

Akan Naming Tradition

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Keywords Names, First day of school, Akan, Ghana

Overview In this lesson, students will explore the concept of names and their importance while learning about a Ghanaian naming tradition and its widespread cultural significance. Students will create an acrostic poem based on their names that shares something of their identity with others.

Essential Questions

- How can a name be related to your personal history?
- How can a name be more than just a name?
- How do we share our identity with others?

Intended Grade Level 2nd-5th

Intended Content Areas Social Studies, English Language Arts

Standard Alignment with NC Standards

Social Studies-

2.B.1.2 Explain how belief systems of various indigenous, religious, and racial groups have influenced or contributed to culture in America.

3.B.1.2 Compare values, beliefs, cultural practices and traditions of various groups living in local and regional communities.

4.B.1.2 Explain how the values and beliefs of various indigenous, religious, and racial groups have contributed to the development of North Carolina.

5.B.1.2 Explain how the values and beliefs of various indigenous, religious, and racial groups have contributed to the development of American identity.

1.1.8 Construct responses to compelling questions using information from sources.

1.1.9 Make inferences from information in sources.

ELA-

SL.2.4 Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent and complete sentences.

SL.3.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly in complete sentences at an understandable pace.

Materials

- [Resource Slides for Classroom Use](#)
- Paper, crayons, pencils, markers

Suggested Length of Time 45 minutes

Procedures

- Today we will talk about something that is special to us but something that we often share when we meet people for the very first time. What is it? Names.
- Ask a student: What is a name?
- Sometimes people have stories about their names but not always.
 - Give a personal example about a pet's name, why your hometown has its name, etc.
 - Ask students if they are named after someone. Does your name have a special meaning or story? Does a pet or stuffed animal of yours have a special name? Allow students to share with a partner or whole group.
 - Acknowledge that names are important—they are a part of your identity, and you deserve to have your name honored by being called what you like and by having it pronounced correctly.
- Read a picture book such as [Alma and How She Got Her Name](#), [Your Name is a Song](#), or [Thunderboy](#) that honors children's name and the role they have in our lives and culture.
- Tell the students that Ghana's name also has a history:
 - Prior to its independence on March 6, 1957, Ghana had been called the Gold Coast by European colonial powers. It had this name because of the gold resources found there.
 - After independence, the country was renamed "Ghana" after the great West African medieval trading empire that had been located NW of modern-day Ghana.
 - There are currently over 70 different ethnic groups in Ghana today. One of them is called the Akan, and we will learn about one of their traditions today.
- In Ghana there is an Akan tradition for giving a child a name that corresponds to the day of the week that they were born on. Very often kids named in this tradition have other names as well. While many people in Ghana may give a baby a day of the week name, many people do not. ([This chart is accessible here](#) as a handout)

Day of the Week	Akan Day of the Week	Akan Female Names (Twi and Fante)	Akan Male Names (Twi and Fante)
Monday	Edwoada/Dwoada associated with peace	Adwoa, Adjoa	Jojo, Kojo, Kwadwo
Tuesday	Ebenada/Benada associated with ocean	Abena	Kwabena, Kobina, Ebo
Wednesday	Wukuada associated with spider/Ananse	Akua, Ekuwa	Kweku, Kuuku, Kwaku
Thursday	Yawoada associated with earth	Yaaba, Yaa	Yao, Yaw, Ekwo
Friday	Efiada/Fiada associated with family	Efua, Afua, Afia	Kofi, Fiifi
Saturday	Memeneda Associated with god	Ama	Kwame, Ato, Kwamena
Sunday	Kwasiada associated with universe	Akosua, Esi	Kwesi, Kwasi

- Sometimes other names can be given to show birth order:
 - Manu (the second, male) / Maanu (the second, female)
 - Mensa (the third, male) / Mansa (the third, female)
 - Annan (the fourth, male) / Anane (the fourth, female).

Example: “Mansa Efua” = third female born on a Friday

- Kofi Atta Annan (born in Kumasi, Ghana was the head of the United Nations.)
Can you guess what day of the week he was born on? Atta also means “twin” because he had a twin sister.
- Yaa Gyasi (famous writer of Homegoing) What day was she born on?
- Why do you think that there is this naming tradition in Ghana?

- If possible, look up students' day of the week birthdays ahead of time (you can quickly google the full date and year to determine this). Give students a sticky note with their birthday and day of the week on it and have them determine what their Ghanaian week name would be. Using this name, have students create an acrostic poem using the initials of their Ghanaian week name and words that describe themselves or their interests.
 - For a girl born on Friday, here is a sample poem:
Artistic
Fun loving
Unbelievably good at running
Argumentative but in a good way

Optional Extension Activities:

- Students can illustrate their acrostic poems perhaps using adinkra or kente cloth patterns.
- Students can create another poem using their actual first or last name.
- Consider giving students parameters for their poems: use just verbs or full sentences or alliterative language or similes to create their poems.