

Ghana Beyond Subsistence
Teaching-Learning-Connecting Lessons
2019.05 Celebrating African Arts:
Èwè, Ghana: *Alobalo*

Area: CRITICAL THINKING / ARTS

CELEBRATING AFRICAN ARTS: *Alobalo/wo* (singular/plural)

Although they have supported western-style education for more than a century, the Èwè Dome communities from Ho to Hohoe in the Volta Region of eastern Ghana have relied on a wide variety of oral traditions to unify their communities. These include:

Gliwo: Stories with moral lessons

“The Old Lady and the King’s Ram”:

The king’s ram repeatedly invades an Old Lady’s farm and eats her market vegetables. One day, the Old Lady has had enough. She catches the ram, kills it, and sends the meat home for cooking. The family will need firewood to cook the ram so the Old Lady directs her grandchild to fetch some wood. As the grandchild walks to the bush, she sings, “*Fia f’agbotsu ke!*” (See Figure 1) A towns person overhears her song and informs the King about the killing of his ram. The King orders the Old Lady executed and the grandchild enslaved. The moral of the story, “When you hide, people will find out.”

Nyatotowo: Origin myths

Where does God live? God used to live nearby, but humans started pounding *fufu*. The noise caused God to move far away.

Adzowo: Puzzles and riddles

Sodza akpe, beleti deka /What is a battalion of soldiers wearing only one belt? A broom.

Lododowo: Proverbs

Detsi vivie hea zikpui/The soup that is sweet draws the chairs closer

Nyadodo: So-called Lunatic’s ramblings and advice, such as advice from the “Lunatic from Keta”

The Lunatic from Keta says he has a lot of responsibilities so he doesn’t know what to do first. One task is to shout. This is the easiest. He decides to move from easy to most difficult. He shouts first to get that out of the way.

(The storyteller tells this story to guide a child who is misbehaving by showing anger inappropriately to admonish that the child sounds like the lunatic from Keta.)

Alobalowo: Short stories ending with a question to allow each child to answer aloud to practice critical thinking

“The King’s Daughter and the Three Suitors”

A king has a daughter who is ready to marry. The king announces a challenge to find the best suitor. Three men take up the challenge. The king instructs the men to search the world to find something truly unique. On a specified date three months later, the three return. One has found a magic mirror, another a magic mat, and the third medicine that

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brings the dead back to life. The king is impressed. He tests the mirror by he calling his daughter's name. As her image appears in the mirror, to their horror the four discover that she has died suddenly. They jump on the second suitor's magic mat and fly to her side where the king successfully uses the third suitor's medicine to bring her to life. Which suitor should marry the king's daughter and explain your choice?

“The Three Boys and the Headhunters”

Three boys are walking in the woods past dark, picking and eating blackberries. They know that a king has died and that the headhunters are out looking for stragglers. They had heard that the headhunters would chop off the heads of anyone they caught and put the heads in the grave with the chief. Nevertheless, the boys ignore all the advice. They just walk along—until they hear the sound of headhunters ahead in the woods. “ÁÒ!” (No!),” they cry, and each boy hides.

One sticks his head in a bush. The second climbs a tree above the bush. The third runs a distance into the forest. When the headhunters arrive in the clearing, they immediately see the first boy, grab him, and cut off his head. “Careful,” warns the second. “Don't spray his blood on me.” The headhunters pull him from the tree and take his head. Looking at the two heads, one headhunter wonders aloud, “Why are their teeth purple?” The third boy answers from the forest, “We were eating blackberries.” The headhunters capture him, too.

Which boy was the least smart?

(In bygone days, to control their children Èwè parents warned their children to be home by dark or the headhunters would get them. When a king died, the headhunters would hunt for people to put their head in the coffin of the king. Compare to Egyptian burial practices for pharaohs.)

Each of these oral traditions create a space for exploring human nature and teaching valuable lessons for interactions within the community, how to overcome obstacles, how to create beauty and renew the soul, and how to be alone without getting lost. Tellers and hearers alike empathize with the story's characters, who may be very similar or contrarily very unlike themselves. The stories ground and center the community members but also allow them to see beyond their mortal lives and to soar into the heavens.