



Nigeria Today

TERMS & NAMES

Yoruba

Igbo

Hausa

Wole Soyinka

MAIN IDEA

Nigeria has a rich diversity of peoples and resources.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Nigeria's diversity has caused civil war, from which the country is currently recovering.

DATELINE

ZAZZUA, HAUSALAND, ANCIENT NIGERIA, 1566—The Queen is dead! Long live the Queen! This week the peaceful and prosperous reign of Queen Bakwa came to an end. Her daughter, Amina, was crowned queen. Unlike her peace-loving mother, Queen Amina is a warrior in the Zazzua cavalry.

At her crowning, she announced her intention to force other West African rulers to honor her and allow Hausa traders to travel safely through their lands. She also intends to build earthen defense walls around all of Zazzua's towns. She will begin her first military campaign in three months' time.



Place • These earthen defense walls are known as *ganuwar Amina*, or "Amina's walls." ▲

A Look at Nigeria

Queen Amina's 16th-century military conquests helped make the present-day nation of Nigeria very diverse. Its land includes several types of environments, such as tropical rain forests, mangrove swamps, and savannas. Its people and cultures come from more than 250 ethnic groups. Nigeria has a long history and a rich artistic heritage. However, like other African countries, Nigeria faced violence on the way to becoming a modern democracy.



Culture • This sculpture was made by a Nok artist at least 1,500 years ago. ▲

History of Nigeria's People

The Nok people were one of the earliest known cultures in the land that is now Nigeria. By about 500 B.C., they occupied the central plateau. They were skilled in ironworking and weaving.

Today, about 60 percent of Nigerians belong to one of three major ethnic groups: the **Yoruba** (YAWR•uh•buh), the **Igbo**, and the **Hausa** (HOW•suh). The first Yoruba established their kingdom on the west bank of the Niger River. The Igbo were part of the Nri kingdom in the southeast, and the Hausa built cities in the northern savannas.

The Yoruba Most of the Yoruba today live in southwestern Nigeria. Before colonial rule, Yoruba society was organized around powerful city-states. Yoruba men grew yams, peanuts, millet, beans, and other crops on land around the cities. Artists and poets had great prestige in traditional Yoruba society. Yoruba women specialized in marketing and trade. Their businesses made some women wealthy and independent.

The Igbo For thousands of years, the Igbo have lived in the southeast region of Nigeria. Igbo villages are fairly democratic, with leaders being chosen rather than inheriting their position. They are known for their metalworking, weaving, and woodcarving. In British colonial times, many Igbo held jobs in business and government.

The Hausa The Hausa are the largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Almost all Hausa are Muslims. Most live in farming villages in northern Nigeria. Crafts such as leatherworking, weaving, and blacksmithing have been passed down through generations.



Culture • An Igbo woman paints a python on a house wall. ▲

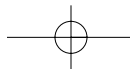
Reading Social Studies

A. Comparing
How do the current locations of Nigeria's three ethnic groups compare with their original locations?

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Culture** • Which of Nigeria's ethnic groups covers the largest area?
- Location** • Which ethnic groups live alongside Lake Chad?





Becoming a Democracy

Region • Cassava plants grow in Nigeria's tropical climate. Nigerians eat the cassava's starchy root, shown below. It must be prepared carefully, since it is poisonous if eaten raw. ▼



In the 1800s, the United Kingdom colonized the northern and southern areas of what is now Nigeria. English became the common language. The two regions were united in 1914. In the 1920s, Nigerians began to work toward separating from British rule. Nigeria finally gained independence in 1960.

When oil was found in eastern Nigeria, the Igbo people there declared their independence. They set up the Republic of Biafra (bee•AF•ruh). Civil war raged from 1966 to 1970, causing a million deaths from fighting or starvation. After the war, military rulers took over. People had little freedom. Sometimes elections were held, but leaders often ignored the results. Finally, in May 1999, Nigeria had a free election. Former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo was elected president.

Reading Social Studies

B. Recognizing Important Details What event prompted the Igbo people to declare independence from Nigeria?



Nigeria's Economy

Nigeria has more than 123 million people—the largest population in Africa. More than half of Nigerians are farmers. Huge areas of the country have rubber, cacao, peanut, and palm oil plantations. The country has rich deposits of oil and natural gas. Oil is Nigeria's main export, supplying more than 90 percent of government income. Minerals,

such as coal, iron ore, tin, lead, limestone, and zinc, are also important to the economy. Factories produce cars, cement, chemicals, clothing, and processed foods.



Wole Soyinka Wole Soyinka (WOH•leh shaw•YIHNG•kuh), a Yoruba man, was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria, in 1934. In 1986, Soyinka became the first black African to receive the Nobel Prize in literature. Soyinka (shown on the left) is best known for his plays, which combine African stories and European drama. He has also written novels, essays, and poetry. At the same time, he has been a voice for democracy, justice, and freedom of speech.

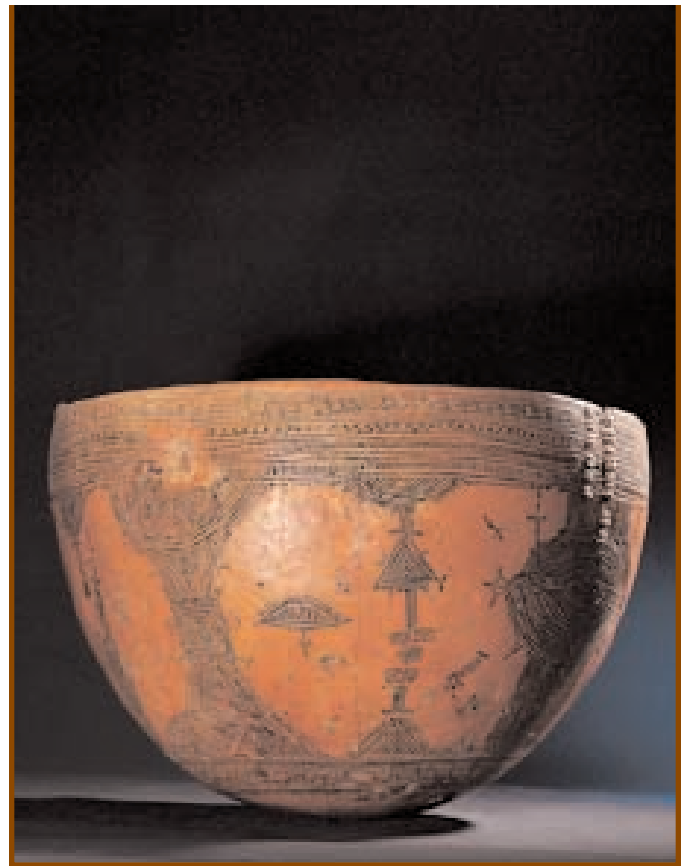
Soyinka's outspoken ideas got him into trouble with Nigeria's military rulers, and he was thrown into prison. After he was released, he left Nigeria. Soyinka lived in France and the United States for many years. He returned to Nigeria in 1998 to work for democratic reforms.



Nigerian Art and Literature

Nigeria's many cultures and ethnic groups have produced a rich mix of artistic styles. Yoruban artists have been making metal sculptures for about a thousand years. Yoruba also carve masks and figures out of wood. Decorated calabashes, or gourds, are another example of Nigerian art. Dried, hollow gourds are used as food containers or musical instruments. Baskets are made from local plants. Basket weavers turn practical containers into works of art.

Nigerians are also famous for their literature. Nigerian writers such as Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri, and **Wole Soyinka** have used folktale themes. Their novels and plays combine these themes with modern-day concerns such as human rights.



Human-Environment Interaction • This decorated bowl was made from a calabash. ▲

SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

1. Identify: (a) Yoruba (b) Igbo (c) Hausa (d) Wole Soyinka

Taking Notes

2. Use a chart like this one to list the three major ethnic groups of Nigeria and give facts about each.

Group	Facts

Main Ideas

3. (a) How could a drought affect Nigeria's economy?
 (b) How did the discovery of oil affect Nigeria after it gained independence?
 (c) How are Nigeria's modern writers influenced by the past?

Critical Thinking

4. Synthesizing

What relationship exists between Nigerian society and history and its art and literature?

Think About

- what modern Nigerian artists and writers are concerned about
- how the past affects modern artists

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Make a **mask** inspired by Nigeria's history, economy, or peoples.