



Obakunle Akinlana's Study Guide

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Alo Irintan Yoruba (Yoruba Folklore)

Alo Irintan, when translated means, Yoruba Folklore. This cultural presentation is aimed at giving participants an understanding of the arts and history of the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria, Africa.

Too often African art, whether visual or performing is thought of as "primitive", despite the complexity and sophistication of the aesthetics, symbolism, and functions of the objects. Furthermore, there is a tendency to generalize about the cultures of Africa, even though the vast continent is home to many civilizations and ancient artistic traditions. This presentation focuses on one language group and its incredibly rich artistic heritage, the Yoruba people.

The Yoruba people of Nigeria and the People's Republic of Benin are one of the largest cultural groups in Africa, numbering more than 20 million. The Yoruba have been prolific in the creation of magnificent art objects for centuries, reflecting the ancient origins of their culture which flourished from about 800 to 1600 AD from Ile Ife.

Alo Irintan Yoruba is a program that is designed to give students an understanding and overview of the art and culture of the Yoruba people through storytelling, music and art.

Yoruba Artifacts

Yoruba art has a long and distinguished history. Based on evidence from archaeological excavations, their urbanization dates from 900 A.D. to the present. The Yoruba are heirs to one of the oldest and richest artistic traditions in Africa, a tradition that remains vital and influential today.

Yoruba Artifacts, con't.

For centuries Africans have documented their history and culture through the visual arts, using wood, metal, stone, clay, cloth, gourds, beads and leather as canvas to display their stories. Whatever the medium, Africans have found it necessary to remember heroes, rulers, warriors, enemies, men, women, gods, and goddesses, plants and animals through their art.

Gelede dance masks - This mask is danced at Gelede festivals. These celebrations pay homage to woman's spiritual powers and their influence and contributions to the town.

Epa dance mask - 30" tall - Epa headdresses are masks that are worn at festivals honoring important people, deities or events. This mask is carved from trees that are native to the area. Before the tree that is selected is cut, a ritual is performed to appease the tree's spirit. This Epa mask is 40 years old and is made in honor of Esu, the messenger and inspector general of Olodumare the Supreme God of the Yorubas.

Ifa bowl - 19" - 40 years old - is a ritual vessel used to store the sacred palm nuts of Ifa. A woman is shown offering a fowl to the Yoruba deity of destiny.

Ibeji Twins - 9" - More twins are born in Yorubaland than anywhere else in the world. When twins are born, carvings are made to honor them. The cowrie shell jacket is used to dress the figurines. Cowrie shells were once used as money by the Yoruba, and are still used to the present to identify important items. The jacket is a symbol of riches and honors the twins.

Esu dance wand - is carved from one piece of wood and is used by members of the Esu society to give honor to their deity, the messenger of the universe. Size is 25" tall.

Ayo board game - Popular game played throughout Africa. Wooden handcarved. Size is 18x8x4".

Irukere - Horsetail used by chiefs and priests as a symbol of authority, power and importance.

Calabash - (a member of the squash family, when dried is used as a utensil) - used to carry food, wine, oils, water, etc.

Basket - handwoven from palm leaves, used to carry food, cloths, etc.

Abebe - straw, leather or feather fan.



Beaded crown - The beaded crown is one of the most important symbols of power, and is worn only by the king who are called oba. This crown is ten years old.

Adire Eleso textile - Cloth in which designs are created by pleating, folding, twisting, sewing or tying it in place with raffia and then dyeing it in indigo vats.

Aso oke - Handwoven 3" strips of cloth that are sewn together creating various patterns. This beautiful material is worn at weddings and other formal events.

Batik - Material that is designed using wax relief and dyes.

Musical Instruments

Agogo - A bell made from iron used for tempo.

Bata - A cone shape wooden drum covered with leather.

Dun Dun - An hour glass shape wooden drum covered with leather. This drum pitch changes by squeezing it, thus, making it mimic the Yoruba tonal language. This drum is known as the talking drum.

Shekere - A gourd or calabash with beads, shells, or seeds strung onto it.

Shakara - A flat circular drum made from clay and goat skin.

Balaphone - An instrument made from wood and gourds.

Ocean drum - A flat circular drum covered with leather containing beads, seeds or sand produce ocean sounds.

Earth drum - A wooden cylinder drum covered with animal skin.

Customs of the Yoruba

Good manners - Respect for elders, laws, honesty, work, intelligence, patience, and loyalty are the criteria for acceptable character among the Yoruba. Cleanliness and discipline are other measures of character along with participation in many societies and the knowledge of family and national history. Education is a priority for the Yoruba people. Whether it's traditional poetry, such as the "Odus of Ifa", or modern studies in universities, knowledge is respected by the Yorubas.

Upon entering a house, one removes their shoes as a show of respect to the house as well as to the occupants.

Elders are always greeted with respect and acknowledged by bowing the head or touching the ground with the hand.

Before any meal is served, a bowl of water with a cloth is passed to each diner, and the hands are washed. The left hand is not used when eating nor is it extended in a handshake unless one is a member of the ogboni society.

The common Yoruba diet includes, fish, beef, goat, sheep, bush meat, chicken, poultry, rabbit, hedge-hog, snail, shrimp, crab, lobster, yams, beans, okra, peanuts, corn, tomatoes, oranges, pineapples, carrots, pumpkin, melon, peppers, mango, almonds, cashews, coconuts, dates, palm nuts, bananas, cassava, palm oil, greens, ginger, milk, honey, sugar cane, rice, plantain, beer, palm wine...

Ede Yoruba (Speak Yoruba)

Yoruba alphabet:

A - ahh	GB - gbee	M - mee	S - see
B - bee	H- hee	N - nhh	Ṣ - she
D - dee	I - ee	O - oh	T - tee
E - aye	J - gee	Ọ - owh	U - oo
Ẹ - ehh	K - key	P - kpee	W - wee
F - fee	L - lee	R - ree	Y - yee
G - ghee			

Good morning - Ẹ karo

Good afternoon - Ẹ ka san

Good evening - Ẹ ka le

Good night - O daro

How are you doing? - Ẹ alafia ni?

I am doing fine thank you - Alafia ni a dupe.

What is your name? - Kini oruko re?

My name is Obakunle Akinlana. - Oruko mi nje Obakunle Akinlana.

Yoruba names:

A Yoruba proverb says, "we look inward in deciding what name to give a child". Names among the Yoruba reveal personal and historical information about the bearer. For instance, Ade, meaning crown, is a prefix that is exclusive to members of royal families. Adebisi, he/she was born into royalty. In the case of twin births, the first child born is called Taiwo. The second child of twins is called Kehinde. Names beginning with the prefix Ayan, indicates that the child is from a family of drummers. For example, Ayanbunmi means, Ayan gave me this child.

Recommended reading:

The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, by William Bascom ISBN 0-88133-038-8

Yoruba Names, by Chief Fama ISBN 0-9644247-5-4

Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought, by Drewal, Pemberton & Abiodun ISBN 0-8109-1794-7

Teach Yourself Yoruba, by E.C. Rowlands ISBN 0-8442-3843-0

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