Lesson Plan: Postage Stamp Contest
Provided by the Art Institute of Chicago Department of Museum Education

Suggested Grade Level: 2–6
Estimated Time: 1–2 hours

Introduction
The continuity and social well-being of many African communities depends upon the ability to grow abundant crops. The Bamana of southern Mali consider farming to be the most noble of professions. In this lesson, students look at a pair of headdresses used by the Bamana in the spectacular ceremonial Ci Wara masquerade, held to encourage hard work and ensure good crops. Students examine the objects’ forms and learn about their agricultural associations. Then they design a block of four stamps, each one depicting a view of the headdresses that portrays their ceremonial use.

Lesson Objectives
• Explore an art object’s origin and function.
• Represent a work of art from multiple viewpoints.

Key Terms
• Western Sudan
• Mali
• agriculture
• headdress
• ceremony
• abstract
• symbol

Instructional Materials
• What I See When I Really Look Activity Sheet
• Postage Stamp Contest activity sheet
• pencils
• colored pencils
• watercolors
• watercolor brushes
Procedures

Discussion

• Show students the pair of headdresses. If using the Web to view the objects, take advantage of the close-up view.

• Have students fill out the What I See When I Really Look Activity Sheet. After they have completed this, make the following observations and ask the following questions to encourage discussion of the objects’ forms:
  o Look carefully and think about what you see. What do these objects look like? What elements give you that impression?
  o The headdresses combine recognizable forms and abstract shapes. Name all of the animal forms you see. (antelope, anteater, or aardvark) What do you think the repeated triangular shapes represent?
  o How do the angles and curves work together to create one visually pleasing object?
  o Examine and describe the interesting play between the “positive” shapes (made of wood and metal) and the “negative” shapes (the open spaces in between the solid shapes). Do your eyes focus on the two large basic forms of the sculptures, on the smaller shapes, or do you tend to concentrate on the rich surface of dots and lines?
  o What materials were used to make these sculptures? (wood, brass tacks, hammered metal, stiff grasses)
  o Which figure represents a man and which one represents a woman? Why might both have been included here? What might the baby suggest?

• Explain to students that these headdresses were worn during ceremonial dances just before planting or harvest. Tell them that the male and female headdresses are always worn in pairs so that they appear to dance together. They represent the cooperation and unity required for successful farming.

• Note again the animals represented by these sculptures. Discuss the physical attributes that make them ideal choices for suggesting the human qualities vital for successful farming.

• Explain that a special Bamana association teaches about farming seasons, soils, and plants. Ask students the following questions:
  o How do American farmers learn to farm?
  o Can you name social events in the past or present that take place at planting or harvesting times in the United States? (square dances, husking bees, county and state fairs)? What purpose do you think they serve?
Activity
Tell students that they have been selected to design a block of four postage stamps celebrating the Bamana culture. Give them two or more postage-stamp activity sheets and encourage them to use one or more to sketch their ideas and another to draw and paint their final images.

Tell them that all four designs must be based on the headdresses. The images may include: the entire object, parts of the object, the object being used in a ceremony, or the object with the tools and products of agriculture.

Evaluation
Base students' evaluations on their participation in class discussion and their ability to analyze an art object by producing distinct views of it.

Follow-up:
Have students create a set of four stamps based on another African object in the Arts of Africa Art Accessunit. Alternatively, have them create a stamp set based on an African country. Ask them to explore four different aspects of that country, such as terrain, ethnic groups, art, vegetation, lifestyle, exports, animals, national flag, or cities. Encourage them to develop designs that relate to each other.

Illinois Learning Standards
Fine Arts: 25–27
Social Science: 17–18
What I See When I Really Look

☒ I first noticed: (include why) ____________________________________________

☒ The basic shape of this object is:
  square  rectangular  round  oval  triangular
  But other shapes I see are_______________________________________________

☒ It seems to be made mainly out of:
  wood  metal  stone  clay  fabric  shell  other (fill in)_______________________
  But other materials I see are_____________________________________________

☒ The surface is mainly:
  shiny  dull  smooth  rough  plain  fancy  painted  carved
  But it is also___________________________________________________________

☒ The object is:
  symmetrical  asymmetrical  simple  complex  other (fill in)_________________

☒ Title________________Country________Ethnic Group_______________________

☒ What I personally like most
  about this object is (include why) and/or my general thoughts about it are:
  ___________________________________________________
  ___________________________________________________
  ___________________________________________________
  ___________________________________________________
  ___________________________________________________
  ___________________________________________________
  ___________________________________________________
  ___________________________________________________
  ___________________________________________________

☒ Draw the object in the space below

Postage Stamp Contest

You have been selected to design a block of stamps celebrating Africa. Choose #1 or #2:

#1 - All four designs must be based on one African object from The Art Institute of Chicago and must relate to each other visually. Your images may include: the entire object, parts of the object, and something about its origin or use.

#2 - All four designs must be based on one African country and must relate to each other visually. Explore four different aspects of that country, such as: terrain, ethnic groups, art, vegetation, lifestyle, exports, animals, national flag, or cities.