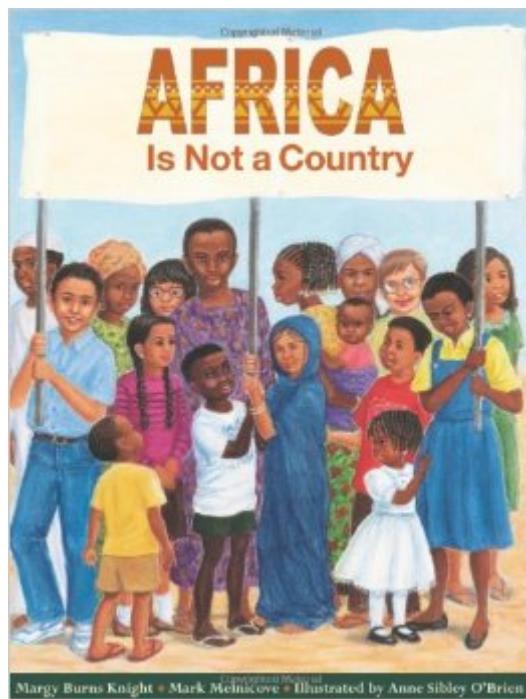


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# Africa Is Not A Country



## **Synopsis**

Demonstrates the diversity of the African continent by describing daily life in some of its fifty-three nations.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 48 pages

Publisher: Millbrook Press; unknown edition (January 1, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0761316477

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Product Dimensions: 10.9 x 0.2 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ (27 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #57,481 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Africa #43 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Africa

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 1 - 7

## **Customer Reviews**

I bought this book for my 4 year old son who is part African in order to, facilitate his learning about his roots. In general, the book is OK but, what is not true to form is the portrayal of most of sub Saharan Africa as a village. All the stories are about poor kids in villages with mud huts! From the book, one would assume yes, Africa is not a continent but, just a series of villages with no electricity nor running water; perpetuating yet another myth about Africa. It would have been good to also read about the bustling city of Douala where kids rush to catch the school bus or, loud Nairobi with the matatus that take the school kids on field trips. I have not found a book like this yet so, a project in our home is to create one like this for our son.

As an African I find it strange that in this century there has to be a book specifically written to teach anyone, even kids, that Africa is not a country but a continent of over 50 sovereign states and thousands of ethnicities. Ironically, I find that most of this ignorance is within the African American community. Even in recent months and years adults still ask me ridiculous questions such as: "can I get a rental car to drive to Africa?".. "Is there real estate and nice houses in Africa?" The latter

question, very recent, was by a college-educated female friend, so I Googled the hospital where I was born in one of the largest cities in the world - in Sub-Saharan Africa. I zoomed into the hospital facility and surrounding commercial sky-scrappers. Then I felt sorry for the look of surprise on her face. A few years ago I traveled home and returned to the US with pictures of my nieces and nephews at their nice homes. The kids looked like and dressed like any middle class American kids from good homes. My friend at first did not believe the images. The expectation was to see starved children in a war-torn village, the type you see on those commercials asking you for money. Or what you see on TV when President Jimmy Carter visits a remote village to do charity work. This book in particular does not help by portraying erroneously, that most Africans live in one big village of huts and mud houses. I must also blame Africans for encouraging this misconception. Africans tend to speak in terms of "In Africa we do this, in Africa we do that". Nothing is further from the truth than a monolithic African. As a West African, I do not even know a lot in details about other West Africans, let alone the Eastern and Southern Africans. Most of what I know is what I read in books and in the media, like the rest of the world, and from other African friends. And what I learn in many cases is widely different from my own ethnic culture. I therefore cannot speak authoritatively for any other African other than my country, and I certainly do not want another African to speak for me, simply because they don't know more than they read in world media. I recognize that this book may help some kids to better understand Africa, but it perpetuates this misconception of African poverty, with little or no depiction of middle-class city life. I wish it was not necessary to write a book on such low level information.

It's sort of sad that a book like this is even necessary, but I have seen teachers make assignments such as, "Everyone will do a report on how people live in different places. We need reports on Japan, Mexico, Germany, China, and Africa." "Africa Is Not a Country" takes a brief look at the 50-some individual countries that make up the African continent. Each country is presented in a two-page spread, with some text and a large illustration. The text works in lots of facts about each country, without being overly academic. The illustrations are large, colorful, and detailed. The book begins with morning and ends at night and depicts people having breakfast, going to school, doing housework, shopping, playing, etc. The emphasis is always on modern people (not wildlife, not "exotic" tribes). Well done.

Having visited many classes of young children, I have seen the ignorance that children today have about the African continent and the vast cultures that inhabit the mysterious land. Knight's writing is

academic, but not too technical, and playful but honest as she presents a look at the daily lives of children from all over the continent. The book is complete with a listing of all the African countries and important facts about them making it handy in the classroom and wonderful detailed stories about specifically chosen countries making it useful for home story telling. Children need this book and the best part is that they will love it too.

While teaching elementary art one year at a predominantly white American school, my supervisors told me that they wanted me to make a series of lessons "about Africa." I was given a package of paper plates and a request that the kids do at least one project where they made "authentic tribal masks." At this point, I realized that my work was cut out for me. Though the task of educating an entire school of children (and adults) to re-write their limited view of the world was impossible, I wanted to at least plant the seeds of understanding that the world is far bigger than their stunted views of mud huts and tribal masks. In conjunction with some visiting friends (such as my Egyptian friend who had a really hard time convincing the 3rd graders that #1 he didn't live in a pyramid and #2 He, too, counted as "African"), I utilized this book as an introduction to the incredibly diverse regions, languages, and peoples of this continent. The story takes place over the course of a day, and each country featured is explained through the eyes of children living there. I particularly like that each page offers the reader a word in one of the languages of the featured country, mentions different foods, and shows a variety of lifestyles from the farm to the city. Of course, a single book cannot represent an entire continent, and a two-page spread cannot represent an entire country. This book cannot be seen as an entire course in debunking American stereotypes about Africa. What it is, I believe, is a fantastic launching point for conversation, for starting questions, and for getting kids to think a little bigger. It's sad that a book like this exists, and it's even sadder how useful it is, but I was thankful for it.

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