

Examining Cultural Diffusion through Divination Traditions

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| **Introduction** | |
| According to traditional Yoruba beliefs, a pantheon of deities, known as *orisa*, and other spiritual forces are instrumental in determining the course of events in the lives of individuals on Earth. Still practiced today, Ifa divination is a way for people to communicate with these powers and determine how best to live their lives.  This lesson has students explore the Ifa divination practice to learn about how it is conducted as well as the materials used. They also will explore how this tradition is still practiced today by individuals in Africa as well as in America and how this is a representation of cultural diffusion and change over time. | |
| **Indiana Standards Connections:**    7.3.3 – Describe and compare major cultural characteristics of regions in Africa, Asia, and Southwest Pacific. Examples: language, religion, recreation, clothing, diet, fine arts, family structure, and traditions  ES.3.1 – Students identify and explore current traditions, rites, and norms of an ethnic or racial group(s) and how they have or are changing over time.  S.2.1 – Define culture and identify the material and non-material components of culture.  6.3.10 – Explain the ways cultural diffusion, invention, and innovation change culture. | **Compelling Question(s):**  How do religious practices demonstrate cultural values?  How do religious customs transcend cultures and regions?  Why does cultural diffusion occur? |
| **Lesson Objectives:**  Students will be able to:   * Describe the religious practice of Ifa and how it is representative of not only Nigerian culture but also peoples impacted by the African diaspora. | |
| **Materials** | |
| * Class Projection Device * Access to the following ASP item in the Indiana University Digital Toolbox:   + [Ifa Divination Tray (Opon Ifa)](https://artmuseum.indiana.edu/collections-online/browse/object.php?number=2014.1) * Additional Ifa Artifacts & Descriptions   + [Met Museum: Ifa Divination Vessel](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/316595?pos=4)   + [Image of Mat with Babalawo or Santeria materials (second section on website)](http://www.earthmetropolis.com/Earth/yoruba_ifa.html)   + [UNESCO - Ifa Divination System](https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ifa-divination-system-00146)   + [Agere Ifa (Divination Cup)](https://www.imodara.com/discover/nigeria-yoruba-agere-ifa-divination-cup/)   + [Divination Cup (Agere Ifa)](https://artmuseum.indiana.edu/collections-online/browse/object.php?number=77.34.4) * Videos   + YouTube Video: [The Ifa Divination System](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9lGVF6jYN4)   + YouTube Video: [What is Ifa?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ff3ZvmG1jc) * Articles about African religious practices today   + [Harvard Gazette - The spirituality of Africa](https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/10/the-spirituality-of-africa/)   + [Baltimore Sun - West African religions on the rise in Maryland](https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/bs-md-african-faiths-20190315-story.html) | |
| **Learning Plan** | |
| **Activities**   1. Begin by showing students the image of the Ifa Divination Tray. You can choose to have students look at the entire image or provide them the close-up images of the various pieces. Ask students to infer what this item’s purpose is. Students will more than likely note the shape being similar to a plate. They may note the head at the top; you can ask them to infer who this face might be—a god, a leader, etc. 2. After allowing students time to analyze the image and share what they notice, inform students that this is a divination tray used in the practice of Ifa. You can share with students the brief description included with the work. You can also choose to show students several of the other Ifa divination artifacts (the Met Museum item also has an excellent description that could be shared with students). Students can analyze these various artifacts and note similarities and differences, examine the materials, what their purposes are in the practice, etc. You can also go back to the divination tray and ask students to now make new inferences about the images along the tray. 3. Next, show students the brief YouTube Video: The Ifa Divination System. This allows students to see the divination practice in action. Students could be asked to take notes about the practice; you may choose to give them a Guided Notes that goes along with the video. 4. Share with students that, while this is a practice custom to a people of Nigeria, the religion has spread to the Americas as well. 5. Students can then read the brief article (and/or watch video) by the Baltimore Sun that discusses the rise of Ifa and Vodou in Maryland. You can also have students read the Harvard Gazette article (either in full or choose excerpts) of an interview with a professor of Indigenous African religions. The second YouTube video linked in the has people discussing the practice of Ifa today. 6. Debrief with the following questions:    * How does the Ifa practice reflect the cultural values and beliefs of the people who practice it?    * Why are these practices adopted and conducted by individuals in America today? Why might this practice look different for those who practice it today?    * Can you think of other religious practices that are similar to this? In what way(s)? | |
| **Assessment Suggestions**  Answering the questions in the debrief can be done by students individually and collected prior to discussion, to allow the teacher to see if students understand the cultural practice. | |
| **Extensions**  Students could explore other divination customs from different cultures, such as the Latin Dia de Los Muertos as well as practices of Indigenous groups in the Americas.  Students could also look into the impact of the slave trade on African religious practices. Potential resource from the Pluralism Project: [African Religion in America](https://pluralism.org/files/pluralism/files/african_religion_in_america_0.pdf) | |

Ifa Divination Tray Activity Possibilities

Some of the best opportunities for education are *integrative*—meaning that students are able to make connections across disciplines to reinforce the knowledge that they are developing. For example, they may be learning about Renaissance Italy in World Studies at the same time that they read Dante’s *Inferno* in English class while also studying Botticelli in Art. Feel free to combine and adapt some of the ideas across disciplines and standards to best suit your particular context. You can also collaborate with other teachers at your school or supplement the resources provided by contacting your librarian.

**Note: The following ideas are meant to give general guidance for teachers to include artifacts and other material culture in their classrooms. They are not meant to be treated as comprehensive activities or lessons that are one-size-fits-all for any classroom. They should be personalized to best fit the needs of a teacher’s individual context in accordance with prior student learning, student abilities, available resources, and any curriculum.**

**Art**

**Visual Arts – Responding:**

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| Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work  Enduring Understanding: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed throughout engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.  Essential Question(s): How do life experiences influence the way you relate to art? How does learning about art impact how we perceive the world? What can we learn from our responses to art? | |
| VA:Re7.1.1a | *Select and describe works of art that illustrate daily life experiences.* |
| VA:Re7.1.3a | *Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art.* |
| VA:Re7.1.6a | *Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value.* |

**Visual Arts – Connecting:**

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| Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.  Enduring Understanding: People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.  Essential Question(s): How does art help us understanding the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures? How is art used to impact the videos of a society> How does art preserve aspects of life? | |
| VA:Cn11.1.1a | *Understand that people from different places and times have made art for a variety of reasons.* |
| VA:Cn11.1.2a | *Compare and contrast cultural uses of artwork from different times and places.* |
| VA:Cn11.1.3a | *Recognize that responses to art change depending on knowledge of the time and place in which it was made* |
| VA:Cn11.1.4a | *Through observation, infer information about time, place, and culture in which a work of art was created.* |
| VA:Cn11.1.6a | *Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.* |
| VA:Cn11.1.7a | *Analyze how response to art is influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses* |
| VA:Cn11.1.8a | *Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity* |
| VA:Cn11.1.IIa | *Compare uses of art in a variety of social, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.* |
| VA:Cn11.1.IIIa | *Appraise the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society.* |

*In examining the divination tray and subsequent artifacts, students can be asked to consider how these artifacts represent the customs and daily life of the people of Nigeria. They can examine the design, the materials used, and how this art form represents how these artifacts represent both daily life as well as beliefs.*

**Social Studies**

**Grade Contents**

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| K.3.6 | *Identify and compare similarities and differences in families, classmates, neighbors and neighborhoods, and ethnic and cultural groups.* |
| 1.3.8 | *Compare cultural similarities and differences of various ethnic and cultural groups found in Indiana such as family traditions and customs, and traditional clothing and food* |
| 3.3.7 | *Compare the cultural characteristics of the local community with communities in other parts of the world.* |
| 6.3.10 | *Explain the ways cultural diffusion, invention, and innovation change culture.* |
| 7.3.3 | *Describe and compare major cultural characteristics of regions in Africa, Asia, and Southwest Pacific.* ***Examples****: language, religion, recreation, clothing, diet, fine arts, family structure, and traditions* |

**Sociology**

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| **S.2.1** | *Define culture and identify the material and non-material components of culture.* |
| **ES.4.1** | *Identify culture conflict, cultural similarity, cultural diversity.* |

**Ethnic Studies**

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| **ES.3.1** | *Students identify and explore current traditions, rites, and norms of an ethnic or racial group(s) and how they have or are changing over time* |
| **ES.4.1** | *Students examine historical and contemporary economic, intellectual, social, cultural and political contributions to society by ethnic or racial group(s) or an individual within a group.* |

*The Social Studies standards noted here all revolve around students examining cultural customs and traditions as well as cultural change over time.*

**Language Arts**

**Writing Skills:**

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| 4.W.5 | Conduct short research on a topic.   * Identify a specific question to address (e.g., What is the history of the Indy 500?). * Use organizational features of print and digital sources to efficiently locate further information. * Determine the reliability of the sources. * Summarize and organize information in their own words, giving credit to the source * Present the research information, choosing from a variety of formats. |
| 5.W.5 | Conduct short research assignments and tasks on a topic.   * With support, formulate a research question (e.g., What were John Wooden’s greatest contributions to college basketball?). * Identify and acquire information through reliable primary and secondary sources. * Summarize and paraphrase important ideas and supporting details, and include direct quotations where appropriate, citing the source of information. * Avoid plagiarism and follow copyright guidelines for use of images, pictures, etc. * Present the research information, choosing from a variety of sources. |

*Students could conduct brief research projects on divination rituals of various cultures. They could either develop a presentation, a brief essay, or even a* [*one-pager*](https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/one-pagers/) *as a product.*