

Isomo Loruko - Yoruba Naming Ceremony

The Yoruba people live in Nigeria in western Africa. In their culture a name is not just a name. It tells the circumstances under which a child was born. There are names for just about every situation. Sometimes a new name is even created. A name can also tell group or family history. It is always selected by family elders. Yoruba people always celebrate the naming ceremony when a child is seven days old.

During their naming ceremony, the family and the community welcome a new child and accept joint responsibility for raising it. As part of the ceremony, items used in everyday life are presented to the child as symbolic gifts. The basic items are water, salt, honey, sugar, whole peppercorns, kola nuts, bitter kola, wine, dried catfish, and palm oil. The pen and a book, especially the Bible or the Koran, are fairly recent additions to the ceremony. As with many other aspects of Nigerian life, the items used as well as the ceremony itself, vary depending on the ethnic group and family preferences. The theme they share in common is that the birth of a child is a time of great joy and celebration for the entire family and community.

Isomo Loruko, the Yoruba Naming Ceremony, can be reenacted in a global studies class and used to stimulate discussion comparing Yoruba culture with the traditions observed by students in the class and the importance of tradition for families and communities. Many of the ingredients used in this version of the Yoruba Naming Ceremony are difficult to find in the United States so other items can be substituted. For example, vegetable oil can be used instead of palm oil. When acting out the ceremony in a classroom, use fruit juice instead of wine.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1- Describe ceremonies your family holds to welcome babies or mark other important occasions? How is the Yoruba Naming Ceremony similar to and different from these ceremonies?
- 2- How are children's names selected in your family? What do they represent? Why?
- 3- Describe symbols that are important to your family and ethnic group. What do these symbols represent? Why are they important?

Follow-Up Activities:

- 1- Invite guests to class to discuss the ceremonies and customs of other ethnic groups.
- 2- Create a cultural museum with artifacts representing the family and ethnic traditions of the students in your class.
- 3- Create a class mural or individual posters that illustrate the Yoruba Naming Ceremony.

Isomo Loruko - Yoruba Naming Ceremony Script

Ingredients: Fruit juice, water, palm oil or vegetable oil, honey, bitter kola and kola nut (unsweetened baker's chocolate), whole peppercorns (or a clove of garlic), dried fish (preferably catfish), pen, book.

Participants: Elder (Agba), Mother (Iya), Father (Baba), Grandmother (Iya-iya: mother's mother), Grandfather (Baba-baba: father's father), Aunt (Aburo-iya: mother's younger sister), Uncle (Egbon-baba: father's older sibling), Honored Guests (Alejo Pataki) (5), Community members.

Elder (Agba): We are gathered here today because Fola and Ayinde have brought us a new life. We have brought certain gifts today to use in this naming ceremony, and we ask our ancestors to bless these things. We thank our ancestors for this addition to the family. We ask our ancestors to join us and bless this child. May the names given today enhance this child's life.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

(Traditionally, each of the items used in the ceremony is rubbed on the child's lips. Today, for health reasons, the mother of the child tastes the food items instead of the infant.)

Mother (Iya): We offer wine to our ancestors as libation so that they might join us today in blessing this child.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Father (Baba): Water (omi) has no enemies because everything in life needs water to survive. It is everlasting. This child will never be thirsty in life and like water, no enemies will slow your growth.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Grandmother (Iya-iya): Palm oil (epo) is used to prevent rust, to lubricate and to massage and soothe the body. May this child have a smooth and easy life.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Grandfather (Baba-baba): The bitter kola (orogbo), unlike most other kolas, lasts a very long time. This child will have a very long life.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Aunt (Aburo-iya): Kola nut (obi) is chewed and then spit out. You will repel the evil in life.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Uncle (Egbon-baba): Honey (oyin) is used as a sweetener in our food. Your life will be sweet and happy.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Honored Guest (Alejo Pataki) 1: Peppers (ata) have many seeds within its fruit. May you have a fruitful life with lots of children.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Honored Guest (Alejo Pataki) 2: We use salt (iyo) to add flavor to our food. Your life will not be ordinary, but it will be filled with flavor, happiness and substance.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Honored Guest (Alejo Pataki) 3: The fish (eja) uses its head to find its way in water, no matter how rough the water is. You will find your way in life and never drown, even through tough times.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Honored Guest (Alejo Pataki) 4: The pen is very important today because it can be used for both good and evil. You will not use the pen for evil and no one will use it for evil against you.

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Honored Guest (Alejo Pataki) 5: This book (iwe) contains the word of (God, philosophy, and science, etc.). May you be God smart and book smart. May God be with you as you follow in God's path.

(The last two items (pen and bible) are new additions to the ceremony).

Community: Ase (so it shall be).

Elder (Agba): We will now name this child together. I want you all to repeat the names after me so that this child can hear them. The names are [Abejide (male), Ifeoluwa (female)] Balogun.

(The last name is the surname. The class should select a given name for the child.)

Community: [Abejide (male), Ifeoluwa (female)] Balogun!

(This is followed by prayers and celebration for the rest of the day.)

Yoruba Female Names

Names like Ayo, Ade, Ola, Olu, Oluwa, Omo, are also used as prefixes in Yoruba names.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Adebayo	Born into happiness
Ayo	Joy
Ayobunmi	Joy is given to me
Ayodele	Joy arrives in the house
Ayodeji	My joy is doubled
Ayomide	My Joy is here
Bolade	Arrives in honor
Ebunoluwa	God's gift
Fola	Respect
Ifeoluwa	The love of God
Morenike	I have someone to care for
Nilaja	Brings peace
Niyonu	Compassionate and tender
Olayonu	Full of happiness
Olu (Oluwa)	God
Olubunmi	God has given me
Olufela	God speed ones wealth
Olufemi	God loves me
Olufunmilayo	God has given me joy
Omodara	The child is good or beautiful
Yetunde	Mother is back

Yoruba male names

Names like Ayo, Ade, Ola, Olu, Oluwa, Omo, are also used as prefixes in Yoruba names

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Abegunde	Born during a holiday
Abejide	Born during the rainy season
Abiodun	Born during holiday
Abiola	Born into wealth
Abiona	Born during a journey or trip
Ade	Crown or royalty
Adigun	Righteous
Afiba	By the sea
Aiyetoro	Peace on earth
Ajagbe	The winner
Akinlana	Valor opens the way
Animashaun	Generous
Ayinde	We gave praise and he came
Babafemi	Father loves me
Babatunde	Father is back
Balogun	Warlord
Banjoko	Do not wander
Ekundayo	Tears change to happiness
Modupe	Thank you
Oba	King
Olaniyan	Honorable
Oluwadamilola	God has made me rich
Oluwatobi	God is great
Omoniyi	Child is honor
Tokunbo	A child born overseas