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Nnedi Okorafor

Akata Warrior

United States of America (2017)

TAGS: African Traditions



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Akata Warrior
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	USA
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Nnedi Okorafor, *The Nsibidi Scripts* (Series, Book 2): *Akata Warrior*. New York: Viking, 2017, 477 pp.
ISBN	9780670785612
Awards	Lodestar Award for best Young Adult Book (2018), Locus Award for Best Young Adult Novel (2018), Barnes & Noble Best Young Adult Book (2017).
Genre	Novels
Target Audience	Young adults (teenagers)
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com

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Creators



Nnedimma Okorafor by Cheetah Witch. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 (accessed: February 7, 2022).

Nnedi Okorafor , b. 1974
(Author)

Nnedimma Okorafor is a Nigerian-American writer, whose parents migrated to the US for their studies and could not return due to the Nigerian Civil War. She was born in April 8, 1974. Despite her parents' decision to stay in America, she made several attempts to reconnect with her homeland through her childhood visits to the Igbo land. This made her learn much about the Igbo culture. She attended Homewood Flossmoor High School in Flossmoor, Illinois, where she was rated as one of the best tennis players. She was very good in mathematics and science. Her initial goal was to become an entomologist, as she was interested in insects. At the age of 13, she was diagnosed with scoliosis. The situation became worse at 19, and she underwent a spinal fusion surgery to straighten and fuse her spine. These complications led to paralysis in the lower part of her body. Not discouraged by her health situation, she began writing short stories on science-fiction.

After an intense physical therapy, she regained her ability to walk but could not continue with her athletic career. She took a creative writing class which pushed her into writing her first novel by the end of that semester. Nnedi Okorafor obtained a Master's degree in Journalism and a PhD in English from Michigan State University and the University of Illinois, respectively. In 2001, she graduated from the Clarion Writers Workshop in Lansing, Michigan.

She is the author of several works among which are: *Binti*, *Who Fears Death*, *Zahrah*, *Ankara Witch*, *Lagoon*, *Akata Warrior* and *The Book of Phoenix*. She has featured as co-script writer of many films and some of her works have been adapted into films. Her various awards include: The World Fantasy Award, Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa, Nebula Award for Best Novella, Hugo Award for Best Novella, Children's Africana Book Award. She currently lives in Olympia Fields, Illinois, USA.

Source:

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aalbc.com (accessed: October 5, 2021).

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Nnedi Okorafor, *Akata Witch*, New York: Viking, 2011. Nnedi Okorafor, *Akata Woman*, (Jan. 18, 2022).

Summary

Akata Warrior recounts the story of Sunny Nwazue, who is a *leopard** Nigerian-American albino girl, struggling to understand her true self through the secret *leopard world***, after officially undergoing initiation into a local Leopard Society***. The key to leopards' extraordinary power is their uniqueness or 'natural' flaws. In Sunny's case, it is her albinism. Sunny finds it difficult to adapt to both worlds, since she is the only leopard person in her family. One day, she is attacked by Ekwensu, a massive octopus, a lake monster. Fortunately for her, *Mami Wata* (mermaid or water nymph) saves her.

She meets with her friends, Chichi, Sasha and Orlu, who also belong to the leopard cult. They discuss the Ekwensu's attack and wonder about the beast's special interest in Sunny. At home, Sunny finds a picture of her grandmother, who was also a *leopard person*. Sunny believes her grandmother would have been a perfect mentor for her. She also discovers her grandmother's book, titled *Nsibidi: The Magical Language of the Spirits*. She tries to read, but becomes nauseous and extremely tired. The strange book is a magical script. After she struggles to read some parts of the *Nsibidi*, she falls asleep and dreams of an apocalypse, a city burning. She witnesses the flames in the forest, moving higher and higher.

Later, she visits the *Leopard world* to acquire more knowledge about *Nsibidi* from Sugar Cream, her mentor and the chief Librarian. Sugar Cream tells her that *Nsibidi* gives experience. She learns how to read it and realizes that *Nsibidi* also drains the reader's energy.

During one of her many *juju*** lessons (initiation lessons) in Leopard Knock, Ekwensu attacks her and hits her with a bead. After the fight, Sunny is unable to bring forth *Ayanwu*, her spirit face and believes she cannot get back to Leopard Knock. She learns that Ekwensu's attack caused an oil spill in the world of Lambs, the Niger Delta.

Sunny unsuccessfully tries to perform a night juju*****, which would kill all biting insects. Her friends take her to Bola, a *Mami Wata*

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priestess******, who reveals to her that during the fight with Ekwensu, her spirit face was cut off. Bola is surprised that a leopard person survived the loss of her spirit face. Bola explains that Sunny's apocalyptic vision is a call to go to Osisi with her friends to save the world before Ekwensu's next strike. For the journey, they need a flying grasscutter from the giant spider Udide in Lagos.

The following day, Sunny regains *Ayanwu* (her spirit face). Ayanwu tells her it is possible for her to perform any juju (mystery) she wants without the spirit face, and also return to Leopard Knock. All Sunny needs is to feel secure and believe she is a leopard person. With her spirit face back, Sunny and her friends go to Lagos to meet Udide in her brother's Chukwu jeep. They find Udide in a cave. The spider is of the size of a house, with eight powerful legs pressed to the cave's ceiling. They start to fight with her, but Orlu, who is eloquent and knowledgeable about spirit animals, calms her down. Sunny then asks for a flying grass cutter*******, and in return tells Udide a story about a sad day in her life. Udide is pleased, and helps release the flying giant grass cutter from its cocoon.

The following day, they go to Osisi, a mystical megacity of glittering skyscrapers and large colorful buildings. Guided by Sunny's mystical visions and her Grandmother's *Nsibidi*, they enter a high-ceilinged house, a mysterious place with ceremonial masks hanging on the wall. Every room in the house is rigged with juju (mystical issues). Ayanwu disappears again and they are suddenly attacked by a swarm of stinging insects. Orlu succeeds to find a way out, while Chichi is caught by a masquerade, Mmuo Aku. Sasha follows the masquerade to free Chichi. Sunny discovers it was Ekwensu's plan to fight her alone without her friends and her spirit face. Ekwensu appears in the form of a palm tree growing in the center of the house and touching the ceiling. For the first time, Sunny sees Ekwensu's face. Ekwensu begins to dance and spin, preparing to strike. Sunny gets ready to fight back, bringing out her juju knife******** and focusing on Ekwensu's spinning body. She holds her breath, and runs forward. She climbs on Ekwensu, looking for her mask. Sunny knows if she fails, Ekwensu will implement his apocalyptic plan. Sunny fights Ekwensu without juju knives and magic but in a hand-to-hand combat. She pulls Ekwensu's mask off and she wins the fight. They all return to Lagos and travel home in Chukwu's jeep.

On the night of their return, the four friends are summoned to Leopard Knock for judgement. Sunny, their spokesperson, narrates

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the whole story and how they saved the world from the apocalypse planned by Ekwensu. The council orders them to go home. They would not be punished. Back home, Sunny feels different. She has become closer to her brothers, but her home feels strange, as if it belonged to someone else. Sunny went on a quest to find her identity and in the process she lost her home.

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* Leopard is an animal totem. Animals are chosen as totems because they have qualities that members of a given society would like to imitate. Sometimes members of such a society transform into the animal when there is danger or in order to fight a common enemy. Such practices foster clan solidarity. Thus a leopard woman is a woman who belongs to the secret society where the leopard is the animal symbol or totem.

** The leopard world is the common platform where members of the leopard secret society operate. Each member has a common characteristic that can easily be identified within the society.

*** A secret society, with leopard as totem.

**** Juju refers to mysticism or any mystical practice, magic, witchcraft. In another context, juju is a masquerade dancer, often stuffed with some mystical concoction for public display or shrine performances. A juju lesson is simply a mystical lesson or an initiation process.

***** Practice some mystical acts in the night or perform some night rituals.

****** Water nymph priestess.

******* Mystical cane rat that can fly a person from one location to another in less than no time.

******** Mystical knife.

Analysis

The juvenile adventure into the spirit realm told by Okorafor in *Akata Warrior* reveals that in the African worldview, physical and

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supernatural powers may be used in conflict management and resolution. As the narrator points out, not all people are granted the powers that allow them to fully manifest their mythic potential. First, we meet the protagonist (Sunny), who bridges the world of the lamb (ordinary world) with that of the spirit and magic (the leopard world). Sunny, like powerful epic heroes, saves the world from an apocalypse (revealed in her dream) using her totem, spirit face and extraordinary powers: as an albino she has visionary abilities, she obtained leopard knowledge from sacred scripts (*Nsibidi*); and membership of the leopard secret cult gives her the strength to sail across the physical world to the spiritual realm in order to stamp out Ekwensu's malicious vision (of a massive octopus and lake monster) to bring an end to the world. Okorafor's protagonist has the full knowledge of the physical world and the world hereafter, and is able to avert the apocalypse. It is with this special knowledge that she is able to liberate people of the world of the lambs from the malevolent entity, Ekwensu. However, the leopard society still punishes her for revealing some of their secrets to the people of the world of the Lamb. It is a lesson for the younger generation that not all our efforts are recognized, no matter how good they may be.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Adversity Freedom Knowledge Learning

Further Reading

Edgar, R. Robert and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse: The Story of Nkenkwe, A Twentieth- Century South African Prophet*, Witwatersrand: Witwatersrand University Press, 1999.

Zaretsky, I. Irving and Cynthia Shambough, eds., *Spirit Possession*

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