THE ARTS OF AFRICA

TEACHING PACKET

PRODUCED BY

THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSEUM EDUCATION

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THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

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Introduction

The history of Africa and its contact with the West is long and complex. Yet, the real story of Africa and the West, so fascinatingly varied, is still not readily available in school texts. The legacy of the Slave Trade and notions about Africa and the African people that it engendered took ascendancy over previous attitudes of mutual curiosity and respect between sovereign states. The last two decades have seen a slow but steady effort on the part of scholars, educators, and cultural institutions to disseminate new and critical information on the subject. The arts of Africa are a vehicle for showing students the intricate tapestry of diverse peoples, languages, and cultures that is Africa. By looking at works of art, students learn about the breadth of human thought and creativity. Knowledge of the arts of Africa intellectually equips students to shape a world in which Africa, in its past and present, plays a significant role.

This teaching packet has been put together under an overarching philosophy: art objects are the focal point from which information and knowledge are derived. The Benin Plaque of a Warrior, as an example, offers many educational experiences. Students become aware of the sophisticated technology of the metallurgy of the Bini people of the old kingdom of Benin by analyzing the fabrication of the plaque. They also learn about Benin architecture when they discover that this and other plaques adorned the royal palace (the packet contains an illustration of a box that was fashioned as a model of a section of the Oba's, or king's, palace). They learn about culture and ritual while examining the object that a warrior carries; they learn about art techniques by studying his embroidered kilt sculpted in bronze.

Using such examples from the African collection of The Art Institute of Chicago, our aim is to provide educators with material that can be presented in the classroom and explored in the museum. Students can study the Benin Plaque of a Warrior using the drawing in the packet (which can be duplicated), through group viewing and discussion of a slide of the object, and, finally, through examination of the actual piece in the African gallery at the museum. A drawn copy, a photographic reproduction, and direct viewing of an object offer different perceptual experiences. In this media age, teachers should discuss the distortions of photographic processes, teaching their students to become sensitive viewers and critics.

Every object has a rich story. The packet contains fifteen slides with helpful identifications, a glossary of terms, a bibliography, and sources for visual materials. The maps of Africa reveal the topographical and climatic conditions that determine where people live and the natural resources that shape their art.

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Slide Identifications

Note to teachers: Before you present the slides, we suggest you read over the following information and adjust it to the grade level of your students.

The primary concern of African art is to present truths about human existence related to the forces of nature and the cosmos. Much African art was made for a ritual purpose. Nothing appears in the designs by accident; every element has meaning and conveys to the community enduring traditions and standards of behavior. African artists work with great skill to manipulate these ideas and still create new forms. The examples in the slide packet illustrate rhythm of forms, balance between negative and positive spaces, and richly textured surfaces that are characteristic of the finest African art.

1. Mali, Bankoni Culture
   A Horseman with Four Attendants
   Late 14th/early 15th century
   Terracotta

This compelling collection of terracotta figures, probably produced by an early, unknown ethnic group, was found at a site not far from Bamako, the capital of Mali. At first glance, the figures appear naive and childlike, especially in the modeling of the limbs and the horse. Upon further study, however, one begins to sense dignity, forceful self-esteem, and strength of character projected by this group. The forms used to convey these qualities are neither random nor accidental.

While it is not possible to determine the exact use of these objects, the fact that all five were broken and buried together implies a common function. They may be related to the contemporary Bamana male initiation society figures displayed at annual sacrifices and at the festivities associated with a fertility cult. It is also possible to consider these terracottas as historical monuments intended to commemorate a particular royal family.
2. Mali, Segou Region, Bamana People
*Pair of Tyi Wara Dance Headdresses*
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, brass tacks, metal, and quills
Ada Turnbull Hertle Fund, 1965.6.7

*Tyi wara* headdresses are used in a ceremonial dance which recalls the Bamana myth of the origins of farming. The ceremonial dances occur prior to the rainy season. The male performers who wear the headdresses are covered with long costumes. First the *tyi wara* performers accompany the workers to the field. Upon their return to the village, they engage in a dance which imitates the movement and play of two antelopes. The dance is intended to appease those earth spirits who have been disturbed by man's planting activity and to ensure the success of the harvest.

These headdresses are seen together in the dance ceremony. The carver carefully differentiated the male from the female. They are visually balanced. The horns of the male curve backward; those of the female are vertically erect. The female carries her young on her back, and the male's penis extends diagonally from his belly. The curving manes echo each other. The lightness of the manes, with voids between the feather forms, contrasts with the heaviness of the antelopes' solid bodies. Because of the quality of design and workmanship, the Art Institute's pair of *tyi wara* headdresses is considered to be the finest in any private or public collection in the United States.

3. Mali, Bamana People
*Zoomorphic Effigy (Boli)*
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, cloth, mud, and organic materials
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harold X. Weinstein, 1961.1177

*Boli* have many forms or almost no form at all. Some take the shapes of human beings, while others have forms of powerful, bulky animals, such as the one in this slide.

This ritual object has a core of wood and cloth. Its form is built up over the years during ritual ceremonies when earth, animal blood, and vegetable matter are added. Repeated sacrifices develop a highly textured surface. The dark earth color which results suggests to us the creative formlessness of the beginnings of the universe. These sacrificial offerings renew the *boli*, and as a combination of living materials, the effigy represents all the forces of the cosmos.

The *boli* is an object of great magical and religious power. Preserved on the altars of some of the secret societies which strictly organize Bamana life, *bolis* are treated with
great reverence by society members and may only be approached by qualified religious persons.

4. Burkina Faso, Bwa (or Nuna) People

**Butterfly Mask**
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood and pigment
Primitive Art Purchase Fund, 1970.103

Large geometric constructions of wood are common in the masks of the western Sudan. It is not known precisely why the butterfly is represented as a mask, and it may be the only insect among the great variety of West African mask types. There may be some connection to the profusion of butterflies which appear each spring in western Africa, since this mask is featured in an annual spring festival to encourage agricultural fertility.

The red, black, and white colors seen here are often used by the Bwa People. This mask is a rectangle rather than the more common round, oval, or triangular shapes. The horn in the middle of the brow is meant to impale any witches who may be present. Masks from the Bwa People tend to have great height or, like the butterfly mask, great width, and thus are visually striking in the rhythmic motion of the dance.

5. Ivory Coast, Senufo People

**Mask of a Mythic Protector**
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood
Primitive Art Purchase Fund, 1963.842

The dark, aggressive, jutting forms in this distinctive Senufo mask refer to various animals said to have first appeared at the time of creation. Each element—antelope horns, crocodile teeth, warthog horns, lizard body—represents the unique nature of that animal. Thus the mask represents a mythological being who combines all their powers. The elements chosen from each animal and the skill with which the carver fused them into a sculptural unit produced a bold, dynamic form intended to inspire fear and awe.

It was the function of the mask to protect the community from evil. The mask was worn at night by costumed members of the secret Lo society. The wearer carried a forked stick holding glowing embers which made it appear that fire issued from the mouth of the mask. Seen only by firelight or moonlight, the “fire spitter” mask presented an awesome display of primordial force, impelling spectators to consider the issues of order and disorder, chaos and harmony present in the universe.
This figure is an imagined ideal, embodying Baule notions of female beauty. The elegant coiffure, proper scarification, long neck and legs of a woman at the height of youthful health and beauty represent a morally correct person capable of working to sustain society.

Such figures were created to serve one of two kinds of spirits: either a nature spirit or a spirit spouse, which everyone has had in the spirit world prior to earthly existence. The Baule maintain that nature spirits are more varied in form than spirit spouses. It is impossible to determine the original purpose of one of these figures once it has been removed from its original setting.

Someone seeking the solution to a problem was often advised to establish a shrine and to commission the carving of a sculpted figure in order to placate the jealous or discontented spirit spouse. The second type of figure was created to appease nature spirits who were known to follow a person and disrupt his life until an appropriate shrine had been established.

A special system for measuring the weight of gold was established by Islamic cultures in Timbuktu, Jenne, and Gao. Gold mined in North Africa had been traded for 1,000 years along routes from the great savannah trading centers of Timbuktu and Jenne south to the Guinea coast and was also used as currency since there were no coins or paper money. The gold nuggets or gold dust were measured on balance scales against brass counterweights of precise values — hence the name goldweights.

The weights were usually cast of brass by the lost wax method: an artist modeled the wax, built a mold around it, and poured hot metal into the mold, melting or “losing” the wax model. The early weights, c. 1400-1720, are overwhelmingly geometric, while later weights, c. 1700-1900, have recogniz-
able forms. The weights depict almost every possible secular subject and show the imagination of the modeler.

The design for many of the goldweights from Ghana is based on traditional proverbs. Thousands of proverbs, rich with the visual imagery of Akan speech, have been translated into this lively sculptural form. Many of the goldweights cannot be interpreted today by local informants since the proverbs have been lost from memory.

8. Ghana, Ashanti People
Panel (Kente Cloth)
20th Century
Rayon, 23 Narrow woven strips with bands of plain weave; weft-faced warp rib plain weave; plain weave with supplementary patterning wefts; plain weave with supplementary brocading wefts; pieced
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David C. Ruttenberg, 1986.1043

Since the 16th century, local weaving centers throughout Ghana have been producing narrow-band textiles which, when sewn together, create the fabric known as kente. The cloth is traditionally associated with Ashanti royalty and aristocracy. Worn toga-style, the kente forms part of a regalia that includes decorated sandals, caps, and elaborate jewelry signifying the wearer’s status. The overall patterns and individual design motifs have a variety of names and symbolic meanings and may refer to a specific person, event, or proverb.

The visual power of these textiles comes from the juxtaposition of contrasting colors and from the dense patterns. As the wearer moves, the vibrant, sumptuous fabric gives the illusion of three-dimensionality.

9. Nigeria, Kingdom of Benin
Wall Plaque of a Warrior
Bronze
16th/17th century
Samuel P. Avery Fund, 1933.782

Bronze casting has existed in the Kingdom of Benin since the early 14th century, becoming more common with the arrival of Portuguese traders who brought with them large supplies of the metal. Bronze plaques were made for the royal court to decorate wooden pillars in the palace of the king or oba. The plaques depict scenes of warriors, courtiers, animals, and objects, most of which are related to Benin mythology and history.

In this plaque, a warrior holds a weapon, the ceremonial eben, in his right hand, and he wears armlets and a leopard tooth collar. All
of these accoutrements indicate his high political and social status. The border of his kilt is decorated with the guilloche pattern, a symbol of royalty, which appears on many objects of the Benin and Yoruba people. In the upper left corner is a brass manilla, a horseshoe-shaped object which was used as currency and which served as a supply of metal for casters.

The plaques begin as figures modeled in wax or clay which are then cast in bronze. In this plaque, the artist generates a feeling of motion by the asymmetrical arrangement of the two arms, one raised holding the eben and the other resting on the warrior’s hip. The theme is that of a powerful state with a strong economy, represented by the manilla, and supported by the strength of its warriors. The interplay between the crisp detailing of the figure in high relief and the finely incised decoration of the background enhances the visual impact.

10. Nigeria, Kishi, Yoruba People
Pair of ibeji (Twins)
Early 20th century
Wood, beads, and fiber
Gift of Jeffery and Deborah Hammer,
1982.1513, 1514

The Yoruba regard the birth of twins as a fortuitous event and greet their arrival with rejoicing. Due to the dangers inherent in multiple births, however, one or both of the twins frequently dies. Whether that occurs at birth or later, an image of the dead child, called ere ibeji, is carved. It must be cared for by the surviving twin, or, if both have died, by the mother. The ibeji are treated as though they are living children. Each is fed, dressed, and washed on a regular basis, frequently causing the carved features to wear away. This practice appeases any malevolent forces created by the twin’s death. It also represents the strong values of family that characterize Yoruba society.

The carver of these alert figures with their pert stance creates a push-pull tension between the conical headdresses which point up and the softer rolling volume of the bodies which push downward. Like the antelope headdresses, there is perfect balance between solid forms and empty spaces.
11. Nigeria, Ekiti area, Palace Courtyard of the Ogaga (King) of Ikere, Yoruba People, carved by Olowe of Ise Veranda Post (Opo) Representing an Enthroned King and His Senior Wife. c. 1914 Wood and pigment Major Acquisitions Centennial Fund, 1984.550

This sculpture depicts a seated Yoruba king and his senior wife, with two small attendant figures (one of the three original attendants is missing). The figure of the queen originally supported the edge of the veranda roof of the royal compound, much as women in Yoruba society support the community. The sculpture was designed to represent the values and functions of rulership and, by analogy, the ideal of family in Yoruba society.

The king, smaller in size but central to the group of figures, is seated in a position of authority. He leans over and looks down at the attendant figures at his feet. He wears a beaded crown which was worn by all preceding kings. At his coronation, the crown was placed on his head by the senior wife. The large size and mysterious, almost intimidating, quality of the queen symbolize the strength and spiritual power considered to be important attributes of women among the Yoruba. On the crown sits an ibis, a bird whose probing beak symbolizes the ruler's ability to search out evil in the land.


Mmwo masks are worn by members of a men's secret society at festivals and funeral ceremonies. The mask is worn to appease and honor the spirits of beautiful young girls who have died in maidenhood. The stark white pigment of the face represents the spirit world. The elaborate carving of the tall coiffure and the delicate face are made to please the spirits. If satisfied, the spirits will then intercede with the gods and bring good fortune to the living.

In direct contrast to the asymmetry of the Benin plaque, the carved coiffure and facial scarification of this mask form a perfectly symmetrical design. The dark scarification marks, the stark white of the face, and the long, thin nose and mouth illustrate the aesthetic ideal of the Igbo People.
13. Democratic Republic of Zaire, Yaka People, Popokabaka Zone
Neckrest in the Form of a House on Stilts
Late 19th/ early 20th century
Wood
Gift of George F. Harding, 1928.175

This neckrest is a typical piece of household furniture among the Yaka people. When lying on one's side, the neckrest supports the head just below the ear, preventing the head from touching the ground. The elaborate coiffures and head pieces worn by the Yaka created the need for this type of support which is called *musaw*.

14. Democratic Republic of Zaire,
Mayumbe People
Mask
Wood, kaolin, and pigment
Alsdorf Foundation Restricted Gift,
1962.700

Few Kongo tribes produce carved masks. This is a beautiful exception. The mask delicately plays off finely carved facial features with stark color contrasts of black and white. The serene visage appears to see into another world, a mystical ancestral realm. There is very little information available about these masks, but scholars have suggested that they may have been used during initiation or funerary ceremonies, for purposes of divination or healing, or they may be related to the white-faced masks of Gabon which represent the spirits of the dead.
15. Democratic Republic of Zaire, Kasai Province, Mweka, Kuba People

**Mask of a Mythic Royal Ancestor**
(*Mukyeem or Moshambwooy*)

Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, beads, cowrie shells, feathers, hair, fiber, skin, and metal
Laura T. Magnuson Fund, 1982.1504

Much of the extraordinary art of the Kuba people of Zaire is produced to satisfy the dynastic needs of a highly stratified society. This mask represents Woot, the primeval ancestor of the Kuba kings. The Kuba myths of creation and the founding of the royal line are enacted in processions and ceremonies associated with initiations and burial rites. It is in these ceremonies that the *mukyeem* appears with two other masks. They provide spectacle and entertainment, but, more importantly, the ceremonies serve as a means for transmitting cultural values.

The *mukyeem* mask exhibits many symbols of power. The rare cowrie shells imply wealth and status. The use of leopard and monkey fur, parrot feathers, and forms borrowed from the chameleon and the elephant serve as visual metaphors for the properties and potency of these animals, and, by association, of the royal line. The artist has combined the rich, high colors of these varied materials to create a dynamic and magical presence.
Bamana *Tyi Wara* Dance Headdresses
Benin Wall Plaque of a Warrior
Goldweights

Man with Powder Keg on Head and Pipe in Mouth

Proverb: One should always take care. (Never check your gasoline tank with a lighted match.)

Geometric Goldweight

The tooth-like decoration symbolizes the life-giving rays of the sun. The unconnected double spiral refers to creative and life-giving activities.

Scorpion

The scorpion is the symbol of both death and rebirth, and represents Nyame, the all-powerful Sky God. The body is decorated along the sides with spiral rings which may imply that life is continuous and eternal.

Proverb: When the scorpion stings you mercilessly, you have to kill it in the same spirit. (An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.)

Catfish

Catfish with sharp serrated spines are likened to dangerous men or chiefs.

Proverb: The river fish’s game is no safe game. (No good can come from playing with a dangerous man.)
African Proverbs

The following proverbs 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. 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. (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 in gold.

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 gets 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 have no 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 his 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 stream.

A man always breaking off from his work never finishes anything. (Nigeria)
A job worth doing is worth doing well.

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.
Adinkra is a hand-printed and hand-embroidered cloth which was most often used for mourning ceremonies but now is worn for a variety of social occasions. It is commonly found in West Africa, specifically, Ghana.

The stamps for the various Adinkra designs are cut from slightly curved pieces of calabash (gourd) into which four or more pieces of stiff palm leaf ribs are inserted and tied together to form a handle which is held between the thumb and forefinger when printing. The natural black dye for the printing is made from the bark of the badie tree (Bridelia Micrantha). Iron slag or ferrous stone known as etia in the Twi language is added to the dye
and the whole substance is boiled to the consistency of coal tar. It is then left to cool. The dye is called *adinkra aduro*.

Generally, the cloth was a russet brown with black designs. This was the color used for mourning. Today, however, a variety of background colors is used with black or burnt umber designs. Strips of dyed cotton fabric about 15 inches wide and 12 1/2 feet long are sewn together to form a cloth which is about 6 1/2 feet wide and 12 1/2 feet long.

The cloth to be stamped is then pegged taut with wooden pegs to a flat area of ground. The carved calabash printing blocks are dipped into the dye and then carefully impressed onto the desired area of the pegged cloth. Even pressure is exerted on the stamp as the curved ends are rolled from side to side to get the pattern well printed on the cloth. The operation is repeated until the whole piece of cloth is stamped with the patterns the artist has in his imagination or has been requested to produce. The printed cloth is left to dry. Colorful embroidery in a straight-line stitch is sometimes done to cover the seams where the long strips have been joined.

Many of the symbols stamped on the cloths represent concepts referring to social institutions such as marriage, law, and traditional political structures. Some of these are symbolized by such natural phenomena as the behavior of the moon, the stars, and the sun; others are represented by plants and animals. In some cases, geometric shapes are used to symbolize social, ethical, religious, and aesthetic concepts.
Adinkra Symbolism

**Gye Myame** (Except God)
Symbol of the Supreme God.

**Sunsum** (Soul)
Symbol of the soul.

**Fihankra** (Compound House)
Symbol of security and togetherness.

**Osram** (Moon)
Symbol of positive female qualities; love, kindness.

**Adinkrahene** (King of the Adinkin Symbols)
Symbol of power, protection, and growth.

**Kerapa** (Good Soul)
Symbol of good luck and cleanliness of the soul.
Adinkra Symbolism

*Gyawn Atiko* (The hairstyle of Gwawu, an old war Chief of the Ashanti people)
Symbol of courage and determination.

*Afuntun mmireku*
*Denkyem mmireku* (Double crocodile with one stomach)
Symbol of unity among different groups of people who have one common goal.

*Duafe* (The wooden comb)
Symbol of positive female qualities; patience, fondness, care.

*Kyekye ko aware* (The star gets married to the moon)
Symbol of faithfulness, love, kindness, marriage, and togetherness.

*Bi nka bi* (Bite not one another)
Symbol of unity and harmony.

*Epa* (Handcuffs)
Symbol of slavish association.
Adinkra Cloth Printing

The goal of this activity is to introduce participants to the adinkra cloth and its method of production. The participants will be able to print adinkra symbols on cotton and explain some of the symbolic meanings. The activity is normally geared to grades 3 and up, but special instructions have been included to enable younger students to participate.

Materials (for 25 participants)
- 25 adinkra stamps (see below and next page for instructions).
- 25-30 pieces of cotton fabric, about 8 1/2" by 11" (or cotton tee shirts).
- 15 ink pads (foam rubber placed in empty margarine containers with lids).
- 2 or 3 cans (8 fl. oz. size) of textile ink. Dark colors are best.
- Plenty of old newspapers to cover worktables and floor space.
- Scrap paper.

Instructions

It is advisable to demonstrate the entire process for the children so that they have a clear idea of the steps involved.

1. Lay out the cotton fabric or tee shirt (or use scrap paper for demonstration).
2. Ink the stamp.
3. Place the inked stamp flat on the desired portion of the fabric. Apply even pressure to the stamp, leaving it for a few seconds to allow the ink to be absorbed by the fabric. Do not shake or twist the stamp.
4. Gently lift the stamp and repeat the process. To obtain the true character of the adinkra cloth, fill a square area or row on the fabric with one type of motif.
5. Now give each child a stamp (they can exchange stamps in order to vary their patterns).
6. After the printing, the fabric should be allowed to dry undisturbed for at least 30 minutes so that the ink will set properly.
7. After clean-up, discuss the process and results with the children; display their adinkras for appreciation.
Making adinkra stamps

1. For grades K-3
Carving is a difficult process for this age group, but they can achieve the same effect with stenciling. Using a shirt cardboard, the children can draw some of the simple adinkra designs and cut them out. Water down the textile ink to a paint-like consistency. The children can use this to stencil the adinkra designs onto their tee shirts or cotton fabric.

2. For grades 4 and up
Potatoes and styrofoam blocks can be utilized effectively as “stamps” for this age group. If potatoes are being used, large ones are best. Cut in half so the widest surface is exposed. Draw the design with a sharp pencil on the inner surface; carve it out with an exacto knife. The styrofoam block can be carved in the same manner.

For those who desire more permanence, linoleum blocks, available in art supply stores, offer the best results. After drawing the designs on the linoleum side, special linoleum carving tools must be used to produce the relief surface.
African Architecture

These buildings in Zaria, Nigeria, illustrate an efficient use of indigenous materials. They are essentially clay boxes whose flat roofs have wooden reinforcements. Since the late 19th century, the Hausa of this region have decorated these buildings with low relief or painted designs.

Elaborate royal complexes are found in the towns of the Kuba of Zaire. Within the complexes are many buildings, each serving a separate purpose. The building illustrated here is the mwaam ambul, a small house in which the king spends his nights.

Characteristic of Kuba buildings is the geometric pattern decorating the walls which have been woven of palm and reeds. This pattern is similar to those found on Kuba textiles.
Benin Architecture

This bronze box represents the palace of the King (Oba) of Benin. It displays a tall pyramidal tower topped by sculptures of ibises, an African bird, Portuguese soldiers, and a python. The wooden pillars were covered by bronze plaques, similar to the one in the Art Institute collection.

This bronze plaque, which may have adorned the pillars of the Oba’s palace, shows the gateway to the royal palace, with its tower, symbolic python, and shingled roof and columns, upon which bronze plaques were affixed.
Glossary

Archaeology: The scientific study of material remains (such as fossil relics, art, artifacts, and monuments) of past human cultures.

Adze: A cutting tool that has a thin, arched blade set at right angles to the handle and is used primarily for carving wood.

Amulet: Magic object carried on the body, the use of which is widespread throughout Africa among peoples of all religions including Christians and Muslims.

Ancestor: In Africa, an ancestor is not just any deceased person from whom one is descended. Only those who have lived their lives as complete persons and who have exemplified the values of society become ancestors. Generally speaking, an ancestor is a person who lived a long life, was healthy in mind and body, had many children, and died an honorable death.

Anthropomorphism: The attribution of human characteristics to nonhuman things such as animals or trees.

Brass: Copper and zinc alloy.

Bronze: Alloy of copper and tin, and sometimes iron. Most so-called African bronzes are brass.

Calabash: Calabashes, or gourds, grow abundantly on creeping plants. When dried they are used as rafts, food containers, and sound boxes for musical instruments which are decorated with a variety of intricate geometric motifs.

Cowrie shell: A shell of a mollusk found in tropical seas. Its shiny, often marked surface made it so prized it was often used as money in Africa and the South Seas. The shells also have been used to adorn sculptures and masks to indicate great value, importance, and status.

Eben: A ceremonial sword indicating rank among the Benin and Yoruba peoples.

Fetish: An object believed to have the power to aid and protect its owner against illness and disease.

Guilloche pattern: An ornamental border formed of two or more bands interlaced in such a way as to repeat a rounded design. On Benin and Yoruba sculptures and textiles its presence often indicates status.

Iconography: The imagery or symbolism of a work of art.

Ideogram: A character or symbol representing an idea or thing without expressing a particular word or phrase for it.

Ivory: The hard, smooth dentine forming the main part of the tusks of the elephant. Carved ivories were some of the first African objets d'art to be appreciated by Europeans. Wealthy and noble Europeans imported many elaborately carved objects, such as salicellars, which had been fabricated to their specifications by African craftsmen. The export of ivory is now generally illegal.

Initiation: The ceremonies and rites, often including circumcision, physical ordeals, and professional training which mark the passage from childhood to adulthood.
Kaolin: A white clay, produced by the thinning or watering down of ground feldspar (a stone) and used as a white pigment on many African objects.

Labret or lip-plug: Object which is placed in an incision in the upper or lower lip as a form of decoration. These are made of various materials and vary in size.

Lost wax process: The method of casting bronze and other metals by modeling a sculpture in clay, covering it with a thin, finely detailed wax model, and covering that with another layer of clay. The whole mold is then heated so that the layer of wax melts away and molten metal is poured into the space where the wax had been. For the process of casting a solid object see page 4.

Manilla: A horseshoe-shaped brass object of Portuguese origin which was used as money in Africa and signifies wealth and status in Benin iconography.

Microcosm: A diminutive representative system similar to a larger system in configuration or development.

Myth: A traditional story that serves to explain a practice, belief, natural phenomenon, or world view of a people.

Patination: A dark finish on many African carvings which is the result of rubbing them with oil or coating them with smoke from fires. The texture that results is an important element of their beauty.

Propitiate: To appease an offended power.

Raffia: A strong, straw-like fiber made from the inner skin of the palm leaf which is used to adorn African costumes and masks.

Rain forest: A dense evergreen forest occupying a tropical region with an annual rainfall of at least 100 inches.

Reliquary: A vessel, often elaborately carved, in which hair, cloth, and bones of a venerated ancestor are stored. The reliquary is believed to have magical properties.

Sahel: Region on the edge of the desert between the Sahara and the Sudan.

Savannah: A flat, treeless grassland of tropical or subtropical regions.

Scarification: The act of making scratches or cuts in the skin which become scars and signify status, beauty, or tribal identity.

Secret society: The select group within a tribe with its own lore and magical objects. The group requires a special initiation rite and has an assigned function, such as performing a particular ceremony.

Spirit world: The unseen world which includes deities, dead culture heroes, ancestors, and malevolent and beneficent nature spirits which act upon the well-being of the living.

Terracotta: A glazed or unglazed fired clay used especially for statuettes, vases, and architectural purposes.

Zoomorphism: The attribution of animal characteristics or qualities to a human or god.
Sample Curriculum

The following is a curriculum unit designed by Jenny Knight, a teacher at Beye School in Oak Park, Illinois. It is duplicated here as an example of a successful and imaginative way to teach students about some aspects of Africa. Ms. Knight's educational philosophy incorporates the belief that students learn best when their curiosity is stimulated through a variety of intellectual and sensory experiences, including guest speakers/demonstrators, field trips, audio-visual materials, art objects and reproductions, photographs, literature, and hands-on activities. Through these multi-dimensional experiences students begin to recognize some of the cultural, political, social, and historical contributions Africa has made to the world.

Goals

To learn about:

1. The origins of man
2. The sophistication of early civilizations, e.g. Timbuktu, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Zimbabwe, Ethiopia
3. The impact of European colonization
4. 20th-century political issues
5. Some of the similarities and differences in ethnic groups

Preparation

Each student chooses a specific culture to research throughout the unit and identifies:

1. The traditions of the culture
2. How the culture is changing
3. Predictions of the future; what the student thinks will happen to his/her selected ethnic group

The class will:

1. Define culture
3. Read from African Views of the West by JoAnn White and identify African concerns
Activities

1. Take several field trips. Some suggestions:
   - The Art Institute of Chicago, the DuSable Museum, and the Field Museum
     to see African objects and learn about African culture;
   - to give students ideas for making their own art objects
   - Eye on Design (shop in Hinsdale)
     - to make jewelry and learn about trade beads
   - A Public Library
     - to choose a novel to research

2. Listen to African stories from tapes or invite a storyteller to class
3. Create stories and video tape (or record on audio cassette) each student's
   retelling
4. Cook African food
5. Write African poetry
6. Make art objects in an African tradition and display as a museum exhibit
7. Write letters against Apartheid to Prime Minister de Klerk of South Africa
8. Identify all of the countries in Africa

Sample Reading Assignment and Study Questions

Have students choose a journal or magazine article about a contemporary issue to read and analyze. The following is a list of suggested questions and discussion topics relating to “Heavy Artillery for Horns of Plenty,” U.S. News and World Report, February 20, 1989.

1. Historically, who were the poachers of Africa?
2. How are these poachers different from present-day poachers?
3. Explain the motivation for poaching.
4. How is Kenya dealing with this problem?
5. If you were a wildlife consultant on poaching, what suggestions would you make?
SAMPLE WORKSHEET: VOCABULARY STUDY
Vocabulary words are from article on contemporary issues (see previous page)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Synonyms</th>
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<tr>
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</table>
This curriculum unit requires students to choose a specific African culture to research, write about, and present to the class. A good way to approach these cultures is through literature. The students at Beye School used the following novels from their public library as part of their research.

### African Novels

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Novel</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bantu</td>
<td>The Bantu Civilization</td>
<td>E. Jefferson Murphy</td>
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<td>Masai</td>
<td>The Masai Herders of East Africa</td>
<td>Sonia Bleeker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bushmen</td>
<td>The Harmless People</td>
<td>Elizabeth M. Thomas</td>
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<td>Ewe</td>
<td>African Traveler-The Story of Mary Kingsley</td>
<td>Ronald Syme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandinka</td>
<td>Black African Empires</td>
<td>Joan Joseph</td>
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<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Enchantment of Africa, Benin</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amhara-Tigre</td>
<td>The Princess &amp; the Lion</td>
<td>Coatsworth Hawes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Goat Who Killed the Leopard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>The Ibo of Biafra</td>
<td>Sonia Bleeker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkana</td>
<td>The King’s Drum</td>
<td>Harold Courlander</td>
</tr>
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<td>Asante</td>
<td>The Ashanti of Ghana</td>
<td>Sonia Bleeker</td>
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<td>Pygmies</td>
<td>The Pygmies</td>
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<td>Dinka</td>
<td>Nelson Mandela: Man and Movement</td>
<td>Mary Benson</td>
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<td>Encyclopedia of Black Folklore and Humor</td>
<td>Henry Spalding</td>
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<td>Nuba</td>
<td>The Last of the Nuba</td>
<td>Leni Rosenfelt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kikuyu</td>
<td>Flame Trees of Thika</td>
<td>Huxley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td>The Washing of Spears</td>
<td>Donald R. Morris</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kala</td>
<td>Sunrise Tomorrow</td>
<td>Naomi Mitchison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xhosa</td>
<td>Waiting for the Rain</td>
<td>Sheila Gordon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuareg</td>
<td>The Tuareg</td>
<td>Sonia Bleeker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samburu</td>
<td>Born Free</td>
<td>Joy Adamson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulani</td>
<td>The Land &amp; People of Nigeria</td>
<td>Forman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Topographical Map of Africa

- Mediterranean type vegetation
- Desert
- Sahel
- Savanna and steppe grasslands
- Rain forest
- Zoned mountain vegetation
A Selection of African Cultures

ANGOLA
Chokwe
Kongo

BENIN
Benin
Fon
Yoruba

BURKINA FASO
Bwa
Gurunsi
Kurumba
Lobi
Mossi

CAMEROON
Bamileke
Bamum
Bangwa
Fang
Mambila
Tikar

CONGO
Kongo

GABON
Ashira
Fang
Hongwe
Kota
Lumbo
Punu

GHANA
Asante
Lobi

GUINEA
Baga
Kissi
Nalu

GUINEA-BISSAU
Bidjogo

IVORY COAST
Anyi
Attie
Baule
Dan
Guere
Guro
Lobi
Senufo
Yaure

LIBERIA
Bande
Bassa
Dan
Guere
Kissi
Toma

MALI
Bamana
Dogon
Malinke
Senufo

MOZAMBIQUE
Makonde

NIGERIA
Afo
Benin
Efik
Ibibio
Ite
Igbo
Ijo
Mambila
Mumuye
Nok Style Area
Yoruba

SIERRA LEONE
Kissi
Mende
Sherbro

TANZANIA
Makonde

ZAIRE
Boca
Chokwe
Hemba
Kongo
Kuba
Kwele
Lega
Luba
Lulua
Lwalwa
Mangbetu
Mbala
Mbole
Pende
Songye
Suku
Teke-Tsaaye
Yaka
Bibliography

Bibliography for Teachers


Bibliography for Students


Specific Culture and Cultural Areas


**General Bibliography**


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**Audio-Visual Material**

  
  African Studies Center
  
  Michigan State University
  
  100 International Center
  
  East Lansing, MI 48824
  
  (517) 353-3500

- *Art and Life in Africa*. (Video and slide kit)

- *Art and Death in Africa*. (Video)

- *Art of Haiti*. (Documentary video)

- *Art of the Dogon*. (Documentary video)

- *Film and Video Resources about Africa*. (Slide sets, artifact kits, videotapes, cassette tapes, records, filmstrips)

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1989 Supplement to *African Studies Film Catalog*.

University of Illinois

1208 W. California

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(217) 333-6335

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Facets Multimedia

1517 West Fullerton Avenue

Chicago, IL 60614

(312) 281-9075
African Studies Program Collection of 35 mm Slides
University of Wisconsin
African Studies Program IMC
1454 Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706

Additional Teaching Material

Royal Benin Art. (Workshop for the National Art Education Association)
National Museum of African Art
Smithsonian Institution
316-318 A Street N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
(202) 287-3490

African Emblems of Status. (Education packet)
National Museum of African Art
Smithsonian Institution
316-318 A Street N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
(202) 287-3490

Four Peoples of Africa. (An Introduction to African sculpture for teachers with slides and materials)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
5th Avenue at 82nd Street
New York, NY 10028
(212) 879-5500
Credits


*Adinkra* cloth, p. 17: from the Collection of Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, Netherlands.


