Indigenous African Knowledge and Health System as Rites of Passage

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The objectives of this module include:

Introduction and exploration of Zulu worldviews through language, rites of passage, Ubuntu principles, and indigenous healing knowledge systems

Learners will cross-culturally relate these principles to their respective knowledge systems and contexts and through participatory projects interrogate their own power as agents of social justice

It is editable, adaptable, can be progressed individually or for a collective, as well as printed or accessed digitally.

Each one teach one!

The Tree of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems



Material Culture (microcosmos): Easily seen

Soil is the liminal space (mesocosmos)


Water's surface is the liminal space
Roots are parts of culture not easily seen
Ubuntu
Oral tradition
Rites of Passage
Worldview
Languages
Intergenerationality
Healing Traditions
Aesthetics of Form & Function
Relationship with the land
Communalism
Macrocosmos (sub and super)

"Here is a tree rooted in African soil, nourished with waters from the rivers of Africa. Come and sit under its shade and become, with us, the leaves of the same branch and the branches of the same tree." Robert Sobukwe

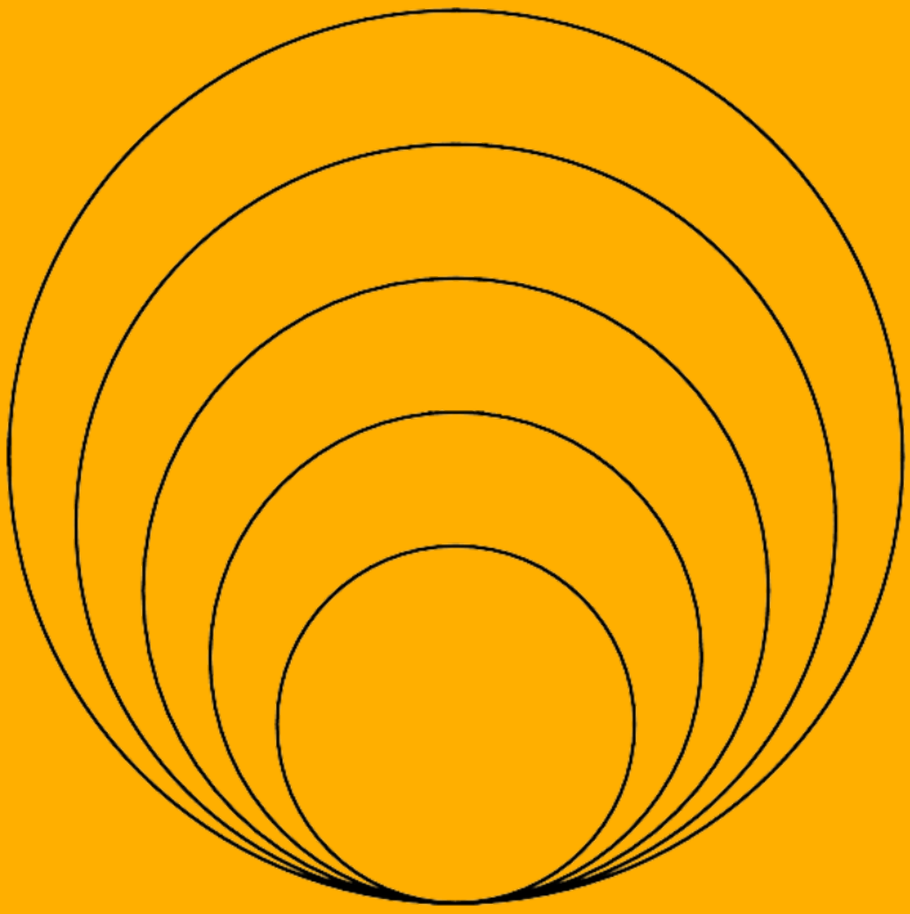


An African worldview roots itself in Black culture throughout the African Diaspora like the aerial roots of the Natal Fig (Ficus natalensis). This tree is indigenous to the Origin Center of Humanity, South Africa.

It is a useful metaphor that demonstrates the way an African worldview permeates throughout the Diaspora just as each of the roots touches down and fosters distinct and new growth that can also be traced back to the same tree (and worldview).[4]

Activity:

After reading the article below and reflecting on the "tree of indigenous knowledge" from the previous pages, fill in the chart to show your understanding of an African-centered worldview. Include Ubuntu.



Ubuntu

umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (Xhosa)

"A person is a person through other people"

Click Here or Scan the QR Code to read about Ubuntu

https://journals.ukzn.ac.za/index.php/soa/article/vie...

Although Ubuntu is arguably more endemic to cultures on African soil, there is a movement to recenter it within cultural and academic dialogues. This similarly includes articulating the values of an African worldview in the plethora of "mother tongues."

As of 2023, South Africa has 12 official languages however historically only two have been taught in schools. English and Afrikaans have been the "father tongues" through which paternalistic Dutch settlers and British colonialists have spread their worldview that includes values such as individualism, separation and dualism.

The movement to include isiZulu as a language of instruction in settings such as the University at KwaZulu Natal has found "aerial roots" in Cape Town as well. Afrikaaps (Kaaps) is being heralded as an indignous language that reflects the diverse compositions of people of color on the Cape (as opposed to a slang or inferior form of Afrikaans the language of the Boers)



Mural Art in Cape Town S. Africa
Depicting the spirit of Ubuntu as it exists in the language of Kaaps

Click Here for more info on Hip Hop Activism and Kaaps in S Africa

For people outside of Africa, the word and concept of Ubuntu may at first feel like a mispronunciation or dis-articulation.

Depending on your positionality, there may be several degrees of separation that are simultaneously doorways leading back to the center of experiencing oneness and beingess in this way.

For many who exist in the in-betweens dispersed throughout the African Diaspora, realizing Ubuntu necessitates a rite of passage and initiation to deepen into an African worldview.

The first threshold is to recognize Ubuntu in your own cultural heritage and pronounce it in your native tongue. And now for your first test....



SCAN ME

Enter the tree's doorway by clicking here or scanning the QR code

African Centered Rites of Passage

As the philosophy of Ubuntu recognizes the interconnectedness of all things, rites of passage ceremonies have been created to support and recognize the transition from one stage of development to another.

Activity 1:

Explore rites of passage through archeological artifacts from South Africa and relate it to your own experiences

https://www.iziko.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/0...

Click Here or Scan QR code for activity

Activity 2 Case Study

Connect the characteristics of adolescent rites of passage to a community activism program in South Africa

Click Here or Scan the QR code

Ubuntu as a Rite of Passage

Biological transitions are not the only stages that are marked by rites of passage.

Realizing Ubuntu in our lives may necessitate a "rite of passage" into living a realized expression of humaneness, empathy, and collective well-being. This paradigm shift calls for an ego-death and a shedding of notions of inferiority, individualism, and disharmony with the natural world.

Click Here or Scan the QR code to read the article

https://medium.com
/@chevannidavids/ubunt...

The Call/the Dream



Similarly, the call to awaken to our purpose constitutes a rite of passage. Within Nguni cultures of South Africa, indigenous knowledge systems support the call to become an Inyanga (herbalist) and/or a sangoma (mediumistic healer) through an initiation process that is akin to a rite of passage.

"It's a period of identity crisis that leads to renewed identity formation and the beauty of it is that it's ongoing. There's that first, formal, structured initiation process, but there is also so much that you learn afterwards in your own practice as your ancestors show you how to heal the people who are sent to you for help. You are always learning and, in turn ,always growing and becoming."

Katlego Tapala
Sangoma South Africa

The Path of the Inyanga and Sangoma

Initiation as a Rite of Passage

- **Separation**

According to Katlego Tapala a Sangoma, well-being is understood as having no anxieties regarding one's interconnection (Ubuntu). Interestingly, separation is the first stage of initiation and is characterized by ingulo. Separation may include physical, mental and social isolation.

- **Liminal / Transitory Space**

This is the in-between stage and may be experienced through tests and trials, the collapse of time-space, trance states, purging, and extrasensory experiences. Specific messages, acuity, and purpose are revealed.

- **Integration**

Re-entry into community in order to practice what has been learned. This return is often accompanied by challenging symptoms as one adjust to a new role or stage of development.

A choose your own adventure rite of passage exploration

Path of the Inyanga & Sangoma



isiZulu and Xhosa wor(l)d-view

- Gobela lead teacher for healers
- Hlenga to heal
- Umhlaba earth
- Umuthi: tree or medicine
- Inyanga herbalist and moon
- ukubhola: consultation/divination
- Sangoma a mediumistic healer
- Ingulo severe distress/illness caused by ancestors as call to initiation
- Diatola Divination tools

The Gobela

I am your gobela *and I will support you on your journey into becoming an Inyanga, Sangoma, neither or both. As your path unfolds, you will come across a variety of crossroads that require you make a choice. Remember, I and your ancestors will be there with you, and the choices you make will determine the tests you must pass, the skills you will demonstrate, and the knowledge you must acquire in order to complete your initiation.*



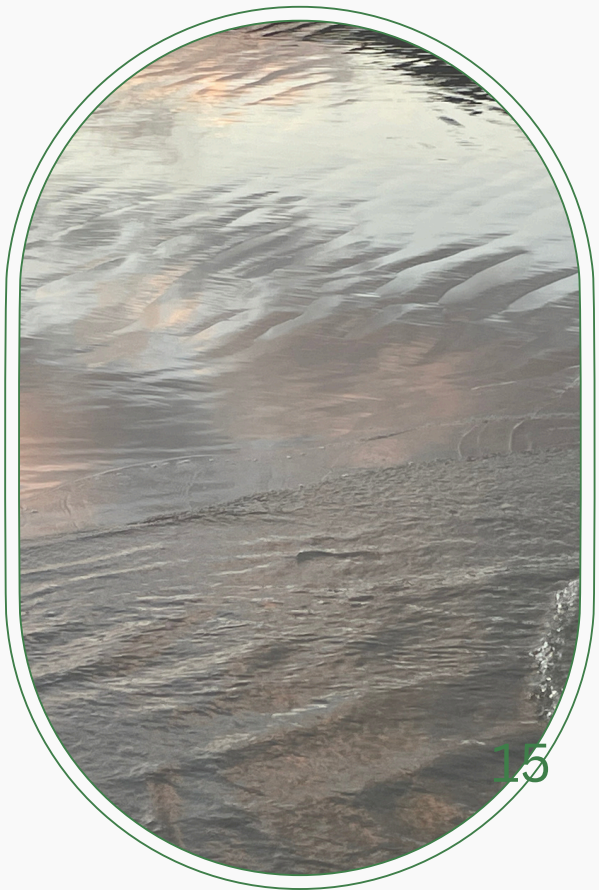
Ingulo

Lately you have been experiencing unusual symptoms. These fluctuating and unpredictable mental and emotional states include restlessness, confusion, swiftly changing emotions, fear, anxiety, and sleep disruptions. Your appetite has decreased; you have recurring stomach and headaches; you are chronically fatigued and have also experienced fainting spells. Due to these, you have indulged the need for isolation and withdrawn from responsibilities and your social circle.

Seek medical opinion
Go to pg. 16



Struggle on your own
Go to pg 17



Ingulo

The physician runs a series of tests but does not find anything bio-medically wrong, and refers you to a therapist. After several sessions with the therapist, you are given a diagnosis and refered to a psychiatrist who prescribes medication to treat your symptoms.

Although many of the most intrusive thoughts and debilitating symptoms have subsided, the medication has several side effects that cause you to feel numb. In addition, you have experienced vivid dreams where your ancestors speak to you, you are in mortal terror, or an event is revealed in a prophetic way.

Ingulo

In addition to the physical and emotional dis-ease, you have experienced vivid dreams where your ancestors speak to you, you are in mortal terror, or an event is revealed in a prophetic way.





Consult a Sangoma
go to pg 18

Explore herbalism as an alternative to medication
go to pg 23

Consultation with a Sangoma

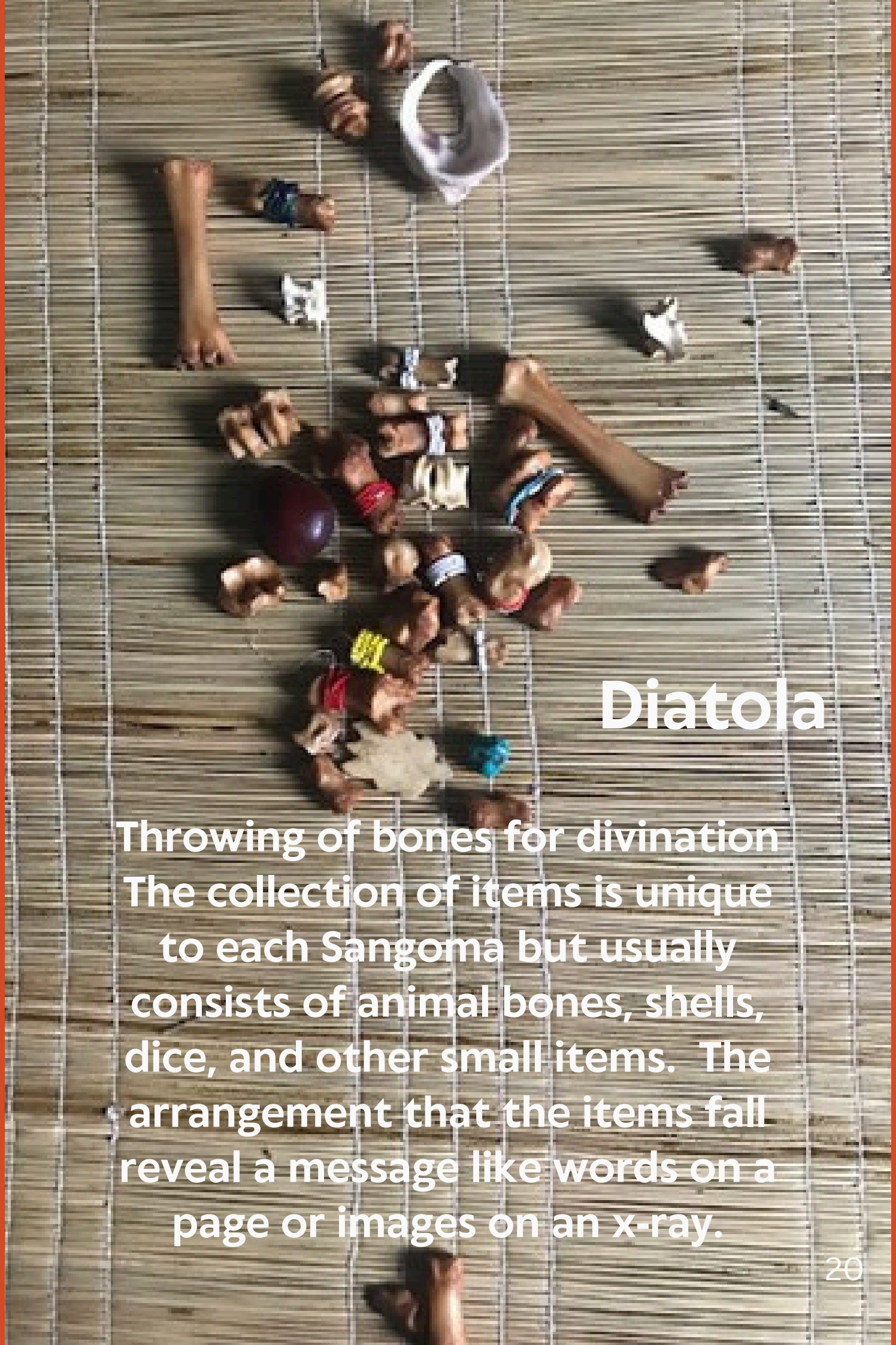


Indiginous health approach:
up to 80% of sub-Saharan Africa relies on traditional healing practices. These include consulting a Sangoma who conducts an inquiry into the totality of the person's being including the physical, communal, ancestral, and spiritual. As it stems from the philosophy of Ubuntu, it transcends the dualistic Western biomedical approach in that sessions are collaborative and address the whole communal person. Prescriptive treatment addresses both symptoms and the root.



ukubhola

During your consultation, you bring your experiences into the session and ask for guidance. The Sangoma calls on your ancestors and theirs and utilizes their instruments to assess the root causes of your dis-ease as well as what (if anything) your ancestors are guiding you to do.



Diatola

Throwing of bones for divination
The collection of items is unique to each Sangoma but usually consists of animal bones, shells, dice, and other small items. The arrangement that the items fall reveal a message like words on a page or images on an x-ray.



Door 1
Turn to page 22

The message from the divination illuminates the meaning of the dreams that you have been having. You are being called to choose a path.



Door 2
Go to pg 24



Door 3
Turn to pg 23

The doorway you chose is a solitary confinement cell at the prison that is memorialized at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg South Africa. It is a site and symbol of the brutality of apartheid

.

Your calling, path, and purpose has been interrupted and temporarily usurped by this oppressive system.

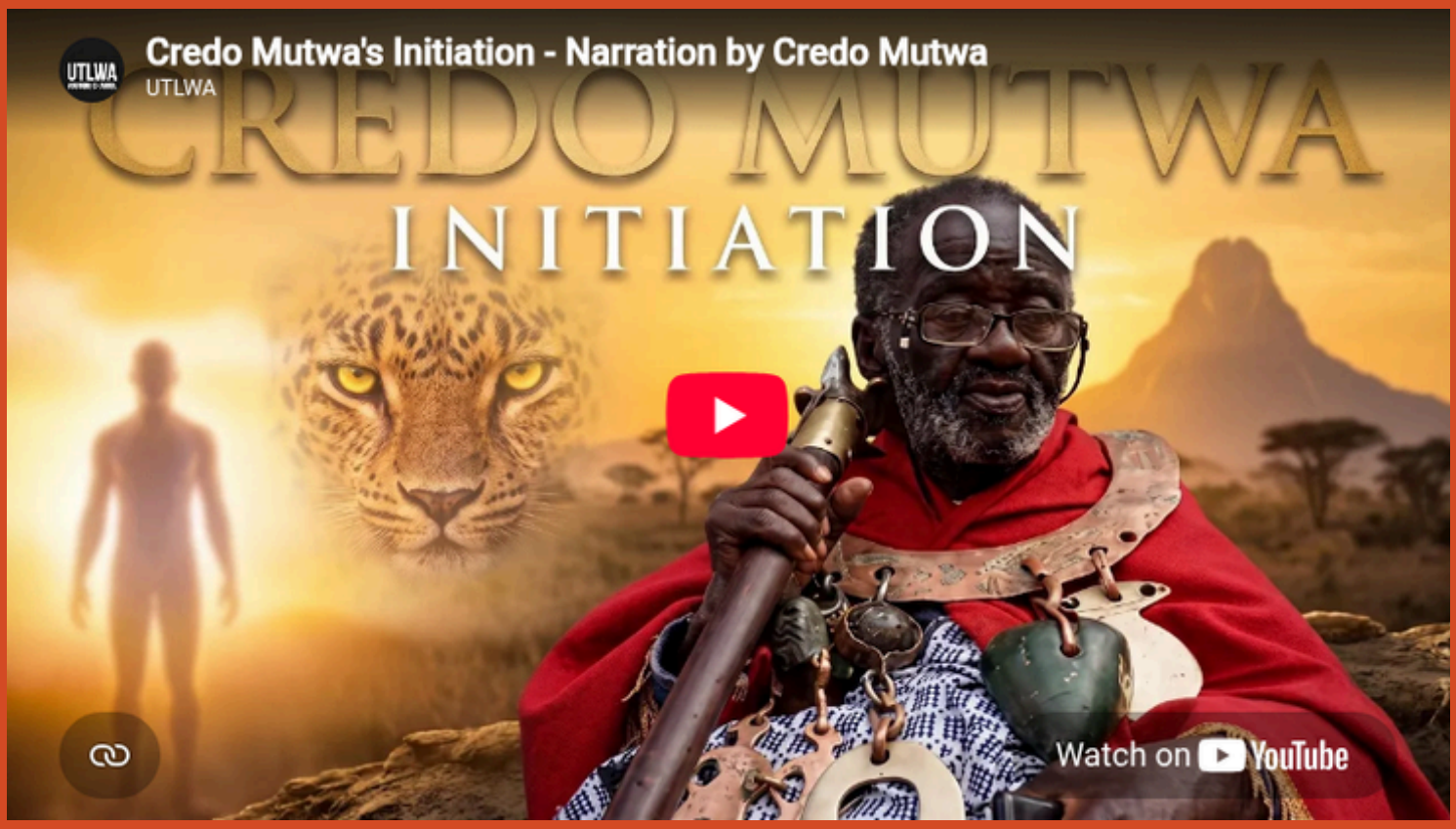
In order to regain footing on your path, you must interrogate and report on how South Africans fought against and resisted Apartheid.

https://www.constitutionhill.org.za/pages/history

Click here or Scan QR code to research. Then write a 1 page journal entry from the perspective of a South African Political prisoner. You can then regain your journey by turning to pg 21



A Sangoma's Initiation



Click above or Scan below

You have arrived at your intiation into becoming a Sangoma. Listen to the story of Credo Mutua, renown sangoma of South Africa, and imagine you are going through this process.

Activity: Depict your imagined initiation in artistic form. This can be song, dance, video, zine, visual art, etc. Then proceed to pg 28

An Inyanga's Initiation



Click here or Scan below

https://southafrica.co.za/medicinal-plants.html

You have arrived at your intiation into becoming an Inyanga.

Activity: Create a plant profile of 2-3 plants of South Africa that includes a picture, name, and medicinal uses. Match these 2-3 plant profiles with some from your region. Use one to make one of the preparations on the following pages

Preparations

- **Tea**

Mix of 1-3 dry herbs. Steep in hot water for 1-3 minutes and then drain and sip. May add honey to sweeten

- **Tincture**

Steep herb in a menstrum (90 or above proof alcohol or glycerin) for at least 6 weeks. Dry herbs 1: 3 parts fresh 2:3 parts. Store in a cool dry place and shake weekly. Steep and store liquid for up to a year.

- **Decoction**

Steep herbs overnight (6-8 hours min) in spring water; drain and drink

Preparations

- **Steam**

  Boiling water is added to fresh or dry plants. When still steaming yet temperate, the infused steam can be inhaled

- **Bath**

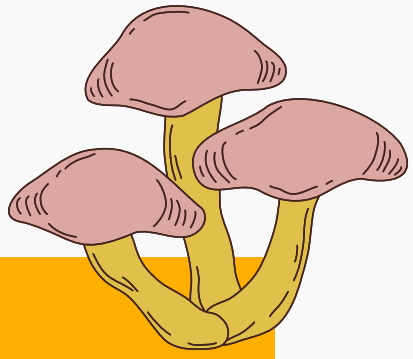
  Add herbs directly to hot bath water or create a tea/infusion and then pour into bath

- **Smudge**

  Burn dry herbs to smoke cleanse a space or person

Go to pg 28

Inyanga Initiaton Completion Projects



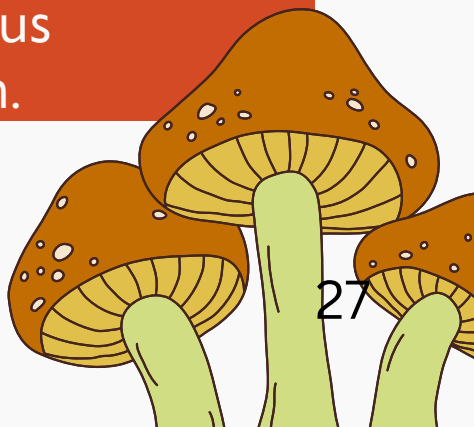
Umuthi crafting

Create an 3-5 herbal blends using ingredients that are significant to you, your experiences, skills, relations, and moments that are rite of passages in your life. In the spirit of Ubuntu, knowledge of at least 2 ingredients should have been gifted to you by someone else. Provide a recipe that includes a story or "prescriptive" effect for each blend.

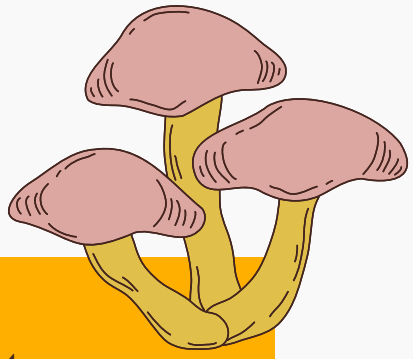


Ubuntu Meditation Journal

Sit and meditate with a specific aspect of nature (plant, tree, body of water, etc). Record each meditation in a journal. In the spirit of Ubuntu, at least 2 of these must take place with someone else and incorporate their experience. For each meditation, narrate the events, characters, and objects. Use your own indigenous knowledge system to interpret them.



Sangoma Initiaton Completion Projects



Ditaola

Create a collection of 5-10 objects that you you will use to perform Ukhubola. It should be a mix of items that are significant to you and your experiences, skills, relations, and moments that are rite of passages in your life. In the spirit of Ubuntu, at least 2 should have been gifted to you by someone else or the earth. Provide a description or story that explains the significance of each item.



Dream Journal

Create a dream journal that describes and interprets 5-10 dreams. In the spirit of Ubuntu, at least 2 of these must someone else's dreams. For each dream, narrate the events, characters, and objects. Use your own indigenous knowledge system (rather than a dream dictionary) to interpret them.





Resource Page

Click here