

NYAM

KRAK TEET

COODAH

Lesson 4:
GULLAH GEECHEE
RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

GULLAH GEECHEE

COMEVA

BEENYA

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Lesson 4:

Gullah Geechee Resistance and Resilience

Objective:

Students will synthesize past lessons to explore the Gullah Geechee community's cultural preservation efforts as examples of both resistance to erasure and resilience in adapting to change.

Keywords:

Cultural Preservation, Resistance, Resilience, Coodah, Krak Teet, Nyam

Background:

In Lesson 1, we explored Gullah Geechee language. In Lesson 2, we covered Gullah Geechee foodways. Lesson 3 shared the spiritual practices. All of the traditions shared—from its English-based creole language to the red rice and ring shout—are examples of cultural preservation. Cultural preservation involves passing down traditions, languages, customs, and heritage to ensure these cultural elements stick around for generations to come.

Cultural preservation is a form of resistance. Resistance refers to opposing or withstanding something. When West and Central Africans were brought to this country, the aim was to erase their African heritage and force them to accept their new status quo as their only option. Had those Africans accepted this forced erasure, their descendants—now known as the Gullah Geechee—would have been severed from their heritage and their true identity. Cultures can easily become overshadowed by the dominant culture of their region. Cultural preservation resists this attempt.

In addition to resistance, for a culture to survive it must also be resilient. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from difficulties, adapt to changes, and grow stronger through challenges. It comes in various forms, such as physical, emotional, psychological, economic, and cultural. Resistance and resilience are similar but distinct concepts. Resistance is about standing firm and opposing external pressures, while resilience is about adapting and thriving despite those pressures.

The Gullah Geechee word for a turtle is a “coodah.” “To speak” translates to “krak teet” in Gullah Geechee. To “nyam” is to “eat.” A “comeya” is a transplant, whereas a “beenya” is a native. Using these African words instead of their English translation is a form of resistance. Continuing to call themselves Gullah Geechee instead of African American, although they are both, is a form of resistance.

Most of the rice eaten in the Gullah Geechee corridor today was not cultivated there; most of it was imported from overseas. This did not stop the Gullah Geechee from making sweetgrass baskets, however. Instead, they diversified the shape and began selling them as art. This is an example of resilience. Originally, drums were used to keep the rhythm in ring shouts. When they were outlawed, the Gullah Geechee swapped the drum for a large stick. This, too, is an example of resilience.

The Gullah Geechee community's commitment to preserving their language, foodways, and spiritual practices demonstrates their resistance to cultural erasure and their resilience in adjusting to challenges. By embracing their unique heritage and adapting traditional practices to contemporary circumstances, the Gullah Geechee are an excellent embodiment of resistance and resilience. These preservation efforts ensure that their rich cultural identity stands the test of time, providing future generations with a deep connection to their past and a strong foundation for their future.

Preserving Culture:

Conducting Oral Histories to Capture and Share Traditions

1. Materials Needed:

Recording device (cell phone, audio recorder, or pencil and paper)

2. Preparing to Interview:

- Choose who they will interview (a classmate, a family member, etc.)
- Write the questions they'll ask to generate responses about traditions:
 - Did you grow up celebrating any traditions?
 - What foods were involved in this tradition?
 - Who prepared the food?
 - Who is in attendance?
 - What do you enjoy most/least about this tradition?
 - Do you feel like your/our culture is resilient? Why?
 - Etc.
- Set the date and time to interview.
- If applicable, make sure the recording device works.

3. Interview

Discussion:

- Share highlights from their interviews.
- Research other Gullah Geechee words and phrases, and practice using them.
- Give more examples of resistance and resilience.
- Inquire whether they would be interested in conducting future oral histories and, if so, what topics they would like to explore.
- Have the students identify whether they consider themselves as comeyas or beenyas in relation to your current city.