

Cultural background: LIBERIA

(Liberian refugee students)

Language

English, Mande, Mel Kru, Goa, and Kreyol.

Teaching in the Classroom

English is used for instruction in all public and mission schools and in universities. Education suffered as a result of war and the Ebola outbreak in 2014. Prior to the war, access to formal primary schooling was limited to missionary schools. In rural areas, secret societies (Poro and Sande) relied on “bush schools” to teach history and genealogy along with training in herbalism and midwifery. Higher education opportunities are limited, especially for indigenous people. In refugee camps educational opportunities were also limited.

Many children learn through listening and memorization since many indigenous languages are oral.

Primary and secondary schools are free and compulsory in theory. In primary school (grades 1-6) students learn basic reading, arithmetic, general sciences, and sometimes English and Bible studies. Secondary schooling is divided into two levels: lower secondary or junior secondary and upper or senior secondary. Lower secondary schools (grades 7-9) are mainly found in Monrovia and at missions in rural areas. Students take Algebra, Chemistry, Geography, Geometry, and Physical Science. Upper secondary schools (grades 10-12) are almost all in the capital city.

Family/School Engagement

Many Liberians have an exaggerated sense of familiarity with customs, language, and cultural norms in the USA because of Liberia’s historical connections to the USA, having repatriated many hundreds freed slaves from the USA. You should still reach out to parents and invite them to be involved in their

children's school life. It is important to also keep in mind that many refugees do not know how to drive or lack access to a car, so transportation to school events will be a challenge.

Greetings vary by location and ethnic groups. Many Liberians greet by giving a basic handshake. It is common to stretch out one or two hands, shake warmly, and then hug. Only shake hands with people in the same age group. For many ethnic groups, young people must bow slightly at the knees when greeting an elderly.

The "snap-shake" greeting is done when shaking hands with someone. You grasp the middle finger of the other person's right hand between your thumb and ring finger, and bring it up quickly with a snap. This practice originates from freed American slaves. It is also used as a way to greet dinner guests by Liberian Americans.

Public displays of affection are taboo between men and women. However, people of the same gender may hold hands as a sign of friendship. When joining a small group, people apologize for disrupting the discussion and proceed to shake hands with everyone in the group.

Gender, Culture, and Family

Linguistically Liberian tribes can be divided into 3 groups: The Mende (north and east), the Kru, including the Krahn, (east and southeast) and the Mel (northwest). A person's last name is indicative of one's ethnic heritage. Although a minority, former American slaves (Americo-Liberians) have a higher socio-economic status than indigenous groups and have a sense of entitlement and prestige over others.

Men are dominant and assume the role of warriors. Women carry out household chores and participate in agricultural labor, which gives them some power and status. Traditionally, women are viewed as the property of their husbands, but civil marriages grant inheritance and property rights to women. Children are viewed as potential workers and are expected to take care of their parents and other elders. Childrearing is a collective responsibility. Corporal punishment is an acceptable form of discipline among Liberian families and could be a topic of misunderstanding in the USA.