

West African Storytellers: Griots and Griottes *Bethany Sage*

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Overview

This unit supplements the tenth grade World Cultures African curriculum. After studying the history and geography of this region in the world, the students begin to learn about the culture, religion, and arts of the people of Africa. The curriculum will expand the students' cultural knowledge by giving them the opportunity to study the function of oral history and folktales in Africa. The following information discusses the role of oral history in Africa, the history and purpose of griots and griottes in West Africa, and the themes of folktales in West Africa.

Although folktales seem to be polarized from historical accounts, there appears to be a meeting point between the two modes of information. While folktales tend to rely more on myth, symbol, or legend instead of factual presentation, both history and folktales speak about human experience. I began to think about what type of unit I would like to write and realized that the culture and history of West Africa is something I know very little about. West Africa is a critical area to discuss from a cultural and historical point of view as numerous important events sprung out of this region, the gold-salt trade and the Atlantic slave trade to name just two. Much of this West African history has been preserved through time by oral history. I felt that both my students and I could benefit greatly by a unit on West African folktales presented through the eyes of the storytellers in this region, the griots and griottes. I would like to use this unit to teach my students the importance of oral history and folktales in a culture and to also expose them to an area that has a rich and vibrant history. I hope this will give me an opportunity to show my students a different medium of historical analysis and to deepen their appreciation for other cultural groups.

I teach two sections of Pittsburgh Scholars Program (PSP) World Cultures. Our book is broken down into regions of the world: Africa, the Middle

East, South Asia, East Asia, South East Asia, Australia and Oceania, Europe, Russia, Canada, and Latin America. Each section of the World Cultures book has three to five chapters that cover the geography, history, economy, and culture of each region. Although the book is a good starting point for discussing the culture and beliefs of the people of the world it is only a survey course, so no single chapter goes very in-depth on any particular topic. In the last section on the unit on African art and literature, the students read a one-paragraph synopsis of the use of oral history in Africa and the vocabulary word *griot* is introduced as the storyteller in a traditional Africa society. It is my hope that by taking a deeper look into the use and importance of oral history in Africa, my students will be able to appreciate the stories and tales that they encounter. I want my students to be able to look at these tales to better understand the culture of a group of people and use this medium to better understand their own histories. By the end of this unit, my students will be able to look at the oral history and folktale traditions of other cultures and be able to pull information out about a culture that may have long ago become extinct. I plan on teaching this unit at the end of the first report as a final look at the culture of Africa, with an emphasis on West African folktales. This unit will serve as the first report nine weeks project and will give my students a chance to look more in-depth in one area of African culture. I also teach two sections of Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) Philosophy and World's Religions and I feel I will be able to adjust the unit to include elements of it when I teach about primal religions of the world.

Although oral history and folktales have been used throughout time by all cultures, I have decided to set some specific parameters around my unit. I am going to focus specifically on the use of oral history and storytellers in West Africa only. I have decided not to look at Africa as a whole because I am worried that my unit would lose its focus. Also the cultures of Africa vary in detail from culture to culture due to the differences in group habits, habitats, languages, and histories. The people of Africa are quite diverse and I hope that by focusing on a specific area of the continent my unit will better reflect the true culture of the people of West Africa. I have decided to look at West Africa specifically because the storytellers of this region, the griots, are discussed briefly in my students' textbooks and I want to use this to link my unit to the curriculum.

I will first take a brief look at the role of oral history and storytelling in West African society. The use of oral traditions was seen as a means for not only communicating, but also for preserving history. The use of written text among the common people is relatively recent to West Africa but oral history has existed in West Africa for centuries and is used to pass along the behavior, values, and wisdom of the tribe. This simple introduction to the unit will serve a dual purpose. Not only will this give the students some background on oral history in West Africa, but I can also use this information to create an introductory lesson for my students to get them interested in the topic.

The major emphasis of my project will be on the role of griots (male member of a caste of professional oral historians from West Africa) and griottes (the female version of griots) in West African communities and their part in passing down oral traditions and folktales. No one has a monopoly on tale telling in West Africa but due to the amount of knowledge they possess, the griots have been in demand throughout time. It is known that griots have been a part of West African culture for at least 700 years. A griot was traditionally a court poet who was attached to the king with the purpose of singing the king's glories and recording important historical events. But, the griot also reminded the king of his duties to the people he ruled. Through time, the griots had numerous roles in their communities such as genealogists, historians, advisors, and spokesman. Griots emerged to become their own caste within the tribes and continued to pass down history, folktales, and legends that they memorized completely. The characters in their stories represented both positive and negative qualities and the outcome of the folktales they told indicated the values that were seen as accepted and appropriate to their community. I will be discussing the origin of griots, their training and preparation for their job, and the social role they hold in their society. I also want to devote a section specifically to African griottes, the female griots. I want to look at the role women play in African storytelling and their place in the community.

Finally, I am going to end my unit with a look at some of the themes expressed in West African folktales. I want to look at what these folktales say about the culture and mores of the West African communities in which they are told. For an activity, the students will then be able to read a few African folktales at the end of the unit. It is my hope that by this point they will not only have an appreciation for folktales in West Africa, but that they will also be able to look deeper at the folktales to pull out the meanings and lessons from the stories.

Rationale

Introduction – the Role of Oral History

The use of oral history has been an important element in West Africa culture and continues to influence modern literature today. Oral history preserved the memory and details of West Africa's vibrant past through the spoken word. Writing as a means of communicating is a relatively recent event in this region. West Africans did have an elaborate writing system early in history, but it was not in popular use so the use of oral history became quite important (Owomoyela). Many European scholars mistakenly saw African oral history or orature as primitive and unsophisticated because they compared the art of oral storytelling to the written works of Europe. The oral histories related were not static and there was no reverence for a single unchanging story as there was on the shelves of European libraries (Agatucci). Today, it is believed that the study of oral history is

very important when looking at West African culture because so many African writers today still borrow techniques and ideas from their oral traditions (Okpewho). Some writers used the historical oral traditions passed down through West African griots as the basis for their written works. Novelist Thomas Mofolo based his novel *Chaka* on the oral history of the famous Zulu military leader. Other writers often introduce oral narrative proverbs, myths, folktales, or ballads into their written work. In *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, he includes a condensed version of an Igbo folktale called Ikemefuna's song (Agatucci).

There are numerous types of oral histories used to promote cultural awareness in West African society. Genealogies and legends serve to promote social stability and symbolically express political power and historical truth. Tales or riddles are used to entertain people and have the ability to explain the moral truths of the society. Parables are used to settle personal disputes and to disseminate the people's mores and beliefs. Folktales are also another important part of oral history in West Africa. Folktales are used as a medium through which the behavioral values of the community and the cumulative wisdom of the past generation are passed on to the next generation (Owomoyela). Folktales do not present every behavioral or cultural value of a society, but they do express selected themes of society that are deemed important and suitable for expression (Lindfors). These folktales draw from life, events, episodes, characters, and places that have had a deep impact on the people from the region. They can discuss themes of both beauty and horror but seem to form the backbone of oral literature for the people (Ikonne). These folktales discussed common themes that all humans face: creation, birth, death, corrupt rulers, and many more. When European scholars began to encounter these folktales they saw many similarities between the two continents and assumed that the folktales must have spread from Europe to Africa during the slave trade. Never once did they consider that the tales may have begun in Africa or that the themes within the tales are universal and apply to all societies (Okpewho).

In a folktale session by lay people all that is needed is a person to tell the story to an audience. Often, many stories are told about the same characters but there is usually no attempt to relate each story back to a single plot. Sometimes, these sessions can go on for several days until the entire story is related to the audience. Professional storytellers or griots have the task of storing and commemorating traditional narratives and historical events. Their memorization of these oral histories have become record keeping devices where they know the places, names, and incidents of history and can retell these events from one generation to the next (Ikonne). Either way, oral tradition is no more than the sum of those who convey it. Each storyteller puts their own mark on the narrative that they tell. This oral tradition has managed to survive in some respects despite the advancement of the printed word because it continues to meet the social needs of the people to legitimize their traditional values and social structure (Hale, 1990).

As the role of oral history has changed over time in West Africa, so has the role of its keeper, the griot.

History and Job Description of Griots

Numerous factors impact a person's appropriateness for acting as a storyteller in West Africa. A person's age, sex, and professional status are all taken into account when discussing storytellers. In West Africa people follow the age-grade system where each age group goes through life and its important milestones with their own peers. A person's age determines what types of stories they are allowed to tell and the cultural rules which allow them to tell their tales. It would be totally inappropriate for a child to sit among adults and act as a storyteller; the child has no right to socialize with the adults and instead should be with its own peers. A person's sex also has an impact on their ability to act as a storyteller in West Africa. There are subject matters which members of West African communities feel are not appropriate to be discussed in mixed company. Men also tend to have more leisure time to tell stories while women are busy with cooking, cleaning, and tending to the children. But, the most important factor to look at in West Africa is a person's professional status. In West Africa, there are professional singers and narrators (griots) whose role is to relate the stories of the community. This role has changed greatly overtime, but griots still hold their own social position and are called on to perform their stories during important events and social occasions (Lindfors).

No one knows the origin of the word griot, but it is traditionally not thought of as African in origin. There is some evidence that the word is French and came into use after the French began their exploration of the African continent and were exposed to the storytellers (Hale, 1990). Among the people of West Africa, almost all the oral narratives about the origin of griots focus on an act involving blood. It is said that two brothers were traveling on a long trip and their food ran out. The elder brother took the gun and said he was going to go hunting for food. The younger brother heard a gun go off and saw his brother return with a chunk of meat. The elder brother insisted on cooking the meat and said that he had already eaten and that the rest was for the younger brother. Three days later the elder brother could not walk and that is when it was discovered that he had cut out a piece of his own leg so that his younger brother would not starve. When the two brothers reached their final destination the younger brother composed a song to honor his elder brother – who showered him with gifts. But, it is said that griots hold a separate and distinct social position because of this tale. No matter the reason, the younger brother ate the flesh of a human so now he and his offspring are seen as different because the younger brother violated this basic social taboo. It is said that this is the origin of griots in West Africa (Hale, 1998).

There are also early written accounts of the griots in West Africa. The earliest accounts are sketchy because they are based on second hand information or the author of the text did not have the intention to capture the role of griots in society. Al-Bakri from Cordova, Spain mentioned in his 1068 account that the King of Ghana had interpreters and visitors for the King were announced by beating on a special log. In 1352, Ibn Battuta encountered griots at court in Mali. Ibn Battuta was one of the world's greatest travelers and in 1325 he set out to visit the people of the Muslim world. It is believed he went to Mali because 27 years earlier the great ruler of Mali, Mansa Musa, had converted to Islam and traveled to Mecca for Hajj and this provoked Ibn Battuta's interest. Ibn Battuta offered the first reliable eyewitness descriptions of griots in West Africa. He remained in Mali for eight months as a guest of the ruler Mansa Sulayman and spoke often with Dugha, the current ruler's griot. Based on the accounts by Ibn Battuta it is assumed that the profession has been practiced for at least the past 1,000 years. There were few other accounts of griots by outsiders until the 17th century when numerous travelers from Europe descended on West Africa. It is a missionary Saint-Lo in his work *Relation du Voyage du Cap-Verd* in 1637 that the term griot is first used. From this time on, there were numerous works by author outside of Africa that speak about the role of griots in West African society (Hale, 1998).

In traditional West African society, the griot held a place of honor and was very important to the community. Griots were known for their mastery of the language, history and communal knowledge of the people, and their ability to involve their audiences into their performances (Owomoyela). They acted as the spokesman for the ruler and would recite events from history, entertain the people, and present poems and tongue twisters. Many of their stories or poems contained a moral or lesson for those who were listening (Ahmad). The griot had numerous functions in the tribe and although their role has changed some of these roles still are performed by the griots of today. The griot acted as a genealogist for the tribe. This was very important for marriage proposals when a suitor wanted to prove their worth and in naming ceremonies to honor one's ancestors. A complete knowledge of genealogy was crucial for a griot. Today, in rural villages this is still practiced by the griots but in the cities, the task of memorizing genealogy is impossible. A griot also acted as a historian for the tribe. Their job was to link the past to the present and serve as a witness to events. This aspect gives historians today insight into the values of the people and their social structures, but can not be viewed as absolute truths. Often, the griot molded their historical accounts based on the current conditions of their society. For the rulers of a tribe the griot could act as an advisor, spokesperson, mediator, translator, and diplomat. Griots were very knowledgeable of various African dialects and had a way with crafting words that made them very suitable in these positions. These roles are less practiced today by griots due to the political structure of West Africa. There are no longer village chiefs that rule the area and depend on their griots. Instead there is a political structure in place that is modeled after European

systems of government. Since World War II, the nations of Benin, Ghana, and Guinea fought to overthrow the imperialist nations of Britain and France to win their independence. In 1999 Nigeria was able to elect a president for the first time since being colonized by Britain in the late 1800s. The only thing these new nations had to support their emerging governments were the examples left behind by the British and French, so many adapted the parliamentary system to meet their needs for government (Ahmad).

Griots also had served as musicians, praise-singers, composers, and exhorters where they entertained the ruler and his people and as teachers where they taught about the rules, behavioral expectations, and values of their society. Those outside Africa have the most knowledge of these aspects of the profession as many griots have traveled outside of Africa to perform and make a livelihood for themselves. Finally, they were ceremony participants for namings, initiations, courtships, marriages, installations of rulers, and funerals. This aspect of the profession remains strong in parts of rural West Africa (Hale, 1998). West African griots were so widely regarded and such an integral part of society in West Africa that many in their communities suggested they held some magical power over the words they spoke (Owomoyela).

Griots did not hold the same place of honor among outside sources and the printed literature of Europe. They are often depicted in a negative light (Hoffman). A French scholar defined griots as “members of a despised but feared caste of musician-genealogist-sorcerer parasite that exists in large numbers of West African peoples, living at the expense of the chiefs for whom they sing praises and recite genealogies (Hale, 1990 215).” Today, scholars and writers are able to collect some of the best pieces of oral literature from the griots that live in the cities and towns of West Africa. Many now have at least a primary school education and have traveled throughout Africa and world relating their stories (Okpewho). Their role has evolved from village entertainer and historian to the performers on television, radio, and recording artists. Many today are popular singers who reinterpret traditional songs (Lott). They are also in great demand for ceremonies and parties both in the rural areas and the cities. Any traditional gathering – marriage, child naming ceremonies, funerals, etc. –is incomplete without a corps of griots (Cosaan: Senegalese Culture).

Training and Preparation of Griots

The training and preparation to become a griot is labor intensive and is a life-time commitment. These storytellers must assemble material throughout time and space, commit all of it to memory, dress it in a striking language, and deliver it in an exciting and entertaining manner. This is no small accomplishment! There are no universities that offer a degree in griotism but the training they undertake could be compared to a doctoral degree. The griot makes a name and reputation

for himself by his extensive repertoire and the number of stories he has committed to memory (Owomoyela). This entire education is oral and they learn not only the stories but also how to sing each of the songs and to play numerous instruments as accompaniment to their stories (Palmer).

To be accomplished in his or her profession, a griot must have some form of training or apprenticeship. Traditionally, one had to be of griot origin to carry out the profession. Many griots are first exposed to their craft by their own families and this informal training begins at birth and continues throughout the griot's lifetime. This training will often begin with the child's father, older brothers, uncles, or grandfathers. The young child is exposed to the stories, songs, and instruments of his family and often will absorb skills as time goes on. Obviously, not every child of a griot becomes a griot also. The child must possess an interest in the type of oral literature practiced in the home, must have some degree of intelligence and ability, must be able to pay very close attention to detail, and must be able to use their imagination and abilities to craft their own works (Okpewho). Although they will still be identified as a griot from birth (this will be discussed further in the next section), some children born into griot families choose to follow their own talents and desires outside of the family profession (Hoffman). At birth, there used to be a traditional naming ceremony aimed at instilling the necessary abilities for the child to succeed in the profession. Water was taken from seven houses, boiled, and then used to wash the child. This ceremony linked the child to the community. This practice still occurs in some of the more rural areas of West Africa (Hale, 1998).

During childhood, the child has continued exposure to the verbal and musical arts of family and friends. Sometimes fathers make smaller versions of musical instruments for their children to learn from because the larger string instruments are too complex for a small child to use. The children receive musical instruction on a variety of instruments including the lute, kora, balafon, and drums for the boys and the ardin and karinya for the girls. Unlike other children in West African society who follow the age-grade system, griot children are often allowed to observe adult activities and entertainment. This is seen as a form of instruction for the children. The final stage of this early instruction is marked by the novice griot participating in performances where they serve in a chorus or among other musicians, so that they can receive practice without ruining the performance (Hale, 1998).

Often a child will then also have continued formal instruction if he/she shows an interest in becoming a griot. The child will often leave home to seek training with other griots who are masters in their craft. Instruction is open to both sexes although it is often easier for men to move about from place to place for instruction (Okpewho). The students learn three to four lines of a story a night and when they absorb enough basic information they accompany their teacher to

ceremonies. This is often the period where the student will also learn a new instrument that he was not taught while at home (Hale, 1998). Often the students will pay the master griot with work or fodder for the fire in exchange for his instruction. Usually, a student will remain for three to four years before leaving to find instruction by a new master griot that will have new stories for the student to learn. A student may eventually enter into a period which could be called a "school". There are a few buildings set up in areas like Keta and Kita where there is a large concentration of griots. Students come from not only West Africa, but also the world, to receive instruction from the master griots that live in the area. The training is not considered formal, but learning permeates daily life (Hale, 1990).

There are also some state-sponsored training programs and private schools for younger adults to attend in which to learn some of the skills of a griot. These programs emphasize the musical rather than verbal aspect of the profession and were established more for students who are not from griot families. Often, these skills are more to aid a student master one of the instruments typically played by a griot, rather than teach the student how to become a griot. These schools were established to break down the barrier many face when trying to become a musician and the stereotypes of being a griot. (This aspect will be discussed in further detail in the next section.) These students more than likely will not become griots. In order to practice griotism one must have been born into a griot family and received instruction early on from a skilled griot (Hale, 1998).

Once a griot begins to practice his craft he will still spend a lifetime learning new stories and refining the stories he has in his repertoire. Each griot over the years judges what is important and what is not important to repeat and use in his tales. He will combine the past with the present with revisions and translations that reflect the impact of each generation (Hale, 1990). By the time a griot reaches forty or fifty, if they have great talent people begin to refer to them as a master griot. The master griot overtime will increasingly turn to training his own children and a new generation of students looking to become griots. This is how the cycle continues generation after generation (Hale, 1998).

The manner and modes of training and preparation does differ across time and from society to society. In traditional times, griots would receive royal patronage after they had practiced as a free-lance poet and showed their worth to the ruler. When the tribal kingdoms collapsed during the era of colonialism, griots found a way to adapt their skills and talents to the new era. They began to offer their services to the rich men and politicians of the new West African states (Okpewho).

Social Role of Griots in Society

Historically, griots have held a special but feared role in society. Within the royal courts they held a special place of honor, even though they were seen to belong to the lower caste of artisans. Griots were privileged and respected in their ceremonial roles and could in their performances criticize the most powerful ruler without penalty (Owomoyela). The griots were both feared and respected by the people of West Africa for their wisdom and talent with word. They could sing a ruler's or person's praises or they could sing their doom if something angered the griot. Traditionally, for their services they were rewarded in many ways including residence in the palace or surrounding area, a regular salary or exquisite gifts, a portion of land to farm, and protection from the ruler. Often, if they did not receive the reward requested or expected they would use their verbal skills to rail against the ruler until they received what they felt was a fitting reward for their services. There was no set fee so they never knew exactly what they would receive for their talent. The position was inherited through the father and was passed down from generation to generation (Okpewho).

Even though the griots were respected in traditional times, they still belonged to a lower caste of people associated with their professions. They did rank higher up socially than slaves, but did not have the social prestige of the noble class. Intermarriage was not likely during traditional times. The nobles were afraid of social and caste pollution and the griots were afraid that intimacy might lead to the revelation of some of the castes secrets that they used to maintain their position of importance in society. As early as 1745 there is printed evidence that griots were looked down upon by the nobles as "false and fulsome flatterers" and someone who was "despised...but feared." Yet, they were indispensable to the nobles. Griots performed the essential but polluting tasks of circumcision, excision, funeral preparations, haircutting, and midwifery (Hill).

Besides the specialized professional activities they performed many felt that they had the ability to manage occult powers that they could manipulate through their control of words (Hoffman). Many West African groups felt that words were idle, dangerous, and impure. It was often seen as undignified for a noble to raise their voices so they would whisper their message into the ear of the principal griot who would then embellish and relay the message (Hill). Many felt that griots had a close relationship to *nyama*, a special force that is evoked when one carries out certain actions. It is said that griots are born with a greater capacity to control the *nyama* than nobles and that the griots could use this power for negative purposes. Not only did they believe the griots could use their words to destroy reputations, they also believed the griots could conjure spells of death and destruction with their words. Griots were not buried in the ground because the villages feared polluting the soil with the bodies that possessed the *nyama*. Often they were forced to live outside the village and were thought to have

brought disaster on any place that allowed griots to live within their bounds (Hale, 1998).

Today, griots hold a difficult position in society. Many do not see this oral art as a respectable profession and feel that griots should hold a “real job” to support themselves. Many see the griots as only beggars who pester people in public in order to receive money or gifts. In some areas of West Africa today, griots have such a low ranking in the public’s eyes that it is often difficult for a griot to find a wife to marry. Many have married women from outside of the country while they travel because they know it would be too difficult to find a spouse once they returned to West Africa (Okpewho). The amount of importance attributed to griots for celebrations and preservation of history has also declined, especially in urban areas. Modern educational systems and technology have pushed these artists to the background. Those griots that are successful in the cities have found success by catering to the rich of society. This is a vast difference from the role they used to play in traditional times. Often, they are only seen as entertainers and no longer hold the stories that are specific to the community. The cities are just too large and too diverse for a griot to carry the history of the people (Okpewho). Those griots who have had success in the cities are celebrated almost as the pop stars of Mali, Nigeria, Guinea, Senegal, and The Gambia. They have transformed traditional compositions into modern, electric music (“What is a Griot?”).

Modern educational practices have also affected the training and livelihood of griots. The apprenticeship that occurred throughout the child’s lifetime has diminished as some families are forced into the cities to find work and their children are attending Western style educational systems, instead of the arts learned at home. Due to the pressures of city life, the parents simply do not have the time to instruct their children in the ways of a griot. Also, West Africa has become a money economy based on western economic systems and many see the role of a griot as frivolous. Families in the rural areas sometimes can no longer afford to support their own family griots so griots in the rural areas often have trouble scratching out a survival for themselves (Okpewho).

Griottes – The Female Story Teller

Most of the research done on West African storytellers has dwelt on the male storytellers, griots. The assumption was that in patriarchal West Africa, the griottes played a lesser role in the storytelling. Many felt that the griottes would only stand by while the griots recited or perhaps sang short choruses throughout a song. It is now believed that griottes have always played an important role in storytelling in West Africa and that the reason why griottes were not discussed deals with the people who were recording and talking about the culture of West Africa (Lott). Many of the researchers who visited West Africa were men and in

the past many of the travelers to Africa were also men. The situation was compounded by the fact that West African societies are patriarchal so women would not speak out to let their own voices be heard by others. Finally, griots were already viewed low on the social structure, so griottes would often disappear when discussing society (Hale, 1998).

There are a few records of griottes in history. Frenchman Michel Jajolet de La Courbe did record numerous descriptions of griots during his travels through West Africa during the 1680's. In his descriptions he also talks about local women being led by a griotte who sang something concerning the feast. He also spoke about griottes who accompanied princesses and queens. From this account, there is no doubt that griottes have also played an integral part the profession of storytelling (Hale, 1998). The appearance of griots and griottes in formally posed photographs in the late 19th century also supports the argument that griottes were also important members of official retinues. The fact that leaders saw fit to devote the time, energy, and expense of taking pictures of griottes during a time in which photography was complex and expensive gives some insight into the importance of griottes (Hale, 1994).

There appears to be little difference between the way griots and griottes are taught their professions. Women tended to learn from other women but the father also contributed to his daughter's education. Men did have more opportunity to travel alone, especially in West African societies that practiced Islam. However, women would often travel with their families at an early age to celebrations and performances where they could meet and talk with other griots and griottes. Current technology has further aided griottes' ability to learn new stories and tales. They can now train by listening to taped performances or to the radio. Roughly 80% of the songs on the radio are by women so that is an additional source for the griottes to pick up new songs or to get ideas for their own creations. Griottes can also become master griottes, but this is a rare occurrence and usually does not occur until they reaches at least the age of 50 (Hale, 1994).

Griottes sing at ceremonies, celebrations, and special occasions. When a woman is about to be married, griottes will sing to her to prepare the bride for her new life. The songs focus on the trouble she may encounter in the new marriage and to reassure the bride that if her marriage is too bad, she can always come home (Lott). One such song by a griotte Weybi Karma is:

Stop crying, bride,
Stop crying, and listen to me.
If your mother-in-law abuses you,
Just cry, but don't say anything.
If your sisters or brothers-in-law abuse you,
Just cry, but don't say anything.

If your husband's mother abuses you,
Just cry, but don't say anything.
But leaving your house is not a crime (Hale, 1994 86).

This song is just one example of the role that griottes also play in society. Not only do they speak about a woman's right to leave a home where there is domestic abuse, but they also act as models for socially appropriate behavior in their communities (Hale, 1994).

Today it is clear that griottes are both more numerous and in many cases more famous than their male counterparts. The men may be involved in the epics, but most of the daily work of storytelling is done by the songs of the griottes accompanied by the griots on various instruments. If one looks at who actually makes more money, who participates in more events, and who has the most impact on new art forms being created, it is the griottes that are driving the profession (Hale, 1994)). It was thought that some forms of oral narratives were not completed by griottes. Many thought that epics, long historical genealogical accounts, were only sung by griots and women only joined in to sing certain parts or to play musical accompaniment. But many researchers, including Thomas Hale, have found modern griottes are writing and performing their own epics for the women of West Africa. Others have found evidence that griottes may have worked on creating their own epics for generations. The themes of these epics are centered on issues that are important to women: independence, self-reliance, about what it is like to be a woman in West African society, and about their relationships with their husbands and in-laws. Griottes may sing in a chorus and take a back seat to griots at ceremonies for political events or official functions but it is the griottes that take a dominant position at family events like naming ceremonies and weddings (Hale, 1998).

Griottes do work more closely with non-professional women singers and help maintain a sense of community in villages. The distinction between professional and non-professional griottes is fading but still exists in many villages. Still, there are certain ways for griottes to dress, speak, sing, and dance in order to demonstrate their caste. Griot women dress in bright colors with lots of jewelry. They often act loud, vociferous, emotional, sensual, and unafraid to display their sensuality in dance and song. Many outsiders to villages will comment that a griottes may be very quiet and reserved in personally conversations, but when it is her turn to perform she almost become a completely different person in her words and actions (Hoffman).

Themes of the Storytellers

The vast majority of tales in West Africa are not set in any specific time-period. Many are set up with the standard "once upon a time" or "in the olden days". This allows the griot or other narrator the ability to use the tale without worrying

about historical accuracy or details he may choose to add or delete from the tale. The majority of tales in West Africa are told to either explain the roots of society's traditions, customs, or natural phenomena or to entertain the people but with a moral message. These stories serve numerous purposes in society. They reorganize history in terms of the modern world, create an attractive vision of the possibilities for the future, and celebrate the achievements of society (Jones). Also, many of the tales are told in third person. Although individuals are important in West African society, they still must be subjugated to the best interests of the group. This also allows the tales to apply across time, location, condition, and person (Owomoyela). Finally, griots and audiences are aware that times are changing and the old life-style is slowly eroding in West Africa. Inevitably, that has had an impact on the lessons of the stories. Many of the older tales are still told, but with updated lessons and present day expectations (Okpewho).

There are a few themes that appear throughout the folktales in West Africa. One of the favorite themes is that the universe has a moral order and if people disturb that order they will suffer misfortune. Another popular theme is that one must respect the environment if they wish to prosper in their lives (Ahmad). Many other stories deal with accounts on the creation of the universe and events that took place in primitive times with divinities. These stories explain the interrelationships between all the things that exist in the world and ties into stories with environmental themes. Numerous West African tales deal with those about humans and animals. These tales are set in a world in which the barriers between humans and animals do not exist so that they can communicate and understand each other. The animals are endowed with human characteristics and many of the characters are consistent across the entire African continent, despite differences in language and social customs. The human characters are often the jealous wife, lazy man, or disobedient child. The animal characters are the monkey that represents stupidity, the hare/rabbit, tortoise, or spider that represent cunning and rascality, the dog that represents greed, and the elephant or hippo that represents strength but with little intelligence (Owomoyela). The smaller, physically weak, and seemingly vulnerable creatures are endowed with special intelligence and are answerable only to God (Agatucci).

These motifs are so similar throughout each separate tale that it is easy for an audience to discern and follow the drama in each tale. They can sometimes even guess the outcome of the story as soon as the characters are announced. The characters represent the positive and negative qualities so the outcome of the story indicates the values of the community and steers the end of the story in the desirable direction. The morals in the tales are concerned with lessons to be taught and not necessarily goodness. Many of the traditional folktales dealt with survival so characteristics like selflessness, kindness, and utter fairness were often not praised as the ideal characteristic. That is why a cunning character may win

out over a character with sheer power, even if maliciousness is used to win. This aspect of folktales has caused many outsiders to inappropriately label West African folktales as amoral (Owomoyela). Also, many tales deal with a trickster element. These characters create havoc and disharmony among a group and threaten the groups' survival. These tales explain the bad behaviors and evil forces that the group must deal with and keep in check. In the end, the trickster's behaviors are usually punished reaffirming the harmony and wisdom of the community. It explains that the community can survive and will prevail over any situation (Agatucci). An example of such a theme is Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. This novel is a story about Okonkwo, an Ibo clansman who struggles with what it means to be a man in the Ibo culture. It looks at the impact of British colonialism and Christianity on his village and Okonkwo's inability to adjust to these new forces (Addison).

Afterthoughts

Although there are many storytellers I could have chosen throughout Africa, I feel that the griots and griottes of West Africa give a broad enough overview of the importance of folktales in Africa. Griots and griottes serve a vital role in West African society. It is through their efforts that the history and culture of the people have survived for over 1,000 years. Although the role of the griot and griotte has changed overtime, these professionals have found a way to adapt with the times and bring their skills into the future. Only time will tell how successful griots and griottes will be in the next millennium, but their overall contributions are unmistakable to the people of West Africa. I feel that as an extension to this unit, it would be interesting to take it a step further and compare the achievements of the griots and griottes in West Africa with their counterparts around Africa. My hope is that through this unit my students will truly begin to understand the role and importance that folktales play in people's lives.

Objectives

Students in tenth grade are not usually aware of the importance and role art serves in society. My primary objective is to make my students more aware of the role of storytellers in West Africa and how these artists have impacted their region. The students will do this by examining the origin, training, and role of griots in West African society. My secondary objective for this curriculum unit is to make the students more aware of the role of women in history. The students will spend some time looking at the role of women in West Africa and the part they have played in preserving the oral history of their communities. Finally, my last objective is for my students to use the study of West African griots and griottes to make them more aware of the rich history and folklore of their own home, school, and community.

Through the following lessons I want the students to develop their social studies skills, literary skills, and critical thinking skills by reflecting on the role of griots and griottes in West Africa. The students will use the lessons they complete on griots and griottes as a basis on how to look at culture that is different from their own. They will have to be able to read and think about the information critically and apply that information to new situations. The curriculum unit contains specific communication and citizenship standards that incorporate Pittsburgh Public Schools' initiative for standards based education and a complete list of these content standards is included at the end of the curriculum unit.

Strategies

Throughout the curriculum unit, the students will be required to read, analyze, organize, and write about West African griots and griottes. They will complete these tasks through group work, lecture, independent practice, and class discussion. The students will be assessed on their progress through class discussion, writing samples, and a quiz.

Various activities will be used to help the students achieve success and assist them with reaching the standards. The students will be required to participate in a pre-project quiz on folktales and their storytellers in West Africa. This will act as a hook to get the students involved in the unit and allow them to realize all the things they could learn throughout the unit. Once they take the quiz they will exchange papers and through a class discussion of the answers, the students will begin to gain some insight on the folktales and their tellers in West Africa. At the end of the unit the students will assess their knowledge again by taking a look over the quiz and seeing what skills and knowledge they have gained throughout the unit.

Once the students have had an introduction to the material, they will need some content information on griots, griottes, and folktales in West Africa. They will be exposed to notes and vocabulary on griots and griottes in West Africa to get them familiar with the content. The students will then be exposed to a primary account that is famous among the griots of West Africa, the *Epic of Sunjata*. This reading will help the students tie in what they have learned about West Africa with an actual story. It will also help them develop their skills while reading primary accounts and it will help them become more interested in the topic. When the students get to read an actual account that is memorized by griots and they see the length and complexity of the work, I feel that will get the students more interested in the subject.

After gaining much needed background on the griots and griottes of West Africa and how to read a primary account, the students will be able to learn more

about griotism in West Africa by completing homework assignments, discussing primary documents on West African folktales, viewing a film on Griots in Keita, and completing an in-class essay. After completing the above assignments, the students will tie up all of this information in a project on West African folktales. The students will apply the knowledge that they have gained on the topic by reading and analyzing any two West African folktales of their choosing. They will be required to summarize the account and then analyze the account based on the information they have gained in class throughout this unit. At the end of these activities, the students will ultimately be held accountable for what they have learned through classroom notes, discussions, and activities with a quiz on West African folktales and their tellers.

Classroom Activities

Lesson One

Begin the period with the surprise pop quiz on the topic of West African Griots, Griottes, and Folktales. The students will probably not do well but the main point of this activity is to pique their interest about what they will be covering for the next few days. Once the students have finished taking the quizzes review the correct answers so that the students can correct their own papers. Use this time to begin to get the students interested in the topic and allow them to ask questions. Collect the quizzes and hold them for the students so that they can compare them with the assessment activities at the end of the unit. Then, have them write down the folktales immigration in their notebooks and write what it means to them. Discuss a few of the students' responses. Finally, distribute the *Vocabulary List* in the appendix that includes terms the students will be using during the course of this unit and discuss those terms with the students. Have the students keep this handout in their notebooks. This lesson should take one day.

Lesson Two

Begin a teacher led instruction and discussion on griots, griottes, and themes of West African folktales. Be sure to incorporate both the positive and negative images that griots and griottes face in West Africa and the duality of their lives. Also, be sure to fully explain the role that women play in folktales, despite the society being structured as patriarchal. Throughout the instruction have the students participate by asking and answering questions and having them try to relate what they are learning to their own experiences regarding folktales and the people who tell them in their lives. Depending on the level of the students, any time constraints, the amount of information the instructor chooses to add or delete from this unit, and the students' discussion this lesson could last from two to four days. For homework during this lesson, have the students read the handout *How to Read a Primary Source*. This handout gives the students some tips and advice

on how to read and work with primary sources. They should be prepared to discuss this information in the next lesson. (Optional – for lesson 3) Also for homework over the two to four days, have the students write down a folktale they heard while growing up. They should also write down where they heard it and who told them the story. Tell them to make sure their writing is clear because these stories will be shared in class.

(Option) For middle school, instead of the students taking notes, the teacher could provide the students with an outline of the information that will be covered in the lecture. The outline could contain blanks and questions that the students would have to fill in as the lecture proceeded to keep them on task.

Lesson Three (Optional)

The students should bring in their folktale summaries that they completed for homework. The teacher should collect the folktales and then redistribute the tales to different students in the class. Then, have the students break into groups of 4-5 and have each student read the folktale they were given. Tell the students that they should be looking for the reason why they think the folktale was used and the objective of the tale. Once the group has had some time to share, have the class come back together as a large group. Ask for a few volunteers to read the folktales they were given and their analysis of the folktale. Discuss the answers as a group. This lesson could take one to two days to complete depending on how many students are in the class, how many students completed their homework assignment, and how willing the students are to share their responses.

Lesson Four

In class, the students will begin to read the *Epic of Sunjata*. The *Epic of Sunjata* can be found at <http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/schwww/sch618/Sundjata/Sundjata.html>. This is something the students could read in a computer lab as they click through the pages of the story, or the teacher can print out and copy the story for the students to read in class. The benefit of using a computer lab is that there are some links within the story that would help give the students more background on the story. Also, if the teacher chooses to use it, there are activities built into the reading for the students to complete as they read. These activities could be used for homework each night as a review or enhancement of the information they learned in class. This activity will take 2-4 days depending on the reading ability of the students. (Option) The teacher may also want to provide reading questions for the students to complete as they read this story. This will be a way to ensure that the students understand what they read and are reading the entire work. The teacher may also want to use the computer lab but still have the students read the

work aloud so that there could be some discussion over what the students are reading.

Lesson Five

Students will watch the film *Keita: The Heritage of the Griot*. Before viewing the film the teacher can distribute a reading that prepares the students for the video prepared by California Newsreel, the distributor of the film. The notes can be found on a facilitator's guide for the film at <http://www.newsreel.org/guides/keita.htm>. Give some background information on Keita and the structure of African folktales. Once the students have seen the film, the same website provides questions for the students to discuss or answer on their own. The questions are appropriate for a high school level, but would need to be modified for middle school students. This lesson would take two days to complete in class. For homework the students will complete a written reflection on what the film taught them and how griots are facing conflict due to modernization and urbanization in West Africa. The students should also reflect on how modernization is impacting their own society.

Lesson Six

As a class, begin reading a few selections (3-4) of West African folktales. A good source to finding these folktales is a book by Steven H. Gale called *West African Folktales*. He has collected various folktales from West Africa and divided them by region within the book. This book also comes with a companion by the same author called *West African Folktales: Instructor's Manual*. This book would be helpful when discussing the folktales and provides reading questions for each of the tales and background for each region of West Africa. Discuss the themes expressed in each of the tales and have the students look at the characters in the stories chosen for class. For homework each night, the students could complete questions over the story or could summarize what they learned from each story. This lesson will take two to three days to complete in class depending on the length of each story chosen for the activity.

Lesson Seven

The students can complete this lesson throughout the unit. It can be graded as a test or project. The students should find two to three West African folktales that were not read in class and read them at home. Then, they need to summarize the story for each folktale, analyze the characters in the folktale, and discuss what they think the role of the folktale was in West African societies. Tell them they should think about why the story was written and the goal of the narrator in the story. Each folktale's summary and analysis should be a two-page typed paper. When students turn in their papers they should also include the original folktales

they read either printed off the computer or photocopied from the book or journal in which they found the folktale. The total length of the project will depend on the number of assigned folktales, but should be four to six pages in length.

(Option) For middle school students the number of folktales or length of the paper could be reduced. Also, instead of writing a paper the students could memorize and learn parts to real West African folktales which they would role-play in class at the end of the unit.

Assessment

Obviously, there has been assessment of the student's knowledge throughout the unit but there are a few ways to assess the entire unit. One way is the use of the final assignment, the summary and analysis of two to three West African folktales, as a way to assess the student's knowledge of the themes and role of folktales in West Africa. This assignment could be turned in as a project grade, lengthened, or additional required elements could be added to make this project fit each teacher's needs and expectations for their students.

Another overall assessment technique used in the unit was the essay for homework over the role of griots in society and the issues they face in the modern world. While this is not a formal research paper, this gives the students the opportunity to think critically about what they learned and defend their own position on the topic of the role of modernization on griots in West Africa. This also would help them to begin to look more closely at the role modernization plays in their own lives and how it impacts the society in which they live.

This unit could be used to not only assess the students' knowledge but also to share this knowledge with other classes. The students could share their own folktales with other classes or could reenact the West African folktales they role-played in class. This activity could be used as a thematic semester-long project where the students would not only look in-depth at the historical content of griots and griottes in West Africa, but would also use English skills to write out and learn their lines, and Fine Arts skills for costumes, set design, and props. This role-play could be used to teach other students about folktales in West Africa. At the end of the performance there could be a time for questions and answers which would allow the students who performed the opportunity to take the lead in their own learning process.

Finally, the students can be given a test on the information they learned. While testing is important, I would suggest that this assessment be paired with one of the writing assignments unless the test is designed to allow written answers instead of simply multiple choice questions. The students can also retake the

initial pre-project quiz to see how their content knowledge has grown and improved.

Appendices

The following handouts follow in this order:

1. Vocabulary List
2. Student information sheet
 - How to Read Primary Documents

Vocabulary List

Age-grade system - a system where all the young males go through life graduating from age group to age group, following a regular pattern.

Ardin – a harp-like instrument played exclusively by women; has between 8 and 12 strings and at the same time plucking the strings, the musician will tap its resonance chamber creating a second rhythm.

Balafon – a wooden xylophone, most likely the original griot instrument.

Caste – an endogamous and hereditary social group limited to persons of the same rank, occupation, economic position, and having mores distinguishing it from other such groups.

Folktales – a legend originating and traditional among a group of people especially one forming part of the oral tradition of a common people.

Genealogy – the study of the history of families and the line of descent from their ancestors.

Griot – male member of a caste of professional oral historians from West Africa.

Griottes – female member of a caste of professional oral historians from West Africa.

Griotism – the profession of griots and griottes, the practice of oral history, entertainment, and musical arts in West Africa.

Ibn Battuta – Moroccan traveler from mid-14th century who set out to visit all the people of the Muslim world.

Karinya – a tubular-iron bell played exclusively by women.

Kora - a 21-string cross between a harp and a lute; is described as a bridge-harp with two rows of strings, one on either side of the meter-long neck, and a body made of a calabash.

Lute – a plucked string instrument, not usually exceeding three strings, with a resonance chamber made of wood and covered in either goat or cow skin, evolved from an instrument originally developed in the Middle East.

Mansa Musa – leader of Mali who traveled to Mecca in 1324 for Hajj; was said to have taken over 500 people with him and left such an impression that Mali began to appear on maps through out the Middle East and Europe.

Nyama - a special power released by the sung or spoken work; is similar to the Western idea of a soul but more complex; seen as force that controls nature and is the creator of the universe.

Orature – orally composed and transmitted pieces of literature.

How to Read Primary Documents

Reading primary sources requires a lot of hard work and determination, especially for first timers who have never had the opportunity to tap this wonderful resource. Although reading primary sources can be challenging, it is not impossible! The following are a few tips and advice that you can use to aid your comprehension of any primary document.

1. Read through the primary document and try to pull out the main idea(s) that the writer is discussing.
 - Who is the author and what is their motivation for creating this work?
 - Write out the thesis of the document in one sentence.
 - Is this primary document a reliable source? Why or why not?
2. Try to figure what context (time period, event, emotional state, etc.) the piece was created.
 - Do the ideas or values described in the work differ from society's ideas or values today? How?
 - What historical, political, economic, or social events are happening in society that could have influenced this work?
3. Be sure to look up and define any words you do not understand.
 - Use a dictionary to look up words you do not understand. Write the definition right on your photocopy of the document.
 - Try to read any words or phrases you do not understand over again and try to use contextual clues to figure out what the author meant by the word or phrase.
4. Re-read the primary document as many times as you need to so that you understand what the document is about.
 - Does the author make any judgments or come to any conclusions in the document that you did not notice before?
 - Use post-it notes or highlight areas of importance that form the basis for the document.
5. Consult dictionaries, the encyclopedia, the Internet, your teacher, other students, or any other resource you need to help you better grasp the material in the primary document.
 - Does this document support or go against any other document or secondary source that you have read? How?
 - Write questions to yourself in the margins of the document to look up or ask another person.
6. Above all else remember that the author had a **REASON** for creating this document and you need to figure out why they felt the need to create this primary source. Sometimes this requires a little social scientific research and a little historical imagination!

If you follow these simple steps your understanding and appreciation of primary documents will grow each time you use a new source and there is no better way to understand a period in history than to review documents from that time period.

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Annotated List for Teachers – great for background/historical information

Addison Public Library. “Chinua Achebe: Things Fall Apart”. Available Online. <http://www.addison.lib.il.us/6achebe.asp>. This is a summary of Achebe’s famous 1958 novel from the Addison Public Library. It also includes discussion questions that could be used if the book was read in a classroom.

Agatucci, Cora. “African Storytelling”. Available Online. <http://web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/hum211/afrstory.htm>. 24 Feb. 04. This web-page was created by Professor Cora Agatucci for her Humanities 211 course. The page is dedicated to African storytelling and the themes in those folktales. There is also a small mention of griots and their role in the process. The work is good for a very general overview on the topic.

Ahmad, Iftikhar, et. al. World Cultures: A Global Mosaic. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. 2001. This is the World Cultures textbook for the tenth grade students in Pittsburgh Public Schools. There is a little information on griots and folktales in West Africa in chapter six of the text. This is where the idea from my project came from initially.

Cosaan: Senegalese Culture. “Griots.” Available Online. www.geocities.com/jbenhill/griots.html. 24 Feb. 04. This online article looks at the role of griots in society and the origin of their trade. It is an excellent overview of the topic and could work as a class reading if the teacher was short on time and needed a quick discussion on griots in West Africa.

Cultural Heritage Initiative for Community Outreach – University of Michigan School of Information. “The Oral Tradition.” Available Online. <http://www.si.umich.edu/chico/UMS/Drummers/oraltradition.html>. 24 Feb. 04. This website gives an overview of the role of storytelling in Africa and discusses some of the famous African epics like the *Mandinka Epic*. This site would be an excellent resource for students to read for homework or go through in a computer lab.

Hale, Thomas. Griots and Griottes – Masters of Words and Music. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 1998. This is the seminal work on griots and griottes in West Africa. Almost any work I read after 1998 speaks quotes Hale in some context. This book has the origin, job description, social roles, and relevance of griots and griottes in West Africa.

Hale, Thomas A. "Griottes: Female Voices from West Africa." Research in African Literatures. 25(3): 71-92. Fall 1994. This journal article appears to have been the pre-write for Hale's book Griots and Griottes. It is a brief but concise view into griottes and their impact on storytelling in West Africa.

Hale, Thomas. Scribe, Griot, Novelist. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press. 1990. This is an early work for Hale. This book compares and contrasts the roles of scribes, griots, and novelists in West Africa. The section on griots was very informative and the information about the scribes also had some relevancy. This is a great book if the reader wants to look at African literature over a period of time.

Hill, Joseph B. People of Word, Song, and Money: The Evolution of Senegalese Griots and Their Art. Brigham Young University. 1999. This was a thesis done as part of a fulfillment for graduation from BYU. The work is broken down into five chapters and covers the role of griots in traditional society compared to griotism in the modern world. It also has extensive sections on the music of the griots of West Africa.

Hoffman, Barbara G. Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 2000. This author spent time in Africa attempting to become a griotte and wrote about a time when each family of griots was struggling for power in Mande. Her descriptions of the caste differences among the people of West Africa and excerpts of actual griot works were fantastic. The book also contains some wonderful pictures that could make the topic more real to the students.

Ikonne, Chidi, Emelia Oko, Peter Onwudinjo. African Literature and African Historical Experiences. Nigeria: Oluseyi Press, Ltd.. 1991. This book is a collection of criticisms and analysis on African literature and the role of history in Africa. There was some solid information on the role of folktales and oral history in Africa.

Jones, Eldred Durosimi. "Myth and History." African Literature Today. 11: 31-52. 1980.

This journal article compares folklore to the actual historical events and attempts to distinguish the information contained in both. The author also spends a great deal of time looking at the types of themes contained in the folktales.

"Legends and Language Learning." Bringing Africa to the French Classroom. Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Department of Instruction at Pitt. April 1993. This was a previously done curriculum unit on the types of folktales in Africa and a little information on griots. This would be a good

supplement to my unit for a teacher of foreign language, as the most of the information contained within the unit is in French.

Lindfors, Bernth. Forms of Folklore in Africa: Narrative, Poetic, Gnostic, Dramatic. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. 1977. This source is a collection of different works that discuss the forms of folklore in Africa. The source is edited by Lindfors. It gave a lot of information regarding the types of folklore in Africa and explained that parameters that defined someone who was allowed to tell the tales. This was a good source for separating and understanding the types of folklore in Africa.

Lott, Joanna. "Keepers of History." Available Online. <http://www.rps.psu.edu/0205/keepers.html>. 25 Feb. 04. This article was from Penn State Online and discusses the roles of griots in West Africa. It has some nice pictures (including one of Thomas Hale) and a few excerpts from actual griot songs. It also speaks directly about the role of griottes and Hale's work in this field.

Okpewho, Isidore. African Oral Literature – Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 1992. This is an excellent work for looking at the training and preparation of griots in West Africa. The author also explains many of the themes in folktales and the social placement of griots in society. This book is an excellent companion to Hale's Griots and Griottes.

Owomoyela, Oyekan. African Literatures: An Introduction. Waltham, MA: Crossroads Press. 1979. This work may be a little outdated but the wealth of information is still quite remarkable. The book contains a look at all forms of African literature, from oral history to the printed word. There was a lot of information on the role of oral history in Africa, the themes expressed in African folktales, and some information on the role and importance of griots in society.

Palmer, Robert. "Griots of West Africa." Jali Kunda. Available Online. http://www.geocities.com/ritmi2002/griots_west_africa_hm. 26 Feb. 04. This is an introduction to journal on West African music. The author spent most of the time analyzing the role of music in West Africa today but did spend a little time discussing griots and their function in West Africa. This article would be better for someone interested in the music of West Africa today.

"What is a Griot?" Mali Empire and Griot Traditions. Available Online. <http://web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/hum211/coursepack/maligriot.htm>. 24 Feb.

04. This site explains what a griot is and gives a little background information on the types of musical instruments griots use while telling their stories. This is also the site that discusses the film *Keita: The Heritage of the Griot* and allowed me to read up more on the film, which became an activity for my curriculum unit.

Annotated List for Classroom Materials

- Bartel, Nick. "Sunjata." The Epic of Sunjata. Available Online. <http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/schwww/sch618/Sundjata/Sundjata.html>. 12 March 04. This web-site contains the Epic of Sunjata along with pictures and outside links to other sources. The students can access this web-site at home or at school or if the school has a lack of technology the teacher can print the pages out and have the students read the story in class. There are lots of colors and pictures which will hold the students attention and with help middle school students could also benefit from this story. The end of the site gives a great bibliography for other works on the topic and other websites that are available.
- Berry, Jack. *West African Folktales*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 1991. This book is a collection of folktales from West Africa. The preface explains the role of spoken art in West Africa and how verbal arts impact the telling of a folktale. It also divides and explains the types of West African folktales that are common throughout the region, like riddles, trickster tales, and historical folktales.
- California Newsreel. "Facilitators Guide." Keita: The Heritage of the Griot. Available Online. 3 March 04. This website provides the background information for the film Keita. The guide provides background information on Keita, an explanation of folktales in West Africa, and gives questions for the students to answer after the film. This site also contains a link so that an educator can order the film for their classroom. High schools are able to order the video for \$49.95.
- Gale, Steven H. West African Folktales. IL: NTC Publishing Group. 1995. This book is a collection of various folktales from around West Africa, divided by countries. The folktales are age appropriate for middle school and high school.
- Gale, Steven H. West African Folktales: Instructor's Manual. IL: NTC Publishing Group. 1995. This is the instructor's manual for the *West African Folktales* book also by Steven Gale. The book contains questions for the students about the folktales and gives background on each of the countries of West Africa.

Standards

Citizenship (by standard number)

1. All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups, and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States, and other nations.
4. All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation, and world by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.
5. All students develop and defend a position on current issues confronting the United States and other nations by conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations.
7. All students demonstrate their skill of communicating, negotiating, and cooperative with others.
8. All students demonstrate the ability to work effectively with others.

Communication (by standard number)

2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.