

SECTION

6

DEITY NAMES AND
PUBERTY/INITIATION
RITES

CULTURAL PRACTICES AND TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE

Cultural Practices

INTRODUCTION

This section introduces you to the concept of deity names amongst the ethnic groups in Ghana, focusing on the origins of the deity names in your culture. You will be guided to discover the reasons for and the importance of deity names. This study enables you to demonstrate t understanding of naming systems and to appreciate and respect the Ghanaian identity, culture and heritage. You The section also discusses the initiation into the adulthood (puberty rites) . The discussions will be focusing on the processes involved before, during and after the initiation in your culture and across other Ghanaian cultures. You will also study the significance of puberty rites to the initiates, their family and their community as whole. You should be able to explain some similarities and differences in the performance of initiation into adulthood between different Ghanaian cultures.

At the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explore deity names focusing on their origin and the reason.
- Discuss the process of initiation into adulthood (puberty rites: before, during and after
- Compare the process of initiation into adulthood rites in the respective cultures of Ghana.

Key ideas:

- Deity names take their origins from a specific deity
- They are connected to supernatural beings
- They show the bearers their historical connections
- Puberty is a stage when adolescents become capable of reproduction.
- Initiation means introducing someone into a society
- Puberty rites are performed for both boys and girls.

Deity Names

There are names we bear as a result of our associations with supernatural powers. These names are referred to as deity names. Before you read about deity names, you have to understand what deities are.

What are deities?

Deities are gods or goddesses. They are supernatural beings that are worshipped by people who believe they control or exert force over some of their deeds. Deities possess spiritual powers and some divine authority. They are often associated with religious beliefs and practices. They can be male (gods) or females (goddesses). Some examples of religion-based gods and goddesses are Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Aphrodite, Artemis, etc. In Ghana, every region or ethnic group has some deities they believe in. Some of the popular deities in Ghana include:

Ga: Dantu, Nae, Klote, La Kpa, etc.

Akan: Kune, Tegare, Nyamaa, Antoa, etc.

Dagomba: Tambo, etc.

Who are the popular deities in your community?

Deity names

Deity names are given to humans based on their beliefs and background of worship. Deity names are also specific names that families, communities, religions and cultures bear as a result of their affiliations with the deities.

Some deities' names

The following are some examples of deities among Ghanaians:

1. Among the Ewe people, the Anlos in the Volta region worship a deity known as 'Afa', god of divination and first son of the diviner 'Bokɔ' bears the name 'Amuzu'.
2. Among the Akan people, different gods and goddesses are associated with different days. Therefore, the day of the week on which people are born may affect their name. For instance, 'Adwo' is a god of Monday, hence the name Adwoa is assigned to females born on Monday and Kwadzo for males respectively.

Try saying the examples of deity names above. Ask your teacher to check your pronunciation. Do you know any examples of deity names in your community?

The origins of the deity names:

Origins of deity names vary from religion to religion and depend largely on the belief system and cultural practices of the people who assign and bear the names. For example, among the Ewes, deity names take their origin from Yeve (God of thunder), the Akan take their deity names from river deities, Dangme have drawn some names from the deity (God) of recreation and so on.

Do you know the origins of your name?

Reasons for the deity names

People bear deity names for a number of reasons and factors. Deity names can be assigned to the individual to describe the deity's roles, some are derived as a result of the divine nature of the deity. Others can be based on the inspiration taken from the deity and there are also those that can reflect the culture of a particular community or those that are based on the deity's personality trait or attributes.

Furthermore, when couples are finding it difficult to give birth, they consult deities for their intervention. They make vows and name the children after the deities to redeem their vows.

Importance of deity names

Deity names hold significance in various aspects of the lives of worshippers.

Below are some benefits the bearers of deity names derive from their names:

1. Easy identification. Deity names help to identify the specific deity one worships and where the person comes from.
2. Shows the connection between the person and the deity.
3. Deity names are passed down through generations, preserving cultural and religious legacies, etc.
4. Shows the beliefs of the parent
5. In some belief systems, bearing the name of a deity is believed to grant power, protection or spiritual authority.

Activity 6.1

1. In your own words, explain what is a deity?
2. In pairs, write down ten traditional Ghanaian names and identify the deity names among them.
3. Compare the deity names that you identified in your language with members in your class with the same language background. Be prepared to present your findings to the class.
4. Do you have a deity name as your family or first name? State the origin of your name. If no, then discuss the origin of any deity names you provided in (i).

Activity 6.2

Complete the table below with 5 deity names, their origins, and reasons

	Ethnic group	Deity name	Origin	Reason
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Activity 6.3

1. Provide one reason why people enter into a covenant with a deity in your community.
2. State 3 significant meanings of deity names to the people who bear them.

Puberty Rites

This part of the section discusses initiation into adulthood, focusing on the various stages, activities performed before initiation, during the initiation and after the initiation across various cultures.

Thinking question:

Can you think of any 3 physical changes you identified in your body between the ages of 10 and 14 years old?

What is puberty?

The stage in life when a boy or a girl becomes sexually mature and becomes capable of reproduction. Usually, it occurs from ages 10-14 for girls, and ages 12-16 for boys (although this can vary from person to person).

Physical changes in girl

Some of the changes observed in girls may include the following:

- The pelvic girdle becomes wider

- The thighs grow bigger
- The buttocks become rounded
- They experience their first menstruation
- Development of breasts
- Growth of hair in pubic area and armpit

Physical changes in boys

For boys, the following are some of the changes that may be observed:

- Enlargement of penis and testicles
- Growth of hair in pubic areas and armpit
- Chest and shoulders become broader
- Muscles become developed
- Deepening of voice
- Increase in height
- Growth of facial hair

These signs signify a stage in life which is referred to as **Puberty**.

Puberty rites

Puberty rites are traditional ceremonies or rituals that mark an individual’s transition from childhood to adulthood. This is an additional ceremony or cultural event after the naming ceremony of a child which marks the transition of a young girl or a boy into maturity.

The **table 6.1** below shows the names of the puberty rites among some ethnic groups in Ghana.

Ethnic group	Name of the rite for girls	Name of the rite for boys
Ewe	Gbɔtowɔwɔ/Tugbewɔwɔ	Tudedeasi
Krobo	Dipo	
Fante	Bragor	
Twi	Bragoro	
Akpafu	Iseyi	
Ga	Otofo/ Otseɲtse	Plamatsemɔ/Butrumwɔwɔ/ Dɛɲtuwoo
Sissala	-	Baala
Vagla		Pellaa

What is the puberty rites ceremony called in your culture? Do both boys and girls pass experience puberty rites? **What is initiation?**

Initiation is a ceremony or a symbol that marks the transformation of an individual from one stage of life to another, which is also known as rite of passage. One can be initiated into mystical vocation, secret organizations or baptised into a religion. However, the type of initiation discussed here is the initiation into adulthood known as the puberty rites.

The initiation processes

The various processes involved in the performance of the puberty rites may vary from one ethnic group to another due to cultural diversity. The preparations before the initiation, during the initiation and after the initiation are discussed below.

Comparing Puberty Rites: Some Similarities

Puberty rites for the girls:

1. Before the initiation

When the parents identify some changes in their adolescent girls, they start some preparations.

In most cases when the girl experiences her first menstruation known as menarche, they undergo some of the following processes:

- a. The girls are first of all separated from the rest of the family members to prepare them for the puberty rites.
- b. The parents of the girls inform the elders or the spiritual leader responsible for the performance of the rituals, about their intentions.
- c. Experienced old women in the community confine the young girls (initiates) in one room and educate them on the acceptable behaviors as women ready to get married and manage their home as a wife.
- d. The young girls are educated on housekeeping skills such as cooking, sweeping, washing and how to practice general personal hygiene, etc.
- e. The initiates are introduced to a craft such as mat weaving, bead making and others.
- f. They also learn how to sing and dance to their traditional songs.
- g. They are educated on how to engage themselves in sexual activities with their future husbands since they are being prepared for marriage.

2. During the initiation

During the initiation the priest/priestess/old lady performs the following on the initiate girls.

He/she prepares and makes a libation to commit the initiates into the care and protection of the gods and goddesses, and also to ensure successful rituals. After the libation, they are led through spiritual activities which include the following:

- a. Spiritual testing to prove their virginity. They do this by asking them to sit on black rock, bathe in a river or sea forest, etc.
- b. The priest/ priestess or old lady also engages shaves the head of the girls
- c. The initiates are made to sit on stools/skins (enstoolment/enskinment, etc.) during the initiation.
- d. They are also fed with foods (cooked egg, mashed yam, etc.)

After successful spiritual cleansing they are adorned in traditional clothes, beads and other accessories.

- e. A durbar is organized in their honour to welcome them officially into adulthood.
- f. During the durbar, the initiates are dressed in expensive beads and clothes , exposing their bodies to their male counterparts to observe and select their future wives among them.



Fig. 6.1: Initiate girls during ‘Dipo’ spiritual cleansing at puberty rite

Below are some examples of the initiates after the puberty rites



Fig.6.2: Initiate girls adorned with beads after initiation (puberty rites)

After the initiation

- After the initiation, the new adults in the company of their family members and friends, go round the community to say thank you to the community members.
- The people of the community make donations to the new adults as a way of congratulating them on a successful initiation. Some of the gifts may include money, beads, clothes, scarves and so on.



Fig. 6.3: Shows initiate girls dressed in kente cloth after initiation (puberty rites)

Comparing Puberty Rites: Some differences in the process across-cultures in Ghana

Apart from the cross-cultural similarities of the initiation, there are cultural-specifics that are discussed below.

The people of Ewe

1. Depending on the community and the purpose, the initiation may last, from one week up to one month.
2. Initiate girls are confined at the back of the main house and their friends are asked to stay with them to entertain them and also keep them company during these periods.
3. During the initiation, the eating of a cooked egg is seen as a symbol of fertility.

The Krobo people

1. The Krobos perform the puberty rite (Dipo) for their young girls when the announcement is made on behalf of the Earth Goddess (Nene Kloweki) and is held in February, lasting for five (5) days.
2. Before initiation the parents of the girls to be initiated present them to their clan priests or priestess responsible for 'Dipo'.
3. During the initiation, the priest/priestess performs libation and performs other rituals for the girls including shaving the lower part of their head, enskinment, etc.

The Ga people

1. The Ga people perform Otofo either at an early age for a young girl or at any other time when the need arises. It can be performed for an already married woman who wants to pass through the initiation to purify her of any omen in her marriage.

The Akan people

1. The ceremony lasts for eight (8) days and commences either on Monday or Tuesday.
2. Before the initiation, the girls are examined both physically and spiritually by the queen mother of the town to ensure that they are virgins and that they are not pregnant as well.

How are puberty rites performed in your culture of study?

The puberty rite for boys

The puberty rite for boys is not common among most Ghanaian cultures. The few ones practiced are referred to as “Tudedeasi” by the Ewe people, Baala by Sissala people, Plamatsemɔ/Butrumwɔɔ/Dɛntuwoɔ by the Ga people and Pellaa by Vagla people. Puberty rite for boys is not always a ceremony. For example, amongst the Ewes, the presentation of gun to the adolescent boy is known as ‘Tudedeasi’. He should use the gun to keep his family safe and to hunt.

Some of the processes may include;

1. Isolation of initiate boys
2. The general education on manhood, responsibility and sexuality
3. The introduction of the boys to adulthood
4. Physical and spiritual preparation
5. Teaching of cultural values and traditions

The processes may vary from community to community and are based on the beliefs of various ethnic groups across Ghana.

Importance of puberty rites

1. Marks transition into maturity.
2. Provides individuals with the knowledge or abilities needed to occupy a new status and privilege.
3. Declares that the individual is ready for marriage
4. Prepares initiates physically and spiritually for marriage.
5. Teaches the initiates (boys and girls) good manners and morals.
6. Teaches them cultural and traditional values of their people.
7. Checks immorality and prevents premarital sex.
8. The rite enables a girl to acquire some capital for her future.

Activity 6.4

Write down the name of the puberty rite for boys or girls in your language of study and share your answer with colleagues in a group.

Activity 6.5

- a. In groups, look at the pictures carefully and describe the various costumes used in the initiation. Discuss things you like about the costumes.



- b. Discuss the significance of any of the costumes used for the rites.

2. Please, insert video of the puberty rites in the respective Ghanaian language of study here. For example, bragoro of Akan people: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpTdowLmxN8>.
 - a. What normally happens *before* the initiation process?
 - b. Watch the video on the puberty rite focus on the activities engaged in during and after the initiation.
 - c. State any 2 activities you observed in the video:
 - i. during the initiation
 - ii. after the initiation
 - d. Share your observations about the video with your classmates focusing on the similarities and differences in the puberty rites of another Ghanaian culture.
3. a. Study this photo:



- b. Using what you have learnt, describe what is happening?

Activity 6.4

Discuss 2 differences and similarities in the initiation processes into adulthood rites among your people and those of any other 2 ethnic groups in Ghana. Share your findings with a peer in the class.

Activity 6.5

As a Ghanaian language learner, mention 3 aspects of the initiation into the adulthood that you would you like to change or maintain and why. Share your thoughts with your classmates

References

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Review Question

Review questions on deity names

1. Write 5 deity names people use as family name in your family and in your community.
2. List 5 deity names and their origins in your language of study.
3. Write any female deity (goddess) and any 3 names associated with that deity.
4. Explain one reason why people might agree with a deity to use his/her name for their child in your community.
5. State 3 significances of deity names to the people who bear the names.

Review questions on puberty rite

1. Explain the term puberty rite in your own understanding
2. State and explain five significance of puberty rites to your community. Why are they important?
3. Which aspect of the puberty rite do you think should be reviewed? Explain your answer.

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