

The following information and suggested websites and classroom activities are all intended to fill in some of the gaps about Sierra Leone. What does it look like? How hot is it? What do Sierra Leoneans have for breakfast?

ROUGH GUIDES

Thanks to *The Rough Guides* for this contribution to *Reel Lives: Sierra Leone*. www.roughguides.com

The information is, in part, intended to illustrate that daily life in different parts of the world is actually very similar. We hope that you will be able to use the following ideas, along with the DVD and the booklet, to cut through some of the stereotypes of life in Africa and highlight the structure of day-to-day life.

Many Sierra Leonean children go to school during the week; they play football with their friends and try to get out of doing their homework – funnily enough, they are just like children in the UK! In spite of wars and conflict, many people in Sierra Leone continued with their work and studies. It is impossible to ignore the devastation that the recent civil war has inflicted on this small country, and the long-term impact that it will have. If and when Sierra Leone returns to normality, it will resume its place among West Africa's most attractive tourist destinations. With long stretches of white, sandy beaches, lush green forests and extensive nature reserves, the country has an intrinsic appeal, surpassing that of many neighbouring nations.

General

Sierra Leone is situated on the west coast of Africa and shares borders with Guinea (to the north and east) and Liberia (to the south east). Its 250 miles (400 km) of coastline overlooks the north Atlantic Ocean. With an area of 27,800 sq miles (72,000 sq km), Sierra Leone is a little smaller than Scotland. The capital city is Freetown in the Western Area of the country. There are four areas – Eastern Province, Western Area, Southern Province and Northern Province – similar to counties in the UK.

Population

The population of Sierra Leone has recently been estimated at 4.5million – again, similar to Scotland's population.

Topography

The country can broadly be divided into three areas:

- mangrove swamps and beaches along the coast
- a belt of low-lying wooded land in the immediate interior
- a mountain plateau, rising to 2,000 metres, further inland

Some of the images and footage on the DVD illustrate the beauty of the landscape.

Weather and climate

The climate is tropical, with a hot, humid, rainy season from May to November, when most of the country gets drenched in heavy and prolonged monsoon rain, and a winter dry season from December to April. While temperatures are not extremely high, humidity is usually excessive, especially along the coast. The lowest night-time temperature ever recorded in Freetown (19°C) is actually the highest record minimum temperature for any African country – an indication of Freetown's altogether very uncomfortable climate much of the year.

Daylight hours are constant through the year: the sun rises about 7am and

sets about 7pm in the evening. There are no dark, cold winter nights in Sierra Leone like here in the UK.

Images of wet and dry season can be found at <http://hypertextbook.com/eworld/photos.shtml>



The national flag

The green is symbolic of the hilly mountains, blue is for waves (i.e., sea) and the white in the flag stands for unity and justice (which is the national motto).

Currency

Leones: £1 = 1,400 leones

Have a look at the currency of Sierra Leone – coins and notes. They can be found at <http://hypertextbook.com/eworld/photos.shtml>

Suggested activities:

In groups, create your own culture, with flag, national anthem, currency, and think about roads, schools, law and order etc. This encourages the children to think about equality/inequality and human rights issues.

See resource book *The Learning Works – Create a Culture*, by Carol Nordgaarden (ISBN 0-88160-240-X)

Plants

Sierra Leone is very lush (similar to the Lake District or the Scottish Highlands), enhanced by the long rainy season. Savannah vegetation – grasses and bushes – are prominent in the north. Forest covers most of the south-east, with trees including teak, palms and mahogany (used for making drums).

Animals

West African wildlife is by no means as diverse as Southern and East African countries, but nevertheless includes bush pigs, chimpanzees, monkeys, porcupines, and crocodiles and hippopotamuses in the rivers. Some believe that the mountain range in Freetown, named Lion Mountain, was so called because it used to be inhabited by lions. This theory is possible, but there are no lions now.

Food (see also recipes in the Resources Folder)

There is a great variety of food and drink in Sierra Leone, both locally produced and imported.

Due to the country's poverty, the majority of people eat food that is locally produced because it is cheaper. Rice is one of the most important staples and is grown all over Sierra Leone. Those who eat enough rice can spot the significant differences in taste and texture between rice from different regions. Upland 'hill rice' is the more traditional short-grain variety; the red-speckled Mende kind is one of the best. Plantains (like bananas but cooked instead of eaten raw) are commonly used as a staple in place of rice. Fufu (mashed cassava) and agidi (maize-meal) are also eaten as a main meal.

Breakfast can be anything that you fancy, but the most popular breakfast is rice, cassava, eggs or cornflakes depending on what you have access to, what

you like and what you have time to prepare before school or work. Yebe is a good and popular breakfast dish, a kind of stew made of potato, cassava or mangoes when in season. Pap, a sweet rice broth, is also nice for early starts.

Sweet bread (sugar-laden) and ordinary bread (a basic, non-sweet, white bread) are sold almost everywhere. Bread can be eaten for a meal with egg or bananas, with stew or soup to dip and soak up the tasty sauce, or as a snack. Overall, bread is eaten as it is in the UK, as sandwiches, burgers and with soups, but not as often.

Another popular and healthy snack is fruit. Of the wide variety of fruit that is locally grown, oranges are probably the cheapest; in season, they will cost you a penny each. Mangoes, coconuts, pineapple, apple and bananas are all sold and eaten everywhere.

Lunch may be rice, bread or a snack bought from the high street or the market areas. For quick snacks, fried-chicken is the most popular. Freetown has a good selection of restaurants that serve (mainly European) food at prices compared to what you would pay in the West. There are also inexpensive chop houses (like cafés), serving variations of rice and palm-oil-based meals during lunchtime. Freetown boasts a good range of street food: rice akara (rice cake), fried dough (doughnuts), roast meat, egg sandwiches, boiled cassava, yams, plantains and sandwiches. A popular snack is the 'steak sandwich' – slivers of kebab with palm oil in bread, known as rosbif in Krio.

So, what about the evening meal? The most common sauce is *plasas*, made with finely shredded leaves of sweet potato or cassava, okra, dried fish and hot pepper, all cooked in palm oil. There are numerous variations on plasas – a version based on groundnuts is most common in the north – and it is often served with meat. (Shawn eats groundnut soup and rice after school on the DVD.) You may also get *egusi* sauces or soups, based on crushed squash seed. Along the coast, fish stew is very common. Of course, they are served with rice.

There are also variations in how food is eaten. Some use hands, especially for *fufu* as it is rolled and dipped in sauce (as Mbalou and Hassan show us at breakfast time on the DVD), and most others are eaten with spoons. It is common for a family to sit down together and all share the food from one large platter of food. It certainly saves on the washing up!

Activities: Look at how people eat across the world – chopsticks, cutlery, hands, plates, dishes etc. How many ways do the children in your class use? Think of pizza, BBQs, soup and noodles! They probably use more methods than they realise.

Use some of the recipes in the Resources Folder to try some of your own African dishes. Use the Market Food Activity in the Resource Folder to look at diet and lifestyles

Language

Although English is the official language in Sierra Leone, Krio is the main language that is spoken and understood by most people in all parts of the country. Krio is written phonetically. There are, however, at least 15 languages in Sierra Leone, and everybody speaks at least 2! Imagine, speaking one language at school and another at home. Maybe some of the pupils in your class are bi-lingual or multi-lingual.

A little Krio

<i>Aw di bohdi?</i>	<i>How are you?</i>
<i>No bad, bohdi fine</i>	<i>Not bad, fine</i>
<i>Mohnin-o!</i>	<i>Good morning!</i>
<i>Ivinin-o!</i>	<i>Good evening!</i>
<i>Kushe-o!</i>	<i>Hello</i>
<i>Usai yu kohmot?</i>	<i>Where are you from?</i>
<i>A kohmot...</i>	<i>I'm from...</i>
<i>Wi go si bak</i>	<i>Goodbye/see you again</i>
<i>Wetin na yu nem?</i>	<i>What's your name?</i>
<i>A nem...</i>	<i>My name is...</i>

Education

See the DVD!

Agriculture and industry

The landscape and weather makes for great farming. What is the main crop? Rice. Cassava, millet, sorghum, groundnuts (peanuts), sugar, palm oil, coffee, cocoa, ginger and kola nuts are grown, eaten and traded.

The major non-consumables are diamonds, rutile (titanium) and bauxite, which are mined in the provinces.

Diamonds

The Star of Sierra Leone is the biggest diamond ever found in Sierra Leone and was 968.80 carats! It is the third largest diamond ever found in the world and weighed over half a pound. One of the diamonds in the Queen of England's Crown Jewels is rumoured to be from Sierra Leone. (To give you a yardstick, the average diamond in an engagement ring is 1 carat, costing about £250!)

Diamonds have different uses in Sierra Leone and the UK. In the UK, they often feature in engagement rings and the rich and famous regularly wear their gems with pride. In Sierra Leone, diamonds are currency and not a status symbol. If a family mines a diamond, then it is like a savings account. It is kept somewhere safe for as long as necessary, and then when money is needed, for example, when the car needs replacing, the family wants to build a house or the school fees need paying, then the diamond is sold to a trader, who will invariably export it to the West. Once the diamond is sold, the whole family will eat well, new clothes and shoes will be bought for the children and make the most of their diamond fortune! It is like winning the Lottery.

Exports

Minerals, coffee, cocoa, are exported like many African countries. But, there are inequalities and problems tied in with this. A look at Fair Trade will highlight some of the issues around coffee and cocoa.

Imports

Mineral fuel, machinery, vehicles, foodstuffs – there is no construction of vehicles in Sierra Leone, so all cars, coaches, buses, vans and lorries are imported, predominantly from Europe.

Look at what the UK imports and exports – a large wall map can illustrate the flow of goods to, and from, Africa and how each country benefits from these goods. Your class can start to think about the lifecycle of goods. Start with Shawn's kitchen – Pringles, Sainsbury's cereal, Nokia mobile, *Harry Potter* book, *Clean & Clear* face wash. They were all imported from the West.

Sports

Football is popular all over the country, but most of the big action is concentrated around Freetown, where Mighty Blackpool, East End Lions, FC Kallon and Wellington People are some of the clubs which play. Sierra Leone's National Stadium in Freetown has recently been renovated following the war and hosts football and athletics.

A website showing the golf course in Freetown can be found at <http://liberian.tripod.com/Post200.html>

For a website with images of footballers in Sierra Leone, where football is as widely played and supported as here, visit <http://www.photo.nl/Football/>

Communication

Post: The Sierra Leone postal system usually takes seven days between Sierra Leone and the UK, and 10 days to the US. Outside Freetown, the mail – incoming as well as outgoing – is unreliable, though letters posted from Freetown do not usually go astray. There is a DHL office in the capital. Internet access is slowly improving, and Internet cafés are opening up, mainly in Freetown.

Phones: Sierra Leone's telephone system is surprisingly reasonable with plenty of telecentres (like cybercafes but with phones!) especially in the capital. There

are three mobile phone providers (like Orange, Virgin etc). Mobiles are possibly more popular in Sierra Leone than in the UK because it is much harder to have a landline installed in Sierra Leone than here.

Entertainment

Cinema is dormant if not extinct; imported movies and videos are all you will see. Film could perhaps be great in Sierra Leone, if the country's record in the field of drama is any indication – Freetown has a remarkable tradition of popular theatre. Quite a few theatrical groups are currently functioning and all of them write their own plays or self-translate scripts.

In their attempts to outwit the censors, playwrights have moved increasingly from musical variety shows to exuberant farce and satire. Shows are uproarious, even rowdy. There is a strong blend of comedy and social comment in these Krio plays.

Media

There are 12 weekly papers, most of which are in English (*Daily Mail* and the *Concord Times* publish twice a week). *West Africa* magazine is usually on sale in Freetown the week after its Friday publication in the UK. The state television station, SLTV, broadcasts local football games, cheap imported documentary fillers, news and movies. All large hotels are equipped with satellite TV, either in the rooms or the public bar. Apart from the Sierra Leone Broadcasting System (SLBS) on 99.9FM, radio stations include Radio FM 98.1, VOH FM 96.2, SLAJ and KISS FM 104, which feature a mix of music and chat. The BBC World Service can be heard in Freetown on 94.3FM.

For a very informative website about Sierra Leone radio, visit <http://sierraleoneradio.net/links.php>

Clothes

People wear a mix of African clothes (like the shirt Usifu has made for him in the DVD) and Western clothes. Football shirts are worn especially by boys and men, as are the latest fashion items from the UK, which are found on the local markets.

Stories and songs

Anansi is a popular character in Sierra Leonean stories. Like Aesop's fables, Anansi stories are moralistic and pass on messages using unlikely scenarios and characters. They are also generally passed on and told in the oral tradition. This is wonderful for allowing flexibility in the telling and retelling of stories. The story about how the snake lost his legs, which is included in this resource folder, is a perfect example of this. To arrange the story on paper, slight changes occurred along the way. On reading this new version, Usifu cried with laughter, at his own story! Usifu was thrilled with the interpretation. This shows that there is no right or wrong answer in storytelling – rather, the re-interpretations are welcomed and warmly received.

For a website offering four West African folktales including Anansi, visit <http://ccs.clarityconnect.com/NRiggs/AfricanFolktales.html>

For some help using storytelling in the classroom – curriculum tips and ideas – a good site can be found at <http://www.storyarts.org/classroom/index.html>

For Anansi stories with worksheets to colour, visit http://www.phillipmartin.info/liberia/text_folktales_intro.htm

The Three Brothers, a West African folktale (with a puppet to make) can be found at www.missmaggie.com/weeklypack/week27ig.pdf

Popular music

Sierra Leone has a rich variety of music and the influence of Freetown over the last 200 years has been large. But today, while cheaply produced gospel cassettes sell by the wagonload, there is no real recording industry and few places to hear live music. The most popular musician at the time of writing is Jimmy B, who has recorded Sierra Leonean-style house/ragga/hip-hop in South Africa. He has his own studio in the capital, where he produces other, lesser-known local artists.

Nightclubs pump out the same mainstream music as heard here, whilst specialist reggae or African nights focus on specific styles.

Cassettes and CDs are sold on most street corners at comparably cheaper prices than in the UK. Their authenticity can not always be guaranteed, however!

Recommended CDs

SE Rogie *The Palm Wine Sounds of SE Rogie* (Stern's)

The doyen of Sierra Leonean musical entertainers developed an effortlessly sensual style of palm-wine guitar playing and had hits in the 1960s all along the West African coast. He emigrated to the US and died in the UK in 1994.

Abdul Tee-Jay Rokoto *Make Me Dance-Dance* (Weekend Beatnik/Rogue Productions)

A timeless selection of uplifting Sierra-Leonean dance music, led by the long-reigning king of modern African guitar in the UK.

Various Sierra Leone Music (Zensor)

Compilation of Krio and up-country tracks, recorded for the radio in Freetown in the 1950s and 1960s. Including tracks by the Krio singer Ebenezer Calender, who played guitar and trumpet and wrote all his own songs, this is a real collector's item with an excellent accompanying booklet.

Rough Guide to High Life (World Music Network)

Highlife music conjures up images of African nightclubs, shiny dancefloors, champagne, fine clothes and spirit of hope and expectation that marked the end of the colonial era. The heyday of highlife was in the 1960s and 1970s, and the name describes and defines the popular guitar-led dance music of West Africa, primarily from Ghana to Nigeria. The Rough Guide to Highlife surveys this vibrant scene, featuring classic tracks of the era and the biggest artists within the genre. Visit <http://www.worldmusic.net/network/index.html> to buy this CD.

Amara Kabba *Confront It!*

Featured in Shawn's section of the DVD, the album can be bought on line at <http://www.rootsmusic.nl/CDSchain-ConfrontIt.htm>