

A HANDS-ON TOUR OF AFRICA

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Did you know...

- a camel can drink 35 gallons of water in 10 minutes? (a bathtub full)
- the average rainfall in the Sahara Desert is 4"/year, and the average rainfall in the Tropical Rainforest is 70"-80"/year?
- Pygmy men weigh only 80 lbs. but eat up to 60 bananas plus meat at one meal?

Come join me on a tour of the amazing continent of Africa, exploring the jungles, discovering the culture, experiencing African drumming and tasting Nigerian chin chin.

Our adventure begins as we look at the continent through map making, labeling all the countries, and drawing in rivers, mountains and lakes, as well as the various topographic areas. Our challenge is to memorize all 55 countries, so we enlarge a map, colour it, cut out all the countries and laminate them for a puzzle. We marvel at our youngest 5 year old who strives to get the puzzle completed, while memorizing the names of the countries.

We continue on our escapade by 'visiting' a bazaar in Morocco, through the eyes of our grandparents' first-hand experience. We are able to wear a jellaba and a fez hat to dramatize the bartering that takes place for goods. It is a stretch for us to stick to our prices, especially when we really want to buy something beautiful.

Our read aloud is a biography of Mary Slessor, the first women missionary to Africa. (1876) This young Scottish woman, called Ma by the natives in Calabaar, Nigeria, brought the hope of education and faith to the people. We are amazed at her courage, her determination and her faith as she so lovingly cares for the many Africans that are brought to her. How did she have the stamina to keep going as she braved sickness, danger and even death?

Moving forward through our tour, we notice the Great Rift Valley and take special notice of Lake Natron in Tanzania. This saline lake is often coloured red or pink because of the microorganisms that thrive in it. We can use the PH scale to determine its alkalinity, and discover that it can reach a PH of 9 to 10.5, which is almost as alkaline as ammonia. It is here that Lesser Flamingoes breed, but we learn that they are currently under threat of extinction, due to the development of an ash plant being built nearby. Oh the constant struggle we face in our world keep animals from extinction!

We must stop for some nourishment in Nigeria. We'll cook up some chin chin, which is made up of flour, sugar, an egg and some caraway seeds kneaded and rolled into strips to be dipped into hot oil.... 'donuts' in Nigeria? While we're here, let's hear some African

drumming. We are amazed to learn that the Ashanti's first drums were 'talking' drums used to send messages to the next tribe. How ingenious!

We finalize our journey by creating a treasured keepsake for our home - a giraffe made out of Styrofoam and paper mache. It is true that a big mess is made as we play with the goop and cover our giraffe with newspaper and glue. But this certainly is a family affair, from the youngest to the oldest; everyone gets to add his personal touch. In the days and months to come we will see this giraffe and be reminded of its long, lanky legs that are powerful enough to shatter a lions skull with one strong kick.

I hope that you have enjoyed this whirlwind tour. You can see that the sights and sounds of Africa are intriguing for children of all ages. In this article, we haven't even touched on the perils of disease or the injustices of apartheid. It is through these 'unit studies' that we instill a love of learning in our families, at the same time as teaching geography, science, history, art and literature. I tend to agree with Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, as she states in For the Children's Sake,

"Education extends to all of life...the truly educated person has only had many doors of interest opened. He knows that life will not be long enough to follow everything through fully."

Diane, and her husband, Harv have been home educating their five children since 1988. She has taught the "unit study" way, using KONOS for all of these years, adding bits and pieces of other curriculum to this approach. One of their daughters is currently in Africa as a midwife.

Diane is the KONOS – Canada East Representative. The activities described in this article were completed using the KONOS Culture Series – AFRICA, The Land of Stewardship. For more information, check out the website at www.konos-canada.com.