

Rastafarianism



Rastafarians have had a big impact on the world. Many people connect Rastafarianism with Bob Marley and reggae music. Many Rastas can be easily identified because of their hair, which they wear in locks. Although Rastafarianism originated in Kingston, Jamaica, Rastafarians and their beliefs have migrated all over the world including to Canada. In this module, you will learn more about this religious group and their customs.

Here is a list of activities you will work on:

- KWL Chart
- Reading
- Listening / Video
- Summary
- Research Activities

KWL Chart

K	W	L
What I know about Rastafarianism	What I want to know about Rastafarianism	What I learned about Rastafarianism



Bob Marley¹



Haile Selassie I²

Reading

The Rastafarian religion began in Jamaica during the 1930s following a prophecy made by Marcus Garvey, a black political leader. Garvey led an organisation known as the Universal Negro Improvement Association, whose intention was to unify blacks with their land of origin (Africa).

Garvey preached, "Look to Africa where a black king shall be crowned; he shall be your Redeemer." This statement is regarded as a prophecy by Rastafarians and became the foundation of the Rastafari movement. Garvey's statement was rapidly followed by the crowning of Emperor Haile Selassie I in Ethiopia. Rastafarians regard Marcus Garvey as a prophet and saw crowning of Haile Selassie as the

¹ Retrieved 16 Dec 2017 from <https://thegrio.com/2012/02/06/happy-birthday-to-the-late-great-bob-marley/>

² Retrieved 16 Dec 2017 from

<http://www.thedailystar.net/shout/the-greatest-story/king-kings-the-life-and-death-haile-selassie-i-204853>

fulfilment of Garvey's prophecy. Haile Selassie is therefore regarded by Rastafarians as the Black Messiah, Jah Rastafari. He is a figure of salvation and it's believed he will redeem blacks from their struggles and reunite them with their homeland, Africa. The religion takes its name from Haile Selassie's birth name before he became Emperor of Ethiopia, which was Ras Tafari.

Through their use of language, dress, locked hair, and lifestyle, Rastas seek to draw a clear boundary between themselves and non-Rastas. One of the distinguishing marks of the movement is the formation of hair into locks. The formation of locks is inspired by the biblical Book of Numbers (chapter 6 verses 5-6) whereby the people of God could make a special vow of dedication called the Nazirite vow, which stated that they could not cut their hair. The locks represent the covenant that the Rastas have made with God, and are also regarded as a symbol of strength linked to the hair of the biblical figure of Samson - who was known for his extraordinary strength. Rastafarians often compare themselves to the Biblical children of Israel, who escaped slavery from Egypt.

Although many people of African descent may not share the Rastafarians' religious beliefs, they agree with their promotion of unity among all peoples of African heritage - especially in the fight against racism and other forms of ill-treatment. An example of this promotion of unity is shown in the fact that Bob Marley, who was Jamaican, flew to Zimbabwe in 1980 to perform in a concert celebrating that country's recent independence from Britain. Additionally, many people agree with Rastafarians that there must be a consistent effort to restore pride in African heritage and to celebrate the contributions of people of African descent.



Rastas in Jamaica

Other Beliefs

- Rastas believe in repatriation. This means they believe that people of African descent should return to Africa, which they regard as home.
- They do not use salt when cooking, preferring to use natural herbs to give food flavour. They call their food which is cooked using only natural herbs ital food.
- Most Rastas are vegetarians.
- Rastas do not eat pork or shellfish (e.g shrimp, lobster).
- They only believe in the Old Testament in the Bible - that is, the books from Genesis to Malachi.
- Rastafarian worship includes African drumming, chanting (a type of slow singing of songs), and dancing.

Repatriation

As stated above, many Rastafarians believe that people of African descent who were born outside of Africa should return to the continent because their ancestors were taken from Africa against their will. The Ethiopian World Federation (EWF) was established in the United States in 1937. Its aim was to gain support for the Ethiopians during the Italian invasion of 1935-41. In 1948, Emperor Haile Selassie I gave 500 acres of land to allow members of the Ethiopian World Federation, Rastafarians, and people of African descent born outside of Africa to settle in Ethiopia. The land was given in a town called Shashamane.

Although Ethiopia is considered the Rastafarian holy land and thus the place of choice to live, some Rastafarians have settled in other African countries as well. For example, Bob Marley's widow, Rita Marley, has lived in Ghana for a number of years. Famous Americans such as author Maya Angelou and sociology professor W.E.B DuBois have also lived in Ghana.



SHASHAMANE, Ethiopia — Rastafarians play music, sing and pray on November 2, 2015 in Shashamane as they celebrate the anniversary of late Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's coronation, which took place on November 2, 1930.³

³ Retrieved 16 Dec 2017 from http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Promised-land_19238767

Rastafarianism has a very strong influence on Reggae music. Reggae is a type of music which originated in Jamaica in the 1960s and has spread and become popular all over the world, including in Canada. Because of the influence of Rastafarianism, repatriation is mentioned in many Reggae songs. Below are excerpts from some reggae songs that speak about repatriation.

1. Song Called "One Way Ticket" by Luciano.

Please give me a one way ticket, going back to Africa to live it. I am in Babylon suffering like a dog. I want to go home. You work me so hard without reward. All my youthful days are there, I don't get any reward. My woman is crying and my children are suffering. By any means necessary I have to leave this system. Please give me a one way ticket, going back to Africa to live it. I am in Babylon suffering like a dog. I want to go home. They took me away from my father's land, and carried me to Babylon. So much agony and suffering, years of blood, sweat, and tears and just living in fear. So please give me a one way ticket, going back to Africa to live it. I am in Babylon suffering like a dog. I want to go home. I don't want to return, strictly one way and when the plane touches down in Africa, that is where I will stay.



Luciano⁴

⁴ Luciano performing at the 2016 Palm Beach Jerk and Caribbean Culture Festival. West Palm Beach, Florida. Retrieved 16 Dec 2017 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luciano_\(singer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luciano_(singer))

2. Song Called "Forward to Africa" by Culture

Children of Israel want to go home now. Come on now brothers and sisters run and come to hear what I have to say. Listen and I will tell you brother what is the talk to the talk of the town. For in every corner that you walk you will see a group of people talking about Ethiopia. Some say they want to leave the rest of the world and forward to Africa. Some talk about Ethiopia and the others Liberia. But don't matter where. The Rasta does not fear because I know I must be there to get my share of all those riches and delicious dishes of Ethiopia. Sing triumphant song let me hear you.

And oh what a glorious morning, brother when we land on Ethiopia's shore. Our sorrows will all be over and here Jah people will weep no more. It is a land of liberty where milk, corn and wine awaiting us. In my sickness I an' I ⁵ will be witness of Ethiopia.



Culture live in concert 2003⁶

⁵ "I an' I" is a way of saying I.

⁶ Retrieved 16 Dec 2017 from <http://forwardever.blogspot.ca/2012/09/joseph-hill-man-of-culture.html>

3. Song Called "Mamma Africa" by Garnet Silk

Mamma Africa, Mamma Africa, I am coming home, coming home. Hello Mamma Africa, how are you? I'm feeling fine and I hope you're fine, too. Hello Mamma Africa, how are you I hope when you hear these words your grace turns blue, grace turns blue. I am singing these words just to let you know how much I care and I won't let go. Even though we're oceans away, you're with me day by day. Memories of you keep flashing through my mind, the very thought of you makes my time. Hello Mamma Africa, how are you? I 'm feeling fine and I hope you're fine, too. Hello Mamma Africa, how are you I hope when you hear these words, your grace turns blue, grace turns blue. Don't you worry now I won't be long. Sweet paradise I am coming soon. When I am with you I can't be wrong, if not in May then you will see me in June.



Questions

1. Why do you think the writers of these songs still sing so lovingly of Africa even though their forefathers were taken from that continent over 500 years ago?
2. If you won a prize to visit any African country, where would you go? Why would you go to that African country?

Listening/ Video

1. This video shows a group of Rastafarians worshipping:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R40-j2y4pYA>

2. This video shows Rastafarians from all over the world who have returned to Ethiopia to live in a community called Shashemaneland:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQ6uGRmPQSQ>

Summary

Rastafarianism is a religion that developed in the 20th Century as some Jamaicans of African descent sought to connect with their African origins. The Religion is centered around Jah who is God, and importance is given to Emperor Haile Selassie, who many Rastas believe is the messiah or Jah on earth.⁷ Rastafarians believe that people of African descent in other parts of the world should aim to return to Africa, their homeland. They have developed their own distinctive ways of living and worship based on their beliefs. Even people who are not Rastafarian support some of the beliefs they have popularized such as African unity and pride in African culture and heritage.

Activities

1. Use the internet and books to find out more about Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Use the following questions to guide you.
 - a. Who was Marcus Garvey?
 - b. What were the aims of the UNIA?
 - c. Explain 3 of the UNIA's achievements.
2. Reggae singer Bob Marley wrote a song depicting a speech given by Emperor Haile Selassie to the United Nations General Assembly in 1963.

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rastafari>

- a. Find out which song it was and read the words. What is the title of the song?
- b. According to the song, what is the cause of war in the world?
- c. How does the song encourage us to treat other human beings?

References

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rastafari#Grounding>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/rastafari/ataglance/glance.shtml>

<http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20150501/understanding-rastafari-%E2%80%93-part-one>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shashamane>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rastafari>