Chapter One
Traveling to West Africa

Journeys (pp. 1-9)

The author first journeyed to Africa as a three year old child in 1949 and has returned many times as an adult doing ethnomusicological field studies of the Kpelle people. Both modes of travel and living conditions have evolved over the more than four decades of her work in Liberia, yet elements of the culture remain constant as shown in brief vignettes of the author’s travels and field work.

Map Skills:
AA

1. On a map of the world, locate Africa; then locate Liberia.
2. Use Figure 1.1 in the text (Map of Liberia) to locate towns and other geographic features mentioned in this discussion.

Modes of Travel:
AA

1. Using a world map and the description of the first journey to Africa, plot a route from the United States to the Azores, to Portugal, and down the coast of Africa to Liberia.
2. Using a world map and the description of a more recent journey (page 5), plot a route from Bloomington, Indiana, to Chicago, to London, to Liberia.
3. Discuss differences in modes of travel (prop airplane vs jet, etc.). What changes in transportation have occurred within the life time of students in the class? What changes have occurred in the lives of the students’ parents?
4. Consider what other technological changes have occurred from the time of the author’s first visit to Liberia and today? (For example: manual typewriters vs. computers)
5. Discuss what modes of travel within Liberia may have remained constant.

Living in Liberia as an “Outsider”:
AA

Read the descriptions of the author’s family’s life in Liberia and excerpts from the author’s subsequent research journals cited on pages 1-9; then, discuss the following questions. Students may choose to work in groups, each group addressing one question, with discussion by the class as a whole following these breakout discussions.

1. What was the purpose of the family’s move to Liberia in 1949? How did the author’s parents earn a living?
2. How did the author receive her early education? How many hours per day was formal instruction provided?
3. How did 1 and 3 above reinforce the author’s status as a cultural outsider?
4. How did the author’s informal education (interaction with village children) affect her interest in Kpelle culture and aid her in understanding the culture as an adult researcher?
5. To what extent did such informal education endow the author with the status of cultural insider?
6. What roles are played by the written journals in transmitting information about travels and research?

**Defining Culture?**

S, U

In the first full paragraph on page nine, the author briefly examines what constitutes a culture: shared learned behaviors “that differ because people living in disparate parts of the world, with a variety of religious beliefs or family arrangements, or geographically separated communities tend to develop particular shared values for living.” Using this paragraph as a springboard for discussion, identify characteristics, beliefs or practices that members of a culture might share.

After the class has agreed upon a set number of shared behaviors:

1. Discuss how these shared characteristics are important markers of a culture.
2. Consider why groups might form around this set of shared characteristics.
3. Compare these characteristics among two or more cultures examining similarities and differences in how the characteristics are manifested in each.
4. Create a chart comparing shared characteristics in several cultures. Handout/Overhead 1.1 may be used for this activity. A few suggested characteristics are given as examples. This chart may be extended to include as many shared characteristics as the class chooses to examine.

**Handout/Overhead 1.1**

**Defining Culture?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared Characteristic</th>
<th>Culture 1</th>
<th>Culture 2</th>
<th>Culture 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Tools (pp. 9-11)

The Process of Ethnomusicological Research:
S,U

An ethnomusicologist is a person who conducts scientific study of music, especially traditional or non-Western music, as an aspect of culture. Pages 9-11 provide a glimpse into the tools and processes used by an ethnomusicologist to study the music of a culture, in this case, the Kpelle culture of Liberia. After reading these pages, use the following topics, questions, and comments to generate class discussion.

1. The tools of an ethnomusicologist often include a written journal, video camera, still camera, and audio recording devices.
   a. What role does each tool play in conducting the research?
   b. What other tools may be of use to the researcher?

2. Interviews of musicians, composers, audience members, etc. are an essential element of cultural research.
   a. Why are these verbal interviews important techniques for gaining cultural insights?
   b. Language can be one of the greatest obstacles to obtaining and understanding cultural data. Discuss each of the following levels of language competency on the part of the research and the impact upon the effectiveness of gathering data:
      --No skill in the language of culture
      --Basic “tourist level” skill in language of the culture
      --Competent skill in language of the culture
      --Native speaker of language of the culture
   What types of problems may arise when relying upon a translator during interviews? What types of problems may arise when the interview subject must respond in a language other than his/her mother tongue?

3. Permission and ownership issues arise in determining who has the authority to transmit musical/cultural knowledge to a researcher and the degree of reliability of the data recorded. At several points in this text, references are made to paying musicians for the right to participate and/or observe such as on page three (negotiating a fee for a recording session) and page 16 (negotiating attendance at a wake). In more formal settings, a signed permission form is required in order to conduct research and use the information in publications.
   a. Why is it important to obtain permission to record and/or photograph a culture-bearer?
   b. How may a researcher determine who is the property authority on the culture to interview, record, and/or photograph?
   c. What other protocols must be observed while conducting cultural research? (One example: when approaching a Navajo Hogan—traditional dwelling—one must wait in the car until the resident comes out of the Hogan, acknowledges the researcher’s presence, and invites the research to come into the home. Among Lakota peoples, a gift of tobacco—a scared ceremonial plant—is often expected before an interview may begin.)

4. Contemporary ethnomusicologists often become participants in the culture joining in playing instruments, singing, dancing, undergoing initiation rites, or being “adopted”—formally or informally—by a member of the culture. Note the author’s reference to her study of the koning, a triangular frame zither used
by the Kpelle.

a. What are the advantages of becoming a participant in cultural activities?

b. What disadvantages?

5. Contemporary discussion on ethnomusicological research methodologies center on Insider versus Outsider status of the person conducting the research. The “ultimate insider” would be a person born and raised in the culture, a native speaker of the language of the culture, and a trained performer/creator of the music of the culture. The “ultimate outsider” would be a person not born in or raised in the culture, a non-speaker of the language of the culture at any level of proficiency, and who lacks functional knowledge of the music of the culture as a performer/participant. There are infinite degrees of insider-outsider status lying between these two levels.

a. What advantages will an insider bring to the research of a specific culture? What disadvantages?

b. What advantages will an outsider bring to the research of a specific culture? What disadvantages?

c. What might be an ideal balance of insider-outsider in conducting research on the music of a culture? Form discussion groups within class and report findings to class.

6. Archival of research data is an important step in preserving cultural information for both current and future analysis, assessment, and publication. Go to either the Library of Congress (http://www.loc.gov) or the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University (http://www.indiana.edu/~librarchm) and investigate studies from a culture of your choice. Prepare a brief report to present to class.

A Class Research Project:

AA

Most communities in the United States are home to multiple cultures. Often, many dozens of languages and cultures may be present within a school district or even a single school building. Individuals or groups within the music class may elect to conduct a cultural research project examining one of the musics from within the school or community. The following steps serve as a guide to creating such a project:

- Identify cultural micro-communities within the school or community selecting one as the subject for this project.
- Conduct library and online research on the target culture to attain a basic level of understanding of the culture and its music.
- Identify culture-bearers (performers, composers, dancers, etc.) from within the target culture to be interview subjects, to be video/audio recorded, to be invited to perform for the music class.
- Design interview questions to be used for all subject. Consistency of questioning increases the validity of the information.
- Obtain appropriate permissions from school, culture group, and culture bearer. (Some schools have pre-existing forms, but music-specific forms may be designed for the project if necessary.)
- Conduct interviews and make recordings. Use both recordings and written journals to document research.
- Analyze and report data for class report.
- Invite culture-bearer(s) to perform for music classes or school assembly program.
- Handout/Overhead 1.2 may be used as a coversheet for each interview.
West Africa in Perspective (pp. 11-15)

West Africa was the home of powerful African kingdoms in the Middle Ages and has been a crossroads of trade and culture for centuries. Later subjected to colonial rule and serving as a point of departure for many slaves bound for the New World, West Africa is today a mixture of old and new influences with hundreds of languages and cultures. Read the information on pages 11-15, then complete the following activities.

Map Skills:
AA (1-3); S,U (4)

1. On a map of the world locate West Africa and Liberia.
2. Using an online or print historical atlas, locate the ancient African kingdoms listed in the text.
3. Using an online or print historical atlas, locate major trade routes through Africa leading to and from West Africa and compare these to modern highways and routes traveled by the author during her research in Liberia.
4. Assign written projects on the history and culture of The Kingdom of Ghana, Kingdom of Mali, Benin, and the Ashanti Kingdom. Pay particular attention to the musical cultures including instruments, royal court traditions, and dance.

Early Cultural Reports:
S,U

1. Discuss cultural information on West Africa as reported by early visitors such as Abdullah Ibn Battuta, D.W. Whitehurst, and other missionaries and scholars.
2. What is the significance of the journey of George Herzog in the field of music ethnology?

Social Structures in West Africa:
S,U

After reading the third, fourth, fifth and sixth paragraphs on page 13, select student groups to research the following topics making full use of online and print resources to supplement information from the text.

- Extended family structures in West Africa
- Poro and Sande societies in West Africa
- Musical learning within “secret societies” in West African cultures
- Duality of religious practice in West African culture
Music in the Arts and Life (pp. 15-18)

The Role of Music in Culture:
AA

After reading the information on pages 15-18, complete the following activities. Use these comments to generate class discussions.

1. In many West African languages, there is not a specific word equivalent to the Western idea of music. Are there other cultures in which this also occurs?
2. Give examples of the roles music plays in Kpelle everyday life.
3. Give examples of the roles music plays in Kpelle life cycle events.
4. Give examples of how other musical styles have fused with Kpelle (and other West African) musics.

CD 1: “Ku Kelee Be Li”

This song, performed by the St. Peter’s Lutheran Church Kpelle Choir, draws upon both indigenous themes associated with Poro and Sande organizations as well as Christian worship practices.

Background Discussions:
S, U

1. What Christian references and musical practices may be observed in “Ku Kelee Be Li”? 
2. What musical elements are drawn from Poro and Sande ritual performances? 
3. How is the power of Jesus connected to indigenous religious beliefs? 
4. Explain the use of veiled political protest in this song. Compare this to such practices in Anti-Apartheid songs in South Africa and signal songs in pre-Civil War United States.

Listening/Performing:
E (1); S, U (2-3); U (4)

1. While listening to CD1, raise one finger to indicate entrance of soloist and two fingers to indicate entrance of chorus.
2. Sing choral response on neutral syllables throughout song (Learn by oral process)
3. Clap or tap rhythm patterns heard on recording (Learn by oral process)
4. Advanced students may wish to transcribe choral response motifs and selected instrumental lines. The following representations of the choral response and two percussion lines were transcribed by a group of university students studying “Ku Kelee Be Li.” Student journals noted the following challenges encountered while attempting to transcribe sections of the song and its accompaniment: Lines seemed to “merge” because students were unable to visually observe who was performing; some pitches and rhythms could not accurately be transcribed into western notation; quality of field tape (background noise, etc.) created difficulty in clearly hearing rhythms and pitches.
Performance, and Instruments (pp. 18-21)

Performance:
S,U

After reading the section on “Ideas About Performance” on page 18, use the following questions to generate class discussion:

1. How is music performance in West Africa similar to speaking one’s native language? How does this belief compare to teaching methods stressing a “Mother Tongue” method of learning?
2. Which groups of people are selected for specialized musical training? Why?
3. Discuss the role of “supernatural tutelary spirits” in performance.
Instruments classifications:

Musicians in West African play an astonishingly large variety of drums, rattles, lhamellophones, lutes, zithers, animal horn trumpets, as well as contemporary instruments such as synthesizers and electric guitar. Contrary to some of the more complex systems of instrument classification, the Kpelle categorize their instruments as either blown (fee) or struck (yale). In the case of Kpelle stringed instruments, all are considered struck since they are played by being plucked by the finger and this is considered as “striking” the instrument.

In Chapter 2 (Thinking About Instruments) of Thinking Musically (one of the framing volumes of the Global Music Series), Bonnie Wade introduces several systems used for classifying instruments including standard western orchestral (strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion), the ba yin system from the Zhou Dynasty in China (metal, stone, skin, gourd, bamboo, wood, silk, earth), ancient India (vibrating body of the instrument itself, a vibrating membrane, a vibrating string, a vibrating column of air), and the Sachs-Hornbostel classification system used by ethnomusicologists (aerophones, idiophones, membranophones, chordophones, mechanical and electrical). Students and teachers alike are referred to this source for a fuller explanation of the complexities of classifying instruments in world cultures.

As a class exercise in categorizing instruments from Kpelle and other cultures, list a number of instruments and categorize them in Kpelle, Western European, Ba yin, Ancient India, and Sachs-Hornbostel systems of classification. Be prepared to explain reasons for choice of category. Handout/Overhead 1.3 may be used for this exercise. Several instruments are categorized in the example below. The chart may be expanded to include as many instruments as desired.

**Handout/Overhead 1.3 Instrument Classification Exercise**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Kpelle</th>
<th>Western European</th>
<th>Ba Yin</th>
<th>Ancient India</th>
<th>Sachs-Hornbostel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trumpet</td>
<td>Blown</td>
<td>Brass</td>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>Vibrating column of air</td>
<td>Aerophone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goblet drum</td>
<td>Struck</td>
<td>Percussion</td>
<td>Skin</td>
<td>Vibrating membrane</td>
<td>Membranophone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame zither</td>
<td>Struck</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>Silk</td>
<td>Vibrating string</td>
<td>Chordophone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakuhachi</td>
<td>Blown</td>
<td>Woodwind</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Vibrating column of air</td>
<td>Aerophone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical bow</td>
<td>Struck</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>Silk</td>
<td>Vibrating String</td>
<td>Chordophone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>