Papa Legba and Janus – Guardians of the Threshold

Subjects: English · Religious Studies · History · Latin | recommended from age 13 (B1) | Video: 9:09 min



Watch the video
youtu.be/76cMF_2FFwI

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

A · Before watching

1. Think of a moment of change after which something was different (e.g. your first day at school). What makes such moments special?

B · While watching

1. What special gift does Legba have among the Fon, and why did it make him the messenger between gods and humans?

2. How can you recognise Janus, and where does his name come from? What does Ovid place in his hands?

3. How did Legba change in Haiti? Describe how he is shown there.

4. How does a Vodou ceremony begin? Name the symbol on the ground and the request in the first song.

5. What did the doors of the temple of Janus in the Roman Forum signal, and why were they almost always open?

Useful words

threshold	Schwelle	cornmeal	Maismehl
crossroads	Wegkreuzung	uprising	Aufstand
messenger	Bote, Botin	uprooted	entwurzelt
cane	Spazierstock	transition	Übergang

C · Put the story in order

Number the events from 1 to 8 in the order they happen in the video.

	On the plantations, different beliefs merge into Vodou.
	The emperor Augustus boasts that the doors of Janus were closed three times.
	Among the Fon in West Africa, Legba is the youngest son of Mawu and Lisa.
	A manbo traces a vèvè, and the first song calls on Papa Legba.
	In Rome, Janus is named in prayers even before Jupiter.
	In 1909, Arnold van Gennep describes why transitions are dangerous.
	People from West Africa are forcibly carried to Saint-Domingue.
	In 1804, Haiti becomes the first nation founded by people who had freed themselves from slavery.

D · Think and discuss

1. For people whose homeland had been torn away, Legba became “the old, patient guardian of the road back home”. Explain why this transformation fits the history of Haiti.

2. “Transitions are dangerous.” Use van Gennep's idea to explain why very different cultures place a guardian at the threshold. Give one example of a transition from your own life.

E · Two guardians of the threshold

Compare Papa Legba and Janus. For each one, write down what the video says.

	Papa Legba	Janus
Appearance and objects		
Which gate does he guard, and when is he called on?		
What does his gate mean to people?		

F · Get creative

1. Draw a gate in your exercise book: on one side write what Legba and Janus have in common, on the other how they differ. Below it, explain in 3–4 sentences which of the two impresses you more and why.