Lesson 4  CONTEXT: Expression

African Storytellers

African literature has changed over the centuries. The literature of Africa south of the Sahara began as an oral tradition in which generations passed down stories, poems, and proverbs. By the fourteenth century, Timbuktu and other West African cities became great centers of Islam, and a noted literature in Arabic was created. Beginning in the twentieth century, African writers have created a modern literature of short stories, poems, novels, and plays. One of the best-known novels is *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe.

In the following exercises, you will have the opportunity to expand your vocabulary by reading about traditional and modern African literature. Below are ten Vocabulary Words that will be used in these exercises.

- apprehensive
- commendable
- ineffectual
- mystic
- callous
- indignant
- judicial
- paraphrase
- personification
- verbatim

**EXERCISE 1**  Wordbusting

**Directions.** Follow these instructions for this word and the nine words on the next page.

- Figure out the word’s meaning by looking at its context, its structure, and its sound. Fill in at least one of the three CSS boxes. Alternate which boxes you complete.
- Then, look up the word in a dictionary, read all of its meanings, and write the meaning of the word as it is used in the sentence.
- Follow this same process for each of the Vocabulary Words on the next page. You will need to draw your own map for each word. Use a separate sheet of paper.

1. **apprehensive**

Listening to storytellers speak or chant traditional stories or epic poems may have helped early African peoples to be less anxious about the future. Those who were apprehensive may have been calmed by hearing stories about brave heroes who successfully meet life’s challenges.

**Context:**

**Structure:**

**Sound:**

**Dictionary:**
Directions. Scan the definitions in Column A. Then, think about how the boldface words are used in the sentences in Column B. To complete the exercise, match each definition in Column A with the correct Vocabulary Word from Column B. Write the letter of your choice on the line provided; then write the Vocabulary Word on the line preceding the definition.

COLUMNA

11. word: __________________
adj. lacking mercy; insensitive; thick and hardened; having calluses

12. word: __________________
adj. mysterious; n. a person who believes that truth or God can best be known through spiritual insight or experience

13. word: __________________
adj. angered by the unfairness or meanness of something

14. word: __________________
adv. in the exact words; adj. following the original exactly

15. word: __________________
v. to state a meaning in other words; n. a rewording of the meaning of a text

16. word: __________________
adj. praiseworthy; deserving approval or credit

17. word: __________________
adj. sensible; wise and careful; discreet; prudent

18. word: __________________
n. a figure of speech in which something nonhuman is given human qualities; a person or thing that perfectly represents an idea or quality

19. word: __________________
adj. unable to bring about a desired result; inadequate

20. word: __________________
adj. uneasy; fearful about the future

COLUMNB

(A) In addition to tales, the African oral tradition includes thousands of brief, wise proverbs. These short sayings are often made memorable through personification: Objects such as drums, rivers, and trees are given human qualities.

(B) I took my young sister, Viola, to the library’s commendable African Stories program for children. Many people have found the program worthy of praise.

(C) When we first arrived, Viola was a bit apprehensive because the large poster of the trickster Anansi, a spider, made her anxious and uneasy.

(D) The judicious storyteller saw Viola’s reaction and took down the poster. His action showed good judgment.

(E) Some past storytellers at the library have been ineffectual, but this one, who was born in Ghana, was very effective.

(F) The storyteller told trickster tales about the spider Anansi, a hare, and a tortoise. I’m sure that many of the children went home and paraphrased each story for the benefit of their parents. It would be fun to hear the little kids relating the tales.

(G) Viola, on the other hand, remembered the stories and could tell them verbatim, not leaving out a single sentence or detail.

(H) She became indignant if I said I didn’t want to hear the tales again. I usually gave in to her anger, though.

(I) Mother accused me of being callous for becoming impatient with Viola, but I’m far from unfeeling. In fact, I bought Viola a book of African tales.

(J) Viola really liked the mystic tales from Nigeria, especially the mysterious Yoruba tales about Ogun, the god of war.