



**For Indigenous peoples,
for nature,
for all humanity**

The Baka: 10 insightful facts (for learners aged 5-11)

Dear educator,

Thank you very much for choosing Survival International's educational resources. A core part of our mission is supporting teachers in introducing Indigenous rights to young people. Our engaging resources are designed to make learning about the struggles and rights of Indigenous peoples accessible and meaningful for students of all ages.

This discussion guide aimed at young people aged 5-11 intends to foster students' appreciation for Indigenous knowledge and highlight the profound connection Indigenous peoples, like the Baka, have with their environment. It contains a short introduction as well as the following 10 insightful facts about the Baka:

1. Un-be-leaf-able!
2. There's more than one elephant in the room!
3. Honey, I'm comb!
4. May the forest be with you!
5. Sharing is caring
6. What's all the buzz about?
7. Beau-tooth-ful!
8. Eating beef: a mi-steak?
9. 'Tis the season
10. There's music in the air!

Before you use this series of lessons with your students, you may want to look at our [Introduction to Indigenous peoples](#) for learners of all ages.

Please feel free to use this resource to best suit your students' needs. All we ask is that you reinforce **three key messages**:

1. There are more than 476 million Indigenous people worldwide, who form part of extraordinarily diverse societies with ways of life that are just as modern as anyone else's. They have technologies, laws, education, religions, and complex social, political, and economic structures. Like all societies, Indigenous peoples continually evolve – embracing tools like mobile phones and social media while adapting their ancestral techniques to challenges such as climate change. This doesn't make them any less Indigenous.
2. Indigenous identity is deeply rooted in their reciprocal connection to their land. Many Indigenous peoples rely on their land for their livelihoods which are largely self-sufficient. The intricate systems they have developed to live sustainably on their land foster strong community ties. Indigenous peoples

actively shape and safeguard some of the planet's most biodiverse regions, preserving them for future generations.

3. Indigenous peoples around the globe show remarkable resilience in the face of systemic racism, land theft, forced development, and genocidal violence. They fight tirelessly and strategically to defend their rights, territories, and ways of life. Supporting their struggle and standing in solidarity with their pursuit of justice and self-determination is essential.

To learn more about how to teach about Indigenous peoples' rights and struggles in a culturally sensitive manner, we invite you to look at our [*Teaching guidance Indigenous peoples: Dos & Don'ts*](#).

Your Survival education team

About Survival International

Survival International is the global campaigning movement for Indigenous peoples' rights. Since 1969, we've been working to prevent their destruction and give them a platform to speak to the world about the genocidal violence, slavery and racism they face on a daily basis. By lobbying the powerful, Survival helps defend the lives, lands and futures of people who should have the same rights as other contemporary societies. Unlike many other organizations, Survival refuses government money and does not take donations from companies that might violate the rights of Indigenous peoples. To learn more, visit www.survivalinternational.org

0. Introduction



The Baka are hunter gatherers who have lived in and cared for the world's second largest rainforest, the Congo Basin, for generations.

But for years, the Baka have had their land stolen from them by outsiders to create protected areas. What's more, when the Baka return to their lands, park rangers often treat them badly, even violently. This makes life

difficult for the Baka families who just want to live peacefully in their forest, because without their forest, the Baka could not survive. Nor can the forest survive without them.

Evidence shows that Indigenous territories effectively prevent deforestation, and that their territories are rich in biodiversity. Protecting our planet relies on respecting Indigenous rights: Indigenous peoples are by far the world's best conservationists.

Here's what the Baka have shared about their forests' importance. As a starting point, students should consider how the Baka's views on forests contrast with those of people in their country.



Suzanne, Baka, Republic of Congo © Survival



Odette, Baka, Republic of Congo © Survival



Eyaya Nivrel, Baka, Republic of Congo © Survival



Luc Ndeloua, Baka, Cameroon © Survival

- “If we were to give up the forest, we’d be sacrificing our children’s lives, our parents’ lives, our own lives. It would be as if we were killing ourselves.”¹
- “The Baka belong to the forest. It is our home.”²
- “We Baka, we’re not the type of people who just stay in the village. We’re forest people ... Our life, our future is out in the forest. For us and for our children. I know the forest from A-Z. Every root, every tree.”³
- “We live from the forest: wild mangoes, fish, meat, wild honey and yams, everything. The food we eat is from the forest.” – Suzanne, Baka⁴

¹ https://survivalinternational.org/articles/883/baka_sacrificed_for_conservation

² <https://www.survivalinternational.org/campaigns/green-genocide>

³ https://survivalinternational.org/articles/883/baka_sacrificed_for_conservation

⁴ <https://www.survivalinternational.org/films/299859387>

- “We are Baka. We live in the forest. ... The forest is ours. We Baka live in the forest, we don’t live in the village.” – Odette, Baka⁵
- “The forest is our home, it’s where we live. ... We, the Baka, enter the forest to get the things we need.” Eyaya Nivrel, Baka⁶
- “We are the forest.” – Luc Ndeloua, Baka⁷

For decades, Survival International has been investigating and exposing the human rights abuses faced by the Baka people in the name of conservation, working to ensure they can remain living on their land. To hear testimonies from the Baka and learn more about the campaign, [please go here](#).

1. Un-be-leaf-able!

The Baka have invaluable knowledge of the environment around them – families use up to 500 different plants for medicine, tools, food and shelter. They can, however, recognize many more plants on their land.



Consider the following questions:

- Can you guess different ways the Baka might use plants?⁸
- What plants in your area can you name? Do you know what they can be used for?
- To say “forever” in Baka language, you say *belebele* – “forest-forest”. What does this tell you about how important their forests are to the Baka?

2. There’s more than one elephant in the room!

In the Baka’s language, there are over 15 words for “elephant”, each word reflecting the age, gender, and personality of the elephant. Similarly, they have distinct words for gorillas, like “ngile” for father, “gole” for mother, “kalabe” for baby boy, and “mangombe” for baby girl.

Consider the following questions:

- What does the Baka people’s extensive vocabulary for animals reveal about their relationship with wildlife?
- Can you list some animals in English for which we have multiple words? (e.g. ‘dog’, ‘puppy’, ‘hound’ etc.)

⁵ <https://www.survivalinternational.org/films/462981526>

⁶ <https://www.survivalinternational.org/films/905616677>

⁷ <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DFznpJNnMI/>

⁸ Answer: The Baka use plants for all aspects of their life, for food, for shelter, for medicines, for their rituals, for making instruments, baskets, make-up and much more.

3. Honey, I'm comb!

Honey is an important part of the Baka's diet, as a source of sugar and energy. There are over a dozen types of honey in the rainforest, and some Baka people can climb up high into the canopy to reach the hives to collect it. It's risky, and a highly skilled activity [as this video shows](#).

4. May the forest be with you!

The Baka have a profound respect for the forest and believe it is home to a very powerful spirit called Jengi. They believe Jengi punishes those who harm the forest but rewards those who treat it well. To make Jengi happy, the Baka make sure to care for the forest because they know this pleases the spirit.



Consider the following questions:

- Do you think the forests are respected by people in this country? How can we make people respect the forests and understand their importance?
- What would Jengi think of our behavior towards forests and how we treat nature here in this country?

5. Sharing is caring

In many Baka communities, sharing is a way of life. Rather than focusing on individual ownership, resources — like food, tools, and other essentials — are shared among families and neighbors. If someone needs something, they can ask for it, and refusing to share them is seen as impolite. If somebody has more food than they need, they are expected to share it.



Consider the following questions:

- What do you think about the Baka's idea of sharing rather than "owning"? What would you like to share with others and what would you rather keep for yourself? How do you feel when you share something with your friends?
- Sharing helps the Baka to survive. Why do you think that is? Could sharing also benefit your community?

6. What's all the buzz about?

In Baka communities, the use of clocks and watches isn't prevalent, but they use nature's cues to know what time of day it is. The Baka pay close attention to bees to tell the time!

Consider the following questions:

- How do you think a Baka member might use bees to help them tell what time of day it is?⁹ Could you tell the time without using a clock or watch? What clues from nature could you use to see what time of day it is?

7. Beau-tooth-ful!

Lots of Baka men and women have their teeth sharpened to make them look pointy as they think it makes them look more attractive. Beauty practices differ greatly across the world, and as the Baka find the practice of sharpening their teeth attractive, different cultures elsewhere also value different beauty practices.

Consider the following questions:

- The practice of teeth sharpening may be unfamiliar. The Baka may find many of the beauty customs in your country unfamiliar too. Could you think of any?
- Who decides what beauty standards are normal, or attractive?

8. Eating beef: a mi-steak?

Food traditions are different around the world, and societies vary in their perception of what foods are acceptable or not. Baka families classify forest animals as acceptable to eat, such as porcupines and small deer, as they see them as wild and pure. They often avoid eating animals commonly consumed in industrialized societies, such as cows and pigs, as they are seen as less wild and possibly contaminated due to their proximity to humans.



Consider the following questions:

- Some people have said that because the Baka hunt wild animals, they should be forced to leave their forests. Given what you know so far, do you think it's wrong for the Baka to hunt wild animals?
- If the Baka were forced to leave their forests, what impact do you think this would have on the Baka and their daily diet?

⁹ Answer: The Baka use the sound of bees' hums to tell the time.

màkelo: humming of the bees about 5-6 a.m.; mongombe: humming of bees about 3-4 p.m.; dakàa na mòjembò: humming of the bees about 5-6 p.m.

9. 'Tis the season

In the industrialized world, our lifestyle is very consistent year-round. Yet, in the rainforest, it's a different tale: the Baka must adapt to survive. In the wet season, the Baka live in villages on the edge of the forest, foraging and hunting. In the dry season, when hunting is scarce, the Baka head deep into the forest for expeditions that last several months. During these months they build forest camps (*mongulus*) to go fishing, collect honey, larvae and hunt wild animals, as well as gather wild yam.

[Click here](#) to watch a video of Baka women in Cameroon building their *mongulus*.



Consider the following questions:

- To what extent does the change of seasons affect you in your country? Do you live differently in summer to winter? How? Do you like the idea of living by the seasons?
- Do you think you could survive in the rainforest? What would you do to find food/water? What aspects of rainforest life would you find the most difficult, and what aspects would you find most enjoyable?



- What do you think the Baka children are doing in this photo?¹⁰

¹⁰ Answer: In this photo children are dam-fishing. Dam-fishing involves making mini dams in streams using branches and mud, scooping out the water from the small dammed area, and then trying to pick out any fish.

10. There's music in the air!



playing the Angbindi.

Music is integral to Baka lives – even if the word “music” doesn’t exist in Baka language – they have music for every occasion. Music is used for healing and initiation rituals to hunting activities. For instance, Baka women sing *yeli* songs before hunting expeditions to calm the animals. The Baka craft their own instruments from materials found in the rainforest. Here are two important instruments:

Earth bow (Angbindi): The Baka make a stringed instrument by bending a long branch, attaching a string to it and driving it into the ground, producing beautiful sounds. [Watch here](#) to see the Baka

Water drums (Likpende): The Baka cup their hands and then play the river as we would a drum, each person playing a different rhythm. [Click here](#) to see the Baka playing the Likpende.

Consider the following questions:

- How do people in your community use music, for example, to celebrate or express certain emotions?
- How could you make music from the natural resources around you?

Learn more about Survival International’s work and how to promote Indigenous peoples’ rights

We love hearing from you and your students!

- Does your class have questions on this topic? Would they like to have a brief virtual meeting with a Survival International staff member?
- Do you want to have a Survival International staff member speak at a school assembly?
- Would you, your colleagues, or other educators you know, like to receive more Survival International educational materials? We have materials suitable for groups aged 5 to 18 years.
- Would you like your school to be involved in supporting Survival International’s work in partnership with Indigenous peoples?

If the answer is yes, then please get in touch with our team at info@survivalinternational.org

We can’t wait to hear from you!