

Teaching Notes & Resources

Key Stage 2 / 3

Themes: Belonging | West African Mythology |
Magic | Friendship | Adventure Writing | Superpowers

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Introduction

About the Book

Koku has always felt like he was cursed with a weird name and an illness to match. He thinks life can't get any worse - until he unleashes a demon on a school trip. He expects detention, but instead he's hurled into an impossible quest filled with **MAGICAL TRIBES**, **MAN-EATING MONSTERS** and **VENGEFUL MERMAIDS**.

When an **ASSASSIN** is sent to hunt him down, Koku's only hope is to team up with a clumsy shapeshifter and a moody warrior-in-training. Together they enter the **JUJULAND JUNGLE**, a place filled with **DANGEROUS SECRETS**.

Can Koku discover his own power, before it's too late?

About the Author

Maria Motúnráyò Adébísí graduated from the University of Oxford in 2017 with a degree in English Literature, although she currently works in tech. As part of her degree she focused on post-colonial literature from Nigeria and West Africa, and on graduating she realised that she wanted to write a novel that would speak to children straddling British and African identities and make them proud of both.



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Contents

Theme 1 - Belonging

Objectives: Explore why Koku feels like an outsider; consider the importance of belonging and having a tribe; sketch pictures of your tribe

Theme 2 - West African Mythology

Objectives: Learn about traditional Olori clothing; learn about the gods and goddesses of Olori and create a profile of your favourite god

Theme 3 - Adventure Stories

Objectives: Understand the key ingredients to adventure writing; plan and write an adventure story inspired by the text; design your own comic strip



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Theme 1 - Belonging

Read the first two pages of *Kòkú Àkànbí and the Heart of Midnight*



CHAPTER ONE

The Museum Incident

I thought the museum school trip was going to be dead, but it was actually sort of interesting.

Our class had to go down a creaky staircase to the basement, where there was a wooden sign with faded letters on it that read *The Victor Frobenius Africa Collection*. While the rest of the museum was showing off with its super high ceilings, crisp white walls and blinding lights, our room was small, dingy and cramped.

But I'm not gonna lie – this tiny exhibit had some cool stuff.

There were strips of patterned ankara cloth, glistening cowrie shells, gleaming coral necklaces,

1

brass amulets with roaring leopards' faces, ultra sharp flat throwing knives, beaded orange terracotta pots and menacing masks all arranged behind sheets of glass. The guy who jacked this stuff – Phineas, or whatever – had pretty good taste.

It looked kind of sick and, unlike the Roman stuff upstairs, it was made by people who looked like me.

It was super loud, though, cause there were thirty kids but only four teachers, all running after ponytailed girls with lip-gloss, and foxy guys doing Messi impressions all over the place.

I was tryna ignore the noise cause I was actually getting interested in something for once, when a shivery feeling crawled up my spine and lit my insides on fire. I have this condition called sickle cell anaemia. My blood cells have a weird shape which makes them rubbish at carrying oxygen, which is their job. It makes me tired all the time and super sensitive to temperature changes: when I get too cold, I get this painful crisis.

The museum air con was doing madneses to my insides.

I shut my eyes tight and tried to ignore it. I hoped it would go away soon. All I needed was quiet. Then I felt a shove out of nowhere.

2

Discussion Questions

- Where is *The Victor Frobenius African Collection* exhibit found in the museum?
- How does it compare to the rest of the museum? Pick examples from the text to show this
- What does Koku mean when he says, 'it was made by people who looked like me'? Why might this be important to him?
- What is the name of Koku's condition? What is it? How does it affect him?

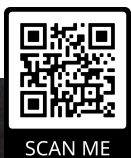


Theme 1 - Belonging

Throughout much of the story, Koku feels that he is an outsider, or 'oyinbo' in Yoruba. What does it mean to be an **outsider**? How does this **make Koku feel**? Discuss this as a group.

Activity 1: Read the below quotes from the story. Why do these examples make Koku feel like an outsider?

Quotes	This makes Koku feel like an outsider because:
<p>"Oi, Cuckoo," [Atticus] said, trying to get my attention. He knows my name is Koku.' (page 3)</p>	
<p>'My mum died during a war in Olori when I was three years old... it took all the people that were supposed to be mine and left me with no one' (page 5)</p>	
<p>'I'm freakishly small for my age... my puberty is delayed cause I don't get the oxygen my body needs to develop.' (page 5)</p>	
<p>'It hit me: I was in a different country. A different continent. This is Olori where the sun never sets. A strange new world.' (page 34)</p>	
<p>'I can't explain what it feels like to understand [Yoruba] language, but not speak it at the same time.' (page 35)</p>	



Theme 1 - Belonging

By the end of the story, Koku no longer feels like an outsider. Read the below extract. What has Koku realised at this point in the story? What does the term 'tribe' mean to you? Why is it important to feel that you belong? Discuss your ideas.

You must find your own tribe of people you can trust. My father's deep voice echoed in my head.

We were a tribe of weirdos when I really thought about it: Moremi had magic braids, I had a demon dad ... and Osoosi was half-dog or something. But somehow I knew I belonged with them.'

Page 257

Activity 2: My Tribe

Sketch pictures of the people in your life that you consider part of your tribe. This could be family, friends, pets, clubs, or communities you are a part of – anyone and anywhere that makes you feel like you belong! If you are happy to, have a chat with a partner about someone in your tribe and why they are important to you.

Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:



Theme 2 - West African Mythology

Read the following extract. At this stage of the story, Koku has just arrived in Olori and is attending the Masquerade Festival

When we were done at the shrine, we returned to the crowd. Everyone had taken their shades off to show respect and was waiting in silence. A bunch of serious-looking men, each wearing a brass leopard amulet with gold eyes pinned to the centre of their robes, walked up to the fancy seats in the centre of the courtyard.

'Who are those guys?' I tugged on Mama Oti's *buba* top.

'They are the *Oyomesi* chiefs,' Mama Oti whispered. 'They are the only ones who can advise the king, as they get divine knowledge from Rùnmí, the god of wisdom.'

46

The chiefs walked slowly so you could appreciate every inch of their white lace *agbada* gowns, which were weighed down by rows of beads.

They sat in the seats on the stage. '*A dupe lowo Ògún! We give thanks to the wisdom of ancestors!*' one of the seated chiefs announced, while thumbing a white beaded necklace decorated with curved symbols. His voice was loud and clear, but his lips didn't move. '*Today we celebrate the descendants of giants. To sweeten the road of our mighty king, we feast our eyes upon tales of old!*'

A white ring flashed around his eyes before fading to black. Glowing white symbols crawled out from under his *agbada* gown and covered his hands and neck, before sinking into his skin. They matched the symbols on his necklace.

The heat was clearly getting to me more than I'd realised. I was sweating loads— but at least there would be less chance of a crisis.

'In the time before time, there was nothing but darkness and raw energy. This energy developed into eight life forms, powerful beings known as the Òrìṣà gods. Each god controlled an element of existence.'

The declaration roared inside my skull, making my teeth dance.

47

Discussion Questions

- Who are the *Oyomesi* chiefs?
- What is unusual about the announcement made by one of the seated chiefs?
- How does the description of the chief make him seem magical and powerful? Give examples
- How did the gods come into being? What did each god control? Read the full chapter to learn about each Orisa god



Theme 2 - West African Mythology

Activity 1: Dress to impress in Olori

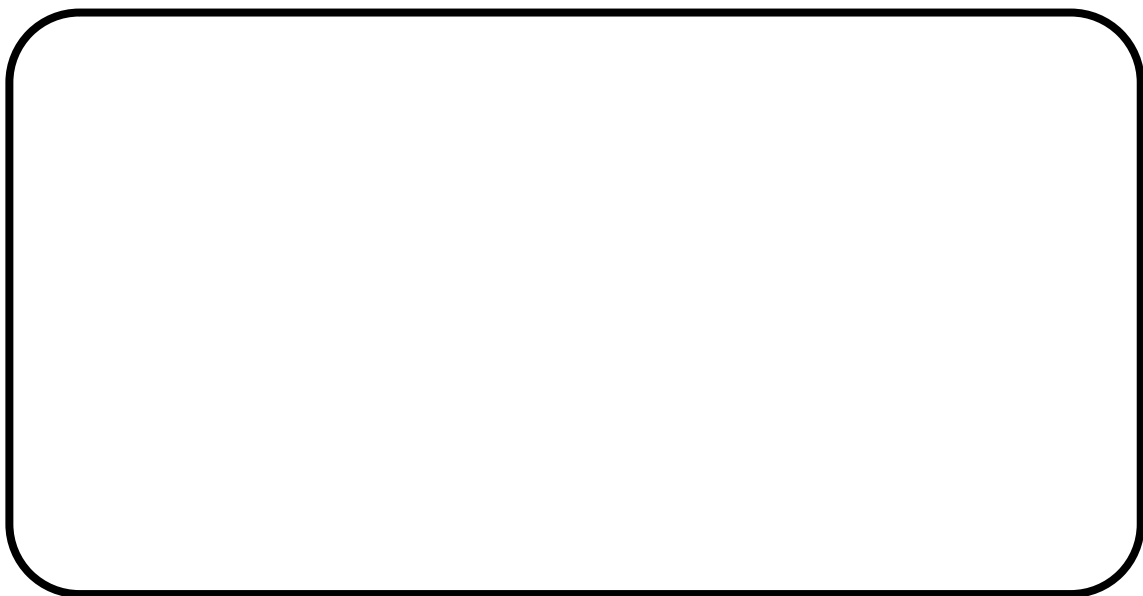
In *Kòkú Àkànbí and the Heart of Midnight*, Olori is a fictional place located in West Africa.

When Koku arrives in Olori, Mama Oti hands him a traditional Olori outfit for the Masquerade Festival. Read the below descriptions of Olori clothing from the book.

- *'Colourful giant cotton headwraps' (page 32)*
- *Mama Oti 'dressed in green with a wrapper skirt and matching buba top, paired with a sash around her shoulders and sunglasses with giant frames' (page 34)*
- *Moremi in 'baggy purple ankara print trousers' (page 35)*
- *Koku in 'a buba and ankara, a long woven gown and matching loose trousers... varying shades of bright green' (page 39)*
- *'A large ankara-print tote bag' (page 39)*

Pick an item of clothing described above and draw it in the space below

You may find it helpful to research some of the words and descriptions to help you draw them.



Theme 2 - West African Mythology

Activity 2: Create an Orisa god profile

The gods and goddesses of *Kòkú Àkànbí* and *the Heart of Midnight* are inspired by West African Mythology. Myths are stories passed down for generations to explain a people's history. They often contain supernatural or magical elements.

After reading Chapter Five 'The Masquerade Festival', chose one of the eight Orisa gods and fill in the below profile of the god and their descendants.

Name of God:

Element:

Traditional Clothing:

Magical Qualities/ Skills:

Why not have a go at drawing one of the descendants of your chosen God?



Theme 3 - Adventure Stories

In order to restore night to Olori, Koku must embark on a dangerous quest in the magical Jujuland jungle.

Read the below extract, which describes the moment when Koku arrives in Jujuland.



It felt like falling a thousand feet with nothing below, like trying to scream when you're drowning underwater, like being buried alive. Dirt was ripping my eyelids to shreds, scratching my eyeballs and shoving its way down my throat. I travelled through that hole for forever, until there was something solid underneath me.

I found myself at the base of the tree, looking up. My eyes opened properly for the first time in ages. The sky was pitch black. But weirdly I could see perfectly cause the moon was ultra-bright here, way larger than I ever remembered it being. It shone a pale yellow light on everything making my skin

128

super glowy. I took a deep breath and smiled.

I didn't have to squint no more. The dark sky was a huge relief. It felt like I'd taken a long sip of ice-cold water. Slowly, I began to look around me, my jaw on my chest. All the plants and animals were neon coloured like they'd swallowed a bunch of disco balls. Hanging from the tree's branches were one-eyed bats with glowing wings and three-legged baboons with fluorescent fur. The jungle was mad. Not mad like on TV, or the books I read in school, or the anime I watch online, but *mad*. Glittering fish with wings flew about as I looked, glow-in-the-dark creatures with bright green insides slithered over my feet, as slimy as Mama Oti's *okro* soup. The sweet scent of tropical flowers mingled with wet soil and damp wood. The air was so hot and sticky I was sweating in places I didn't know I could.

I couldn't believe it. This was Jujuland.

Discussion Questions

- Which three similes does Koku use to describe falling into Jujuland?
- What does Koku notice about the sky? How does this compare to the sky back in Olori?
- What is unusual about the plants and animals in Jujuland?
- How does Koku describe the air? How does he feel about what he is experiencing?
- What is your first impression of Jujuland?
- What do you think are the key ingredients that make a good adventure story?



Theme 3 - Adventure Stories

Activity 1: Create a plan for your own adventure story using *Kòkú Àkànbí and the Heart of Midnight* to inspire you.

Adventure Story Ingredients	Example from <i>Kòkú Àkànbí and the Heart of Midnight</i>	My Ideas
An unlikely hero	Koku feels he is weak and an outsider but soon realises he has his own powers and a destiny to fulfil	
A magical setting	Olori and Jujuland are amazing places, rich in history, myth, and magic	
A quest	Koku must find the powerful Heart of Midnight stone to save Olori	
Friendship	Moremi and Osoosi use their powers to help protect Koku throughout the story	
Divine objects	The Heart of Midnight and Sword of Ògún both have immense power	



Theme 3 - Adventure Stories

At the end of the story, Koku says that he dreams of having 'a sparkling career ahead of [himself] as a manga artist' (page 374) – this is a style of Japanese comics or graphic novels. Throughout the book, there are several comic-style illustrations which help bring the story to life.

Activity 2: Create a short comic strip, either from *Kòkú Àkànbí and the Heart of Midnight* or your own adventure story using your ideas from the previous activity.

