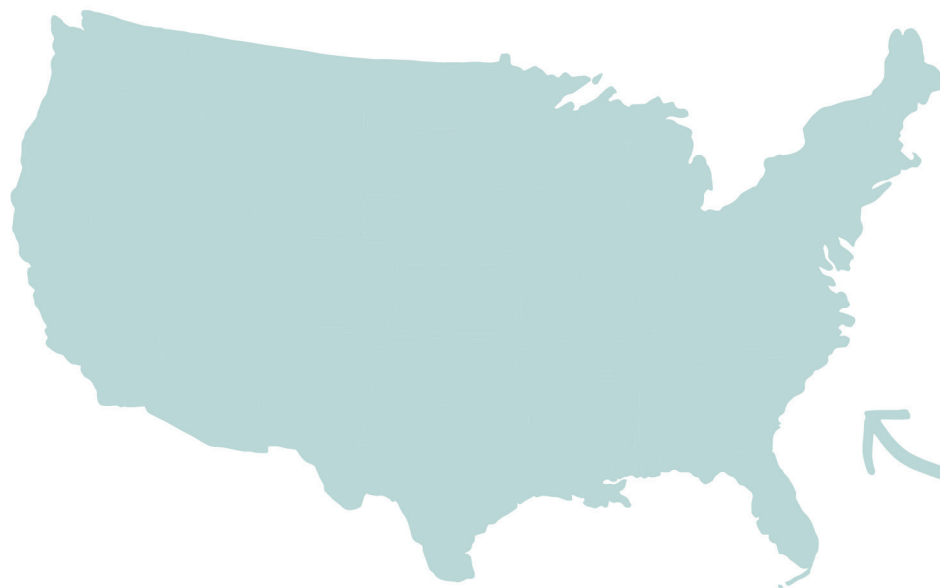




**Lesson 1:
WHO ARE THE
GULLAH GEECHEE?**



Lesson created and written by: Trelani Michelle - TrelaniMichelle.com
Lesson layout and artwork by: Heather Heckel - HeatherHeckel.com

Lesson 1: Who Are The Gullah Geechee?

Objective:

Students will be able to define culture and explain the origins of Gullah Geechee culture.

Keywords:

Gullah Geechee, Culture, Ancestor, Native, Creole

Background:

The Gullah Geechee are African Americans with ancestral roots in the Southeastern United States—extending from southeastern North Carolina all the way down to northeastern Florida. This extension is called the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. The largest cities in the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor include Wilmington, NC; Myrtle Beach, SC; Charleston, SC; Savannah, GA; and Jacksonville, FL. It also includes sea islands like St. Helena Island, Hilton Head Island, Sapelo Island, Jekyll Island, and Ft. George Island.

Like most African Americans, the Gullah Geechee’s ancestors were taken from West and Central African countries such as Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, and Cameroon. They were brought to the United States between the early 1600s and the 1850s and forced into labor because of their skills and physical strength. Their expertise in cultivating rice, indigo, cotton, and vegetables, along with mastery in building dams, blacksmithing, boatbuilding, and cooking, made them highly valuable.

Back home on the continent of Africa, they belonged to a variety of distinct cultures. Culture is the way of life for a group of people, including things like their traditions, language, food, and religion, as well as what they celebrate and how they celebrate it. Geographic location plays a central role in culture since it influences the climate, available crops, and the overall way of life, as these factors shape local traditions, clothing, food practices, hobbies people have, and the kind of work that they do. The climate and landscape on the coast of West Africa is similar to that of the coast of the Gullah Geechee Corridor. So many continued to work the waterways, eat seafood, and grow many of the same crops.

Though their geographic locations in Africa were rather similar, they often did not share a common language, which posed a challenge when they were brought to this country, especially since they did not speak English either. So they combined elements from their native languages with English to develop the Gullah Geechee language, an English-based creole. A creole is a language that forms when people mix two or more languages together, creating a new language that combines a few words and phrases from each one. In addition to developing a creole language, they also blended many of their African traditions with Native American and European influences to create the rich cultural heritage known today as Gullah Geechee culture. This heritage includes a unique language, traditional arts and spiritual beliefs, and distinctive culinary practices that reflect their ancestral roots and resilience.

Summary:

The Gullah Geechee are African Americans with ancestral roots in the Southeastern U.S., from southeastern North Carolina all the way down to northeastern Florida. Their ancestors, taken from West and Central Africa between the early 1600s and the 1850s, were forced into labor due to their skills and strength. To preserve their heritage, they created the Gullah Geechee language by blending native African languages with English. They also incorporated African traditions with Native American and European influences to create the Gullah Geechee culture.

Mapping Our Roots: From Africa to the Gullah Geechee Corridor

1. Materials Needed:

- World map to reference
- Colored pencils
- Printouts of the maps to color and label (the last two pages of this lesson)
- Pencils (for labeling)

2. Labeling and Coloring:

- Refer to the world map to properly label the blank maps. You can label as many countries and states as you wish, but, at minimum, label the primary countries that the Gullah Geechee's African ancestors came from:

Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Cameroon, Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Guinea, and Burkina Faso

- Color only the primary countries from which the Gullah Geechee ancestors came on the map of Africa, and the states where they were brought in the United States (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida). You can use any colors you like; feel free to be creative and vibrant, as African culture is known for its vivid and colorful expression.

3. Discussion:

- After completing the activity, discuss the maps. Ask students to share:
- Other challenges they imagine Africans had coming from Africa to America
- What culture means
- How their geographic location impacts their culture
- How the Gullah Geechee maintained African traditions in a new country
- If they have ever visited the Gullah Geechee corridor

Map of Africa



Map of the United Staes of America

