

- The Ashanti are a proud people who have worked hard to achieve a distinct identity among the Akan people. Share with the class examples of Ashanti art, many of which are directly linked to sayings, like poems, proverbs and even folk tales. Ask students to analyze representations of Ashanti culture and identify what they say about how the Ashanti regard themselves, their neighbors and their culture. The Metropolitan Museum of Art features wonderful examples of Ashanti art at the following web site:  
[www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/asan\\_1/hd\\_asan\\_1.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/asan_1/hd_asan_1.htm).
- A huge land mass, or super-continent, known as Gondwanaland split apart 250 million years ago. Africa shifted to the north, while the Indian subcontinent moved eastward. The island of Madagascar, often referred to as a "micro-continent," was left behind, cut off from the rest of the world and thus able to develop a uniquely diverse natural environment. Ask students to investigate the biodiversity hotspot of Madagascar and list examples of plant and animal species that are considered endangered on this island. Students may also define Pangaea, research the history of the development of the theory of plate tectonics, or continental drift, and discuss evidence that has been accepted to support this idea. To support their research, students may create detailed maps, computer animations or time lines of the stages of the breakup of Pangaea. Helpful research material may be found at the following web site: [www.exploratorium.edu/origins/antarctica/ideas/gondwana3.html](http://www.exploratorium.edu/origins/antarctica/ideas/gondwana3.html).
- Despite having a rich history and culture and being home to world-renowned historic cities, Mali is ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world, with the average income under \$300 and with some districts reporting 90% of the population living below the poverty line. The great hope for many African nations is oil, as it is predicted that Africa will supply more oil to the United States than the Middle East by the end of the decade. In 2005, an Australian company was awarded two onshore petroleum exploration licenses in the Republic of Mali. Until now, the benefits of oil have not trickled down to the vast majority of people in Africa. Ask students to research the social and economic issues related to oil production in Africa and conduct a roundtable discussion representing the interests of oil companies, Mali's government, and the citizens of Mali. If oil is discovered, what is the best way to ensure that oil revenues are used to benefit all parties? Students may expand the activity and conduct similar exercises featuring mock discussions between various interest groups involved in other oil-exporting African nations such as Nigeria, Angola and Equatorial Guinea.

### Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at [www.LibraryVideo.com](http://www.LibraryVideo.com)

- [www.marshall.edu/akanart/akancosmology.html](http://www.marshall.edu/akanart/akancosmology.html)  
The Akan Cultural Symbols Project at Marshall University presents "Akan Cosmology," a detailed analysis of Akan beliefs.
- [www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Dogon.html](http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Dogon.html)  
The University of Iowa provides a brief summary of the social, cultural and economic aspects of Dogon culture.
- [courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/brit-occ.htm](http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/brit-occ.htm)  
West Chester University has a short historical summary of the history of the British in West Africa.
- [www.mongabay.com/reference/country\\_studies/madagascar/SOCIETY.html](http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/madagascar/SOCIETY.html)  
A wealth of information on the history of Madagascar.

### Suggested Print Resources

- Berry, Sara. *Chiefs Know Their Boundaries: Essays on Property, Power and the Past in Asante 1896-1996*. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH; 2000.
- Edgerton, Robert B. *Fall of the Asante Empire: The Hundred Year War for Africa's Gold Coast*. The Free Press, New York, NY; 1995.
- Hollyman, Stephenie. *Dogon: Africa's People of the Cliffs*. Harry N. Abrams, New York, NY; 2001.

#### TEACHER'S GUIDE

Jeffrey W. Litzke, M.Ed.

Curriculum Specialist, Schlessinger Media

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# WONDERS OF AFRICA™

## SUB-SAHARAN CULTURES

### Grades 7 & up

Through a wide selection of cultural heritage sites, *Wonders of Africa* introduces students to the diverse regions and people, the unique natural beauty and the turbulent and often tragic history associated with the world's second largest continent. Students will examine specific African beliefs, customs and traditions as they explore topics such as the exotic Swahili culture, the enormous influence of Islam and Christianity and the devastating history of slavery and colonialism. *Wonders of Africa* not only provides unique insight into Africa's past, but also offers an excellent foundation for understanding modern African societies.



## Program Overview

Studying the fascinating and legendary Dogon and Ashanti and the mysterious Vazimba people provides students with insight into the cultural diversity of Africa and helps to tell the history of the continent from an African perspective. Exploring these ancient African civilizations allows us to understand the causes and effects of the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms and reveals the wide range of African religious traditions. Although the bustling gold trade that was the foundation of the precolonial Ashanti civilization and the reclusive and exotic life of the Dogon have fallen into decline in some ways, and the original Vazimba have all but disappeared, these cultures and their descendants still attempt to maintain elements of their ancient lifestyles and remain important symbols of bygone eras.

## Episode 1: The Dogon

The Dogon are a West African ethnic group from the central plateau region of Mali. They are part of the legendary Mande people, who were driven out of their region over 800 years ago and settled in and around the barren Bandiagara Plateau. Here, they could live a peaceful life without the constant fear of attack from hostile neighbors. A focal point of Dogon culture is ancestor worship, which also reflects their animist view of the world, as according to legend, the Dogon's very first ancestor was turned into a now-revered snake. The Dogon build their houses out of clay and they believe that they themselves were created from clay by Amma, the god of creation. Today, there are approximately 600,000 Dogon in Mali, mostly hardscrabble farmers living in scattered villages without a centralized government. Because of the rocky, arid environment, whole villages have been abandoned and the ancient wisdom of the Dogon is being overtaken by grim modern realities. However, many Dogon continue to struggle to maintain their old, autonomous culture and traditions.

### Vocabulary

**Mande** — A term that refers to an ancient culture and language group spoken by a large number of people in West Africa.

**Bandiagara Plateau** — A site in West Africa noted for its landscape of cliffs and sandy dunes that has significant archaeological and anthropological interest.

**Animist** — A person who believes that both spiritual beings and spiritual forces in nature influence our lives, health and security.

**Amma** — For the Dogon people, the name of the sky god or creator of the universe.

**Tellem** — An ancient West African people who lived in what is now present-day Mali.

**falaise** — The French word for a steep slope or cliff that results from erosion or faulting that separates two level areas.

**toguna** — A Dogon meeting house.

## Episode 2: The Ashanti

The Ashanti Empire was a powerful West African kingdom famous for its gold deposits, and strong government leaders and a powerful military that ruled in what is now southern Ghana in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Groups of villages made up the traditional Ashanti state, ruled over by a chief whose primary duties were religious and military. The strong Ashanti warriors fought actively against, but ultimately succumbed to, British colonialists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The ancient capital city of Kumasi was symbolized by the Golden Stool and is where all Ashanti kings were enthroned. While traditional Ashanti buildings were destroyed in colonial times, and ancient village gods are not widely revered today, ceremonies that attempt to preserve Ashanti traditions are still performed. Today, Kumasi is one of the most densely-populated regions in modern Ghana.

### Vocabulary

**Muslim** — A follower of Islam, a religion practiced by more than one billion people around the world.

**Akom** — A traditional religious experience in Ghana in which an individual is thought to be possessed by a spirit. Akomfo means “possessed persons.”

**Abosom** — A word that refers to “lesser gods” as opposed to the Supreme Being; part of the belief system of the Akan people in Ghana.

**Akwasidae** — A colorful ceremony of the Ashanti Kingdom in which people honor their king and ancestral spirits.

**Asaase** — The name of a traditional goddess of the Akan people in Ghana. Asaase is the mother of the earth.

**Kumasi** — The capital city and important historical center in the Ashanti region of Ghana.

**Gold Coast** — The name of a former colony of Great Britain established in 1874; the former name of Ghana until the country became independent in 1956.

## Episode 3: The Vazimba

Madagascar is located in the Indian Ocean, off the southeast coast of Africa, and is the fourth largest island in the world. The vast majority of people living in Madagascar are Malagasy, a people characterized by a combination of Asian and African cultural elements. Anthropologists suggest that this unique cultural heritage is a result of Indonesians settling on the island around the first century of the Common Era. The Malagasy worship the Vazimba, a long-vanished people who are considered to be the first inhabitants of Madagascar and whose spirits are said to inhabit the surrounding landscape. Today, the Tsingy Vazimba believe they are descended from the original Vazimba, a name which means, “those who have always been here.”

## Vocabulary

**Norenanahary** — God, according to the creation myth of the Vazimba people.

**Mainity** — The daughter of God, according to the Vazimba creation myth.

**tsingy** — Sharp limestone pinnacles found in the Bemaraha region of Madagascar that may reach 150 feet in height. Throughout the *tsingy* are canyons and gorges full of rich fauna and flora.

## Follow-up Discussion Questions

- Where did the Dogon people originally come from? Discuss why they may have been driven from their native country.
- What is the Toguna? Analyze its significance to the social climate and practices of the Dogon people.
- What is the role of the village chief of Bodwease? List issues and concerns that he discusses with the Council of Elders.
- Describe the level of commitment many people in the village of Bodwease have toward the ancient village gods. Summarize the debate regarding the maintenance of the temple in Bodwease and the continuation of the Akom ritual.
- Relate the creation myth which is still told by the Tsingy Vazimba. Evaluate the importance of creation myths and discuss what they tell us about different world cultures.
- Why do the Tsingy Vazimba visit the endless labyrinth of caves and grottoes in Madagascar? Discuss the importance of the original Vazimba to their descendants.

## Follow-up Activities

- Famous for its gold, its statecraft and above all for its warfare, the Ashanti kingdom flourished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It took the British 70 years and seven wars to subdue the Ashanti. Ask students to research the history of this imperial conflict, developing biographical profiles of key political and military leaders, and writing detailed time lines of events and important treaties. More information may be found at the following web site: [cweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+gh0143\)](http://cweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+gh0143)).

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