

Kirikou and the Sorceress



# Kirikou and the Sorceress

Film Guide **Emma Teck**

## Kirikou and the Sorceress

**Director** Michel Ocelot/  
France/1998/74 mins

### Cast Voices

**Antionette Kellerman** Karaba  
**Fezele Mpeka** Uncle  
**Kombisile Sangweni** The Mother  
**Theo Sebeko** Kirikou  
**Mabutho Sithole** The Old Man

### Crew

**Directed by** Michel Ocelot  
**Written by** Michel Ocelot  
**Producers**  
Didier Brunner, Paul Thiltges,  
Jacques Vercruyssen  
**Original Music** Youssou N'Dour  
**Film Editing** Dominique Lefevre  
**Sound Department**  
Mathieu Cox, Alek Goosse,  
Marina Lerchs

## Introduction

Kirikou and the sorceress is the story of a small but extremely brave little boy, Kirikou, born in a little village somewhere in West Africa. Kirikou can already walk and talk when he is born and he starts to understand things straight away in his village. He is very determined and always finds a solution, whatever the problem. There is an evil sorceress, Kabala, who is tormenting Kirikou's village. She has to be bribed and soothed constantly. She has dried up the well and threatened to eat all the men from the village. Brave warriors have vanished when they tried to fight her. Little Kirikou decides it is not wise to fight Karaba, but it is better to negotiate with her instead. He embarks on a journey to discover why Karaba is so evil. To find out the truth he must go to the forbidden mountain, where the wise man of the mountain, who knows Karaba and her secrets, awaits him.

## What kind of story is 'Kirikou and the Sorceress'?

The film is based on a West African **folktale**. These stories have been passed down by an **oral tradition** from generation to generation. These stories may be several centuries old. West Africa has a great oral tradition. This kind of story is told by a **Griot**. A griot is a learned storyteller, entertainer and historian. Often a griot will memorize the **genealogy**, or family history, of everyone in a village going back centuries.

Myths and legends refer to similar kinds of stories, usually about gods or heroes with special powers. Such stories may also be used to explain certain beliefs or events in the distant past. 'Kirikou' is a story that is like a myth or legend but also like folktales and fairytales. Both are concerned with adventures involving magical powers and struggles between good and evil.

*What do you understand by the words, myth, legend, folktale and fairytale?*

*Can you give an example of one of these?*

*A Griot is an old storyteller, Do we have these in Ireland?*

*Can you think of an Irish story that has been passed down through the centuries?*

*What does Genealogy mean? Find out about your own genealogy. Ask your parents how long your family has been living here.*



## Africa: Did you know?

### Where people came from?

Africa is the place where people like us first came from, so African history goes back further than any other place on earth. At first there were not many people in Africa, and they lived by gathering wild plants and by scavenging meat that other, stronger animals had killed. Gradually they began using stone tools and fire; then they began hunting for themselves. The first people on earth probably started out in south-east Africa. Genetic evidence shows us that until about 60,000 years ago Africa was the only place on earth where modern people lived. Then some people spread out along the coast, going around the **Arabian Peninsula**, **India**, **Australia** and all the way to **West Asia**. Around 6,000 BC the climate in Africa got gradually hotter and drier. The **Sahara Desert** was forming again. It was harder to get food. Some people in Africa began farming to get food, but with this the population expanded very quickly. By 3,000 BC there were so many people in Africa that they started forming into Kingdoms. The first African Kingdom and the first Kingdom in the world, was in **Egypt**, where Pharaohs built the Pyramids.

### Africa's Geography

Africa is the world's second largest continent. It is home to **enormous mountains**, **three large deserts** and **the world's longest river**. The **Great Rift Valley** of East Africa is an enormous split torn in the Earth's crust that runs from the forests of Tanzania to the Deserts of Ethiopia. In some places the rift is thousands of metres deep. There are places along the rift where the walls of the valley are more than two kilometres high! Many lakes have formed in the Great Rift Valley. **Lake Victoria**, on the border of Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya is the world's second largest freshwater lake and home to Victoria Falls, the world's highest waterfall. Most of equatorial Africa is lush tropical rainforest. The rainforest is hot and wet. Rainforest is home to some of the most important vegetation because it provides oxygen to the entire planet and keeps the earth's temperature from rising. North and South of the rainforest are **Savannas**, areas with tall grasses and scattered trees and bushes. The Savanna is home to large grazing animals like elephants, lions, tigers, giraffes and zebras.

*Find a map of the world and trace the route the Africans took when they left 60,000 years ago.*

*What is Africa's largest mountain, longest river and three large deserts? Find them on the map.*

*Which part of Africa do you think Kirikou and his tribe lived in?*

## Plots

A good way to learn about folktales is to think of the similarities between the plots of various stories. Most folk or fairytales start with a hero setting off on some kind of **quest**, to **find someone** or **something**, or to **rescue** someone from the clutches of evil. There will be **adventures** on the way and then a confrontation with an evil villain. After a **battle** the **hero wins** and saves the day. Often in these stories, the **hero is sent off by his village**, or an old king to find the precious object or person that is in danger. During his journey a **wise person** or a **good magician** might give advice or a **magic sword** to help the hero in his quest. The hero will be **blocked** by **agents** of the evil force.

The hero's journey is a crucial part of the plot. The journey means that the hero will experience a **different environment** with the possibility of **danger**. The hero will also learn from his journey and the many things he has encountered. This knowledge will help him to defeat the evil that is against him.

*Looking at the different elements of the hero's story, outline the plot of 'Kirikou'.*

*Look at some other stories that you know. Can you give a plot outline for them? How are the stories similar, how are they different?*

## Animals and Birds

Folktales tend to treat animals and birds as characters, able to talk and to think. Animals can be a threat or act as helpers for the hero.

*These animals appear in 'Kirikou and the Sorceress'. What do they do to help or hinder Kirikou in his journey?*

Zorill | Snake | Warthog | Squirrels | Toucans



*If this was an Irish folktale, what animals do you think would help you on a journey?*

## Music

The music for the film was composed using only traditional African instruments. These are some of the instruments that were used.

Balafon | Ritti | Cora | Xalam | Tokho Sabaar | Belon

*Have you ever heard of any of these instruments? Find out as much as you can about them. Name some traditional Irish instruments.*

## Traditional West African Culture

The film makes reference to several aspects of West African culture:

**Baobab:** This is a great West African tree with an enormous trunk. In the film the old man sits beneath it to talk to the children.

**Savannah:** This is the name for the open country of many parts of Africa, characterized by flat landscape with occasional trees.

**Cassava or Manioc:** The women in the film are pounding something in a giant pestle and mortar. The food they are pounding is a large root vegetable, which is pounded into a paste.

## The Moral

The central question in 'Kirikou and the Sorceress' is: why is the sorceress so evil? This is the question that Kirikou asks at the beginning of the tale, because no one else in the village has bothered to ask it. Kirikou will not reach the truth by believing in superstition but by taking matters into his own hands. Kirikou is only ten centimetres tall so he cannot fight the sorceress like all the other men in the village. He must use his brains to get to the truth and then he will be able to reach the source of Karaba's evil.

Kirikou is very brave and he does not believe the superstitions that the other villagers believe. He is small so he can fit into small places. For Kirikou being small is an advantage. When he goes up the mouth of the dried up spring he finds that it is not really the evil sorceress that has dried up the spring, but a big thirsty monster. It suits the evil sorceress to let the villagers believe that she was the reason for the spring drying up so that they will be even more afraid of her.

**The old wise man** tells Kirikou that the villagers are silly because they believe in superstition instead of finding things out for themselves. When Kirikou asks about Karaba eating all of the men in the village he replies that she likes 'yam in spicy sauce, just like you'. The men have not really been eaten but turned into robots.

Family and friends are very important in this story. We can see that when Kirikou nearly drowns after destroying the monster in the spring. His mother holds him very close and all of the villagers sing a song to him

to help him get better, even all of the children who were mean to him before in the river.

We learn in this story that it is important to forgive people. Kirikou forgives the children for being mean to him, and he also forgives the sorceress for all of the evil things she did.

*Why do you think Kirikou forgave the sorceress for all the things she did? Why was it hard for the villagers to forgive her?*

## Conclusion

At the end of the film Kirikou pulls the thorn out from Karaba's spine. Some men had put the thorn there a long time ago. As soon as the thorn was out everything changed.

This story is different from other stories because the evil sorceress is not killed. We discover that she was only an instrument of her pain and couldn't reach the thorn to pull it out. It would have been too painful for her to do so. What does that tell us; that when we are hurting, instead of asking for help, we can hurt other people too.

The film ends with Kirikou asking Karaba to marry him and they live happily ever after.

*What changed when the thorn was pulled out of Karaba's spine? What happened to Kirikou?*

*Did you like the animation? Make up your own story and draw pictures to go with it. This is called a storyboard. You can then make a flip book animation with your own characters and events.*

## Further information

### Websites:

[www.enchantedlearning.com](http://www.enchantedlearning.com)  
[www.nationalgeographic.com/kids](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids)  
[www.kirikou.net](http://www.kirikou.net)