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Friends : GHANA

This two lesson Topic looks at children's friendships in the West African country of **Ghana**. The two lessons are structured around audio recordings of Ghanaian children discussing why their friends are important, what leads them to argue, and how they have learned to make peace again.

Lesson 1 : What makes a friend?

Lesson 2 : Resolving friendship conflicts

Ghana



Human beings have inhabited the land which is now present day Ghana from about 1500 BC. The territory includes what was once the Empire of Ashanti, one of the most influential states in sub-Saharan Africa before colonial rule. Later, modern day Ghana was the first place in sub-Saharan Africa where Europeans came to trade, first in gold, later in slaves. In 1854 Britain proclaimed the territory as a crown colony, the Gold Coast. It remained so until 1957, when Ghana became the first black African nation in the region to achieve independence. The country is now a democracy, and often seen as a model for economic and political reform in Africa.

- **President** John Atta Mills (elected 2008)
- **Population:** 23.8 million (UN, 2009)
- **Capital:** Accra
- **Area:** 238,533 sq km (92,098 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** English, African languages including Akan, Ewe
- **Major religions:** Christianity, indigenous beliefs, Islam

- **Life expectancy:** 56 years (men), 57 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** Cedi
Main exports: Gold, cocoa, timber, tuna, bauxite, aluminium, manganese ore, diamonds
- **GNI per capita:** US \$670 (World Bank, 2008)

Friendships at School

In Ghana, as all over the world, many children make most of their friendships at school. Primary education has been free of charge here since 2005, and latest figures suggest that some 95 percent of children do enrol at this level. But classes are large (50 children is common, on occasion there may be up to 100). As a result the pastoral care which the adults are able to provide is unavoidably thinly spread, so it is friends who must give each other vital support. In Lesson 1 Tracks 1 and 3, children describe how they and their friends help each other with their studies, also lend each other writing equipment and books, and even care for each other when they are unwell. Also, as all over the world, children in Ghana enjoy playing games together, and in Track 2, six year old Enoch describes how he and his friends enjoy sharing the much loved traditional *Anansi* stories.

Mixed Sex Friendships

Eastern Region, in the south of Ghana, where these recordings were made, is predominantly Christian (unlike the north of the country where more than half of the population are Muslim). The area is relatively well developed and is not far from the capital city Accra. These primary schools are all mixed sex, boys and girls learn together and are allowed to mix together freely in the playground. However, as we hear in Lesson 1 Track 4, even so on the whole younger children prefer to play separately. Girls consider the boys too rough; also, the games they want to play are different. Ghanaian girls love to play *ampe*, a complex traditional clapping game, whilst the boys prefer to play football. However, often on Fridays (a day when many Ghanaian primary schools follow a different routine, with much more time given to games and extra-curricular activities) boys and girls do come together to enjoy a joint football match.

Arguing and making peace

As elsewhere in the world, on occasion disputes develop and children fight with their friends. Often, for children from homes which are not rich and who may have to fend for themselves far more than they would in the West, every *cedi*^{*}, is doubly precious; as a result many arguments centre around stealing. In Lesson 2 Track 2 a girl describes how fights develop because children believe (quite possibly mistakenly) that their clothing (socks, shoes, sandals), or their money, have been stolen. And with teachers in short supply, the prefects, or “seniors”, carry a high load of responsibility, and it is they who will have the task of persuading children to make peace.

**Cedi : Ghanaian currency unit*