Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2006 Volume I: Stories around the World in Film

Oral Tradition and Memory in African Film

Guide for Curriculum Unit 06.01.07, published September 2006
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This unit is designed to imbue seventh and eighth grade middles school students with a deepening awareness of African storytelling through African produced film. Students will find cultural relevance in films heretofore unavailable to them; indeed, this is an innovative methodology which will challenge both the student and the teacher while adhering to state standards for Language Arts. Lesson plans encompass the use of a portfolio with graphic organizer, art projects, open-ended questions, and a student-as-teacher in class project. Elements of African storytelling will be studied with the role of the African griot as the transmitter of ancient secrets leading to a boy's destiny in *Keita*, a rite of passage film produced in Mali. *Wend Kuuni* is the story of a mute boy, displaced from his village and raised in the bush. The research on the background of African storytelling and on these films is included in the unit. The elements of filmmaking will be presented, appropriate to the level of middle school students, and the unit includes lesson plans dealing with cinematic conventions. Thus, the students can view the films in entirety first, studying the subtitles, and then watch clips or short sections of them in order to analyze the filmmaker's task. Students will enjoy studying the oral traditions of African storytelling with a new, realistic vision through film.

(Developed for Language Arts, grade 7; recommended for Language Arts, grades 7-8)