

# LESSON PLAN FOR WEEK SIX

**Subject:** History

**Class:** J.S. 1

## ORIGIN

The Itsekiri are found in the Western Delta area of Nigeria. The Kingdom is said to have come into existence in the latter part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The story of origin of Itsekiri is associated with the migration of a Benin prince Iginuwa and his people to Itsekiri land. It is believed that this movement took place in 1473 under the reign of a Benin King, Oba Olua. It is said that Olua's heir (Iginuwa) became very unpopular in Benin because of the ill advice he gave his father. As a result, the Benin chiefs and people decided not to allow him succeed his father.

In view of this, Olua made adequate preparations to enable the prince to go out in search of a new home. Iginuwa left Benin with seventy sons of the seventy Benin chiefs (nobles). On arrival in their new place, Iginuwa and his team are said to have met "certain mythical beings" whom they called Umale. Most of these fled on their arrival, while some stayed behind and accepted Iginuwa's leadership. The tradition says that Itsekiri was the name of one of these mythical beings who was very good to Iginuwa and his chiefs. Iginuwa started a new Kingdom with the help of these beings in the Western Niger area.

## BASIC FACTS THAT SHOULD BE NOTED ABOUT THE ITSEKIRI

- a. That the mythical Umale whom Iginuwa is said to have met on arrival in his new home were no "mythical beings" but perhaps the original inhabitants of the area whom many writers have identified as the Ijaw and Urhobo.
- b. That those earlier inhabitants accepted Iginuwa's leadership, perhaps because they were impressed by his royal regalia.
- c. That the original inhabitants of the area were a mixed group comprising the Ijaw; Urhobo, Benin and Yoruba elements.
- d. That the society which emerged out of this amalgam was Edo because of their close contact with Benin.
- e. That if the Itsekiri ruling group came from Benin with their idea of centralized monarch the ruled was a mixed group from areas other than Benin.

## SOCIO – POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

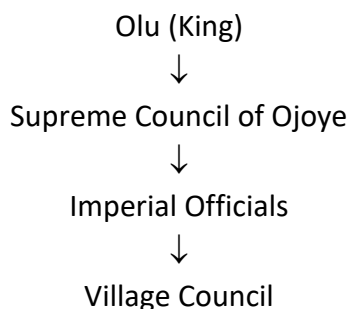
The Itsekiri Kingdom was made up of Ode Itsekiri (the capital) and a few settlements and villages scattered along the forcados, Escravos and Benin Rivers.

The Kingdom was ruled by Olu (King). The Olu had the right to confer titles on worthy and deserving citizens. He was both the spiritual and political head of the Itsekiri. He could offer sacrifices to the departed rulers and important deities of the Kingdom.

Next to the King (Olu) was the supreme council of Ojoye. The council of Ojoye was made up of the sons of the seventy Benin nobles who accompanied Iginuwa to Itsekiri land. A case of disagreement by the Olu and the council was always brought to an oracle for final judgement.

Apart from the council of Ojoye the King had the help of other imperial officials who helped him in the day to day administration of the Kingdom. These includes – the Ologbotsere (Prime minister) and chief adviser to the Olu), Iyatsere (war chief) Uwangue (custodian of Olu's regalia and chief spokesman in council).

Next was the village council which was headed by the Olaraaja (the eldest man of the land) and the Okpanran (priest). Disputes which could not be settled by the village elders were sent to the Olu's council.



### **THE ITSEKIRI ECONOMY**

The Itsekiri has coastal and hinterland area. Both areas have different vegetation and the differences in the vegetation of these areas led to differences in agricultural production and in the development of an internal trading system.

The coastal Itsekiri exchanged the products of the delta (fish, crayfish, salt and earthen ware) with the agricultural products of the hinterland trade. The Itsekiri specialized in pot – making and were the only suppliers of pots in the entire delta area. The pots were used for:

- a. The salt industries
- b. For grinding tobacco
- c. For household purposes.

Their internal trade existed along two major fronts;

- i. The long distance cross – delta trade
- ii. The local trade between the Itsekiri and the Ijaw and Urhobo neighbours.

Other articles of trade within Itsekiri land before 18<sup>th</sup> century were palm oil, Ivory, pepper and cloth.

Itsekiri Kingdom also engaged in Trans – Atlantic trade (trade in slaves). This helped to expand the Itsekiri trade by providing it with more commodities for exchange with the hinterland.

### **EVALUATION**

1. Trace the origin of the Itsekiri people.
2. Highlight five basic facts about the Itsekiri Kingdom.
3. Discuss the socio – political organization of the Itsekiri.
4. Examine the economic development of the Itsekiri.

### **ASSIGNMENT**

Examine the economic development of the Itsekiri before 1800.