

Name: _____ Class: _____

Lasting Contributions

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The Atlantic slave trade lasted from the 16th to the 19th century. This was a time when Africans were forcibly brought to the Americas to work as slaves. In this informational text, Diana Childress discusses the lasting impact that Africans had on these nations. As you read, take notes on the traditions and practices that Africans brought from their homeland.

- [1] People who move to a new country bring with them customs and traditions from their homelands. The millions of African people who survived forced transport via the Middle Passage¹ across the Atlantic were no exception. Although they came from many different ethnic and language groups, their shared experience of violent oppression served to form strong bonds among them. Adapting and preserving African culture was a survival strategy that helped them retain² pride in their identities. The result was a unique legacy³ that greatly enriched⁴ cultural life throughout the Americas and around the world.



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Language and Literature

To communicate with fellow captives who spoke different languages, slaves developed simplified versions of their owners' languages. Known as pidgin dialects, they soon colored the pronunciation, vocabulary, and idioms used by the free people around them. This was especially true in the American South. In some places, these dialects developed into new languages. One is Gullah, which is still spoken in the coastal regions of South Carolina, Georgia, and northeast Florida. Others include Creole languages that are based on French, English, and Portuguese. These are spoken throughout the Caribbean islands and along the east coast of South America.

Because many communities made it illegal for enslaved people to learn to read, Africans would pass along the history and social values of their homelands through storytelling. In West Africa, musicians and storytellers, known as griots, had been doing this for generations. Many of the folktales that were handed down orally by enslaved people became part of mainstream American culture. Among them are the Uncle Remus stories, which the African-American poet James Weldon Johnson called "the greatest body of folklore⁵ America has produced."

1. the sea journey from West Africa to the West Indies by which enslaved people were brought to the Americas
2. **Retain (verb):** to continue to have something
3. a lasting impact
4. **Enrich (verb):** to improve or enhance something
5. the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community passed through the generations by word of mouth

Rhythm and Blues

Enslaved people also kept alive the polyrhythmic⁶ music of their native homelands. They did so using homemade banjos, marimbas, gourd fiddles, hand drums, and other instruments that they based on the ones they had left behind. Without musical notation, their complex music was passed down by example, study, and repetition.

- [5] Music was more than social entertainment. It was a means of self-expression and part of religious rituals. All members of an enslaved community joined in the music-making by dancing, singing, clapping, or foot stomping. These music and dance forms lived on long after slavery ended. For example, African music inspired jazz, blues, ragtime, and hip hop. Afro-Cuban mambo, Afro-Brazilian samba, Argentine tango, and many other musical forms and dances that are referred to as “Latin” have their roots in the rhythms and instruments introduced to the Americas by Africans.

African music’s layered rhythms and distinctive choreography are also important elements of modern classical music and modern dance. Even new forms of worship and belief arose from the religious rituals, music, and dancing of enslaved communities. African rites⁷ with added elements of Catholic or Protestant Christianity evolved into new religions. One is Voodoo, which is practiced in Haiti and Louisiana. Another is Santeria, which is observed in Cuba and Puerto Rico. Still another is Candomble, with members along the east coast of Brazil. Some of these African-based American religions have millions of followers today.

Using traditional African features of percussion,⁸ syncopation,⁹ and improvisation,¹⁰ enslaved people also composed new music. Songs of suffering led to their descendants creating what we now call the blues. Christian hymns and Bible passages inspired heartfelt spirituals.¹¹

Soul Food

The slave trade also introduced new foods to the Americas. Slave ships arriving in Africa from Europe or North America needed to bring on board for the Middle Passage enough food to keep their human cargoes healthy. When the ships arrived in the Americas, any food that had not been eaten would be unloaded with the captives. As plantation owners were focused on cash crops such as sugar and cotton, they took little interest in the “leftover” African foods. However, they often allowed enslaved people to grow these foods for themselves.

These “leftovers” usually arrived in areas with tropical or subtropical climates that were similar to those of West Africa. They also arrived with people who knew how to cultivate¹² the plants from seeds and cuttings. Thus, African foods took root in many parts of the Western Hemisphere. Enslaved people used them to cook “memory dishes” to remind them of their lost homes.

6. the use of two or more conflicting rhythms

7. religious ceremonies or acts

8. musical instruments that involve hitting an object or shaking it, such as drums and rattles

9. an off-beat rhythm

10. musical elements that are created without preparation or planning

11. religious songs

12. **Cultivate (verb):** to grow

- [10] Today, many African dishes are popular in the Americas. Akaraje, which are fritters made of black-eyed peas and filled with spicy shrimp, are a popular street food in Brazil. West African fufu, made of mashed yams or other tubers topped with boiled vegetables, is made with plantains in the Caribbean. The same dish is called mofongo in Puerto Rico, mangu in the Dominican Republic, and fufu de platanos in Cuba. Louisiana is famous for gumbo, a stew with meats or fish and okra. It is also known for jambalaya, which is made with rice, vegetables, and shrimp.

Throughout the southern United States, a casserole of black-eyed peas and rice called Hopping John is eaten on January 1 to bring good luck in the new year. Other African foods — bananas, watermelons, sesame seeds, yams, and eggplants, for example — are so familiar that it is easy to forget that they were transplanted to the Americas by Africans brought here in slavery.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. What is the central idea of the text?
 - A. Africans secretly developed many of the traditions that would become important to the Americas.
 - B. Africans struggled to pass their traditions down because they were forbidden from writing or reading.
 - C. When Africans were brought to the Americas, their culture became an important part of many countries' cultures.
 - D. When Africans left their homeland, they forgot the cultural traditions that were important to their identity.

2. Which quote from the text highlights the influence that African cultures had on the Americas?
 - A. "communities made it illegal for enslaved people to learn to read" (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "Music was more than social entertainment." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "they took little interest in the 'leftover' African foods." (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "Today, many African dishes are popular in the Americas." (Paragraph 10)

3. How does the section "Language and Literature" contribute to the development of ideas in the text? (Paragraphs 2-3)
 - A. It shows how language and literature have changed in Africa.
 - B. It shows how Africans contributed to language and literature in the Americas.
 - C. It shows how Africans were excluded from participating in language and literature in the Americas.
 - D. It shows how African languages and literature were lost when Africans were brought to the Americas.

4. What is the effect of the author comparing humans to "cargoes" in paragraph 8?
 - A. It suggests that enslaved people were expensive.
 - B. It emphasizes how valuable enslaved people were.
 - C. It emphasizes that enslaved people were viewed as goods.
 - D. It suggests that enslaved people were difficult to transport.

5. What is the most likely meaning of "transplanted" in paragraph 11?
 - A. brought
 - B. gifted
 - C. left
 - D. lost

6. Which statement describes how the author organizes information in the text?
- A. She describes how Africa's culture was changed by the loss of so many people.
 - B. She compares America's culture today to its culture when Africans first arrived.
 - C. She describes the different ways Africans contributed to culture in the Americas.
 - D. She compares how slaves from different areas of the world affected America's culture.
7. What is the connection between African oral storytelling and the preservation of African culture in the Americas? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the text, the author describes literature, music, and food that originated in Africa and were brought to America by enslaved Africans. How many of these examples are you familiar with? Would you consider many of these examples to be a core part of American culture? Why or why not?
2. In the text, the author describes how Africans kept their culture alive in America. How do different groups of people keep cultural traditions from the past alive in America today? How is this unique to America?
3. In the text, the author describes aspects of African culture that were passed down for generations. What is something that is important to your culture that you plan to pass down?