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FREE LEARNING NOTES FOR ZAMBIA

FORM 1

History

Traditional Ceremonies in Zambia

Lesson notes for learners · Competence-Based Curriculum

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A traditional ceremony is a public event in which a community marks an important moment in the life of its people, such as a harvest, the installation of a chief, or the passage of young people into adulthood. In Zambia you may see the Kuomboka of the Lozi, the Nc'wala of the Ngoni, the Umutomboko of the Lunda or the Ukusefya pa Ng'wena of the Bemba, and each one shows how a people keep their history and values alive.

AFTER THESE NOTES YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO

- Explain what a traditional ceremony is and name well-known ceremonies of Zambia
- Group traditional ceremonies by the purpose they serve
- Analyse the importance of traditional ceremonies for a community and for the nation
- Explain why valuable ceremonies should be protected and passed on to the young

KEY WORDS

ceremony	a formal public event held to mark something important
tradition	a custom or belief passed down from older generations to younger ones
culture	the way of life of a people: their language, dress, food, beliefs, music and customs
chief	the traditional leader of a community, who holds office under customary law
initiation	teaching and rites that prepare young people for adult life
Chisungu	the Bemba initiation ceremony that prepares a girl for womanhood and marriage
first fruits	the first part of the harvest, offered or tasted before the people eat freely
heritage	what a people inherit from the past and pass on, such as customs, stories and places

1 What a traditional ceremony is

A traditional ceremony follows customs that older generations handed down. It is held at a known time or on a known occasion, and the community gathers to take part. There is usually a leader, special dress, music, dance and food.

Ceremonies are not all the same. Some mark a stage in a person's life, some mark the farming year, some honour a chief, and some remember an event in the history of a people. The table below gives six well-known examples.

The Kulamba is held by the Chewa, who live mainly in Eastern Province. Chewa people from other parts of Zambia and from the neighbouring countries of Malawi and Mozambique also come to it, because the Chewa are one people living in all three countries. The Nc'wala is held in February, when the first fruits of the harvest are tasted. It thanks God and the ancestors, honours the Ngoni king, Mpezeni, and remembers the migration of the Ngoni.

Ceremony	People	Province	What it is about
Kuomboka	Lozi	Western	The Litunga moves from the flooded plain to higher ground
Nc'wala	Ngoni	Eastern	Thanks for the first fruits, honour to King Mpezeni, remembering the Ngoni migration
Umutomboko	Lunda	Luapula	Remembers the migration and victories of the Lunda
Ukusefya pa Ng'wena	Bemba	Northern	Remembers the migration of the Bemba and thanks the ancestors
Likumbi Lya Mize	Luvale	North-Western	Celebrates Luvale culture, including the Makishi masked dancers
Kulamba	Chewa	Eastern	Chewa chiefs and people gather to honour the paramount chief Kalonga Gawa Undi

Figure 1. Some well-known traditional ceremonies of Zambia, with the people who hold them and what each is about

2 Kinds of traditional ceremonies

Ceremonies can be grouped by their purpose. Grouping them helps you answer examination questions, because you can name the group first and then give an example.

Ceremonies of the life cycle follow a person from birth to death. They include naming ceremonies, initiation ceremonies for girls and boys, weddings and funerals.

The Chisungu is a Bemba example. It is the initiation of girls into womanhood. It is held for the girls of a family or village, not for the whole community, and elder women teach the girls the duties of adult life and marriage. Initiation ceremonies for young people prepare them for these duties.

Ceremonies of the farming year are held at planting or harvest. The Nc'wala is a thanksgiving for the first fruits.

Ceremonies of chiefs and history have two parts. The first is ceremonies that honour leaders, such as the installation of a chief. The second is ceremonies of remembrance, which recall events in a people's history, such as the Umutomboko. In the diagram below they are placed in one group because both are about the leadership and past of a people.

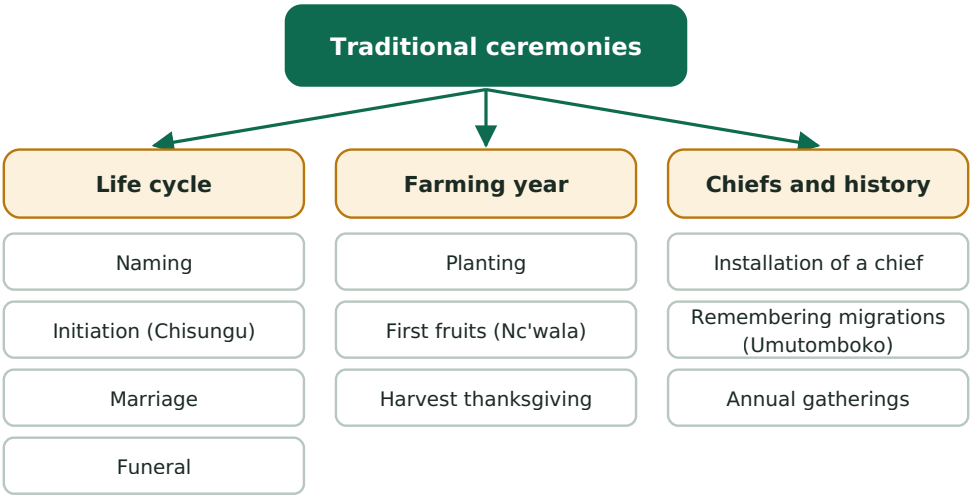


Figure 2. The three main groups of traditional ceremonies, with examples of what belongs in each group

3 Why traditional ceremonies are important

To analyse the importance of ceremonies, look at what each one does for the people who take part. The main reasons are given below, each with a Zambian example.

They preserve culture and history. Songs, dances and speeches carry a people's history from one generation to the next, often where little is written down. The Umutomboko recalls how the Lunda moved and won their lands.

They teach values and behaviour. In initiation, young people are taught respect, responsibility, hard work and how to behave in marriage and in the community. Elders are the teachers.

They unite people. Families, villages and sometimes people who have moved to towns come back together. At the Kulamba, Chewa chiefs and people gather before their paramount chief, and this strengthens their sense of belonging.

They honour leaders and support respect for authority. Ceremonies show the standing of the chief and the loyalty of the people, so order and respect are kept.

They give thanks and ask for blessing. The Nc'wala is held when the first fruits are tasted, and the Ngoni thank God and the ancestors for the harvest. Many peoples believe the ancestors still watch over the living.

They bring social and economic benefits. People who come to watch a ceremony such as the Kuomboka buy food, use transport and need places to stay, so local traders, drivers and guesthouses can earn money.

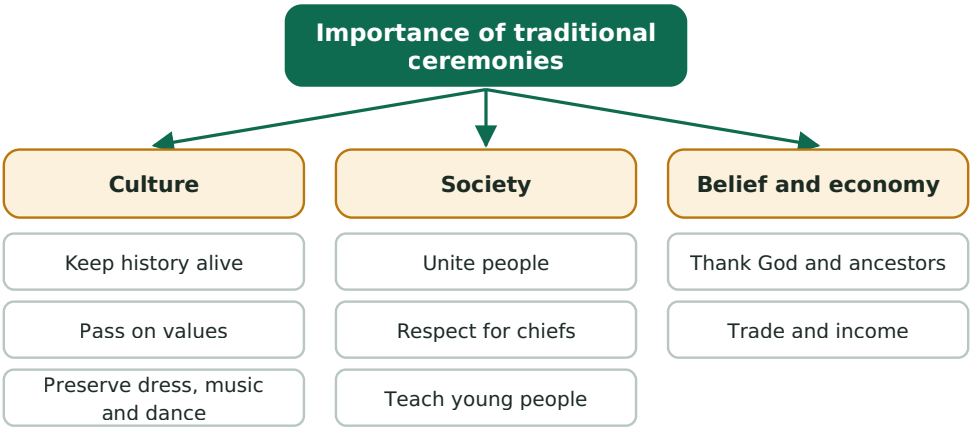


Figure 3. The main reasons traditional ceremonies are important, grouped under culture, society, and belief and economy

WORKED EXAMPLE

Using the Kuomboka, show how one ceremony can serve more than one purpose.

The Kuomboka is the Lozi ceremony in which the Litunga moves from the flooded plain to higher ground. It remembers a practical event, the yearly rise of the Zambezi floodwater.

Purpose 1, culture and history: the royal barge, the drums and the dress keep Lozi history and customs alive.

Purpose 2, unity and respect for authority: many Lozi gather to follow their king, which shows loyalty and togetherness.

Purpose 3, economy: people who come to watch buy food, use transport and need lodging, so local people can earn money.

So one ceremony can preserve culture, unite people and bring income at the same time.

4 Protecting ceremonies

Ways of life have changed with schooling, life in towns, new religions and new ways of earning a living. Some customs have changed as a result, and some practices have weakened or been left out.

Where a custom is harmful, it should be changed. Where it is valuable, it should be kept, because it is part of the heritage of a people.

Communities, chiefs and schools can help to keep valuable ceremonies alive. Elders can explain them to the young, the history behind them can be written down, and young people can be taught to take part and to understand what each ceremony means.

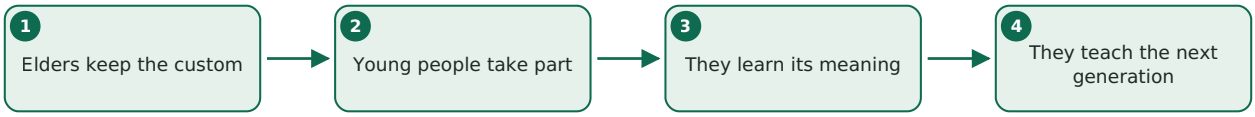


Figure 4. How a valuable ceremony is passed on from one generation to the next

TRY THIS

Ask an elder at home or in your community about a ceremony held in your area. Write down its name, when it is held, who takes part, and what it teaches or celebrates. Then say which reason for its importance, from this note, fits it best.

REMEMBER

- A traditional ceremony is a public event, based on customs handed down, that marks something important to a community.
- Ceremonies can be grouped as life cycle, farming year, and chiefs and history.
- Well-known examples are the Kuomboka (Lozi), Nc'wala (Ngoni), Umutomboko (Lunda), Ukusefya pa Ng'wena (Bemba), Likumbi Lya Mize (Luvale) and Kulamba (Chewa).
- Ceremonies preserve culture and history, teach values, unite people, honour leaders, give thanks to God and the ancestors, and can bring income to local people.
- Harmful customs should be changed, and valuable ones should be protected and passed on to the young.

? Check yourself

1. What is a traditional ceremony?
2. Name the people who hold the Nc'wala and say what it celebrates.
3. Match each ceremony to its people: Kuomboka, Umutomboko, Ukusefya pa Ng'wena.
4. Give the three groups into which ceremonies can be divided, with one example of each.
5. What is the Chisungu, and who takes part in it?
6. Explain how initiation ceremonies help the community.
7. Why do ceremonies help to unite people?
8. State two economic benefits of ceremonies such as the Kuomboka.

ANSWERS

1. A public event, based on customs handed down from older generations, held to mark something important to a community, such as a harvest, a chief's installation or the passage into adulthood.
2. The Ngoni of Eastern Province. It is held in February when the first fruits of the harvest are tasted. It thanks God and the ancestors, honours King Mpezeni and remembers the Ngoni migration.
3. Kuomboka: Lozi. Umutomboko: Lunda. Ukusefya pa Ng'wena: Bemba.
4. Life cycle (for example the Chisungu initiation or marriage), farming year (for example the Nc'wala), and chiefs and history (for example the Umutomboko or the installation of a chief).
5. The Bemba initiation of girls into womanhood. It is held for the girls of a family or village, not for the whole community, and elder women teach the girls the duties of adult life and marriage.
6. Young people are taught respect, responsibility, hard work and how to behave in marriage and in the community. Elders are the teachers, so the values of the community are passed on.
7. They bring families and villages together, sometimes including people who have moved to towns, so they share one celebration and feel they belong to one people. The Kulamba is an example.
8. People who come to watch buy food, use transport and need places to stay, so local traders, drivers and guesthouses can earn money.

Written by 25Schools to follow the Form 1 History syllabus of the Zambian competence-based curriculum. Free for learners to read, download and share. More notes and quizzes at 25schools.com.