

Name _____

Poetry of Africa: Prep Packet for October 25th-October 31st

Please complete the entire packet by Tuesday, October 31st. Work at your own pace.

Please complete the map below for this weekly packet on poets of Africa.

www.graphicmaps.com

Africa

Name the Country!

1 _____	15 _____	29 _____	43 _____
2 _____	16 _____	30 _____	44 _____
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An African Classic SUNJATA



Background

Sunjata Keita (c. 1217–c. 1255) was a Mande leader who founded the Mali Empire, which once stretched across much of West Africa. His story is told in *Sunjata*, the greatest of African epics.

Sunjata is similar to epics from Europe and the Middle East, such as the Greek *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, and the Babylonian *Gilgamesh*. Each of these epics was composed little by little over centuries by oral storytellers before becoming a single, unified work. In ancient Greece, such storytellers were known as *aoidoi*; in West Africa, storytellers are called *griots*, and they still practice their craft today. There is one major difference between *Sunjata* and the other epics. *Sunjata* has never been put into a final, written form, even after centuries of retelling. Mandé griots continue to tell and retell *Sunjata* today. At least three different griots have published their version of *Sunjata* in English. While these versions tell a single, cohesive story, they also vary in details.

Griots and the United States

When enslaved Africans were brought to America, they were generally forbidden to learn to read or write. So the oral traditions of the griots continued here, creating a wealth of African American storytelling.

Such storytelling was really a form of performance art, often involving verse, song, and dance. Audiences were not passive spectators but were expected to interrupt and comment on the story. As you read this excerpt from *Sunjata*, notice how the narrating griot calls upon the audience to respond, frequently asking, "You heard it?" This tradition of interaction between the speaker and the audience continues in many African American churches today.

Research: Analyze Literary Influences

The 1994 animated movie *The Lion King* is similar to both Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Sunjata*. In a short paragraph, argue whether you think *The Lion King* is based on *Sunjata* or not. Use examples from both works to make your point.

Lit. of Middle East & South Asia

from Sunjata

Retold by Djanka Tassej Condé

Before You Read

The epic *Sunjata* tells the story of the hero of the title, who founded the Mali Empire in the early 13th century. The story begins with Ma Sogolon Wulen Condé (Sunjata's mother) giving birth to the hero, who is born crippled. As a boy, he shows his strength and virtue by uprooting a baobab tree. When his father dies, Sunjata is denied his inheritance by his half-brother, and he and his mother are forced to flee the kingdom. While they are gone, the Susu king Sumanguru overthrows Sunjata's kingdom. Sunjata later returns, uses magic to defeat Sumanguru, and unites various groups in West Africa under the Mali Empire.

World Context *Sunjata* is one of the most influential tales in the West African oral tradition.

That Ma'an Sunjata,
God made him into a person,
Made him into a human fetus and he was born.
After this son was born,
When the Mande women were told about it,
They gathered together again under the Mande **baobab** tree.

They said, "It is one thing to give birth to a son,
And another thing for him to survive."
What did they do again?

Many versions of the tale exist, but its core—Sunjata's triumph and his commitment to the Mali traditions—remains the same. This version of the story was told by Djanka Tassej Condé, a griot who lives in West Africa. In this excerpt about Sunjata's childhood, he is sometimes referred to as Ma'an Sunjata, Jata, or Simbon.



LITERARY LENS: EPIC POETRY

Epics around the world contain common elements. For example, epics are founded in historical fact or legend, they feature a courageous and noble hero who must undertake a dangerous journey or task, and they contain supernatural creatures. Watch for these elements as you read *Sunjata*.

baobab
a species of tree; its fruit and leaves are used for food

sorcery
*witchcraft; the use of
evil powers*

lameness
*having a limb that is
unable to move easily*

Through **sorcery** they stretched the tendons of his two feet.

They confined him to the ground.

(You heard it?)

His **lameness** forced him to remain on the ground.

One year!

Two years!

Three years!

Four years!

Five years!

Six years!

The seventh year!

The co-wives provoked Sogolon to anger.

One day—

(Because we are walking on a straight path,

We cannot wander from one side to the other,

We have to take the main road,

So we will know how Manden was built,

You heard it?)

In the seventh year there came a day

When Maramajan Tarawelé¹ went and picked some baobab leaves

From the same baobab tree that was already mentioned.

While on her way back, Ma Sogolon Wulen Condé said,

She said, "Big sister Maramajan Tarawelé,

Won't you give me a few of your baobab leaves?"

The house in which Ma'an Sunjata was lodged,

This was said under its eaves.

Maramajan Tarawelé said, "Ah!"

She said, "Younger sister,

You who are the owner of sons,

If you ask us for baobab leaves, what are we supposed to do?

Your lame son is sitting right there inside the house.

You are alone in your search for baobab leaves.

Why don't you tell your son to get up and walk?"

Ma'an Sogolon Wulen Condé said, "Ah, that is not what I meant.

I thought I could depend on sisterhood.

¹ Maramajan Tarawelé: a sister of Sujata's mother

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But I did not know you were upset because I had this child."

They didn't know Sunjata was listening to them.

After that was said,

When Ma Sogolon Condé was passing by,

Sunjata said, "Mother!

Mother!"

She did not answer because she knew he had overheard them.

He said, "Mother, what are they saying?"

She said, "Ah, forget about that talk."

He said, "Ah, how can I ignore that?"

He said, "Mother, I will walk today."

(You heard it?)

He said, "What they are talking about,
That you have a lame person in the house,
That you should beg them for a baobab leaf,"

He said, "I will walk today."

He said, "Go and get my father's *sunsun*² staff,
And bring it to me."

2 *sunsun*: a type of extremely strong wood, sometimes called West African ebony

He said, "I will walk today."
Ma Sogolon Condé went and got the *sunsun* staff.
She brought it to Simbon.
When the *sunsun* staff was thrust firmly into the ground,
When he attempted to stand holding the staff,
The *sunsun* staff broke.
He said to her, "Ah, mother.
Go and bring my father's iron staff."
He said, "They say you have a lame son in the house,

But you gave birth to a real son.
Nothing happens before its time.
Go and bring my father's iron staff."
She went for the iron staff, but he also broke that.
He said, "Go and tell my father's blacksmith,
Let him **forge** an iron staff so I can walk."

forge
to form using heat

(You heard it?)
The blacksmith carried one load of iron to the bellows,
Forged it and made it into an iron staff.
When it was thrust into the ground,
When he attempted to stand, the staff bent.
Where is that iron staff today?

It is in Narena,³
The staff of Sunjata.
He broke both of his father's staffs.
The one that was forged for him is in Narena.
The one that was bent became a bow.
Therefore, when he stood,

He lifted one foot,
Then he lifted the other foot,
Then the other foot.
(You heard it?)

Then his mother said, "Simbon has walked."
The *jeliw*⁴ sang this in a song:
"Has walked,
Jata has walked.
Has walked,

³ **Narena:** a city in what is now Mali

⁴ **jeliw:** another name for two or more griots

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Jata has walked."
It was rivalry that caused Jata to walk,
Because of the humiliation to his mother.
That is why, when I hear people saying they do not
love their mother,
They dismiss their mothers, *oof!*

Heh! Jelimori!⁵
The father is everybody's, the mother is personal.
When you stand in the crowd,
People do not talk about your father,
It is your mother they will talk about.
After that, God gave him feet.
He went into the house and took his bow.
Some people say he made the iron staff into his bow,
But don't repeat that.
His father's quiver and bow were there.
He took the quiver and bow and went out of the town.
When he got there, he embraced a baobab tree.
He shook it,
He shook it,
He uprooted it,
And then he put it on his shoulder.
He brought it into his mother's yard.
He said, "Now everyone will come here for baobab leaves."
(Aah, Sogolon Condé!
When things are hard for you,
Everyone will abuse you.
When things are good for you,
People will say, "We knew this would happen for you."
May God help us to **persevere**.)

persevere
to continue despite
opposition

Then when the Mande women came, they said,
"Aah, Sogolon Condé!
We knew this would happen for you.
The sacrifice that was made by everybody,
It has been answered through you."

5 **Jelimori**: a West African name; the griot is speaking to someone in the audience

That was what they said as they picked the baobab leaves.
Before the time that So'olon Ma'an could walk,
His younger brother So'olon Jamori had been born.
While So'olon Ma'an was still on the ground
Manden Bori was born.
After So'olon Ma'an walked,
So'olon Kolonkan was born.
Sogolon stopped after four births.

[Sunjata's half-brother, Dankaran Tuman, viewed him as a rival for their father's legacy. Dankaran Tuman and his mother plotted to have a group of nine sorceresses kill Sunjata. However, Sunjata had one ally among the sorceresses.]

His ally among the nine sorceresses
Was Jelimusoni Tunku Manyan Diawara.
In the middle of the night, she went and told Simbon.
She said, "Sunjata, we will kill you the day after tomorrow,
If God agrees.
You had better do something.
The cows from your father's legacy that you declined from
your brother,
The big bull that is among them,
Dankaran Tuman has called big sister Tasissi Gbandimina,
Called Jonmusoni Manyan,
Called me, Jelimusoni Tunku Manyan Diawara,
Called Nyuma Danba Magasuba,
Called Maramajan Tarawelé,
That we should kill you.
If we kill you, he will give us that bull.
Between sorcery and the craving for meat,
We have agreed to it.
Watch out for yourself.
If you don't do something about it,
If you don't speak to them about this
And make them an attractive offer,
The day after tomorrow,
Hunting in the bush is very important to you,

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East + South Asia

But if you go out we will kill you.
You are no match for us."
Sunjata took her hand and said, "You have told me the truth."
He said, "Very well, go and tell them
That I, the son of a Condé woman,
They must spare me.
You should tell them that one bull
Is not bigger than three male antelope.
Tell them that if they spare me,
And if God is willing,
I will give them three male antelope for the one bull.
Tell them to spare me;
They should not do what my brother asks."
When she went and told them,
The sorceresses said, "All we want is meat.
Tell him if he does what he has said,
He will have no problem."

That night and the next day passed.
When the following night had passed,
When the *sigbé*⁶ bird chirped at dawn,
Simbon took his hammock,
Put on his crocodile-mouth hat,
Hung his hunter's whistle on his chest,
Took his quiver and bow,
And left the town.
When he got one kilometer away from the town,
He saw an antelope.
He shot at it and knocked it down.
He shot another arrow,
Hit another antelope and knocked it down.
Again he shot an arrow,
The sun did not get white before he had killed all three.
God is with the just.
Everybody does what he wants,
But God makes the final decision.
The chick destined to be a rooster will eventually crow,

⁶ *sigbé*; a type of sparrow found in West Africa

No matter what is laid in its path.
It will overcome.
After he killed them,
He carried the three antelope to the edge of town.
Then he went into the town.
He told Jelimusoni Tunku Manyan Diawara
That she should go and tell the nine sorceresses
That their meat was at the edge of town.
When they were told this, they set out.
They went and found the game.
They butchered them;
They roasted some of it,
They boiled some of it,
They fried some of it,
And made some of it into meatballs.
~~What did they say then?~~
They said, "Ma'an Sunjata,"
They said, "Even a female genie will not harm you,
Much less a human female."
What saved him?
His hands.
When you are popular, you must have an open hand.
It is a man's generosity that will save him.
Nothing saved Sunjata but his hands.
They blessed him.
They said, "We are with you to the death.
Even a female ant will never sting you.
No female genie will ever even chase you.
No female wild animal will ever harm you,
If God agrees,
Or we are not producers of kitchen smoke."
They spared him.

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Read and Think Critically

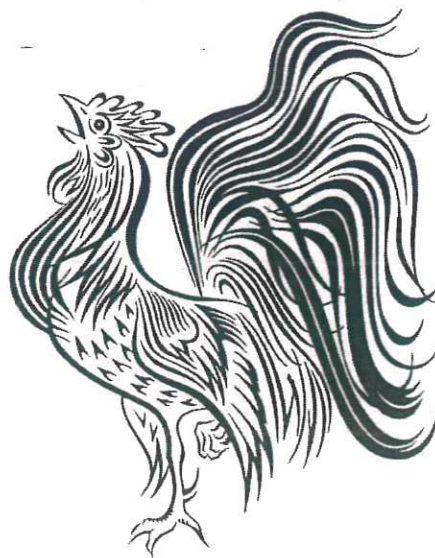
Identify, Summarize, Infer



1. **EPIC POETRY** Like myths, epics reinforce the cultural values of the storyteller as well as the audience. Identify one value represented in the epic. Cite at least one passage to support your choice.
2. How do the Mandé women change their comments to Sogolon Condé after Sunjata learns to walk? What does this imply about their character? Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.
3. The nine sorceresses decide not to kill Sunjata. Summarize the lesson conveyed through this episode.
4. At one point, the griot says, "The chick destined to be a rooster will eventually crow" (page 277). Explain the meaning of this saying in the context of the poem.



5. **USE THE INTERNET** Using several online resources, research the African American tradition known as call and-response, a form that grew out of the interactive storytelling technique exemplified in *Sunjata*.



Sunjata:
West Africa

Please document your answers to the "Read and Think Critically" Questions on this sheet for the West African epic poem *Sunjata*.

1. _____

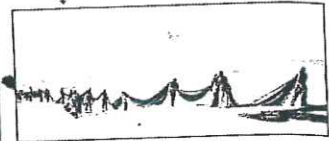
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The Literature of SENEGAL



Background

Senegal is a former French colony that achieved independence in 1960. Its literature, and the rest of its arts, have all been shaped by the Negritude movement, which sought to express traditional black African culture through the arts.

The Negritude movement began with a small group of black students born in French colonies in Africa and the Americas who met while studying in Paris in the 1930s. They realized that taking pride in their African heritage was the most effective way to counter the widespread racism that they faced.

One of these students was poet Léopold Senghor (1906–2001) of Senegal. He went on to become one of Africa's greatest writers and intellectuals and a strong advocate of Negritude. In addition, Senghor was unanimously elected Senegal's first president. Guided by the principles of Negritude, Senghor attempted to form a uniquely African form of socialism and democracy.

Senegal and the United States

The first Senegalese writer of international note became famous in the United States. Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784) was kidnapped and brought to America as a slave at the age of seven, two centuries before Senegal became a nation. She served in the household of the Wheatley family of Boston, who recognized her precocious brilliance and saw to it that she was exceptionally well-educated.

Wheatley's poetry astounded both America and Europe. The slave-owning George Washington admired her poetry, as did the great French writer Voltaire. Wheatley's brilliance led some people to recognize the moral bankruptcy of slavery.

She was freed in 1773, but the harsh climate of New England ruined her health. Despite her fame, she died in poverty at the age of 31.

Research: Use Academic Online Sources

Research the Negritude movement founded by Léopold Senghor along with Martinique's Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) and French Guiana's Léon Damas (1912–1978). Begin by finding Web sites affiliated with universities or other academic organizations. (You may want to look for .edu and .org in the Web address.) Make a list of your sources.

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Africa

David Diop

Before You Read

David Diop (1927–1960) was born in France, but he identified with his African heritage. His mother was from Cameroon, his father from Senegal. He had been recognized as a very promising poet when his life was cut short by a plane crash. Most of Diop's work was destroyed with him in the crash. The 22 poems published before his death appear in English translation in *Hammer Blows and Other Writings*.

World Context Senegalese writer David Diop was influential in the Negritude (French for "blackness") movement, a literary movement arising in the 1930s that celebrated the African cultures.



LITERARY LENS: PERSONIFICATION

Personification is a figure-of-speech in which human qualities are ascribed to nonhuman objects. Watch for personification in this poem.

Africa my Africa
Africa of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs¹
Africa of whom my grandmother sings
On the banks of the distant river
I have never known you
But your blood flows in my veins
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields
The blood of your sweat
The sweat of your work
The work of your slavery
The slavery of your children
Africa tell me Africa
Is this you this back that is bent
This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation
This back trembling with red scars
And saying yes to the whip under the midday sun
But a grave voice answers me
Impetuous son that tree young and strong

¹ **savannahs:** (also savannas) a common type of grasslands in parts of Africa where it is rainy in summer, dry in winter

That tree there
In splendid loveliness amidst white and faded flowers
That is Africa your Africa
That grows again patiently obstinately
And its fruit gradually acquires
The bitter taste of liberty.

Read and Think Critically

Cite, Speculate, Summarize

1. Cite lines from this poem to show that it is a good example of the tenets of Negritude.



2. **PERSONIFICATION** In personification a nonhuman object is given human attributes. Use three citations from the poem to show how Diop uses personification.

3. Consider the last lines of the poem: "And its fruit gradually acquires / The bitter taste of liberty." Speculate on the reason Diop uses the adjective "bitter" to modify the phrase "taste of liberty."

4. Read this poem aloud, paying special attention to repeated words and phrases. Use examples to illustrate the effect of the **repetition**.



5. **DO FOCUSED RESEARCH** Using the academic sources you found (see page 280), do focused research on the literary movement known as Negritude. Summarize your findings in a short paragraph.



MOTHER OF AFRICA
Mmakgabo Mmapula Helen Sebidi

David Diop's "Africa"
Senegal

Please document your answers to the "Read and Think Critically" Questions on this sheet for David Diop's poem "Africa."

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Lit. of Middle
East + South Asia



The Literature of NIGERIA

Background

Since achieving independence from Great Britain in 1960, Nigeria has been plagued by corruption, violence, military coups, and civil war. Conflicts often pit one of the country's 250 ethnic groups against another, or divide the Muslim majority and the large Christian minority. Other conflicts have flared over natural resources. Though Nigeria is one of the ten largest oil exporting countries in the world, most of its inhabitants remain mired in poverty.

As tragic as Nigeria's recent history has been, the half-century of conflict has inspired great literature. Chinua Achebe's (1930–) classic novel *Things Fall Apart* describes the clash between traditional village culture and British colonial ways. Author and environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941–1995) penned *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*, a verbally stunning satire of corruption during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), and *On a Darkling Plain*, his personal diaries of that war. Saro-Wiwa was one of eight activists executed on November 10, 1995.

Nigeria and the United States

As a result of the problems and persecution in Nigeria, many Nigerian writers have moved to the United States. The most celebrated of these is Wole Soyinka (b. 1934), the first black African to win the Nobel Prize in literature. While his famous play *Death and the King's Horseman* reflects bitterly on the era of British colonialism, many of his writings are even more strongly critical of African authoritarianism. Indeed, Soyinka claims that his work condemns "the oppressive boot and the irrelevance of the color of the foot that wears it." During his years in the United States, Soyinka has been a respected professor at several American universities.

Research: Use Academic Online Sources

Two Nigerian women writers who have achieved worldwide fame for their writing are Buchi Emecheta (1944–) and Flora Nwapa (1931–1993). Choose one of these writers and write a short paragraph about how she portrays women's lives in Africa. Use academic Web sites for your information. You may search for "A Celebration of Women Writers" hosted by the University of Pennsylvania.

Telephone Conversation

Wole Soyinka

Before You Read

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka (1934–) was born in Nigeria and belongs to the Yoruba tribe. He was the first African to win the Nobel Prize in literature (1986). His multiple talents qualify him as a "renaissance man": a novelist, playwright, critic, teacher, poet, actor, translator, and politician. According to one critic, Soyinka's writing "blends African with European cultural traditions, the high seriousness of modernist elite literature, and the topicality of African popular theater."

World Context In 1967, Soyinka was imprisoned for political reasons. While in solitary confinement, a woman prisoner was mistakenly put in the same cell with him. When she recognized him as a famous author, she began to weep. The woman helped him find new strength in himself, Soyinka recalled in an interview, "so she did me a lot more good than she could ever have guessed on that day."



LITERARY LENS: WORD CHOICE

A poet chooses each word in a poem carefully. Consider the **word choice** in this poem.



The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. "Madam," I warned,
"I hate a wasted journey—I am African."
Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurized good breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick-coated, long-gold rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.
"HOW DARK?" . . . I had not misheard . . . "ARE YOU LIGHT
OR VERY DARK?" Button B. Button A. Stench
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. It *was* real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender

Lit. of Middle East + South Asia

Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
 Considerate she was, varying the emphasis—
 "ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?" Revelation came.
 "You mean—like plain or milk chocolate?"
 Her assent was very clinical, crushing in its light
 Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
 I chose. "West African sepia"—and as afterthought,
 "Down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic
 Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent
 Hard on the mouthpiece. "WHAT'S THAT?" conceding
 "DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS." "Like brunette."
 "THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?" "Not altogether.
 Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see—
 The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
 Are peroxide blonde. Friction, caused—
 Foolishly madam—by sitting down, has turned
 My bottom raven black—One moment madam!"—sensing
 Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
 About my ears—"Madam," I pleaded, "wouldn't you rather
 See for yourself?"

Read and Think Critically

Summarize, Describe, Infer

1.  **WORD CHOICE** Summarize the **setting** of the poem (the time, place, and situation). Then identify specific words and phrases that evoke the setting. In a short paragraph, show how the words and phrases you have identified evoke the setting.
2. Describe the writer's attitude after he figures out the landlady's "game."
3. Silence is mentioned several times in the poem. "Translate" the implied message of one of these silent moments into the real meaning. Cite from the poem to make your argument.
4.  **USE QUOTES SMOOTHLY** Review a paragraph or short paper in which you have included quoted material. Revise awkward introductory sentences and phrases.

Wole Soyinka's "Telephone Conversations"
Nigeria

Please document your answers to the "Read and Think Critically" Questions on this sheet for Wole Soyinka's poem "Telephone Conversations."

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

*You do not need to complete #4 of the "Read and Think Critically" Section.