

TEACHING NOTES AND RESOURCES KS2 AND KS3

Jamaican History: The Taíno | The Maroons



About the Book and Author



When her island home is overrun by evil spirits, Evie is saved only by the powerful gemstone her parents entrusted to her. Her best friend Arthur is not so lucky - caught in the magical crossfire, he finds himself in the body of a cat.

On a mission to return him to his body and defeat the ghouls, Evie and Arthur team up with Cai, a trainee shaman, who helps them discover the truth. The terrifying Blackheart Man is plotting to steal the island's four magical gemstones and use their power to destroy the barrier between the worlds of the living and the dead. It will take all of Evie's magic, Cai's bravery and Arthur's talent for thievery to stop him.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashley is an author and editor living in Manchester with his partner and a greedy cat. His fantasy adventures *The Boy to Beat the Gods* and *Spirit Warriors* put a compelling spin on West African and Caribbean mythology and folklore. When he isn't reading or writing stories, Ashley enjoys making music, gaming, anime, and being out in nature.

Taíno People



The Jamaican coat of arms contains a depiction of two Taíno people

Spirit Warriors is inspired by real history as well as folklore.

- The South Americans who settled on the island later known as Jamaica, were there for around 900 years. Over that period of time Taíno culture emerged.
- The Taíno people are immortalised in the Jamaican coat of arms (left).
- The Taíno name for the island was Xaymaca (Zah-my-kuh) which means 'land of wood and water'. 'Jamaica' is a mispronunciation by the Spanish who invaded and colonised the island.
- The era of Taíno settlement was interrupted by the Spanish, led by Christopher Columbus in the early 1500s.
- In the space of around 50 years, almost all Taíno people were systematically wiped out by the Spanish, from enslavement, diseases and starvation.
- Some are thought to have escaped to other lands. Some went into hiding in Jamaica's rural mountain regions.

Taíno Spirituality

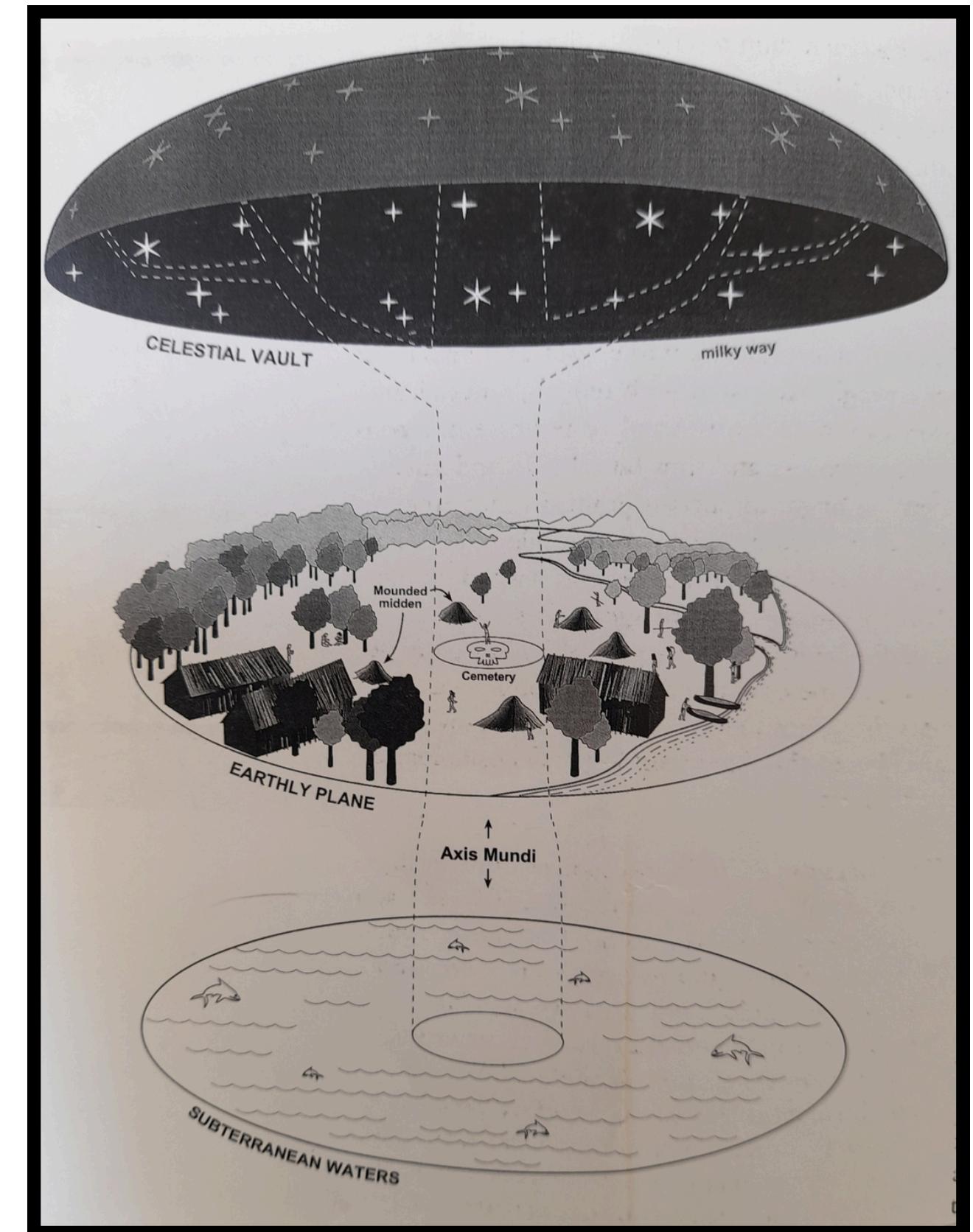
- The shamans in Spirit Warriors are based on real spiritual guides from Taíno culture called 'bohiques'.
- Bohiques are the equivalent of shamans and were believed to be able to connect with the spirit world.
- Taíno people believed there were three layers to the cosmos: the celestial vault, the earthly plane (human existence) and the subterranean waters below.
- Bohiques were thought to be able to travel between plains.
- Owls were special birds and thought to be representatives of death.
- The Taíno word for owl is 'mucaro', after which Cai's master is named.



(left) Taíno sculpture of a mucaro (owl).



(Right) Taíno sculpture of a bohique, seated and connecting with the celestial plane.



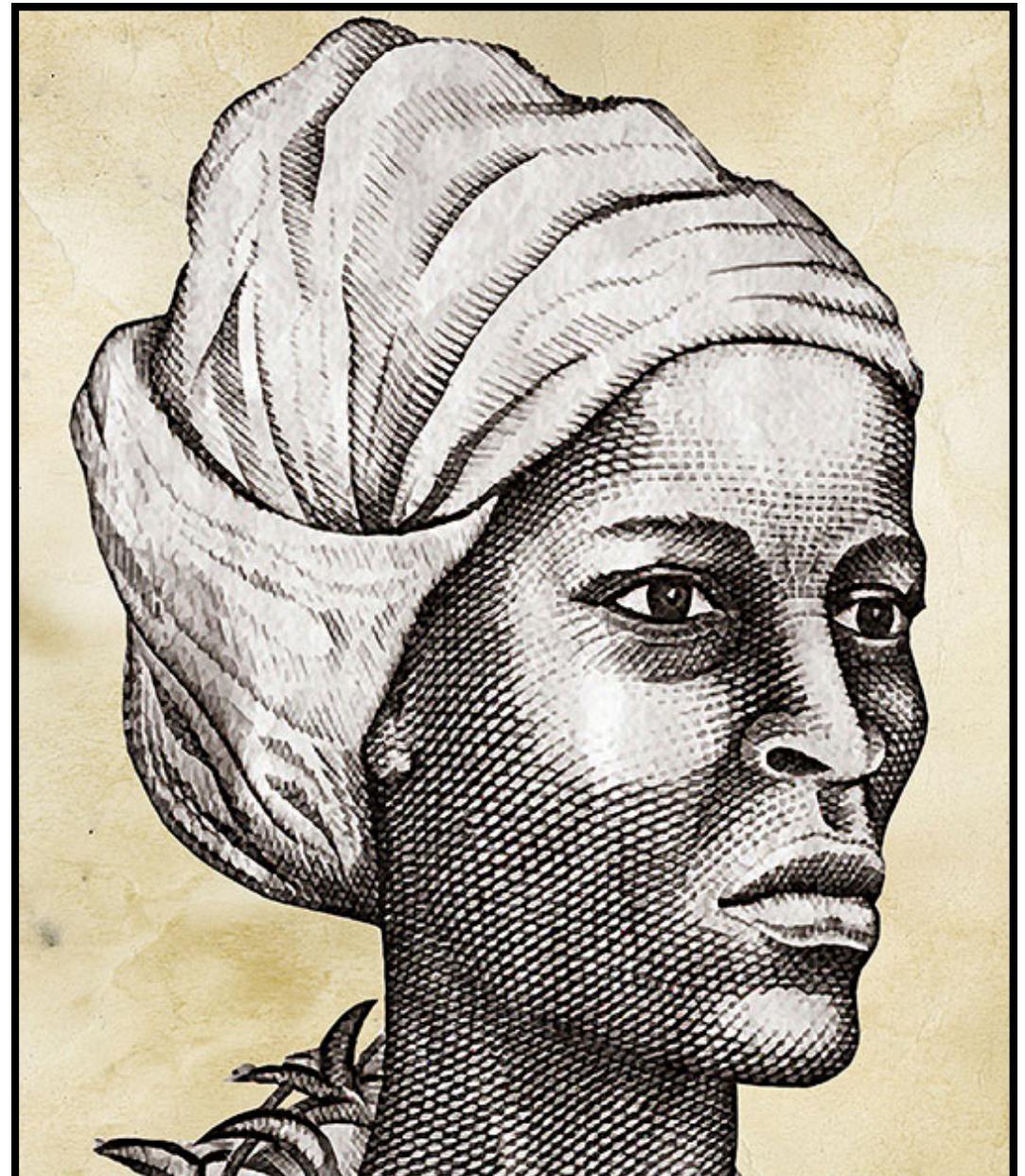
The three layers of the Taíno cosmos: the celestial vault above, the earthly plane, and the subterranean waters below

The Maroons

- When the Spanish colonised the island they brought with them enslaved people from the continent of Africa where they were forced to labour. At that point in history western Europe had a technological advantage over West Africa and other places around the world, and used it to devastating effect.
- The British attacked the Spanish to take Jamaica for themselves in 1655.
- During the conflict, some of the enslaved Africans managed to escape and fled to Jamaica's mountains and remote forests.
- Settlements were created where these escapees lived and thrived. They became known as Maroons, which comes from the Spanish word *cimarron* meaning 'wild' or 'unruly'.
- The Maroons gave British colonisers a lot of trouble, as they fought them hard to remain free. They also broke into slave plantations to help others to escape and join their communities.



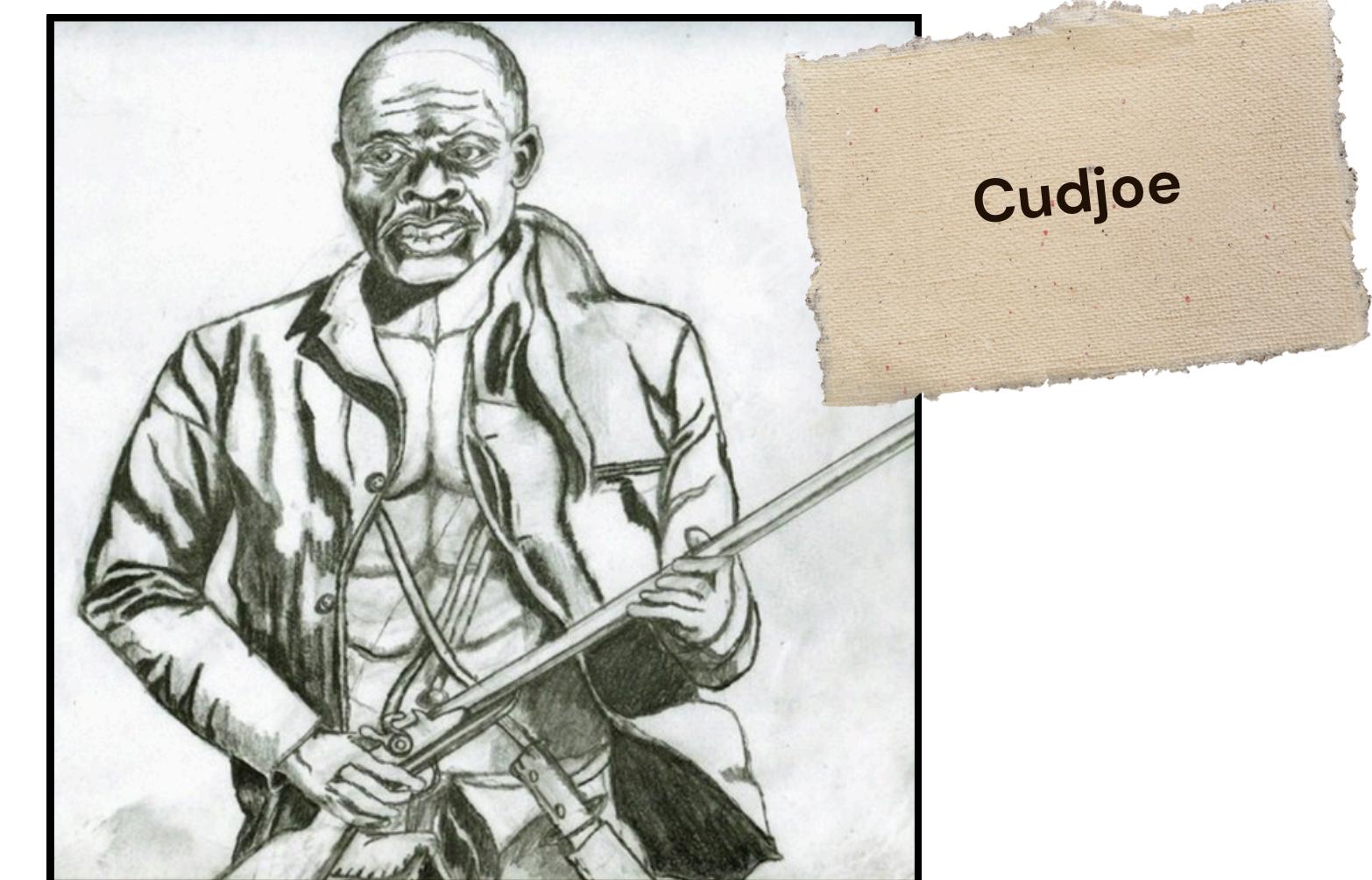
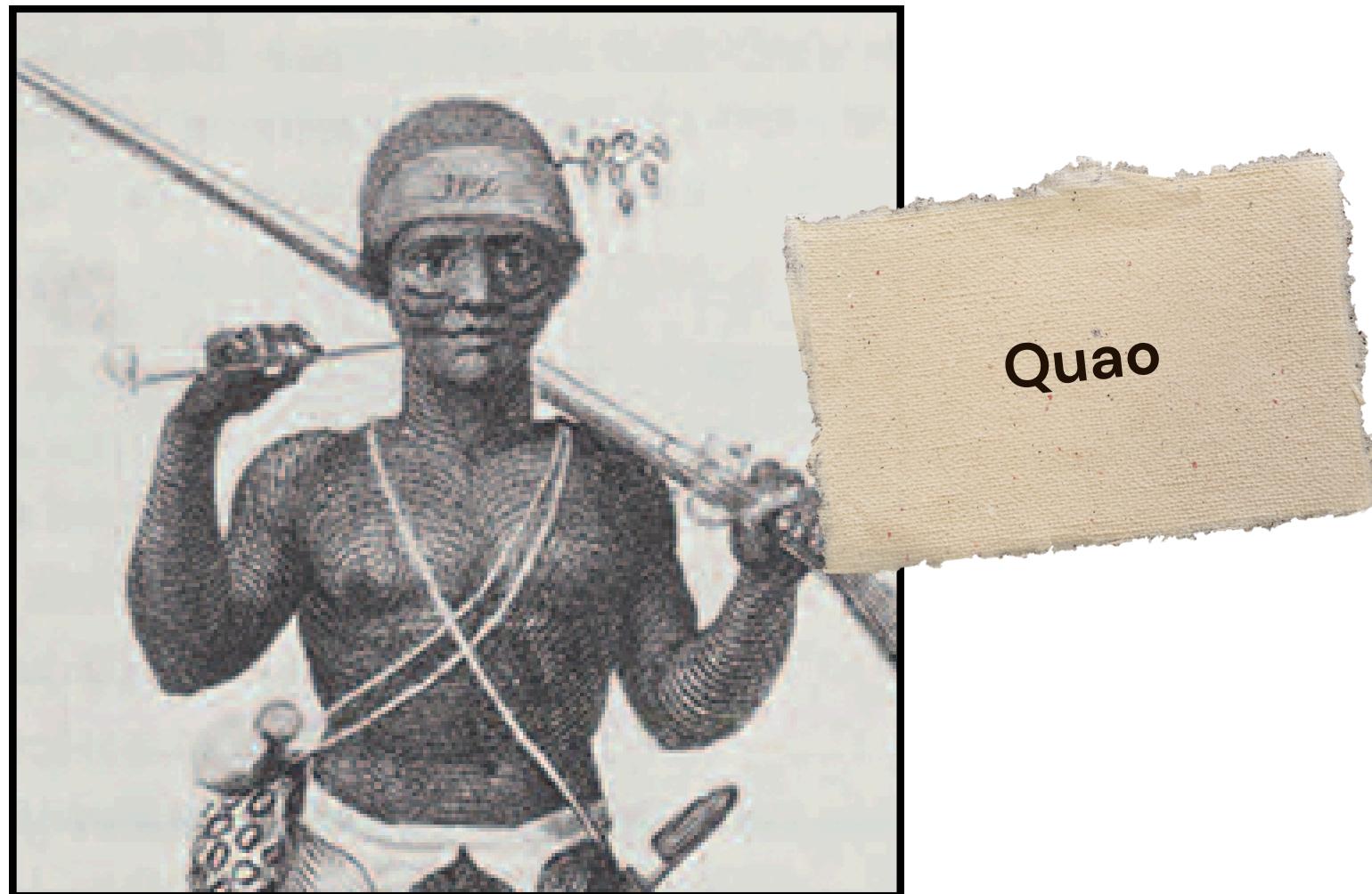
Nanny of the Maroons



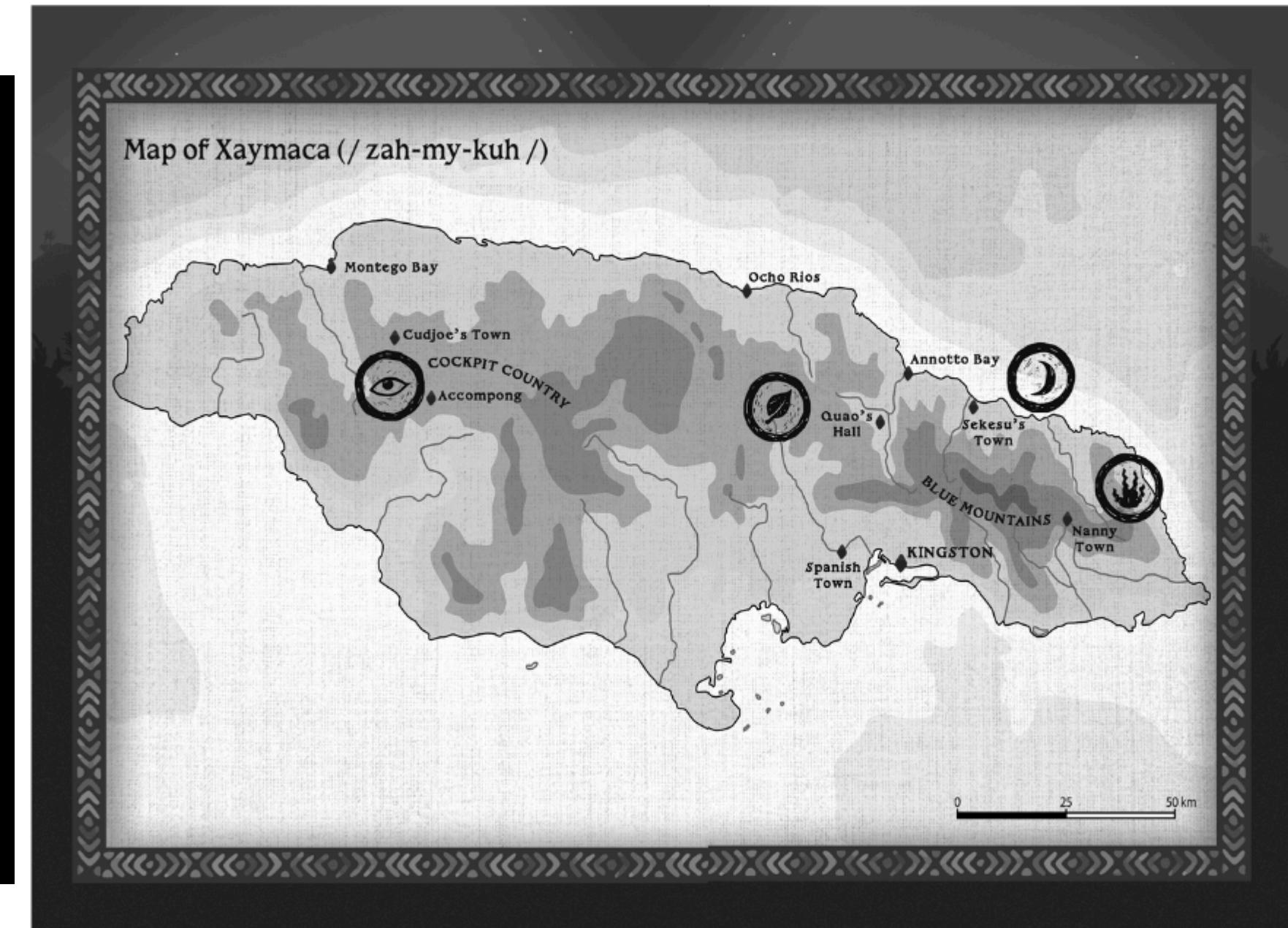
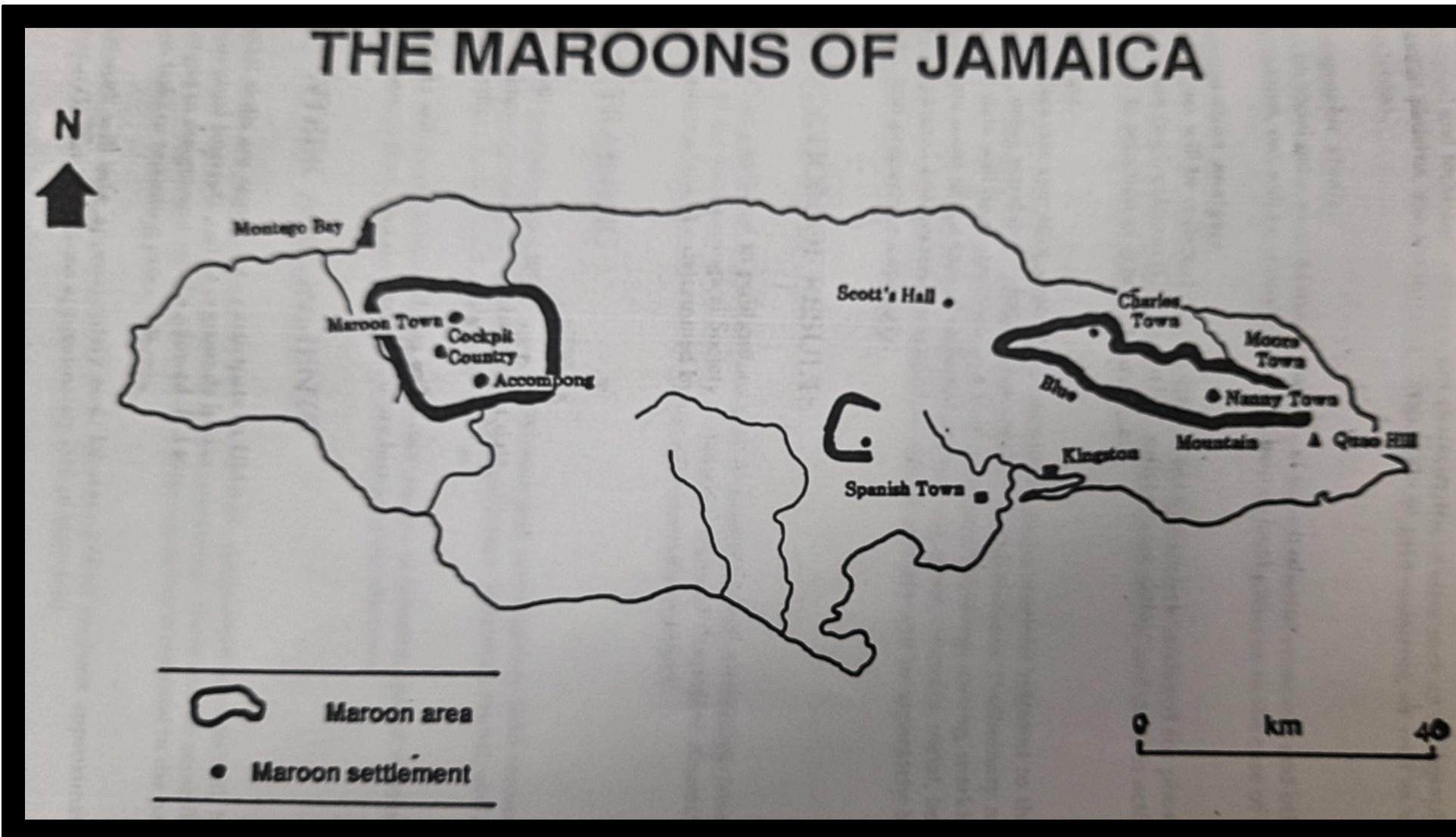
- Nanny is one of seven national heroes in Jamaica, and notably the only woman.
- She was an exceptional military leader of the Maroons in the early 18th Century, and the most famous of them all.
- She was a force in strategising guerilla warfare against the British particularly during the First Maroon War from 1728 to 1739.
- Several historical letters and accounts from British personnel speak of how fearsome she was as a leader and how skilled in warfare.
- The most well-guarded Maroon settlement was Nanny Town, which was only accessible by hunters' trails and strategically positioned inside a river loop.
- Nanny was born in Ghana, and most likely to have been forcibly brought to Jamaica during the Transatlantic slave trade.
- As well as having military might, she also had a high standing as a chieftain and wise woman who passed down stories and encouraged the embrace of African customs and traditions.
- There are many fantastical stories about Nanny, which have become folklore in and of themselves. For example, that she had supernatural powers and could stop bullets.
- Another folklore element of her story is that she had an older sister named Sekesu. Sekesu is a prominent character in *Spirit Warriors* but is widely believed to be fictional.

More Maroon leaders

- Over the course of two long wars in the 18th Century: The First Maroon War and The Second Maroon War, several leaders led the resistance against the British to defend their townships and remain free.
- They succeeded despite being at a technological disadvantage. However, the British only ceded due to Maroon leaders such as Quao and Cudjoe signing treaties of agreement where the terms still benefitted the British. Regardless, the fact that Maroon townships remained free from enslavement, and still exist to this present day, is a remarkable feat.



Real vs Fictional Maroon Town Map



Discussion Questions

1. How do you think Taíno culture and spirituality has influenced the author's world in *Spirit Warriors*?
2. What are your thoughts on how the author has used fictional characters alongside real people from history?
3. What key differences can you see between the real map of Jamaica's Maroon towns and the version from *Spirit Warriors*? Why do you think these differences exist?
4. How does the real history of Maroon resistance and warfare play a part in the storyline and character journeys of *Spirit Warriors*?