



The African Art of Healing: Past, Present, and Future

EXPERIENCE GUIDE

Presented by The Oshun Center
for Intercultural Healing



Nsibidi for "Welcome"

WELCOME! All across the Black Diaspora, you will find traditions of magic and spirituality similar to what Nnedi Okorafor describes in *Akata Witch*, what Sunny sees in the flames, and what she encounters with her friends.

Read along with this booklet as you explore the world of Leopard Knocks and learn as you go!

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WHAT IS LEOPARD KNOCKS?

"The full name is Ngbe Abum Obbaw , that's Efik for 'Leopard Knocks His Foot'." - Chichi, Akata Witch

In *Akata Witch*, Leopard Knocks is a magical city in Nigeria bustling with shops, bookstores and restaurants protected by juju. A dangerous, narrow bridge over a river that leads into Leopard Knocks and can only be crossed with confidence, courage, and revealing your "spirit face".

It was built on an island that was conjured by the ancestors and shrouded in a heavy mist. Leopard Knocks gets its name from a spell an Efik woman created to stop an actual Leopard from attacking her, by having it stub its foot on something hard.

Leopard Knocks is the headquarters of the Leopard People, who are magical beings who exist all over the world but are unknown by Lambs (non-magical people). They value knowledge over money and materialism, and the collective is more important than the individual. First, in chapter 3, and throughout the book, Sunny and her friends go to Leopard Knocks to visit their teacher, Anatov, Defender of Frogs and All Things Natural. Anatov's Hut is their classroom for learning magic and growing as a team together to save their community.



Illustration by Bayou Bay

WHAT IS AFRICAN FUTURISM?

African Futurism was coined by Nigerian American writer Nnedi Okorafor in 2019 to describe a sub-category of science fiction that is “directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view..and...does not privilege or center the West.” It is centered with optimistic “visions in the future,” and is written by and centers on people of African descent while staying rooted in the African continent.

The oldest human skeleton (nicknamed “Lucy”) was found in Ethiopia, where she lived 3 million years ago. Africa is often called the **birthplace of humanity** and scientists consider the earliest humans to have lived there. We all come from Africa! Today, Black and African cultures teach us rich lessons about family, community, creativity, spirituality, strength and resilience. Black and African books, art, and music teach us to look beyond ourselves and to see beyond the here and now. This tradition shows us how we are all connected across race, class, age, gender, language – and even across space and time!

Many Black and African cultures consider the past, present, and future intricately connected, where we can still communicate with ancestors who have passed away, and where what we do now, affects our future generations. The symbol below comes from the Bakongo religion of the people of Central Africa including the Democratic Republic of Congo, but it has also been found in plantation homes and places where enslaved Africans lived in the American South.

This symbol, called the **Bakongo Cosmogram**, or **dikenga cross**, or **yowa**, represents the circle of life and how souls travel across both physical and spiritual worlds. It shows how the Bakongo people saw themselves as a part of a wide and interconnected universe.

According to this belief, when someone passes away, they leave the realm of the living, but this is not the end of their story. Death is simply the beginning - a birth - of a new life in the ancestor and spirit realm.

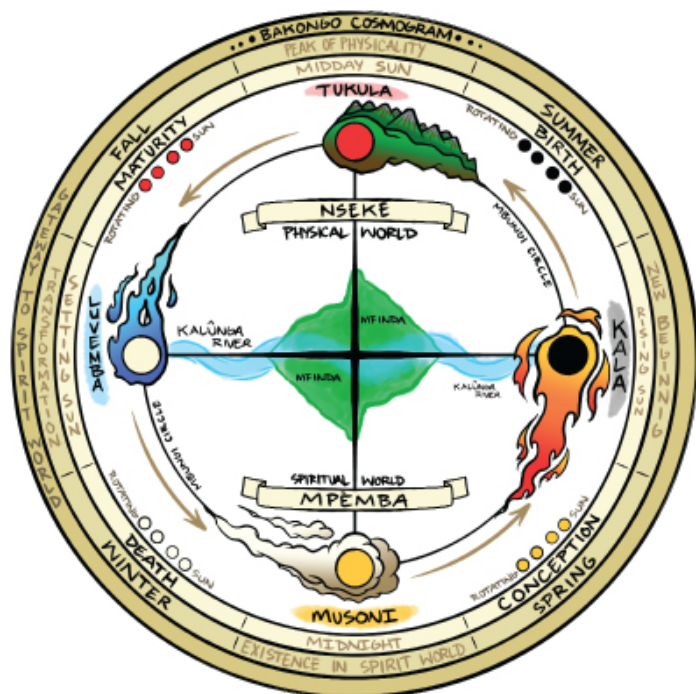


Illustration by Bayou Bay

PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE



Sankofa is a Twi word and Adinkra symbol from the Akan people of Ghana that means “go back and get it!” Sankofa is drawn as a mythical bird with its head turned backward and holding an egg, representing knowledge of the past. This concept shows up in Black American art and culture and reminds us all how important it is to remember, learn from, and stay connected to the past – to help guide our future.

“I have great respect for the past. If you don’t know where you’ve come from, you don’t know where you’re going. I have respect for the past, but I’m a person of the moment. I’m here, and I do my best to be completely centered at the place I’m at.” – Maya Angelou

West African authors Malidoma and Sobonfu Some write about a **hearing ritual** among their Dagara people of Burkina Faso used to remind children of their purpose in life. Community elders put a pregnant mother or parent in a trance, and ask questions to the unborn baby. They ask: Who are you? Why are you coming here? Based on the reply, they will choose a name for the child and guide the parents to surround them with things to remind them of their purpose. The entire community, especially grandparents, are responsible for helping each child find their gifts and remember their purpose.

It’s normal for children to get into trouble, but this is considered a time when the child has forgotten their purpose. The village will create another ritual where the community sings to the child, tells them of their value and gifts, grieves their forgetting, and pleads for them to return.

Akata Witch takes place in southern Nigeria, where the Yoruba people may be Christian or Muslim, but some also practice a traditional belief system called **Ifá** where practitioners give offerings to **orisha** (spirits) that represent different parts of human nature. Some of these spirits are well-known and celebrated across the Black Diaspora, like Oshun (of the rivers, love and creativity), Oya (of the storms and transformation) or Shango (of fire, justice and protection). Through the slave trade, Yoruba traditions spread across the Americas and influenced other forms of Black spirituality such as **Santería** in Cuba, **Candomblé** in Brazil, **Voudou** in Haiti and **Hoodoo** in the American South.

FIRST FLOOR - LEOPARD KNOCKS MARKETPLACE



Congratulations! You courageously crossed over the bridge and have now entered the protected island of Leopard Knocks.

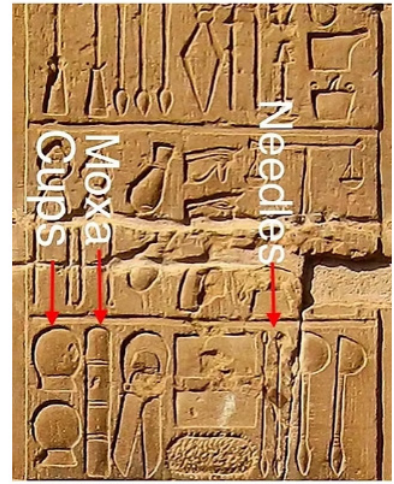
Visit the Welcome Table to pick up a booklet of the island to guide you, and make sure to stop by each “shop” to learn something new.

You’ll find delicious Nigerian snacks, books on Black and African culture and healing, and **Ear Acupressure**, an ancient healing art from Africa and Asia. This involves placing tiny metal beads to press on special ear points, including **Shen Men**, a Chinese word meaning “spirit gate.” Pressing this point may calm and relax you, clear blockages and open the way for more clarity in your mind, heart, and emotions. It may also give you extra energy for the journey ahead!

Visit the Community Altar and pay your respects to your ancestors (this might include your family, or anyone you choose!) or friends who have passed on to the spirit world. Feel free to leave something small at the altar if you want, like a stone, leaf, or small plate of food. Anything left on the altar will be given back to the earth at the end of the day.

Stop by the Oracle Card Shop to explore another way of communicating with the ancestors. In this tradition, you ask a question and then choose one (or a few) cards to help answer your question. Feel free to ask for help in setting a goal for what to learn at Leopard Knocks, or ask for help with something that’s bothering you – or anything at all! If you feel any cards stick out to you for any reason, that could be your intuition or ancestors whispering. If you feel nothing, that’s okay too! No matter what cards you pull, they will give you inspiration and positive messages for your journey.

Since you had to reveal your spirit face to cross the bridge, why not show it off! We invite your true self and spirit to feel free here. **Stop by the DIY Face & Body Painting Shop** and check out the examples and reflection questions to create your own spirit face, or make a design on your arm or hand!



Ebers Papyrus, Ancient Egyptian Medical Remedies (1550 B.C.)

ELEVATORS & SECOND FLOOR -

PORTALS & RAINING CHITTIM

Continue your journey up the island and to deeper experiences by making your way to the elevators.

As you near them, make sure to look up. You may see an open portal to the 2nd floor with chittim raining down on you!

The “chittim” that rains down on Sunny and her friends as a reward for learning is based on real-world **manillas** or **okpoho**, metal jewelry that served as currency across West Africa during the slave trade.



Illustration by Bayou Bay

Through your time in Leopard Knocks, you may be gifted chittim at certain activities, as a reminder that at Leopard Knocks, true wealth is not stacking cash, but gaining great knowledge.



Before you leave, make sure to return to the 1st floor Chittim Shop to share one thing that you learned in exchange for more chittim as a goodbye gift!

Explore the second floor to see the full art installation “Raining Chittim” by Bayou Bay and continue up the elevators to explore more of your past, present, and future.

“Money and material things make you king or queen of the Lamb world...Leopard People are different. The only way you can earn chittim is by learning. The more you learn, the more chittim you earn. Knowledge is the center of all things.”- Akata Witch

THIRD FLOOR - MAGAZINE ROOM MASQUERADES

Visit the 3rd floor to explore ancestors and spirits of the past!

Take a few moments in the **Magazine Room** to watch videos of traditional masquerades for inspiration. Pay attention to the colors and shapes you see, how they move, and if any remind you of anyone you know. Can you tell if there's a story being told? Are any secrets being shared – or kept hidden?

Whether they come out on holidays, celebrations, or for spiritual ceremonies, Nigerian masquerades are held in great respect, awe, and fear. As Sunny and her friends found out, conjuring masquerades and communicating with ancient spirits is not for the faint of heart. If you don't know what you're doing and don't have a teacher to guide you, it can lead to trouble. Traditionally, children run in fear of masquerades. Many people avoid touching or looking them in the eye because their power is too great and could cause harm. Watching masquerades on video is one way to explore this powerful tradition from a safe distance.



Did you know? Annual carnivals in the Caribbean, Brazil, and Venice, Greece, were influenced by African masquerades and similar pagan festivals across Europe. For example, in early Rome, Saturnalia was celebrated each December by decorating homes with wreaths and gathering for food, music, and gifts, and laid the foundation for today's Christmas traditions.

THIRD FLOOR - INNOVATION LAB ANCESTOR ZINES & MASK MAKING

Cross over into **the Innovation Lab** to get creative with Nicci Williams! You can make a mask and/or an Ancestor Zine based on anyone from the past or present of your choice to take home and teach to a friend or family member. Choose someone in your family who you love, or anyone who has influenced you, or a spirit that calls to you! Here's some ideas to get started:

- Oshun
- Oya
- Shango
- Obatala
- Andrea Jenkins
- Beyonce
- Bob Marley
- Nnedi Okorafor
- "Lucy" (The Oldest Human)
- Mother Earth
- Father Sky
- Audre Lorde
- Octavia Butler
- Shuri
- Black Panther
- Mutulu Shukur
- Diandra Forrest

FOURTH FLOOR - ANATOV'S HUT



Continue up the last portal (elevator) to the fourth floor to enter Anatov's Hut, where Sunny meets her teacher and is initiated into her magical powers.

Just as Sunny's life was transformed by her initiation, we invite you to enter this floor to explore your future and open doors to your own transformation.

CAUTION: This room is meant to be a multi-sensory experience! It may be warm, humid, and dark, with herbal and essential oils in the air including but not limited to incense, chamomile, cypress, cedarwood, eucalyptus, lavender, roses, cedar, ginger, garlic, shea butter, cinnamon, dandelion, and burdock root. If you have allergies or are scent-sensitive, proceed with caution. We can also offer you a mask to wear!

Did you know? The island of Leopard Knocks was based on the Gullah Islands near South Carolina? Both South Carolina and southern Nigeria are hot and humid, and this room may feel like it!

Walking & Seated Meditations - Labyrinth & Swing Chairs

You'll see that the tables swirl into the center of the room in a labyrinth design. Labyrinths exist in many cultures including ancient Egypt, Greek mythology, medieval Europe, Christian churches, India, and American Indigenous communities. They can guide a simple walking meditation, or be thought of as a map – symbolic for following your spiritual path or pilgrimage. In the past, labyrinths have also been used to guide ritual dances or as a maze to trap negative energy or evil spirits like a web.



Follow the candles through the labyrinth at your own pace. As you walk, notice the sounds and smells of the room, and your thoughts, and your feet on the floor. If you'd like, imagine following the roadmap of your life, or the path of your ancestors, or imagine trapping negativity in an impenetrable web. Once you reach the center, simply turn and find your way out.

Illustration by Bayou Bay

You can also sit in the swing chairs for more meditation time. Please be mindful of others waiting for the chairs, and keep your time in them to about 5 minutes.

FOURTH FLOOR - ANATOV'S HUT

Visit with Plant Elders

Mother Nature is a powerful healer, and herbs and plants are a major part of Black and African cuisines, ceremonies, and healing arts. African dishes are known for their abundant flavor and medicinal spices used such as ginger, garlic, peppers, and slow-cooked bone broths. Leaves, flowers, stems, roots, and stones are used across Yoruba, Hoodoo, Voodoo, and many other Black traditions for both spiritual and physical healing properties.



Illustration by Bayou Bay

Visit the tables with covered bowls to explore a few of the most common herbs used in Black cultures (Hint: You may recognize some of these from your kitchen!). For an extra challenge, close your eyes and try to identify the herb with only touch or smell. The name of the herb will be on the table – please remember to place this paper face-down and cover up the bowl for the next person to guess.

Tuning Fork Acupressure Circle

If you enjoyed receiving ear seed acupressure on the 1st floor, join the circle of chairs for a longer session! Tuning forks is a safe and gentle way to stimulate points on the hands, arms, and head for all ages. Acupressure can address physical health as well as emotions like grief or sadness, anger, overwhelm, worry, fear or panic. Join the circle with Traditional Chinese Medicine doctoral student Nathalie Crowley to feel more calm and grounded, address blockages or pain, and bring a sense of wellness, peace, and protection into your future.

FOURTH FLOOR - ANATOV'S HUT

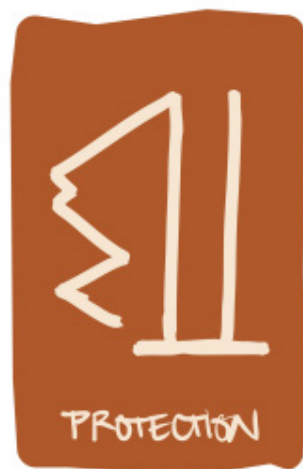
Chair Massage & Energy Cleansing

Find your way to the massage chair for a gentle session including laying on of hands, shea butter hand massage, and energy cleansing with massage therapist and chiropractic doctoral student Ihotu Ali. Be prepared to share one old thing you are ready to release, and one new thing you are ready to call into your future.

Laying on of hands is one of the oldest healing arts found across cultures and mentioned in multiple religious texts. The Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria use the word **akaraka** (meaning destiny or fate) to describe a local palm reading tradition, of reading someone's future by the lines in their hand. The San people of Southern Africa used touch to draw sickness "out" of an ill person, along with pouring libations, prayer, purification baths, fire or water rituals, or other herbal remedies. Across Africa and the Black Diaspora, many people choose to combine Western allopathic medicine with cultural or spiritual traditions like prayer, rituals, or working with a healer.

From a Western science perspective, these cultural traditions help keep the person calm, and activate their vagus nerve and parasympathetic nervous system, which may strengthen their immune system and body's ability to fight off illness. **From an African science perspective**, these traditions help keep the person connected to community, spirit, and nature. Think about a phone with a dead battery that needs to recharge. By plugging the phone back into an energy source, like re-activating someone's connection to the **Bakongo Cosmogram** circle of life, they are able to heal.

These are two very different ways of thinking about illness and healing. Is it possible that both could be right? What could our future look like, if we had access to many different cultures, traditions, and healing arts, instead of just one?



REFLECTION

What have you learned from the book or this event that you want to share with others?

What is your superpower?

Who are the people you turn to as friends and comrades to fight your challenges with?

When you feel lost, how can you reach out to friends and teachers to remind you of your superpowers?

What does ancestral or spiritual healing look like in your culture(s)?

THANK YOU!

Continue the Akata Witch Magic at Home

Thank you for visiting Leopard Knocks! To help you remember the magic even as you return to the world of the Lambs, here's two special gifts for you to enjoy and share with family and friends!

Tune in to the Akata Witch Spotify Playlist for Afrobeat, High Life, Reggae, and Afro-futurist sounds from across the Black Diaspora. Find a quiet place to listen to the Grand-Baby Meditation and explore your connection with your parents, grandparents, and any other ancestors in your family line.

Scan the QR codes or enter the links below!



Afrobeat & African Futurist Vibes
spoti.fi/4kYJD4i



Grand-Baby Meditation
bit.ly/akatawitchmeditation

If you are looking for more community, connection, and protection, check out these amazing organizations with Black leaders and programs for local Black and BIPOC communities:

- Cultural Wellness Center
- Reviving Roots
- Creative Kuponya
- Healthcare Reparations Cooperative
- Ayo's Somatic Network
- REP for Minnesota
- Family Tree Clinic
- Our Justice
- Odigo Wellness
- Oshun Center for Intercultural Healing
- Affirmation Space
- ZaRah Integrated Root Center
- African American Babies Coalition
- Black Family Blueprint
- Right Spot Wellness
- Body of the Earth
- African American Leadership Forum
- Kente Circle
- Snuggle House Foundation
- Nexxus Community Partners
- Penumba Theatre
- HEAL Minneapolis
- 612 Jungle
- Public Functionary

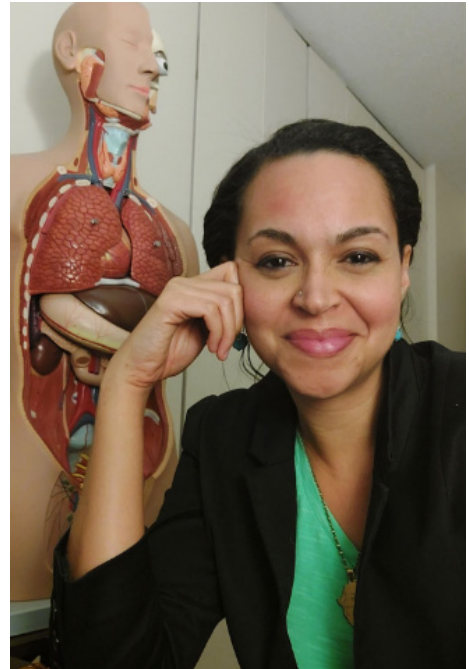
READ BRAVE

OSHUN CENTER CREATIVE TEAM

Ihotu Jennifer Ali is a cultural bodyworker, birth worker, soon-to-be Doctor of Chiropractic, and Director of the Oshun Center for Intercultural Healing. Ihotu is pronounced “ee-ho-too” and means love in Idoma, a language of eastern Nigeria, where she was raised by her Nigerian father and Minnesotan mother.

As a United Nations health researcher, Ihotu worked in over 30 countries and now offers integrative care inspired by healers and midwives across the African Diaspora. She specializes in chronic pain, pregnancy and pelvis care, Mayan abdominal massage, chiropractic and musculoskeletal acupuncture. She teaches on re-integrating global indigenous practices into modern health care and birth settings to spark generational healing and change.

<http://www.ihotuali.com>
@ihotuali



Bayou Bay (he/stardust pronouns) is a Twin Cities based mixed-media artist and designer born in St. Paul on the occupied lands of the Dakota & Anishinaabe peoples. His work embodies themes of nature from the micro to the cosmic, black and collective liberation, healing trauma, time, portals, geometry, setting intentions for affirmations, asking questions, symbols, and identity exploration. Water is an especially strong theme in Bayou’s work.

<http://affirmationspace.com>
@the_bayou_constellation



READ BRAVE OSHUN CENTER CREATIVE TEAM

Nathalie Crowley (she/her) is a born and raised Minneapolisian who has worked in healthcare and in the anti-violence movement for 20+ years, most recently in leadership positions at Family Tree Clinic in Minneapolis. She has used her experience working in healthcare as a queer and trans woman of color to help educate and advocate for increased access to quality wellness care for trans, queer, and BIPOC Minnesotans. Nathalie's desire for more access to quality wellness care for trans, queer, and BIPOC folks led her to leave the healthcare administration world, and she is now in school at Northwestern Health Sciences University earning her doctoral degree in acupuncture and Chinese medicine. She is especially interested in herbal medicine and how traditional medicines can support people who have historically been harmed by the Western medical system.



Nicci Williams is a multi-racial, multi-abled, neurovaried, multi-generational Minneapolisian. They have a background in psychology and school counseling; with a focus on childhood development & play, trauma informed practice, sexual health, and racial equity. She is newly adventuring in the outdoors and spends as much time adventuring in community as she can. Nicci is intentionally curious and accidentally hilarious. They are the Equity-focused Programs Manager at Family Tree Clinic, and they believe that more play and sweetness are sources of power and healing for all of us - past, present, and future.



NAVIGATING GEORGE LATIMER CENTRAL LIBRARY

Restrooms -

Floor One
Floor Three
Floor Four

Drinking Fountains -

Floor One
Floor Three
Floor Four

Accessible Entry/Exit

Accessible exit/entrance to the building is located on the Kellogg Blvd. side of building (facing the river and Science Museum).

Elevators -

Elevators to all four floors are available. Please go through the Lobby and Welcome Center, past the first floor restrooms, and into the atrium.

Please note that pressing the elevator button will call the next available elevator, which may arrive on the opposite