

# Film Guide *for Tubabs In Africa*

## A Teacher's Guide for the Classroom

### Synopsis

The Gambia is one of the smallest and least developed countries in Western Africa, bordered by Senegal and the Atlantic Ocean. Filmmakers Amy Flannery, Mary Flannery, and Michael Ford followed eight college students and their professor from St. Mary's College of Maryland to The Gambia for culture and language training, extensive travel, and ethnographic fieldwork. After two weeks of language and culture training near the coastal capital city of Banjul, the students travel in country to rural Bajakunda where they encounter the stark realities of a developing country: no running water, no electricity, and dirt roads. Upon their return to the capital, Anne works in a women's communal garden, Summer assists midwives, and Andrew goes ten miles offshore with local fisherman in a wooden pirogue. Together, the students explore differences between African and American culture, language, religion, work, and living conditions.

### Suggested Uses

Grades 6-12: Geography, Social Studies, Anthropology, Biology, World History; or, twelve to eighteen year olds.

### Character Subjects

Pam Wye, age 19 -Undecided Major  
 Will James, age 20 -Biology Major  
 Samantha Sissman, age 22 -Sociology/Anthropology Major  
 Summer Wember, age 23 -Anthropology Major  
 Robert White, age 20 - Philosophy and Political Science Major  
 Anne Dailey, age 21- Anthropology Major  
 Bill Roberts -Professor of Anthropology at St. Mary's College of Maryland  
 Adam Njie -Language and Culture Teacher  
 Musa L. Sanko -Language and Culture Teacher

### Objectives

- The student will compare and contrast his or her own life, environment and culture with that of contemporary Gambians.
- The student will analyze the impact of colonialism, imperialism and slavery upon developing Gambia.
- The student will explore issues of identity and power between the US and The Gambia.
- The student will evaluate documentary film for its objectivity, thoroughness, and/or anthropological uses.

**A film by Amy Flannery, Mary Flannery, Michael Ford**  
 Color, 56 minutes, 30 seconds, ©2003

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<http://www.yellowcat.com>

*"Tubabs is a 'reality show' about something very important, the attempt to understand another culture. It offers key insights about both American and West African cultures. Its format will intrigue students. This study guide helps students and teachers dig below the surface."*  
 — Mary Anne Saul, North Reading High School, MA

## Standards

*The College Board Advanced Placement © May 2004 - 2005*

## Human Geography

- III. Cultural patterns and processes
  - B. Cultural differences
    - 1. Language
    - 2. Religion
    - 3. Ethnicity
    - 4. Gender
    - 5. Popular and folk culture
  - D. Cultural landscapes and cultural identity
    - 1. Values and preferences
    - 2. Symbolic landscapes and sense of place
- IV. Political organization of space
  - B. Evolution of the contemporary political pattern
    - 2. Colonialism and Imperialism

*Massachusetts Department of Education:  
History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, 2003*

## World Geography

- Compare the standard of living in various countries today using gross domestic product per capita as an indicator.
- Identify when modern African countries became independent nations and explain how independence was achieved.
- Describe the political and social status of women in selected countries in Africa.
- Describe major ethnic and religious groups in various countries in Africa.
- Describe the major obstacles to economic development in many African nations, including linguistic, tribal, and religious diversity; corrupt government; the lack of widespread education; and the political boundaries established in the 19th century by European nations and the legacy of their rule.
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## World History I

Describe the development and effects of the trans-African slave trade to the Middle East from the 8th century on, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the Western Hemisphere from the 16th century on.

## World History II

Identify major developments of African history in the 19th and early 20th centuries, e.g. Africa's interaction with imperialism, agricultural changes and new patterns of employment.

*National Council for the Social Studies' Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies, 1994*

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of: culture and cultural diversity; the ways human beings view themselves in and over time; people, places, and environments; individual development and identity; interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions; how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance; how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services; relationships among science, technology, and society; global connections and interdependence; and the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

## Vocabulary

**Colonialism** - The exploitation of a weak country by a stronger one, especially as it pertains to economic resources.

**Culture** - Behavior, beliefs, art, institutions, and all products of human thought that express a particular period, class, community, or population.

**Dalasi** - Gambian form of currency.

**Ethnocentric** - The belief that one's own ethnic group is superior to that of others.

**Ethnography** - Descriptive anthropological and documentary films and/or written texts.

**Griot** - Western African storyteller who passes on the oral history and tradition of a family or village.

**Gris-Gris** - Pronounced "gree-gree," the term refers to small, leather pouches worn around the neck, arm, or waist that contain amulets believed to ward off evil or bring good luck. In the film, Andrew refers to these as "ju-jus."

**Pirogue** - Narrow, wooden boat with an outboard motor.

**Slavery** - Forced work performed under harsh conditions for little or no pay.

**Tubab** - Derived from "two bob," the term originally indicated the standard fee paid to Gambians in exchange for odd jobs performed during British Colonial rule. The term now refers to foreigners.

## Before the Film

These questions can be discussed with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Watch the film until the title, “Up Country” and map appear. Stop the film and have students compare their responses to those of the college students who travel to The Gambia.

1. What do you know or believe to be true about The Gambia, Gambians and how they live? What are some similarities and differences between their lifestyle and yours?
2. Jot down five to ten questions you have about The Gambia specifically, Africa in general, or inhabitants of both? What are some ways in which you could discover the answers to these questions?
3. If you were planning a trip to The Gambia, a small country in Western Africa, what kind of environment, living conditions and lifestyle would you expect? How would you prepare for an extended stay?
4. What kind of information about America would you hope to convey to the Gambian people that you meet? How could you do convey this information if you do not speak a common language?

## During the Film

Students should keep notes during the film and jot down questions as they arise. A graphic organizer, such as the one below, is recommended to record insights concerning the values and discoveries of both Gambians and Americans featured in the film:

While the teacher might choose to stop the tape to discuss some of the following issues, many are not developed or answered until the end of the film. The following questions focus on the higher-order thinking skills included in Bloom’s taxonomy, such as application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, rather than recall.

1. When the bus gets stuck in the mud, some students continue on to their destination by foot, while others stay with the bus. None of them appear to assist the bus or driver by pushing; the Gambian school children, however, interrupt their day to help push collectively. Why didn’t the American students stay to help push the bus? What contrasts, if any, does this indicate to you concerning American and Gambian behavior, values, and/or priorities?
2. In discussing their expectations and preparations for the trip, Andrew suggests that the Gambians live and work in “prehistoric, primitive” ways. Later, he discovers that, despite the lack of technology like Global Positioning Satellites (GPS), compasses, flares, and radios, the Gambians are very competent fishermen. Discuss Andrew’s changing perceptions. What informs his initial opinion? What events cause him to change his mind?

3. The students express many different concerns about money: Andrew buys too much in the beginning, Will enjoys haggling, while Summer and Anne suggest that they are mistaken for being wealthy because they are American. Discuss the different perceptions of wealth that both the Americans and Gambians hold.

4. Will says that all of the American students are tubabs because they are foreigners, but Rob does not identify with that term because he is not white. Compare and contrast the following binaries: white/nonwhite, foreigner/native, first world/third world or developed/developing country. What do these relationships mean for Americans, Gambians, the college students, and/or audiences of the film? The teacher may choose to construct a T-chart or other graphic organizer comparing and contrasting some of these terms. The student can write an essay analyzing these binary terms in the context of the film, current events, and/or their own lives.

5. Pam says she cannot imagine living in The Gambia for the rest of her life, while Anne says that the Gambians live at a much slower pace than the college students. Later, Will suggests that many people “have nothing to do.” At the end of the film, however, Anne thanks the Gambian women for taking time out of their busy day to teach her gardening skills. Discuss the students’ changing perceptions about the Gambian pace of life? What do the students learn about people’s work in The Gambia? How is it similar to or different from that in America?

6. During a discussion about anthropological fieldwork, Will says that the purpose of ethnography is to understand things about a culture that the people in the culture may not understand themselves. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Is this level of understanding possible? If so, how? What do you believe the purpose of ethnography to be? How could you go about conducting an ethnography of your own culture? What would you choose to study? *The teacher will need to thoroughly define ethnography and perhaps provide examples in order for students to answer this question. In addition, the teacher can follow up on this inquiry with an assignment to plan and conduct an ethnography of the student’s school culture, family culture, ethnic group, religious affiliation, or community.*

7. Summer, Pam, and Anne initiate a trash collection. What is the Gambians’ general attitude towards litter? Why is there such a disparity between the attitudes of the people in the village and the American women? Are there similar areas in your school, community, city, or home? What can you infer about The Gambia’s public services based on the information the audience is given? What additional questions do you have concerning the state of living in The Gambia? How can you find the answers to your questions?

8. Professor Roberts divides the students into groups and sends them on errands. Why does he do this? What techniques do the students use to find food for the group? Are they effective? What could you do differently?

9. When the group travels to the eco-tourism camp, Tumani Tenda, Professor Roberts notes that it was established to provide an “authentic African village” experience for tourists/foreign visitors. What aspects of the Gambian people and their lifestyles were included in this camp in order to make it “authentic”? What do you believe to be “authentically” African and how did you arrive at your notion of “authenticity”? What would you advise Gambians see or do to have an “authentic” American experience if they visited your city or town for the first time? Would their experience accurately represent your culture?

10. What do the college students learn about The Gambia? How do they learn these lessons? *The teacher may want to compare learning inside and outside of the classroom by using a T-chart or other graphic organizer. Students can compare the lessons learned in the film with what they learn inside and outside of the classroom. Encourage students to move beyond “book smarts” and “street smarts” to analyze modes of knowing that are not easily identifiable or quantifiable.* What have you learned from experience that you could not have learned from a formal lesson? What is the value and meaning of your knowledge obtained from inside versus outside the traditional classroom?

11. Despite all of the perceived differences between their own lives and those of the Gambian people, did the students find any similarities? Can you identify any similarities between the Gambian people and the college students that they may not have identified? Can you identify any similarities between the Gambian people and yourself?

### After the Film

These questions can be discussed with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Applying the questions to particular subjects in the film will encourage the class to be more specific. The teacher may want to put each character subject’s name on a card, distribute the cards to small groups, have each group answer all four questions about that particular college student, and then share their conclusions with the class.

1. How would you have reacted to an extended stay in The Gambia? Would your reactions be similar to or different from those of the college students’?
2. What lessons did the American students learn from their trip to Africa? What events or circumstances affected their opinions and perceptions? Compare their opinions and attitudes from the beginning of the trip to the end of the trip.
3. How did the student’s preparations affect their stay?
4. How did the students convey respect, love, or understanding to the Gambians even though they did not speak the same language?

### Extension Activities

The following activities were designed for different types of intelligences. The categories, based on the research of Howard Gardner, are next to each assignment. While the categories of interpersonal and intrapersonal are not included, many of the activities also appeal to those intelligences.

While the activities may require internet research, additional inquiries can be made at your school and public libraries, state facilities, nonprofit cultural groups, and tourist agencies.

The teacher may choose to assign these activities to individual students or small groups. Some of these activities are more appropriate for grades 9-12 than for grades 6-8.

**Verbal/linguistic** - After researching Goree Island’s Musée des Esclaves, write or record an oral history from a fictional slave, one who may have passed through the Island en route to the New World via the slave ships. Where did the slave come from? How was the slave captured? How long was she at sea? Where did she go in the New World? What was his or her life like in the New World? To whom is she telling the story and what does she hope to teach the listener? This project can easily accommodate two students if the interview is conducted in a question and answer format. The teacher may require the students to perform the narrative for an audience.

**Spatial** - Plan an extended trip to multiple countries in Africa. What sights would you visit? Where would you stay? What would you eat? How would you travel? Construct a series of postcards or Powerpoint slides—one for each stop—that illustrate your journey. Include a picture on the front, a brief letter on the back, and a postage stamp identifying the location from where you mailed the postcard.

**Logical/mathematical** - How many Dalasi, or Gambian currency, are in a US dollar? Look up the appropriate conversion to help you budget an extended trip to The Gambia, including airfare, in-country travel, food, lodging, and sightseeing. Or, after determining how much a typical Gambian makes in a year (estimates vary but are generally around \$320 per capita) and how she budgets daily expenses, compare this figure to the typical income and yearly expenses of an American. What is the disparity of wealth between the median Gambian family and the median U.S. family? The student’s work may take the form of a spreadsheet with accompanying written explanations.

**Verbal/linguistic** - Describe a day in the life of one of the following professions: farmer, blacksmith, midwife, or fisherman. Use time markers that are specific to the profession, like sunrise for a farmer, rather than hands on a clock. The teacher may require the students to don appropriate dress and perform the narrative for

an audience. The student's product may take the form of journal entries or a time line, either on paper or digital.

**Naturalistic** - Utilizing the following resources—Abuko Nature Reserve, Bijolo Forest Park, Kiang West National Park, Karinti Tanji River Bird Reserve, and The River Gambia National Park—construct an animal guide, perhaps including birds, fish, or mammals, for The Gambia. Include facts about 10-20 different species and a diagram for each with identifying characteristics. Some of the creatures you may want to include are the White-backed Night Heron, Klaas's Cuckoo, Hippopotamus, Chimpanzee, Guinea Baboon, or the West African Manatee. The students work make take the form of a booklet, flashcards, or Powerpoint presentation.

**Naturalistic** - Organize a Gambian meal for your class. Find recipes for the following Gambian dishes: *Supakanja* or beef, fish, and okra stew; *Plasas* or spinach stew; *Fufu* or mashed yams; and *Chakery* or sweet couscous. Cook and enjoy, but be sure to observe Gambian rules of etiquette: eat out of a communal bowl with your clean right hand only, remove your shoes, keep talking to a minimum, and burp aloud to show that you enjoyed the meal. Try locating kola nuts so you can discover for yourself what they actually taste like. Kola nuts, which do contain caffeine, can be obtained online through herbal import companies. They are generally believed to combat fatigue or hunger.

**Spatial** - Create a map that illustrates the routes used by the Transatlantic Slave Trade including historically-correct boundaries for countries in both Africa and the New World. Illustrate your map with seven to fifteen bulleted facts and figures, such as estimates on how many slaves were transported in each ship.

**Logical/mathematical** - The primary tourist areas in The Gambia are coastal regions where hotels sometimes remove mangroves or alter the estuaries, thereby effecting the plant and wildlife diversity, one of the main sights tourists come to see in The Gambia. Plan an Eco-Hotel and Tour company that includes the following elements: a review of the competition and analysis of the industry (Who are the tourists? Where do they come from? How many come each year? When do they come?); a description of your company, your services, and what makes it different; an original company name, hotel name, and advertising campaign; spreadsheet of operating costs and projected income for the first three years; and a blueprint of what the facility looks like. Assemble your work into a bound project proposal.

**Musical/rhythmic** - After investigating your family's genealogy, write and perform a griot's song about the history and identity of your own family and the place in which they live. You should construct a 21-string *kora* (a cross between a harp and guitar), a 5-string *kontingo* or *ngoni*, or a wooden-slatted *balaphone* (similar to a xylophone or marimba) to accompany the song.

**Spatial** - Create a pamphlet or Powerpoint presentation for international volunteers looking to work in The Gambia. Include summaries, illustrations, facts and figures for 5-10 sites throughout the country as well as a description of the work they could perform and the people who would benefit from the work. Use your persuasive language skills to convince volunteers to pick The Gambia. You may want to focus on work pertaining to ecological conservation, education, eco-tourism, HIV/AIDS prevention, or community development.

**Bodily-kinesthetic** - The film depicts several examples of dancing, but the purpose is not explained. What are some different types of dance, e.g. religious, celebratory, amusement, etc.? Do the dances of men and women differ? Does the presence of tourists effect the Gambians' dance? Prepare a presentation or demonstration on 1-2 types of music, dance, and/or accompanying dress from West Africa. Construct a T-chart or other graphic organizer comparing West African modes of expression with American Hip-hop or your favorite type of music. How do the dress, rhythm, lyrics, and movement differ? Use clips of music obtained online to assist your demonstration of the dances. This assignment requires that the student perform at least two different dances with appropriate music and dress. Online clips of songs can sometimes be obtained for free but can also be purchased for as little as \$.99 each. Encourage students to utilize free community resources first, such as school and public libraries, community dance groups, and/or dance instructors.

### Research Topics and Writing Assignments

1. Discuss the quality - both attributes and hardships - of women's lives and work in The Gambia. You may want to include a short discussion about the communal gardens and hospital in which Anne and Summer work.
2. Investigate some of the apparent differences between Gambian and American life depicted in the film, such as medical care and hygiene: What were traditional childbirth customs before the clinic was established? How are Western systems of health-care complicated by different ethnic groups and their opinions of propriety or hygiene? What were traditional customs regarding toiletry before bathrooms were built? Language and education: What languages do Gambian children learn in school? How is the education system structured? At what age do students stop attending school? Food storage and preparation: Are bugs in the bread a usual occurrence? How much of their food do Gambians purchase or grow? For all of these topics, discuss the conflicts between traditional ways of living and Western methods.
3. Research the conflicts between contemporary and traditional values concerning Gambian practices of polygamy. Explain the reasoning behind both systems, including differences in the quality of life for men, women, and children. Who opposes polygamy and why?

4. Research the history of colonialism in The Gambia, focusing on the impact of Portugal, Germany, and Britain. How did these relationships affect The Gambia's people, language, culture, resources, and economic health? What were the results, both short term and long term, of becoming an independent country? How did colonialism effect The Gambia similarly to or differently than neighboring Senegal? The teacher might modify this assignment to require the student to produce a timeline rather than a research paper.

5. Research the history of Islam in The Gambia and perhaps its neighboring country Senegal. When was Islam introduced? Who introduced Islam? How was the faith assimilated into existing beliefs? How did it conflict with existing beliefs? How did Gambians respond to those conflicts? Remind the student that Language and Culture Teacher Adam Njie said that while many of the students in the film expected all Muslims to hate Americans, Muslims actually have a wide variety of opinions regarding Americans, just as Americans have a wide variety of opinions regarding Muslims.

## Resources and Links

### *Gambian/West African Information*

Africa Server

[http://www.africaserver.nl/front\\_uk.htm](http://www.africaserver.nl/front_uk.htm)

An incredibly rich site for historical, cultural, political information and news about each African country. Search by country or theme. Special section about Africans in the Netherlands.

Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ga.html>

Facts about Gambia's geography, people, government, economy, communications, transportation, military, and transnational issues. The Gorée Institute

<http://www.goreeinstitute.org>

The site of a Senegalese institute with the mission of working towards open and self-sufficient societies in Africa - focused specifically on the community of Gorée. Website provides information on the institute's history, programs, and publications.

Lonely Planet

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/africa/gambia>

Lonely Planet travel guide's section on Gambia. Offers overview information about Gambia's population, yearly events, environment, culture, history, transportation systems; also recommends tourist activities, side trips, and additional readings.

Peace Corps in Gambia

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.wherepc.africa.thegambia>

Information about volunteering with the Peace Corps in Gambia - educational, environmental, and health programs.

Republic of The Gambia

<http://www.gambia.gm>

Gambia's official website offering information on the business environment, economic structure, political scene, trade policies, natural resources, and population statistics.

United Nations World Heritage Site / UNESCO – Gorée Island, Senegal

<http://webworld.unesco.org/goree>

Virtual tour of Gorée Island provides photographs, video clips, and texts that detail its history and significance. Site is in English and French.

United Nations Cyber School Bus

<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/index.asp?id=270>

Map and overview information about economy, environment, health, and technology in Gambia.

### *African Music/Art/Culture*

Afropop World Wide

<http://www.afropop.org>

African and world music radio stations, audio slideshows, photographs, online live programming, concert information, news headlines, and music discussion forums.

Calabash Music

<http://www.calabashmusic.com>

Fair trade world music available to download.

Cora Connection

<http://www.coraconnection.com>

West African folk band's site with information on the instruments, the history and the artists behind West African music and culture.

The Foundation of African Hip-Hop Culture Online

<http://www.africanhiphop.com>

News, discussion forums, and articles about hip-hop in and from Africa.

Gambian Griot School of Music and Dance

<http://home.planet.nl/~verka067>

West African music and dance information from the Gambian Griot School.

PBS/WNET's *Free to Dance* Resources

<http://wnet.org/freetodance/resources.html>

Website for *Free to Dance*, a documentary that "chronicles the crucial role that African-American choreographers and dancers have played in the development of modern dance as an American art form." Historical background, transcript and personal interviews,

supplementary biographies, lesson plans, and additional African-American dance resources.

West African Dance in Boston

<http://www.wadabo.org>

### Additional Films at *DER*

**Future Remembrance: Photography and Image Arts in Ghana (rd. 1998)**

By Tobias Wendl and Nancy du Plessis

An exuberant documentary examining photographers, sculptors and painters of Ghana as they talk about economic, social, cultural, aesthetic, and spiritual motivations for their work. Issues such as gender roles and the influence of American print media on local art arise as we watch the artists reconcile their artistic inspiration with outside pressures. Highly recommended for African studies, media and culture studies, art and ritual, and gender.

<http://www.der.org/films/future-remembrance.html>

**That Our Children Will Not Die (rd. 1978)**

By Joyce Chopra

Nigeria, with over 75 million people, is the most populous state in sub-Saharan Africa. In spite of rapid modernization, Nigeria continues to have one of the highest mortality rates in the world though many of the health problems that afflict the population are, in fact, preventable. This film examines three different community-based approaches to the delivery of primary health care services in culturally and geographically distinct regions of Nigeria.

<http://www.der.org/films/our-children-will-not-die.html>

**Wandering Warrior: The Life of Mpeti Ole Surum, A Maasai Warrior (1997)**

By Clifford Moskow and Rhonda Richards

Meet Mpeti Ole Surum, aka Tom, a Maasai Warrior from Kenya, as he markets himself to American schools and community groups as a cultural lecturer. See his rise to fame in his home country and assimilation in a new one.

<http://www.der.org/films/wandering-warrior.html>

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