Arts of Africa

New Edition

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Preface: How to Use This Manual

Art plays an integral role in the daily lives of African people. While their forms, textures, and colors may be visually dazzling, awe-inspiring, or even frightening, African art objects also provide important information about history, religion, and social systems. This teacher manual complements the collection of African art at The Art Institute of Chicago and provides an excellent preparation for the experience of viewing African works in the museum.

This teacher manual is intended to serve as a flexible resource for a variety of teaching styles, subjects, and classroom situations. The introduction addresses several important points that should be kept in mind when discussing the art of Africa. Then two options for organizing the study of African art are presented. First, twenty objects (with slides) are discussed in geographic order and are supplemented by related objects (with illustrations) that provide additional information and points of comparison. This presentation facilitates the study of the history and culture of the continent by region. Second, a series of broad themes is briefly discussed, and each of the twenty objects is cross-referenced and indexed according to those themes. This format gives teachers the opportunity to organize material into thematic units. A special section on African decorative arts describes a variety of artistic media and techniques. In addition to slides and text illustrations, two extensive glossaries, a pronunciation guide, maps, numerous suggestions for classroom activities, and educational resources provide background information and help to place the art into a broad geographic and historical context.
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ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF AFRICAN ART

- The History, Collection, and Display of African Art
- African Social and Spiritual Systems
- Understanding African Art
Introduction: Issues in the Study of African Art

From rock paintings created twenty-eight thousand years ago in southern Africa to kente (KEN-tay) cloth sold today in Chicago, the arts of Africa are diverse and powerful vehicles for creative expression. As old and complex as any of the world’s artistic traditions, the arts of Africa are the product of a vast continent, at least three times the size of the United States and home to over seven hundred million people. A rich array of art objects is just one of many unique African contributions to the world, including sophisticated political systems, music, trade and market systems, herbal medicines, and technologies.

The History, Collection, and Display of African Art

The history of contact between Africa and the West (defined here as Europe and the Europeanized Americas) is long and complex, characterized by periods of mutual respect, curiosity, and exchange, as well as the legacies of slavery and colonialism. Prior to the early 1900s, African sculptures were displayed in the Western world as objects of curiosity or anthropological specimens rather than as fine art. While Western knowledge about the cultures and contexts from which these objects came was nebulous and romanticized, much has been learned since then about the roles art plays in African societies and the meanings it holds for communities and individuals. The collection of African art at The Art Institute of Chicago offers a rich opportunity to learn about African history, culture, and spirituality.

While art forms are produced in great variety across the continent of Africa, museum collections like that of the Art Institute generally contain more wooden sculpture, especially masks and figures, than examples of jewelry, dress, or architecture. Wooden sculptures have been more easily collected and have fit more readily into traditional Western ideas about fine art. This preference has led to greater emphasis on the arts of West and Central Africa, where most wooden sculpture is produced, than on the more ephemeral arts of eastern and southern Africa. In addition, the arts created north of the Sahara Desert, in northern Africa and Egypt, represent different (although related) artistic traditions and usually are found in other areas of museum collections.

Because much African art is created from natural materials, which rarely

1. Pronunciations are provided at the first appearance of the word in the text; see also the Pronunciation Guide on page 75.

Italics are used to denote African words that may be found in the Glossary of African Terms (see pages 85-87), while bold text indicates a word which is defined in the general Glossary (see pages 77-83). Dates are given using the B.C.E./C.E. system; designating Before Common Era/Common Era. The dividing line between the two is the year zero in the Julian Calendar.
survive long in the continent’s often tropical climates, most African sculpture in the Art Institute dates from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, older African objects of durable brass, bronze, ivory, and terracotta form a valuable part of the historical record. Although the record of historical change in Africa is often incomplete, it is important to remember that African art is not static or frozen in time. Roy Sieber, a renowned scholar of African art, has written that “the Western world has no monopoly on history. The flow of change in time is as real in Africa as anywhere else.” The flux between long-standing cultural structures and creative innovation is an ongoing theme in the way Africans organize and mediate their world through art. For example, changes brought by Islam, Christianity, and colonialism have had dramatic effects on some art forms, while others have remained virtually unaffected. So while some of the art forms discussed in this text are no longer being produced, others continue to play vital roles in community life. Because of the variety of situations represented here, both past and present tenses are used to describe objects in the Art Institute’s collection, based upon specific circumstances in distinct cultures.

Though we often do not know the identity of the individual African artists who made these works, it is wrong to assume that they are or were anonymous. Artists play important roles in African societies, creating work for individuals and groups. They work in a variety of situations, as full-time professionals, members of artists’ guilds, or part-time specialists. While their work is often unsigned, their unique artistic styles are known to the patrons who commission works and the communities which see them.

African Social and Spiritual Systems

Homes may vary in size and shape across the African continent, from a few rooms for a small family, to a sprawling group of connected compounds housing an extended family, to an expansive palace for a king and his court. Likewise, social organization in much of sub-Saharan Africa is based upon a flexible system of extended families, lineage ties, and larger affinities of language, religion, and politics that are shared by members of the same and related ethnic groups. The term “tribe,” often used negatively to imply isolated people with little economic or political structure, does not accurately describe the complex social organization of diverse African peoples. Among Africans, as among all people, ethnicity is a fluid form of identity that is negotiated within boundaries of social, political, and economic relationships.

Art objects in museums are usually organized by nationality and ethnicity, and this manual follows such a format; for example, the designation “Mali; Bamana” (BAH-mah-nah) indicates that a particular work of art was created in the present-day nation of Mali, by an artist of Bamana ethnicity. Additional information may further clarify the origin of an object, denoting the town, royal court, or region of the country in which an object was created. However, it is important to note that individual artists may work in various styles for patrons of various ethnicities, and that forms, techniques, and objects are commonly exchanged with neighboring communities as well as farther abroad.

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Like ethnicity, spirituality in Africa is often fluid and manifested throughout various aspects of art and culture. Most African religions are inherently practical and frequently evoked to aid in improving one’s circumstances. In much of Africa, the creator god is viewed as remote from daily life. In contrast, secondary deities such as wilderness spirits and spirits of deceased ancestors are a vital part of daily experience. Ritual specialists play important roles in African spiritual practice, using their special skills, knowledge, and training to make connections between the temporal world and the spirit world, often with the aid of powerful art forms.

Understanding African Art

Museums provide opportunities for the quiet contemplation of African art, but it is important to remember that most African objects in museums were made to be seen in very different contexts. In Africa, masks are often kept stored away, only to be taken out on specific occasions and to be seen in fleeting moments amid the whirl of dance, costume, and crowds. Sculptures may be kept hidden in sacred places, only to be viewed by certain privileged individuals. And songs, music, dance, proverbs, or prayers that accompany the use of these objects can amplify both the aesthetic experience and meaning of the art.

Attention to aesthetic concerns pervades African life, from the artful display of produce in the market place to the careful arrangement of the patterns of a garment wrapped around a human body. The aesthetic power of African art can be considered on several levels. At the most basic level, viewers may appreciate the beauty of line, shape, form, or color. On another, the conceptual qualities of African art may be considered: a large head may indicate intelligence, muscularity may denote a strong and productive member of society, prominent genitals may express the importance of human and agricultural fertility and procreation. Artists may also deliberately produce displeasing effects; for example, a sculpture may be beautiful and peaceful, or chaotic, threatening, and fearsome, depending on the context for which it is created. Although often described as functional, African art could not be effective without serious attention to form and composition. The frequently heard comment that African societies have no word for art is a serious misconception. African languages all include words that are used to describe aesthetic experience. For instance, art historian Kate Ezra discusses two words for art among the Bamana people of Mali, which “convey the idea that art... is something that attracts your attention, focuses your eye, and directs your thoughts.”

Like art throughout the world, art in Africa provides a way to explore the human condition. It is integrated into important events in the lives of individuals and the community, and it can send a message about civilization and social values or proclaim the majesty, power, and wealth of a ruler. Whether it educates, celebrates, entertains, affirms beliefs, or enhances prestige, art plays an integral role in the daily lives of many African people. Close examination of the forms, functions, and meanings of African art provides important and compelling points of access to these rich cultures.

GEOGRAPHIC APPROACH
Western Sudan
Guinea Coast
Equatorial Forest
Central Africa
Eastern and Southern Africa

THEMATIC APPROACH
Continuity
Initiation Associations
Masquerade
Beauty and Status
Authority
Women
Departure
Arts of Daily Life

AFRICAN DECORATIVE ARTS
Textiles
Pottery
Furniture
Metalworking
Central Africa
Two Approaches to the Study of African Art at The Art Institute of Chicago

All art may be studied by asking common questions: Where did this work of art come from? When was it made? By whom? For whom? In what style? By what means? All of these questions may be asked of the African art collection in the Art Institute. This teacher manual is intended to serve as a flexible resource for a variety of teaching styles, subjects, and classroom situations. The two ways of organizing the study of African art, by geographic location and thematically, are described below.

I. GEOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Modern Africa comprises fifty-three separate nations and a greater number of distinct ethnic groups than any other continent. Its incredibly diverse landscape includes deserts, mountains, grasslands, and rain forests. Much African sculpture is produced in the basins of three major rivers: the Niger and Benue Rivers in West Africa, and the Congo River (formerly known as the Zaire River) in Central Africa. Because of interrelationships of language, history, and culture, the Art Institute collection can be divided into broad geographic regions: Western Sudan, Guinea Coast, Equatorial Forest, and Central Africa (see maps pages 22, 34, 54, 60). Eastern and southern Africa, which are less represented in the Art Institute’s collection, form a fifth region (see map page 72).

Western Sudan

The Western Sudan is a grassy, tree-covered savanna that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea and separates the vast Sahara desert from the rain forest (see map page 22). This region includes the present-day nations of Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, as well as northern Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin (BEH-neen), and Nigeria. The Niger River has its headwaters in the highlands of Guinea, runs northward into central Mali, then arcs southward into Nigeria, and flows through the Western Sudan. The region has a short rainy season, generally lasting from June to September, which makes subsistence farming possible. In


6. While this can be translated into English as Ivory Coast, the French version, Côte d’Ivoire, is the official country name.
the dry season, communities gather for *initiation*, harvest, and funerary ceremonies, which are often accompanied by *masquerade* performances.

Coincident with Europe's Middle Ages, empires arose in Western Sudan- Ghana in the eighth century and Mali in the twelfth. Traders from North Africa, who traversed the Sahara during that time bringing copper, salt, and luxury goods to exchange for gold, ivory, and *kola* nuts, described powerful kings, such as Sundiata and Mansa Musa of the Mali empire, who inhabited expansive palaces built of sun-dried mud brick. These palaces also housed courtiers, servants, slaves, and guilds of highly skilled professional artists. In the thirteenth century, the city of Jenne (JEN-ay) became a bustling urban trading center, and Timbuktu was recognized as an important center of Islamic learning. During the fifteenth century, the Mali empire was succeeded by the Songhai (SOHN-guy) empire, which arose from a small chiefdom of fishermen, hunters, and farmers. Under the leadership of Sunni Ali, the Songhai empire expanded to encompass a vast amount of territory that was as large as Europe west of the Rhine River. Smaller West African states succeeded these vast empires, lasting until the nineteenth century.

The earliest surviving sculptures from the Western Sudan region are the terracotta sculptures of the Nok culture, originally found in what is today northern Nigeria, and dating from 500 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. Terracotta sculpture from the Inland Delta of the Niger River dates from the ninth to seventeenth centuries C.E. More recent art from the area, including that of the Dogon (DOH-gone), Bamana, and Senufo (sen-OO-foh) peoples, consists largely of wooden masks and figurative sculptures. These art forms may commemorate ancestors or spirits, reinforce important communal ideals, or play a role in maintaining social harmony. They are seen in a variety of contexts, including initiation ceremonies, harvest festivals, and *funerals*.

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7. The empire of Ghana has no geographic or known historical associations with the modern coastal West African nation of Ghana. However, the modern nation's name may have been chosen to make a purposeful association with the wealth and splendor of the ancient kingdom.

8. Translated writings about Africa by travelers and traders, including the observations of Muslim and European chroniclers of West Africa, can be found in Basil Davidson, *The African Past: Chronicles from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Boston: Little, Brown. 1964).

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**Guinea Coast**

South of the savanna grasslands of the Western Sudan, the area known as the Guinea Coast stretches from Senegal to Cameroun (see map page 34). This coastal region is characterized by the thick undergrowth, trees, and dense vegetation of the rain forest that give way to beaches edged with palm trees at the shoreline. Many of the countries along this coast were named for the goods they exported to European merchants beginning in the late fifteenth century. These include the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) and the Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast), as well as the Slave Coast (present-day Togo and the Republic of Benin). Other present-day countries in the region include Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria.

Culturally and artistically, the Guinea Coast can be divided into two regions that are separated by the Bandama River in central Côte d’Ivoire. The western region is in some ways linked to the Western Sudan, since many Sudanic peoples migrated southward to escape the expanding empires of Ghana and Mali and subsequently integrated with coastal forest inhabitants. This region is characterized by village groups ruled by
chiefs or councils of elders rather than by a monarch. Much art of this western region is created for associations that oversee the education and initiation of youth, entertain the community, and maintain societal law and order.

Peoples of the eastern region of the Guinea Coast share related languages, a tendency toward highly centralized kingdoms, and arts which reflect royal power. The kingdoms of Asante (ah-SAHN-tay), Yoruba (yoh-rah-BAH), and Benin embody these traditions. The Asante kingdom, which thrives today, brought together a number of separate though culturally related states in 1701 and is ruled by a supreme king or Asantehene (ah-SAHN-te-HEY-nay). While at the time of transition individual states kept their own chiefs, they shared military power and owed allegiance to the Golden Stool, which is the ultimate symbol of the nation and its well-being. Many Asante art forms are symbols of status and prestige and are found in the contexts of court life, royal funerals, and state festivals. The Asante kingdom functions within the political structure of modern Ghana, and many of its once royal art forms have become markers of prestige and status for Ghanaians in general.

Art and culture of the Yoruba people have roots in the ancient kingdom of Ife (EE-fay) in southwestern Nigeria, the religious and political center of the Yoruba from the ninth through the fifteenth centuries. Oral history relates that the deity Oduduwa (oh-DO-do-wah) was the first ruler of Ife, and that he sent his sixteen sons to found the sixteen Yoruba kingdoms. Ife is known to have had highly centralized political, economic, and religious systems and far-reaching trade networks. Artistically, Ife is famous for its highly developed metal and terracotta sculptures that depict rulers in the prime of life. Other ancient art forms have been discovered in southern Nigeria at the site called Igbo Ukwu, dating from the ninth century. While little is known of the ancient culture that inhabited this site, its art is also thought to be associated with leadership and may have been linked to the art of Ife. Arts of the contemporary Yoruba people address both leadership and religion. Yoruba sculpture celebrates a wide pantheon of gods who play important roles in the daily lives of individuals and the community, especially concerning issues of fertility, health, and prosperity.

As in Yoruba kingdoms, oral history of the kingdom of Benin points to Ife as the origin of its ruling dynasty. Ife is also believed to have been Benin’s source for the knowledge of brass casting, an art form which is vital to the ritual life of the kingdom. The kingdom of Benin was already flourishing when Portuguese traders first arrived on the Guinea Coast in 1485. It has continued to thrive, even after the capital, Benin City, was sacked by British soldiers in 1897, and remains a vital political force to this day. The art of Benin centers on the power and wealth of its divine king, or oba, and includes a great variety of objects and materials, such as commemorative brass heads, carved altar tusk, and brass plaques which once covered the pillars of the royal palace. Today, the kingdom is a vital political force in Nigeria and the thirty-eighth king, Oba Erediauwa, presides over an active court.

9. The Kingdom of Benin, in south-central Nigeria, is not to be confused with the modern nation, the Republic of Benin (see map page 92) with which it has no historical association.
Equatorial Forest

The dense jungle landscape of the Equatorial Forest covers Africa north and south of the equator, including the modern nations of Cameroon, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and the Central African Republic, as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire, see map page 54). In this region, crops of cassava, yams, bananas, and oil palms are planted in clearings opened by slash-and-burn agriculture. The history of the region is characterized by frequent migrations of small ethnic groups, which generally have been prompted by struggles for power at the village level. The arts of the region often play a role in initiation proceedings and are usually commissioned and used by regulatory associations, which are responsible for maintaining social order in the community. In the southern part of the region, groups such as the Fang and Kota are known for their reliquary figures, which once utilized and protected the spiritual power of ancestral relics.

A notable exception to these small, decentralized communities is found among the kingdoms of the grasslands area of northwestern Cameroon. Here, the central authority of the king is reinforced by powerful palace regulatory associations. Art proclaims and enhances this hierarchical power structure at events such as funerals, installations of new rulers, and annual celebrations. Royal architecture consists of magnificent high-roofed palaces with painted and carved decorative posts.

Central Africa

South of the Equatorial Forest, a vast expanse of savanna crosses Central Africa, from the Atlantic Ocean and the mouth of the Congo River, (formerly known as the Zaire River) in the west, to the great lakes of East Africa (see map page 60). The mighty river and its tributaries are the focus for the concentration and movement of people and cultural traditions in this region. Most central Africans speak languages of the Bantu language family, and their use of copper, ivory, and iron dates back to at least the early twelfth century. Central Africa is characterized by cultures with centralized political systems such as the Kongo, Kuba, and Luba in present-day west, central, and southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo hereafter designated Congo (formerly Zaire) respectively, and the Lunda and Chokwe (CHOCK-way) in northern and eastern Angola.

In 1482, Portuguese traders and missionaries reached the mouth of the then Zaire River where they established trade relationships with the vast, thriving Kongo kingdom. The Kongo people were largely converted to Christianity before the decline of the kingdom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Inland kingdoms, such as the Kuba, founded in the early seventeenth century, were less affected by European presence and still thrive today. Kuba art forms enhance the power and prestige of kings and chiefs, and include staffs, fly whisks, textiles, and stools ornamented with such luxury materials as glass beads, cowrie shells, leather, and metal.

Some ethnic groups in the region are less centralized, vesting power in local chiefs, as among the Yaka (YA-kah), Songye (SOHN-gee), and Luluwa (LOO-loo-wah) peoples. In addition to royal arts, other regional
art forms include sculptures, often empowered by special ingredients, which attract the aid of supernatural forces in a variety of contexts. Masks also play important roles in royal processions as well as initiation ceremonies and funerals.

**Eastern and Southern Africa**

This last geographic area encompasses the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, including such extremes of environment as the Kalahari Desert, Mount Kilimanjaro, and Lake Victoria (see map page 72). Present-day nations in this area span the African continent from Namibia to Madagascar to Uganda. These regions are vast, and have long and diverse histories: the Rift Valley in modern Kenya is the site where some of man’s oldest ancestors have been found, and trade routes from Egypt, India, and the Middle East have long crossed eastern Africa. Few generalizations can be made about the great diversity of people who include millions of Bantu speakers, small communities of Khoisan groups, people of mixed Arab and African descent, and the Asian-African people of the island of Madagascar. However, since the arts of the region are not as well-represented in museum collections, they are treated here in a single category. These arts encompass household objects like those in the Art Institute collection, as well as poetry, music, dance, body decoration, architecture, and house painting—art forms not discussed here, but certainly worthy of close, independent examination.

**II. THEMATIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF AFRICAN ART**

To understand African art it is necessary to understand its original social context. The following themes address the function and meaning of African art for the people it serves and affects; however, the selected themes are just a sampling of the ways African art may be understood. Many objects from the Art Institute collection can be discussed in relation to multiple themes. Teachers may also choose to introduce other ideas, such as the depiction of animals, the role of the artist, or the use of specific materials.

**Continuity**

Continuity and social well-being are central concerns for all societies. In much of Africa, the future of individual families and the community as a whole has depended upon the ability to bear and raise healthy children and the ability to grow abundant crops. In addition to assuring continuity of a **lineage**, children are sources of continuing well-being for their families because it is they who will work the land, pay due respect to elders, provide proper burials, and maintain contact with the ancestors. Agricultural fertility, especially in the hot, dry climates of the Western Sudan, is also a preoccupation. Art forms reflect these concerns; symbols of human and agricultural fertility, such as sculptures of mothers with children, are often integrated into rituals that call upon spiritual forces for assistance. These objects may be featured at special events like planting
and harvest festivals, where a community expresses gratitude for previous abundant harvests and appeals for continued prosperity. Similarly, art forms may address the need for social harmony and good health by conveying important messages about the value of cooperation and hard work.

**Initiation Associations**

In many African communities, the transition from childhood into adulthood is more clearly defined than it is in the West. Often, the passage into adulthood is marked by a ritual of initiation in which children are removed from their everyday surroundings and taught the important moral, philosophical, historical, and practical information needed in adult life. Initiation rituals frequently grant young people membership into associations that are the guardians of specialized knowledge and that are segregated by sex. **Circumcision** is often part of initiation for both sexes and may be seen as a prerequisite to full adult status. Enduring the physical pain of circumcision announces to the community that a youth is ready to face the many challenges of adult life with bravery, diplomacy, and intelligence. Beyond the training of young people, **initiation associations** also play important roles in the community, entertaining or enforcing important societal rules and regulations.

Art can play an important role in the initiation process. Generally, initiates may learn to make masks, sculptures, and costumes. They also are taught the meanings of symbols incorporated into art objects that reinforce important concepts learned during initiation. Masks play a variety of roles during initiation, from frightening and intimidating the initiates to educating and protecting them.

**Masquerade**

Whether they are performed in the market place, the fields, or the center of town, masks are a significant part of community life in many parts of Africa. Masquerades, in which specific masked performers manifest spiritual forces, may heal, protect, instruct, frighten, commemorate, and entertain. Masks play important roles during initiation and funerary ceremonies, and may also glorify the power of leaders. In Africa, the word "mask" usually refers not just to a face covering, but also to the costume, dance, songs, music, and audience accompaniments that unite to create a performance or masquerade. African audiences often speak of masks as if they were beings, and at times this text will do the same, suggesting that the mask is a complete character with its own powers. Masking is a total aesthetic experience, whose power and excitement cannot be fully conveyed by a museum display. Masquerade often involves an element of sustained disbelief: a masked performer, who onlookers know to be a human in costume, may be temporarily accepted as the incarnation of an ancestor or spirit, whose appearance energizes the occasion. Masquerade performers can be young or old, male or female; however, masks are frequently danced by young men who play both male and female characters. In contemporary Africa, masquerade has proven adaptable. It flourishes by reflecting new situations and continuing to play vital roles in many communities.
Beauty and Status

In the past, the style of a Yoruba woman's hair would reveal whether she was single, married, pregnant, or in mourning. In contemporary Africa, personal adornment continues not only to beautify, but also to indicate status and moral character. An elaborate coiffure, scarification marks, and other forms of body decoration may be seen to separate humans from the animal world, mark one's ethnic identity, or provide a visible measure of maturity and self-esteem. Such embellishments may also indicate social status, leadership roles, and wealth. While different cultures may have different definitions of beauty, there is often agreement on certain ideals within a particular culture, and this information can help us to appreciate the great variety of form and meaning in African art.

Authority

Leadership takes many forms in Africa, from respected elders who advise a community with their cumulative wisdom, to the divine king who rules a kingdom with spiritual guidance from a host of gods and ancestors. Whether king, chief, or elder, leaders of Africa's diverse societies have used art to project their status, power, and authority. These arts encompass varied materials and forms, which often reflect the wealth of the leader and his or her community. Councils of elders and regulatory associations may also play important roles in governance. These associations may carry out a chief's orders, enforce rules and regulations, or settle disputes. Such groups are important patrons of the arts, commissioning masks, sculpture, and other objects to assist them in their various duties.

Women

African women play many roles in their communities and may wield significant power, whether directly or indirectly. Because art-making is often divided by gender, with men producing most African sculpture whether in wood, metal, or ivory, women's artistic production has received less attention in Western scholarship. Likewise, the influence of women in other spheres has also been underrepresented. It is important to think about the complex ways in which African men and women participate in social, political, economic, and religious arenas. In particular, the study of women offers an opportunity to redress past generalizations and recognize women's special and unique contributions to African societies as reflected in their art forms.

Departure

When an Asante king dies, the queen mother announces his death by stating the proverb, "A great tree has fallen." In many African societies, death is seen as part of the ongoing cycle of life that continues in the world beyond. While burial is often quick and informal, elaborate funerary ceremonies that require significant resources may take place up to several years following the death of an important individual. Art helps to honor and commemorate the deceased person's life and achievements, facilitate his or her passage to the other world, and request his or her continued attention to the concerns of the living.
The elaborateness of mourning and funerary rituals often depends upon a person's status in a society. Since one's status and experience in life are often believed to be carried into the world beyond, an elderly chief naturally will have the greatest power as an intermediary between the world of the living and that of the spirits. Thus, while the death of a king or chief may be an occasion for lavish preparations, the death of a small child may be met with minimal ceremony. In addition to funerary arts, the arts of departure also include sculptures commemorating ancestors and containers for ancestral relics.

Arts of Daily Life
Many African art forms serve the social and spiritual needs of a community, but art objects also can address the needs of daily life such as food preparation, clothing, and storage. While some utilitarian objects are mass-produced and ultimately disposable, others are beautifully designed, skillfully crafted, and decorated by hand. These objects may acquire special meaning over time, reinforcing ideas about history, belonging, and identity in addition to serving their practical function. The following special section on African decorative arts provides further information about many of the materials and processes used to make such objects.
African Decorative Arts

When we think of African art, wooden masks and figures are likely to come to mind before pottery, textiles, or furniture. The latter objects are often called decorative, utilitarian, personal, or household arts. These objects may also be referred to as crafts; however, this word implies a lack of artistic merit, which does not do justice to the high level of aesthetic consideration that often is brought to their creation. In Africa, decorative arts are sometimes created by their owners, but more often by a variety of specialized artisans, including blacksmiths, woodcarvers, weavers, potters, calabash workers, leather workers, basket weavers, bead workers, goldsmiths, and brass casters. This section provides information on a number of African decorative arts, including textiles, pottery, furniture, and metalwork. The Art Institute collection includes numerous examples of each, and those discussed in this manual can be found in the Thematic Index under the heading Arts of Daily Life (see page 92).

Textiles

African textiles reflect the diversity of the continent and play important roles in personal, social, spiritual, and commercial arenas. In daily life, they serve as wrapped and tailored garments, covers, and carriers. They also may express social status, wealth, self-assurance, and propriety. Textiles may carry spiritual significance or complete the lavish regalia of a leader. Often highly desirable and valuable, textiles are regularly traded for other commodities in marketplaces across the continent and, thus, may travel great distances.

The textiles of Africa are infinite in their variety of forms and functions. Woven Asante or Ewe kente, mud-painted Barnama bogolanfini (BOH-goh-lahn-fee-nee) indigo resist-dyed Yoruba adire (AH-dyeer-ay), stamped Asante adinkra (uh-DIN-krah), cut-pile Kuba raffia cloth, embroidered Hausa robes—these represent just a sampling from the world of African textiles. Some African textiles share an important common feature: designs made more dynamic by purposeful irregularities of pattern. This taste for interrupting the expected on purpose is a wonderful component of African aesthetics, and can be appreciated through the close examination of textile patterns. In contrast, other types of African textiles are valued for the precision and regularity of their designs.
In addition to the many varieties of African textiles, the art of wearing cloth deserves consideration. Cloth is an important component of the public presentation of self in African society. The wearing of a particular type of cloth, as well as the grace with which it is worn, can send messages about one’s respect for tradition or one’s capacity to negotiate the modern world. African cloth is often worn in the form of wrappers, untailed pieces of cloth which are folded, draped, and wrapped around the body in many ways, with stripes or patterns carefully matched and aligned. Women in much of West Africa wear three-piece ensembles made of matching cloth, consisting of a tailored top and two wrappers. One wrapper is worn as a skirt while the second may be worn doubled and loosely wrapped over the first, or may be used as a baby carrier, head tie, or shawl. Men in the central Guinea Coast region of West Africa traditionally wear a single large piece of cloth wrapped around the body and passed over the left shoulder. The continual arrangement and adjustment of wrappers by men and women has been described as an art of gesture, which, when done well, creates an aesthetic space around the body that is enhanced by the body’s movement and rustling of the cloth.

The technical processes of African weaving are discussed at length in the literature on African textiles. In the most basic sense, a woven textile is comprised of two components: the set of fibers held in tension by the loom, called the warp, and the fibers interlaced with the warp by the weaver, called the weft. African woven textiles are generally produced on one of two types of looms, a wide vertical loom or a narrow horizontal loom. A vertical loom is formed from two cross bars which support a continuous vertical spiral of warp threads and produce a cloth twice the size of the work area. In Nigeria, vertical looms are often used by women, who both weave cloth for their families’ use and to sell in the market. In Central Africa, professional male weavers use vertical looms to create cloths from raffia fibers. Horizontal looms produce an unending horizontal strip of cloth about four inches wide, which is cut and edge-sewn to produce larger pieces that may be wrapped or tailored (see photo at left). Horizontal looms are usually associated with professional male weavers in West Africa, who learn their craft by apprenticeship and often work in specialized weaving centers. However, women in some areas have also begun to work on horizontal looms to produce stripwoven cloth for sale.

The Art Institute collection contains a large variety of African textiles that are exhibited on a rotating basis in order to preserve them. The collection includes an example of Asante kente cloth (left, and see page 41 and slide 8).
Pottery

Pottery is among the oldest and most durable art traditions of Africa, known in Kenya since the upper Paleolithic era, and dating to at least the early fourth millennium B.C.E. in Nigeria. African pottery is known for its strength and ability to stand great extremes of temperature. Such characteristics are inherent in pottery that is created from coarse clays tempered with crushed pot sherds and fired quickly over relatively low heat.

Whether for storing, preparing or serving food, or drinking or carrying water and other liquids, pots of every size and shape have their own distinct uses. Both utilitarian and ritual pots are usually created by women. In many parts of the Western Sudan, potters are the wives of blacksmiths; in other areas potters may be members of guilds or families specializing in pottery making. African pottery is generally hand built; the potter's wheel is a relatively recent introduction from Europe.

A great variety of techniques are used for working clay, including coiling, pulling, and shaping over a mold. The malleability of clay allows flexibility in shapes and sizes, and pottery is decorated in a great number of ways, including designs which are stamped, impressed, carved, scraped, polished, and painted onto the pot surface, usually before firing.

The Art Institute collection includes a variety of pottery vessels from Cameroon, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Congo, as well as the Zulu beer container from South Africa (see above and slide 20).

Furniture

As in other parts of the world, furniture in Africa ranges from the simplest of forms, such as a reed mat that may serve as both bed and chair, to larger, more complex forms, often carved from wood. Beds, stools, chairs, and neckrests are basic items of furniture that are found in many parts of Africa. Such objects are often personal and used only by their owners, but they also can be public, ceremonial, and highly symbolic.

Akan (ah-KAHN) stools present an excellent example of furniture that plays both private and public roles. In the Akan region of southern Ghana, most stools are intimate objects which mark important moments in a
person's life. An Akan proverb states, "there are no secrets between a man and his stool." A wooden stool is usually presented to a child by his or her father once the child learns to crawl. Often a stool is given to a bride by her groom following their marriage. The deceased are also seated upon stools to be bathed before burial. These stools are all said to carry the essence of their owners and should not be used by others. For this reason, they are tilted on their side when not in use and are usually abandoned upon the death of their owners.

Akan stools also can serve important public functions. Since Akan stools are associated with one's character and standing in life, it is understandable that chiefs use them for official purposes to demonstrate their power and authority. The most important Akan political icon is the Golden Stool, a legendary stool said to have been made of solid gold and called down from heaven when the Asante kingdom was formed in the early eighteenth century. The Golden Stool remains in the Asantehene's treasury at the royal capital, Kumasi, and is exhibited only on the most important official occasions. It is regarded as a supernatural object that enshrines and protects the soul of the Asante people and ensures their well-being.

African furniture in the Art Institute collection includes a brass-covered Akan ceremonial stool and a wooden Chokwe chair, in addition to the Songye stool (see above and slide 18) and Yaka neckrest (see below and slide 19).
Metalworking

Iron-working technology was well established in sub-Saharan Africa by the middle of the first millennium B.C.E., and, as in Europe, it had a profound impact on people’s lives. Iron farming tools and hunting weapons helped people to gain better control of nearby forests and fields making it possible to sustain larger populations. Iron weapons also improved defenses and made it easier to conquer neighboring territories.

Once metallic ores are gathered and smelted, a blacksmith forges the metal to produce a great variety of objects, including tools such as hoes and adzes, as well as guns, lanterns, and ritual objects. Since so many activities, including woodworking, are dependent to some degree upon metal tools, blacksmithing is often described as the core craft. Specialized professionals who are both a part of society and distinct from it, blacksmiths occupy an enigmatic social position in many parts of Africa. Because of their ability to transform molten metals into iron, which is often associated with supernatural power, blacksmiths are respected and feared, given privileges and subjected to certain restrictions. In areas where blacksmiths make art objects with ritual significance, they often play important spiritual roles as both supernatural healers and mediators.

While iron improves the quality of tools and weapons, art objects of bronze, copper, silver, and gold enhance the prestige of leaders and the power of ritual. African artists who work with these mediums often use the lost-wax casting technique. While blacksmiths may create jewelry in some areas, goldsmiths more often are responsible for creating items such as necklaces, bracelets, anklets, rings, and earrings from a variety of metals. In the gold-rich regions of Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, goldsmiths create objects of personal adornment such as beads and pendants. They also create a wide array of regalia for chiefs. The Art Institute collection includes a variety of objects cast in metal, including gold pendants from Côte d’Ivoire, Senufo divination instruments, and Akan weights cast from brass for measuring gold dust (see above and slide 9).
Selected Works of African Art at The Art Institute of Chicago

WESTERN SUDAN
Equestrian and Four Figures
Standing Male Figure
Pair of Headdresses (Chiwara Kunw)
Ceremonial Drum (Pinge)
Mask (Kponyungo)

GUINEA COAST
Headdress (Nimba, D’mba, or Yamban)
Portrait mask of a Woman, (Ndoma)
Men’s Wrapper (Kente)
Goldweights [Man with Powder Keg, Geometric Design, Monkey, Catfish]
Plaque of Warrior Chief
Veranda Post of Enthroned King (Opo Ogoga)
Mask for Gelede

EQUATORIAL FOREST
Mask with Lizard Headdress
Reliquary Figure

CENTRAL AFRICA
Mask (Mukenga)
Mask (Mwana Pwo)
Maternity Figure
Stool
Headrest (Building on Stilts)

EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA
Beer Storage or Serving Vessel
Western Sudan
Western Sudan

**Equestrian and Four Figures**

Mali, Bougouni; Bankoni
Probably late 14th/early 15th century
Terracotta

**Themes: Beauty and Status, Authority**

The diverse art forms of Africa have a long and complex history, which is not yet fully documented. This group of **terracotta** sculptures—composed of a male equestrian figure, two seated figures, and two kneeling figures—are among the oldest known art objects from the Western Sudan. These sculptures illustrate the powerful impact of ancient artistic traditions, and serve as a reminder of the need for further research to augment our knowledge of Africa's rich history.

Since the 1940s, many buried terracotta sculptures discovered in the Inland Delta of the Niger River have been attributed to the ancient city of Jenne. Located in the south of present-day Mali, Jenne was a thriving center for trade, agriculture, and craft production from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries (see map page 22). Objects found south of the Inland Niger Delta, including the Art Institute's **Equestrian and Four Figures**, are often called Bankoni. The term Bankoni is used to identify figures related by their recognizable elongated torsos and cylindrical forms. The figures are often depicted in a kneeling position, with hands on knees, and are usually found broken in several places. The name Bankoni comes from the site where one such example was found, approximately six miles from Bamako, the present-day capital of Mali. Today this region is the home of the Bamana people, and it has been suggested that these works were made by **ancestors** of the Bamana.

The elongated forms and heavy bracelets of the Art Institute figures are characteristic of Bankoni sculpture. Their tubular shapes, rounded edges, and fluid contours reflect the malleable properties of clay. The figures are notable for their minimized and abstract physical features; attention is concentrated instead upon their embellishment. The horseman carries a dagger with a decorated **scabbard**, and wears a knife sheath on his left.

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**SLIDE 1**

**Equestrian and Four Figures**

H: 27 1/2 in. (70 cm); L: 8 1/4 in. (21 cm);
D: 19 in. (48.5 cm) and H: 17 7/8 in. (45 cm);
W: 5 3/4 in. (14.6 cm); D: 7 3/8 in.
(19.3 cm) and H: 18 in. (46 cm);
W: 4 7/8 in. (14.7 cm); D: 7 3/8 in. (19 cm) and H: 17
1/4 in. (44 cm); L: 4 in. (10.2 cm); D: 7 1/4
in. (18.5 cm) and H: 17 3/8 in. (43.5 cm);
W: 5 in. (12.7 cm); D: 7 1/4 in. (18.4 cm)

arm and a string of bells or pendants at his waist. The large seated male figure carries a quiver slung over his back and a dagger at his left shoulder. Heavy bracelets, necklaces, belts, and incised geometric patterns perhaps representing sacrifice are found to some degree on each figure. While daggers and quivers indicate hunting and military power, these other forms of embellishment suggest individuals of elevated status.

The equestrian figure, rigid and regal upon his mount, is the focus of attention within the group. Horses are believed to have been brought to West Africa by Arab merchants in the 7th century. Horses were a crucial factor in the long-distance trade through which wealth was amassed. Warriors on horseback increased military power of ancient empires, which depended heavily upon the speed and power of cavalry to expand their territory. It is also speculated that in a ritual context, horses may have represented a vehicle for communication between natural and supernatural forces. For many West African cultures, including the Bamana and the Dogon of present-day Mali, equestrian figures continue to be symbols of prosperity, authority, and power.

Unfortunately, little can be said with certainty about the production, function, or meaning of these figures. The first scientific and controlled excavations in the region took place only in 1977, and many pieces have been removed from sites without consideration of their archaeological importance. As a result, most sculpture from the region lacks specific contextual information. However, since pottery is the prerogative of women in the Delta region today, it is likely that the figures were produced by women. It has been proposed that the five Art Institute sculptures were created as a ceremonial group by two artists. All five Art Institute figures were discovered broken and buried together, implying that they were originally displayed together. They were found hidden in a burrow, possibly marking a sacred place in the countryside.

The few Inland Niger Delta figures from properly documented archaeological sites were found set into walls or floors of houses, and it has been suggested that the figures may have served to articulate a request to ancestors or spirits for protection from the annual flooding in the area. Given the close proximity of the Bankoni area to the delta, it is possible that the Art Institute figures were used in a similar way. It also has been proposed that the Bankoni sculptures were intended as clay portraits commemorating a royal family. A third interpretation looks to contemporary initiation and fertility associations in the region as sources of meaning, linking past and present. While none of these interpretations can be asserted conclusively, the Bankoni figures are part of the artistic tradition, representing auspicious individuals of special status and powers.
Standing Male Figure
Mali, Dogon
18th Century
Wood, sacrificial material

Themes: Continuity, Beauty and Status

Since the fifteenth century, the Dogon have inhabited the spectacular Bandiagara (BAHN-dee-a-gah-rah) Escarpment, 125 miles of steep slopes rising above the dry Seno Plain of present-day central Mali. This isolated, arid region has provided centuries of protection from invaders, but makes farming—the source of Dogon sustenance—extremely difficult. Dogon art forms reflect the dramatic power of their environment while providing an important source of connection to ancestors, who offer spiritual assistance and ensure continuity.

Dogon art is renowned for its elegant, abstract treatment of human form. Crafted by a master sculptor, the elongated forms and subtle detail of the Art Institute’s Standing Male Figure make a strong visual impact—a study in balance and harmony. The severity of the whole is softened by the smoothly rounded curves of the chest, abdomen, calves, and thighs. The vertical lines of the columnar neck, the upper arms, and the straight, incised backbone are countered by the diagonal thrust of the chin, lower arms, and thighs.

Embellishments, such as the thin, incised beard, intricately braided coiffure, and short necklace suggest a figure of authority or status. A ceremonial staff, its handle now missing, rests on the figure’s left shoulder. Such L-shaped wooden staffs are used by Dogon men as tools, weapons, and ritual objects. In this sculpture, the unknown artist has combined the agile, muscular body of a man in the prime of life with the bearded authority of an elder.

Sculpture is valued among the Dogon for both its aesthetic form and its religious function. Dogon figurative sculpture is found primarily on altars, which may be located in the upper story of a house, a corner of the living quarters, a granary, a courtyard, or a separate structure adjacent to the family compound. Generally, altars are dedicated to ancestors, who are believed to act as intermediaries between the living and the larger forces of the universe. Deceased members of an extended family may be enshrined in an altar in the home of the family head, while important mythical ancestors may be revered by families of the same lineage in separate structures within a community. Unfortunately, few altars have been described in detail, and there is little information available with which to identify sculptures or link certain kinds with specific types of altars. However, the extremely hard wood from which the Art Institute sculpture is carved indicates that it is associated with an important ancestor, possibly the head of an extended family.
The crusty residue on the surface of the figure is the result of numerous years of application of sacrificial materials. These materials may have included millet porridge, oil, or the blood of a chicken, goat, or sheep, organic materials which are valued for their life-sustaining properties and which imbue the figure with vital energy. At planting and harvest times, and other occasions important to an individual or community, this ritual activity provides a means of communing with ancestors or spirits. For the Dogon, these sacrificial applications demonstrate religious commitment, and express the hope of receiving spiritual help which will ensure ample rainfall, successful farming, community harmony, and healthy children.

While some figurative sculptures are used only on ceremonial occasions, then cleaned and stored, others are left indefinitely on altars. Repeated application of sacrificial materials infuses some sculptures with powerful force. Over time, such sculptures may become too potent from so much use and attention, at which time they are discarded or stored. The smooth, dry surface and lighter color of the lower part of the Art Institute figure suggests that it may have been left in a cave for numerous decades. Such figures became partially buried in a mixture of sand and bat excrement, resulting in dehydration and preservation of the wood.

Since the 1930s, when interest was sparked by a team of French anthropologists, the Dogon people, landscape, and art have captured the imaginations of Europeans and Americans. Often abstract and austere, Dogon figurative sculpture covers a broad range of types, styles, and uses, whose history and meaning are still not completely understood. Dogon art provides a stunning aesthetic display, and an evocation of important beliefs relating to history, family, and continuity.
**Pair of Headdresses (Chiwara Kunw)**
Mali, Segou; Bamana
Mid-19th / early 20th century
Wood, metal, quills

**Themes: Continuity, Initiation Associations, Masquerade**

In Africa, as in other parts of the world, art forms can entertain, enlighten, and inspire their audiences, acting as catalysts for positive social actions. This is especially true in instances where art serves a direct social purpose. For the Bamana people, *chiwara* play such a role, embodying virtues essential to successful and prosperous agriculture in the arid fields of southern Mali.  

The importance of agriculture among the Bamana is reflected in the multiple meanings of the term *chiwara*. Artistically, *chiwara* encompasses the performance, including headdresses, costumes, and dances, which praises and encourages agricultural work. Socially, *chiwara* is the name of the association charged with preserving and transmitting knowledge—of seasons, soil, and plant life—related to farming. In Bamana legend, *Chi wara* (CHEE WAH-rah) is the proper name of the mythological half-man, half-antelope who taught the Bamana to cultivate the earth and who epitomizes the qualities of the ideal farmer. In daily life, *chiwaraw* are the young male champion farmers whose strength, endurance, and farming abilities emulate the mythic creature, and thus qualify them to wear the headdresses.

composed of elegant, flowing geometric shapes, this pair of sculptures combines animal forms to suggest human qualities. The elaborate mane and tall horns capture the antelope’s graceful strength and bounding energy, attributes which are also vital to surviving the long hours that farmers spend hoeing, planting, and harvesting in the hot, dry fields. The aardvark or anteater’s stocky body and its tapered face, used for burrowing into the earth, suggest the endurance and determination of these animals, as well as the human action of planting seeds. In addition, the female antelope is depicted with her baby on her back, mimicking the way African women carry their infants and suggesting both human and agricultural fertility.

*Chiwara* headdresses are worn in pairs at ceremonial dances which take place during the daytime prior to planting or harvest. Each sculpted wooden headdress is attached to a basketry cap worn on top of the dancer’s head. Long *raffia* fibers, dyed black, are attached to the basketry cap and cover the dancer’s face and body. The dancer bends forward, holding long sticks in front of him to represent the antelope’s forelegs. A female chorus accompanies the male dancers, praising the virtues of the ideal farmer, while the dancers imitate the movement, play, and bounding leaps of the antelope. In the past, performers usually accompanied farmers to the fields to dance. Today, performances take place in the village during the daytime, providing entertainment for the whole community.

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10. The Bamana word for head is *kun*, so *Chi Wara Kunw* literally means “Heads of *Chi Wara*.” The final “w” makes a word plural, thus the singular *chi wara*. Also spelled *ci wara* or *yi wara*.
The pairing of sculptures, representing a male and a female, stresses the cooperation and unity that is essential to successful farming. Likewise, the chiwara performance encourages men and women to work together. In addition to dancing, men’s duties include preparing the headdresses and dressing the performers. Women wash the costumes, offer their jewelry to embellish the headdresses and costumes, and provide food and drink for the celebration. Female partners also dance behind men in the dance circle, repeating the men’s steps.

These Bamana headdresses are carved by a specialized group of male professionals who are important artists as well as craftsmen of utilitarian objects in wood and metal. As both blacksmiths and sculptors, they create a wide range of objects, including hoes, guns, lanterns, figural sculpture, and ritual objects. From the hardwood of the toro tree, which is resistant to insects, a sculptor can create a chi wara headdress in about ten days. More recently, carvers have used wood of the kapok tree, which is lighter and easier to carve than the toro. After carving the basic shape, the blacksmith incises linear designs on the figure, and blackens the wood with flame and ash. The headdresses are then ornamented with pieces of hammered metal, brass tacks, and quills. The artist who carved the Art Institute pair displayed such skill in the balance of its curving forms, complementary positive (solid) and negative (open) spaces, and semi-abstract style that the sculptures are considered among the finest pair in any collection in the United States.

**RELATED OBJECT**

*Ritual Object (Boli)*

Mali; Bamana
Mid-19th century/early 20th century
Wood, cloth, mud, sacrificial material

H: 17 1/2 in. (44.5 cm); W: 11 3/8 in. (28.9 cm); D: 20 3/8 in. (51.7 cm)

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harold X. Weinstein, 1961.117

Bamana blacksmiths are responsible for creating many different art forms, including the powerful and mysterious objects known as *boliw.*¹¹ Drawings and photographs cannot capture the visual impact of the Art Institute *boli,* which seems to take the shape of an animal, such as a water buffalo or hippopotamus, but is not readily identifiable. Over many years, the wood and cloth core of this ritual object has been layered with heavy coats of sacrificial material, which are said to activate its powers. These materials include earth, mud, the blood of chickens or goats, and other materials taken from the natural environment, and are the source of the boli’s dark color and subtly textured surface. Unlike some art objects, boliw are never finished, but can be continually augmented, which increases their power and meaning over time.

Boliw are owned and controlled by *elders* and others with the special knowledge and ability necessary to access their many layers of meaning and supernatural power. Though boliw are often displayed on ritual altars that may be seen by the public, they are at the same time secret and dangerous objects that function like large amulets or reservoirs of power. While the conglomeration of natural materials that comprise boliw is reported to symbolize the universe, their many layers of symbolic significance are not accessible to the uninitiated.

¹¹. Singular is *boli.*
Ceremonial Drum (Pinge)
Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Senufo
1930/50
Wood, hide, applied color

Themes: Continuity, Initiation Associations, Beauty and Status, Women, Departure

Through a sophisticated fusion of form, function, and meaning, Senufo carvers provide instruction in cultural values and ideals. This memorial drum, called a pinge, is prized for its beauty, its music, and what it can teach about women, work, and social balance among the Senufo. It is a rare elaboration of a basic type of drum, which combines the standard elongated, hide-covered, single-membrane drum with a caryatid or supporting figure, in this case a female figure seated upon a stool.

The female figure that supports the drum balances the weight of her load on her head with powerful, upraised arms, a rigidly arched back, and a strong neck. Her jutting chin emphasizes inner strength, while downward-looking eyes suggest composure and concentration. The figure is posed seated on a stool with her feet well off the ground, a position of honor and praise. Her scarification marks, bracelets, and carefully coiffed hair also identify her as a woman of status. By combining these symbols of respect and hard work, the artist affirms the value of work and social responsibility. Taken literally, the image evokes a woman's daily activities—nurturing her family and community by carrying on her head large containers of grain or water, piles of firewood, or a netted bundle of pots for sale in the market place. Metaphorically, the image represents and honors the weight of a woman's responsibilities, including the difficulties of childbearing and a lifetime of hard work.

The female figure carries profound importance in Senufo art and culture for several reasons. First, women are seen as the founders of families and the backbones of the Senufo matrilineal descent system. Further, women take on the roles of spiritual mediators through the Sogobo divination society, in which women learn to facilitate communication between the human and spiritual worlds. And finally, the female form has aesthetic priority among the Senufo, who judge it to be more beautiful than the male form, and thus a better artistic subject.

The drum supported by the caryatid figure is carved in bas-relief with animals and human figures that also have symbolic significance. Among the animals in the composition are a crocodile "biting" a section of the drum's decorative border, a snake seizing or devouring a fish, and a small snake attacking a water turtle. The human figures include a man on horseback holding a spear and a victorious warrior holding manacles, a type of handcuffs formerly used in slave raids. These images depict themes of opposition and conflict in a world of competing forces. Complementing the theme of idealized female accomplishments that is portrayed by the
supporting female figure, the carving on the body of the drum suggests male power and success.

The imagery portrayed on the drum is far more purposeful and meaningful than it may seem at first; and, like much African art, a full understanding of it is available only to members of the community who have acquired high levels of knowledge and status over time. Young people, newcomers, and outsiders have access only to the most superficial layers of meaning. On the drum itself, this kind of knowledge is suggested by the presence of two objects, the powers of which are controlled by ritual experts: an antelope horn that is used as a container for medicinal substances, and a patterned square that is suggestive of a protective amulet.

The Art Institute drum was probably carved sometime between 1930 and 1950 by a Kulebele woodcarver. Senufo sculptors are members of either the Kulebele, a specialized group of woodcarvers, or the blacksmith-artisan group, who work with metal as well as with wood. Among the Senufo—who number approximately 1.5 million people in the present-day countries of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire—drums like the Art Institute example are used in a wide variety of contexts. In some regions, drums with similar motifs are played by men during agricultural competitions or in celebrations of advancement in initiation associations. However, in other regions, drums are played by women during commemorative funerals of members of the women's associations Sandogo and Tyekpa. On such occasions, the music of the drum would be accompanied by singing and dancing, and in the case of Tyekpa, women would dance with figural sculptures balanced on their heads in honor of the lifetime of contributions of a deceased member. Hence, during important occasions of public performance and display, the female caryatid drum provides engaging music and thought-provoking sculpture that affirms the contributions of women to the continuity and harmony of Senufo society.

12. While the tradition of women drummers is relatively rare in sub-Saharan Africa, Senufo women drummers have a long and accomplished history.
Mask (Kponyungo)
Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Senufo
Mid-19th/mid-20th century
Wood, applied color

Themes: Initiation associations, Masquerade, Authority, Departure

In startling contrast to the cool, composed forms of the female caryatid drum (see page 29 and slide 4), this Senufo helmet mask combines key features of powerful animals in a bold, aggressive composition. Called kponyungo (PON-yun-goh) a Senufo term broadly translated as “funeral head mask,” this type of mask is worn by senior members of the Poro association and is used in performances to manifest and harness some of the most dangerous and powerful spiritual forces.

The mask is made from a single block of wood and would have been commissioned by an individual and carved by a Kulebele specialist. Each of its parts represents a different animal and adds that animal’s special traits to the power of the mask; such masks are known as composite masks. The huge open jaws of this mask represent those of a hyena, while the sharply pointed teeth are attributed to the crocodile. The intensity of these fierce features is augmented by two sets of warthog tusks that protrude from the mask’s mouth and snout. Warthogs are considered to be violent and erratic animals and are associated with pain and disorder. At the back of the mask, long, straight antelope horns and curving, striated ram horns suggest speed, grace, and beauty. Two animals can be seen between the horns. One is a chameleon and the other a type of bird known as a hornbill. The hornbill is a symbol of fertility among the Senufo, while the chameleon is revered for its magical powers of transformation, which are demonstrated by its ability to change color.

This helmet mask, with all its animal attributes, is the ultimate embodiment of supernatural power and knowledge among the Senufo. For Poro initiates, the mask has many levels of meaning and represents powers of the wilderness as well as important myths. For example, initiates immersed in Poro knowledge would associate the chameleon not only with transformation, but also with the origin of the world because its slow and hesitant walk is said to be due to its legendary status as the first animal to walk on the surface of the newly formed earth.

The mask is worn over the head like a helmet, and the male wearer sees through its open jaws. The man’s body is covered by a loose-fitting body suit of coarsely woven fabric that is organically dyed a deep, earthy red and painted with geometric and figurative patterns. The performer plays a double-membrane barrel drum, and is accompanied by a fellow initiate playing a long, cylindrical Poro drum.
The forceful and aggressive qualities that are portrayed in the kponyungo mask are played out in its performance. Because of the mask’s awesome supernatural powers, the performance can be unpredictable and dangerous. The performer’s movements are jerky and aggressive. In the special context of masquerade, such erratic or even violent behavior is not challenged as it would be in normal situations, because the mask’s supernatural powers are seen as separate from the human realm and not governed by laws of human society. Among some Senufo subgroups, similar masks are called “firespitters” because the masqueraders appear at night, carrying forked sticks that hold glowing embers which they blow upon to produce a shower of sparks. Earlier accounts of such performances include descriptions of performers dancing barefoot upon piles of burning logs, further associating these masks with the powers of fire.

Poro is an important foundation of community life for the Senufo. The association plays an important part in governance and education, as well as guarding and passing on the know-how to harness powerful and potentially dangerous supernatural forces and maintain relations with ancestors. The kponyungo masquerade is one way of manifesting supernatural powers that may be used to protect a community, enforce societal rules and regulations, mediate disputes, judge cases of criminal offense, and punish transgressors of the law. The mask is controlled and danced by men and is performed upon occasions sponsored by the Poro association, including funerals for its members. During commemorative funerals, kponyungo masks from several Poro associations play their drums beside the body of the deceased in order to ensure a peaceful passage to the world of the ancestors and maintain contact with ancestral forces. The awesome powers of the kponyungo mask inspire fear and awe in the community, justifying its place among the most dangerous and powerful Senufo art forms.
Guinea Coast
Guinea Coast

Headdress (Nimba, D'mba, or Yamban)
Guinea; Baga
Mid-19th/early 20th century
Wood, metal tacks

Themes: Continuity, Masquerade, Beauty and Status, Women

Until the 1950s and the government of the leader, Sekou Touré, which actively suppressed the expression of ethnic identity in favor of a newly defined nationalist identity, Baga (BAH-gah) people of coastal Guinea gathered together for seasonal festivals in which the highlight was the performance of a massive headdress called nimba or d'mba. Such masquerades are vividly remembered by Baga elders, and have begun to reappear in performances due to recent efforts of cultural renewal. Through the depiction of Baga ideals of womanhood, d'mba masks embody important beliefs about fertility, cooperation, and continuity.

The female figure is the inspiration for the swelling contours and rounded shapes of this striking mask. The simplified, abstracted, and enlarged form represents a mature woman who has given birth to and raised many children. Flat, pendulous breasts signify motherhood and attest to the nurturing of many infants. The hairstyle, which is composed of parallel rows and a high central crest, is a traditional style of the neighboring Fulbe people and is worn only by women of status. The hairstyle also may suggest fertility, as the stylized rows are said to resemble planted fields and to invoke agricultural activities, especially women’s tasks such as gathering and harvesting the rice that nourishes and sustains the community. The face, neck, and chest of the figure are decorated with raised scarification patterns. Such patterns adorn a civilized adult who has endured the pain of the scarification process in order to enhance her prestige, beauty, and dynamic presence. Holes and traces of green corro-
sion mark areas where brass furniture tacks originally embellished the mask. These tacks once echoed the carved scarification patterns, and their shiny metallic surfaces were said to hint at the brilliance and clarity of superior intelligence.

The honor of wearing a d’mba mask in a masquerade performance is shared among the most robust young men of the community. In the past, d’mba masks appeared on a variety of significant occasions, including rice planting and harvest festivals as well as births, marriages, and funerals. Masquerade festivals began early in the morning and lasted until sunset, often continuing over several days with numerous dancers performing. Masks from different quarters of a village competed in performance, and often traveled to other communities to perform, consolidating ties between various families. Today, such masks are worn in performances that take place to honor important visitors and before regional youth soccer tournaments where entire communities gather to watch young men compete.

A nimba headdress, probably in a Buluñits or Bagá Foré village. This is possibly the earliest photograph of a nimba headdress. It was taken around 1904 by the French administrator M.A. Cevrier and was published in André Arcin’s milestone book Histoire de la Guinée française (Paris, 1911).

The weighty head- dress is worn over a pad on top of a dancer’s head, with the sides resting on his shoulders. The dancer grips the mask by the front posts and peers out through the small holes between the mask’s breasts. A wooden hoop is attached to the front posts of the mask, from which a voluminous skirt of raffia fibers hangs to the dancer’s ankles. A dark colored fabric shawl covers this attachment and is pinned together in front just below the chest. Occasionally, painted wooden jewelry is attached to the ears of the mask and straw or fabric is hung from the nose, further enhancing its beauty.

In the masquerade, a dancer’s performance consists of spinning, walking with gliding steps, and periodically throwing himself to the ground. At times the performer climbs onto rooftops and continues dancing. Dancers are accompanied by men playing large drums and women singing, waving fans and fly whisks, and throwing rice.

Baga masks and figures are usually mistakenly described in museum catalogues and gallery labels as ritual objects belonging to an initiation association called the Simo society. In actuality, “simo” is not an association, but simply the word used to describe something “sacred” in the language of the neighboring Susu ethnic group, a language that is also spoken by most Baga people. Similarly, the commonly used name of this mask, nimba, is the Susu equivalent of d’mba, the Baga term. D’mba masks are not part of an initiation association but belong to

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the entire community. They represent the spiritual patron of women, a universal mother whose veneration is of paramount importance in celebrating and promoting human and agricultural fertility and growth. The mask embodies ideas which affect the community in positive ways: aiding young women in childbearing and child raising, promoting cooperation and productivity in agricultural labor, and encouraging the benevolent attention of the ancestors.

The Baga people have inhabited the coast of Guinea since at least the fourteenth century. The tradition of d’mba masks, conceivably several centuries old, represents for the Baga the essence of feminine elegance, vigor, and productivity, ideals which continue to serve as markers of personal and collective fulfillment.
**Portrait mask of a Woman, (Ndoma)**

Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Baule
Mid-19th/mid-20th century
Wood, metal, pigment

**Themes:** Masquerade, Beauty and Status

The idealized human face is a subject of special attention for Baule (BOUGH-lay) sculptors. Specific individuals who are admired for their physical beauty, social status, or dancing ability are honored by the carving of portrait masks, called ndoma, a word meaning “double” or “namesake.” Such portrait masks are the last to appear in an entertainment masquerade called gbagba (BAH-BAH), during which masks of domestic and wild animals, and human beings satirize and celebrate aspects of daily life.

Ndoma masks depict recognizable members of the community. Subjects can be male or female, but masks most often depict women. Ideal beauty, as both a physical and moral quality, is evident in all aspects of these portraits. The delicate, gracefully shaped face of the Art Institute mask portrays a person of intelligence and purpose. Her small, almost-closed mouth and downcast eyes refer to respect and composure, qualities of reserve which are highly esteemed by the Baule. Facial scarification, depicted as finely carved raised beads and lines along the forehead and around the eyes and mouth, are important embellishments, identifying the woman portrayed as a civilized, social being. Further, the three small lines at each corner of the mouth are protective scars given to a child born to a mother who has lost several children in infancy.

The elegant hairstyle on this mask, composed of neat, conical bundles projecting upward, is an important sign of beauty and prestige. A woman’s ability to wear her hair in an intricate style suggests her social bonds, as one’s hair is styled by close friends or family members. It also suggests the luxury of leisure time, as such hairstyles take many hours to create. The sculpture depicts a person in the prime of life, without wrinkles or other signs of age. In contrast to the youthful appearance of the mask, however, its dancing during the masquerade is suggestive of the movements of a dignified elder, thus combining two Baule ideals: the physical beauty of youth and the wisdom and status of age.
Ndoma masks may be commissioned by an admirer or made upon the personal initiative of a carver. They are not portraits in the sense of being a realistic representation of a person’s physical features. Rather, they combine idealized facial features with recognizable details of a specific individual such as her coiffure or scarification marks. Characteristic gestures of the person may also be reproduced in performance, and she may lend articles of clothing, scarves, and jewelry to complete the portrait.

The gbagba masquerade, in which ndoma masks are included, is performed at times of celebration—when an important official is welcomed to the community, for example—or at funerals of women and men closely associated with the masquerade. Although the performers are young men, gbagba is called a women’s dance because its style is considered feminine and many of its participants are female. The masks represent not gods, spirits, or ancestors, but men, women, and animals who are very much a part of the real world. The masks perform scenes from daily life that represent a microcosm of the human world.

The ndoma masks appear toward the end of the performance. Their costume consists of a raffia underskirt, a waist-length cloth which surrounds the face of the mask, and rattle anklets made of palm leaves or old cans, as well as the scarves and jewelry borrowed from the person each mask portrays. The highly skilled dancer moves elegantly and slowly with refined and subtle steps. The woman who is portrayed by the mask is a vital part of its performance. She accompanies the dancer, offering him money, laying down cloths upon which he steps, and dancing along side him. Audience members participate as well, dancing, clapping, drumming, whistling, and often playing wooden clappers or iron gongs.

A woman may accompany the performance of her portrait mask as long as she is physically able, often over several decades. When the woman dies, a worthy female descendent—a daughter, granddaughter, or even great-granddaughter—may take her place, thus continuing a tradition of honor and distinction across generations.

**RELATED OBJECT**

*Figure of Wilderness Spirit or Other World Man*

*(Asie Ulu or Biola Bian)*  
Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Baule  
Early/mid-20th century  
Wood, brass

H: 22 3/4 in. (57.8 cm); W: 4 in. (10.2 cm); D: 4 1/2 in.  
(11.4 cm)


For the Baule, idealized beauty is an important element in figural sculpture as well as masks. Baule figures are called *waka san* or wooden people, and their beauty is meant to be pleasing to spirit forces. Like the portrait mask, this figure has a gracefully shaped head, elaborate coiffure, and scarification markings. The male figure’s strong neck depicts an individual at the height of youthful health, able to work hard and carry heavy loads on his head, much like the female figure that supports the Senufo drum (see page 29 and slide 4). Full, rounded thighs and exaggerated calf muscles add to the figure’s image of strength and stability. Traces of paint indicate that the figure was once painted red, the Baule way of depicting a light or golden skin tone.
Baule figure sculptures typically represent one of two types of spirit: wilderness spirits or other world men and women. When viewed outside their original context, it is often difficult to determine the difference between these two types. A wilderness spirit is believed to take possession of an individual, causing him or her to behave in antisocial ways, while an other world man or woman is said to become jealous of one's human lover or spouse, causing problems with relationships or in conceiving or raising children. When a person experiences such problems, she or he may consult a diviner to determine the cause, and it is often recommended that a sculptural figure be commissioned that will become the spirit's home in the human world. Both types of figures are clothed, kept in a special place, and given plenty of attention to keep the spirits they represent satisfied and gain their favor and assistance. The attachment between a spirit and a human being is lifelong, and can be beneficial to both once the relationship has been properly acknowledged.

Described as destructive and malicious, wilderness spirits represent the antithesis of Baule social ideals. These may attach themselves to individuals at times of physical or emotional vulnerability. Nature spirits are said to be horribly ugly, filthy creatures with wild hair and deformities such as hunched backs, backwards feet, or disproportionate body parts. Hence, the beautifully carved figures do not physically represent wilderness spirits but are meant to honor and charm them into positive contact with humans. Scarification patterns and elaborate coiffures, which signify a person who is socialized and civilized, are also meant to have a positive influence on the spirits. Sacrifices of eggs or millet beer are frequently applied to the surface of these figures, usually at the feet or mouth.

Other world men or women represent partners all people are believed to have had before their earthly existence. Figures representing such spirits are well tended. They may be offered money or jewelry, as well as food, though it is usually not applied directly onto the figure. In addition, one night each week the figure's owner sleeps alone and dreams of his or her other world man or woman. Contemporary versions of these figures make interesting comments on current gender role debates in Baule society. Women most often commission male figures wearing business suits and other contemporary marks of success, while men more often commission images of women dressed in traditionally wrapped cloth and carrying babies.
Men's Wrapper (Kente)
Ghana; Akan
1st half of 20th century

Themes: Beauty and Status, Authority, Arts of Daily Life

Textiles are especially powerful art forms among the Asante people of Ghana, who value cloth for its ability to reflect and project history and identity. Kente cloth is a significant mark of prestige and social status that is linked to the history of the Asante people. In the early eighteenth century, a confederation of states was united to create the Asante nation, which was ruled by a supreme king, called the Asantehene. As this union became stronger, the Asantehene required a means of expressing his power and leadership. He ordered weavers to make special cloths, now known as kente, and reserved certain patterns solely for royal use.

The term kente has its roots in the term kenten, which means basket in the neighboring Fante (FAHN-tay) language. This term may be a reference to the complexity of kente weaving or to the baskets in which such cloths were carried from Asante territory to outside markets, often by Fante middlemen. Kente is a particular variety of Asante prestige cloth that is handwoven on a horizontal loom in a long, continuous strip approximately 2-3 inches wide. After it is woven, the strip is cut into sections of equal length and sewn together edge to edge. Known for its bold, contrasting colors and dense patterns, kente has a striking visual impact and presents a dazzling image of richness, depth, and motion when worn. The overall patterns or specific motifs found on the cloths often have names and meanings, and may refer to ideas, events, or proverbs.

Asante weavers, who are traditionally male, often learn their craft by apprenticeship to an uncle or other relative. Young men may also come from throughout the region to study with master weavers at Bonwire, an important weaving town which was once the Asante royal weaving center. The most striking feature of kente cloth is the elaboration of patterns inlaid into the weft, including delicate geometric motifs such as diamonds, steps, checkerboards, and triangles. These inlays enrich the cloth both aesthetically and monetarily. Early eighteenth-century kente cloths were primarily made of silk, which was acquired by unraveling imported European and North African textiles, and characterized by a white, blue, and red color scheme. Rayon is currently the most common material for weaving kente, and color schemes are found in almost infinite varieties.
Kente cloths are an important part of Asante leadership arts and regalia, which include lavishly decorated sandals, caps, jewelry, swords, staffs, stools, and umbrellas. The richest, heaviest, and most elaborate cloths are associated with Asante royalty and aristocracy; as many as twenty-four strips may be joined to produce an amount of fabric suitable for a royal garment. Today kente has become more accessible to the public, but it continues to be an important symbol of wealth and social status. It is often worn on special religious or social occasions, including weddings, child-naming ceremonies, burials, and funerals. Since Ghanaian independence in 1959, the popularity of this cloth has grown beyond the borders of Ghana as well. Kente has taken on additional layers of meaning as an important Pan-African symbol, and a reservoir of cultural pride for people of African descent in the Americas.
Goldweights [Man with Powder Keg, Geometric Design, Monkey, Catfish]

Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Akan
18th/early 20th century
Brass

Themes: Beauty and Status, Authority, Arts of Daily Life

Relationships of culture, trade, art, and language link the diverse peoples of the Akan-speaking region of southern Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. The term Akan encompasses separate ethnic groups, including the Asante and the Fante, who speak closely related languages, share many cultural traits, and probably have a single origin. The Akan are renowned for the beauty and majesty of their art forms, which include the refined, miniature cast-brass sculptures (see above and slide 9) that are used for measuring gold dust. Goldweights can be appreciated for the technical skill with which they are made as well as for the wit with which they portray messages.

In the Akan region, gold is valued for its sparkle, color, and rarity and for the ease with which it can be transformed into splendid ornaments, lavish regalia, and coinage. Historically, gold has also been a driving force behind the contact between this part of West Africa and other parts of the globe. The manufacture of gold coins in North Africa and Europe was made possible by the network of commercial caravan routes that transported gold from its source in what is today central Ghana across the Sahara desert. Legends describe the fabled Mansa Musa, ruler of the Malian empire which controlled much of this trade, who was so generous with his gifts of gold during his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 that its market value was effectively ruined for several years. Gold dust served as currency in parts of Ghana at least as early as the fifteenth century. Sixteenth-century Portuguese traders, arriving at the shores of what was then called “the Gold Coast,” found Akan chiefs and traders who were well versed in the value of gold, and skilled in weighing it precisely. Using an Islamic method carried south from the ancient African cities of Jenne, Timbuktu, and Gao, the Akan weighed gold dust on simple balance scales against counterweights of precise measurements.

Until as late as the early twentieth century, almost every Akan man owned a set of these counterweights, which are commonly called goldweights. An important coming-of-age gift from a father to his son consisted of a small amount of gold dust, a set of small weights, balance scales, spoons, and scoops—the basic necessities that would allow him to begin trading. While the majority of weights were made of cast brass, occasionally seeds, beads, pottery, and even gold were used as counterweights. Goldweights were created by metalsmiths, specialized craftsmen who create weights, jewelry, and other objects in brass, silver, and copper, as well as in gold.

Slide 9

Goldweights [Man with Powder Keg, Geometric Design, Monkey, Catfish]

Maximum Height: 2 in. (5.1 cm)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Pinsof, 1973.530; Gift of Raymond E. Britt, Jr., 1978.89; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Wielgus, 1977.39; Gift of Alfred Wolkenburg, 1966.82

43 Arts of Africa
Most weights were created through the lost-wax casting technique, but occasionally an object such as a peanut shell was used as a mold. It took great skill to model the small, lively figures that became molds for the weights, prized both for their functionality and their aesthetic value.

By the early twentieth century, as gold dust was replaced with other forms of currency, goldweights were no longer needed for daily business transactions. However, today weights belonging to chiefs continue to be an important part of state treasuries, prized now for their sculptural qualities and historic associations. Goldweights are often considered royal property that is to be inherited by successive chiefs and possibly may even serve as tiny blueprints for the periodic replacement of the royal regalia they often represent. Thus, over the years these functional objects have taken on additional significance.

While over sixty weight values were known and used in gold trade, an individual trader was able to perform the basic transactions using only about a dozen weights. Weights take an infinite variety of forms, but there is no known correspondence between subject matter and weight values. It is believed that the earlier weights—those produced prior to the eighteenth century—were mostly abstract and geometric in shape, while later weights became increasingly elaborate and figural. Subjects represented by Akan goldweights include animals, insects, and scenes from daily life, many of which also illustrate proverbs and blend realism, fantasy, and humor.

The Art Institute collection contains a variety of weights, both geometric and figurative. The figurative weights include a scorpion, a catfish, a monkey, and a man carrying a keg of gunpowder on his head while smoking a pipe. The man with the powder keg refers to the proverb “Don’t some of us smoke even when carrying gunpowder?” This suggests that even in times of trouble or danger one needs to enjoy the small pleasures of life. However, this proverb can also be interpreted as a warning, “One should always take care.” As this example demonstrates, more than one proverb can often be quoted in relation to a particular weight. This is especially true of weights with animal imagery.

The representation of symbols, objects, or scenes that are directly related to proverbial messages is a unique feature of Akan artistic expression. The Akan value rich, visually oriented speech; it is said that “we speak to the wise man in proverbs, not in plain language.” Proverbs are an essential part of such speaking and serve to codify verbally social norms, behavior, and values. The representation of proverbs in royal regalia, goldweights, and textiles can send subtle messages from a leader to the people, through allusion and indirect reference. While the use of proverbs in trade is less apparent, it is quite probable that proverbs played a role in the verbal exchange and social occasion of market transactions.
Plaque of Warrior Chief
Nigeria, Court of Benin; Edo
16th/18th century
Bronze

Themes: Beauty and Status, Authority

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch visitors to Benin City, the cosmopolitan capital of the kingdom of Benin, described wide, straight avenues, clean and orderly houses, and impressive architectural structures. Descriptions of the royal palace complex noted impressive audience halls, large courtyards, and long rectangular galleries supported by wooden pillars that were covered from top to bottom with square brass plaques. The Art Institute plaque fragment, originally square in format, depicts a warrior chief wearing full ceremonial regalia. He brandishes a ceremonial sword, a gesture of his loyalty to the oba, or king.

In Benin, the oba is believed to be a divine ruler, one descended from the gods. As such, he provides an all-important link between the human and spiritual realms and has the power to influence natural and supernatural forces that affect the well-being of the Edo (EH-doh) people, the largest ethnic group in the Benin kingdom. This warrior’s ritual gesture, as well as his military power and status within the court, refer to omnipresent themes in Benin art: the power and wealth of the oba, and the vitality and prosperity of his people. The warrior chief wears a necklace embellished with leopard teeth, which connote strength and ferocious power. His high rank is indicated by a coral-studded cap and high coral-beaded collar. All coral, which is highly valued in the Benin kingdom, is owned by the oba, who distributes it to chiefs, title holders, and other important individuals. The warrior’s costume includes other prestigious objects as well: a lavishly woven wrapped skirt, cast brass armlets, and a leopard-face hip ornament.

The incised foliate patterns in the background of the plaque form a river-leaf design that is associated with Olokun (oh-loh-KOON), god of the sea and provider of earthly wealth in Benin cosmology. The raised horseshoe shape in the upper left corner of the plaque represents a copper or brass manilla. Manillas were used by Europeans as a form of currency and, when melted, provided an important source of metal for Benin casting.

Most art from the kingdom of Benin is produced for the court; the best artists, richest materials, and most advanced working methods are to this day under royal jurisdiction. Since the sixteenth century, highly trained
related object

Royal Altar Tusk
Nigeria, Court of Benin; Edo
1830/88
Ivory

D: 5 in. (12.7 cm); L: 77 in. (195.6 cm)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Hokin, 1976.523

For the Edo people, it is the head which is said to lead one through life and symbolizes the ability to survive and prosper. Vertical projections from the top of the head—in the form of hats, crowns, or hairstyles—symbolize the link between human and spiritual realms. Since the eighteenth century, carved elephant tusks mounted atop brass heads have been displayed on royal altars, embodying the oba’s relationship to his ancestors. Every new oba commissions a set of brass heads and ivory tusks (see illustration at left) to commemorate his father. Each set is unique, with
motifs often reflecting political, economic, and spiritual concerns of the time.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the oba had a virtual monopoly on ivory, since he was entitled to one tusk from every elephant slain in the kingdom. In addition to being a valuable trade commodity, ivory was also an ideal medium for expressing the authority, spiritual power, and wealth of Benin’s king. Ivory recalls the wisdom, strength, and longevity of the elephant, an important symbol of royal authority. Spiritual powers are suggested by the whiteness of ivory, which is reminiscent of chalk, a symbol of ritual purity linked to Olokun, the Edo god of the sea. And, because of its prominent place in lucrative trade with European merchants, ivory symbolizes the oba’s personal wealth and his ability to bring prosperity to the kingdom.

Like most altar tusks, the Art Institute’s is entirely covered in relief carvings depicting past obas, palace priests, warriors and officials, foreigners, and emblems of royalty and power. The figure of a mudfish appears several times on the tusk, recognizable in the bottom row of images as a fish with distinctive whiskers. This unique catfish-like creature, found in the rivers of southern Nigeria, is a potent multilayered symbol often linked to the mystical powers of the oba. One type of mudfish can give a powerful electrical shock that is associated with the oba’s terrifying power over his enemies. Other types of mudfish are known for their ability to survive on land as well as in the water. This ability to exist in two worlds is also appropriate to the oba, who as a divine king is simultaneously part of the human and spiritual realms. The mudfish is also a symbol for Olokun, and the oba is seen as the earthly counterpart to this powerful sea god.

The tusk contains several images of a king with upward curling mudfish taking the place of his human legs, and mudfish whiskers replacing his crown. Like the mudfish, the mudfish-legged figure refers to the oba’s divine nature and his close association with Olokun. In addition, this image is a specific reference to Oba Ohen, who ruled during the fifteenth century and is said by some Edo to have been the human incarnation of the sea god himself. As a sign of his divine nature, Oba Ohen’s legs were paralyzed and deformed. He attempted to hide his crippled legs from his subjects, and was eventually killed for this deception. His image delivers a message about the powers and responsibilities of a leader, a warning to rulers not to abuse their authority, and a perpetual reminder of the people’s right to resist a tyrannical oba.

Another motif relating to kingship is found directly above the image of Oba Ohen. This image shows an oba in ceremonial dress, with his hands and arms supported by attendants. Played out by the oba in actual ceremonies, this gesture suggests that the oba cannot rule without the support of his people.
Veranda Post of Enthroned King (Opo Ogoga)
Carved by Olowe of Ise (died 1938)
Nigeria, Ekiti, Ikere; Yoruba
From the palace of the Ogoga (King) of Ikere
1910/1914
Wood, pigment

Themes: Beauty and Status, Authority, Women

This striking sculpture originally greeted visitors entering the palace courtyard of the ogoga, the king of Ikere, a small town in southwestern Nigeria. Carved by Olowe of Ise (OH-loh-way of EE-say), one of the greatest Yoruba carvers of the twentieth century, the post was one of four figural posts made for the palace *veranda*. The others depict a queen presenting twin daughters, a man on horseback, and a two-tiered post of a kneeling woman supporting a horse and rider.  

A masterpiece of sculpture, the Art Institute's enthroned king and his senior wife represent important ideals of leadership and family in Yoruba society.

The innovative composition of the veranda post features the large female figure—the senior wife—standing behind and looming over the seated king, while smaller figures stand or kneel at his feet. The figure of the senior wife is notable for its size and strength, suggesting the importance of women in Yoruba society. Standing tall behind the diminutive king, her solid body, strong shoulders, columnar neck, and elaborate hairstyle form the architectural support for the veranda post, just as women support their community. The senior wife's gaze is directed downward toward the king while her arms rest protectively on his throne. This gesture echoes the role of the senior wife on ceremonial occasions, when she stands behind the king and places the crown upon his head, suggesting that men cannot rule without the support of women.

Olowe has used ornamentation that complements the sculptural form of the post to provide important information about the senior wife. Her towering, elaborate hairstyle and the scarification patterns on her face and back signify a beautiful woman of high social status. Her royal position is proclaimed by the bracelets, anklets, beaded necklace, and multiple strands of waist beads she wears. The gap between her front teeth is an additional Yoruban mark of beauty, and her strong body and prominent breasts identify her as a woman in her prime childbearing years. Color also provides meaning. The blue of this figure is symbolic of *etutu*, a Yoruba concept signifying mystic coolness and the inner power and reserve associated with women.

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14. The sculpture of the queen presenting her daughters is now in the collection of the Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York; the equestrian figure is at the New Orleans Museum of Art, and the two-tiered post is in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford University, England.
While the king is smaller, a fact emphasized by his dangling feet, the male figure maintains primacy because it is central to the composition. He is seated upon a throne in a position of composure and authority. Clothed in a wrapper, the king wears beaded jewelry similar to that of his wife. The complementary relationship of the two figures is reinforced through the repetition of line and pattern in their jewelry and body positions. Color also indicates their unity and balance. The blue of the female figure is complemented by the reddish color of the king, now mostly faded. Through this color combination, the inner strength and calm of the queen's etutu are balanced by overt power and life force, qualities known as ase, symbolized by the king's red color.

The true focus of the composition, however, is not the king, but the exaggeratedly large beaded conical crown upon his head. Among the Yoruba, like their neighbors in the Kingdom of Benin, projections from the top of the head are associated with divine presence. A Yoruba king's crown, such as the one in the Art Institute's collection (see following related object), is the key to royal power and authority and much of his power is believed to reside within it. The crown is also a vital link to past rulers, who now wield power in the spiritual realm. The faces depicted on Yoruba crowns may represent these ancestors and the power they continue to hold among the living.

The figure of a bird, like that perched atop the peak of the king's crown, is another potent symbol in Yoruba art with many levels of meaning. The bird's long, probing beak, which is pointed toward the king, symbolizes his powers of supernatural surveillance which enable him to search out evil among his people. Birds are also a symbol of older women, female ancestors, and female deities, who are collectively known to the Yoruba as "our mothers." Such women are perceived as having spiritual and supernatural power, and the king could not rule without their support.

Olowe of Ise is known for his expressive and dynamic compositions that incorporate multiple figures interacting with one another. He also used hierarchical proportion to convey ideas. In keeping with this, the least important members of the royal group on the veranda post are the tiny attendant figures at the king's feet. The figure to the king's right plays a flute to announce the king's presence, while a woman kneels in front, perhaps making a request to the king. To the king's left a palace attendant, now missing, once carried a royal fan.

Until his death in 1938, Olowe served as court artist to the king of Ise, but carved special commissions for other rulers and wealthy families throughout Yorubaland. His bold colors, richly textured surfaces, and dynamic portrayals created a great demand for his work. The veranda post in the Art Institute collection showcases these qualities at their finest and successfully embodies important concepts of leadership and the complementary roles of women and men in Yoruba society.

A beaded conical crown is the most important symbol of royal power and authority for a Yoruba king and represents his role as intermediary between the people and the royal forefathers. According to oral history, it was Odudua, maker of land and founder of the Yoruba, who initiated the wearing of a veiled beaded crown as the essential sign of kingship. He placed a beaded crown on the head of each of his sixteen sons to establish the original Yoruba kingdoms. Today Yoruba kings, or obas, are both rulers and divine beings, related by birth to these past obas who are now powerful ancestors.

As is true of much symbolism, the crown's symbols can be interpreted in many ways. The faces on the front and back, like those on the crown worn by the king on the veranda post by Olowe of Ise (see page 48 and slide 11), may represent the all-seeing nature of the ancestors or of the oba. The crown's beaded veil serves to protect the people from the oba's potent and dangerous gaze and hides the oba's unique facial features, thereby projecting the generic image of a leader like the ancestors whose beaded faces appear above. The sixteen birds on the crown may refer to the sixteen sons of Odudua, to the Yoruba people, or to the power of older women, female ancestors, and female deities.

Historically, the highly skilled artists who create royal crowns reside in several bead-working centers in Yorubaland. The crowns are built upon a coneshaped wicker or cardboard frame, which is covered with wet, starched muslin or another stiffened cloth. Some artists may mark designs in chalk or pencil on the muslin surface before beading; others work from memory or rely on inspiration. Beads are strung together in long strands, then tacked to the surface of the crown until it is completely covered. Small bird forms are then sewn onto the crown, and covered with beads.

Once complete, the crown is consecrated through a series of rituals in which powerful herbal ingredients are hidden in its top, protecting the oba and enhancing his supernatural powers. Because of these powerful medicinal ingredients, the gaze of the king must never fall on the inside of his crown. Oral history explains that a despotic king was once forced by the elders to look into his crown, a signal that he must "go and rest"—either commit suicide or be executed. Thus, the crown also symbolically offers community elders an important check on royal power.
**Mask for Gelede**
Master Fagbite or Falola Edun  
Nigeria, Ketu; Yoruba  
Early/mid-20th century  
Wood, pigment

**Themes: Continuity, Masquerade, Women**

Known as “our mothers,” elder women are a vital force in Yoruba life. Because these women have given birth, they are believed to possess powerful spiritual energy which can affect human and agricultural fertility and communal well-being. Such women are addressed through many forms of Yoruba art. They are represented by the birds on Yoruba beaded crowns and also are honored through the Gelede (GEHL-eh-day) masquerade, which pleases and placates “our mothers,” while entertaining and enlightening “the children of our mothers”— the community.

A Gelede mask usually consists of a carved wooden head and a superstructure that can take an infinite variety of forms. The head of the Art Institute mask is characteristic of Yoruba style with its high forehead, pointed chin, bulging, almond-shaped eyes, and fleshy parallel lips. Above, two young hunters hold the legs of a creature that is attempting to escape down the forehead of the mask. The masterful composition simultaneously captures both precarious balance and dynamic action. The captured creature is a pangolin, a spiny anteater that rolls itself into a hard, scaly ball when threatened. The two hunters have successfully trapped the pangolin by holding its hind legs, thus defeating its self-defense mechanism. On one level, this scene honors the social contributions of hunters. On another level, the mask conveys ideas about Ogun, the divine patron of hunters. Ogun is the god of iron, from which hunting weapons are made, and the subject of many important lessons about the value of cooperation, aggression, and knowledge.

The superstructures of Gelede masks address a wide range of topics and concerns. Masks portray humans, animals, and objects which are symbolic commentaries upon all aspects of life, including gender roles, fashion, technology, and proverbial knowledge. While the Art Institute mask honors hunters, another mask may ridicule the behavior of a thief by illustrating a person stealing, and yet another may suggest the value of...
technology by featuring a carved and brightly painted biplane. Members of the Gelede association are responsible for commissioning masks and planning masquerade performances. They commission masks both from local artists and from well-known carvers in other towns. Masks are carved from lightweight, close-grained, soft wood that is freshly cut. The Art Institute mask was created either by the master carver Fagbite Asamu of Idahin, or by his equally noted son and student, Falola Edun. These artists are famous for the complex designs, fluid forms, and textured surfaces that can be seen in this mask.

Because they are held in honor of women, Gelede masquerades take place in the market, a space controlled by influential women merchants. The performances may be held at the start of a new agricultural cycle, during important funerals, and at times of difficulty such as a drought or an epidemic of illness. The performances last several hours, starting in the afternoon and continuing into the evening. Boys who are just learning to perform appear first, wearing makeshift masks and incomplete costumes. Though their dance steps may be hesitant, they are cheered on enthusiastically by the crowd.

They are followed by increasingly sophisticated older male dancers, who appear in pairs with their masks worn on top of their heads like caps. The masqueraders wear sheer cloths covering their faces, wrapped skirts, and ankle rattles. Cloths borrowed from women are an essential part of the costumes. Colorful women’s head scarves are an important addition, flaring out dramatically from the dancers’ waists during the twisting dances. Costumes may include carved wooden breasts and bellies to emphasize female figures, or multiple layers of fabric to exaggerate a masculine chest and torso. Dancers spin, stamp, and twist in precise, rhythmic movements, accompanied by drummers and singers. As the enthusiasm mounts, Gelede association members rush into the dance arena to cheer the dancers to even more spectacular performances. At dusk, the last mask appears, often representing a deified female ancestor and signaling the conclusion of a successful festival.

The Gelede masquerade offers an important occasion for communal entertainment and instruction. Gelede associations are continually creating new masks and dances to reflect particular situations and ideas. Male dancers dramatize their perceptions of themselves and of the special powers and attributes of women. Gelede maintains social harmony by encouraging women to use their powers for communal benefit, and reinforces cultural values. The values of cooperation and wisdom displayed by the pair of hunters on the Art Institute mask exemplify these ideals.
The Yoruba have the highest recorded rate of twin births in the world. For Yoruba families, the birth of twins is a fortuitous event that is greeted with much rejoicing. Twins are believed to possess special powers and the ability to bring good fortune to those who honor them properly. However, due to the dangers of multiple births, and since twins are smaller and weaker than single babies, one or both twins frequently die during infancy. Twin figures like those in the Art Institute collection, called ibeji (EE-bay-jee) are carved as memorials to deceased twins.

This pair of female twins is notable for the way the artist has combined the solid curving forms of the bodies with open spaces between the arms and legs, creating a sense of balance. The jutting forms of the hairstyles are repeated in the rounded eyes and breasts of the figures. The figures are small, like children, but have fully developed adult bodies. This visual combination of infancy and adulthood suggests something extraordinary, and hints at the special powers of twins. The elaborate hairstyles and beaded jewelry also mark the honored status of twins. In addition, the color of the beads may express devotion to a particular Yoruba deity.

When one twin dies, a single sculpture is usually commissioned and cared for by the surviving twin. If both twins die, two images are created, and cared for by the twins' mother. Replicating the attention shown to living children, the sculptures are ritually washed, dressed, and offered favorite foods. Over time, these actions cause the features of the sculptures to become worn smooth, as seen in the Art Institute pair. Ibeji also function as dance sculpture. In some areas, mothers dance in public at least once a year, cradling the twin figures in their arms or carrying them in wrappers around their waists. The mothers cradle the figures as if they were children, while showing respect for their power through this public display. Ibeji honor and commemorate deceased twins, appeal to their special powers to bring good fortune, and reflect the importance of family among the Yoruba people.
Equatorial Forest
Equatorial Forest

Mask with Lizard Headdress
Cameroon; Bamum or Kom
Mid-19th/early 20th century
Wood

Themes: Initiation Associations, Masquerade, Authority

The many small kingdoms of the Grassfields region (formed of steep hills and fertile valleys) of Cameroon are characterized by rigidly stratified social hierarchies. Local artists create a wide range of art forms related to leadership and prestige. This mask may have appeared in a variety of contexts sanctioned by the men’s regulatory association, where it would have been prized for its expressive force, its dramatic performance, and its role in sustaining the social order.

The Art Institute mask is striking for its exaggerated physical qualities. The wide bulging eyes, full round cheeks, flattened nose, broad nostrils, and protruding mouth are common features of Grassfield’s figural sculpture, and create an impression of incredible energy and vitality. The pointed teeth in the mask’s open mouth emphasize this powerful force. Many Grassfields masks are portrayed wearing a knotted cap that is a prerogative of men of high rank. However, the innovative sculptor of the Art Institute mask has used unique imagery to suggest a notable man. Here, we find a striated hair-style, the neat rows of which end in stylized lizards. In Grassfields art, the lizard is one of several auspicious creatures, including leopards, elephants, buffalo, spiders, frogs, and birds, which are associated with royalty and prestige.

SLIDE 13
Mask with Lizard Headdress
H: 13 1/8 in. (33.3 cm); W: 10 1/2 in. (26.7 cm); D: 8 7/8 in. (22.6 cm)
Primitive Art Purchase Fund, 1966.411
The differentiation of various mask types becomes difficult once they have been removed from their original context, and any identification of a mask can only be offered as a suggestion. The Art Institute mask, with its striated hairstyle, is similar to masks that portray a character who acts as a representative to royalty or to a regulatory association. Such a mask would be worn with a feathered cloak and the performer would carry several staffs.

The use of masks in the Grasslands is controlled by the men's regulatory association. Such associations are closely affiliated with the king, or fon, and are responsible for enforcing laws of the kingdom and the fon's special orders. Masks appear at commemorative celebrations honoring the dead, at the annual palace-sponsored festival, and during public appearances of the fon, including the public installation ceremony when a new fon takes power. The regulatory association also may give permission for using masks to other organizations such as the princes' and warriors' associations and dance groups that are sponsored by important families. The majority of masks in museum collections belong to this final category, and the Art Institute mask may have been used in such a context as well. Masks like this one, which depict prestigious individuals, are often chosen by these groups to proclaim and enhance their social status.

During public performances, the mask is worn like a cap on top of the performer's head, and is carefully balanced by one hand. Masks perform in groups ranging in number from a dozen to over twenty, and appear in a specific order. During a celebration honoring the dead, the number of masks marks the status of the deceased. Costumes may be created from raffia, cloth, or feathers, depending upon the occasion, and a fly whisk is often part of the ensemble. Drums, rattles, xylophones, and songs may accompany the dancer. Virtuoso dancing is encouraged, and after the performance the masquerader will solicit and receive a "dash," or tip, of money or kola nuts from members of the audience.

Grassfields art is created by specialized artists whose services and skills are frequently traded between various kingdoms. The fons of many kingdoms are carvers as well as rulers, a distinction that enhances their prestige and popularity. Often, the fon will supervise a sculptor's work and, until the twentieth century, most kingdoms had an artist in the palace who created commissions for royal and regulatory association purposes. The royal sculptor also trained apprentices who were recruited locally or from another kingdom on the basis of talent or reputation. Recently, carvers have become more independent, working from their home compounds.

The prestige arts of the Grassfields kingdoms include architectural sculpture, wooden stools, palm-wine containers, pipes, and fly whisks. Masks also have been an important part of this artistic repertoire. Grassfields masks display a parade of symbols whose meanings are understood by the community, and emphasize a world ordered by social, political, and economic status.
Reliquary Figure
Gabon; Fang
Mid-19th/early 20th century
Wood, oil residue

Themes: Continuity, Initiation Associations, Departure

In Central Africa, as in many parts of Asia and Europe, reliquaries were used to hold important remembrances of the deceased. Among the Fang, who inhabit the rain forests of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and southern Cameroon, wooden figures and heads were placed on top of bark boxes that held skulls or bones of deceased family members. Until the early part of the twentieth century, these sculptures served as guardians, literally and metaphorically protecting the sacred contents of the boxes from the forbidden gaze of women and children.

The form of the Art Institute reliquary figure reflects the Fang belief in the importance of harmony between opposites. Fang people state that while reliquary sculptures represent age, ancestors, and ancestral powers over daily life, they also include infantile qualities. For instance, the high domed forehead and tapering chin of the figure may suggest a skull, linked to death, while the large size of the head also suggests an infant. These seemingly contradictory features suggest the continuity of the life cycle, in which the living and the dead are linked through newborns, thought to be especially close to the ancestors.

The Art Institute figure also combines a symmetrical pose and composed expression with the tension of bulging, flexed muscles, balancing the stability of age with the physical strength and fertility of youth. The juxtaposition of simple facial features and complex crested coiffure, and the interplay of concave and convex surfaces reinforces the harmony and balance of the figure. While its formal symmetry may appear static to a Western viewer, for the Fang this exacting balance is evocative of life and vitality.

Reliquaries were cared for by adult male members of a Fang initiation association called bieri (BEER-ee), which is devoted to honoring the ancestors. Reliquaries were kept in the private parts of homes, often in the dark corners of men’s sleeping quarters. Because these containers were imbued with potent spiritual powers, the sculptures served to warn those who could be harmed by such forces, especially women and
children, not to come near the reliquaries. The eyes of a figure, often accented by the head of a nail, served as a special sign of its vigilance as a guardian. The shiny surfaces of the nails suggested the supernatural ability to see intruders in the dark. While a reliquary figure is not a portrait, its human form represents the generalized image of the ancestors, both male and female, who watch over the community.

Fang reliquaries served as focal points for honoring ancestral spirits, seeking their aid and blessing, and protecting the remains of the deceased. Reliquary figures were regularly cleansed and rubbed with palm oil to renew their powers of intercession with the ancestors, resulting in the glistening black surface of the Art Institute figure. Early twentieth-century accounts also describe occasions where reliquary figures were carried in procession, possibly in connection with initiation into the bieri association.

The Art Institute collection also contains a reliquary figure created by the neighboring Kota people of Gabon and Congo. Among the Kota, abstract reliquary figures made of wood covered with brass and copper sheets were placed on top of baskets or cloth bundles containing relics. While Fang reliquaries are the concern of an extended family, Kota reliquaries belong to an entire community. They are not kept individually in houses, but are grouped together in one small shelter. Like the shining eyes of some Fang sculptures, the metal surface of the Kota reliquary figure warns those who should not see the contents of the reliquary and wards off evil forces.

For several hundred years prior to the twentieth century, Fang groups migrated frequently throughout the equatorial forest. During these times of migration, reliquary heads and figures provided a transportable means of honoring the ancestors. After about 1930, changes in Fang lifestyle and religion, largely due to colonialism, led to the gradual abandonment of reliquary containers. Like many reliquary figures in museum collections, it is interesting to note that the Art Institute figure no longer includes a bark box. Once the reliquary boxes were abandoned, ancestral fragments were sometimes incorporated into the sculptures themselves. Or, more likely, the box and its guardian were separated at some point, either by the Fang owner who kept the sacred relics, or by a Western collector who preferred the carved sculpture.
Central Africa

Mask (Mukenga)
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Western Kasai; Kuba
Late 19th/mid-20th century
Wood, glass beads, cowrie shells, feathers, raffia, fur; fabric, string, bells

Themes: Masquerade, Beauty and Status, Authority, Departure

Kuba is the name given to a kingdom that unites a number of ethnic groups in the Western Kasai region of south-central Congo, formerly known as Zaire. These groups share many characteristics, including a highly stratified society and art forms with a rich variety of surface decoration. Included among these groups are the Bushoong, whose paramount chief, the nyim (NIM), is the ruler of all Kuba people. The Mukenga (moo-KEN-gah) mask is a regional variant of the primary Bushoong royal mask called Moshambwooy mushal. Mukenga masks play important roles in funerals of elite title holders in the northern half of the Kuba kingdom. Highly centralized government, divine kingship, and title holding are among the hallmarks of Kuba society. The arts play a vital role within this system, serving as visible symbols of the status, wisdom, and authority of Kuba leaders.

Created over a wooden frame, the surface of the Mukenga mask is covered with raffia cloth, upon which beads, shells, raffia fibers, and animal fur are attached. Since the mask honors significant individuals, its materials are related to status and leadership. The careful arrangement of cowrie shells, which are imported from the Indian Ocean and other tropical seas
and were once prized as currency, remains an important sign of wealth and status in Kuba art. Beads, which also were highly valuable imported commodities at one time, are sewn on the back, sides, and trunk of the mask in intricate patterns, often symbolizing concepts relating to leadership. The spotted fur of the fearsome leopard covers the mask face. Known as the king of the forest, the leopard is a symbol of leadership and fierce power. The ruff of the large and dangerous colobus monkey, covering the neck of the mask, carries similar associations with forest powers. Its resemblance to a white beard also may recall the wisdom of elders.

The elephant, supreme symbol of leadership, is represented by the cowrie-shell and bead-covered trunk projecting upward and over the front of the mask, and by the two tusks at the trunk's base. The elephant is also an important symbol of wealth. During the nineteenth century, the Kuba controlled ivory trade in the nearby forests, which brought great prosperity and power to the nyim and his kingdom. A tuft of bright red parrot feathers, worn by senior title holders, accents the tip of the projecting trunk. The rich combination of color, shape, and texture creates a vivid composite creature.

Mukenga is primarily a funerary mask that is performed to honor deceased men of high status. The mask tours a community on the third day after a death, and, following the burial, it is performed by a man who wears an elaborate full-body costume that includes leggings, gloves, footwear, a vest, and cloth strips heavily embellished with cowrie shells and beads. The dancer also wears beaded armlets, wristlets, anklets, and belts and is accompanied by the music of whistles, bullroarers, and drums.

During these masquerade dances, Mukenga personifies an important title holder honoring the deceased. The Kuba believe that the spirit of a deceased person may influence the world of the living, and the appearance of masks such as Mukenga helps to ensure positive relations with these spirits. Similar masks also may be displayed on the corpses of title holders before burial. The funerary attire of title holders is identical to the costume of the Mukenga, thus the mask and costume represent the deceased as well as title holders and their wealth. Masks and costumes in the Kuba style have been adopted in areas north of the kingdom, attesting to both the power and influence of the kingdom, and the renowned skill of Kuba artists.

By appearing in mask performances at funerals of elite title holders, Mukenga masks honor a lifetime of achievement, promote the continuity of leadership, and ensure beneficial relations with ancestral forces.
**RELATED OBJECT**

**Mask (Ngady Amwaash)**
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Kasai; Kuba
Late 19th/early-20th century
Wood, pigment, glass beads, cowrie shells, fabric, string; fur, bells
H: 12 1/2 in. (31.7 cm); W: 8 1/8 in. (20.6 cm); D: 10 in. (25.4 cm)

Restricted gift of the American Hospital Supply Corp., The Evanston Associates of the Woman’s Board in honor of Wilbur Tuggle, Dr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Hammer, William E. Hartmann, Charles A. Meyer, D. Daniel Michel, Mrs. Claire B. Ziesler, and the Africa, Oceania, and the Americas Purchase Fund, 1982.1505

Kuba masks are numerous and varied. Like Mukenga (see page 61 and slide 15), other masks appear primarily in the context of funerals, or very infrequently play roles in initiation rituals. However, at the royal capital of Nsheng (also called Mushenge), Kuba mask performances may also honor the king or important visiting dignitaries. Masks and performances which originate throughout the Kuba kingdom are redefined and adapted at the capital, becoming more lavish and elaborate for appearance in royal masquerade processions. While Mukenga is specific to the northern Kuba region, masks similar to the Art Institute’s Bwoom (see right) and Ngady Amwaash (see above) masks are found throughout the kingdom as well as at the royal capital. These masks reflect the powers of nature spirits, and emphasize distinctions of gender and status in Kuba society.

Legend states that Queen Ngokady, who lived during the first Kuba dynasty, requested the creation of the Ngady Amwaash mask to emphasize the cultural role of women in Kuba society. This composite mask is covered with patterns borrowed from Kuba textiles—from its cowrie-shell coiffure to the delicate beaded, painted, and woven patterns covering the face and neck. Facing triangles of black and white create a pattern called “the king’s house,” while parallel lines running from the eyes to the jawline are called “tears.” Turquoise beads form the line of the eyebrows, and a blue-and-white beaded band decorates the mask face from nose to chin.

Worn by male performers, the costume for Ngady Amwaash consists of a woman’s long embroidered wrapper, a short overskirt, and a vest that may be decorated with painted patterns or cowrie shells. A pair of small wooden breasts may be attached to the vest. Because of the tightly wrapped skirt, the dancer’s movements are controlled, creating a sinuous silhouette. In performance, Ngady Amwaash represents a female spirit who personifies the elegance, beauty, and composure of Kuba women.

The female mask alternates in performance with an aggressive male character, such as Bwoom. The Bwoom mask is characterized by its strongly sculptural form that includes a bulging forehead, deep-set eyes, and a jutting chin. Surface decoration includes three beaded lines forming a trident on the forehead, as well as beaded bands covering the eyes and nose. The jaw is outlined by a row of tiny rattle seeds made from dried pods, and a cloth beard hangs from the chin. Thin pieces of hammered metal cover the cheeks and mouth.

Bwoom’s costume consists of a short skirt made of freshly cut leaves, a vine belt, and a vest made of dyed black raffia. Feathers are attached to the top of the mask, and raffia bands are tied to the ankles, wrists, and arms. The masquerader’s performance is punctuated by the jabbing of a long knife or sword. Bwoom is an image of powerful force that is controlled but still dangerous, echoing the menacing power of warriors and chiefs. When Bwoom performs at the royal capital, the mask is said to represent Kuba commoners, those not of the royal family. At the same time, like all Kuba masks, Bwoom represents a nature spirit.
Mask (Mwana Pwo)
Angola or Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) Northern Angola; Chokwe
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, fiber, beads, pigment

Themes: Initiation Associations, Masquerade, Beauty and Status, Women

Chokwe elders share vital information with adolescent boys about religion, social organization, and political structure during the youths’ initiation into adulthood. At this time, initiates also receive training in the arts, including dance, music, and carving. The mask called Mwana Pwo (MWAH-nah PWOH) is one of a variety of mask types about which initiates learn. Mwana Pwo, meaning “beautiful young woman,” represents an archetypal figure and is used to invoke Chokwe history and cultural values.

While all Chokwe boys learn the basics of woodcarving during initiation, masks such as Mwana Pwo are created by professional woodcarvers. Carvers make objects for daily use in the village or town where they live, but must sculpt commissions for ritual purposes, such as masks, in a secret place in the forest. Chokwe artists are said to model such masks after a particular woman admired for her beauty. While most Mwana Pwo masks have the same basic shape, the relatively naturalistic style and facial expression of the Art Institute mask suggest a portrait.

A carver may take inspiration from a particular feature of his model, or from other distinctive characteristics such as the elaborate beaded hairstyle depicted on this mask. This traditional Chokwe style is so time-consuming to create that women sometimes reproduce it on wigs that can be worn repeatedly at dances and special occasions. The patterned lines across the forehead near the hair of the mask represent a headband worn by Chokwe women, also usually made of beads. The scarification marks on the mask may be inspired by a particular individual as well. These include parallel vertical lines running down the nose and chin and parallel curved crescents on the cheeks. A cross form with triangular ends on the forehead may also represent scarification or may represent a pendant attached to the headband. This type of cross is said to stem from the Christian cross, introduced by the Portuguese as early as the fifteenth century.
Although it depicts a woman, the mask is worn by a male dancer. His costume consists of a net garment of looped fibers that covers the body from neck to toes and an attachment with carved wooden breasts at the torso. A cotton skirt, a heavy beaded belt, and a rattle and fly whisk held in the hands may complete the ensemble. Dances take place during initiation in the central square of the village or town, and are accompanied by a variety of drums and a large slit-gong. The dancer moves elegantly and gracefully, demonstrating ideal qualities such as good manners and courtesy. Dancers receive token gifts from the audience after the performance.

According to the Chokwe, Mwana Pwo is a generalized depiction of a female ancestor who died at an early age. The closed eyes of the mask may suggest death, as it is said that the mask is a reminder of the pain of death. The mask also symbolizes the prominence of women among the Chokwe, a matrilineal society, and its performance is believed to bring fertility and prosperity to the community. The Mwana Pwo mask has a male counterpart, Cihongo (chee-HON-goh) who represents power and wealth. In the past, the two masks may have danced together, mimicking relationships between men and women. The performance of Mwana Pwo functions on several levels: gaining the favor of ancestors by paying homage to the deceased, demonstrating proper social behavior, honoring women, and entertaining initiates and the community.

The history of the Chokwe people is closely tied to that of other ethnic groups in southern Congo (formerly Zaire) and eastern Angola. Oral history links Chokwe origins to a prince named Tshibinda Ilunga, "Ilunga the great hunter," who traveled from the Luba kingdom to visit the neighboring Lunda people. The prince introduced a centralized political system, hunting with bows and arrows, and eventually married a female Lunda chief named Lueji. When Lueji shared her power with the prince, her brothers left the kingdom, refusing to be ruled by a foreigner. Lueji's brothers founded their own kingdoms, the Lwena and the Chokwe. The Chokwe are distinguished among their neighbors for the power and prestige of their art forms. The Mwana Pwo mask has been adopted by neighbors such as the Lwena, who retain its meaning and credit its Chokwe origins.
**Maternity Figure**
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire); Luluwa
Mid- to late 19th century
Wood, pigment
Themes: Continuity, Beauty and Status, Women

The name Luluwa, or Bena Luluwa meaning “people of” Luluwa, was originally given by Europeans to a number of chiefdoms near the Luluwa River in Congo (formerly Zaire). These chiefdoms are relatively independent from each other, but developed a carving style easily distinguishable from their Kuba, Songye, and Chokwe neighbors.

Beauty is a moral and physical quality for the Luluwa people, and healthy, shiny skin is seen as an important mark of such inner and outer beauty. It is this type of beauty that is depicted in the supple carved surfaces of Luluwa figural sculpture, such as the mother and child figure in the Art Institute collection.

Luluwa figurative sculpture is easily recognized. With its large head, gracefully elongated neck, bulging muscular calves, and oversized feet, this figure conforms to Luluwa standards, as do the elaborate scarification patterns covering the figure’s neck, abdomen and face. These marks, which form straight, circular, and zigzag designs, were once the most important form of body decoration among the Luluwa. The visual and tactile qualities of such scars were seen as making a person more beautiful by contributing to the quality of his or her skin, and reflecting his or her moral character. A number of the motifs have specific significance. Concentric circles refer to the heavens and symbolize hope. Here they are found on the figure’s head at the temples, the focus for common sense and intelligence. The double waved line on the mother’s forehead stands for the double heartbeat of a mother and the child in her womb.

Other distinctive marks of beauty depicted on this figure include a high forehead, elegant pointed hairstyle, and jewelry. The exaggeratedly large, protruding navel is regarded as an important link between mother and child, as well as a mark of beauty.

The theme of mother and child is an important one in African art and is often explored in figurative sculptures that express the importance of fertility and continuity. This figure of a mother cradling an infant was made for a member of a Luluwa association dedicated to women who have lost children by miscarriage, stillbirth, or in infancy. Pregnant
members of the association wear a special apron and belt, and partially shave their heads, characteristics reproduced on the Art Institute sculpture. A woman who has had difficulties in bearing healthy children will consult a diviner, or ritual specialist, who may recommend that she become a member of the association and follow its prescriptions. In the past this included commissioning a carved figure made from the wood of a sacred tree. Once the sculpture was completed, the woman would take special care of it, rubbing it with oil, red earth, and kaolin, a fine white clay, and giving the figure a glossy, reddish appearance. It may have been kept in a basket by her bed and brought out on nights when the moon was full, a full moon being a symbol of fertility. The post below the feet of the figure may have been stuck in the ground to help the figure stand. Such practices were meant to ensure that her next child would be the reincarnation of a family ancestor, who was guaranteed to survive into adulthood.

In addition to their use in rituals for pregnant women, some figures also played a role in ensuring the continued well-being of newborn children and their mothers. These figures often depict a woman carrying a small cup of medicinal ingredients in her hand, and may have been kept close to newborns, since it was believed that the figures called upon powerful ancestral spirits to protect infants. If the child contracted an illness such as a skin disease or an eye infection, the related part of the figure would be rubbed with kaolin to attract the aid of the ancestral powers.
Stool
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire); Songye
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, copper alloy

Themes: Beauty and Status, Authority, Arts of Daily Life

The Songye region of south-central Congo is divided into numerous chiefdoms, each controlled by a supreme chief who is assisted by ministers and sub-chiefs. The chief is also supported by the men’s association, which is responsible for maintaining social and political control. His power, status, and right to rule are affirmed by his regalia, which includes leopard skins, head-dresses, staffs, and a special chair or stool.

While ordinary people may own plain, undecorated stools, elaborately carved stools are the property of prestigious individuals. A limited number of distinctive Songye stools with supporting figures, or caryatids, were created during a short period in the early twentieth century. These stools were probably inspired by the neighboring Luba people, who expanded into Songye territory in the early and mid-nineteenth century, and whose chiefs used elaborately carved caryatid stools, usually featuring female figures on important state occasions. The round seat of the Art Institute’s Songye stool is supported by a male figure who literally bears the weight of the seated chief, expressing communal support of his leadership. The flexed legs, raised arms, and muscular chest of this figure express the strength and power of the chief, while prominent genitals suggest his virility and masculinity. The large, rounded abdomen echoes that of a healthy and prosperous ruler.

It is interesting to note the resemblance between the stool’s caryatid figure and powerful Songye sculptures called mankishi (man-KEE-shhee) that are often used for healing and protection. The carved wooden mankishi are owned by individuals or communities and incorporate powerful medicinal ingredients into the head or protruding stomach which harness positive forces to bring good fortune to owners of the mankishi. The rounded protruding stomach of this caryatid figure suggests such a medicinal cavity. By integrating the form of mankishi into his stool, the chief may have drawn upon their powers in support of his leadership.

In addition to the resemblance to mankishi, the rounded, bulging eyes and jutting chin and mouth of the caryatid figure mimic features of masks owned by the Songye men’s association. Male initiates learn symbolic names for the various parts of such masks, which are defined in terms...
relating to the natural world, Songye culture, and cosmology. The eyes of the masks are called "the swellings of sorcerers," while the chin and mouth are described as "the snout of a crocodile." Such terms may refer to physical qualities of the masks on one level, but also carry symbolic associations understood only by initiates. The flattened crest on the forehead of the stool's figure corresponds to the crest of the association's female masks, which are danced by men and linked symbolically to the installation of chiefs. The suggestion of a men's association mask on the stool of the chief may draw additional support for the chiefdom.

Oral history states that the first Songye chief had to earn the right to sit upon the chief's stool by demonstrating his physical and supernatural superiority to the satisfaction of both the living and the deceased. Today, a potential chief must go through a series of rituals designed to garner the support of both the community and the ancestors. During an investiture ceremony, a chief who has successfully demonstrated his capabilities is seated upon the chief's stool, which is placed on top of a raffia mat and covered with a leopard's skin. Once the chief is seated upon the stool, it is officially proclaimed that the people and the lands are under his authority.

A Songye sculptor who makes objects for ritual use must possess special skills and observe certain restrictions. For example, a sculptor who creates a mask for the men's association must be a member of the association. The mask must be carved outside of town, either where the tree was cut down or at the association meeting place, and carving is done in secret. While we do not know that these exact restrictions apply to the carving of royal stools, it is likely that special precautions are taken. By combining the form of Luba stools with the imagery of Songye masks and figures, the sculptor of this stool has drawn upon the visual and metaphorical powers of these diverse objects in support of the chiefdom.
Headrest (Building on Stilts)
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire); Yaka
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood

Themes: Beauty and Status, Authority, Arts of Daily Life

Among the Yaka of southwestern Congo, political power is vested in local chiefs. The Yaka also respect the rights of certain extended families considered to be original owners of the land. A Yaka land chief, or tulamba (too-LAHM-bah), is linked with a specific ancestor, and serves a political and ritual function in controlling the use of land for settling and hunting. The arts of the Yaka are closely related to those of the neighboring Suku peoples, and include masks for initiation ceremonies and prestige objects for land chiefs and other leaders.

For the Yaka, headgear is an important marker of leadership and authority. A tulamba is recognized by his elaborate headpiece of woven, netted, knotted, or braided raffia fibers. These prestigious headpieces often include items such as protective amulets and feathers, which allude to the tulamba’s spiritual role. The headpieces take a variety of shapes, and each is associated with the name and title of a distant ancestor. Because of its ritual importance, a tulamba must wear his headpiece constantly, even while sleeping.

In the past, a headrest was an essential accessory for protecting an elaborate hairstyle or an important headpiece. When lying on one’s side on a sleeping mat, the headrest supported the head along the chin, just below the ear. Headrests supported the neck of the sleeper, leaving the elaborate headpiece free, and were cool and comfortable in the tropical climate. Headrests were personal objects, kept in the inner bed chamber of a home. They were carved from wood by sculptors who learned their skills as apprentices to relatives. While they have now largely fallen into disuse, Yaka headrests were once produced in great number and variety, with imagery including humans, leopards, antelopes, and houses.

Although a small and intimate personal object, the aesthetic appeal of the Art Institute’s delicately carved headrest surely equals that of the intricate headpiece it was created to support. The depiction of an elevated house among the Yaka is relatively rare, with only a few known examples.
The pitched-roof building may suggest the family home, referring to the family unit and carrying important ancestral associations. However, the building on stilts might also represent a pigeon roost or an elevated storage building for ritual objects.

This headrest probably once hid a protective amulet packet in its interior cavity or had amulets attached to it. The powerful ingredients in these amulets reflected the spiritual role of the tulamba, and protected him from malevolent influences while sleeping. Since decision making among the Yaka frequently entailed “dreaming” on a matter, headrests and their powerful hidden ingredients were often associated with protecting and influencing the dreams of the sleeper.
Eastern and Southern Africa
Eastern and Southern Africa

*Beer Storage or Serving Vessel*
South Africa; Northern Nguni (probably Zulu)
1940/50
Terracotta

**Themes: Women, Arts of Daily Life**

The traditional Northern Nguni household—consisting of a family head, senior wife, other wives, relatives, and children—is largely self-sufficient, able to grow, raise, or manufacture most of life's daily necessities of food, clothing, weapons, and utensils. The in-house production of objects of daily use bestows upon them a highly personal character. Unlike *initiation associations* in many other parts of Africa, no masks or headdresses are found among the Northern Nguni. Like the arts of other eastern and southern African peoples, Northern Nguni artistic expression emphasizes personal adornment and decorative arts including beadwork, basketry, woodworking, and pottery.

In general, the Northern Nguni make two types of pottery: vessels for cooking and serving food, and vessels for storing, drinking, and carrying water, milk curds, and beer. While today ceramic cooking vessels have largely been replaced by mass-produced iron pots and enamel plates and bowls, hand-made ceramic beer pots are still found throughout the region. Northern nguni beer is a nourishing, mildly alcoholic, *sorghum*-based beverage prepared by women. Its brewing, presentation, and consumption involve a large number of objects, including basketry strainers, skimmers, pot lids, gourd serving ladies, and a variety of pottery vessels.

The serving of generous quantities of beer is a fundamental element of Northern Nguni social gatherings, and is considered a tangible sign of
social harmony and well-being. On ceremonial occasions, beer is offered in remembrance of the ancestors and in appreciation for a successful harvest. A standard beer pot is spherical in shape, with a narrow opening defined by a lipless rim. The surface is decorated with raised geometric patterns, blackened, and polished. Serving vessels are created in a variety of sizes, including larger pots such as the Art Institute example, as well as smaller individual serving pots.

Pottery is the domain of Northern Nguni women, who make the various types of pots found in every household. The creation of these pots is a specialized art form, and skilled potters sell their wares to their neighbors. Potters gather their own clay, choosing black or brown clay for finer drinking and serving vessels. The clay is allowed to dry, then finely ground and mixed with water to create the desired consistency. The potter rolls long cylinders of clay that she coils, pushes together, and flattens to form the basic pot shape. She then scrapes the inner walls of the pot to the desired thickness and smooths the outer surface.

Several different techniques are used to decorate beer drinking and serving vessels with bands of geometric patterns, such as squares, triangles, and diamonds. One of the oldest types of Northern Nguni pottery decoration is found on the Art Institute beer pot: raised "warts" created from small pellets of clay individually applied to the outer surface of a pot. Because this form of decoration is so time-consuming, it is rarely used today, replaced instead by designs in similar patterns which can be more quickly incised into the pot surface. After drying for several days, the pot must be fired, blackened, and polished before it is ready for use.
Pronunciation Guide

Adinkra: uh-DIN-krah
Adire: AH-dyeer-ay
Asante (now generally preferred over Ashanti): ah-SAHN-tay
Asantehene: ah-SAHN-te-HEY-nay
Akan: ah-KAHN
Baga: BAH-gah
Bamana: BAH-mah-nah
Bandiagara: BAHN-dee-a-gah-rah
Baule: BOUGH-lay
Benin: BEH-nee-n
Bieri: BEER-ee
Bogolanfini: BOH-goh-lahn-fee-nee
Chi Wara: CHEE WAH-rah
Chokwe: CHOCH-way
Cihongo: chee-HON-goh
Dogon: DOH-gone
Edo: EH-doh
Fante: FAHN-tay
Gbogba: BAH-BAH
Gelede: GEHL-eh-day
Ibeji: EE-bay-jee
Ife: EE-fay
Jenne: JEN-ay

Kente: KEN-tay
Kifwebe: kee-FWAY-bay
Kponyungo: PON-yun-goh
Luluwa: LOO-loo-wah
Mankishi: man-KEE-shee
Mwana Pwo: MWAH-nah PWOH
Mukenga: moo-KEN-gah
Nyim: NIM
Oduduwa: oh-DO-do-wah
Olokun: oh-loh-KOON
Olowe of Ise: OH-loh-way of EE-say
Osei Tutu: oh-SAY TOO-too
Pinge: PIN-gee
Senufo: sen-OO-foh
Songhai: SOHN-guy
Songye: SOHN-gee
Tulamba: too-LAHM-bah
Yaka: YA-kah
Yoruba: yoh-rah-BAH
Glossary

**Adze**: A sharp ax-like tool used by artists to carve wood. The thin, arched blade of an adze runs perpendicular to its handle, unlike an ax blade, which is parallel.

**Amulet**: A small container holding special powerful ingredients, often worn on the body as a charm for purposes of protection and sometimes placed inside important objects such as a king’s crown.

**Ancestor**: A deceased person, either immediate or remote, to whom a family or larger group traces its origins. Ancestors are often believed to be concerned with the welfare of the community and to be able to intercede to bring good fortune or punishment to the living. They provide an important link to the spirit world and a source of continuity.

**Bas-relief**: Translated from the French as low relief; sculpture in which images project slightly from a flat background. See also: relief.

**Blacksmith**: A craftsman who forges iron from ore and makes iron and wood tools and other objects. In Africa, blacksmiths often carve wood sculpture and masks; they are respected and feared for their special powers and skills and are subject to special privileges and restrictions. See also: forging.

**Brass**: A metal commonly used in Africa to make jewelry and other decorative, ritual, or functional items such as Asante goldweights. Usually an alloy (combination) of copper and zinc.

**Bronze**: An alloy of copper and tin. Many African objects described as bronze actually are made of brass.

**Bullroarer**: A small wooden slat attached to a string that makes a roaring noise when whirled.

**Calabash**: A gourdlike fruit from a tropical tree or vine. The hard shell of a dried calabash often is decorated and used as a vessel.
**Caryatid:** A term used to describe a column which takes the form of a human figure, usually a female. In African art, caryatid figures often support stools and drums.

**Casting:** A technical process that uses a mold to shape an object from molten metal. See also: *lost-wax casting.*

**Circumcision:** A surgical procedure in which the genitals are altered. For males, the foreskin of the penis is removed. Female circumcision, also called excision, may include the removal of all or part of the clitoris and/or labia. In many parts of the world, circumcision is one of the rituals that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood and can carry profound cultural and religious significance. Centuries old, in the later part of the twentieth century this tradition has come under critical scrutiny throughout the world, and its use is being questioned and, in some instances, rejected.

**Coiffure:** A hairstyle.

**Colonialism:** The system by which a nation initiates, maintains, or extends its control over foreign regions, especially for economic exploitation. In Africa, colonialism usually refers to the direct control over parts of the continent by European nations mostly between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries.

**Composite:** The combination of several elements to form a single unit. Often used in relation to African art to describe the combination of animal or human features to create a single fanciful creature; an artistic practice common in many cultures.

**Compound:** A traditional African dwelling, consisting of a series of rooms built around an open courtyard. Husband, wives, children, and grandparents usually live in one compound. Compounds vary greatly in size and structure.

**Coral:** The bright red skeletal deposit produced underwater by polyps that often spreads out in branching forms and reefs. Collected by divers, bits of coral are used in jewelry-making.

**Cosmology:** A theory that accounts for the natural order of the universe, such as the placement and movement of stars and planets, etc.

**Cowrie shells:** Small white shells usually from the Indian Ocean, so prized for their rarity and beauty that they once were used as currency in African trade and are still considered a symbol of status and wealth when used to embellish jewelry, artwork, and clothing.

**Deity:** A supreme being, such as a god or goddess.
**Delta:** A deposit of soil, mud, and sand, usually triangular, formed at the mouth of a river. The Inland Niger River Delta is a large, fertile expanse of land regularly flooded by the waters of the Niger River. These waters expose mounds of earth in which many objects in bronze and terracotta have been discovered.

**Divination:** A variety of tests performed in order to foretell future events, or to discover the causes of and remedies for certain problems. Some forms of divination involve throwing a set of objects (cowrie shells, kola nuts, or other small items) and decoding the resulting patterns of the fallen objects in order to answer a series of questions. See also: *diviner*.

**Diviner:** An individual with special abilities and training who can facilitate communication between human and spirit worlds. A diviner may perform a variety of tests to discover the causes of and remedies for certain problems, or to foretell future events. See also: *divination, ritual specialist*.

**Elder:** An older person who has gained wisdom, authority, and/or rank through age and experience, and is treated with respect and reverence by other members of the community.

**Ethnic group:** A group of people who share a common origin, language, social organization, and/or religious beliefs; a culture. Often referred to as a tribe, a term that implies an isolated band of people with a simple economic or political structure.

**Fly whisk:** A hand-held instrument for driving away flies. In some parts of West and Central Africa, elaborate fly whisks are carried as symbols of status by people of wealth and rank.

**Foliate:** Resembling a leaf; leaf-shaped.

**Forging:** To form or shape metal by heating or hammering, usually performed by trained craftsmen known as blacksmiths.

**Funeral:** African burials are often quick and simple. Funeral ceremonies, however, are often quite elaborate, and can take place up to several years following a person’s death. Funeral ceremonies generally mark the end of mourning and the final transition of the spirit of the deceased to the world of the ancestors. They may involve elaborate and costly preparations that reflect the status of the deceased and enhance that of his or her family. They may include feasts, masquerade performances, and other entertainment for large numbers of relatives and community members.

**Goldsmith:** A person who shapes gold by hammering or other techniques.

**Griot:** A storyteller or oral historian.

**Granary:** A building where millet and other grains are stored.
Hierarchical proportions: The systematic use of size within an artistic composition to connote status (i.e. the largest figure is of highest rank or most important).

Incise: To cut into a surface with a sharp tool; i.e., to engrave or carve a design or pattern.

Idealization: The creation of a standard or model of perfection, beauty, or excellence.

Initiation: This term describes both the period of training and the ceremonies that mark the transition from one life stage to another. The term most often refers to the transition from adolescence to adulthood, which may include a period of seclusion and instruction. An initiate may also undergo physical transformations, such as scarification or circumcision. An African adult may be initiated into increasingly sophisticated levels of knowledge and responsibility over a lifetime, often under the tutelage of an initiation association.

Initiation association: A group, sometimes called a “secret society,” limited to those who have met certain membership requirements. These associations are often based upon a specialized body of knowledge, and their role in the community may include administering justice, educating youth, healing, and maintaining communal well-being. Initiation associations may be made up of men, women, or both. Associations often are important art patrons and can be responsible for masquerade performances. See also: regulatory association.

Ivory: The hard, smooth, creamy white dentin forming the main part of an elephant’s tusk. Ivory trade brought great prosperity to various African cultures. Its use for art objects often is reserved for leaders, and generally associated with wealth and prestige.

Kaolin: A fine white clay that may be crushed into a powder or made into a paste. It may be applied to the body or to art objects as pigment, coloration, or for medicinal or religious reasons.

Kapok: a tree whose wood is lighter and easier to carve than that of the toro tree.

Kola: An African tree with nuts that yield a mild stimulant. Kola nuts can be chewed, or their stimulant may be extracted for use in soft drinks and medicine. Kola nuts are important items of ritual exchange, used in sacrifice, divination, and as token gifts.

Lineage: A group of individuals who are descended from the same ancestor.

Loom: A device for weaving cloth. See also warp and weft.
**Lost-wax casting:** A technique for casting metal objects. The desired object is created in actual size and full detail in wax, sometimes over a clay core. The wax model is covered with a thick layer of soft clay which molds to the details of the wax original, and is then heated. During heating, the clay bakes, or hardens, creating a mold; the wax melts and is drained from the mold. Molten metal is then poured into the hardened clay mold where the wax once was, taking on its form. When the metal has cooled, the baked clay is broken away to reveal the cast object.

**Manilla:** A horseshoe-shaped brass or copper object used from the late fifteenth to the mid-twentieth century as a form of currency in parts of Africa, including southern Nigeria. Possibly of Portuguese origin, manillas were obtained in trade with Europeans in exchange for a variety of African goods, and signify wealth and status in Benin iconography.

**Masquerade:** An occasion combining performers, dances, music, masks, and costumes. Masquerades serve many functions, from entertaining to healing, and may be held on a variety of occasions, including initiation and funerary ceremonies. A masquerade often involves an element of sustained disbelief when a masked performer may temporarily be accepted by the audience as the incarnation of a spirit.

**Matrilineal:** A form of social organization where descent is traced through the female line.

**Mediator:** One who reconciles parties in dispute.

**Millet:** A cereal grass whose grain is used for food.

**Oral history:** History that is conveyed verbally from one generation to the next, often through songs, poetry, and stories.

**Patrilineal:** A form of social organization where descent is traced through the male line.

**Pot sherd:** A pottery fragment.

**Proverb:** A short popular saying containing a familiar truth or useful piece of advice in expressive, often visual, language (i.e., “Don’t cry over spilt milk.”).

**Raffia:** Strong, strawlike fibers from the inner skin of the palm leaf. They may be woven, knitted, or knotted to create textiles. Unwoven raffia fibers are often a major component of masquerade costumes.

**Rain forest:** A tropical woodland region characterized by dense underbrush, tall trees, and an annual rainfall of at least 100 inches.

**Regalia:** Assorted finery which indicates status and rank; often associated with royalty.
**Regulatory association:** A group of people responsible for maintaining order and enforcing the laws of a community. Such a group may be closely affiliated with a leader, for example, the chief or respected elder, etc. See also: **initiation association.**

**Relief:** The projection of sculpted forms from a flat surface.

**Relic:** Venerated remains of the deceased, including skulls, bones, or locks of hair as well as cloth and other personal items, often housed in a reliquary.

**Reliquary:** A special container created to hold objects closely associated with a deceased person. Reliquaries may contain bones or locks of hair as well as cloth and other important personal items. See also: **relic.**

**Ritual:** A ceremony related to religious doctrine or social customs.

**Ritual specialist:** An individual with special training and abilities, who can facilitate communication between human and spirit worlds. A ritual specialist performs many functions in an African community, which may include counseling, mediating disputes, using medicinal herbs to cure illnesses, and foretelling future events. Often called priest, priestess, or herbalist. See also **diviner.**

**Sacrifice:** An offering to a deity, spirit, or ancestor of something valued. In Africa, sacrifices commonly are made of prepared food, millet beer, palm wine, store-bought alcohol, or money. A chicken, or in rare cases a larger domestic animal such as a ram or cow, may be ritually killed as a sacrifice. When large animals are sacrificed, the meat is generally shared among a group of people. Sacrifice, accompanied by ceremony and prayer, demonstrates a person's respect for supernatural powers, augments these powerful forces, and may activate them to his or her benefit.

**Savanna:** A tropical or subtropical region, often with grass, scattered trees, and shrubs. Savanna climates have one or two short periods of rainfall followed by longer dry seasons.

**Scabbard:** A sheath or holder for a sword.

**Scarification:** Ornamental scars intentionally created by making small, shallow cuts to the skin of the face or body for cosmetic purposes. The patterns and tactile quality of such scars are considered highly attractive in African communities. Scarification also may mark one's status as a civilized being, an adult, or a member of a specific ethnic group or initiation association.

**Slit-gong:** An elongated wooden drum, with a straight, narrow opening running the length of the top, that gives a loud, resonant tone when struck.
**Smelt:** To melt ore, a natural combination of minerals, so as to extract the pure metal, such as lead, tin, copper or zinc.

**Sorghum:** A cereal grass grown for grain or syrup.

**Spirit world:** The world inhabited by deities, spirits, and ancestors who can affect and interact with the world of the living.

**Sudan:** A broad climatic zone in northern Africa, south of the Sahara desert, extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. It is characterized by an extremely dry climate and a very short rainy season.

**Superstructure:** A term often used to describe sculpted structures which are supported by the lower or base portion of a mask and project vertically above it.

**Symmetry:** Correspondence of opposite parts in size, shape, and position.

**Terracotta:** Clay that has been fired until it is hard and waterproof.

**Title holders:** Members of hierarchical societies holding rank or titles due to political and/or religious favor.

**Veranda:** An open porch or gallery, usually with a roof.

**Warp:** The set of threads held in tension on a loom.

**Weft:** The set of threads interlaced with the warp to create cloth.

**Wrapper:** An untailored piece of cloth (originally handwoven) which is folded, draped, and wrapped around the body in a variety of ways. A wrapper may be worn around the body, around the waist as a skirt, or used as a baby carrier, a head tie, or a shawl.
Glossary of African Terms

Note: The name in parentheses refers to the language from which this word or phrase comes.

**Adinkra**: (Asante) Stamped Asante textile.

**Adire**: (Yoruba) Resist-dyed Yoruba textile.

**Asanthehene**: (Asante) The highest-ranking chief of the Asante people.

**Asie usu**: (Baule) Baule Wilderness spirit.

**Bieri**: (Fang) Association that honors deceased ancestors of a Fang lineage.

**Bolo bian**: (Baule) Baule other world man.

**Bogolanfini, Bogolanfini** [sing. and pl.]: (Bamana) Mud-painted Bamana textile.

**Boli, boliw**: [sing. and pl.]: (Bamana) Bamana ritual object that is endowed with spiritual energy.

**Bwoom**: (Kuba) Mask that portrays a male character and, like all Kuba masks, reflects powers of nature spirits.

**Chi Wara**: (Bamana) In Bamana legend, the proper name of the mythological half-man, half-antelope who taught the Bamana to cultivate the earth and who epitomizes the qualities of the ideal farmer.

**Chiwaraw, chiwaraw**: [sing. and pl.]: The young male champion farmers whose strength, endurance, and farming abilities emulate the mythic creature, and thus qualify them to wear the chi wara headdresses.

**Cihongo**: (Chokwe) The Chokwe male counterpart to the Mwana Pwo mask; represents power and wealth.
D'mba: (Baga) Mask portraying Baga ideals of womanhood. Also called Nimba or Yamban.

Etutu: (Yoruba) Yoruba concept signifying mystic coolness and the inner power and reserve associated with women.

Fon: (Cameroon Grasslands) Supreme leader or king among the grasslands kingdoms of present-day Cameroon.

Gbogba: (Baule) Baule entertainment masquerade that satirizes and celebrates aspects of daily life.

Gelede: (Yoruba) Masquerade intended to please and placate elder women as well as entertain and enlighten the Yoruba community.

Ibeji, ere ibeji: (Yoruba) Figures carved as memorials to deceased Yoruba twins.

Kente: (Asante) Asante prestige cloth that is woven in narrow strips, with bold, contrasting colors and dense patterns.

Keten: (Fante) Basket; source of the word kente and descriptive of the cloth’s weave.

Kponyungo: (Senufo) Broadly translated as “funeral head mask,” a Senufo helmet mask that combines key features of powerful animals in a bold, aggressive composition.

Kulebele: (Senufo) Specialized group of Senufo woodcarvers.

Moshambooy Mushal: (Kuba) The primary Bushoong royal mask.

Mukenga: (Kuba) Regional variant of the primary Bushoong royal mask called Moshambooy mushal, which plays important roles in funerals of elite title holders in the northern half of the Kuba kingdom.

Mwana Pwo: (Chokwe) “Beautiful young woman,” a mask that represents an archetypal figure and is used to invoke Chokwe history and cultural values; the male counterpart is Cihongo.

Ndoma: (Baule) Baule portrait mask honoring a specific individual admired for physical beauty, social status, or dancing ability.
Ngady Amwaash: (Kuba) Mask that portrays a female character and, like all Kuba masks, reflects the powers of nature spirits.

Nimba: (Baga) See d’mba.

Nkishi, mankishi [sing. and pl.]: (Songye) Sculptures that are endowed with powers to heal and protect through the application of medicinal materials.

Nyim: (Kuba) The supreme ruler, or king, of the Kuba people.

Oba: (Edo) The divine (believed to be descended from a god) ruler, or king, of the kingdom of Benin.

Ogoga: (Yoruba) The Yoruba ruler or king of Ikere.

Opo: (Yoruba) Post for supporting a roof.

Pinge: (Senufo) Drum.

Poro: (Senufo) Senufo initiation association that plays an important part in spiritual practices, governance, and education.

Sandogo: (Senufo) A Senufo divination society in which women learn to facilitate communication between the human and spiritual worlds.

Simo (Baga; derived from Susu) In Baga culture, anything sacred such as a mask, masquerade or initiation.

Toro: Hardwood tree resistant to insects.

Tulamba: (Yaka) Yaka land chief, a titled leader of a lineage; in the past, land chiefs were proprietors of land belonging to lineage.

Tyekpa: (Senufo) Senufo women’s initiation association.

Waka sran: (Baule) Literally, wooden people; Baule figural sculpture.

Yamban: (Baga) See d’mba.
# Thematic Index

## Geographic Approach

### Western Sudan

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<td>Related Object</td>
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<td>14.</td>
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- Map of Africa
- Topographical Map of Africa
- Blank Map

Poster-size *Arts of Africa* map in plastic sleeve at end of manual.
MAP OF AFRICA:
Topographical Regions
1" = 768 miles

- Mediterranean Type Vegetation
- Desert and Desert Shrub
- Sahel: Dry Semidesert with Shrub and Grass
- Tropical Savanna and Steppe Grasslands
- Tropical Rain Forest
- Zoned Mountain Vegetation
- Explore Ten General Areas
- Use Eight Activity Sheets
- Examine Twenty Works of Art
Discussion Questions and Classroom Applications

This section includes suggestions for classroom discussions and creative activities based on the arts of Africa. Teachers will find multiple classroom uses that link this art to a variety of subject areas. The suggestions are directed to students, are easily adapted to any grade level, and should be altered, supplemented, and refined to suit students’ interests, attention spans, and abilities.

Although the art objects in this manual come from different African countries and ethnic groups, the materials chosen, ideas expressed, and functions served often are similar. Therefore, some of the classroom suggestions are applicable to more than one object and may be interchanged whenever appropriate. The African art objects are addressed separately and are compared to specific artworks from other times and cultures* in the section entitled Examine Twenty Works of Art. Comparisons among the African works in this manual are included in the section entitled Take a Thematic Approach, although those connections and associations may be made at any point.

*Please note: Artworks included in the Classroom Applications have been selected primarily from The Art Institute of Chicago’s collection and most may be found in The Art Institute of Chicago: The Essential Guide, (see bibliography), as well as in the galleries.
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Explore Ten General Areas

1. EXAMINE THE GEOGRAPHY OF AFRICA

The continent of Africa is vast and varied. Locate Africa on a map of the world. Compare its size to that of North America or other continents you have studied. Africa is comprised of many countries and ethnic groups, each unique yet sharing much in common. Referring to the maps on pages xx, what are the five broad geographic regions addressed in this manual? What are the physical characteristics that define each region? What countries comprise each region? What ethnic group(s) inhabits each country?

From what areas do most of the objects represented in this manual come? What might be some of the reasons for this? Where did ancient African kingdoms and cities first develop and why? Investigate how natural resources, protective and productive environments (climate and soil), and access to trade influence the settlement and/or migration of people. What are the major cities in Africa today? What was their relationship to the ancient kingdoms and what most recently has influenced their development?

It is fascinating to study the geography of a place based on images created by artists. Study paintings, prints, drawings, maps, and photographs of Africa created by artists long ago and by more recent artists. Describe how Europeans, and later Americans, interpreted this continent with their first contacts and how their views have changed over time. Are artists' interpretations based solely on observation? On what else might these interpretations be based? Discuss not only what one can learn about Africa from these images, but also what one can learn about the artists who created them and the times and places from which they come.

2. CONSTRUCT A TIMELINE BASED ON AFRICAN ART, CULTURE, AND HISTORY

Many different countries, cultures, events, and objects must be included in even a limited survey of African art. To help clarify and more easily understand all of this information, create a timeline as a class project. Place on this chart photocopies of pictures from books, original drawings,
and magazine photographs that refer to the art, places, and cultures explored in this manual. Major events in African history (political, social, economic) and important leaders may also be included using pictures or words. To make this timeline more meaningful for your class, include whatever else is appropriate, such as: major world events, art works from other times and places, and additional information from class studies or individual research. Include events related to your own state, city, school, or neighborhood.

3. EXPLORE AFRICAN OBJECTS IN THEIR ORIGINAL CONTEXT AND IN MUSEUM SETTINGS

Masks, figures, drums, clothing, goldweights, plaques, crowns, furniture, and pottery—all African objects placed inside well-lit, glass-enclosed cases in museum galleries—are miles, years, and cultures apart from their creation. On museum labels facts are provided, the amount of information varying from object to object. Discuss how different these objects appear in museum settings compared to the way they appeared in their original contexts.

Although visually interesting and carefully crafted, most of these objects were not created as “art objects” by their makers. They were very much a part of life; used daily or occasionally in rituals or festivals, or in secret by a chosen few, or in the open by the community at large. Generally, these objects are connected to nature, important events or people, and/or the spiritual world. Learn what functions the objects served, the meaning of symbols that decorate them, and additional significant information.

Create a comparison chart which clearly shows your research for several objects in this manual. Taken further, you may wish to compare African objects to similar objects from other cultures and times. Examine African perspectives towards these traditional objects at the time they were created and now. Research and discuss which African objects were first collected by early Europeans, and later by Americans, and why. Consider when, how, and why these objects originally entered museum collections and on what basis others continue to be added. Explore how museums’ exhibitions of these objects also have changed over time.

Working with another student, choose one object from this manual and research its original context. Together discuss how this object would best be displayed in a museum setting. What information would you include to explain it to a museum visitor and how could that most effectively be incorporated into your display? (Consider: label copy, illustrations, maps, charts, photographs, or a description of a proposed video.) Create a model of the exhibition display for your object. Write a short paragraph about your object to include in an African Art Gallery Brochure, to be produced by the entire class. You may even wish to create a one-sheet Gallery Game to be used by student groups when viewing art in the museum. It should include interesting facts, looking questions, and a game or activity based on your object. As a final culmination of this project, the
class might enjoy inviting other classes in the school to visit your "African Art Gallery"—complete with mock exhibitions, a gallery brochure, and games for students.

4. LOOKING AT AFRICAN ART

Sometimes the meanings and symbols of works of art are hard to understand because they come from other places and times. Take time to really look and think about what you see. The art from Africa is powerful and both visually and conceptually complex. Imagine objects in this manual in use; feel the power and energy of the dynamic forces expressed by their forms.

Discuss various levels on which one can appreciate art—its visual qualities, context, and history, as well as its emotional and symbolic content. Approach African art in the same manner. Examine the form, color, composition, and texture. Discuss skills needed to create the work and why the artist made it. Remember that all artists make conscious choices regarding their work. Enlarged body parts are often related to their importance, real or symbolic, rather than to an interest in recreating the way things appear in nature. Changes in proportion or simplification of shapes also are used to create specific emotional or visual effects.

Another factor to consider when studying the African art in this manual is that it was created by artists working within a traditional framework. Cultural or community expectations, requests, and restrictions were placed on the artists; guidelines, styles, and traditions had to be followed. Working methods and materials also often were mandated. Yet within that format, artists could express their personal vision, creativity, and skill—incorporating details and forms which proclaimed their unique individuality. Research traditional African objects from one specific area or ethnic group, examining the particular artistic traditions that distinguish it from the work of other groups. Create a chart which lists your findings and include drawings or photocopies of objects as visual examples.

Explore how some traditions in African art have changed over time and why. (e.g., Islam, Christian, and colonial influences; ritual practices no longer observed; tourist and trade markets; political and economic changes). Compare traditional African artists to artists working within other strong traditional frameworks, such as Amish quilt makers or Navajo weavers, and how this context affects what they make. Investigate how some traditions have been lost, some have continued, while others have been rediscovered. Discuss the flux between traditional cultural structures and creative innovation. Look at examples of contemporary African work where new and unique interpretations (and materials) have affected the design of traditional masks and sculptures.
5. PLAN AN IMAGINARY TRIP TO AFRICA

Africa is a continent of variety—geographical, historical, and cultural. Although an actual class trip to a few African countries (see map, p. X) would be ideal, much can be learned through an imaginary tour. Discuss which five or six countries might offer the most variety for an interesting trip. Dividing the class into groups, each group should be assigned (or should choose) one of those countries on which to base a tour. Within each group, students should choose one of the following roles to play and work together in assembling their trip.

**Travel Agent**—makes all travel arrangements, including obtaining lowest airfare, information regarding passports and visas, accommodations, meals, and ground transportation (including approximate costs). Other duties include explaining miscellaneous information regarding exchange rates and currency, time zones, weather conditions, luggage and packing suggestions, insurance and assistance, health tips, electricity, and duty-free limits.

**Adventure Guide**—provides information regarding nature and exploration tours of local water (lagoons, lakes, rivers, oceans) and land features (deserts, forests, mountains, grasslands, rain forests, jungles, savannas, beaches), as well as activities to be enjoyed at each (boating, fishing, swimming, hiking, mountain climbing, hunting and camera safaris, ecology studies, archeological digs). Other duties include listing and explaining special equipment, clothing, or skills suggested for these tours.

**Tour Guide**—provides information regarding tours of local cities, towns, or villages. This includes suggestions on special places to visit and things to see (country’s capital, historical sites, churches, parks, shops, outdoor marketplaces, museums, artist workshops, farms, local homes, factories, schools, mines, animal reserves). Other duties include explaining local customs, as well as local expectations regarding behavior, clothing, bargaining, and photography.

**Public Relations/Special Events Director**—chooses people (or groups) to meet and provides background information about that person (or group), a meeting place, and suggested agenda. (May include national and local rulers, politicians; business, community, military, religious leaders; artists, musicians, performers, storytellers; local residents, journalists, activists, conservationists.) Other duties include making arrangements for attending local or national special events, rituals, celebrations, or festivals and providing descriptions of each.

**Present research in an interesting and creative way.** Groups may obtain facsimiles of (and/or create their own) necessary documents, forms, passes, or tickets. They should make brochures or flyers that provide important information, describe activities and destinations, and/or suggest daily itineraries. As a culmination of this project, each group should make one sample journal of its imaginary trip using students’ research, including “snapshots” taken (actual photographs, magazine pictures, drawings, or photocopies of book images) and written entries describing daily activities.
6. INVESTIGATE THE INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN ART ON EUROPEAN ARTISTS AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS

Much has been written about the effect of African sculptures and masks on early twentieth-century European and American artists. For the most part, these artists were open to new ideas and were experimenting with the notion that art did not have to imitate nature. The special appeal of African art was that it captured the spirit of things, invisible forces and emotions, and did not copy them. It was less descriptive and more symbolic than representational art. Going beyond inherited Western traditions and history, African art offered these artists a new way to see and portray the world.

African influences can be seen in art movements such as Cubism and Surrealism. Discover what drew artists to the power and forms of African art and what visual and philosophical ideas early twentieth-century artists shared with it.

In exploring their cultural and/or spiritual heritage, some African American artists have looked to Africa and African art as a source of ethnic pride and cultural identification. Reclaiming African styles, ideas, images, and themes has become an important part of black American identity for many, particularly in the twentieth century. Discuss how artists such as Aaron Douglas, Marion Perkins, and Jacob Lawrence have incorporated and transformed African themes, symbols, techniques, ideas, spirituality, myths, or patterns in their own work. (See the teacher manual, African American Art at The Art Institute of Chicago, cited in bibliography.)

Other connections may be made to work of African American writers, dancers, and musicians which also show evidence of African influences. These creative individuals often were or are in the same social, political, and artistic circles, sharing common goals and interests. Explore these individuals and their influence on and inspiration from each other.

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7. STUDY ANIMAL IMAGES IN AFRICAN ART

The relationship people share with animals often is expressed in objects artists create, as well as in literature (oral and written). Animal images appear regularly and abundantly in the arts of Africa, on a wide range of objects, by nearly every ethnic group throughout the continent. Animals are represented both naturalistically and in exaggerated forms. They appear alone or combined with other animals or images; depicted in part and in their entirety; and sometimes are represented by their actual tusks, teeth, skins, quills, feathers, and bones.

Much can be learned about a people and the way they view the world by studying animal images they create. What relationship do Africans have with the great variety of animals that share their continent? What roles have animals played historically in lives of the people and how has that changed over time? Where and how do specific animals live? How has
that changed over time and why? Explore objects in this manual in terms of animals represented and images used. How do interpretations vary according to country and ethnic group? What issues (social, religious, economic, political, historical) are most often addressed by animal images and by objects on which they appear? What functions do the objects they decorate serve? What are the most admired characteristics, both physical and behavioral, of specific animals and why are they admired? How are these attributes represented symbolically and in what ways are they associated with human traits, powers, or skills?

Research animal images used by people of other countries, cultures, and times. (Consider traditional Native American and ancient American art, and its relationship to animals.) Which animals are represented, how, and on what type of objects? What are the functions of these objects in their societies? How do their functions compare to those in Africa? Explore the idea of combining traits of various animals in images of European gargoyles and Asian dragons. In twentieth-century America, which animal characteristics are used in connection with cars, sports’ teams, and corporate images? Suggest students note animal symbols they see in TV commercials over a period of one week; ask what they represent. Collect and discuss photographs of animals and their images as represented on objects from around the world.

Animals also play a major part in the oral and written traditions of Africa. Animals often appear in proverbs. (See list of African proverbs on pages xx and numbers 8 and 9 below.) Create a list of familiar proverbs, similes, phrases, and words which include references to animals. (See pages 104-105.) How do animals cited in the list of U.S. proverbs in this manual compare to animals used in the African proverbs? What might be reasons for the specific choice of animals and attributes by each culture?

8. LEARN ABOUT AFRICA THROUGH ITS MYTHS AND STORIES

Storytelling has long been an important feature of African life. The storyteller, or griot, was a position of honor in traditional African society. Stories told praised rulers, described historical events, reinforced customs, and taught morals and values. By reading and discussing these vivid accounts handed down from one generation to the next, a deeper understanding of and appreciation for African culture and its visual arts may be gained. Refer to bibliography for suggested sources. What forms of oral storytelling are you familiar with in American culture? (Examples: campfire or bedtime stories, storytelling fairs and contests of old folk tales, family trip or holiday stories.)

Some African stories explain the creation of the world or how animals got their special characteristics, while others describe experiences of ancestors or the power of the gods. The symbols and animals that appear on African objects are often based on these myths and stories, which were familiar to the people of that culture. (See slide 3 on page 27 which refers to Chi Wara, the mythological half-man, half-antelope; slide 5 on page 31...
which includes a chameleon, the first animal to walk on the earth; or slide 10 on page xx which has a design associated with the sea god, Olokun.) By studying these stories, we can better understand the meaning of images used on African objects. Create an object or drawing based on some aspect of a traditional African myth or write your own myth based on images used on an African object in this manual. Discover how the Asante folklore story of Kwaku Ananse, A Spider appears as “Aunt Nancy” in African American folklore.

Many African myths and stories have direct parallels to those from other cultures. Creation myths are common to almost every group of people, from the ancient Maya legend involving the Maker, a Feathered Serpent, and four creations, to an Eskimo myth about the first man pushing his way out of a pea pod, to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In Africa, Fon of Dahomey tell of the Great Mother creating the world and how her twins, the moon and the sun, create all the other gods who also were twins. The Yoruba of Nigeria myth includes the Creator, a watery world which slowly turns to dry earth, and a chameleon. Equally universal are stories with lessons or morals that teach how to live in this world. Any number of multicultural reading and art activities may be based on stories such as these, providing a greater understanding and acceptance of other traditions and cultures. Many wonderful books with myths and stories from various cultures, some of which are listed in the bibliography of this manual, are available in local libraries and bookstores.

9. DISCOVER THE UNIVERSALITY OF AFRICAN PROVERBS

The African language is visually expressive and this is nowhere more apparent than in its wealth of proverbs. Proverbs are used to comment, advise, teach, and inform; often they have dual meanings, saying more than one thing at a time. In Africa, it is a sign of respectability and intelligence to have the ability to use proverbs appropriately in various situations. With the importance attached to words and the visual nature of African proverbs, it is not surprising that many are represented visually in their art work. Explore examples found in the design of goldweights, textiles (kente, adinkra, Fante Asafo flags), sword ornaments, royal regalia, and other works of art.

African proverbs generally refer to animals, plants, social structures, or experiences intrinsic to Africa and therefore can teach us much about that continent and its people. (See African proverbs on pages 106-108.) Yet even with these very specific references to African situations and animals, in a larger sense proverbs address the human condition. Therefore, comparable messages may be found in proverbs common in the United States today and no doubt in proverbs from other countries as well. Before referring to the list in this manual, try to think of as many familiar proverbs as possible, such as, “Look before you leap.” Make a list on the blackboard. Discuss what each means and brainstorm clever ways to explore them visually. (See page 105 for examples of these proverbs, many
of which refer to animals.) Create your own visual interpretations of traditional African proverbs, or their American counterparts, using traditional African art forms, or by any means you wish.

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10. EXPLORE CREATIVE WRITING THROUGH AFRICAN ART

Discover the natural connections between visual and language arts. Looking carefully and thinking about what one sees can inspire writing; writing about art can add depth and meaning to what one sees. Because the following suggestions may be used with any of the objects in this manual (individually or in combination), they are listed separately here and are not included in the sections dealing with each object. Choose those most appropriate for the age level of your students.

- Write a diary entry based on an imaginary trip to Africa describing a ritual or ceremony you attended in which one particular object was used. Include facts, sense impressions, and your reactions to the object.
- Compose an imaginary conversation between: the object and the artist making it, the object and the person using it, the object and someone watching it being used, two figures (or animals) on the object itself, or two separate objects.
- After carefully looking at and thinking about one object, write whatever comes to mind. Write continuously for two minutes. Count the words and cut them by one-half. Read what remains and cut by half again. Read once more, making any changes you desire. Share the finished thoughts with your classmates. Does the shortened version seem clearer and better phrased?
- Write an imaginary interview between you and one of the masks, the artist who made it, or the dancer who wears it.
- Create a story from the point of view of one object.
- Write a separate phrase for each of five objects. Combine those phrases into a paragraph, adding any words you choose.
- Choose three objects and include them in an imaginary story, relating them to each other in some way.
- Write three sentences based on one object: The first should be a general description, the next a feeling, and the final one should be a connection to something in your life.
- Describe one object in detail, but as if it were made from totally different materials.
- Portray this object in terms of several nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Create a few sentences based on those words.
- Write a first-person account about one object from the point of view of an archaeologist, art historian, mystery writer, conservationist, artist, scientist, ritual expert, deceased ancestor, or ecologist.
• After having spent two weeks in Africa, write a letter to someone explaining why you plan to stay and live there permanently.

• Write an editorial explaining how an issue that was addressed by one of the objects in this manual relates to your life or community.

• Choose one object from this manual. Describe in as much detail as possible how you would feel if you wore or used it, when and where this would take place, and what happened.

• Record an account of a day in the life of an African warrior, chief, ruler, animal, performer, or artist.

• Bring to class a news article written about Africa. Based on that article, write a letter to the editor agreeing with, opposing, or commenting on what was written.

• Describe an imaginary encounter with one of the objects in this manual from the point of view of a Portuguese trader in the fifteenth century, a European artist in the early twentieth century, or an African in the twenty-fifth century.

• After choosing an animal that is depicted in one of the objects, write a story or poem which relates that animal's characteristics to those of a human.

• Create a story describing the creation of one particular African art object from the artist's point of view (include facts, personal thoughts, and feelings).

• Read various historical descriptions expressing a diversity of attitudes towards Africa, Africans, and African art. Write a reaction to one of those viewpoints.

• With several other students, use one of the above suggestions as the basis for a one-act play, debate, newscast, or panel discussion to be performed for the class.
Note: Class Discussions might add many examples to the following lists, or students might invent new examples. Also, discuss where students hear proverbs, at home, school, church, on TV, in books, etc.

**Animal Similes Current in the United States**

- quiet as a mouse
- sing like a canary
- high as an eagle flies
- happy as a clam
- strong as an ox
- like a snake in the grass
- crazy as a loon
- looks like a pigsty
- crafty as a beaver
- cold as a fish
- eats like a bird
- playful as a kitten
- bald as an eagle
- wise as an owl
- dance like a butterfly, sting like a bee
- stubborn as a mule
- swims like a fish
- wiggly as a worm
- hungry as a horse
- soar like an eagle
- strong as a lion
- big as an elephant
- memory like an elephant
- brave as a lion
- wild as a stallion
- works like a horse
- gentle as a lamb
- quick as a bunny
- many lives (9) as a cat
- blind as a bat
- sly as a fox
- busy as a bee
- sick as a dog
- fat as a cow

**Animal Phrases or Words Current in the United States**

- kangaroo court
- wouldn't hurt a fly
- play cat and mouse
- putting on the dog
- leave him to the vultures
- multiply like rabbits
- cook your goose
- it's a dog's life
- move at a snail's pace
- live high off the hog
- the cat's meow
- gets my goat
- cat has got your tongue
- butterflies in my stomach
- go to the dogs
- play possum
- lock horns
- cry wolf
- the birds and the bees
- sheepish grin
- leapin' lizards
- black sheep
- pigeonhole
- pigeon-toed
- lame duck
- leap frog
- cat's cradle
- snake eyes
- monkey bars
- piggyback
- eat enough to choke a horse
- straw that broke the camel's back
- spring chicken
- raining cats and dogs
- crow's feet
- lionhearted
- cold fish
Animal Proverbs Current in the United States

The early bird catches the worm.
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
You can wait until the cows come home.
You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
Don't put all your eggs in one basket.
A leopard can't change its spots.
You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.
That's like locking the barn door after the horse is stolen.
What's good for the goose is good for the gander.
Don't count your chickens before they hatch.
Beware of a wolf in sheep's clothing.
You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.
Don't let the cat out of the bag.
The dog's bark is worse than its bite.
Let sleeping dogs lie.

Proverbs Current in the United States

Don't cry over spilt milk.
Look before you leap.
Don't bite off more than you can chew.
Better be safe than sorry.
A stitch in time saves nine.
Don't judge a book by its cover.
Make hay while the sun shines.
Better late than never.
The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.
One rotten apple spoils the barrel.
Don't make a mountain out of a molehill.
Oil and water don't mix.
It's like finding a needle in a haystack.
Silence is golden.
Waste not, want not.
African Proverbs

From the Fante of Burkina Faso -
(English equivalent phrase is indented and in italic below)
Without the head, the snake is nothing but rope.
After the leopard there is no other.
A good spirit always looks after her young.
Like the vine we can conquer any problem.
A snake does not bite a man without cause.
Fish grow fat for the benefit of the crocodile.
If you play push with the porcupine, expect to get sore hands.
If you put corn on the ground, birds will not be a rare sight.
   *If you challenge us, you can expect a response/
   You reap what you sow.
If the viper is too heavy to carry, why take the cobra as a head cushion.
   *Don't bite off more than you can chew.
When there are no trees left, birds will perch on men's heads.
   *Look for reasons behind the strange behavior of others.
When the scorpion stings you, you must treat it in the same fashion.
   *Fight fire with fire.
The monkey leaps only as far as it can reach.
   *Look before you leap.
We can carry water in a basket using a cactus as a cushion.
   *We can achieve the impossible.
Although the elephant is stronger, we give the stool to the antelope.
   *Brains before brawn.
Only a brave man will go under a big tree.
   *Venture into the unknown.
If you shoot at the leopard and do not kill it, it is better not to have shot at all.
   *Think before you act/Finish what you begin.
Will you fly or will you vanish?
   *There is no escape.
If a child wants to pick a ripe pepper, let him do it. When it gets in his eyes, he will stop himself.
   *Experience is the best teacher.
African Proverbs

From The Art Institute of Chicago *Gold of Africa*, 1990 teacher manual (now out of print). English equivalent phrase is indented and in italics below.

If you beat a lion, it is your own head that aches.

*If you are disrespectful to a chief, you will suffer for it.*

The egg says, “I am like authority. If you hold me too hard I break; if you let me go I fall and break to pieces on the ground.”

*A chief should be neither too severe nor too lenient; he must exercise his responsibilities with care and moderation.*

One head does not make a council.

*There should be consultations when an important decision is made.*

The porcupine whose spears cover its back, who is able to conquer it? (A reference to the invincibility of the Asante in battle.)

The brown scorpion: when it stings you the pain goes until nightfall.

*If you incur a chief’s displeasure, you will feel it for a long time.*

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African Proverbs

From The Art Institute of Chicago *Arts of Africa*, 1989 teacher manual (now out of print). English equivalent phrase is indented and in italics below.

These proverbs, followed by their region of origin, are examples of the lively visual imagery that is characteristic of African speech. An English equivalent to each has been included to demonstrate the universality of human thought and experience. These are not, of course, the only possible English parallels, and you may wish to work with your class on discovering others. Remember, however, that the language in each African saying reflects a specific physical and cultural environment; while the ideas conveyed may apply to many cultures and peoples around the world, the images used are unique to their own time and place.

One camel does not make fun of the other camel’s hump. (Guinea)

*People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.*

Rain does not fall on one roof alone. (Congo)

*We’re all in the same boat.*

When spider webs unite they can tie up a lion. (Ethiopia)

*There is strength in numbers.*

When a bee comes to your house, let her have beer; you may want to visit the bee’s house someday. Congo (formerly Zaire)

*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

What the child says, he has learned it at home. (Gambia-Senegal)

*The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.*
Before healing others, heal thyself. (Gambia-Senegal)

Physician, heal thyself.

One must talk little and listen much. (Gambia-Senegal)

Talk is silver, silence is gold/Children should be seen but not heard.

What goes in at one ear goes out by the other. (Gambia-Senegal)

What goes in one ear comes out the other.

He who puts aside his spoon to draw from the pot with his hand, does not do so twice. (Gambia-Senegal)

Once burned, twice shy.

He who rises early finds the way short. (Gambia-Senegal)

The early bird catches the worm.

When a fowl eats your neighbor's corn, drive it away; another time it will eat yours. (Ghana)

Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

Fire and gunpowder do not lie together. (Ghana)

Oil and water do not mix.

He is a fool whose sheep run away twice. (Ghana)

Experience is the best teacher.

One bad nut spoils all. (Ghana)

A rotten apple spoils the barrel.

The potter eats out of a potsherd. (Ghana)

The shoemaker's children go without shoes.

What is not eaten is not cooked. (Ghana)

Waste not, want not.

Frowning and fierceness prove not manliness. (Nigeria)

A dog's bark is worse than its bite.

When one is carrying water and happens to spill it, if the calabash not be broken, you can get more. (Nigeria)

Don't cry over spilt milk.

Patience is the best of dispositions; he who possesses patience possesses all things. (Nigeria)

Patience is a virtue.

A stream coming down won't let you swim up. (Nigeria)

You can't swim against the current.

A man always breaking off from his work never finishes anything. (Nigeria)

A job worth doing is worth doing well/
Finish what you start.

When a man sees sunshine he dries his tobacco. (Nigeria)

Make hay while the sun shines.

It is not worth talking about a slip of the foot as if it were a fall. (Nigeria)

Don't make a mountain out of a molehill.
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

  [Blank space for drawing]
Design a T-shirt

Pretend that this year your school is celebrating its first annual International Art Day. T-shirts will be sold as a fundraiser for this event and the school needs your ideas! Your class has been studying African art. Please use this as the theme for your T-shirt design. Have fun!
POSTCARDS FROM AFRICA

After studying the arts of Africa, imagine winning a trip to go there with your friends. Choose one object, celebration, custom, geographic region, or fact to show (draw) and tell about (write) in the picture postcard format below. To whom would you send it?

Country: 
Date: 
Dear 

As you can see from the picture on the front of this postcard, what has amazed me most about my trip has been

To:
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.
Journal Notes

The African art you will be exploring is powerful, rich in both images and ideas. Respond to these works **VISUALLY** (with sketches) and **VERBALLY** (with notes). Take time to really look and think about what you see. Record your impressions, feelings, opinions, and/or interesting facts. Note your responses, reactions, and questions as they emerge. Make connections—write and draw whatever comes to mind. You may include magazine photographs or photocopied pictures, quotes, poems, and phrases that relate to the images or ideas. There is no one “right” way to do this. Experiment and explore the possibilities—enjoy!
Create Your Own IMAGINARY Animal
for a mask or sculpture

The designs used for African masks and sculptures are often based on a combination of features of different animals. Look closely at pictures of a variety of animals and think about which physical characteristics most appeal to you. Choose five from different animals and draw them in the small boxes below. In the large box, create a design for a mask or sculpture (head or entire body) based on those drawings. Feel free to add other shapes, lines, or textures to make your picture more interesting. **Anything goes!!**
Design an African Art Tour
Based on the collection of The Art Institute of Chicago

Create a tour* for your classmates using three objects from the Arts of Africa Teacher Manual. Choose one theme based on what you have learned in class, additional research, as well as museum brochures and label copy. Possible themes include: nature, ritual, power, continuity, beauty, status, daily life, leadership, animals, women, men, initiation, form, material, ancestors, death, etc. All three of your objects must relate to your theme. Use this form to organize your thoughts in preparing for your tour.

*Your tour may take place in the museum galleries or in the classroom using projected slides.

THEME STATEMENT:__________________________________________________________

Connections of theme to classroom studies and/or to your life or community:

OBJECT #1 (title, country, ethnic group)________________________________________

Information about the object and relationship to the theme:

Discussion questions:

OBJECT #2 (title, country, ethnic group)________________________________________

Information about the object and relationship to the theme:

Discussion questions:

OBJECT #3 (title, country, ethnic group)________________________________________

Information about the object and relationship to the theme:

Discussion questions:

Alternative: Choose one object from another culture that relates to your theme and explain the connection.
Creative Writing Exercise

African art is powerful and evocative. Take time to really look and choose one artwork that intrigues you. Then, using all of your senses and imagination, create a tale about that object, starting with one of the following phrases:

_ Would you believe me if I told you...
_ On the inside looking out, I see...
_ These things slowly came together and formed...
_ Last night I heard the strangest sounds...
_ When no one is looking, it...
_ Through the crowd and noise appeared this interesting...
_ Gazing back at me in the mirror I saw...
_ Although it seemed so real, I now know...

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**Classroom Applications**

**SLIDE 1**

*Equestrian and Four Figures*
Mali; Bougouni; Bankoni
Probably late 14th/early 15th century
Terracotta

1. Look carefully and think about what you see. What do these objects look like? Describe each one in as much detail as possible. What body parts have been exaggerated, and why? Discuss the static, yet graceful poses and what each one suggests about these figures. In what ways do these five figures relate to each other? Examine the detailed lines and small shapes you see on the figures and suggest what they might represent. How are the characteristics of clay revealed in the shapes used to make these figures? What do the following represent: horse (authority, prosperity, power); ornaments and elaborate hairstyles (wealth, high status); daggers & sheaths (hunting, military power).

2. Objects enter museum collections with varying amounts of background information. Refer to this object's description and the description of its region in this manual. Several theories have been proposed for this group. The figures may have been (1) a ceremonial group used as a prayer or offering for protection from flooding, (2) clay portraits commemorating a royal family, or (3) objects used for initiation and fertility festivities. Divide class into three groups, with each group choosing one of these theories. Each theory should be supported by the evidence you see by carefully examining the sculptures; by researching the area where these figures were found, the Bankoni culture, and similar sculptures; as well as by thoughtful conjecture. You may create charts, diagrams, or use photocopied pictures. Your findings may take the form of a written or oral report, or a panel discussion among the three groups.

Alternative: Create a poster illustrating and describing your "archaeological find" and your own theory behind the meaning and use of these figures. You may take an historcal approach or an imaginative one. Your poster should both visually and verbally support your theory.

3. These figures are made of terracotta. Have you ever worked with clay? What techniques did you use to form and decorate your work? Research where clay comes from and what processes it must go through to result in figures like these. What does that tell you about the culture that produced them? How durable is clay and how might these have survived from the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century? (Consider the climate of Mali, use of these figures, and where they were found.) The basic forms and details have qualities intrinsic to the clay from which they were made. How different would they appear if made from metal, cloth, wood, beads, fur, or stone?

4. Because these figures were found buried together, they may have been displayed together. Although not physically attached to each other, they relate in terms of technique, style, and posture. Create your own group of figures, designing them to directly support one of the theories proposed in #2 above. Think about how to do this most effectively, as it should be clear by looking at your group what function they serve. You may wish to investigate other African objects.
which relate to that theme for additional sources of design. You may use pencil, paint, or clay to make your figures. When finished, compare your results to those of your classmates and discuss the similarities that exist among the figures serving the same function (sharing the same theory).

Alternative: Your family is composed of a group of people. Each is unique, yet you all relate to each other on many levels. Create a portrait of your family, including characteristics or objects that identify and/or are important to each member.
Standing Male Figure
Mali; Dogon
18th century
Wood, sacrificial material

1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What is depicted in this sculpture? Describe what you see in as much detail as possible. Although somewhat contradictory, how do the angles and curves, vertical and diagonals combine to create a feeling of balance and harmony? Compare the size and shape of the arms to the legs. Why are some body parts exaggerated? What gives this figure the strength and stability it seems to possess? What appears to be on one shoulder and what purpose might it have served? Are any parts missing altogether? Why might this be the case? Describe the other details that embellish the figure (hair, beard, necklace). What do they suggest about the figure? Examine the surface of the sculpture and explain what might have caused it to look this way.

2 - The Dogon valued sculpture for its artistic form and religious function. Usually found on altars, figures like this were dedicated to important ancestors who could give spiritual assistance (ensuring ample rainfall, successful farming, community harmony, and healthy children). Prayers were said and rituals performed to honor and please ancestors. Who were some of your ancestors? What do you know about them and where did you learn this information? Do you, or someone you know, ever ask them for help? What do you (or they) request? Do you ever do anything that honors or would have pleased a relative who is gone? Investigate other cultures that ask help from ancestors and compare their rituals to those of the Dogon. How, from whom, and when do people ask for spiritual help? For what do they generally ask? Discuss how this seems to be a universal phenomenon.

Alternative: Write a request or favor to one of your ancestors. Compare your request to those of your classmates. What categories do they seem to fall into? Discuss the difference between specific personal requests and more general ones (those requested for the local community or for all people). Are any of these requests similar to the ones made by the Dogon or by the other cultures studied?

3 - It was believed that the build-up of sacrificial materials, applied year after year, added a powerful force to this sculpture. Why would animal blood, millet porridge or oil have been the materials chosen by the Dogon? Other African objects are believed to have special powers associated with them without the addition of these materials. What are some of these objects and where does their power come from? (crown, stool) Discuss the power associated with various objects in other cultures (American flag, religious chalice, royal scepter), as well as the basis for that power.

4 - European sculptures of the male form from the same period as this figure were usually based on idealized bodies. How does that concept compare to the spiritual one used by the Dogon artist who carved this figure? Make drawings or photocopies from magazines and art books of male sculptures from various time periods and cultures. Bring these to class to discuss and compare. What purpose did these sculptures serve and where were they displayed? Who created them and why? Discuss what can be learned about the values and customs of a culture through its depiction of the male form.

5 - The altars which included figures like this were generally located in the upper story of a house, a corner of the living quarters, a granary, a courtyard, or a separate structure adjacent to the family compound. Create a drawing of this figure (or a photocopy of it) on an altar situated in one of these places. Use your imagination, and/or research, for additional details to include in your picture.

Alternative: Create an altar dedicated to one of your ancestors (or someone you admire). You may use photographs, mementos, and/or drawings. In a short statement, explain where you would place this altar and why, as well as how and when you might use it.
1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What do these objects look like and what gives you that impression? The headdresses combine recognizable forms and abstract shapes. Name all of the animal forms you see. What do you think the repeated triangular shapes represent? Although very different, how do the angles and curves work together to create one visually pleasing image? 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? What materials were used to make these sculptures? (wood, brass tacks, hammered metal, quills) Which figure represents a male and which a female? Why might both have been included here? What might the baby suggest?

2 - It took great skill to create these objects by an artist adept at working with both metal and wood. What tools and techniques do you think he used to make them? Research the specialized group of Bamana men who made headdresses like this, as well as other objects they made (hoes, guns, lanterns, and other ritual objects). What training did they receive and from whom? How were they treated by the community that used these objects? Who makes masks today in Mali? How does their training and life compare to these craftsmen from the mid-19th century?

3 - Explore the multiple meanings (artistic, social, legendary) of the words chi wara. Learn how the male and female headdresses are always worn in pairs, dancing together, representing the cooperation and unity required for successful farming. Research the two dancers’ movements and what they represent. What is their relationship to each other and what qualities does someone need to wear these headdresses? Investigate the Bamana myth about Chi Wara, the half-man, half-antelope who taught the Bamana how to farm.

4 - These headdresses were worn during ceremonial dances just before planting or harvest to ensure agricultural fertility. A special Bamana association teaches about farming in terms of seasons, soil, and plants. How do American farmers learn to farm? Discuss what other farming communities, past or present, have done to ensure successful crops. What social activities took place, or take place, at planting or harvest times and what purpose do they serve? Study Eastman Johnson’s *Husking Bee, Island of Nantucket* (above) for one such scene at that time in history.

5 - Two animals, the antelope and the anteater (or aardvark), are represented by these composite sculptures. Discuss the physical attributes that make them ideal choices for suggesting the human qualities vital for successful farming. After carefully studying photographs of these animals, create your own composite drawing. Decide which features you want to include and use your imagination in combining them to form one interesting image. Simplify, change, or abstract some of the shapes, adding details and decorations for interest.

**Alternative:** Create a headdress for a celebration of the planting or harvest season. It may be based on historic fact, imaginative fiction, or modern scientific information. It may express ecological, romantic, utopian, or futuristic viewpoints. The design and choice of materials should be appropriate to the approach taken. A brief oral or written description of the celebration should accompany the headdress. Check your school or local library and bookstores for the many books available that describe simple and more complex mask-making techniques.
1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What is this object? It has two main parts. Describe each section in as much detail as possible. Which one seems to be the most important, and why? Explain how the parts work together to create one strong image. What is the female figure doing? Compare the size of her hands and arms to her legs. Describe her masklike face and expression. Examine the details on her body (scarification, jewelry) and what they imply about her social standing. Although dwarfed by the size of the drum, what suggests that she is comfortable with her load? How does her position make her almost appear to be part of the stool on which she sits? Examine and describe the images on the drum. Although the special meaning of these images is known only to community members who possess that knowledge, what might they suggest?

2 - The Senufo are a **matrilineal** society, where women are viewed as the family founders, spiritual mediators, and are considered more beautiful in form than men. Explain how this object visually affirms the value placed on women and their contributions. Although this particular image refers to the physical loads African women bear (carrying containers of water or grain, firewood, ceramic pots), what else might it allude to? (social responsibility, hard work, childbearing) Have you ever carried a large, heavy object on your head? What difficulties did you encounter? Research the variety of contexts in which drums like this were used — when, by whom, and for what purpose.

**Alternative:** Investigate other matrilineal societies, such as the Northwest Coast American Indians. How do they view women? Are their views expressed in their artwork and if so, how? In the late twentieth century, how are women viewed in the Côte D'Ivoire and in the United States? What was their role 100 years ago and what might it be 100 years from now? Examine reasons for the changes that have taken place and predict what might influence changes in the future. Describe the roles of your mother, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, or other women you know who represent different generations.

3 - Closely examine the simple, yet bold images on the drum itself. Discuss how they represent male power and success and how, when combined with the female figure, suggest the social balance and harmony valued in Senufo society. They are also strong visual forms in their own right. Make several sketches based on the figures, animals, and borders that you see here. Use these, and your imagination, to create a picture of your own design in pencil, paint, or cut paper shapes. If you wish, when finished with your design, roll your paper into a cylinder, securing the edges so that it forms a drum shape.

4 - This object is both a visually pleasing art form and a functional musical instrument. What is the drum head made of? How is it attached to the drum? Have you ever played a drum? What did you use to hit the top, how many different tones could you get, and how did you do it? Research different types of African drums, such as the donno drum, which looks like an hourglass, or atumpan drums, which are like kettledrums. Music is an important part of African celebrations. What other instruments are traditionally played? (kalungu, kassar, mbira, gondje, rattles) What are they made from and how do they sound? Compare recordings of traditional music from different African nations. Try to guess the instrumentation. Listen to the repeating rhythms, the call-and-response patterns, and compare them to other music you have heard. What influence has traditional African music had on music from other countries? What does contemporary African music sound like? What outside influences have had an effect on it?

**Alternative:** Compare this drum to drums or guitars used by American rock bands. What do designs on these instruments suggest about our culture? Would people unfamiliar with our culture understand the designs? Bring to class pictures of musical instruments from other countries and centuries. Through research and conjecture, try to understand the source and meaning of designs that decorate them.
SLIDE 5

Mask (Kponyungo)
Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Senufo
Mid-19th/mid-20th century
Wood, applied color

1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What is this? How do you think it was worn? What single word describes this mask? What do you see that suggests that particular word? What helps to give this mask a strong sense of aggressive power? Do you think there is an animal in the Côte d'Ivoire that looks like this? Explain your response. How many different animals are depicted, what are they, and how are they represented? (seven animals: hyena—open jaws; crocodile—teeth; warthog—tusks protruding from mouth and snout; antelope—long straight horns; ram—curved, striated horns; chameleon and hornbill—both seen between the horns) Does this mask look as if it had been carved from one piece of wood or as if several pieces were joined together?

2 - This sculpture represents supernatural power, the ability to harness dangerous and powerful spiritual forces. The artist has created a composite of many animals which represent powers of the wilderness. Discuss the unique characteristics of each animal and their relationship to the purpose and use of this mask in performance? With the help of the audience, how is the dancer transformed by the mask?

Alternative: Discuss the use of masks in our society today. They primarily serve to transform, entertain, hide, and/or protect. Based on the idea of transformation, think of characteristics that you would like to possess, or improve upon. What animals share, or represent, these traits? After studying pictures of these animals, draw several sketches combining various parts of the animals. Create a design for an interesting mask based on these drawings and your imagination to help your “transformation.”

3 - Images in objects used, or art viewed by a culture are usually geared to the community they serve and the knowledge that audience possesses. For the people this mask was made for, it has layers of meaning. Research what legends are associated with the animals represented on this mask. In your community, what are examples of images that are understood primarily by the group they serve? (girl or boy scout badges, school or club symbols, team mascots, etc.)

4 - The aggressive qualities visible in this mask are acted out by jerky, erratic movements when it is worn in a masquerade performance. This unpredictable and normally unacceptable behavior, believed due to supernatural forces, is meant to scare the audience and contributes additional power to the mask and performer. Similar “firespitter” masks were worn at night, with the performer making sparks by blowing on glowing embers held by sticks. Why would this type of mask and performance be effective in maintaining social order, enforcing rules, and punishing transgressors? Compare it to some Hopi kachinas (dolls representing ancestral spirits of the Pueblo Indians) which are used to discipline children. How is social order maintained in your community and who is charged with this duty?

Alternative: Imagine that you are wrapped in the darkness of night, with only the light from a fire or bright moon to illuminate you. Now imagine that you are wearing this mask and the complete costume that would cover your body. Concentrate and try to feel its power. Picture how you would move, expressing the supernatural and dangerous forces it embodies. Move accordingly.

5 - This powerful image was intended to inspire fear. Bring to class pictures of vicious-looking animals, discuss scary stories and monster movies, share experiences that were frightening. What is similar or the same about these experiences? Create your own “monster” (or fear-provoking image) based on any of the alternatives discussed above. Use the medium that best expresses your idea. Trade these monster images with a classmate and write a description of the one you receive. Take turns reading the descriptions out loud and see if students can guess to which monster image it refers. Discuss what inspired your own image.
SLIDE 6

Headdress (D'mba)
Guinea; Baga
Mid-19th/early 20th century
Wood, metal

1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What does this look like? Describe it in as much detail as possible. How do the simplified rounded shapes underscore and contribute to the strength of the female form depicted? If many small sharp angles had been used instead, how different would the overall feeling of this figure be? How is the hair defined and what does its prominence suggest? Describe the intricately carved details on the face, neck, and breasts. What might they represent and what do they imply about her social status? How do they add to the visual impact of this sculpture? There is an interesting interplay between the large shapes and the thin forms. Explain how this imparts a feeling of energy to the headdress. What do the large holes on the "legs" suggest? Where do you see evidence of the marks left by the carver's tools? Shiny brass furniture tacks once embellished this mask. Where do you see the green corrosion marks they have left?

2 - D'mba masks embody important beliefs about fertility, cooperation, and continuity. Examine this mask carefully for visual characteristics which suggest these beliefs (large sagging breasts resulting from feeding many babies, hairstyle suggests planted fields and fertility). Explore the relationship of this mask to the important occasions for which it was used (during rice planting and harvest festivals, births, marriages, and funerals).

3 - This mask represents the spiritual patron of women, a universal mother. Look for and bring to class images of women and motherhood from other times and cultures. Discuss what each implies about the time and place from which it comes. Research how Baga mothers typically spent their day in Guinea in the late nineteenth century. What physical and character traits were most admired? How many children did they generally have? How different is their life today? How are women and mothers viewed in your community? What traits are most admired?

Alternative: Using magazine pictures, drawings, and words, create a collage that explores the concept of "universal mother."

4 - This mask is also used to promote and celebrate agricultural fertility, as well as cooperation in the labor needed for farming. Because the United States is an industrialized nation, most people do not raise crops for their own use. Imagine a culture where communities do raise what they eat. If it does not rain, if the soil is poor, if insects infest crops—people do not eat. Discuss why rituals requesting agricultural fertility and growth would be important to the Baga. Research the climatic and soil conditions in Guinea. How is rice grown? What other crops do the Baga grow? What were their agricultural practices in the late nineteenth century and what are they today? Investigate methods and tools used by the Baga for planting and harvesting crops, as well as food storage systems. How have these changed for the average person living in rural Guinea? Who is responsible for farming? Is it a communal activity or does each family work alone? Compare these agricultural practices to farming technology used in the United States.

5 - The wood-and-metal headdress is only part of the full masquerade. Research how it was worn, what was added to it (painted jewelry to ears, straw or fabric to nose, wooden hoop), and what else the costume included (long raffia skirt and fabric shawl). Investigate the masquerade performance; when and where it took place. How did the dancer move and what or who accompanied him? Using this information and your own imagination, complete the "picture" by drawing this mask and the costume that was also worn. Compare your interpretation to those of your classmates.
SLIDE 7

Portrait Mask of a Woman (N'Doma)
Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Baule
Mid-19th/mid-20th century
Wood, metal, pigment

1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What is this? Describe it in as much detail as possible. Who do you think it represents, a man or woman? What makes you think that? What did you notice first about it and why? What are the conical shapes at the top of the head? How does this elaborate hairstyle suggest prestige and luxury? What are the raised, repeated details embellishing the face and what do they imply? How would you describe the facial expression? Although based on a specific individual, this face is idealized. What does that mean and how is it evident here?

2 - N'Doma means “double” or “namesake,” and it refers to an actual person. When this mask was used in performance, the dancer wearing it would include characteristic gestures of the woman on whom it was based. Her personal clothing and jewelry would also become part of the costume worn by the dancer. She would join the dancer, and upon her death, another woman in her family would take her place, providing continuity through generations. Examine personal gestures of individuals you know, gestures that distinguish them from other people. Imitate an elderly uncle or the characteristic move of a famous athlete. What specific articles of clothing would be recognizable as belonging to those individuals? Does your family pass down any special clothing or jewelry (heirlooms) that belonged to a deceased relative? Describe those objects and discuss how, when used, they serve to honor the person who owned them.

3 - Masks like this representing real men and women (and others that represent animals and stereotypical characters) are used to perform in scenes satirizing and celebrating aspects of daily life. Investigate what these other masks looked like. Research what late-nineteenth-century daily life encompassed for the Baule living in the Côte d'Ivoire. What scenes might have been reenacted using these masks? What is daily life like now for school-age Baule children? How does it compare to the way you spend your day?

Alternative: Choose several activities from your daily life on which to base a series of drawings. Discuss the concept of satire. Now choose one of your drawings and create another based on it, only this time make it a satire. What is the difference? Which one was more difficult to do and which do you prefer?

4 - This portrait mask was carved to honor a specific individual in the community. Although facial features have been idealized (not portrayed realistically), recognizable details of the individual, such as hairstyle and scarification marks, are captured. Examine other cultures that have created idealized portraits. How and why did they do this? (Consider: Moche portrait vessels from Peru; Egyptian, Greek, and Roman portrait sculptures.) The Baule concept of ideal beauty includes both physical (beauty of youth) and moral (wisdom and status of age) qualities. How are intelligence, civility, and composure reflected in this mask? Discuss the difference between inner and outer beauty. Are both of these concepts equally revered in late-twentieth-century America? On what do you base your response? Describe your personal interpretation of ideal beauty.

Alternative: Create two self-portraits. One should be a realistic version and the other an idealized interpretation. Which one did you find more difficult to do and why? Which one do you like better and why?

5 - Discuss portraiture in general. Who are the people who have portraits sculpted or painted? The Baule created portrait masks of individuals admired in their community for their beauty, social status, or dancing ability. Who in your community is admired and why? Look at portraiture throughout the centuries. Consider examples in the Art Institute teacher manual Many Faces: Modern Portraits and Identities (see bibliography).

Alternative: Think about people whom you admire. Choose one and create a portrait of that person. Include in your picture a visual hint as to what you respect about him/her. A short statement explaining your admiration may also accompany your portrait.
1. Look carefully and think about what you see. What is this? What have you seen that looks similar? How do you imagine this object was used? What did you first notice about it and why? List all of the colors you see. Examine how some of the colors combine with others to create additional colors. What shapes seem to dominate the design of this fabric? Looking more closely, what other shapes do you see? Do horizontal or vertical lines seem to dominate? Describe the interesting interplay between simple and more elaborate areas. How do the variations in shape, line, and color work together to create interesting patterns and rhythms? If you could touch it, how do you think it would feel?

2. Although visually striking when exhibited flat like this, kente is even more impressive when worn and seen in motion. When the king wore this type of garment, it was a sign of his personal dignity and the power of the state. Some designs were reserved for the sole use of royalty. Investigate how kente was worn and what other items comprised the king’s official regalia (sandals, caps, jewelry, staffs, stools, umbrellas). Compare these garments and objects to those worn and used by other types of leaders (the queen of England, the Roman Catholic pope, military generals). What basic characteristics do they all have in common?

Alternative: Across cultures and throughout time, clothing has expressed status, wealth, power, prestige, and community. How are these qualities reflected in the clothing of the Asante? What did rulers in other African nations wear in the early part of this century and what do they wear now? What did common people wear and how do they dress now? In your own community, what articles of clothing connote prestige or social status and why? Who wears them? Discuss how clothing is a reflection of the person wearing it. Examine how it can also indicate one’s occupation, age, or where one lives. What are examples of these? Discuss fads such as baggy pants or platform shoes in the 1990s. Why are they popular and for whom?

3. One can appreciate the beauty and vitality of kente simply by looking at it. For a deeper appreciation, investigate the meaning of its colors, symbols, and designs. Like other African works of art, many motifs refer to historic events, individual achievements, moral values, or proverbs. Some designs are affiliated with royal lineage or a particular clan. Colors represent ideas and have symbolic significance. Research the meaning of some of these elements and create a chart with your classmates based on your discoveries.

Alternative: Compare traditional African textiles to each other, such as: Asante or Ewe kente, resist-dyed Yoruba adire, stamped Asante adinkra, appliqued Fante Asafo flags, mud-painted Bamana bogolanfini, Kuba raffia cloth, and Hausa embroidered robes. These may in turn be compared in design, technique, or use to traditional textiles or clothing of other cultures, such as American colonial quilts and coverlets, Japanese kimonos, Navajo weavings, or Scottish clan plaids.

4. The designs used for some African textiles, especially kente cloth, are often said to be the visual equivalent of jazz (or much African music). Explore this connection. Relate the following musical descriptions to this art object: repetitive rhythms with interesting variations; breaking the expected by staggering or suspending the pattern; a mood created by color changes and shifting patterns; impromptu motifs within a regular beat; contrasts of hot and cool, loud and soft, simple and complex; solos with overlapping choruses. If feasible in the classroom, listen to jazz music to hear if it “sounds” like this cloth “looks.” Listen to traditional African music and compare it to both the sound of jazz and the patterns of kente.

5. Brightly printed cloth based on traditional kente patterns is widely available in the United States and is often used for hats, ties, vests, bedspreads, and even backpacks. It has become a symbol of cultural pride for people of African descent. Look for and bring to class examples of kente designs from books, newspapers, magazines, and greeting cards. Discuss the social and political implications. Look for similar displays of ethnic pride worn by other groups in the United States, such as: the wearing of green by the Irish on St. Patrick’s Day, Scottish kilts or tartan plaids worn as formal attire, Indian saris
worn daily. Examining the history and meaning of these traditions leads to understanding and celebrating cultural diversity and ethnic roots.

6 - Although visually complex, this textile may be viewed in terms of the techniques used to weave and assemble it. Upon careful and close examination, you can begin to understand how it is made. Basically, sets of horizontal fibers interlace with vertical fibers to create narrow woven cloth strips, which are then sewn together to form the larger cloth. Using graph paper, create your own kente cloth design. Based on the squares of the paper and using colored pencils, create a “strip” which contains simple solid areas, stripes, and intricate geometric designs. Draw a similar one next to it, varying the color and design slightly. Repeat the first strip design in the next section, and continue, adding a new design occasionally.

Alternative: If time permits, investigate the many books that describe and explain weaving techniques on simple looms. Using thin yarn or thick thread, experiment with weaving narrow strips that incorporate kente-like designs.
SLIDE 9

Goldweights [Man with Powder Keg, Geometric Design, Monkey, Catfish]
Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Akan 18th/early 20th century
Brass

1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What are these objects? Describe each one in as much detail as possible. Are they realistically rendered? How has the artist captured the essence of each creature? Examine details and the texture of each one. Which one might have been the most difficult to make and why? Each figure is a specific weight which determines its size. How does the small scale of these objects affect their impact on the viewer? What do they remind you of? (game pieces, charms, trinkets, toys) Describe what they might feel like to hold in your hands.

2 - These objects made of brass were used to weigh gold dust in business transactions. Research what this process involved and who did it. Investigate the economics and commerce of the Akan in the mid-nineteenth century. When was gold dust first used in Ghana as currency and for how long? What became of the goldweights after that time? Investigate other designs used for goldweights and how the shapes changed over time. Africa supplied Europe with most of its gold before the Americas were discovered. How was gold mined in Africa and where? Research kingdoms that were considered part of the “Gold Coast,” as well as trade routes, goods traded, and the flow of gold from country to country. What effect did this gold trade have on African kingdoms and cities involved?
Alternative: Explore gold objects made by the Akan and other ethnic groups in Africa, such as jewelry, pectoral (chest) discs, sword ornaments, and umbrella finials. Who were the artists that made these objects and for whom were they made? Investigate the use, allure, and power associated with gold across time and cultures. Why has it continued to fascinate people to this day? Research how it has been immortalized in stories, legends, and works of art (golden fleece, gold lamb, gold chalice).

3 - The Akan have a history of visually rich speech. Figures like these goldweights are associated with proverbs. Which two figures would relate to the following proverbs: (1) “One should always take care” (or “Don’t some of us smoke even when carrying gunpowder”) (2) “No good can come from playing with a dangerous man” (or “The river fish’s game is no safe game”). Discuss the meaning of these proverbs. Examine the important function proverbs serve to the Akan, as well as to other groups. (Refer to classroom activity #9 on pages 101-102 to further explore the universality of African proverbs.) How do proverbs give advice to the community they serve? How can they continue to carry meaningful messages to us today? Investigate other goldweights and proverbs connected with them. (Refer to pages 106-108 in this manual for additional African proverbs.)
Alternative: Choose one of the following.
(1) Create your own interpretation for designs based on a man with a powder keg, a geometric design, a monkey, and a catfish. (2) Create original goldweight designs based on other African proverbs. (3) Write your own proverbs and create designs which visually represent them. (4) Have class suggest proverbs they know and choose one to illustrate.

4 - When a young Akan man was old enough to begin to buy and sell in the market on his own, he often received a “coming-of-age” gift from his father of a set that included small weights, balance scales, spoons, scoops, and gold dust. Research what these typically looked like. Design a set for yourself (not to be actually used, but as a “symbolic set”). What forms would the weights take to relate to your life or possible future job? What proverbs might be associated with your weights to guide you in your “business transactions?”
SLIDE 10

Plaque of Warrior Chief
Nigeria, Court of Benin; Edo
16th/18th century
Bronze

1 - Look carefully and describe what you see. What is this? What indicates that part of this object may be missing? Describe the figure and what he seems to be doing. What does that tell you about him? Does this look like a portrait of an actual person or is it an idealized, stylized image? Explain your answer. Describe the elaborate details adorning the figure. What do they appear to be and what do they imply about his status? Discuss the contrast between the smooth and richly textured areas, the almost three-dimensional shapes, and flat, but finely decorated areas. What appears to be in the background?

2 - The kingdom of Benin was one of Africa’s most powerful military and commercial nations. Due to a strong emphasis on the social hierarchy of prestigious positions, much may be learned by studying this plaque and others which depict important people in positions of power. Research the origin and organization of this highly structured kingdom. What was its size? What was believed to be the source of the Oba’s (ruler’s) power and what was its scope? Has that changed over time? Investigate the basis of Benin’s economy. What was its relationship to Portugal in 1485 and to Britain in 1897? Compare the Benin Kingdom at the height of its power to other important African kingdoms or nations, or to the government of Nigeria, as it is today.

3 - The technology used to make this brass plaque (and the weight discussed above) is very complex. Discuss the lost-wax casting process and what it implies about the culture that supported it. How is brass made and from where do the materials come? What other brass art objects were made for the royal court of Benin? Why is brass an appropriate material to be used for lasting tributes to a king? Investigate what materials have been used by other African nations for royal art objects or as tributes to their leaders.

What were the materials of choice and objects created for European courts and their royalty at this time?

Alternative: Abundantly filled with detail, this object provides much information regarding other important Benin arts. Examine the jewelry, headress, clothing, and weapon represented in this plaque. Create a chart listing each object, its materials, function, and symbolism, plus a description or sketch. (For example: hip ornament; brass; fastens clothing; status.)

4 - This Benin warrior chief is idealized, based on a “formula” which uses standard poses, clothing, and motifs. It has more relevance to the kingdom than to any specific individual. Compare this figure to Bernardo Martorell’s Saint George Killing the Dragon (below). Discuss what clothing, weapons, expressions, poses, and backgrounds imply about the place, time, and culture of each work.

5 - Benin plaques were hung from the wooden columns of the royal palaces. Research what Benin City (the capital and center of industry) and the palace complex looked like in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. What was the general layout? What did the buildings and/or architectural details look like? Why was the production of these plaques so important to the king? What other types of art objects did he commission? Investigate what they looked like, what materials were used, and what functions they served. Based on this knowledge, create drawings or scale models of the city, the royal complex, particular buildings, or royal art objects.

Bernardo Martorell
Spanish, c. 1400-1452
Saint George Killing the Dragon, 1430/35
Tempera on panel; 61 1/8 x 38 5/8 in. (155.3 x 98 cm)
Gift of Mrs. Richard E. Danielson and Mrs. Chauncey McCormick, 1933.786

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6 - These plaques served as a visual and historical record of the Kingdom of Benin. The images recorded important events, leaders, ceremonies, and objects. What monuments and memorials to important people are located in your community? Why were they recorded in this manner and what does their location imply about their importance? Much of our history is written. Discuss what other forms it has taken more recently. (tape-recorded oral histories, photographs, videotapes). Do you think written history will someday become obsolete? Examine reasons for keeping a record of important events and people and why it seems to be so basic and universal.

**Alternative:** Research the history of your school (or neighborhood). For whom or what is it named? Who were (or are) important people associated with it? What special events took (or take) place there? Divide the class into groups and have each group design a plaque based on one aspect of the school (or neighborhood). When completed, hang the plaques together on one wall of the classroom “palace.”
Veranda Post of Enthroned King (Opo Ogoga)
Carved by Olowe of Ise (died 1938)
From the palace of the Ogoga (King) of Ikere
Nigeria, Ekiti, Ikere; Yoruba
1910/1914
Wood, pigment

1. Look carefully and think about what you see. What did you notice first about this sculpture and why? It is quite complex. How many figures do you see? What seems to be the relationship between the two large figures? What suggests that? What are the two smaller figures doing and how do they connect to the larger ones? Look closely at details embellishing the figures (hairstyles, crown, jewelry, scarification, clothing). What do they imply about figures they adorn? This elaborate sculpture holds together and makes one strong visual statement. Examine how the artist has accomplished this. What repeated shapes and lines do you see? How do they lead your eyes from one part of the sculpture to another? What indicates that this sculpture might have been part of something else?

2. Explore how the artist has visually expressed in this sculpture the complementary roles of Yoruba men and women in society. Discuss visible similarities between the two large figures. How do they relate to each other in posture? She is blue and he was colored red. Research the Yoruba meaning of those colors and how they relate to the concepts of unity and balance. Women play an important role in Yoruba life. How is that suggested here? (size, posture, gaze) Her body is that of a woman in her prime. The particular woman portrayed here is senior wife to the king. Although the king is smaller and seated, what suggests his importance? (Consider: throne, clothing, jewelry, crown.)

3. The crown on the king’s head is the real focus of this sculpture and the key to royal power and authority. The artist obviously spent much time carving the crown’s details with care and skill. Compare it to an illustration of a beaded crown. (See page 50.) Investigate the crown’s associations to divine presence, past rulers, supernatural powers, ancestors, and references to women. How were these crowns made and what materials were used? Bird images are often featured prominently on Yoruba crowns. What do they symbolize? What powerful herbs were hidden in the top of the crowns and what purpose did they serve? Compare this crown to those used by rulers from other African kingdoms or to royal crowns from other cultures and times.

Alternative: Design a crown for yourself, based on the power and authority you would like to possess. What images and symbols would you include?

4. This caryatid sculpture (see page 29 and slide 4) served as the center post supporting the roof of a veranda where the king of Ikere would greet guests (see illustration page 49). Investigate what the post looked like in its original site. Discuss why this sculpture, representing important Yoruba leadership and family ideals, would have been appropriate for that location. If you were to design a post for a similar location for the president of the United States, what would it look like? What images and symbols would best represent the ideals of this country? Create a drawing for a post, including a short statement explaining your design. Share the results with your classmates and discuss and compare the concepts expressed by the various post designs.

Alternative: Design a post for your own home. Consider images that would best reflect your family and their values. Would figures and household pets be part of the design? Would family interests and/or ideals of the community be included? You may represent these ideas realistically, symbolically, or in any manner you choose. Indicate on the back of your drawing what materials you would use to make the post if it were actually going to be installed near your front door.
SLIDE 12

Mask for Gelede

Master Fagbote or Falola Edun
Nigeria, Ketu; Yoruba
Early/mid-20th century
Wood, pigment

1. Look carefully and think about what you see. This mask seems to include two major sections—a large head and a superstructure above it. Examine the head and describe what you see. How have the features been exaggerated and what is the expression on the face? Describe the two figures and the animal on top of the head. What seems to be happening here? Why would the artist have enlarged the size of the hunter’s hands, forearms, and feet? Describe facial features and expressions of the two figures; compare them to the large head below. What is the expression on the animal’s face? Detailed carving was used to suggest the texture of various surfaces. List the textures you see and what they represent. How do they add to the overall visual impact of this mask? Where do you see evidence of the artist’s chisel marks? How are two seemingly contradictory qualities, action and balance, vividly captured here?

2. Gelede masquerades honor Yoruba women (“our mothers”), while at the same time they enlighten, entertain, and guide the community (“the children of our mothers”). This particular mask portrays hunters. Gelede masks address all aspects of Yoruba life and make use of a wide range of images. Investigate other images and the lessons related to them. When and how were these masks used? What social events educate your community and reinforce its values? New masks and dances continue to be created by the Yoruba to address particular situations and concerns. If used for instruction, why would this be important? How does your community or school address new situations and issues?

3. This mask expresses the value of wisdom and cooperation, ideals important to the Yoruba. How do these two hunters exemplify those values? Investigate how the role of hunters was viewed by the Yoruba in the early part of this century. What special knowledge did they possess? What animals did they hunt and what weapons did they use? How are hunters viewed today in Nigeria? What do they hunt and how? Discuss the controversial issue of hunting animals in various parts of Africa. Examine the viewpoints of all concerned, including farmers, hunters, poachers, wildlife preservationists, game wardens, local and national officials, tour companies, and exporters.

Alternative: Investigate the pangolin, including its natural habitat, diet, family life, natural enemies, and defenses. Is it a common animal in Nigeria? What do the Yoruba do with it once they catch it? With what other animals does it share its territory? Are those animals also portrayed in Yoruba art works?

4. Research Ogun, the divine patron of hunters and god of iron. What important lessons does he teach the community and what forms do these lessons take? In what additional patrons or gods do the Yoruba believe? What do they represent and how do they relate to lives of the people? Investigate stories and works of art in which they appear. Compare Ogun to Greek or Roman gods, their myths, and lessons their stories teach.

5. Look into the eyes of this trapped animal. Look at the way its front claws seem to grip into the surface below and how its back legs are clutched by the two hunters. Look at its outstretched body and arched tail. Now try to feel what it is feeling. Write a short paragraph describing what is going through its mind at this moment.

Alternative: Look into the eyes of the hunters. Look at the way they are working together to capture this creature. Their large hands clutch the legs of the animal and each other in an instant of perfect balance. Their bodies are strong and their energies are focused. Feel what they are feeling. Write a short paragraph describing what is going through their minds at this moment.
SLIDE 13

**Mask with Lizard Headdress**
Cameroun; Bamum or Kom
Mid-19th/early 20th century
Wood

1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What did you first notice about this object? What makes this face seem so powerful and alive, almost seeming to breathe? In as much detail as possible, describe each feature. Examine how shadows created by the deep brow make the gaze of the eyes more intense. How would you describe the expression portrayed by the mouth and teeth? Working together, notice how all features of the face become a series of repeating, rounded shapes. How does the headdress or hair echo, yet contrast with the shapes in the face? On closer examination, describe it from a front view and then from the side.

2 - The men's regulatory association, affiliated with the fon (king), controlled the use of this type of mask. What makes this particular image effective for a group charged with maintaining order and enforcing laws of the community, as well as the king's special orders? Discuss at what events these masks were used. Who helps to control order and enforce laws in your community and what identifies these officials? If they attend a social event, what effect does their presence have?

3 - This mask was just one part of the performance in which it was used. Research the rest of the costume and what else was part of the ensemble. How did the dancer move and after performing, what did he ask for and receive from the audience? What instruments were used to create the music, what did they look like, and who played them? Try to get a variety of images in your mind as to how this performance looked, felt, and sounded. Create several drawings based on your research and images you feel and see, as if part of a dream. Experiment with trying to capture the movement and sensory perceptions, the "essence" of the scene, not necessarily a realistic rendering. Try to use shape, line, texture, and color in a free-form manner.

4 - It is believed that animals symbolize various attributes and that the community understands the meaning of these symbols. The Bamum associate the lizard with prestige and royalty. Why does that make it a good choice to adorn this particular mask? Discuss the characteristics of lizards. What other creature images appear on Bamum works of art and what attributes are associated with them? Grassland artists are highly regarded for their artistic skills in creating art works related to prestige and leadership. Who were these artists, how were they trained, what did they make, and for whom?

5 - Animal, bird, reptile, and insect images all appear in African art, as well as in art from other cultures. Much may be learned about a people by studying these images. Bring to class pictures of different types of lizards, or other creatures. Study them carefully, examining each one's unique characteristics. Choose one that most appeals to you and make several very simplified drawings based on it. Each time vary the shapes somewhat, changing them to create a different appearance in each drawing (for example—rounded, angular, skinny). Choose the drawing you like best and cut it out of stiff paper or thin cardboard to use as a stencil. Placing it on a piece of colored construction paper, draw around the outside of the form and any simple inner forms. Move it to other positions on the paper, tracing the shape each time, to create an interesting pattern (such as, all in one line, like the lizards on the mask; forming a circle, with heads or tails touching; or in a tight random formation). The animal shapes may then be filled in with solid colors, patterns, or any details you wish to include. When finished, create a classroom gallery with everyone's drawings taped to the wall. Discuss and enjoy the variety of interpretations.
1. Look carefully and think about what you see. Describe this object in as much detail as possible. Use one word to describe the expression on the face. Do the lines and streaks on the surface alter its expression? (Imagine it without them.) How does the body contrast with the head? Do the muscular arms and strong hands seem to “fit” the body? How do the elongated negative shapes (empty spaces between the arms and body) relate to the figure and become part of the total image? Describe the legs. What might explain this part of the figure? Although body forms are simplified, examine the elaborate hairstyle. What does that imply about the figure? Describe the surface of the sculpture. What might have caused it to look that way? How do the warm, “melting” and, in some areas, wet-looking colors add to the emotional impact of this figure?

2. The Fang believe in the importance of finding harmony between opposites. Search for and discuss examples of opposites (actual or implied) as reflected in this sculpture. Some possibilities are: shiny/dull surface, young/old, stability/vitality, composed expression/tensed muscles, simple face/complex hairstyle, positive/negative shapes, concave/convex surfaces, child-like head/adult body, newborn head/skull, living/dead.

3. While protecting remains of the dead, these reliquaries honored ancestral spirits and were used when asking for their help. Investigate how the Fang renewed the powers of these figures and in what processes they were used. Where were reliquaries kept, who was responsible for their care, and how has this changed over time? Have you ever visited a relative’s gravesite or asked advice from a deceased relative? Do you have any treasured objects that once belonged to someone special who died? If so, do you feel closer to that person when you look at or hold those objects? Discuss your ancestors with other family members. What family stories can they tell about ancestors they never knew? Why might it be important to know who your relatives were? What influence did they have, and possibly continue to have, on your life?

Alternative: Write about one of your relatives (or someone close) who has died and how your relationship with that person has influenced your life. At what times in your life do you tend to think about that person and why? Or create a family tree of your relatives based on the information your family and/or research can provide.

4. Funerary urns and tomb guardian figures are traditional art forms in many cultures. What purpose do they serve? How do they link the living and the dead? Explore burial customs and rituals of different cultures, such as the Mummy Case of Pankhenamun (below) at The Art Institute of Chicago. What does each object suggest about beliefs of the times and cultures from which it comes? Compare Victorian and modern-day tombstones, vaults, or cremation urns. Discuss the variety of burial customs and beliefs of different ethnic groups today.

5. This figure was originally on top of a bark box (a reliquary) containing the bones, and possibly hair or other personal items (the relics), of a deceased ancestor. These sculptures protected the contents and served as a warning to others who could be harmed by the spiritual powers of the relics.

Create a “memory box” to honor someone who is special to you. What would you place inside? What ritual might you create for using it?

Mummy Case of Pankhenamun
Egyptian, Twenty-second Dynasty, c. 900 B.C.
Cartonnage: gummed linen and gesso with painted decoration; h. 81 in (205.2 cm)
W.M. Willner Fund, 1910.238
SLIDE 15
Mask (Mukenga)
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire),
Western Kasai; Kuba
Late 19th/mid-20th century
Wood, glass beads, cowrie shells, feathers, raffia,
fur, fabric, string, bells

1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What is this object? What might give you the impression that this object is important? It is very complex, with a rich variety of shapes, materials, and textures. Consider each of these elements separately. Although the surface is busy, focus on the basic shape of the mask (as if it were all one color and made from one material). What shape is the main part of the mask? What other shapes seem to be attached to it? What animals are represented by some of the shapes you see? (elephant—trunk and tusks; chameleon—protruding eyes) What are some of the materials you see and what might they represent? (cowrie shells—wealth and status; leopard fur—fierce power, leadership; colobus monkey fur—power, wisdom of elders; beads—wealth; parrot feathers—prophecy, worn by senior title holders) Describe the texture of each material and how it would feel if you touched it. Look at the surface patterns formed by these materials. Describe the repeating patterns you see. How does the artist make all of these different elements work together to form one powerful visual image?

2 - Kuba leaders and title holders played important social and political roles in this highly structured kingdom. Worn at funerals or displayed on the deceased, masks like this one honored men of high status and were believed to benefit relationships between the dead and the living. Discuss how the materials and images used for this mask serve as visual symbols of authority, power, and status, thus honoring the dead. What special ceremonies take place at the funeral of a former president of the United States, high-ranking military officers, or important national figures? Discuss how their status is reflected (verbally and visually) in the funeral service and burial.

3 - The images, characteristics, or materials incorporated in this mask represent various animals important to the Kuba and, by their presence, add power to this object. Bring to class pictures of animals. Discuss their particular abilities and unique characteristics. (See pages 104-105 for familiar animal similes used in the United States.) Choose animals whose traits you most admire. Try to find pictures symbolizing or illustrating comparable human traits. Create a collage which explores and expresses these ideas. Using photographs, drawings, stories, and/or poems, make it both a visually and a verbally powerful statement.

Alternative: Discuss movies, comic books, and stories that include humans who slowly or suddenly take on the traits of animals. These powers are used for good or evil, under or out of control, willingly or not. Making full use of your imagination, write a description of an event where you possess and use some supernatural animal powers. Illustrate your story with a drawing or collage.

4 - The bold geometric patterns adorning Kuba masks also are evident on objects from their daily lives, such as wooden boxes and carvings, textiles, building walls, body markings, and clothing. The patterns have names and symbolically refer to animals, plants, and objects. Try to become more aware of the patterns that you see on objects in your daily life—patterns you can actually feel, not just see. The raised designs on coins, speaker grilles, soles of shoes, manhole covers, ornament on buildings, and pegboards are all good examples. Make texture rubbings of objects like these by placing a piece of paper over the object to be copied. Gently rub the side of a dull pencil or crayon over the paper, making sure not to pierce the paper or move it. A pattern should soon emerge. Bring your rubbings to school to share with your classmates. Group the results according to similarities in design (geometric, free-form, animal, plant) and then try to guess the objects from which they came.
1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What is this? What words would you use to describe this mask? What is the expression on her face? Describe each feature and explain how it adds to this expression. How do the repeated shapes and lines add to the visual unity of the face? What else do you see? What do the raised patterns on her face represent? (ritual scarification). Together what do these and the elaborate hairstyle imply about her social status? Name all of the materials used to make this mask. (wood, pigment, fiber, beads)

2 - Part of the visual appeal of this mask is due to the skillful combination of contrasting elements. Describe how the interplay between the small textured areas and the large smooth contours adds strength and interest to this mask. Create a list of other pairs of contrasting characteristics. (smooth face/raised scarification marks; convex/concave surfaces; hard/soft materials; lines curving up/curving down; detailed/simple areas; open/solid surfaces; flexible/rigid materials; irregular/even patterns; organic/geometric shapes)

3 - Although Chokwe boys learn to carve wood, professional carvers created this mask. Describe the steps it would take to transform a piece of wood into this mask. What tools and techniques would the artist have to possess to work with the wood, fiber, and beads used in this object? Have you ever carved anything? If so, what did you make? What materials and tools did you use? What pleasures and/or difficulties did you experience?

4 - *Mwana Pwo* means “beautiful young woman” and masks like this were based on individual women who were admired for their beauty. What specific characteristics of beauty does this mask represent? How has the artist captured the woman’s strength and youth? Are these generally considered signs of beauty in other cultures? Discuss the concept of beauty. Is it viewed the same way in all cultures? Even within one culture, is beauty a standard that remains constant or does it change over time? Examine the three typical Chokwe scarification patterns represented in this mask. What did the Chokwe consider to be other signs of beauty? Research historical examples of body modification for the sake of beauty in other countries and times, such as head shaping by the ancient Americans, foot binding by the Chinese, and body piercing and tattooing by many different cultures. How did these traditions serve in those cultures as emblems of identity and status, as well as beauty?

**Alternative:** Bring to class pictures of people you consider beautiful. How do your examples compare to the current image of beauty promoted today by the movie and fashion industries? What are popular images based on and how do they affect your own self-image? What are examples of things you and your friends do to become “more beautiful”? (diet or workout; cut, color, curl, or straighten hair; pierce or tattoo skin; grow beards, moustaches, or sideburns; undergo plastic surgery; wear nail polish or makeup) Discuss different kinds of beauty.

5 - Masks of this type played an important part in initiation rites of adolescent boys. When worn by the dancer, moving with grace and elegance, the Chokwe ideals of good manners and courtesy were demonstrated. Investigate the male counterpart to this mask, representing power and wealth, known as *Cihongo*. What functions did these specific masks and performances serve? What information regarding religion, social organization, political structure, and the arts were imparted during these initiation rites? How do teenage boys (and girls) learn about religion, history, and cultural values today in our society? Who teaches it to them and where? Do celebrations take place after they have learned this information?

**Alternative:** Some people believe we should integrate more ritual into our daily lives—marking and celebrating important events. Create a ceremony for a personal milestone (past, present, or future) in your life, include what would happen, where it would take place, and who would attend it. Use your imagination, making it as descriptive and as detailed as possible. Your ritual may celebrate anything, for example: losing your first tooth, becoming a brother or sister to your newborn sibling, learning to ride your first bike, joining a sports team, getting your driver’s license, or receiving your first paycheck. If you wish, illustrate your description with a drawing. How does the school day begin with ritual? Is the flag raised or lowered or the Pledge of Allegiance recited?
1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What did you first notice about this sculpture? Describe it in as much detail as possible. The prominent jewelry, patterned loincloth, and elaborate scarification marks adorning this figure are carved with careful attention and in great detail. What does this richly decorated surface suggest about the Luluwa? Which parts of the body are exaggerated and why? Describe the position of the woman’s arms and what that implies about her feelings towards what she is holding. What words would you use to describe the woman’s facial expression? Examine the contrast between the way her smooth, simplified features are carved and the way the detailed, textured patterns surrounding them are carved. What might be the reason for the way the lower portion of this sculpture is finished?

2 - In African art, mother and child sculptures generally signify the importance of fertility and continuity. This particular Luluwa sculpture was carved for and used by women having problems bearing healthy children. Research the Luluwa associations dedicated to these women and the rituals connected to sculptures like this to ensure successful births. Investigate other sculptures that are believed to provide continued well-being for mothers and their children. What other African ethnic groups have similar fertility sculptures and beliefs? Today in our communities, where do women with similar problems seek assistance and what help do they receive? (friends and relatives, established support groups, doctors, fertility clinics, religious leaders)

3 - The image of a mother and child is a popular subject for artists to explore and may be found in a wide range of media and styles, times, and cultures. Why does this theme have such great continued appeal? Examine a work of art that depicts a mother and child and discover what this image conveys about the beliefs, time, and place from which it comes (for example, see Jacques Louis David’s Madame de Pastoret and Her Son, below).

Alternate: Collect magazine pictures or photocopies from books of images that show mothers and their children. Create a collage based on this theme. Feel free to go beyond the typical images one encounters and explore this complex relationship. Drawings, symbols, and words may be incorporated into your collage.

4 - After studying this sculpture carefully, close your eyes and describe what it would feel like to hold in your hands. It would provide a rich tactile experience indeed. Why is this an important and intentional part of its appeal? The Luluwa believe that the skin reflects inner and outer beauty and that it is a reflection of moral character. How do these scarification designs represent that belief? Considered important forms of body decoration, the designs often have special meanings. Research the significance of the concentric circles (refer to heaven and symbolize hope) and the double waved lines (refer to the heartbeat of life for mother and child). What other designs do you see and to what do they refer? Create your own designs representing some of these same concepts. Discuss how designs can represent ideas or objects. Look at art objects from other cultures to see how they represent ideas through symbols and designs (for example, ceramics of the ancient Americas). Do you find any similarities?

Jacques Louis David
French, 1748-1825
Madame de Pastoret and Her Son, 1791/92
Oil on canvas; 52 3/8 x 39 3/8 in. (133.1 x 100 cm)
Clyde M. Carll Fund; Major Aquisotions Endowment, 1967.228
1 - Look carefully and think about what you see. What is this object? What does the figure appear to be doing? How do the shape and position of his feet and legs suggest that he can carry whatever weight is placed upon the seat he holds above his head? What resembles a scale and looks as if it helps balance that weight? What parts of his body have been exaggerated and why might the artist have done that? What suggests virility and masculinity? Is the face naturalistic, or abstracted and masklike? Describe the basic shapes that create the face and the details that embellish it (hair, metal, long nose, teeth). Examine the simplified, angular position of the long arms and fingers and how they contrast with all of the other rounded, swelling forms. Explain how these opposites, along with bent legs ready to spring up, create a dynamic image of vitality, strength, and stability.

2 - The figure carved for this stool is similar to other Songye sculptures known as mankishi, used for healing and protection. Believed to bring good fortune to their owners, medicines were placed in the stomach cavities of such figures. Does the rounded stomach on this figure suggest that belief, as well as a prosperous and healthy ruler? Explain why a Songye chief might want this type of figure for his stool. Discuss the universal concept of "good luck," exploring this phenomenon in other cultures. What do you, or people you know, do for good luck and when? Some examples are people who wear lucky t-shirts or shoes when playing an important basketball game; others carry a rabbit’s foot or special charm for general good luck.

3 - After the Songye chief earns the support of the community and ancestors through rituals, he sits upon the stool and officially receives authority to rule. Who attends this event and what takes place? Compare the Songye ceremony to the coronation of kings or queens or other ceremonies when presidents or other leaders officially receive their power to rule. Compare the design, purpose, and use of the Songye chief’s stool to the thrones or special seats of other rulers. Investigate other regalia that affirm the Songye chief’s power and status (leopard skins, headdresses, staffs) and how these items compare to the regalia of other rulers. Discuss various sources of power for different kinds of rulers and what the powers are based on (for example, intelligence, money, election, physical strength, or family lineage).

Alternative: How would you feel if you could sit upon this hand-carved African royal stool? Much like a throne, it is very special and only the ruler may use it. Imagine that you are a powerful ruler of a fantasy nation. Over what and whom would you have the authority to rule? Write a short paragraph describing your kingdom. Design a stool that would serve as a symbol of your power and status.

4 - Ordinary people had stools, but only important people had elaborately carved ones. Often considered personal objects, stools were to be used only by their owners and abandoned upon death. Others, like this one, were used in public and in ceremonies, as symbols of power. Research the important role stools play in other African nations, as well as the customs, rituals, and uses associated with them. There is an Akan proverb stating, “there are no secrets between a man and his stool.” How would you interpret it? Investigate the Akan Golden Stool, as well as other examples of African personal furniture, which generally included beds, stools, chairs, and headdresses. In addition to the Songye stool, study the Art Institute’s brass-covered Akan ceremonial stool, wooden Chokwe chair, and Yaka Headrest (see page 70 and slide 19).
SLIDE 19
Headrest (Building on Stilts)
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire);
Yaka
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood

1 - Look carefully and think about what you see.
Based only on what you see, without reading the
label, what do you think this object is? Describe
the main portion. Why might it have been placed
on stilts? Imagine what it would look like if the
house were placed directly on the platform. What
geometric shapes do you see? What else do you
see? Explain what purpose the curved top section
might serve. What decorative pattern enlivens the
strong simple shapes? Describe the surface of
this object. Examining it closely, what colors
become apparent? What do you see that shows
evidence of wear or use? What might have been
placed inside the house and why?

2 - This headrest protected an elaborate headpiece
worn by the tilamba, the Yaka chief who
controlled use of the land. His headpiece was a
sign of his authority and leadership. Investigate
what this headpiece looked like, what he added
to it, and why he even had to sleep with it in place
using the headrest as support. Examine headgear
of leaders from other African nations and functions
served by these decorative objects. What
do they share in common? What headgear
proclaims social status or club membership in
your community or school? Describe examples,
who wears them, and when. Discuss other items
worn on the head or in the hair. What messages
do they convey about the person they adorn?

3 - It is believed that this headrest once held
protective packets (inside the house) or had
amulets attached to it. Why would the chief
want to be protected while sleeping? Additionally,
how might the presence of powerful charms
influence important decisions he might need to
“dream on?” Can you think of other items that
serve a protective function for the person sleeping
with them? When you were very young, did you
have a special teddy bear or blanket that provided
security, comfort, and protection? Compare these
to Native American dream catchers, which were
believed to protect sleepers from evil spirits,
catching them so they could do no harm to the
 sleeper.

4 - This particular headrest depicts a building on
stilts. It may represent a family home (referring
to the family unit and associated with ancestors),
a pigeon roost, or a raised container for ritual
objects. Discuss these possibilities and why each
would conform to Yaka customs and beliefs. Try
to find pictures of each and compare them to the
headrest. Other images were also used for the
many headrests that were produced. Investigate
what some of these images were and what they
represented. Compare this headrest, which is
utilitarian yet beautifully designed and crafted, to
those from other countries (particularly China and
Japan) in terms of design and purpose.

5 - The belief in the importance of the head is
evident in much African art. Because the head
guides man, as well as animals, and is used to
solve problems, it is often made larger or more
important by exaggerating its actual size or by
adding a headpiece, elaborate hairstyle, or crown.
(See slides 3, 5, 6, and 15.) Due to its obvious
relationship with the head, headrests were
considered personal furniture and were used only
by their owners. Design a headrest for yourself,
as well as the special packet to be placed inside.
Think about what images would be most
appropriate for this object, to be used only by
you. Consider your interests, strengths, goals,
and favorite objects and how one or more might
be represented on your headrest. What ingredi-
ents would be inside your personal amulet to
give it special powers?
SLIDE 20

*Beer Storage or Serving Vessel*

South Africa; Northern Nguni (probably Zulu)

1940/1950

Terracotta

1. Look carefully and think about what you see. What does this look like? Describe the basic shape and surface of this object. From what material does it appear to be made? What makes you think that? Examine the pattern that decorates the pot and explain how it might have been created. How thick do the walls of this pot appear to be? How heavy do you think it is? If it were filled with liquid, how heavy might it then become? How would you lift it to serve its contents?

2. Zulu pottery falls into two categories, vessels for (1) cooking and serving food, and (2) storing, drinking, and carrying water, milk curds, and beer. Research the shapes of other types of South African pottery. For what was each used and how was it decorated? What materials and techniques were used to create these pots and by whom? Compare Zulu pottery types to those used in other African nations. In addition to terracotta (baked clay), what other materials have been used in African communities as food containers? (calabash, leaves, wood) What changes have taken place since the creation of this beer container about 50 years ago?

3. Beer, nourishing and mildly alcoholic, is served at Zulu social gatherings and is a sign of harmony and well-being. It is offered in appreciation of successful harvests and in remembrance of ancestors on ceremonial occasions. The social sharing of food and drink is universal. Compare Zulu use of beer to the use of beer (or wine) in your community. What is the significance when adults offer a wine “toast” to good fortune at a special event or in appreciation of someone special? How is wine used at religious occasions? Research the use of alcoholic beverages in other times and cultures. What limits, if any, did those societies put on its use? Was it ever abused and if so, what were the consequences?

Alternative: Investigate other beverages and food commonly served in South Africa. Are they similar to foods available in other African countries? What does a typical meal include, who is responsible for making it, and how is it served? From where do its ingredients come? Obtain recipes for traditional African food and investigate American restaurants that serve African food (or food with African influences). Hold a special “Taste of Africa” day in your classroom which is based on your research. Groups of students should prepare or purchase a variety of African food to share, with information regarding its ingredients and preparation.

4. Compare this Zulu beer container to other historical objects used for beer or wine in the collection of the Art Institute, such as Cornelius Kierstede’s *Syllabub cup* (right). Discuss what the shapes, techniques, and decorations reveal about the times and cultures from which these containers come. Examine other drink or food-related objects and the paintings in which they appear.

*Syllabub Cup* American, 1698/1720
Cornelius Kierstede (1675-1757), New York, NY
Silver; h. 5 1/2 in (14 cm), diam. top 5 5/8 in (14.1 cm)
Restricted gift of Mrs. James W. Alsdorf, Pauline Seipp Armstrong, Marshall Field, Charles C. Haffner III, Mrs. Burton W. Hales, Mrs. Harold T. Martin, Mrs. C. Phillip Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Milo M. Naeve, Mrs. Eric Oldberg, Mrs. Frank L. Sulzberger, and the Ethel T. Scarborough Fund, 1984.1172

5. This beer container is visually pleasing in its own right, apart from the function it serves. We often do not pay attention to various utilitarian objects, especially when used on a daily basis. Consider now the design and shape of a specific group of objects with which you come into contact every day. Compile a list of all the food-related containers (cooking, serving, storing, or drinking) that you use in a typical 24-hour period. Discuss how the shapes of the containers relate to their use or to the products they hold. From what materials are they made? Create a class collage using pictures or drawings of various types of food containers, both contemporary American as well as those from other times and places. Discuss their similarities in terms of shape, material, decoration, and use. Create a chart that shows everyone’s findings, using whatever categories the class considers appropriate.

Alternative: Create a drawing or model for a special storage or serving container for your favorite food or beverage. Think about its shape and decoration, and what they imply about the contents and you.
- Bibliography
- Bibliography for Students
- Additional Teaching Materials and Audiovisual Resources
Educational Resources

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: * denotes general sources which provide a good survey and introductory information.


*African Arts*, 1 (1967-68) — present.


Hersak, Dunja. *Songye, Masks and Figure Sculpture.* London: Ethnographica, 1985.


Bibliography for Older Students:


Bibliography for Younger Students:

Additional Teaching Materials:


Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Art and Life in Africa. Minneapolis: Department of Tours and School Services, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, n.d.


Note: A source for inexpensive magazines for collages, etc. is The Second Hand Rose Bookshop at The Harold Washington Library Center in Chicago.

Audiovisual Resources:

Africa: Kings and Cities
Series Title: Africa; No. 4
87 minutes, color, video, 1984, English
Distributor: Home Vision (Video Sales)
5547 N. Ravenswood, Chicago, IL 60640
(312) 878-2600
Fax: (312) 878-8648
Cost of Purchase: $59.95

Arts of Africa
Distributor: The Elizabeth Stone Robson Teacher Resource Center, The Art Institute of Chicago
111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago IL 60603-6110
(312) 443-3719
Cost of rental: No fee / Cost of purchase: $25

Benin Kingship Rituals
18 minutes, color, sound, 16mm, 1962, English
Distributor: The University of California at Los Angeles Instructional Media Library
405 Higard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024
(310) 825-0755
Fax: (310) 206-5392
Cost of rental: $31.00, plus $6.00 shipping charge

Nigerian Art: Kindred Spirits
Series Title: Smithsonian World
60 minutes, color, video, 1990, English
Distributor: PBS Video
1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314
(800) 424-7963; (703) 739-5486
Cost of purchase: $49.95 plus $8.50 shipping charge

A Great Tree Has Fallen
Robert Lang Productions.

Tribal Eye: The Kingdom of Bronze
Series Title: The Tribal Eye (No. 6 of 7)
52 minutes, color, 16mm, 1976, English
Distributor: Center for Media and Independent Learning
The University of California
2176 Shattuck Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94704
(510) 642-0460
Cost of rental: $47.00, plus $7.00 shipping charge

Audiovisual Resources for Younger Viewers:

Anansi the Spider
African Folklore Series
10 minutes, Color, 16mm, 1969
Distributor: Home Vision (Video sales)
5547 N. Ravenswood, Chicago, IL 60640
(312) 878-2600
Fax: (312) 878-8648
Cost of rental: $45.00 for 7 days
Cost of purchase: $79.00

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears
10 minutes
Distributor: Weston Woods Release, Weston, CT 06883
(800) 243-5020
Cost of rental: $20.00 per day
Cost of video purchase: $60.00
List of Slides and Illustrated Related Objects

Slide 1.
Equestrian and Four Figures
Mali, Bougouni; Bankoni
Probably late 14th/early 15th century
Terracotta
Height: 27 1/2 in. (70 cm); Length: 8 1/4 in. (21 cm);
Depth: 19 in. (48.5 cm) and H: 17 1/4 in. (28.5 cm); W: 5 3/4
in. (14.6 cm); D: 7 5/8 in. (19.3 cm) and H: 18 in. (46 cm);
W: 5 7/8 in. (14.7 cm); D: 7 1/2 in. (19 cm) and H: 17 1/4 in.
(44 cm); L: 4 in. (10.2 cm); D: 7 1/4 in. (18.5 cm) and
H: 17 3/8 in. (28.5 cm); W: 5 in. (12.7 cm); D: 7 1/4 in.
(18.4 cm)

Slide 2.
Standing Male Figure
Mali; Dogon
18th century
Wood, sacrificial material
H: 39 1/4 in. (98.5 cm); W: 6 1/8 in. (15.5 cm); D: 5 1/2 in.
(13.9 cm)
Janie Brill Memorial Fund; Major Acquisitions Centennial
Endowment, 1996.41

Slide 3.
Pair of Headdresses (Chiwara Kunw)
Mali, Segou; Bamana
Mid-19th/early 20th century
Wood, metal, quills
H: 31 1/4 in. (79.4 cm); W: 12 1/2 in. (31.8 cm); D: 3 in. (7.6
cm) and H: 38 3/4 in. (98.4 cm); W: 4 1/4 in. (10.8 cm); D:
16 1/8 in. (40.9 cm)
Ada Turnbull Hettle Fund, 1965.6 & .7

RELATED OBJECT
Ritual Object (Boli)
Mali; Bamana
Mid-19th/early 20th century
Wood, cloth, mud, sacrificial material
H: 17 1/2 in. (44.5 cm); W: 11 3/8 in. (28.9 cm); D: 20 3/8 in.
(51.7 cm)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harold X. Weinstein, 1961.1177

Slide 4.
Ceremonial Drum (Pinga)
Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Senoufo
1930/50
Wood, hide, applied color
H: 48 3/8 in. (122.9 cm); D: 19 3/8 in. (49.3 cm)
Robert J. Hall, Herbert R. Molner Discretionary, Curator's
Discretionary, and Departmental Purchase funds; Arnold
Crane, Mrs. Leonard Florsheim, O. Renard Goltra, Ada
Turnbull Herle, Marion and Samuel Klasstimr, Holly and
David Ross, Departmental Acquisitions endowments;
through prior gifts of various donors, 1990.137

Slide 5.
Mask (Kponyungo)
Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Senoufo
Mid-19th/mid-20th century
Wood, applied color
H: 11 in. (27.9 cm); W: 40 1/2 in. (102.9 cm); D: 10 3/4 in.
(27.3 cm)
Primitive Art Purchase Fund, 1963.842

Slide 6.
Headdress (Nimba, D'mba, or Yamban)
Guinea; Baga
Mid-19th/early 20th century
Wood, metal tacks
H: 47 in. (119.4 cm); W: 13 in. (23 1/4 cm); D: 23 1/4 in.
(59.1 cm)
W.G. Field Fund, inc. and Edward E. Ayer Endowment in
memory of Charles L. Hutchinson, 1957.160

Slide 7.
Portrait Mask of a Woman, (Ndoma)
Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Baule
Mid-19th/mid-20th century
Wood, metal, pigment
H: 11 1/4 in. (28.6 cm); W: 7 1/8 in. (18.1 cm); D: 5 in.
(12.7 cm)
Ada Turnbull Hettle Endowment, 1988.309
Slide 8.  
**Men's Wrapper (Kente)**  
Ghana; Akan  
Mid-20th century  
Rayon, 23 narrow woven strips with bands of plain weave, weft-faced warp rib plain weave, plain weave with supplementary patterning wefts, and plain weave with supplementary brocading wefts; pieced geometric design in stripes of blue, red, orange, black, and white; with bands of red, green, orange, black and white. 127.1/4 in. (323.3 cm) x 83 5/8 in. (212.8 cm)  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David C. Ruttenberg, 1986.1043

Slide 9.  
**Goldweights [Man with Powder Keg, Geometric Design, Monkey, Catfish]**  
Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast); Akan  
18th/early 20th century  
Brass  
Max Height 2 in. (5.1 cm)  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Pinsof, 1979.530; Gift of Raymond E. Britt, Jr. 1978.891; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Wielgus, 1977.39; Gift of Alfred Wolkenburg, 1966.82

Slide 10.  
**Plaque of Warrior Chief**  
Nigeria, Court of Benin; Edo  
16th/18th century  
Bronze  
H: 13 3/8 in. (33.9 cm); W: 11 3/8 in. (28.8 cm); D: 1 7/8 in. (4.7 cm)  
Samuel P. Avery Fund, 1933.782

**RELATED OBJECT**  
**Royal Altar Tusk**  
Nigeria, Court of Benin; Edo  
1850/88  
Ivory  
D: 5 in. (12.7 cm); L: 77 in. (195.6 cm)  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Hokin, 1976.523

Slide 11.  
**Veranda Post of Enthroned King (Opo Ogoga)**  
Carved by Olowe of Ise (died 1938)  
Nigeria, Ikiri, Ikere, Yoruba  
From the palace of the Ogoga (King) of Ikere, 1910/1914  
Wood, pigment  
H: 60 in. (152.5 cm); W: 12 1/2 in. (31.3 cm); D: 16 in. (40.6 cm)  
Major Acquisitions Centennial Fund, 1984.550

**RELATED OBJECT**  
**Crown (Ada)**  
Nigeria, Ijebu, Idoawa; Yoruba  
Owned by the Dagburewe (King) of Idoawa  
Late 19th/mid-20th century  
Glass beads, fabric, string, copper alloy  
H: 40 1/2 in. (102.8 cm); W: 10 7/8 in. (27.6 cm)  
Cora Abrahamson Endowment, 1994.314

Slide 12.  
**Mask for Celede**  
Master Fagbite or Falola Edun  
Nigeria, Keta; Yoruba  
Early/mid-20th century  
Wood, pigment  
H: 15 3/4 in. (40 cm); W: 14 1/2 in. (36.8 cm); D: 19 1/4 in. (48.9 cm)  
Anonymous Loan, 3.1993

**RELATED OBJECT**  
**Twin Commemorative Figures (Ere Ibeji)**  
Nigeria, Kishi or Old Oyo; Yoruba  
Early/mid-20th century  
Wood, beads, string  
H: 10 in. (25.4 cm); W: 3 1/4 in. (8.3 cm); D: 2 5/8 in. (6.7 cm)  
Gift of Jeffery and Deborah Hammer, 1982.1513 & 1514

Slide 13.  
**Mask with Lizard Headdress**  
Cameroun; Bamum or Kom  
Mid-19th/early 20th century  
Wood  
H: 13 1/8 in. (33.3 cm); W: 10 1/2 in. (26.7 cm); D: 8 1/8 in. (20.6 cm)  
Primitive Art Purchase Fund, 1966.411

Slide 14.  
**Reliquary Figure**  
Gabon; Fang  
Mid-19th/early 20th century  
Wood, oil residue  
H: 19 3/4 in. (50.3 cm); W: 5 3/4 in. (14.6 cm); D: 5 7/8 in. (14.9 cm)  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Wielgus, 1958.302

Slide 15.  
**Mask (Mukenga)**  
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Western Kasai; Kuba  
Late 19th/mid-20th century  
Wood, glass beads, cowrie shells, feathers, raffia, fur, fabric, string, bells  
H: 22 5/8 in. (57.4 cm); W: 9 1/2 in. (24.1 cm); D: 8 in. (20.3 cm)  
Laura T. Magnuson Fund, 1982.1504
Slide 19.

Headrest (Building on Stilts)
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire); Yaka
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood
H: 6 7/8 in. (16.7 cm); W: 3 7/8 in. (9.8 cm); 6 7/8 in.
(17.4 cm)
Gift of George F. Harding, 1928.175

Slide 20.

Beer Storage or Serving Vessel
South Africa; Northern Nguni (probably Zulu)
1940/50
Terracotta
H: 8 7/8 in. (22.4 cm); D: 11 in. (27.9 cm)
Africa, Oceania, and the Americas Purchase Fund, 1994.316

Slide 16.

Mask (Mwana Pwo)
Angola or Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire),
Northern Angola; Chokwe
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, fiber, beads, pigment
H: 17 1/2 in. (44.5 cm); W: 7 5/8 in. (19.3 cm); D: 7 3/8 in.
(18.7 cm)
Major Acquisitions Centennial Endowment, 1992.731

Slide 17.

Maternity Figure
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire); Luluwa
Mid-late 19th century
Wood, pigment
H: 11 3/8 in. (28.9 cm); W: 3 3/8 in. (8.6 cm); D: 3 1/4 in.
(8.2 cm)
Wirt D. Walker Endowment, 1993.354

Slide 18.

Stool
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire); Songye
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, copper alloy
H: 25 1/8 in. (63.8 cm); W: 10 7/8 in. (27.5 cm); D: 12 1/8 in.
(30.7 cm)
Major Acquisitions Centennial Endowment, 1992.64
NOTE:
The works of art shown in slides 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19,
identified as being from "Zaire,"
should be identified as being from:
Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire).