried the chicken. "He knows exactly where I am at each moment of the day. I only have three remaining eggs."

"Although I cannot prove anything," comforted Rooster, "I think it must be Black Snake who is stealing your eggs. He's patient enough to watch you a long time, and we all know how he loves to eat eggs."

Just the thought of Black Snake eating her eggs made Chicken shudder. She had heard stories of how he swallowed eggs and then crushed them further down his long slender neck. She knew Rooster was probably correct.

"I must hurry back to my nest," declared Chicken, realizing how long she had talked to Rooster. She rushed to her eggs, but it was too late. Two more eggs had vanished. "Rooster!" she cried. "Come help me. I only have one egg left."

Rooster came quickly. "You know, it is very likely that Black Snake will steal your last egg tomorrow," he warned. "Unless we are able to trap him, this will only continue every time you have eggs."

"Yes, it's true," cried Chicken, "but what can we do? How can we possibly stop Black Snake?"

"I have a plan," whispered Rooster. "I think we will not be bothered by him much longer."

The next morning, Chicken continued guarding her last egg as if everything were normal. From a distance, Black Snake didn't realize that a deadly trap had been set for him.

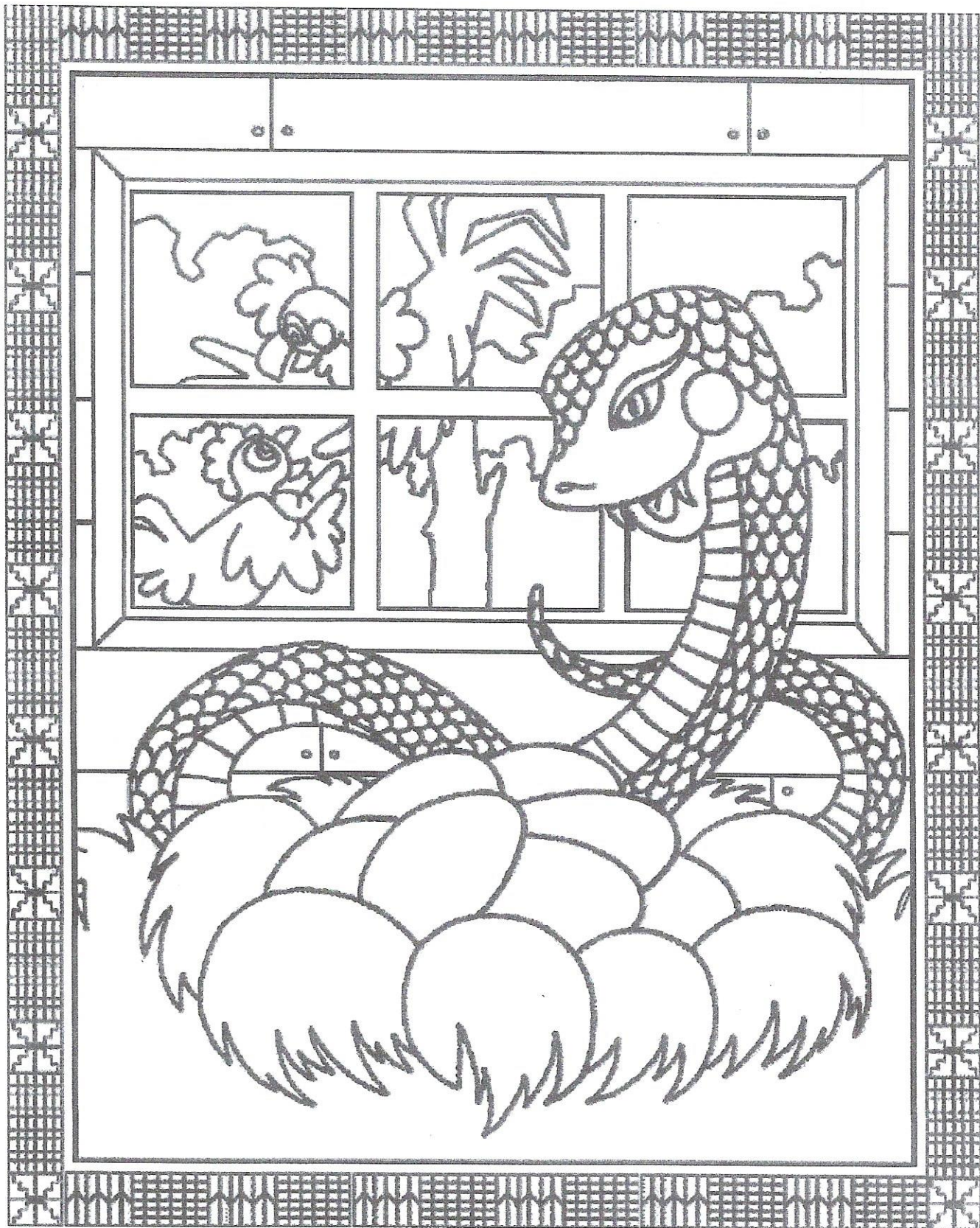
Chicken left her nest for only the shortest moment when Black Snake slithered out of hiding. In no time at all, he swallowed the final egg. It slid down his throat easily. But, when his muscles squeezed the egg, it did not break. It only became firmly lodged in his throat cutting off his air supply.

Black Snake twisted and turned trying to crush the egg or loosen it so he could breathe. By the time Chicken returned with Rooster, the struggle was over. Black Snake would steal no more eggs. He was dead.

"I'm sure he died never knowing why that egg didn't crush," crowed Rooster.

"How could he have known," clucked Chicken, "that the egg was hard boiled?"

Black Snake and the Eggs



SPIDER AND THE HONEY TREE



There was once a young girl from a village far way who had a special talent for finding the very best foods in the bush. Her oranges were just a little sweeter, her plums just a little larger, and her bananas had just a little more flavor. Everyone wondered where she located such delicious fruits. But, nobody ever asked the girl about her secrets of the bush. That is, nobody asked her after they heard the story about Spider and this young girl.

One day Spider asked this young girl to help him look for food. He was too lazy to work for himself and was sure he could trick this girl into sharing her secrets. He didn't know how clever this girl could be.

"Little girl, nobody finds fruits as sweet as yours," cooed the spider. "Will you please take me with you when you go looking in the bush?"

"I've never done that before," replied the girl.

"It would mean so much if you could do it one time," pleaded Spider.

"Well, I suppose I can do it just once," agreed the girl. "Do you promise to keep my secrets?"

"You can trust me," promised the lazy spider.

"What do you like to eat?"

"Well, I like plums and bananas, of course, but I especially love honey."

"I think I can help you," grinned the girl. Spider couldn't believe his luck.

The girl lead Spider along the path into the bush. She took him down trails into areas where people rarely ever go. Spider grinned because he knew he was about to learn her secret places for finding the very best food. After learning this, he would never again have to work hard for good food.

"This plum tree," explained the girl, "does not have much fruit so most people ignore it, but its plums are the sweetest ones in all of the bush."

Now Spider was just as greedy as he was lazy. As soon as the young girl showed him the secret plums, his eyes became wide and his mouth began to water. Then, Spider shoved the little girl into the bushes. He rushed past her and climbed up into the tree. Then, he ate every single one of the plums. He didn't even leave one plum for the little girl. And, he didn't even say thank you!

After his feast, Spider rubbed his very full belly and thought, "This is the best day of my life! What a great idea! I can't believe she showed me where her plums are found. I wonder if she will take me to any bananas? She must be very foolish."

Spider looked down at the girl with his biggest smile and she asked politely, "Do you want any of my special bananas?"

He raced down out of the tree before the girl could change her mind.

The girl continued down the path showing Spider her secrets of the bush. They walked further down the trail into areas where people rarely ever go. "Over here is a small patch of the very best bananas," declared the young girl. Again, as soon as Spider learned the secret, his eyes became wide and his mouth began to water. Again, he shoved the little girl into the bushes. He rushed past her and climbed the banana plants. He ate every single one of the ripe bananas. Again, he

left the young girl with nothing -- not even one banana. And once again, he didn't even say thank you!

His belly was so full, but Spider was not satisfied. He wanted to learn more of the secret places of the bush. He thought to himself, "This girl is really foolish. But, as long as she guides me, I will continue to eat all of her food."

Again, Spider looked down at the little girl and smiled. Once again, the young girl looked up at Spider and politely asked, "Are you too full or would you like to find some honey?"

One more time, Spider rushed out of the tree and followed the girl down the trail before she had a chance to change her mind.

The young girl guided Spider deeper and deeper into the bush where people rarely ever go. "Over here," she instructed, "is a very special tree. Deep inside a small hole is the most delicious honey in all of the bush."

Now this girl was not nearly as foolish as Spider thought. She had a plan to teach this greedy spider a lesson. She remembered that Spider loved honey and was not surprised at all when his eyes became wide and his mouth started to water. She also wasn't surprised when he shoved her into the bushes, ran past her, climbed up the tree, and squeezed into the hole. Again, he ate all of the sweet golden honey, sharing nothing with the young girl. He didn't even share one drop. And once again, he didn't even say thank you.

When Spider had eaten his fill, he tried to climb out of the tree but he couldn't get out the hole. His stomach had grown too large. He was stuck!

"Help me, young girl," cried the spider. "I cannot get out of the tree!"

"You wouldn't be stuck if you hadn't been so selfish," scolded the girl.

"I'm sorry for what I did! Please call for help," cried Spider.

"I am not as foolish as you think. You aren't sorry for what you did. You are only sorry you are caught in the tree."

"No, you're wrong," lied the spider but in his heart he knew she was right. He had enjoyed every minute, every bite of food, as long as he thought he was tricking the young girl. He never expected his idea to turn into such a problem for him. "Please call for help! I am trapped!"

Finally, a smile crossed over the little girl's face and she said she would do as the spider asked. She cried for help -- as softly as she could, "Help! Help! The foolish spider is caught inside the honey tree. Help! Somebody come and help this greedy spider!" Of course, nobody could hear her whispers for help. And, nobody could hear Spider's cries from deep inside the tree. They were too far into the bush where people rarely ever go.

Finally, the little girl looked up at Spider with a clever grin. "Good bye, Spider, I am going to get some huge oranges for my family. If you want to eat some, just follow me there." She waved to him as she left to go down the trail.

Spider and the Honey Tree



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