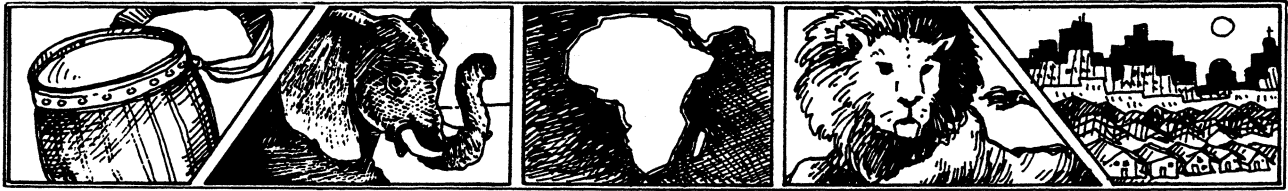


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Africa

Africa is the ancestral homeland of over 100 million African-Americans living throughout North America. Sharing our African heritage with children helps them understand the important contribution that African culture has made to our daily lives.

Area—11.7 million square miles.

Countries—The African continent is composed of 52 countries and one territory.

Population—over 800 million people (2004 estimate of total population for 52 countries and the territory of Western Sahara).

Flag—Each African nation has its own flag. The Organization of African Unity represents all of the independent countries of the continent.

Race—Five races have migrated through this vast continent, mingling together over time.

Religion

African traditional religions, Islam, and Christianity are generally monotheistic—believing in one god who created the world and its inhabitants. Some Africans believe in lesser gods, spirit forces, and in the spirits of their ancestors.

Physical Features

Africa is the second largest continent in the world, and its natural wonders are diverse. Mt. Kilimanjaro, rising 19,500 feet above the East African plains, is the highest mountain on the continent. The great Sahara, the world's largest desert, extends across the full width of the northern part of the continent. The Nile, Congo, and Zambezi are legendary rivers. The Zambezi is famous for its spectacular waterfalls and rapids. Victoria Falls on the Zambezi is wider than Niagara Falls and is twice as high.

The five climate zones of Africa range from arid to tropical. Jungles and tropical rain forests account for a relatively small portion of the land area and are found mostly along the west coast of Africa and in the Congo Basin.

Africa produces a large variety of crops such as peanuts, cocoa, yams, cassava or manioc (the root from which tapioca is made), millet (a grain), maize (corn), coffee, bananas, and coconuts. Many of these are exported to other countries.

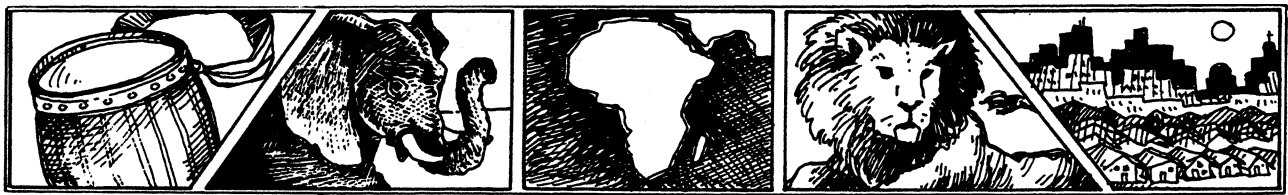
Languages

Over a thousand languages are spoken throughout the vast African continent. Each country has many minor languages and a few predominant languages. The European colonization of Africa had significant effects on the languages the African people speak. The countries colonized by France, Britain, and Portugal also adopted these European languages. Arabic influence made the Arabic language important in the northern part of Africa. Some African languages, like *Swahili* in East Africa and *Hausa* in West Africa, are spoken in more than one country.

In Your Classroom:

Bring a world map and a globe to the classroom and let the children explore them. Introduce basic geographical concepts. Compare sizes and features of different landmasses. Acquaint children with the names of different African countries.

Gather pictures showing the diversity of African peoples. Make up a classroom mural displaying the pictures. *National Geographic* magazines and United Nations calendars are possible sources for these photos.



A History of Africa

Africa's ancient kingdoms of Ghana, Nubia, Egypt, and Mali were important centers of civilization. The influences of empires centered in the ancient trading cities of Timbuktu and Zimbabwe extended throughout much of Africa to other parts of the world. The coastal cities of East Africa traded with people across the Indian Ocean. In 1415, a giraffe was sent to the emperor of China from the trading city of Malindiin, what is now Kenya!

Ancient African empires excelled in the development of mathematics, architecture, art, religion, literature, and law. The Swahili poets and storytellers of East Africa wrote in Arabic as well as in their own language.

Life in Africa was changed by the European voyages of discovery, starting with the Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama in 1497. The Portuguese wanted African trade for their own, so they attacked and robbed the great trading cities, destroying the Indian Ocean trade. They traveled up the great African rivers and dominated the peoples who came in contact with them. Many other European countries soon came to Africa, seeking a share of the African trade.

Sadly, the Europeans were not satisfied with trade alone and turned to slavery as another means of income. African slaves were sent to work on plantations in the West Indies, South America, and the United States.

Gradually, the Europeans took political control of much of Africa as they carved Africa into colonies. The colonial system exploited African resources of labor, minerals, and agriculture. For generations, Africans were reduced to the role of permanent laborers and servants.

Africans strove for their own independence and gradually won it. Many African countries became independent in the latter part of the 20th Century.

In Your Classroom:

Read and discuss the book, *Ashanti to Zulu* by Margaret Musgrove. The book's illustrations accurately depict the life and traditional customs of twenty-six African peoples.