



INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH
CULTUREGUIDE



Senegal

Series 1
Secondary (7–12)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why Study Cultures?	2
Traditions	
Wrestling: The National Sport of Senegal	3
Folklore & Language	
Passing on Knowledge and Values to the Next Generation	7
Food	
Food and the Family Hierarchy	10
Cross-cultural Contributions	
Slavery and the African Renaissance	17
Reference Material	
Facts about Senegal	22
History and Holidays	23
Additional Resources	25
Visuals	28

CROSS-CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

SLAVERY AND THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

Although slavery has affected the development of the entire world, it has particularly influenced the development of Senegal and the rest of Africa. The blending of African culture with European, American, and Latin American cultures has enriched world culture. The renaissance of African culture through the past hundred years has reintroduced the African continent and its people to the international realm of politics, literature, art, and culture.



Starting Points

1. Ask the students what they first think of when they hear the word “slavery.” Explain to them that slavery was a major factor in shaping Senegalese history.
2. As a class, read and discuss the image and English translation of the quote (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1**). Ask them what they think it refers to. Explain how this poetic quote captures the plight of Senegalese slaves.
3. Ask the students how they think Africans feel about the slave trade. In particular, ask them how such feelings would alter Senegalese perspectives of world history.



Information

The History of Slavery

Slavery on the African continent has greatly influenced the people and history of Senegal. The slave trade, which culminated in Europe, did not actually begin there. It existed in Africa (including Senegal) hundreds of years before the Europeans arrived and instituted their slave trade. In Africa, slaves were those who were prisoners of war and those who could not pay their debts. Although African slaves worked in the slave owner’s homes and fields, they were treated as members of the family. Slaves could marry and have children, but these children also became domestic workers.

In 1441, the Portuguese landed on the coast of Senegal and colonized the island of Gorée. They established outposts along the coast so they could restock their ships on the way to the Indies. When the slave trade began in 1510, thousands of slaves departed from these outposts along the coast of Senegal. The two main ports were Saint-Louis and Gorée. Over a two-hundred-year period, millions of African men, women, and children were taken from the African continent via these two ports.

Gorée was an important shipping and holding area during the slave trade. The *maison des esclaves* [mayz-on days es-clahves] (slave house) there auctioned thousands of slaves a year and held men, women, and children for months at a time. The slave house was like a cattle market. The owner and slaveship captain would stand at the top of the stairway (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 2**), and the slave would be

brought into the middle of the courtyard, weighed, and examined. Male slaves were required to weigh 132 pounds (60 kilograms), women needed to weigh 88 pounds (40 kilograms), and children needed to weigh 66 pounds (30 kilograms). Then the slave owner and the slave ship captain would negotiate a price. Once a price was agreed upon, the slave was walked down the hall, out the back door, and across a plank extending from land to the slave trader's ship.

England outlawed the maritime transport of slaves and participation in the slave trade in 1807, and the French followed suit in 1815. However, even though the slave trade was abolished, illegal participation in the slave trade in Senegal continued until about 1848. Slavery was finally abolished in other countries between the middle of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Signar Society

The trading companies hired French, Dutch, Portuguese, and British employees to manage the affairs of the slave trade. They did not, however, allow any foreign employees to administer the slave trade independently of the company. However, many employees found they could circumvent this policy by marrying African women.

The women who married trading company employees were called *Signars* [seen-yarz]—they became a distinct class of Senegalese women. Because Europeans gave them a higher status and more privileges than other Senegalese women, the Signars influenced the political, economic, and social development of Senegal. Senegalese women envied the Signars and longed for their same status and privileges. Therefore, when ships arrived from Europe with a new crew to be stationed in the area, a large group of Senegalese women waited at the docks to receive them. To welcome the men on the evening of their arrival, they held a celebration that included music, food, and dancing, during which each man would choose his “new wife.” This new custom of the Senegalese started because the women desired to attain the same distinctive status as the Signar women.

The Signars taught their daughters about the aristocratic mannerisms of Europe and also how to cook, clean, dance, and speak European languages. They taught their sons such subjects as commerce, bookkeeping, reading, writing, and European languages. It was through these sons that the European employees of slave-trading companies began to go into business for themselves. The sons led excursions to the interior of the country, collecting, purchasing, kidnapping, and acquiring slaves. Typically, slaves were acquired from tribal chiefs who had won them through conquests in battle or bought them through the sale of existing slaves within their communities. The sons would bring these slaves to the trading companies and the mothers would act as brokers. The Signar women ran the slave trade and controlled the profits of the business, and the profits were split between the African women and their European husbands. This wealth enabled a Signar woman to provide financial security and material resources for her family even after her “husband” returned to Europe.

The Signars became French citizens in 1872, when the French colonies in Senegal became municipalities with full rights. In 1914, Blaise Diagne, a member of the Signar class, became the first Senegalese African to represent Senegal in French

parliament. The Signars' wealth helped to create a powerful, elite group of Senegalese who controlled the political momentum of the country. The Signars' influence in the French government provided multiple opportunities for Senegalese citizens to get an education and to travel to France to receive training at French universities. Later, these educated individuals returned to Senegal or other foreign colonies and shared their knowledge and skills, which increased the global awareness of the Senegalese.

Eventually, all Senegalese received French citizenship in 1946, leading to the creation of the Federation of Mali in 1959, in which Senegal joined political forces with other West African countries until they won complete independence from France on 4 April 1960. On this same day, Léopold Sédar Senghor became Senegal's first president and helped guide the country's development over the next twenty years. Senghor later became the first black African appointed to the *Académie Française*, a prestigious institution charged with preserving the French language in its purity. His admittance broke the ethnic barrier, as he was the institution's first non-"white" member.

The effects of slavery impacted Africans living in Europe, in the colonies, in the Americas, and in Senegal long after the abolition of the slave trade. An overwhelming belief existed in most Caucasian societies that people of African descent were second- or third-class citizens. Africans were limited in their ability to participate in European society and were even limited in making decisions within their own country. As white-European laws and customs replaced traditional African laws and customs, Africans had to walk, talk, and act like Europeans to be considered civilized. Traditional African dress, music, dance, education, and customs were pushed aside by the forceful French-European culture. This disenfranchisement of the Africans in Europe and in their own society has created conflicts in African culture that remain unsolved.

The Impact of Negritude

Negritude was one of the most important movements of the twentieth century that addressed this deterioration of African traditions and values. In the early 1930s, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon-Gontran Damas met while studying in Paris, and they started a movement that rejected the traditional views that had persisted in European society since the times of the slave trade. They rejected the idea that Africans were second-class citizens, and they worked to dispel the myths and misconceptions that maintained the status quo. While in Paris in 1934, the three men also started a journal called *L'Étudiant Noir* (The Black Student). They published articles, poetry, and songs that incorporated African traditions and rhythms. They stressed the importance of traditional African culture while reasserting the value and worth of Africans.

Negritude became a driving force for self-determination and self-government in the French colonies. It reversed notions that had limited the social and economic mobility of Africans since the beginning of the colonial period. The movement's goal was to break Western stereotypes of black African inferiority in society. The movement encouraged blacks to unite, stand up for their rights, and take pride in their African culture and history. Negritude empowered and elevated the status of Africans in the wake of slavery and its resulting oppression. Césaire's poem "Return to My Native

Land” depicts this change in perception (see **Additional Resources**). This movement has influenced writers, politicians, and citizens in monumental ways. Today, Negritude literature is read in schools throughout Africa and referenced often in modern literature.

The slave trade, the creation of the Signar class, and the resulting Negritude movement changed the dynamics of France’s interactions with its colonies and provided the momentum that caused Senegal and many other French-African colonies to gain independence. Although the slave trade separated many African families and decreased the population of the African continent, it, in turn, empowered the Africans to lead various colonies to independence and reasserted the validity of African cultures and values.



Activities

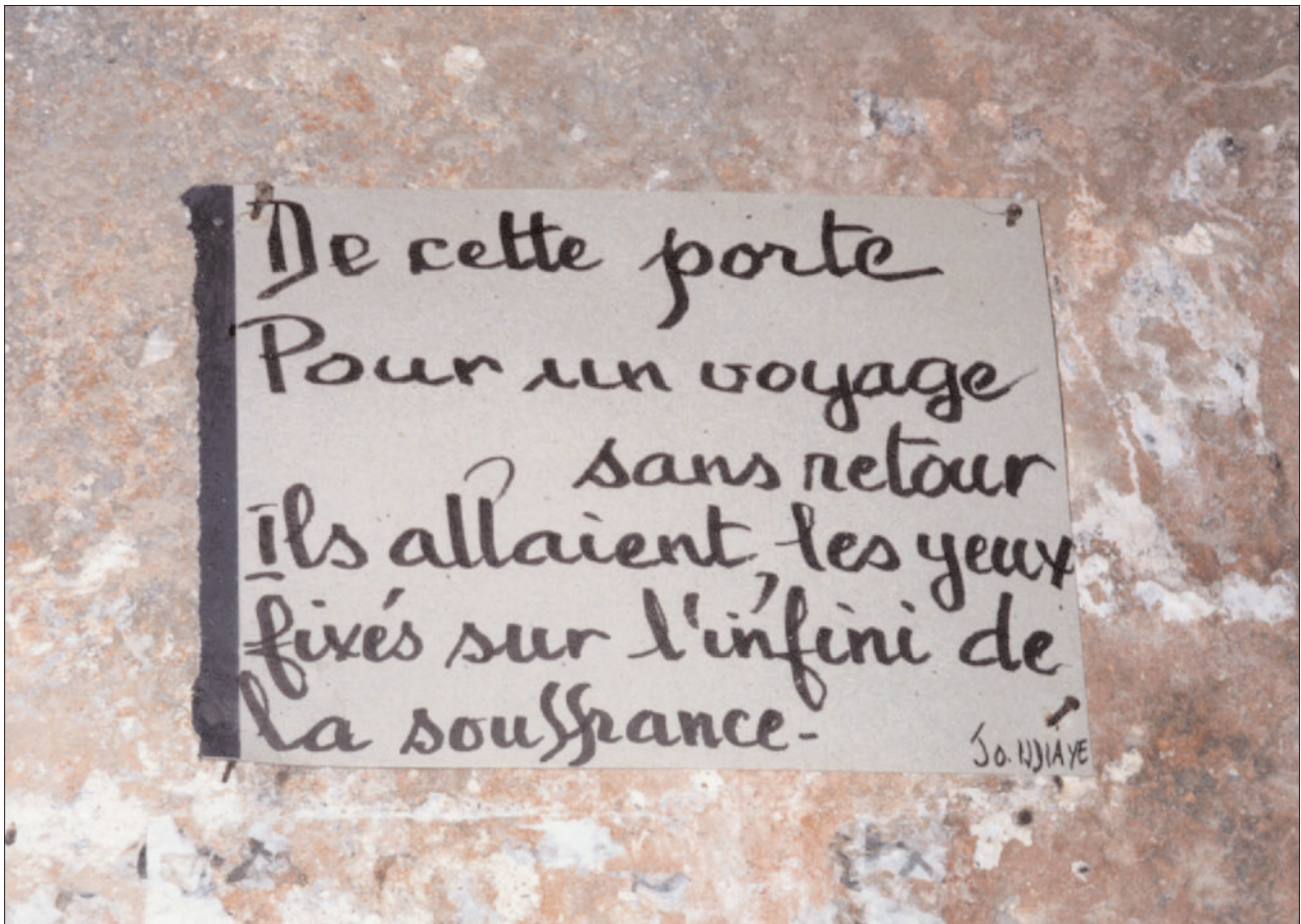
1. View approximately the first minute and a half of the video clip (see **Additional Resources—Supplementary Audiovisual 3**) showing Gorée’s *maison des esclaves*. What are the student’s impressions of the slave house?
2. View the final minutes of the video clip (see **Additional Resources—Supplementary Audiovisual 3**) for a performance of a song using a poem by Raphaël Ndiaye as its lyrics. Read the translation of Raphaël Ndiaye’s poem (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 3**) and discuss the influence that the slave trade had on Africa.
3. Do a research project about the impact of the slave trade, Negritude, or African unity in the United States.
4. Read excerpts from Césaire’s “Return to My Native Land” (see **Additional Resources**). Write a one-page response about themes you noticed in the poem.
5. Review the vocabulary from this unit by completing the word search “Senegalese Slavery” (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 4**).
6. Listen to a recording of the Senegalese national anthem (see **Additional Resources**). Then, learn the words to the national anthem, in French. Perform the song for the school or for your parents.
7. To better appreciate part of African culture that came to America because slaves were brought here, learn about the game *mancala* [man-call-ah], which African slaves introduced to their new homes. Also, play *yoté* [yo-tay], a game played throughout West Africa (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 5**).



Discussion Questions

1. Who in American history would you compare to Léopold Senghor, the first President of Senegal, or Blaise Diagne, the first African in French parliament? Why did you choose who you did?
2. Why is it important to learn about the different aspects and effects of the slave trade?

3. How have your ideas and views of the slave trade changed after learning about the Signars?
4. What similarities and differences can you see in the views and tactics of Negritude and those of the American civil rights movement?



“From this door, for a voyage with no return, they go with their eyes fixed on an infinity of suffering.”



Africa

Land whose zenith is vertical with the sun
I harvest your Great Word
From your most northern reaches to your most southern stretches
From your morning of hope and your evening of memory
Enveloping like a treasure
She goes and comes to replenish the world!

Peace be unto you Africa, Peace be unto you
Plant your succulent fruits out of your serene wisdom
From your saving grace to your pleasing guidance.

Or, here we are, standing upright since the beginning of time,
We were testimonies of Mount Kenya,
The eternal snow of Kilimanjaro,
Sons of extending light throughout the day,
Colored older brothers, accomplishments of humanity,
Passed by the conquering world,
We become discolored under hail and snow,
Here we are ordaining the primordial disorder

Peace be unto you Africa, Peace be unto you
Plant your succulent fruits out of your serene wisdom
From your saving grace to your pleasing guidance.

The Guardians of the Temple watch vigilantly,
The granaries overflowing from your gracious heritage,
We render it entrenched and subtly,
Arranged in a spirit of luxury,
Which will explode into a thousand new suns,
Enlightening and strengthening the world

Peace be unto you Africa, Peace be unto you
Plant your succulent fruits out of your serene wisdom
From your saving grace to your pleasing guidance.

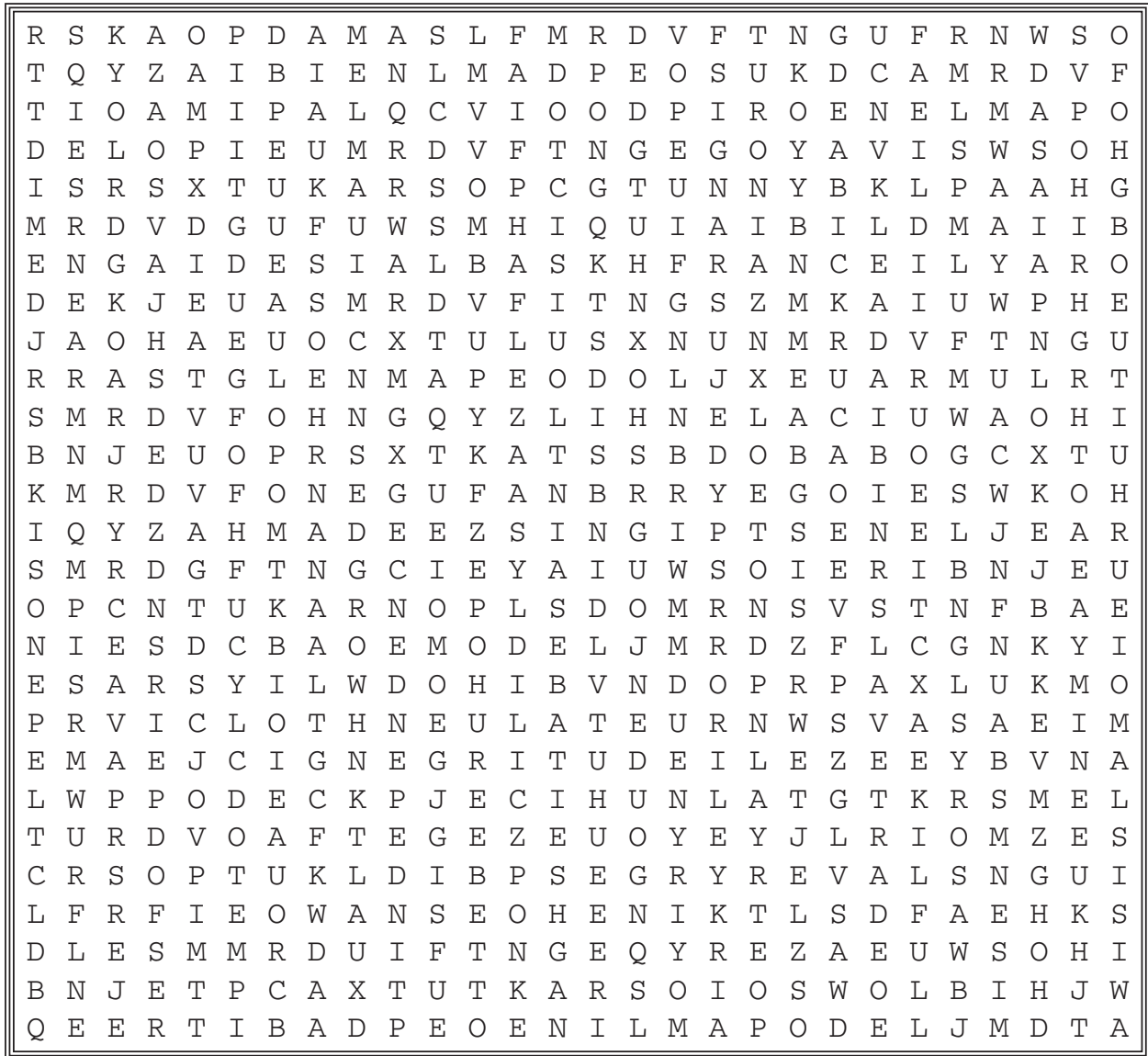
We will make your seed fertile
By reflecting those who possess thy dignity:
Mandala unconquerable and compassionate,
Hampaté Ba the wealth and storage of our traditions
Cheikh Anta Diop the Sphinx of wisdom and of correctness,
Sédar Senghor the suave Seer and subtle,
Steve Biko our unmoving monolith of strength and courage,
Césaire impetuous current washing away with vigor!

Peace be unto you Africa, Peace be unto you
Plant your succulent fruits out of your serene wisdom
From your saving grace to your pleasing guidance.

Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 4: Word Search (1 of 2)

Name: _____

SENEGALESE SLAVERY



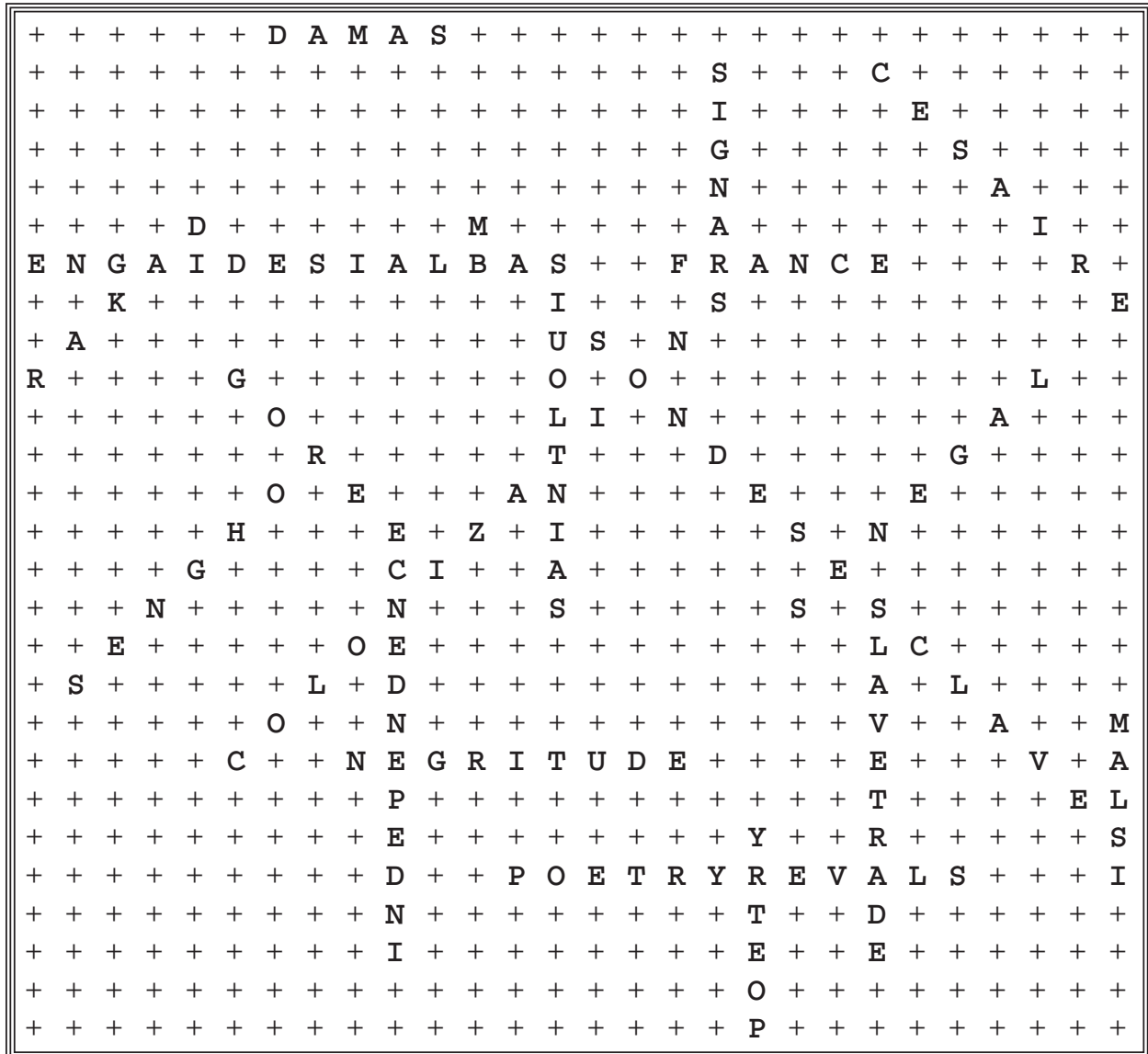
BLAISE DIAGNE
CESAIRE
COLONIZATION
DAKAR
DAMAS
FRANCE

GOREE
INDEPENDENCE
ISLAM
MAISON DES ESCLAVES
NEGRITUDE
POETRY

SAINT-LOUIS
SENEGAL
SENGHOR
SIGNARS
SLAVERY
SLAVE TRADE

Name: _____

SENEGALESE SLAVERY



BLAISE DIAGNE
CESAIRE
COLONIZATION
DAKAR
DAMAS
FRANCE

GOREE
INDEPENDENCE
ISLAM
MAISON DES ESCLAVES
NEGRITUDE
POETRY

SAINT-LOUIS
SENEGAL
SENGHOR
SIGNARS
SLAVERY
SLAVE TRADE

MANCALA AND YOTÉ

Mancala is a specific variation of a game called *wari* [wah-ree], which originated in Egypt and spread to Asia and Africa, where it has been played for centuries. Mancala was introduced in Suriname and the West Indies by African slaves who were brought and sold there. Considered a man's game in Africa, *wari* is played for fun and prestige, not for money. Mancala is a simple game with the potential for intricate strategies. Mancala itself is the term used to describe the group of games that are played with seeds in shallow hallows.

Yoté is a specific West African variation of the game, and it is played throughout the region. It is very popular because it is easy to set up the game: the board can be created by scooping thirty small holes out of the ground and the pieces used to play the game are pebbles and sticks. Yoté is also quite simple, but it requires specific strategy and quick thinking. One player can gain an advantage very quickly, which makes the game ideal for betting on. In Senegal, yoté is usually played for stakes.

Setting up the game:

Provide enough copies of the yoté board for half of the class to have one. Choose partners to play against. Give one player either twelve pennies or marbles and give the other player either twelve pieces of dowel or toothpicks.

Playing the game:

The purpose of the game is for one player to capture all of the opposing player's pieces. Though most yoté games come to a quick and decisive conclusion, it is possible for a game to end in a tie, when each player has three pieces or less left on the board.

1. The player with the pebbles starts the game by putting a pebble in any hole.
2. The other player places one of the pieces in another hole. Only one piece may be played in each turn. A player does not have to place all the pieces on the board before starting to move those already put down; some may be held in reserve until late in the game.
3. Pieces may be moved one space in a straight line (but not diagonally) and only into a vacant hole.
4. A player may capture one of his opponent's pieces by jumping over it and removing it from the board. That player is then allowed a bonus capture, the choice of removing any one of the opponent's pieces still on the board.

YOTÉ BOARD

