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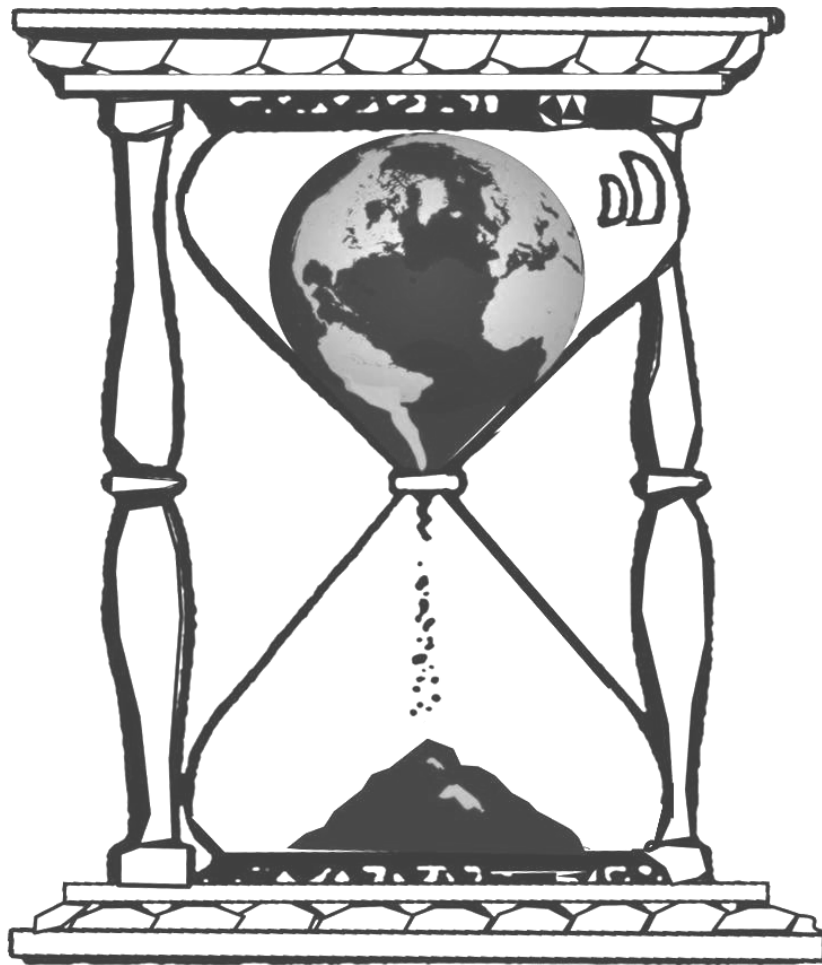
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i Think: World History

Pre-Colonial Africa



by Sharon Coletti

** It is the goal of InspirEd Educators to create instructional materials that are interesting, engaging, and challenging. Our student-centered approach incorporates both content and skills, placing particular emphasis on reading, writing, vocabulary development, and critical and creative thinking in the content areas.

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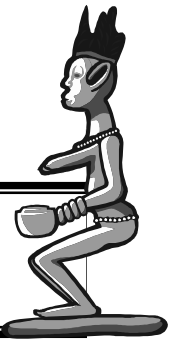
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Roots



Springboard:

Students should read “___” and answer the questions.
(Answers may vary and should be explained, but history is the unit focus.)

Objective: The student will be able to explain how African tribal cultures explained their world.

Materials: ___ (Springboard handout)
Creation Myths (5 handouts)

Terms to know:

- diversity** - differences
- ethnic group** - people who share a culture, language, religion, etc.
- culture** - way of life
- mythology** - stories about gods and goddesses
- traditions** - common practices among a group of people, such as storytelling, celebrations, family roles, and so forth

Procedure:

- After discussing the Springboard, explain that *this unit examines the African continent in the time before Europeans came and took over the land and disrupted the cultures.* Go on to explain that *this first lesson introduces some of the many African tribes and their ideas about the world, particularly some of their views about how they came to be there.*
- **For group instruction** divide students into groups, giving each ONE of the tribe’s creation myths. Have students read their assigned creation story and devise a short skit to convey the story to the class. **For individualized instruction** have the student choose two or more myths to read and compare and contrast using a Venn diagram. Refer to pages 33 or 83 for sample Venn diagrams on other topics.
- After the groups have presented their skits, lead a discussion of the stories and their similarities and differences. If desired, groups can pair up and complete a Venn Diagram before the discussion. (*Comparisons include: All have gods/goddesses that created the world. Contrasts: In some cases the creation occurred more than once for one reason or another, such as a flood. People or lesser gods “get out of hand” in some way, such as being proud or disobedient.*) During the discussion, point out that *while these stories are in written form today, they were part of the tribes’ rich oral traditions for thousands of years before being recorded.*



Africa is a very large and **diverse** continent. Its land varies from flat, dry deserts to thick forests to high, rugged mountains with some areas receiving regular rainfall and others almost none at all. The continent is home to the Sahara, the largest desert in the world, while the land along the equator is covered by tropical rain forests. With most of its vast area located in the Tropics, Africa's climate is divided mainly into two seasons, rainy and dry, though wide variations of both exist.

Some of the world's longest rivers flow through the continent, including the Nile, Niger, Zaire, and Zambezi. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, is a dormant volcano in Tanzania and to its east is the Great Rift Valley containing several huge lakes and a fascinating array of wildlife.

The people living in Africa also differ based on location and historical background. More than 3,000 different ethnic groups, often referred to as tribes, call the continent home. Each has its own culture, language, and traditions which can vary from region to region or even country to country. Some tribes share languages and have common histories, while others have endured long years of conflicts and wars between them.

In addition to the many groups native to Africa, Europeans, Arabs, and others have also settled there over its long history. At times outsiders introduced new ideas and helped bring advancements, but more often they came to rob people of their cultures, resources, and respect. Europeans, in particular, expanded the slave trade to numbers never before seen and took from the land whatever they could. African people were used to do work from that did not benefit them.

Which of these titles do you think would be the **BEST** choice for this passage?

- A. "Introduction to Africa"
- B. "A Diverse Continent"
- C. "Africa's Land and People"
- D. "Before Europeans Came"

Explain why you chose the title you did.

Based on the fact that this unit of study is called "Pre-Colonial Africa," which information in the passage do you think will be addressed in the coming days or weeks? Why? _____

A BANTU TALE

In the beginning, there was one god, but this god was actually made up of three different ones: Nzame, Mebere, and Nkwa. Nzame first created the universe. When Nzame saw what he had done he was very proud of his creation.

The other gods were pleased with the work of Nzame, but they wanted to make a ruler for the Earth so they made the elephant, the monkey, and the leopard. While they liked the animals they had created, the gods did not think these were enough, so they decided to make another animal. They combined themselves to form a new creature which they called "Power."

Power was told that he was to rule the earth. Power was very pleased and did his job well for a time. Then after a while, he grew conceited and abused the creations that the gods had placed in his care and abandoned his gods.

The gods grew angry and sent forth lightning and thunder to destroy everything, though Power himself was not destroyed. The gods had made him too strong and Power was immortal. Unable to defeat the evil Power, the gods decided to recreate the earth and begin again.

They formed a new layer of Earth and placed a single tree to grow upon it. The tree grew, matured, and dropped seeds that grew to form more trees. Some leaves from the trees fell into the water and became fish. Those leaves that fell onto the land became new animals.

Soon the world had begun anew. The new world was filled with new plants, new animals, and even a new man. This man the gods called "Sekume." Then the man Sekume made a woman companion, Mbongwe, from a tree. These people that were made had both a body and a soul. In this way the gods gave life to the body of the human creatures so that when they die, the gods could live on in them. The humans produced many children and their kind prospered on the Earth. The evil Power still exists, but it is only obeyed by a few.

The humans, the animals, and the plants live on to this day, but the old, vacant earth still lies below the new one. If someone were to dig deep enough, the old world would be found. After such a long time, though, what one would find has turned into coal.

FULANI CREATION MYTH

At the beginning there was a huge drop of milk.

Then Doondari came and created the stone.

The stone then created iron.

Iron, in turn, created fire.

Then fire created water,

And water created air.

Then Doondari descended to Earth the second time,

And he took the five elements and

Shaped them into man.

But man was proud.

So Doondari created blindness

And blindness defeated man.

But blindness, too, became proud

So Doondari created sleep to defeat blindness.

When sleep became too proud,

Doondary created worry and worry defeated sleep.

But when worry became too proud,

Doodari created death, and death defeated worry.

Then death, also, became too proud,

So Doondari descended to Earth for a third time.

This time Doondari came as Gueno, the eternal one.

And Gueno defeated death.

Adapted from a translation by Ulli Beier in The Origin of Life and Death, 1966

A MANDE MYTH

In the beginning, there was Mangala. Mangala is the single powerful being, a round and energetic presence. Within Mangala were divisions that represented many things: the four days of Mangala's week, the four elements of matter, the four directions, and other groupings of four. Mangala also contained two sets of twins.

After a time Mangala tired of carrying so much inside, so he removed everything and placed it all in a seed. The seed was to be the creation of the world, but it blew up and destroyed everything within it. Mangala was of course disappointed but he did not lose hope.

Instead, he began again to create the world. This time he began with two sets of twin seeds. Mangala planted the seeds in an egg. He then put more sets of twin seeds into the egg until there were eight sets in all. Inside the egg the seeds turned into fish, the Mande symbol of fertility, and this time his creation succeeded.

Mangala was very pleased, because his second creation was so perfect. He wanted to keep his new, perfect world exactly as he had made it, but soon chaos crept in as one of the twins escaped from the egg. This twin, named Pemba, was very mischievous. He stole a piece of the egg and threw it down, creating the earth.

Mangala, in an effort to save what was left of his creation, grabbed Pemba's twin brother and killed him in order to raise him from the dead. Then Mangala took what was left of the egg and turned it into the sun. Pemba was left with darkness and night while his twin brother, Farro, became a human being.

Mangala favored Farro and taught him the language of creation. Farro's knowledge of words was very powerful, and he used it to defeat his brother Pemba's mischief. Then Farro and the other twins came to Earth, married, and became The People.

In time, an unknown being called Sourakata came from the sky and brought The People the first sacred drum and hammer. When Sourakata began to play the drum and sing, the first rains began to fall so The People could begin to farm.

YORUBA CREATION

In the beginning, there was only the sky above and water and marshland below. The chief god Olorun ruled over the sky, and the goddess Olokun ruled the marsh and water below. One day another god, Obatal, was looking at the Earth and had an idea.

Obatal went to the chief god and asked for permission to create dry land, arguing that if there were dry land, many more and different creatures could live upon the Earth. Olorun, the chief, liked the idea. He gave Obatal permission to create the land and suggested that Obatal consult with the god of prophecy to find out how the creation should take place.

Obatal was told that he would need a gold chain long enough to reach below. He would also need a snail's shell filled with sand, a white hen, a black cat, and a palm nut all placed in a bag. When Obatal had collected all of the required items, he began his climb down the chain to the Earth below. But before he could reach the Earth, he ran out of chain to climb.

Then he heard from the god of prophecy above, "Pour the sand from the snail's shell and immediately release the white hen." Obatal did as he was told. Wherever the sand landed, it formed dry land. The hen scratched at the sand and spread it far and wide covering most of the Earth. Some sand landed in piles and became hills and mountains with valleys in between. Obatal dropped down onto the top of one of the mountains and climbed down to the valley.

There he planted the palm nut, which immediately grew into a tree. The tree dropped palm nuts onto the ground, and each grew immediately into another tree, and so on until trees grew throughout the land. Obatal was pleased with his work and sat down with the black cat to rest.

For many months Obatal sat with the cat, ate palm nuts, and drank wine he made from the palms. After a time, though, Obatal grew bored and wanted to create beings like himself for company. He dug into the sand and found clay, which he shaped into new beings. He was very busy and his work made him thirsty, so he drank more wine than he was used to.

Not realizing he was drunk, many of the figures he fashioned were imperfect, so when Obatal breathed life into them they became imperfect beings. Still Obatal loved them and became their protector. Before long, all of the new people had built huts and formed a city.

The other gods were impressed with Obatala's work and visited often. Only Olokun, the goddess of water and marsh, was unhappy because she had lost so much of her kingdom. She became so angry that she unleashed a tremendous storm. Great waves crashed down upon the people and many drowned. Finally, the other gods realized what Olokun had done, and cast spells to stop the rains and to cause the floods to recede. The sun shone once more and a rainbow formed across the sky over what remained of the land and over the sea.

BUSHMEN BEGINNINGS

Long, long ago people did not live on the surface of the earth but instead lived underneath it. People and animals lived together happily ruled by Kang, the Great Master and Lord of Life. No one ever wanted for anything and everyone understood one another. It was during this blissful time that Kang decided to plan another even more wondrous world.

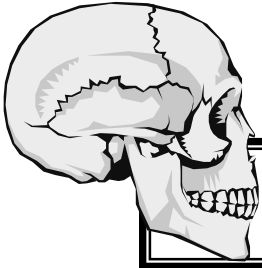
Kang began the new world by creating a marvelous tree with branches that stretched over the entire land. At the tree's base he dug a deep hole all the way to the world of people and animals below. Kang went on to add many more wonderful things to his new world.

When he was sure that all was perfect, Kang called to the people and animals below and the first woman came out of the hole. Others followed until all of the people were gathered at the foot of the tree. Then Kang brought the animals out of the hole. Some were so eager to see what Kang had created that they came up through the tree roots and came out of the branches.

When all had come into the world, Kang gathered the people and animals and told them to live peacefully. Before he left them, he warned the men and women, "You must not build any fires in this new land. If you do, a great evil will befall you!"

All was fine until nightfall. The people watched as the sun left them. Before long they could no longer see one another, the air grew cold, and their hearts filled with fear. When one of the men suggested they build a fire to keep warm, the rest quickly agreed, forgetting all about Kang's warning. Soon they could see each other and were warm and happy once more.

However the fire that brought the people warmth and light was frightening to the animals, which fled to caves and mountains to escape it. Ever since that first night on earth, the animals and people have been apart. They could no longer understand each other and over time, some even became enemies.



Finding Fossils

Springboard:

Students should read “Family Finds” and answer the questions.

Objective: The student will be able to explain some of the scientific research on human origins that has been done in Africa.

Materials: Family Finds (Springboard handout)
He Loves Lucy (2-page handout)

Terms to know:

- paleontology** - the study of fossils to learn about extinct plants and animals
- fossils** - remains of a plant or animal preserved in rock
- anthropology** - the study of humans and their physical and cultural development
- archaeology** - the study of artifacts
- evolution** - gradual process of development over a long period of time, such as in plant/animal species

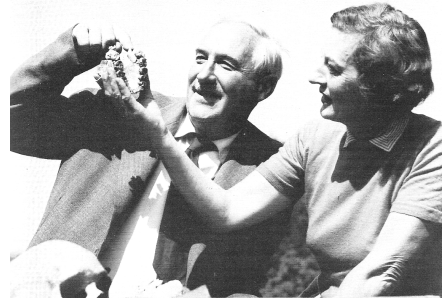
Procedure:

- After reviewing the Springboard, explain that *the student(s) will learn more about paleoanthropology by reading what a leader in the field says about it.*
- Distribute copies of “He Loves Lucy.” The student(s) should read the biography/autobiography individually or as a group. (**NOTE:** This is clearly a controversial topic, so how you choose to address it is up to you.)
- Lead a class discussion including the following questions:
 - ? What does Donald Johanson think about human origins? (*They have evolved from early ape-like ancestors.*)
 - ? What evidence does Johanson give to support his views? (*He and his team have found many fossilized remains of early humans. Explain that Johanson identified Lucy as a human by her hip structure, since human hips hinge forward while monkey hips hinge to the side. Johanson and other scientists believe humans developed gradually over long periods of time from these early beginnings.*)
 - ? How does Johansen’s explanation of the origins of man of mankind differ from tribal African tales about it? (*His explanation does not involve gods.*)
 - ? What do YOU think about Johansen, his work, and his findings? (*Answers will vary.*)
- **EXTENSION:** As a homework or follow-up assignment, the student(s) could look for and read an article about other, possibly more recent discoveries and share what they learn. (A subject search for “paleoanthropology discoveries” nets numerous Internet articles.)

Family Finds

Paleoanthropology is a fairly new and rapidly changing field of social science and is also the most hotly-debated. Paleoanthropologists, those trying to learn about the earliest humans, are unique people who face many difficult situations. They are often criticized; plus they live and work in some of the most isolated and uncomfortable places on earth. The most famous paleoanthropologists are members of the Leakey Family.

Louis and Mary Leakey (at right) started the field of paleoanthropology in the 1920's and 30's. Louis, who had studied anthropology in England, and Mary, who was an artist fascinated with drawing fossils, married and spent decades exploring East Africa where they discovered dozens of human fossils. Perhaps their most important find came in 1948 when they uncovered the skull of a primitive ape which they thought to be an ancestor of both humans and apes. Then in 1958, the first of many skulls was found in Olduvai Gorge in the Great Rift Valley of Tanzania.



The widely reported discoveries of the Leakeys brought archaeology into the public eye, making it a popular topic with the general public. Though the couple later divorced, both remained active in and were responsible for finding most of the artifacts now displayed at the National Museum of Kenya, an important archaeological museum.

Today their son Richard Leakey carries on the work of his parents. Since their deaths, Richard has worked hard to provide support for his parents' belief that Africa is the "cradle of humanity." Their ideas are widely accepted in the scientific community.

Paleontology is the study of fossils to learn about extinct plants and animals, and anthropology is the study of humans and their cultural development. Write a definition for paleoanthropology showing how you think this new field combines these two sciences.

Louis and Mary Leakey are **MOST** important because

- A. Louis studied anthropology in England, and Mary was an artist.
- B. The couple married and spent decades exploring East Africa.
- C. Archaeology became a popular topic with the general public.
- D. Their son Richard Leakey carries on the work of his parents.

The Leakeys are the most famous paleoanthropologists in the world. Which statement would **NOT** explain their position in the field?

- A. Mary and Louis began the field of paleoanthropology.
- B. They lived in isolated and uncomfortable places.
- C. Their ideas are accepted in the scientific community.
- D. The Leakeys found numerous human fossils.