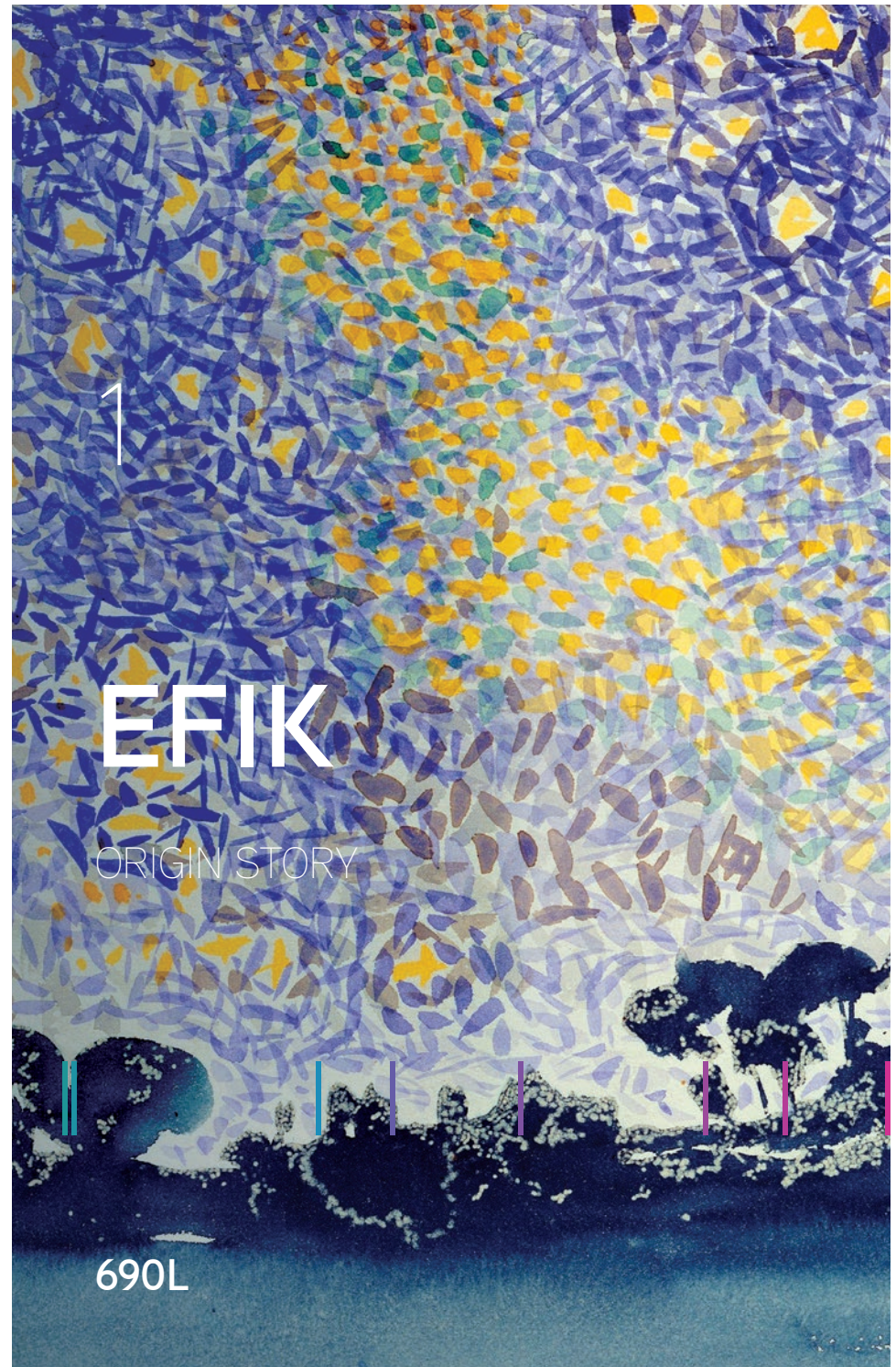




BIG HISTORY PROJECT



1

EFIK

ORIGIN STORY

690L

EFIK

ABASSI, GOD
OF THE UNIVERSE

Compiled by David Baker, adapted by Newsela

What follows is the origin story of the Efik people of Nigeria. They were the first humans to defy the gods to achieve greater power and wisdom.

The Efik people live in southern Nigeria. For many centuries they've dwelled near the Cross River. They traditionally worshipped the god Abassi as a supreme creator. Their belief system was very relaxed. They had no formal priesthood or organized religious institutions. Worship and ritual were carried out on an individual or family level. Their creation story is a tale of humans defying the gods. Their goal was to achieve greater power and wisdom.

Before Abassi there was nothing. Abassi was god of the Universe. He was the giver of life, death, and justice. He was so powerful that he could create life, heal the sick, and even raise the dead. Some say that Abassi was the Sun, and they worshipped it as it rose and set every day. Abassi lived in the sky with his wife, Atai. She was a wise goddess, who often gave Abassi good advice.

Abassi created the stars, the Earth, and all the wildlife upon it. He also created two humans, a man and a woman. These humans lived with Abassi and Atai in the sky. They were very innocent and had little knowledge. Abassi and Atai looked after them. They protected the humans, and even fed them, because they did not know how to feed themselves. One day, the humans were looking down from the sky at the Earth. They decided they wanted to live there. But when they asked Abassi if they could leave the sky and live on the Earth, he forbade it. The Earth was a place with many secrets where many things could be learned. Abassi feared that the humans would one day match his wisdom, or even surpass it.

Atai proposed a compromise. The humans could go live on Earth. However, they had to return to the sky every day to have their meals. The humans were forbidden to learn to hunt or farm. They were also forbidden to marry and have children. Atai worried that if they had children they would create a large nation of people to challenge the power of Abassi.

For a while, this plan worked. The humans returned to the sky every day to take their meals. However, one day, the woman decided she was sick of being fed like a helpless child. She went out into the fields and began to farm. When the time came for dinner, she defiantly refused to return to the sky with the man.

The next day, the man visited the woman in the fields and saw she was growing her own food. He decided to help her. Before long, the man and woman fell in love. They did not return to the sky again. Many years went by and they had many children. When those children were old enough, they joined their parents working in the field. They all continued to learn the secrets of the Earth and teach them to each other.

The humans tried to hide their children from the sight of Abassi, but the god saw them. He grew very angry. He blamed his wife, Atai. She had been the one who convinced him to let the humans live on Earth. Abassi feared that one day, the humans would have learned so much that they would surpass his wisdom. He also feared they would grow so numerous that they would surpass his power.

But Atai had a plan. In order to prevent the humans from growing too powerful, she sent evil into the world. She sent death and caused humans to be in conflict. The evil was so strong that the man and woman immediately died. Their children have suffered the ills of the world and argued among themselves ever since. But because their mother defied the gods, the humans have continued to learn the secrets of the Earth.

Sources

Beier, Ulli. *The Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths*. London: Heinemann, 1966.

Hackett, Rosalind. *Religion in Calabar: The Religious Life and History of a Nigerian Town*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988.

Leeming, David Adams. *Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia*. 2nd ed. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010.

Lynch, Patricia Ann, and Jeremy Roberts. *African Mythology: A to Z*. 2nd ed. New York: Chelsea House, 2010.

Image credits

Landscape with Stars by Henri-Edmond Cross
© Corbis

NEWSELA

Articles leveled by Newsela have been adjusted along several dimensions of text complexity including sentence structure, vocabulary and organization. The number followed by L indicates the Lexile measure of the article. For more information on Lexile measures and how they correspond to grade levels: <http://www.lexile.com/about-lexile/lexile-overview/>

To learn more about Newsela, visit www.newsela.com/about.



The Lexile® Framework for Reading

The Lexile® Framework for Reading evaluates reading ability and text complexity on the same developmental scale. Unlike other measurement systems, the Lexile Framework determines reading ability based on actual assessments, rather than generalized age or grade levels. Recognized as the standard for matching readers with texts, tens of millions of students worldwide receive a Lexile measure that helps them find targeted readings from the more than 100 million articles, books and websites that have been measured. Lexile measures connect learners of all ages with resources at the right level of challenge and monitors their progress toward state and national proficiency standards. More information about the Lexile® Framework can be found at www.Lexile.com.