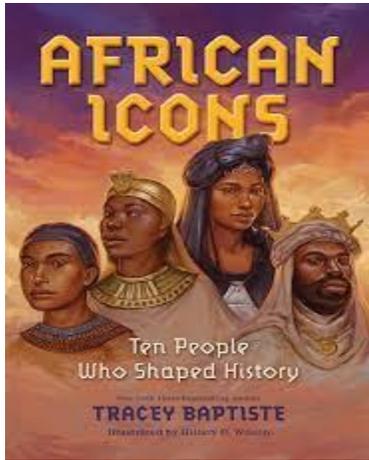


## BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

*African Icons* by Tracey Baptiste ([Author Website](#)), Illustrated by Hillary D. Wilson



Guide by Aaron Guggenheim, PhD., English Language Arts teacher

### Book Summary:

*African Icons* by author Tracey Baptiste shows how ten male and female African leaders -- from Pharaoh Menes of the first dynasty of Egypt to Queen Idia of the Kingdom of Benin in the 1500s -- made substantial contributions to medicine, art, literature, warfare, and architecture. Baptiste argues that these contributions are often overlooked when history is taught to modern audiences. In telling this history, Baptiste hopes to “bring to life some of the history of Africa before the forcible transportation of so many via the Middle Passage to enslavement” (Baptiste, 2021, p. x) and shows how pre-colonial African genius is still present in our everyday lives. Her work is accompanied by full-color illustrations by illustrator Hillary Wilson.

### Questions

1. Before reading this book, were you aware of any of these African icons? Most of us are unfamiliar with the important role these individuals played in Africa and the world. Why do you think that is?
2. Which of these leaders did you identify with the most or were most inspired by? Why?
3. Baptiste shows how African women were pioneering leaders. Why is it important that Baptiste preserve the stories of these women?
4. Why do you think most Americans are unaware of Imhotep's contribution to medicine? Who might benefit from not knowing about his contributions?
  - a. Why do we often label Hippocrates as the “father of medicine”? (Think about the [Hippocratic oath!](#))

5. Baptise argues that writer Aesop's fables "became permanently linked to English culture and language and are still read by children today throughout the Western world" (Baptise, 2021, p. 53). Why do you think that the morals of Aesop's fables became so important to Western culture? Do you feel Aesop gets the credit he deserves for his writing?
6. Wilson's illustrations are presented before each chapter, showing both the African landscape and full-color portraits of the African leader being profiled.
  - a. Why do you think that Wilson includes both illustrations of the landscape and portraits of these leaders side-by-side?
  - b. Why does Wilson include full-color illustrations of these leaders even if they may not be historically accurate renderings? What does she hope to get across by doing so? What do these illustrations make you think and feel?
  - c. Look at some of the maps Wilson included, particularly the one that shows the true size of Africa (see p. xi). Use [these questions from the National Archives](#) to guide your first reading of the map. On your second reading of the map, think about why the illustrator felt it was important to convey the true size of Africa. What does that say about how African history is known by people in the United States?

#### Extension Activities

1. Dig deeper! First look into an erased or overlooked aspect of African history through PBS's free video series, [Africa's Great Civilizations](#),
  - a. How does what historian Dr. Henry Louis Gates presents in this series connect and not connect to what Baptise argues in her book?
  - b. Why do you think that there are new books, television shows, and movies that retell African history for an American audience? Why now? Who benefits from this retelling?
  - c. Do some more personal research! What is a story or contribution from your own family that has been overlooked? Why do you think that is?