

Hands-on Culture of **WEST AFRICA**

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How to Use This Book

This book, like the others in the Hands-On Culture series by J. Weston Walch, Publisher, has been designed to help middle school teachers integrate the study of a culture into the curriculum. Textbooks can teach students about the history and geography of an area, but to gain any real understanding, students must also be exposed to the art and traditions of a culture.

Hands-on Culture of West Africa provides 18 ready-to-use activities to help you do just that. Through the projects in this book, students will be exposed to some common phrases in Wolof, to the writing and counting systems used in West Africa, to West African cuisine, and to the art and literature of West Africa.

Throughout this book the focus is on traditional culture. That is because so much of West Africa's culture, even today, is based on tradition. Learning about the aspects of West African culture examined here will help students understand the culture as a whole. Sources like the Internet also provide excellent routes for students to learn about West Africa today.

Of course, many important elements of traditional West African culture are not included in this book. The mask-making and dancing traditions of West Africa, some fabric arts like *adire eleko*, and many other aspects of culture would make excellent research projects as part of a unit on the culture of West Africa to extend the projects presented here.

Most of the projects in this book work well either as individual projects or as group activities. When a project requires the setting up of a work station, as in the adinkra cloth and cooking projects, you may find it best to divide the class into groups and set up several work areas. You may also find a group approach helpful for some of the other projects. As students deal with such unfamiliar material as the Yoruba counting system, they may find it less intimidating to work together to find solutions.

By their nature, all these projects are interdisciplinary. All are appropriate for a social studies class. Most are appropriate for an art class. Some activities are also appropriate for other subject areas; the correlation chart on page *vii* presents these links. Some activities could be done in several different classes. The Okumpa play activity on page 54 and the adinkra cloth activity on page 39 are example of this type of activity. For the Okumpa play, the background could be given in a social studies class, satire and caricature could be explained and the play could be written in English class, the masks could be made in art class, and the songs could be written and rehearsed in music class. For the adinkra cloth activity, the background could be given in social studies, the discussion of symmetry could be given in math class, and the stamps could be made in art class.

If you are teaching about West Africa as part of an interdisciplinary team, each teacher can teach the activities appropriate to his or her domain. All the projects have been structured so that the teacher presenting the activity does not need to know either the historical context for an activity or the procedure for doing the project. Full background details are provided where needed. You can share some or all of this information with students if you wish, but it is not necessary for student completion of the

project. The step-by-step student instructions for the activities should need no further explanation. All activities have been tested with middle and high school students.

To motivate students, and continue the theme of West African culture, you may wish to tell them that gift giving is an important feature of the culture. It is considered a sign of prestige to give gifts, and gift giving establishes a relationship between people. You might incorporate this custom into your classroom with small gifts or candy for the first group to finish the Nigerian names project correctly, or for the group with the most interesting version of the West African proverbs.

To help demonstrate the process, you may find it helpful to keep one or two examples of student work for each activity. The next time you present the activity, show the student work as models. When dealing with unfamiliar material, it can help students to have a general idea of what is expected of them.

Finally, check out the resources in your community. Many communities have members who have come from West Africa and are happy to share their knowledge with students. West African exchange students, who can often demonstrate various arts and who can at least talk briefly about West Africa and expose students to some of the languages of West Africa, are another resource.

I hope that you—and your students—enjoy this book, and that it helps deepen your students' understanding and appreciation of West Africa.

Subject Area Correlation

	MUSIC	MATH	SCIENCE	LANGUAGE ARTS	ART	SOCIAL STUDIES
Money in West Africa: Cedi, Dalasi, Naira		x			x	x
West African Folktales				x		x
Music of West Africa	x					x
Benin: Appliqué Art of Dahomey				x	x	x
Burkina Faso: Building a House		x	x		x	x
Côte d'Ivoire: Baule Gold Plating					x	x
Ghana: Kente Cloth			x		x	x
Ghana: Akan Coffins					x	x
Ghana: Adinkra Cloth			x		x	x
Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire: Akan Gold Weights					x	x
Mali: Griots and the Story of Sundiata				x		x
Nigeria: Proverbs				x		x
Nigeria: What's in a Name?				x		x
Nigeria: Humor and Politics	x			x	x	x
Nigeria: Yoruba Numbers				x		x
Senegal: A Conversation in Wolof						x
Sierra Leone: The Game of Haba Gaba		x				x
Jollof Rice and Fufu: Cooking of West Africa						x

Money in West Africa: Cedi, Dalasi, Naira



OBJECTIVES

Social Studies

- Students will become familiar with some of the exports of the nations of West Africa.
- Students will understand the connection between available resources and the economy.
- Students will differentiate among various forms of exchange and money.

Math

- Students will practice converting from one currency to another.

Art

- Students will design and create currency.

MATERIALS

Money in West Africa handout
paper
pencils
colored pencils, markers, paints
scissors

BACKGROUND

One interesting twist sometimes arises in this simulation. Two countries both export the same item, but each assigns a different value to the item. Students may find this confusing and think that the same item should always have the same absolute value. Encourage them to realize that the same item can have a different value to different people, depending on its availability.

Students should also be encouraged to look closely at the lists of items exported. Some countries have only a few exports. Some have far more. Can students make any guesses about the economy of these countries, based on the amount of things they export? What about the types of things exported? Encourage students to speculate on the different economic strengths of a country like Liberia, which exports iron, rubber, diamonds, and gold, and one like Mali, which exports cotton, livestock, and peanuts.

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute the handout and discuss it with students.
2. Model each stage of the activity. You can use either one of the currencies on the handout or the fictional currency given in the student procedure—the minim, with an exchange rate of 10 to the dollar, and exports of diamonds, gold, and peanuts.
3. Divide the class into groups. You may assign a country to each group, or you may wish to allow students to choose their own countries. If you feel that this activity may be too challenging for your students, assign all groups countries that use the franc CFA as a currency. They can still experiment with imports and exports and an unfamiliar currency without having to convert from one currency to another via a dollar exchange rate. In other classes, you may want to limit the number of groups using countries with the franc CFA as currency, so that the activity remains challenging.
4. Students should proceed as directed on the handout.

VARIATION

If time permits, have each group trade with a total of three other groups, then see how the goods they hold have changed. Do they still have any of their original goods? Did they receive any of their original goods back in a later trade? What is the monetary value of the goods they now hold based on the currencies of origin?

EXTENSION

These figures are based on the official rate of exchange as of August 1996. Since exchange rates change daily, these rates may be very different today. Have students research the current rates of exchange between these currencies and the dollar to see how much—or whether—they have changed.

ASSESSMENT

Did students create currency and export cards, and successfully carry out at least two transactions using a West African currency?

BONUS QUESTION

These countries were once under French rule.

Name _____ Date _____



Money in West Africa: Cedi, Dalasi, Naira

Africa is a continent, not a country. It is made up of many different peoples, each with their own history, culture, and language. Before Europeans came to Africa, most of these different groups ruled themselves. They only connected with other groups for trade or for war. Great empires rose and conquered other peoples. Then they were conquered in their turn, and the empires faded away.

When people in Europe became aware of Africa, they saw it as a great resource. They took gold and diamonds from its soil and trees from its forests. They took people from Africa—men, women, and children—to work on plantations in America. And to keep control of Africa, they divided it up among themselves. The French took control of some parts. The English and the Germans and the Portuguese took others. They divided the continent into different countries and agreed among themselves on borders. The borders generally didn't have anything to do with the people who lived in an area. Often, the new borders cut right through cultural groups, leaving some members of a group living in one country, others in another.

Today, Africa is once again ruled by Africans. But it is still divided into countries and the borders still cut across ethnic groups. This sometimes causes unrest within a country. But the different peoples of Africa are trying to find positive solutions.

Like other countries around the world, the countries of West Africa produce more than they need of some things. When they have a surplus, they can sell it to other countries as exports. The money they receive for these exports can be used to buy things they need from other countries. These purchases are called imports.

But most countries use different money systems. They have to work out how much one country's money, or currency, is worth in the other country's money before they can make a deal.

The table on the next page lists 14 of the countries of West Africa. It shows each country's main exports. It also names the unit of money each country uses and the dollar exchange rate for that money. The dollar exchange rate is the amount of money you would have to give to equal a dollar. If the dollar exchange rate were seven, that would mean you would have to pay seven units of that money to get a dollar. It also means that one dollar would buy seven units in that currency.



(continued)