

ONE MARYLAND ONE BOOK 2013

READER'S GUIDE



KING PEGGY

An American Secretary, Her Royal Destiny, and the Inspiring Story of How She Changed an African Village

by Peggielene Bartels and Eleanor Herman
Nonfiction © 2012

IMAGINE IF EVERYONE READ THE SAME BOOK AT THE SAME TIME

WHAT NEW THINGS WOULD WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT WITH EACH OTHER?

In its sixth year, One Maryland One Book is Maryland's only statewide community reading program. It brings together diverse people in communities across the state through a shared experience: the reading and thoughtful discussion of the same book. Each year, the book selection process is guided by a common theme, which this year is "a pivotal and impactful moment in time." The Maryland Center for the Book at the Maryland Humanities Council partners with public libraries, high schools, colleges and universities, museums, bookstores, correctional facilities and other organizations to bring book-centered discussions and other related programs to communities across Maryland.

The Maryland Humanities Council has at the core of its mission the deep commitment to providing Marylanders with an opportunity to gather and discuss issues important to their lives and communities, believing that a great work of literature provides an excellent springboard to do so. One Maryland One Book is not just about reading or literature. It is also about bringing people together for meaningful dialogue.

The book selected for 2013 is *King Peggy: An American Secretary, Her Royal Destiny, and the Inspiring Story of How She Changed an African Village* by Peggielene Bartels and Eleanor Herman.

GET THE BOOK

Pick up a copy of *King Peggy* at your local public library or bookstore and start a conversation with your family, friends, coworkers, or even the person sitting next to you as you ride the bus or train. This is your chance to take a moment to have a great conversation with an old friend or to make a new one.

JOIN IN

We invite you to join Honorary Chairperson, Maryland's First Lady Katie O'Malley, and thousands of other Marylanders at one of the many book discussions and related programs happening around the state in September and October.

If you're out and about, you might find copies of *King Peggy* in unexpected places. Our Wandering Books can be found in public spaces such as parks, buses, malls, county fairs, and doctor's offices. If you find a copy, it's yours for a short time. Register the book online so we can see how far it travels (instructions are included with the book), read it, review it, and then release it for someone else to enjoy.

To find One Maryland One Book programs in your area, go to www.onemarylandonebook.org and click on the Calendar.

For all the latest information, Like or Follow us:



Look for *King Peggy* at venues across the state in September, including the Baltimore Book Festival on Saturday, September 28.



Scan this code with your smartphone to watch King Peggy's CNN interview.

LETTER FROM HONORARY CHAIRPERSON MARYLAND'S FIRST LADY KATIE O'MALLEY



Thank you for joining me and the Maryland Humanities Council for One Maryland One Book, our State's community reading project. Each year thousands of Marylanders read the same great work and then come together to talk about it and how it relates to their lives.

King Peggy is the true story of a young woman who emigrated to the United States when she was in her 20s to explore and gain new experiences. Like many who come to this country, she enjoyed the freedom and opportunities and stayed, working at the Ghanaian Embassy for decades. An early morning call five years ago from her cousin back in Ghana informing her that she was to be the next king of her ancestral village forever changed her life. What happens next to Peggy is not just about her installment as king of Otum, but also about the people of her village and the responsibility she feels for all of their futures. Much can be learned from *King Peggy* as she finds ways to improve the lives of her people with so little. She shows how hard work, compassion and the efforts of one individual can uplift an entire community.

We encourage you to pick up a copy of *King Peggy: An American Secretary, Her Royal Destiny, and the Inspiring Story of How She Changed an African Village* and join the conversation. A program of the Maryland Humanities Council's Maryland Center for the Book, One Maryland One Book is made possible each year through the generosity of sponsors and community partners. Thank you for your support and learn more online at www.onemarylandonebook.org.

Sincerely,



Katie O'Malley
First Lady of Maryland

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Peggielene Bartels—King Peggy—was born in Ghana in 1953 and moved to Washington, D.C. in her mid-twenties to work at Ghana's embassy. She became an American citizen in 1997. In 2008, she was chosen to be king of Otuam, a Ghanaian village of 7,000 on the west coast of Africa. She lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, still works at the embassy, and spends several weeks each year in Ghana. Find out more at www.kingpeggy.com.



Eleanor Herman is the author of three books of women's history, including *The New York Times* bestsellers *Sex with Kings* and *Sex with the Queen*. Her profile of Peggy was a cover story for *The Washington Post Magazine*. She lives in McLean, Virginia. Find out more at www.eleanorherman.com.

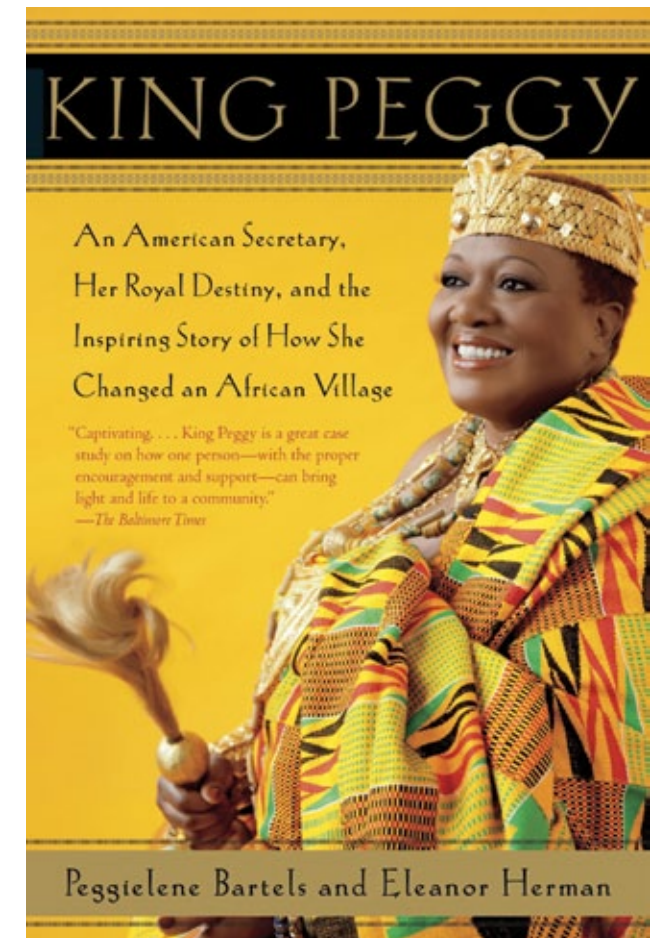


ABOUT THE BOOK

On a hot August night in 2008, Peggielene Bartels was startled awake by a long-distance call. It was her cousin in Ghana with incredible news: Peggy's uncle Joseph, king of a beautiful village on the west coast of Africa, had died, and sacred rituals revealed Peggy to be the next king of Otuam. Thinking it was a joke, she almost hung up. How could a secretary in Washington, D.C., an American citizen, be an African king? Not to mention that she was a woman. But it was true, and, in an instant, Peggy's life was forever changed.

King Peggy chronicles Peggy's astonishing adventures as king of a town of 7,000 souls half a world away. Upon arriving in Otuam for her crowning ceremony, she discovers the reality behind the fairy tale: the town has no running water, no doctor, and no high school; the king's palace is in ruins; and the town coffers are empty. Peggy's determination to change all this sets her on a collision course with Otuam's stubborn male elders, who are unaccustomed to heeding any woman. Yet she finds unexpected allies: her confidante, Cousin Comfort; the sober and reliable contractor, Nana Kwesi, who helps rebuild the palace; and a fisherwoman as strong as Peggy herself. Peggy opens Otuam's first bank account and finds sponsors so the town's children can attend school. But she also begins to wonder if there is something rotten in the state of Otuam. The late king, it seems, died of fright; his children are conspiring to sabotage his funeral; and suddenly Peggy does not know whom to trust.

Peggy's first two years as king of Otuam unfold in a way that is stranger than fiction. In the end, a deeply traditional African town has been uplifted by the ambitions of its decidedly modern female king. And in changing Otuam, Peggy is herself transformed, from an ordinary secretary to the heart and hope of her community. *King Peggy* is an irresistible Cinderella story and an inspiring look at one possible future for Africa.



ABOUT GHANA

Adapted and excerpted by Auni Gelles from the book, King Peggy. Note: data reflects the publication date, not current figures.

Ghana is a country of 24 million inhabitants located on the west coast of Africa. Home to many ethnic groups, including the Ashanti, Fante, and Ewe tribes, Ghana is steeped in rich cultural traditions as well as mineral resources. The nation's capital and largest city is Accra, a port city of approximately 2.3 million. European—first Portuguese and then Dutch, British, and Danish—traders came to Ghana beginning in the 15th century seeking ivory, gold, and slaves. Haunting reminders of the slave trade are still visible today in the expansive castles where slaves were once held. In 1874, Great Britain created the colony of Gold Coast, making English the official language; British colonizers earned favor with many tribal kings by paying them an income, and building roads, churches, schools, and providing jobs. Ghana declared independence from Great Britain on March 6, 1957—just before Peggy's fourth birthday—and became the first sub-Saharan nation to become independent from Britain. Today, Ghana's economy is supported by gold mines, factories, and cocoa production for multinational companies like Nestle and Cadbury. Many Ghanaians follow a religious combination of Christianity and animism, communicating with and making offerings to the spirits of their ancestors. "To the dismay of the missionaries who brought Christianity to Ghana, many of those who had jubilantly converted also continued their ancestral traditions. They saw Jesus, born of a virgin and resurrected from death, as one of God's countless miracles, along with thirsty ancestors and objects that could think." (p. 26)

Ghana's constitutional democracy has made it one of the most stable governments in the region, and the work of elected officials is complemented by hundreds of local kings. Kings serve many roles in Ghanaian society: resolving disputes (rather than in the courtroom), working with the government to build schools, roads, sanitation systems, and managing land use. Ruling with an esteemed council of elders, including a *tsiami*—the king's official spokesman—kings must pay tribute to their ancestors. "Kings were the custodians of Ghana's vibrant cultural heritage. [...] Kings and all they stood for were what made Ghana Ghana, rather than just another former British colony like, say, Canada." (p. 18)

"I realized that on this earth, we all have a calling. We have to be ready to accept it because helping my people has really helped me a lot to know that I can really touch their lives."

– King Peggy, 2013 CNN interview

Nana Peggy is the king of Otuam, a coastal village with a population around 7,000. Otuam has one paved road, Main Street, where there is a police station, a Methodist church, and the royal palace that Peggy and her regent Nana Kwesi restored. Many residents live in mud huts with thatched roofs. Located about 90 minutes from Cape Coast (population 83,000), residents of Otuam speak a distinct dialect of Fante: "the Otuam dialect was linguistic proof of the town's scant interaction with the wider world" (p. 20). The local economy depends heavily on fishing, with fishermen working up to eight hours a day, six days a week, to collect mackerel, herring, red snapper, tilapia, and salmon in handmade canoes. Farmers in the region grow pineapples, yams, and papayas. The government set up a running water system in 1950, but since the pipes went dry in 1977, families—usually children—are responsible for collecting their own water from boreholes dug on the outskirts of town.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Why was Peggy chosen as the next king of Otuam?
- 2 How would *you* handle a life-changing call in the middle of the night informing you that you were to be the new king?
- 3 There are many different cultural traditions in the book. Which did you find most interesting and why? Are any like traditions that you practice?
- 4 Is Peggy's gender important to her position as king? Is gender a factor in how she is treated by the elders?
- 5 Throughout the book, Peggy discovers that many in Otuam are deceptive in their dealings with her. How does this deception affect her rule?
- 6 The deception Peggy faces causes her great angst and she works to, as she says, "bring dignity" to her people. Do you think she handles the many situations and obstacles well or not?
- 7 Why do you think Peggy views her position as king as her "calling?"



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We hope that your participation in One Maryland One Book inspires you to keep talking about the many thought-provoking topics examined in *King Peggy*. The following list of books and movies might also be of interest. We encourage you to continue your exploration!

BOOKS

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

Set in pre-colonial Nigeria, this widely-read African novel by famed author Chinua Achebe tells the tragic story of Igbo leader Okonkwo as he resists the growing influence of British colonizers. (Teens may also enjoy this book.)

Purple Hibiscus by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Like her mother and brother, Kambili, a 15-year-old Nigerian girl, suffers the abuses of her tyrannical father secretly and hopelessly. Then a visit to Auntie Ifeoma, a widowed university professor in another town, opens her mind and changes her family.

Say You're One of Them by Uwem Akpan

Set in various African countries, these five moving stories show children struggling to surmount poverty, war, and disease. (Teens may also enjoy this book.)

Powder Necklace by Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond

Sent from London, where she lives with her mother, to a girls' boarding school in rural Ghana to avoid the "fast life," Lila has just begun to adapt when she is recalled to London, then sent away again to live with her father in Manhattan. These journeys lead her to a new understanding of self.

She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England before Elizabeth by Helen Castor

Medieval historian Helen Castor provides an entertaining and informative look at these exceptional women who dominated their times. (Nonfiction)

The House at Sugar Beach: In Search of a Lost African Childhood by Helene Cooper

Journalist Helene Cooper grew up in a privileged household in Liberia but a violent coup thrust her family into exile. This is the story of her return 23 years later to find her foster sister. (Nonfiction)

Cocktail Hour under the Tree of Forgetfulness by Alexandra Fuller

In her fourth book, Fuller returns with stories of her family's time in Africa in this sequel to *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*. This is the story of her mother and her father and the Africa that they loved during the end of British colonialism. (Nonfiction)

Measuring Time by Helon Habila

Twin brothers who dream of fame as children in a Nigerian village find their dream tested as they mature. One becomes a soldier, while the other works as teacher, writer, and historian, jobs that give him insight into local politics.

Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route by Saidiya Hartman

Retracing the long journey of African slaves through the hinterlands of Ghana, Hartman creates a fascinating tapestry of history, biography, and travel. (Nonfiction)

The White Masai: An Exotic Tale of Love and Adventure by Corinne Hofmann

This is Hofmann's account of her attempt to surmount cultural and linguistic barriers and create a life with a Samburu warrior named Lketinga. (Nonfiction)

The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver

In the late 1950s, an evangelical minister from the American Southwest brings his wife and four young daughters to a primitive Congo village. The novel follows a family and culture through thirty-plus years of changes.

The Girl Who Married a Lion and Other Tales from Africa

compiled by Alexander McCall Smith

Smith, author of *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series, offers a collection of folktales from Zimbabwe and Botswana.



King Peggy with her Soul and Queen Mother on Gazetting Day

photo by Eleanor Herman

BOOKS (cont.)

The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency by Alexander McCall Smith

This is the first in a series of mystery novels that are charming, witty studies of African culture. They star Mma Precious Ramotswe, Botswana's first female private investigator.

Baking Cakes in Kigali by Gaile Parkin

After moving to an apartment complex in Rwanda from nearby Tanzania, Angel Tungaraza uses her cake-making business to reach out to people, especially women, whose lives are scarred by genocide and AIDS.

Wife of the Gods by Kwei Quartey

The mysterious death of a young female medical student takes detective inspector Darko Dawson from his home in Ghana's capital to a village whose ancient customs and vision of women collide with his urbane sensibility.

Ghana Must Go by Taiye Selasi

When Kweku Sai dies suddenly, the family whom he abandoned in America years earlier—his first wife and their four children, now established in varied lives (doctor, artist, law student, and college student)—return to their roots in Ghana and one another.

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives by Lola Shoneyin

The first three wives of a rich, polygamous businessman in Nigeria feel threatened by the better educated fourth wife in this funny yet poignant novel.

This Child Will Be Great: Memoir of a Remarkable Life by Africa's First Woman President by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

The first elected female head of state in Africa, current president of Liberia, and winner of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, Sirleaf describes her early life, her imprisonment and exile, and her ultimate triumph. (Nonfiction)

Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away by Christie Watson

At first the move with her brother and mother from a Nigerian city to her mother's ancestral home, a much more rustic place in the Niger Delta, shocks 12-year-old Blessing. Then her grandmother helps her appreciate her new world.

Heart of Dryness: How the Last Bushmen Can Help Us Endure the Coming Age of Permanent Drought by James G. Workman

Workman chronicles the cautionary tale of the Bushmen of the Kalahari and their remarkable, widely-publicized battle over water with the government of Botswana, and explores the larger story of what many feel is becoming the primary resource battleground of the 21st century: water. (Nonfiction)



Children carrying water - Otum
photo by Eleanor Herman



Main Street - Otum
photo by Eleanor Herman

YOUNG ADULTS

Between Sisters by Adwoa Badoe

After failing almost all of her final exams, Ghanaian sixteen-year-old Gloria moves to Kumasi to work as a housekeeper and nanny for a wealthy female doctor, Christine. Christine teaches Gloria how to read and promises to pay for her to attend dressmaking school, but along the way Gloria must learn about trust and the disease no one talks about.

The Door of No Return by Sarah Mussi

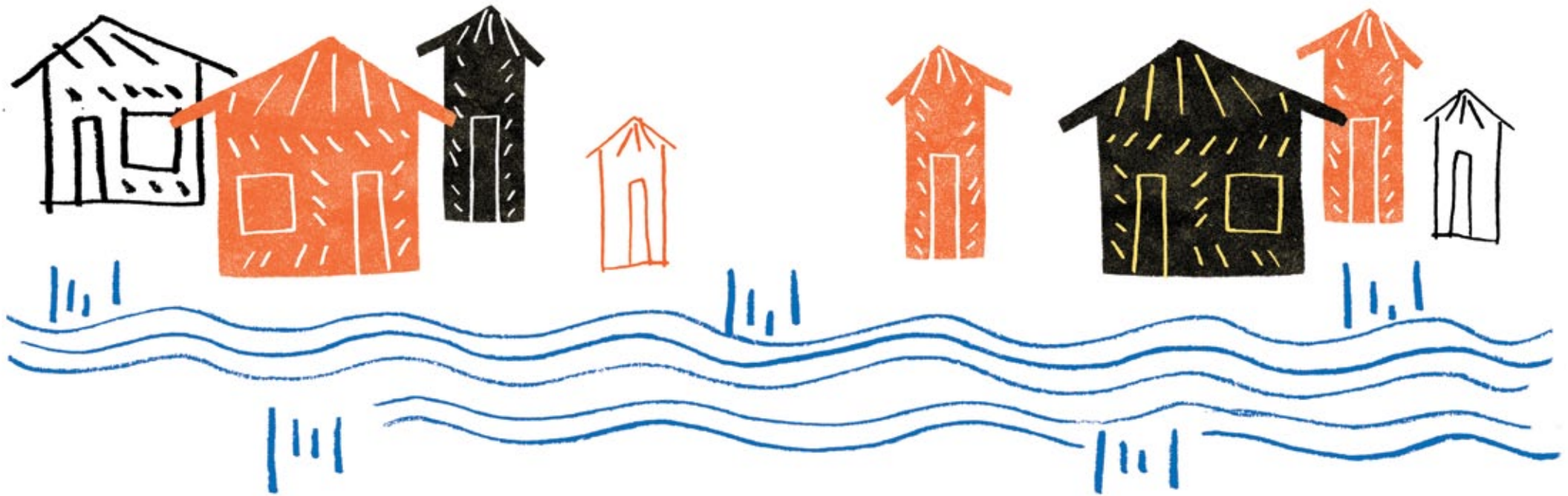
Zach Baxter's grandfather always told him that he was the descendant of African kings whose treasure was stolen when his ancestors were sold into slavery. When his grandfather is murdered, Zach travels to Ghana to track down his family's history.

The Other Side of Truth by Beverley Naidoo

When Nigeria's corrupt military government kills their mother, twelve-year-old Sade and her brother Femi think their lives are over. Fearing for their safety, their father, an outspoken journalist, smuggles the children out of Nigeria and into London. When they get there, they find themselves lost and alone, with no one to trust and no idea when—or if—they will ever see their father again.

Aya: Life in Yop City by Marguerite Abouet, illustrated by Clement Oubrerie

Set on the Ivory Coast in the late 1970s, this graphic novel tells the story of nineteen-year-old Aya, her easygoing friends Adjoua and Bintou, and their meddling relatives and neighbors. It's a wryly funny, breezy account of the simple pleasures and private troubles of everyday life in Yop City.



CHILDREN

Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain by Verna Aardema

Told through rhyme and bright pictures, this Kenyan tale tells how Kipat brought rain for his cows. Ages 5-8

Anna Hibiscus by Atinuke

Anna Hibiscus is the first in a series set in modern West Africa comprised of several short stories about Anna's life in a big, happy, multi-generational family. Ages 5-8

The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories by Adwoa Badoe

This compilation of Ananse stories, featuring striking, colorful illustrations, was collected by the author while growing up in Ghana. It contains ten stories about the trickster spider. Ages 6-9

Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti by Gerald McDermott

This is a classic adaptation of a traditional story that explains how the moon came to be in the sky. Ages 5-8

One Hen: How One Small Loan Made a Big Difference by Katie Smith Milway

Inspired by true events, *One Hen* tells the story of how a Ghanaian community pooled their money to grant one another micro business loans. When Kojo receives one, he is able to grow his first hen and her eggs into a successful poultry business with positive outcomes for his entire community. Ages 7-10

MOVIES

Sankofa (1993, 125 min., unrated) - Directed by Haile Gerima

Sankofa is the story of Mona, a self-possessed African-American woman, sent on a spiritual journey through time to experience the pain of slavery and the discovery of her African identity.

Emmanuel's Gift (2005, 80 min., rated G) - Directed by Lisa Lax and Nancy Stern

Set in Ghana, this documentary tells the story of Emmanuel Ofose Yeboah who was born with a deformed right leg. Against incredible odds, Emmanuel rides his bicycle across the nation, becoming a hero and effecting political and social change in Ghana.

Pray the Devil Back to Hell (2008, 72min., unrated) - Directed by Gini Reticker

Pray the Devil Back to Hell, winner of the 2008 Tribeca Film Festival for Best Documentary Feature, is an inspiring film about a group of Liberian women from various faiths who unite in silent protest to end the civil war and bring peace to their country. As a result of their courageous efforts, the first female head of state was elected.

La Source (2012, 71 min., unrated) - Directed by Patrick Shen

This documentary features the uplifting story of Josue Lajueness, a Haitian Princeton janitor, who returns to his country and realizes his dream of providing clean water to his village. In 2012, *La Source* was nominated for the Social Impact Award at the Silverdocs Documentary Festival and won Best Documentary at the 2013 Omaha Film Festival.

Discovering the Music of Africa (2004, 22 min., unrated) - Directed by Bernard Wilets

This film shows how the music and rhythms of Africa, especially Ghana, are used as both music and means of communication. The film also depicts several traditional dances.

Kente: Woven Ceremonial Cloths of Ghana (2005, 48 min., unrated) - Directed by Janet Willoughby

Filmed on location, this documentary shows how Kente cloth is woven and the traditions of this celebrated textile.

Last Call at the Oasis (2011, 105 min., rated PG-13) - Directed by Jessica Yu

Winner of the 2012 Newport Beach Film Festival for Outstanding Achievement in Filmmaking-Environmental, this documentary focuses on water, one of our most precious resources, and its future sustainability.



The content and resources of this guide were created and compiled with the assistance of the staff of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. Portions have been reprinted with permission from Anchor Books.

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