

Introduction to Igbo Culture

Directions: Read this article with your partner. Use your Reading Strategies Bookmark to annotate the article. Make sure to record your thinking and identify information that helps you answer the essential questions:

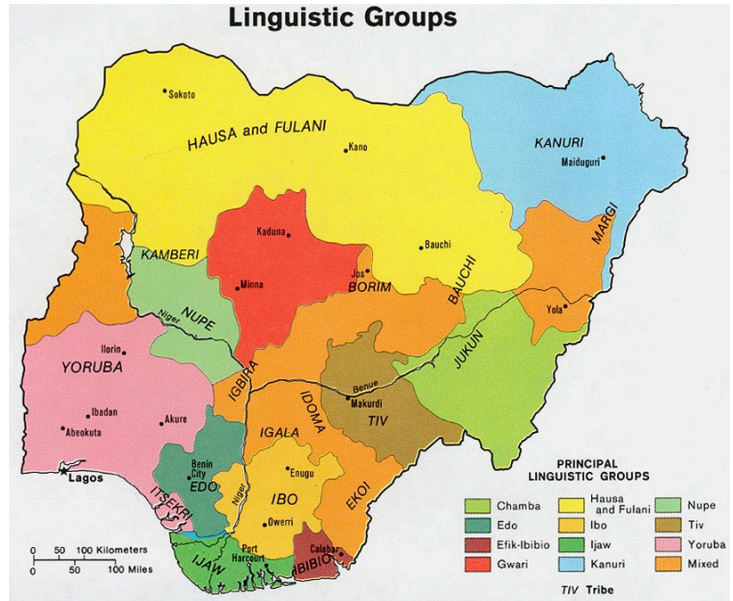
Essential Questions.

1. What was important to people in the Igbo culture before colonization?
2. What is similar between Igbo culture and your culture?

Early Igbo History


The **Igbo (pronounced “ee-BO”)** people form one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, with about 15 million living in Nigeria and another million living outside. Their farming communities are broadly situated between the Niger River in the west and the Cross River in the east, stretching from delta swampland near the southern coast through tropical rain forest to open grasslands to the north.

The Igbo language has dozens of dialects, which developed because Igboland was an aggregation of self-contained towns and villages, separated from



each other by dense bush. Before the twentieth century, it would have been incorrect to speak of the Igbo as a single people; they were made up of over two hundred separate groups. Although their customs and languages were clearly related, each group could have been considered a distinct society, encompassing perhaps twenty or thirty villages. An Igbo person who traveled thirty miles in Igboland might have had great difficulty making himself or herself understood.

However, during the **colonial period** (1900-1960) many Igbo people ventured far from home and congregated in urban centers, at jobs, and in institutions of higher learning. Many realized that what they thought were distinct languages were different dialects of the same language and that all Igbo-speaking people had the same basic culture and sociopolitical organization. In that sense, the concept of a common Igbo identity is a product of the twentieth century.

<div data-bbox="172 1600 228 1638">  </div> <div data-bbox="253 1600 776 1638">Check for understanding</div>	Vocabulary: Colonial Period
<div data-bbox="131 1661 763 1688">The Igbo people are connected to each other because</div> <div data-bbox="131 1801 717 1829">The Igbo people are connected to each other, but</div>	<div data-bbox="805 1661 930 1677">Definition:</div> <div data-bbox="805 1801 888 1818">Image:</div>

Before you continue, make sure that you have:



1. Underlined or highlighted any information about the essential questions.
2. **Made at least 3 annotations** (questions, comments, connections, reactions) on the text.
3. Answered the reading questions and shared your thinking with your partner

Igbo Culture and Mythology

An Igbo creation myth relates that in the beginning the surface of the earth was covered by water and no humans lived on it. Then one day Chukwu (God) created the first human family, composed of Eze Nri, his wife, his sons, and his daughters. Eze Nri and his family stood on the top of an anthill and had nowhere to go because the land was submerged. They were also hungry. Chukwu looked down and took pity on their condition. He gave Eze Nri a piece of yam and said, 'Take this, it is edible.' Eze Nri and his family ate the **yam** and found it was good.

The following morning, they were hungry again and Eze Nri prayed to God for more yam. Chukwu listened attentively and then gave him some yam seeds, saying, 'Plant these and you will have an abundance of yams.' Eze Nri accepted the yam seeds with gratitude. He looked around him and said to Chukwu, 'But the land is covered with water.' Chukwu instructed him to send for Awka blacksmiths, who came with their bellows and blew until the land was dry. Chukwu then asked Eze Nri **to sacrifice his first son and his first daughter and plant the yam seeds in their graves**. Eze Nri obeyed. Shortly afterwards, yam and cocoyam tendrils sprouted from his children's graves. Eventually, Eze Nri harvested yams and cocoyams and shared them among the Igbo people.

This story establishes the Igbo people's belief in a supreme god (Chukwu) who created all things and demanded obedience. It also suggests that religion has long been an integral part of Igbo life. The myth points to the origins of agriculture and the importance of iron working in shaping the Igbo community. Above all, since this myth makes no mention of migrations from distant places as opposed to the majority of African traditions of origin - it suggests that the Igbo people have occupied their present locale for a very long time, a suggestion that is confirmed by archaeology.

Make in inference 	Make a connection 
Based on the creation story, how do you think the Igbo people survived? What do you think they did for food? How do you know?	What similarities do you see between Igbo culture and your own culture? _____ thinks that... _____ thinks that...

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The Igbo Society and Economy:

Igbo people have worked with iron for centuries, and their oral traditions are rich with accounts of iron working and iron use. At Lejja, a small town situated about ten miles south of Nsukka, an ancient iron-working settlement existed where smelting was done in a pit or bowl furnace, initially using rather primitive techniques. Over time, the Igbo improved their technological skills and began to produce sophisticated metal tools such as spearheads, arrowheads, swords, hoes, knives, earrings, finger rings, bracelets, anklets, hammers, anvils, tweezers, scissors, and cooking pots.

The widespread use of iron tools enabled the Igbo people to make better use of the forest. With iron tools they grew yams (their principal staple food), cocoyams, bananas, and plantains. Iron tools also helped them to cut down fruits from the tall palm trees, and process them into edible and medicinal oils. Scholars have attributed the current high density of the Igbo population to the antiquity and effectiveness of yam cultivation and their skills at exploiting the oil palm.

Yam crops did best on forest land cleared for the first time, but some people, either unwilling or unable to handle the back-breaking amount of work required to clear virgin forest, planted their yams continuously on old farm lands and reaped poor harvests as a result. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's father is portrayed as too lazy to clear forest land; he prays to the spirits to grant him a better harvest but is rebuked for his own lack of initiative.



Visualize: Draw a picture of Igbo life as described by this article:

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Mastery	Proficient	Developing	Beginning
<input type="checkbox"/> Student work meets the annotation criteria for every section . <input type="checkbox"/> The reading questions are all answered in complete sentences with ideas that make sense.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student work meets the annotation criteria for 3/4 sections . <input type="checkbox"/> The reading questions are mostly answered in complete sentences with ideas that make sense.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student work meets the annotation criteria for 2/4 sections . <input type="checkbox"/> Some reading questions are answered in complete sentences with ideas that make sense.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student work only meets the annotation criteria for ≤ 1 section . <input type="checkbox"/> The reading questions are not answered in complete sentences with ideas that make sense.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____ Assignment:

English II

Teacher Name