

## Afro Probe

# Exploring Resilience

A Study in Three Parts on the Spirit of Africa

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For The United Church of Canada



**Scientific name**

Rosa abyssinica<sup>1</sup>

**Family name**

Rosaceae

**Local names**

Kaga (Amargna), Qaqawwii (Oromiffa), Dayero (Somali),  
Abyssinian rose (English)

Found only in Arabia, Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan, this rose is common in the mid- and highlands. Common, forming thickets in upland dry evergreen forest and margins and clearings, in upland bushland, rocky places, dry grassland and riparian formations, also in different types of man-made habitats, sometimes standing alone as a small tree (1,700 - 3,300m). Also found in Yemen, Somalia and Sudan.

Image from: [http://images.google.ca/imgres?imgurl=http://www.africa.upenn.edu/faminefood/images/Rosa\\_abyssinica\\_flowering\\_branches.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.africa.upenn.edu/faminefood/category3/cat3\\_Rosa\\_abyssinica.htm&h=753&w=841&sz=53&hl=en&start=95&tbnid=0FH-q0-1FcEkM:&tbnh=130&tbnw=145&prev=images%3Fq%3Dflower%2BSomalia%26start%3D80%26gbv%3D2%26ndsp%3D20%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN](http://images.google.ca/imgres?imgurl=http://www.africa.upenn.edu/faminefood/images/Rosa_abyssinica_flowering_branches.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.africa.upenn.edu/faminefood/category3/cat3_Rosa_abyssinica.htm&h=753&w=841&sz=53&hl=en&start=95&tbnid=0FH-q0-1FcEkM:&tbnh=130&tbnw=145&prev=images%3Fq%3Dflower%2BSomalia%26start%3D80%26gbv%3D2%26ndsp%3D20%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN)

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## Afro Probe

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## A Study in Three Parts on the Spirit of Africa

### Introduction

While the stereotypes of violence, ignorance and poverty obscure the lens through which we view Africa, and its trials and tribulations pervade the common view, those who have traveled to Africa and who know her people find hope and promise in their strength and ability to overcome adversity, buoyed by a spirit of resilience. Without an appreciation of this truth, no study of Africa can be complete. In fact, perhaps studying and appreciating the capacity for resilience needs to be at the heart of the search for solutions to Africa's problems. Modernization, change and the rush to change the face of Africa will fail unless the foundations include an appreciation of African identity and African values. Faced with the diversity of the cultures, philosophies, religions, lifestyles and economic realities of the many people of Africa, the term "resilience" returns again and again as a common unifying factor.

### Prime Objectives

**Exploring Resilience** is designed to increase knowledge and appreciation of Africa and its people by providing units for study at the secondary level that enhance literacy, increase cross-curricular learning and offer opportunities for self expression that can be part of a core English program or link to a diversity of subject areas, and most notably for secondary programs for History, Political Science, Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology, Religion, Geography, Science, Biology, Food Sciences, Travel and Tourism, Visual Arts, Drama and Media and Communications. The unit presents a series of key readings linked to the autobiographies and writings of Africans that have captured public attention not only because of their courage and accomplishments, but because they understand that their success is due as much to their background and identity as Africans as to any individual qualities that they may possess.

By providing students with the opportunity to read and discuss the reflections of Africans as they see their lives and their challenges, it is hoped that students will see Africans as people who are taking actions to determine their future and not as victims who passively wait with hands outstretched to the West for guidance and intervention. Moreover, by examining resilience in a more general sense, students in schools anywhere in the world can learn through the examples offered by highly successful Africans some valuable approaches to facing challenges they can incorporate in their own daily lives.

### Instructional Level

The readings have been selected with secondary students in mind. They assume some ability to read independently to do research, analyze and synthesize materials from a variety of sources, and integrate the paradox of discovering the beauty of life in a world which is also fraught with harsh and cruel realities. The materials have been chosen not for their capacity to shock, but because they presents difficult topics appropriately and in a nuanced manner. A synopsis of the content of each of the major selections is provided in the instructions to the educator, and teachers are invited to select from the materials in accordance with the level of maturity and readiness of the students for which they are intended. (n.b. It is important to note that the biographies of Waris Dirie refer significantly to the issue of female genital mutilation.) A chart of the ministry objectives which the unit covers or touches upon is included at the end of the Educator's Guide for this unit.

## A Balanced Literacy Approach

Learning activities are presented to meet the objectives of a balanced literacy program. Opportunities for guided, shared and independent reading, writing and speaking are included. The autobiographies which have been selected for students to read present different levels of challenge in difficulty with regard to vocabulary, length and symbolic thought. Students should read an autobiography which best meets their reading level. That said, none of the autobiographies are “easy read” or of the “graphic novel” genre. The autobiographies are listed in order of reading difficulty from least difficult to most difficult with a few anecdotal comments to help teachers guide students in their selection for reading:

- A) **Desert Flower** by Waris Dirie: This is Dirie’s first book. She writes as a young woman and often in the conversational voice of a young adult. Some reflective passages appear within the overall narrative text. Some photographs are included. Chapters are very short (less than 15 pages). The piece is 225 pages in length (hardcover version).
- B) **A long way gone** by Ishmael Beah: Beah is also a very young writer. The writing is highly narrative, but he artistically weaves stories and experiences of his youth into the writing and they become symbols for his life and vehicles for him to gain meaning for himself. Chapters are very short (4 to 6 pages on average). Total length is 218 pages.
- C) **Desert Dawn** by Waris Dirie: Dirie published a second autobiography a few years after **Desert Flower**. It is more reflective and less action oriented than the first autobiography. Again, some photographs are included. The soft cover version is 226 pages in length. It would be a particularly interesting study to have students compare the two versions of her autobiography. It is fascinating to ponder why she focuses on certain incidents, and how she understands them at different stages in her life.
- D) **Unbowed** by Wangari Maathai: The history of Kenya is interwoven into Maathai’s life story from the start. Chapters are long (chapter one is 25 pages long) and the font is quite small. Understanding Maathai’s active engagement in politics and organizational work presents greater challenge. The total length including the narratives in the Appendix is 315 pages (excluding the 7 pages of introductory acknowledgments).
- E) **Long Walk to Freedom** by Nelson Mandela: The work is very readable but also very long. To complete the 625 pages, readers need to have commitment. That said, the book is broken into eleven sections with chapters of about 7 to 10 pages. The book provides many direct excerpts of Mandela’s speeches, with particular focus on argumentation and summations from his trials.

Vocabulary enhancement activities and “schemata” or pictorial stimuli are provided to increase comprehension. Discussion starters and a variety of research challenges with different levels of challenge offer tools for stimulating independent reading and attending to the needs of learners with some range of competency at the secondary level to address “differentiated learning”.

## Adaptation to a Variety of Curricular Objectives

Materials and activities are provided that can be used to meet a variety of curricular objectives. Teachers are invited to select from the materials those which best serve their purpose. The following is the order of the continuum of learning as it is presented in the Teacher’s Notes:

- ⇒ Definition of terms
- ⇒ Framing the readings as an expression of Resilience
- ⇒ Using the Autobiographies to gain understanding of Autobiography as a Genre
- ⇒ Providing opportunities for personal expression
- ⇒ Providing opportunities for research and extending the concept of Resilience

Teachers are at liberty to tailor their selection of learning activities to provide greater focus on the literary or socio-political implications of the works.

## Modus Operandi

There are many worksheets which are included in this unit. None can replace the value of honest and

open discussion with your students. Discussion with partners, in groups and with a skilled teacher is the most valuable tool that exists. Through honest and open discussion that we can become aware of our own prejudices and biases. Equally, through discussion we spark each other to become more creative and we can share the joy of our learning. Suggestions for accommodations to increase or decrease the level of academic challenge are provided in the right hand column of the instructions to educators.

## Components

The **Unit Opener** activity consists of a series of **Geography Activities**. It can be used with any or all of the units. It is described in the general **Introduction to Afro Probe**. For **Resilience**, there are the following additional components:

### Part One: The Concept of Resilience

1. **Defining Resilience:** examines a number of graphic symbols to anchor the concept of resilience.
2. **Studying Human Resilience:** an excerpt reading (pp. 28-33) from *The Resilient Child: Preparing Today's Youth for Tomorrow's World* by Joanne M. Joseph. A follow up activity is provided.
3. **Coherence and Community: An African Perspective:** contextualizes the theories of resilience to reflect the experiences of Africans. **Graphic Organizer #1** provides a guideline for supported reading.

### Part Two: Examples of Personal Resilience

1. **Reflecting on Resilience:** introduces four outstanding African personalities whose lives personify the quality of resilience and who have written autobiographies in which they reflect and interpret their experiences. Students are invited to read and analyze one of the autobiographies.
2. **Graphic Organizer #2: Identifying and Plotting Resilience:** provides students with a guideline to track the life history of an individual to demonstrate resilience. Rubrics for evaluation are provided (pages 16-24).
3. **Graphic Organizer #3: Analyzing Resilience:** provides students with a tool to analyze the experience of Resilience as documented through readings from an African perspective. Rubrics for evaluation are provided (pages 16-24).
4. **Reflective Passages—Reader's Theatre / Adapted Research:** A number of key passages from each of the autobiographies have been identified and included. They can be used either to guide student research and as a basis for Reader's Theatre.
5. **Portraying Resilience:** provides students with the opportunity for creative outcomes to demonstrate their understanding of the autobiography of the African personality that they have read. Rubrics for evaluation of student projects are provided.

### Part Three: Extending the Concept of Resilience

1. **The Common Perspective—What's in the News?** An introductory activity to broaden student awareness on the problems Africans face.
2. **Impediments to Resilience: Internal or External?** A discussion opener to heighten student awareness of the legacy of colonialism and the continuing effects of neocolonialism
3. **Nelson Mandela: A Study in Political Resilience**
4. **Wangari Maathai and Waris Dirie: Starting Points to Appreciate the Resilience of African Women**
5. **Ishmael Beah: The Resilience of Children**
6. **Wangari Maathai and the Greenbelt Movement: A Case Study in Environmental Resilience**
7. **Building Economic Resilience: Identifying African Initiatives**
8. **From Knowledge to Action:** A challenge to students to develop a sense of global citizenship and engage in advocacy for human rights and economic justice

## Resources

# Exploring Resilience

## A Study in Three Parts on the Spirit of Africa

### Suggested Order of Presentation with Notes for the Teacher

#### Unit Opener

See instructions in the Introduction to the **Educator's Guide**.

#### A The Concept of Resilience

1. Section Title Page: Use the section title page (page 2 of the Student Worksheets) to explain that students will begin by defining resilience and then move towards refining their understanding of the term and extending it to an African context.
2. Defining Resilience: Distribute page 3 from the Student Worksheets to students. Read the definition of resilience with students. Provide students with time to discuss in small groups the graphic images as representations of resilience.
3. Studying Human Resilience: Copy and distribute the lesson, "Studying Human Resilience" (pages 5 and 6 of the Student Worksheets). Assign Follow Up Activity A to allow students to demonstrate their understanding of resilience and hardiness by first considering these qualities as integral to the world which they already know.

#### B Personal Resilience—Case Studies in Courage and Perseverance

1. Poem by Wangari Maathai: Display and have students read and identify with a partner metaphors of resilience in the poem on page 8 by Wangari Maathai.

### Suggestions for Accommodations and Ideas for Differentiated Learning

#### Unit Opener

See instructions in the Introduction to the **Educator's Guide**.

#### A The Concept of Resilience

1. Demonstration replaces Section Title Page: Demonstrate the operation of either the slinky or the yoyo and discuss with students the elements of resilience that are revealed.
2. Defining Resilience: Distribute Student Worksheet page 3 for small group discussion. Read aloud the definitions and ensure terms such as buoyancy and adversity are understood by students. Omit second definition if necessary.
3. Studying Human Resilience: Preview key vocabulary which will be necessary to read the article, "Studying Human Resilience" by providing students with **Vocabulary Support Sheet A** (page 4) to highlight the key vocabulary:

proactive	passive	adept
refuge	self esteem	efficacy
construe	prowess	impetus
disposition	innate	trauma
defuse	extract	adversity
inoculate	persevere	alienated

⇒ Shared Reading: Read aloud with students and use the articles to assist students to solve the meaning for key words through context clues.

#### B Personal Resilience—Case Studies in Courage and Perseverance

1. Poem by Wangari Maathai: Read aloud with students the poem on page 8 by Wangari Maathai to discuss its connection to the theme of resilience. Draw the attention of students to images such as sunrise, the journey and rainfall as expressions of hope and the quest for success.

2. Coherence and Community: Copy and distribute, “**Coherence and Community—An African Perspective**” located on pages 10 to 12. Read and discuss the content. A vocabulary exercise follows.
  
3. Guided Reading - The Autobiography as a Genre / The Autobiography as Evidence of Resilience in Africa: Brainstorm with students what they understand about the term, autobiography. Be sure the following concepts emerge during the discussion:
  - ⇒ An autobiography is told in the first person.
  - ⇒ An autobiography portrays the author’s point of view
  - ⇒ An autobiography may serve many purposes. (see Graphic Organizer 4A and 4B on pages 17 and 18 of the Student worksheets for ideas to put forward: you may choose to make a transparency of it for the discussion.)
  - ⇒ Provide students with the synopses of the focus autobiographies provided on page 13 of the Student worksheets together with the challenges on page 14. Read the challenges on page 14 with students. Explain that they will be invited to select an Autobiography of an African personality to read and appreciate as both an example of the genre of Autobiography and as a case study in Resilience. (n.b. Teachers who do not wish to focus on the literary aspects of the pieces may choose to omit the discussion of the books as examples of the genre of Autobiography).
  - ⇒ Provide students with copies of the graphic organizers for Guided Reading as they relate to your program: (Graphic Organizer 2: *Identifying and Plotting Resilience* on page 15; Graphic Organizer 3: *Analyzing Resilience* on page 16; and Autobiography as a Genre: Graphic Organizer 4A, *Window into Another Person’s Life* on page 17 with Graphic Organizer 4B: *Point of View as a Reflection Of Truth* on page 18 of the Student Worksheets) and discuss the objectives for each piece.
  - ⇒ You may choose to group students to read an autobiography according to their competence in reading (n.b. refer back to the anecdotal comments which provide some guidelines on level of difficulty in the introduction). Alternatively, if students are proficient readers and the unit is being used in conjunction with pro-
  
2. Coherence and Community: To reduce challenge, preteach the vocabulary on page 12 before reading the article. Display Graphic Organizer 1 as a transparency and guide students to organize information from the passage according to the main points suggested by the organizer.
  
3. Guided Reading—The Autobiography as a Genre / The Autobiography as Evidence of Resilience in Africa: To reduce challenge, model how to use the graphic organizers for Autobiography by referring to a famous personality with whom they may already be familiar (e.g. Wayne Gretzky, Michael Jordan, Oprah Winfrey, John A Macdonald, William Lyon Mackenzie).
  - ⇒ Guide students to select an Autobiography of appropriate length and difficulty to read. Refer to the anecdotal comments in the Introduction that provide some discussion of level of difficulty of the different autobiographies. In particular, be aware that the one written by Mandela is very long.
  - ⇒ You may wish to omit Graphic organizer #3 altogether for students who might have difficulty identifying and quoting relevant passages from the autobiographies OR provide to students some or all of the focus readings for their author (which essentially have located the relevant quotations) provided in the section “**Detecting Resilience**” (pages 30 to 54 of the Student Worksheets) with or without the title summaries to read independently or with you to gain a deeper understanding of their autobiographer.
  - ⇒ **ENRICHMENT**: Challenge students who are ready for tasks of greater difficulty to design their own graphic organizers. As a variant, have advanced students reorganize Graphic Organizer #2 to reflect a “western” perspective. Ask students to select and read an autobiography of a successful western figure, and

grams such as Politics, Economics, Geography and/or History, the autobiographies might be selected to correspond to thematic challenges and students who are highly proficient readers may be interested in reading an autobiography which presents a particular issue. Students who are weak readers, however, should be guided towards selecting materials which are easier to understand.

- ⇒ Educators may select to evaluate student comprehension simply from a literary viewpoint by using the criteria for evaluation for English, or they may choose to use the autobiographies as a vehicle for students to demonstrate understanding of issues that form part of the curricula for **History; Geography; Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology; Economics; World Religions; Politics; Biology and Science; and/or Food and Nutrition.**
- ⇒ Provide students with copies of the rubrics of curriculum points they will address to ensure they understand objectives for evaluation. Make selections from the eight pages of “Signs of Resilience in Africa: The Autobiography as Springboard for Research” (pages 16 to 24). Please note: the same rubrics may be used to evaluate the culminating research projects for the unit. Two additional rubrics which include objectives for Business Studies are added after the Research Challenge on entrepreneurship on page 63.

4. Portraying Resilience: Creative Outcomes  
Have students select one or more of the creative outcomes which are provided on pages 28 to 30 of the Student Worksheets. Opportunities to demonstrate student understanding of the quality of resilience are provided through projects in Drama, Visual Arts and Media Communications. Allow students to select passages for Readers Theatre from the section, **Detecting Resilience** (Student worksheets pages 33 to 57). Provide students with the relevant rubrics entitled **Portraying Resilience** from pages 31 and 32 to ensure objectives for evaluation are clear before students start.

### **C Extending the Concept of Resilience**

1. Encouraging Analysis: Display the Section Introduction on page 58. Now that students have read an autobiography, open a general class discussion on what they thought were

compare their world view to that of the African figure that they chose to study by analyzing the source of their strength and resilience using their revision of Graphic Organizer #2.

4. Portraying Resilience: Creative Outcomes  
Model approaches for students. If possible, provide students with exemplars of projects to further define expectations. Stress the importance of submitting and discussing plans. Be sure to conference with students regularly to ensure that outcomes are developing along potentially successful lines.
  - ⇒ Select shorter passages from Detecting Resilience for Readers Theatre to diminish the level of challenge.
  - ⇒ To increase the level of challenge, have students find their own passages for Readers Theatre from the autobiographies, and do not provide **Detecting Resilience**.

### **C Extending the Concept of Resilience**

1. Encouraging Analysis: Display the Section Introduction on page 58. Have students brainstorm with a partner who read the same autobiography what they thought were the

the principal problems presented by the focus authors. Assist students to classify problems—were they Social? Economic? Political? Environmental? etc.

2. The Common Perspective—What’s in the News? Copy and provide to students Graphic Organizer 5A from page 59. Have students brainstorm with a partner their knowledge of African problems commonly reported on in the news. Indicate to students they will need to return to the next class with an article and a synopsis of the main points to present to a group of 4. Provide time for group members to listen to each other’s presentations. Open a general discussion in which students broaden their knowledge by hearing about the issues explored in different groups. List the main topics on the board. Challenge students to categorize the types of problems that are identified (Political? Economic? Social? Environmental? etc.)
3. Impediments to Resilience: Indicate to students that this activity is a follow up to their search of internet articles for “The Common Perspective”. Make an overhead transparency of Graphic Organizer 6 on page 61 and also provide copies to students. Guide students in discussion that will allow them to broaden their understanding of the forces at play that hinder development and growth. Help students become more aware of the legacy of colonialism and the continuing influence of neocolonialism, the role of multinationals and the effects of geopolitics. Take one problem which students identified from the last day’s discussion and discuss to what extent internal and/or external forces contributed to the situation. Use your transparency to model how to complete the Graphic Organizer. Allow students to work in groups of 4 to work through 4 different situations on their own.
4. Research Project: Provide students with the **Research Challenge Cards** outlined on Student Worksheet pages 62 to 66 as well as the Research Proposal form (page 67), supplementary copies of **Graphic Organizers 2 and 3**, and the relevant rubrics which will provide objectives for evaluation (See **Signs of Resilience in Africa—The Autobiography as Springboard for Research**, pages 19-27 and 69-70 of the Student Worksheets).

principal problems presented by the focus author. Assist students to classify problems—were they Social? Economic? Political? Environmental? etc.

2. The Common Perspective—What’s in the News? Copy and provide to students Graphic Organizer 5B from page 60. Make an overhead transparency of the organizer and read it with students. Identify any terms which they may not know and help students formulate and note definitions. Create groups of 2 or 3 students. Provide each group with ONE specific challenge for which students will do an internet search and collect information. Have students bring the articles they find to class to read with a partner. Encourage pairs to read articles aloud to each other to improve overall comprehension. Have partners highlight main points and assist each other in creating a synopsis of the article.
3. Impediments to Resilience: To diminish the level of challenge, do not allow groups to work on their own. Complete this activity entirely as a full class activity.
4. Research Project:
  - ⇒ To reduce challenge, encourage students to focus on activities that can be accomplished by revisiting the autobiographies which they have already read or which require students to complete shorter readings. Also, encourage students to make greater use of the graphic organizer formats which they have already used.
  - ⇒ To increase challenge, encourage students to

- ⇒ Indicate to students that they should begin by defining the purpose for their research by using the Research Proposal form. You may wish to have students submit their proposal, review their ideas and conference with them before they begin to do the research.
- ⇒ Consider the level of challenge that each project will present as you are assigning the activity.

5. From Knowledge to Action: The concluding activity of the unit is suggested to provide students with the opportunity to identify and advocate for an African cause which has links to organizations, companies, political figures or situations within their own purview. Encourage students to refer back to readings they did for “The Common Perspective” and “Impediments to Resilience” to identify critical situations in Africa linked to external forces. Should they have difficulty, present some of the following prompts:

- ⇒ The current crisis in Darfur which is complicated by the interests of foreign mineral companies and American links to the Khartoum government in its attempt to develop allies in the struggle against terrorism
  - ⇒ The economic hardships caused by structural adjustment programs imposed by financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on debt ridden and impoverished African states
  - ⇒ The slow fulfillment of promises made by Western countries to subsidize antiretroviral drugs to alleviate suffering caused by the AIDS pandemic in sub Saharan Africa (n.b. the case of Lesotho) **malaria**
  - ⇒ The consequences of price fixing on the world market for commodities such as tea and coffee which represent a significant portion of the African export market
  - ⇒ The consequences of publicity and/or the dumping products on African markets which are no longer viable in the west (e.g. The promotion of baby formula in countries where mothers would do better to nurse their children rather than use commercial products which they dilute when they cannot afford to maintain purchases; the sale of drugs nearing their expiry date)
  - ⇒ French government support of remnants of the army and militia of the former Rwandan regime and African states that harbor them, which contributes to instability in Central Africa
  - ⇒ The links between multinational interests in mineral resources, the suspension of human rights by puppet regimes, and the presence of mercenary forces in Africa
- ◆ Discuss with administration how a social action project might form part of the school plan.
  - ◆ Strike committees in the class to undertake some or all of the activities suggested on the student worksheet (p. 70).

pursue topics which lead students to read more broadly and engage in more authentic research. Increase expectations for the introduction and conclusion sections, and open the path to more creative presentations (e.g. Creating a “Good News” bulletin).

- ⇒ For maximum challenge, remove the Research Tips and Resources (information which appears in the second part of each card) to have students start from scratch to find stories of resilience.

5. From Knowledge to Action: Assist students by brainstorming on the board what they have learned from the activities for “The Common Perspective” and “Impediments to Resilience”. Choose ONE of the prompts on the left to explore with students and develop into a class project of response.

- ⇒ Model or review with students how to write a business letter or how to write a Letter to the Editor.
- ⇒ Select ONE of the activities outlined on Student Worksheet page 66 to work on with the class.