

LIBERIA

Lessons for Mission Minded Kids

Lesson 5

Liberian Customs



Liberia

Lesson 5: Liberian Customs

Goals for Lesson 5:

- Students will gain an understanding of Liberian customs and celebrations.
- Students will appreciate the art of Liberian storytelling, and understand taking a moral from a story about animals.
- Some students will be able to recite Psalm 25:4-5 from memory.

Verse for Liberia:

“Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” Psalm 25: 4-5

Before Class:

- Read through the lesson and all of Aunt Clara’s stories, and decide how you will use the material, according to your age group and time allotted.
- Prepare all pictures, including Aunt Clara’s picture from the lesson cover as power point slides, or print them and back them with cardstock for stability.
- Choose one or more of Aunt Clara’s stories that you would like to work with, deciding ahead of time how you will group your students. Using the animal figures, make copies of characters for each of the stories you will use. You will also need to make individual copies of each story you plan to use. You will want to print the animals and stories on cardstock, or mount them on construction paper for stability.
- Obtain a supply of craft sticks or tongue depressors, along with glue, scissors and crayons for making the animal characters.
- Plan ahead how you will divide your students. For each story you use, you will need one narrator and one student for each of the characters in the story. Depending on your facility and your class size, you may also need to arrange to have an adult or helper present for each story you work on.
- Make copies of the coloring page if you will use it.

Lesson Plan:

- Open your time together with a welcome, announcements and a brief prayer. (5 min.)
- Read or tell the “Liberian Customs” part of the lesson, discussing or answering questions as needed, and showing the pictures as directed. (15-20 min.)
- Explain that you will be dividing the class into groups, and that each group will be working on and presenting a “play” of one of Aunt Clara’s stories. Divide the students into groups and place each group at separate ends of a table, or even in separate small Sunday School rooms, with one adult for each group. Give each group the story they will work on and the paper animal figures to make each character. Have students work together to make stick puppets, coloring each animal and mounting it on a craft stick. Assign parts (one narrator and one student for each character that appears in the story). The narrator will read the story aloud, and each character will act out their part with their stick puppet, without speaking. Each group should practice their story, including entrances, actions, props, etc. and then join together as a large group again. Give each small group a chance to perform their “play” for the large group, so that everyone can enjoy each story. Talk about the truths or morals presented in each story. (35-40 min.)
- When each group has presented, lead the class in reviewing the verse by saying it and then singing it together. Remind students that when we learn to follow God’s ways, He helps us to live our lives wisely. These are the truths Aunt Clara taught through her animal stories. (5-8 min.)
- Use the coloring page to fill any remaining time. End in prayer for the country of Liberia. (5 min.)

Depending on how your students respond to this lesson, you might consider performing these plays to other groups at church, or even including them as part of your “Project Liberia Fundraiser.” A “Liberia Feast” with Liberian table settings, Liberian handshakes, and Liberian Storytelling entertainment might be a great draw to raise money to send to the struggling Liberian Churches.....

Lesson 5 Story: Liberian Customs

How many of you like to have birthday parties? What sorts of things do you do at your parties? What other events might your families have a party or a big celebration for? In Liberia, people believe that almost any occasion is a good reason to celebrate. Liberians will dance and sing for days after marriages, births, and initiations into traditional ethnic societies. Even if someone passes away, they will have a celebration honoring the life of the person. During these celebrations, there may be drumming, singing or dancing, as well as food shared among all who are present. A lot of times a group of dancers, singers and musicians will be brought in especially for the celebration. The group may perform in one place or move from one neighborhood home to another. If the dancers and musicians travel from home to home, it is customary for the neighborhoods to give drinks and sometimes money to the performers.

In our last lesson, we talked about the types of foods that Liberians eat. Now let's talk about the customs Liberians follow during a meal. How would we normally sit down to enjoy our dinner? We have plates and silverware and glasses for drinks. Does your family ever put down a special tablecloth on the dinner table for special guests? Usually in Liberia, there is a white or striped tablecloth covering the table. To start with, their plates are upside-down. Is that how you set your plates on the tables? Then they put their napkins on top of the turned over plate. Many Africans prefer to eat with their fingers, so a lot of times there will be no silverware on the table. But since the American influence is so strong in Liberia, some people are also comfortable using silverware. The cups are placed upside down as well. If soup is going to be served with the meal, all the soup bowls are stacked in the center of the table. Who remembers what the national soup of Liberia is? That's right, it is goat soup. As for the drinks for the dinner, they often make homemade lemonade with the fresh lemons that grow there, or they make a non-alcoholic drink with fresh pineapples and ginger root, called ginger beer.

Before the meal actually begins, all the food is laid out on the table at one time. The soup, appetizers, main courses, and desserts are all laid out at one time instead of the hostess getting up to serve each individual course. That way the hostess can relax and enjoy the meal with all of her guests. The bowls and platters are passed around so everyone can help themselves as they are ready for each type of food.

When the guests first arrive, Liberians have a special way of greeting each other. What do we do in America when we meet someone new, or someone comes to our home for a visit? We shake hands don't we? Or if it is someone we know well we might give them a hug. In Liberia they shake hands as well, but a little differently than we do. When Liberians shake hands, they use their thumb and third finger to grab hold of the middle finger of their friend's right hand. Then they bring the middle finger up quickly with a snap. They are very careful not to snap too hard so as not to hurt their friend's

fingers. Why do you think they greet each other that way? Well the greeting comes from the days of slavery when a slave owner would break the finger of a slave as a sign of slavery. When the former slaves came to Liberia, they used this greeting as a new sign of their freedom, and this custom is still practiced today.

After dinner, Liberians love to entertain their guests. Here in America, what are some things you might do after dinner is over? Do you play games with your guests? Tribal Liberians are well known for their dancing and singing. Some tribes are even known for the types of crafts that they make. Do you remember what some of those are? Well some tribes are known for their intricate carved masks and those masks can be used to entertain their guests as well. Also, Liberians love hearing stories and they are wonderful storytellers.

One well known storyteller was a woman by the name of Clara Blaine. **(Show picture from the lesson cover of Clara Blaine.)** “Aunt Clara” as she was known, was a Christian, and as a way of ministering to the Liberian people, she would tell them stories about her relationship with Christ and why they needed Him as their Savior. Her most popular stories were those she told about a Spider and his animal friends. She talked about a spider because it was an insect that everyone in Africa was familiar with. The stories became so popular that they were even broadcast over a Christian radio station called E.L.W.A. (which stands for Eternal Love Winning Africa). **(Show picture of Aunt Clara with the children on the radio.)** When she would start a story, she always began with “Once upon a time....” and then she would pause until her audience chimed in with “TIME”. Then she would continue with her story and the explanation of God’s truths found in the story.

Aunt Clara loved people and she loved Jesus. Groups of people in Monrovia and groups of people in villages came to know about Jesus through Aunt Clara’s storytelling. These groups began meeting as Christ-following churches, and the EC Church of Liberia was begun. People told their neighbors and friends about Jesus, and other churches were formed. Today, the EC Church of Liberia is growing and helping to transform the country of Liberia, all because a good storyteller was willing to use her talents to teach others about Jesus. **(Show picture of Aunt Clara EC Church)** This is an EC Church that was named after Aunt Clara. Because of the fighting during the war, this congregation has had a hard time building a permanent structure. Aren’t you glad that Aunt Clara used one of the Liberian customs to minister to her own people?

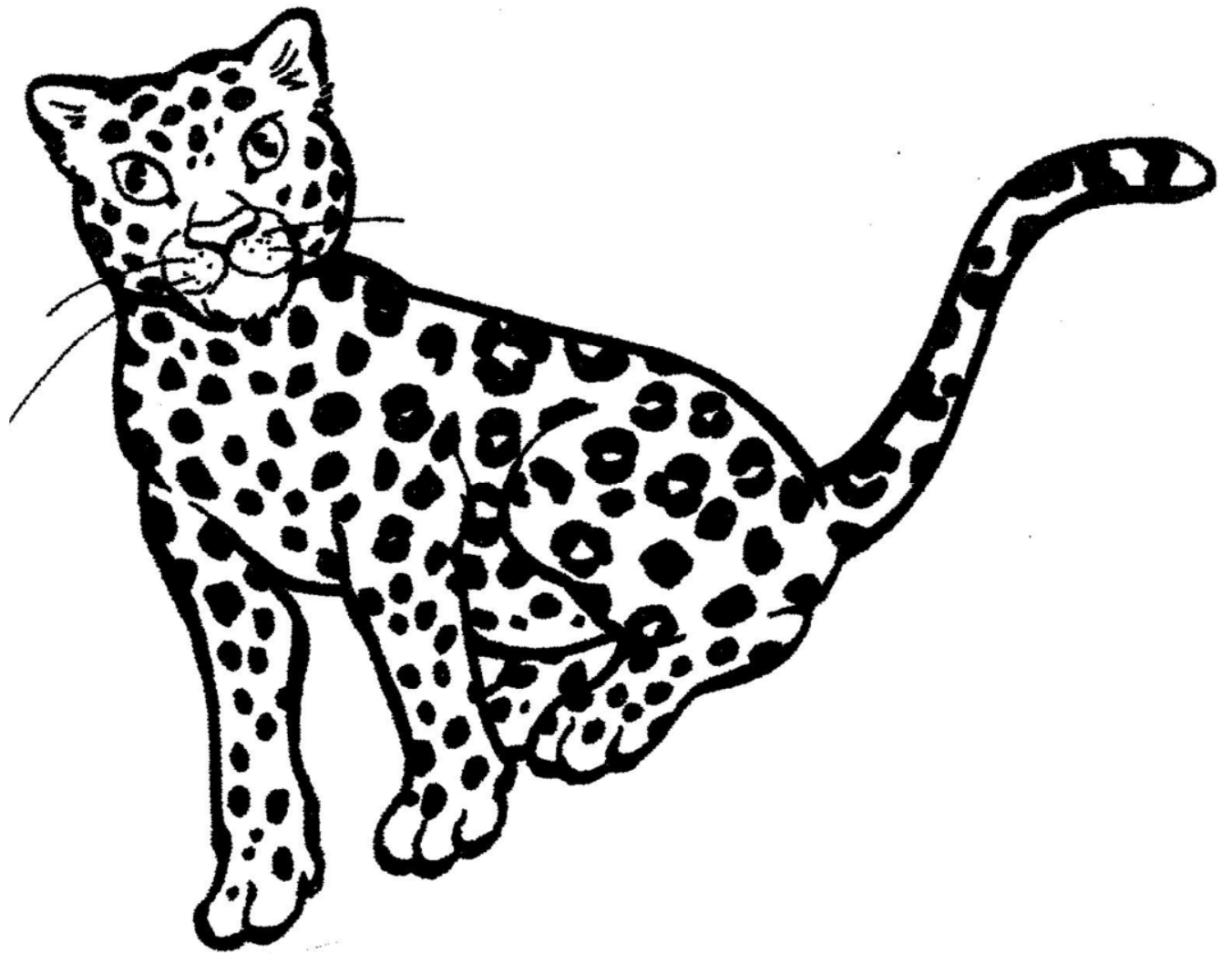
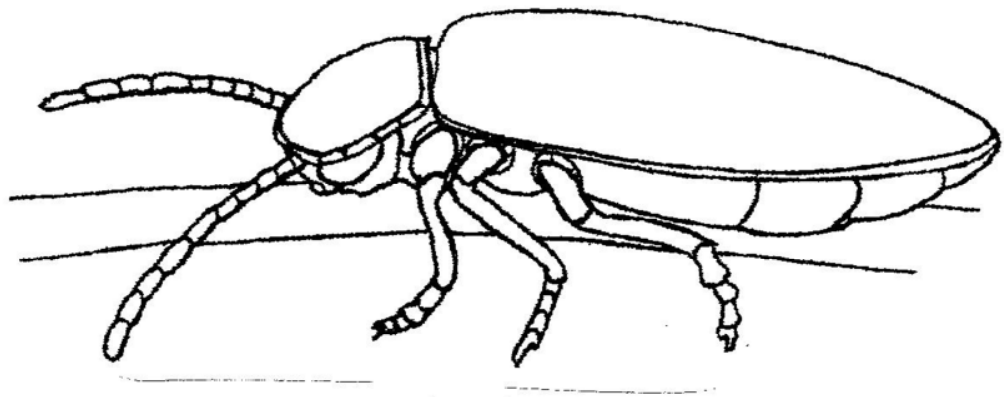
Aunt Clara was so well loved and well-known that when she died in 1979, the government gave her a state funeral as a way to say thank-you for the difference she had made in her country. Let’s pray that the Christians in Liberia will carry on the example of Aunt Clara and find interesting ways to use their own culture to help Liberians understand their need for Jesus.

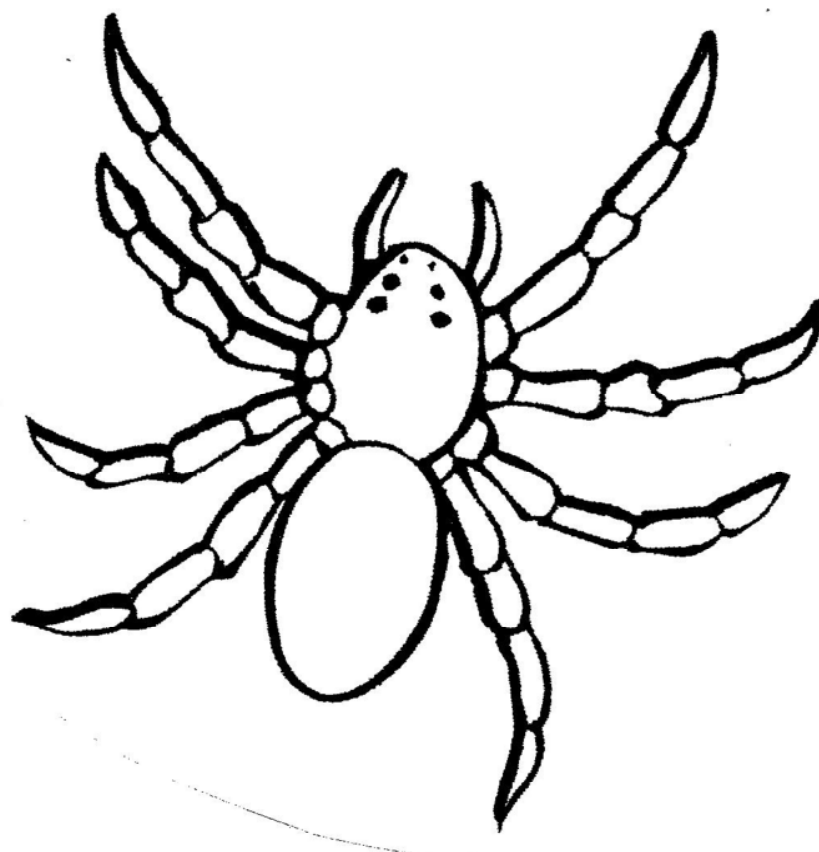


Aunt Clara tells her stories to children over the radio.



Aunt Clara E.C. Church at Cestos City
2009 Annual Conference Sight 1/19/09





Aunt Clara's Stories

“Leopard and Black Deer”

Once upon a time, while playing in the forest, Black Deer met Leopard, and finding it too late to run, she begged for mercy.

“Quickly tell me three true things off the top of your head,” said Leopard, “and I will let you go.”

Deer thought quickly. “This is my first,” she said. “If I return home and tell my friends I met you, they will call me a liar.”

“Excellent,” Leopard declared. “Go on.”

“The second is that if I say you asked me riddles, they will laugh at me.”

“True enough.”

“The third is that you are not hungry anyway.”

Leopard nodded in agreement, and yawned. “True, Black Deer, quite true. If I had been hungry I would have eaten you by now. You are free to go and be laughed at, and called a liar.”

“Spider's Moon”

Once upon a time, Spider and his wife made a large farm of rice. The rice grew well. The stalks were tall and the heads were heavy and bushy.

When the rice was almost ripe, Spider didn't want to wait any longer. He always had a good appetite. The rice looked so nice. He could almost taste the sweetness. He tried to wait, but he just could not. So he decided to speak to his wife.

“Wife, dear,” said Spider. “Let us eat some of the rice before it gets ripe.”

“No, dear husband,” his wife said. “We cannot cut any of the rice until we see the New Moon. The rice is not ready to eat yet.”

Spider did not know what to do. He wanted the rice. What could he do? He sat down to think. He remembered what his wife had said about the moon. After thinking for a while, he got up. He had to do something. So he went to the cassava farm and dug a large, round cassava root. He peeled it and then he cut off a round piece and shaped it like a new moon. He cut a long stick and put the moon high in the sky. Then he went to find his wife.

“Wife, look up and see the New Moon. It is the time for us to eat some of the rice. I am so glad,” he said. He was so happy he danced.

Everyone came out to watch the New Moon. Everyone thought that it was a real moon. He was sure that no one knew what he had done. His wife turned to tell him that they would have new rice the next morning. Before she could speak, a little boy came outside.

“That is not a real moon,” he said.

“Be quiet,” said Spider. “What do you know about moons? You had better go to bed.”

But instead of going to bed, the little boy took his bow and arrow and shot at the moon. The new moon fell and broke into many pieces. Everyone laughed at Spider and he did not get to eat any of the new rice until the real New Moon came and the rice was ripe.

“Why Leopard is an Enemy of Deer”

Once upon a time, Leopard and Deer were the best of friends and always lived together. When sorrows came, they mourned together. When happiness came, they shared their joy. People warned Leopard that Deer would one day fool him, but Leopard never listened to such talk. One fine morning, Deer said, “Let’s go hunting and find something to eat.”

“Tomorrow we will go,” said Leopard. “Today my bones are weary.”

“Tomorrow they may be dead,” said Deer. “Let us go today.”

Leopard finally agreed. But he said, “We should carry food with us, for we will be out all day.”

Deer, who ate far more often than Leopard, refused to help collect the food, so Leopard found six bananas and carried them with him, along with his gun. Deer carried nothing. They walked through the woods a long way without finding anything to hunt. Finally, Deer said, “My belly is empty. Let us eat some bananas.”

“No,” said Leopard. “Not yet. Wait until we are on our way home.”

Deer was obliged to agree, for the food was Leopard’s food. A while later Leopard saw a monkey in a tree. He said to Deer, “Deer, there is a monkey in that tree. See if you can shoot him down.”

“I am too weak with hunger,” Deer complained. So Leopard shot the monkey, but it fell in a fork of the tree and stuck there, dead.

“See if you can get him, Deer,” asked Leopard.

“I don’t have the strength,” Deer said, and sighed unhappily. So Leopard climbed the tree. He reached the monkey and was about to climb down when he saw Deer smelling the six bananas, as if he might eat them. He began to climb down quickly, but he slipped, and his back feet became entangled in some vines, so that he found himself hanging there helplessly, upside down.

“Deer,” he cried. “I beg you to climb up and cut me free!”

“I am too weak with hunger,” Deer said again. Leopard could hear some people working nearby.

“Then shout for the people nearby to come, or I will die.”

“How can I shout when I am so hungry? I have not eaten food all day....particularly bananas.”

“Then eat two bananas and then shout.”

Deer ate two bananas, and shouted in such a small voice that no one could have heard him. Leopard was now in great pain, and he begged his friend to make a greater effort.

“Those two banana hardly touched my throat,” said Deer. “I am still too weak.”

“Then eat two more, and shout for help.”

Deer ate two more bananas, but his second shout was even weaker than the first.

“Have the bananas stolen your voice?” cried Leopard angrily.

“No, my friend, my voice is growing. If I could eat two more bananas my voice would be loud.”

“Then eat the last two, and be quick before my legs are torn loose from my body.”

Deer ate the last two bananas, and then sat down and laughed and laughed at Leopard. Leopard did not know what to do. Deer looked up at him, still laughing, and said, “If you can’t get down, I shall leave you, useless Leopard. Oh, how funny it is to see you hanging by your two feet.”

Leopard became very angry. He struggled and struggled, and began to free himself. He said bitterly, “When I get down I shall eat you, Deer. I will claw you to pieces.”

“When you get down,” Deer mocked him. But Leopard was pulling free of the vines, and when Deer saw this he grew alarmed and ran away. Leopard came down the tree and began to chase him. Deer hid behind a tree, and Leopard did not see him. Leopard went home, but Deer remained in the forest, and since that time he has had to run for his life whenever Leopard finds him.

“Spider, Leopard and Lightning Bug”

Leopard is fond of fish, and once he built a water fence across a stream and set fish traps there. With this simple but clever device he caught many fish, and hunger was a stranger to his house. It happened that Spider heard of this, and one night he called on Lightning Bug.

“I know of a place,” he said, “where we can find many fish very easily, but they must be caught at night. Therefore bring your light, and let us go.”

Lightning Bug agreed to this, and they went to the water fence.

“These are Leopard’s traps,” said Lightning Bug.

“Fish belong to those who find them,” Spider answered. They gathered all the fish and went away; but Spider, being greedy, gave very few to Lightning Bug. Each night for a week they went to the traps, and finally there came a night when Spider decided to keep all the fish for himself. Lightning Bug said, “No”, but Spider held to his decision; therefore the little fly resolved to teach some manners to his greedy friend. With his light he led him to Leopard’s house, and Spider, thinking it was his own, walked in through the door and said; “O wife, here are some more of Leopard’s fish.”

Then he saw Leopard sitting by the fire, staring at him with big eyes; and Leopardess lying on the bed, staring at him with big eyes; and the two young Leopards, who had ceased their playing, were staring at him with small-big eyes. Leopard rose to his feet and cleared his throat.

“So you are the thief!” he growled. Spider trembled with fear, and dropped the fish. He moved quietly toward the door, and Leopard sprang. He missed his mark, and Spider ran out of the house into the night. Not daring to go home, he went far into the forest and made a house of banana leaves. He lived in the forest for some time, and one day Leopard chanced to find the house. He looked carefully at the leaves, walked twice around the house, and sniffed inside it. No one was home.

“It must be Spider’s home,” he said; “fat, lazy, thieving Spider. I will wait for him. We shall have a talk.” He crept inside the house and waited for Spider to return. But Spider saw the marks of Leopard’s feet, and noticed that the marks led into his banana-leaf house and did not come out again. He thought that Leopard might be waiting inside for him, so he went a little way off and cried out: “Ho, my banana-leaf house!”

There was no answer, of course.

“Ho, my banana-leaf house!” he repeated. He waited a little while and then remarked, loudly;

“Here is a strange thing. Every day when I come home I call to my little house, and it answers me. But today it does not answer. I will try again...Ho, my banana-leaf house!”

Leopard cleared his throat and tried to say in a banana-leaf voice; “Ho, Spider, welcome home!”

Spider laughed and laughed, for now he knew for certain that Leopard was in his house.

“Just sit there, foolish Leopard,” he called out. He ran far, far away until he came to the house of Man: and since Leopard could not come here, he crept inside and there he lived, and still lives to this day.



Tabita learns many things from her teacher.