

UNIT I

African Art and Nature

Suggested Grade Level: 4th - 6th

Unit Overview

This unit explores how natural life, such as animals and plants, is commonly used in African art to show sacred attention and respect. In many villages, humans live near animals, and therefore, many rural Africans have continued to respect their place in nature. To many Africans, animals have souls, know magic, and possess extraordinary talents and abilities.

Many Africans raise and honor crops because plants provide them with food. The cycle of crops, from seed to plant to food, is important to many Africans and echoes the cycle of life for all living things. These are only a few of the reasons why nature is given sacred attention and respect.

This unit will examine the ways Africans have expressed respect for nature through art. Essential questions addressed in this unit include: What is the significance of nature in African society? How have Africans abstracted animals in their mask making? What part of nature is important to you? This unit contains three lessons that explore nature in African art as follows:

In **Lesson 1** students will learn about the significance of animal masks from various African cultures. They will then explore characteristics of animals they like and create abstracted animal masks.

For **Lesson 2** students will explore a variety of ways animals have been represented in African culture two-dimensionally. After learning several drawing techniques, they will choose a special animal to draw expressively.

Finally, **Lesson 3** explores the importance of adinkra cloth printing in Ghana. Students will understand the use of adinkra cloth, the meanings of symbols and how stamps are created. They will create their own symbols based on abstracted animal and nature drawings. Then they will make stamps and print their symbols onto fabric, which may be displayed or used to cover sketchbooks.

UNIT I - AFRICAN ART AND NATURE

Lesson One

Animal Mask Making

LESSON PLAN

In this lesson students will learn about the significance of animal masks from various African cultures. They will then explore characteristics of animals they like and create abstracted animal masks.

Background Information

Refer to the **Study Guide** section of this lesson.

Objectives

The student will:

- understand the importance of animal masks in celebrations in some African cultures.
- investigate how African masks symbolically refer to qualities that animals have.
- create their own meaningful animal masks based on qualities in animals that are important to them.

Elements or Principles

shape, color, line, pattern, texture

Technique

Creating 3-dimensional animal masks with papier-mâché, clay, or heavy paper such as tag board or poster board

Materials

Day 1: Drawing paper and pencils. **Day 2:** Ask the students to bring discarded materials such as paper or plastic milk cartons or other packaging materials to make a mask-like mold, newspaper (to cover working surface), newsprint, white glue and water, or commercial papier-mâché. **Day 3:** materials to decorate their masks, e.g., paint, raffia, and found objects.

Vocabulary (see glossary)

metaphor, symbols, abstract, ceremony, ritual

Engaging Students

Today we are going to discuss the importance of animals in African cultures as well as our own. We will learn about various African animal masks to understand their place in different ethnic groups. We will then create our own animal masks.

Essential Questions

- What is the significance of animals in African society? How have Africans abstracted animals in mask making? What animals are important to me?
- What is your favorite animal? Why? How does that animal make you feel? What are special characteristics of that animal?
- Do you ever dress up like an animal? Describe your costume.
- Every culture has special beliefs about animals. Which animals are really special to Americans? Why? What animal is used on the \$1 dollar bill and elsewhere to represent the United States?
- Do we have any ceremonies or events celebrating animals? (Sport teams use animals such as the Rams or Broncos.)

You have seen how Africans have created masks based on admired animal characteristics. Now think about an animal that you find special. What are the characteristics of this animal? Which of these characteristics would you like to have yourself? What part of the animal would show the characteristic you value? How could you show the essential form in shapes, textures, patterns, colors, or movements? Think of other animals that you might like to combine to make your animal mask.

Activity**Day One:**

1. Think about animals that symbolize the characteristics that you value (such as friendliness in a dog or being a fast runner like a cheetah). Get pictures of animals. Draw the basic parts that will symbolize the essential nature of the animal that you like. Add other animal parts until you have drawn the mask that will symbolize something important to you.
2. What expressive or symbolic effects do you want the mask to have? Do you want to use symmetrical or asymmetrical balance? What part do you want to emphasize? Contrast or pattern can be used for emphasis. How can you use repetition to create unity?
3. Find discarded materials at home or at school that will provide the structural form underneath your mask. Paper and plastic milk cartons, cardboard rolls, or Styrofoam pieces may work or think about how you could build the forms using tag board, staples or tape. Also look for materials that you can add to the surface such as yarn, raffia, feathers, and fur.

Day Two:

1. Assemble the materials as a class and share if needed.
2. The teacher should demonstrate ways to make cones, cylinders and other forms using tag board by pushing, pulling, scoring, cutting, twisting, stapling, and taping. Discuss how to attach all the materials.
3. Build the form until it has all the parts you want. If you want, you can exaggerate some of the features.
4. When the form is ready, cover the surface with Vaseline or a thin layer of Saran Wrap so that the form will not stick when the papier-mâché surface is added.
5. Prepare a papier-mâché mixture with white glue and water, commercial modeling compound, wheat paste, or a flour and water mixture.
6. Tear pieces of newsprint to fit the shapes you need. Newspaper is not recommended for the papier-mâché because the ink will show

through the paint. If you use newspaper for the first layer, cover the last layer with newsprint or paper towel.

7. Take a small piece of newsprint and dip it into the papier-mâché mixture. Put the newsprint on the mask form. Smooth the paper down so that each piece is attached to the next. Make sure that you don't leave any edges of paper sticking up.
8. Completely cover your form with one layer of newsprint shapes.
9. For the second layer, think about the surface texture you desire, for example, you can exaggerate some of the textural features. You can also use commercial papier-mâché mixed with water. Let this layer dry over night.

Day Three:

1. When your mask is dry you can remove the form from the back or you can leave it on the form until you have finished painting and adding embellishments.
2. Cut out the eyeholes if you wish your mask to be functional.
3. Now you can embellish your mask in different ways with paint, raffia, feathers, fabric, beads, etc. First draw the design on the mask.
4. Again think about what expressive or symbolic effects you want the mask to have. Do you want to use symmetrical or asymmetrical balance? You can use contrast or pattern to emphasize certain parts and use repetition to create unity.
5. Paint your mask or add other surface textures and colors. Finish with materials such as raffia for hair or beads and other ornaments for decoration.
6. Does your design fit your intentions? Get feedback from the teacher or other students if you cannot figure out how to get the effects you want.

Reflection

Students will choose one of the following ways to share the meanings of their mask.

1. Write about their animals. Why did you choose this animal? What characteristics does this animal have? What does this mask mean to you?
2. Look in a mirror and interview your mask or let someone wear it and you can interview the mask facing you. Write or perform this interview.
3. Perform a dance, movement, or story using your mask. Consider making a costume and composing music or sounds for the performance.

New Mexico Visual Arts Standards/Benchmarks

- 1A) Explore art materials, techniques, qualities, characteristics, and processes; understand what makes them effective in solving specific art problems and how they are used to enhance life experiences and ideas.
- 1B) Explore and understand the use of art materials and techniques by culturally diverse artists locally and globally.
- 2) Use visual arts to express ideas.
- 4) Demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of the creative process.
- 5) Observe, discuss, analyze, and make critical judgments about artistic works.
- 6) Show increased awareness of diverse peoples and cultures through visual arts.

UNIT I - AFRICAN ART AND NATURE

Lesson One Animal Mask Making

STUDY GUIDE

Notice that African animal masks often show the *essence*, that is, the essential form or most important characteristics of the animals used. Parts of animals are used as a *metaphor* to express the most important qualities to the people who make the masks. Historically masks were used in elaborate community ceremonies in which the wearer of the mask assumed the metaphoric role of the creature in the community. When an African person wears the animal mask and costume, they take on physical and metaphorical characteristics of that animal. As you view the masks, notice how animal characteristics have been *abstracted*, or simplified to their essential forms, to express meanings. Picasso once said that all abstraction comes from nature.

According to Allen F. Roberts (1995), Africans don't represent just any animal in their art.

Although animals like horses, rams and dogs are common in many parts of Africa, they are rarely seen in art. Animals that are deemed meaningful in appearance or behavior are represented most often. These animals are miraculous in different ways—from the chameleon that changes its color, to snakes that shed their entire skins, to leopards that are so ferocious that hunters fear them. Africans make masks of animals because they admire certain characteristics they would like for themselves. According to Roberts' research, the more an animal stimulates thought and evokes feelings, the more frequently it appears in African visual arts. Now let's look at some animal masks from various African countries. As you look at the masks, think about their characteristics and why Africans would consider these animals special. Then think about what animals you would like to incorporate into the mask that you will design and make.



Christopher D. Roy.
Roan antelope mask
dancer, Nunuma
people, Burkina Faso.



Roan antelope.
© Christopher Sheehan/
Ark Gallery

- The first thing to understand about African masks is that they are made for performances along with elaborate costumes, music, and dancing. Notice the elaborate costume of this antelope mask dancer who is from the Nunuma people who live in Burkina Faso.
- This dancer is performing and holding batons that represent the antelope's forelegs.
- Can you see similar characteristics between the antelope and the mask?
- How have the animal parts been abstracted to the essential form?



Allen F. Roberts.
Buffalo in Democratic
Republic of Congo,
1976.



Marc Felix. Buffalo
mask in performance
by members of Tabwa'
people, Democratic
Republic of Congo/
Zambia. 1973.
(Roberts, 1995)

- Take a look at the photograph of real buffaloes on the left, and the mask on the right.
- What are the similarities between the animal and the mask? Differences?

Although over one hundred mammals are indigenous to Tabwa territory, including lions and leopards, the buffalo is one of the few animals depicted in their carvings. There are many reasons why the buffalo is so important to Tabwa culture. Buffalo are notorious for their deliberate savagery

and are considered one of the most cunning and dangerous animals. They are mostly nocturnal, active only at dusk and dawn. They enjoy swimming as well as submerging themselves in mud wallows. Although they are enormous, they are able to hide away during the day unseen. This makes them doubly dangerous to the Tabwa, for they are there, but unseen. Buffalo are also skilled at hiding when they are wounded or surprised, giving them the ability to attack people from behind.

Buffalo are animals that possess dualities: passive and aggressive, visible and invisible, in water or mud, active at dusk or dawn. These paradoxes observed by Tabwa hunters are the basis for a metaphoric relationship between the buffalo and humans. Therefore, for the Tabwa people and others in southern Democratic Republic of Congo, buffalo are associated with chiefs and cultural heroes.



Snake Mask, Bwa People, wood,
pigment, and fiber, n.d., Burkina
Faso day in the village of Dossi,
Burkina Faso. 1985

Chinese King Rat Snake.

- What shapes, patterns, movement, and textures are shown on the snake?
- What do you think or feel when you see a snake?
- How has the artist from the Bwa people abstracted a snake's essential form and characteristics in the mask on the left?
- What do you think the Bwa people want to express with their snake mask?

Bwa snake masks are perhaps the most spectacular of African masks. They range from fourteen to sixteen feet long, and stand more than sixteen feet above the dancer's head. They are worn by strong, agile young men who begin training to perform with these masks at a very young age. The masks are worn with a full fiber costume and are balanced by gripping a wooden brace behind the mask between the wearer's teeth!

The origin of the snake mask comes from a Bwa man whose village was being raided by enemies. He found refuge in a python's burrow, which fed and protected him for two market weeks. When the man returned to his village, a diviner instructed him on how to create and perform this tall snake mask to celebrate the snake's help. (Roberts, 1995) Do animals ever help humans? How about pets?

Resources

Unless noted, all images are from *Animals in African Art* by Allen F. Roberts (1995)

1. Photograph of roan antelope mask.
Christopher D. Roy. Nunuma. Burkina Faso.
n.d.
2. Photograph of roan antelope.
<http://www.shoarns.com/RoanAntelope.html>
3. Allen F. Roberts. Photograph of Buffalo in Democratic Republic of Congo. 1976.
4. Marc Felix. Photograph of Tabwa buffalo mask in performance 1973
5. Buffalo Mask, Tabwa, Early to mid-20th century, Wood, Democratic Republic of Congo
6. Snake Mask, Bwa, Wood, pigment, fiber.
n.d., Burkina Faso
7. Photograph of Chinese King Rat Snake.
<http://www.diamondreptile.com/chinesekingsnake.html>

UNIT I – AFRICAN ART AND NATURE

Lesson Two - Drawing Expressive Animals

LESSON PLAN

Artists draw animals in many ways to express their ideas and feelings. In this lesson students will explore a variety of ways animals have been represented two-dimensionally in African culture. After learning several drawing techniques, students will choose a special animal to draw expressively. The student may use gesture drawing to capture the essential animal form quickly through keen observation.

Background Information

Refer to the **Study Guide** section of this lesson.

Objectives

The student will understand the importance of representing animals two-dimensionally in African culture and then create their own expressive animal drawings

Elements or Principles

line, color, shape, texture, unity, proportion, space (negative and positive), movement

Technique

drawing techniques: abstract, expressive, outline, gesture

Materials

images of animals (from calendars, magazines, etc.), colored pencils, chalk pastel

Vocabulary (see glossary)

abstract, expressive, outline, gesture

Engaging Students

Today we are going to discuss the importance of animals in African culture as well as our own. We will learn about expressive drawing and painting techniques used by African artists. We will then create our own expressive animal drawings.

Essential Questions

- What is the significance of animals in African society?

- How have Africans represented animals two-dimensionally?
- What animals are important to me?
- When you think about a tiger, what is the first thing you think of? A dog? cat?
- How does a fish move? bird? (everyone get up and act this out)
- What are creative ways we can incorporate these elements into a drawing? Today we are going to see examples from African artists who represented animals in creative ways.

You have seen how Africans have represented animals in a variety of ways. Take one of the animal images and do sketches using some of the techniques you have seen (gestural, abstract design or expressive contour).

Activity

- As you view examples, pay attention to how the artist used lines, colors and shapes. In addition, consider if the artist used real proportion, exaggeration or distortion. Finally is the design unified?
- The teacher will demonstrate how to draw an animal using each of the techniques using colored pencil (to do fine lines) and pastels (to fill large spaces).

Reflection

Students will write about their animals. Why did you choose this animal? Explain your reasons for the drawing technique you chose. How does it express characteristics or your feelings about this animal?

Students will hang their finished drawings on the gallery wall and discuss the drawing characteristics they like about each drawing technique.

New Mexico Visual Arts Standards/Benchmarks

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1A) Explore art materials, techniques, qualities, characteristics, and processes; understand what makes them effective in solving specific art problems and how they are used to enhance life experiences and ideas.</p> <p>1B) Explore and understand the use of art materials and techniques by culturally diverse artists locally and globally.</p> | <p>2) Use visual arts to express ideas.</p> <p>4) Demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of the creative process.</p> <p>5) Observe, discuss, analyze, and make critical judgments about artistic works.</p> <p>6) Show increased awareness of diverse peoples and cultures through visual art.</p> |
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UNIT I - AFRICAN ART AND NATURE

Lesson Two

Drawing Expressive Animals

STUDY GUIDE



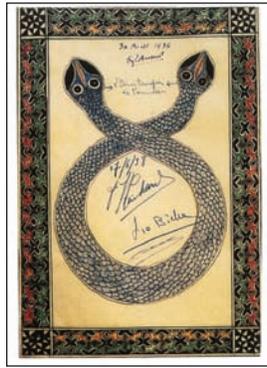
San cave paintings, Matobo Hills, Zimbabwe (approximately 6,000 years old) (gesture drawing)

The San people in the Kalahari Desert in Southern Africa made these drawings 6,000 years ago.

- What do you see in these cave drawings on rocks?
- How does the artist create movement?
- How did the artist use gesture to show the essential form and movement?
- Does New Mexico have any cave or rock paintings? (petroglyphs)
- What do you know about them? Are these cave paintings similar to petroglyphs?
- Can you imagine making animal drawings to show movement?

Human habitation in the Matobo Hills of Zimbabwe stretches back at least 35,000 years. The San who made the paintings were peaceful nomads living off wild fruit and game. This region has over 3,000 known rock paintings, which is more than any other place in Africa. The Mwari religion is associated with the San people (formerly called *Bushmen*) who are held to be the indigenous population of Southern Africa and the ones who created the cave paintings that date back at least 6,000 years. Recently this area has been declared a Unesco World Heritage Site.

(<http://www.afrol.com/articles/10429>) The oldest cave paintings, located in Namibia, are estimated to have been made before 21,000 B.C. (Visona, et. al., 2001, p.473).



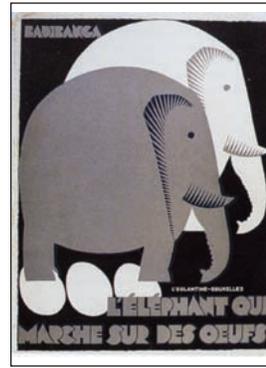
Ibrahim Njoya,
drawing from the
gold book of the ATB,
1934-1960,
Cameroon.
(abstract design)

Ibrahim Njoya drew this double-headed snake that was an important symbol since the 1800s when King Mbuembue created the symbol to remind the Bamum people of his heroic army, that once fought enemies on two fronts at the same time — and won.

- What kind of drawing style did Njoya use?
- To make this kind of design Njoya concentrated on making a careful abstract design.
- Look at the spaces around the snake called negative space. Do you like the shape of those spaces?
- What patterns can you find?
- How did he balance his design?

Ibrahim Njoya is known as the creator of a traditional drawing style in Cameroon. Ibrahim came to the King Njoya's attention due to his popularity for making drawings in sand and his talents as a scribe and decorator. Since the king was writing a history of the Kingdom, he made Ibrahim his secretary to create the illustrations. Ibrahim became the King's personal artist, creating many images for the kingdom. His work was narrative and told the story of the Bamoun kings of Foumban, Cameroon. Ibrahim's most important work was created between 1925 and 1933.

King Njoya acquired his own camera in 1920 and began taking his own portraits. Many of these photographs were transformed into drawings by Ibrahim, thereby giving the King control over his own representation. After the death of the King, Ibrahim continued to produce many works, including drawings idealizing the successive kings, major episodes in the history of the Bamoun people, and genealogical paintings of the kingdom. Indigo blue, the color of royal batiks, and red were the preferred colors used in drawings of kings. His drawings were created as friezes with demarcated space, usually incorporating images with text.



Djilatendo &
Badibanga, The
elephant who walks
on eggs, illustration,
1931, Democratic
Republic of Congo
(abstract design)

©Anthology of African Art in
the 20th Century,
Revue Noire Editions,
Paris 2002,
www.reveuenoire.com

- This is the cover of a book done by two artists. Babidanga created the text, and Djilatendo created elephant.
- How did Djilatendo abstract the elephant? Look at the lines, shapes and color.
- When you hear the title "L'elephant qui marche sur des oeufs" (The elephant who walks on eggs), what kind of story do you think this will be?
- Does the design of the words work well with the design of the elephants? Why or why not?

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was colonized by French-speaking Belgium in the late 19th century. Just as in Cameroon, the Belgians brought new art materials to the DRC. The Belgians created art studios where they taught the Congolese about European art techniques. They imposed their own ideal of beauty. Some Congolese were pressured to create what the Belgians thought would be admired by the Europeans. However, some Congolese found European art styles interesting. Congolese visitors to Europe would sometimes bring home artistic and cultural objects and, therefore, a cultural exchange of ideas happened on both ends.

While artists were commonly known to local communities, they did not sign their work nor seek individual recognition. Europeans, who collected African art, did not commonly ask artists for their names. The idea of recognizing individual artists came about in Africa in the early 20th century due to European influence. One of the first artists who was recognized by name was Djilatendo. Djilatendo had been covering walls with geometric patterns and scenes inspired by fables and everyday life when he met Georges Thiry, a Belgian man who sought out Congolese artists. He provided him with art materials, suggestions, and even purchased their work. Djilatendo, however, was considered the most

original creator of the time and didn't make his work based on European ideals. He continued making subject matter that dealt with fables and symbolic instruments or modern African life. (*An Anthology of African Art: The Twentieth Century*)

Do you know any fables? What are they about? What do you think a fable concerning elephants walking on eggs would be about?



Mwenze Kibwanga, *Pale Moon*, oil on paper, 1956. Democratic Republic of Congo. (expressive contour design)

© Royal Museum for Central Africa; Tervuren, Belgium

- Do you recognize these animals from the previous lesson about animal masks? What kind of animal are they?
- How do you think Mwenze Kibwanga made this painting?
- How is his style different or similar to the styles we have already seen?
- Do the animals seem to be still, active or both?
- Do the animals seem flat or contoured? How did the artist achieve that effect?

As we learned through the previous example, many Belgians became interested in Congolese artists in the early 1900s. Belgians created academic schools of art—some of these focused on African subject matter using European painting and drawing techniques, others were more open and allowed the artists to create as they wished. Mwenze Kibwanga was a part of *The Pierre Romain-Desfosses Workshop* in Elizabethville. The French painter Desfosses, devoted to promoting African artists, founded his workshop in 1947. His artists worked freely, painting in unconventional ways. He encouraged them to use tales as a source for inspiration. (*An Anthology of African Art: The Twentieth Century*)

Resources

All images from *Anthology of African Art: The Twentieth Century* except where noted.

Other drawings could be substituted if the teacher does not have that book.

1. Ibrahim Njoya, drawing from the gold book of the ATB, 1934-1960, Cameroon.
2. Djilatendo and Badibanga, "The elephant who walks on eggs," illustration, 1931, Democratic Republic of Congo.
3. Mwenze Kibwanga, *Pale Moon*, oil on paper, 1956. Democratic Republic of Congo.
4. Adil Hassan, *Untitled*, Sudan.
5. Bushman cave paintings, Matobo Hills, Zimbabwe (approximately 6,000 years old).

UNIT I - AFRICAN ART AND NATURE

Lesson Three

Nature & Symbols in Adinkra Cloth Printing

LESSON PLAN

Some African artists have used symbols to communicate meanings. In this lesson students will learn the importance of adinkra cloth printing in Ghana. They will understand the use of adinkra cloth, the meanings of symbols, and how stamps are created. They will create their own abstract nature symbols and then will make the stamps and print their symbols onto fabric, which may be hung or used to cover sketchbooks.

Background Information

Refer to the **Study Guide** section of this lesson.

Objectives

The student will:

- Understand the importance of Adinkra cloth in Ghana
- Create abstracted nature symbols that will be printed onto fabric.

Elements or Principles

line, rhythm, pattern

Technique

abstract drawing, symbol, stamp and print making.

Materials

Styrofoam trays or scratchboard, scissors, tempera paint, glue, cloth fabric, palettes, palette knives, brayers, water containers, rags, sketchbooks (students can make one), newspaper

Vocabulary (see glossary)

adinkra, calabash, symbol, proverb

Engaging Students

Today we are going to discuss the importance of adinkra cloth in Ghana. We will learn how the stamps are made and printed, and we will also explore the use of adinkra cloth. Then we will make our own stamps based on our favorite animals or things in nature. We will print these symbols onto fabric that we will use to cover a sketchbook or journal. The teacher should define vocabulary or have students research vocabulary words.

Essential Questions

- What is the significance of adinkra cloth in Ghanaian society?
- What is the significance of symbols to you?
- How can you use symbols to tell stories and communicate meanings?
- What symbols do we see a lot in our society? (e.g., flag, peace sign, Statue of Liberty, eagle) What are the meanings of those symbols? Show the students the U.S. dollar bill and discuss the meaning of the eagle and the pyramid on the back.
- What is a proverb? (A proverb is phrase or story which is passed down from one generation to the next and contains wise sayings or philosophical beliefs.) Do you know a proverb?
- Does our society have symbols that communicate proverbs?
- What parts of nature are important to you? How can you turn these into symbols?

We've looked at adinkra cloth and symbols. Now you are going to create three abstract nature symbols. Choose natural forms such as animals, plants, sun, land, or water, which have some kind of personal meaning for you.

Activity

Step One: Abstract drawing

First, teacher should do a demonstration on abstracting an animal and natural object. Then students will select an animal and abstract it by leaving out some of details, a few at a time. Do this several times, simplifying the image more and more each time. Do this also for a natural object such as a tree.

Sketch your animal and/or natural objects abstractly in several different ways. Think about what you would like to emphasize. For example, if creating a stamp for a bird, perhaps you would want to focus on the wings. Think about which characteristics you like about the animal. Perhaps you like the freedom of birds. Your meaning could be “freedom” or you could create your own saying like, “When a bird’s wings lift, they soar.” Finally, you will write a brief paragraph about each symbol, describing the meaning or proverb in more detail.

Have students practice this with their expressive animal drawings before proceeding. After they have three final symbol sketches, have them write down a meaning for each symbol. If the students wish to reverse their drawing they can place their paper on the window and redraw their symbol in reverse.

Step Two: Making the Stamp

1. Place the drawing in reverse on the Styrofoam or scratch foam. Redraw the symbol pushing the pencil down firmly to transfer the drawing through the paper onto the foam.
2. Remove the paper and cut out the shape from the Styrofoam with a scissors.
3. Glue the Styrofoam to a block of wood or add a piece of tape to the back to create a little handle.

Step Three: Preparing and Stamping the Cloth

1. Place a thick pad of newspaper under the cloth where you will later print. This will help give the stamp a stronger impression.
2. Divide the surface of the fabric into sections using a straight edge and pencil.
3. To make an inkpad, place several layers of paper towels in a shallow pan. Add tempera paint mixed with glue to the pad.
4. Press stamp into “inked” plate.
5. Stamp onto fabric experimenting with pattern and design. Make sure to press down well on all parts of the Styrofoam stamp or rock the stamp if it is secured on a piece of wood.
6. Finish off sides of the fabric with lines or more patterns.
7. Hang the cloth on clothesline to dry.

Step Four: Writing about the cloth

Now have students write in more detail about their symbols. Students should write at least one paragraph about each symbol and its meaning including why they chose the animal or natural object. They can also describe the value of using pattern and repetition.

Reflection

Students will discuss their pieces and read their paragraphs to the class or display the finished products and add the written explanation to the display.

Extension for High School Students

Students can dye their cloth first with natural dyes. Linoleum can be used instead of Styrofoam for stamps. Encourage high school students to use color symbolically on their cloth.

New Mexico Visual Arts Standards/ Benchmarks

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|---|--|
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UNIT I - AFRICAN ART AND NATURE

Lesson Three

Nature & Symbols in Adinkra Cloth Printing

STUDY GUIDE

Adinkra Cloth



Adinkra cloth. Mid-20th century, Ashanti, Ntonoso, Ghana. (<http://du.edu/duma/africloth/3775.jpg>)

Courtesy of the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology, #3778

Adinkra cloth is made by stamping symbolic designs and patterns on large pieces of fabric.

- Here is a picture of adinkra cloth.
- Notice all the symbols on this piece.
- How many different symbols can you find?

Historically adinkra cloth was considered sacred and only worn by royalty and spiritual leaders of the Asante people during sacred ceremonies, rituals and funerals.

The use of this cloth is apparent as the word “adinkra” actually means “saying good-bye.” Thus, wearing this cloth at a funeral was a way to say good-bye to a loved one in a symbolic way. Traditionally black colored stamps were carved into gourds and printed on black matte or rust fabric; today a variety of fabric and stamp colors are used.

Historically adinkra cloth symbols may have communicated the wearer’s economic status, social status, heritage and other messages. The symbols are based on codes of conduct, cultural values, cultural parables, proverbs, popular sayings, morals, historical events, celestial bodies, animals, plants and objects. These symbols have a variety of meanings, depending on who is wearing it and where they are wearing the cloth. Today anyone can wear adinkra cloth, and the use has expanded to many social activities such as weddings, festivals and initiation rites. In fact, the Mercedes sign is now used as one of the stamps!



Photograph of Adinkra stamps. (<http://du.edu/duma/africloth/adinkra.stamps.html>)

Courtesy of the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology, # 3780, 3778, 3781

(l.) The stamp on the left is called Adweneme or “ram’s horn.” This refers to the proverb that says: when two rams clash in a fight, one must surrender to the other. It is a symbol of strength. The middle stamp is Binkabe, and it symbolizes the proverb, “If you don’t harm somebody, he will never harm you.”

(rt.) The last stamp means Efia Abosia, household gravel.

Adinkra Symbols

<http://www.marshall.edu/akanart/adinkracloth.html>



- Let’s look at some more adinkra symbols.
- This one is “Akoko Nan” or “Hen’s feet.” It is a symbol of parental discipline, protection, parenthood, care, and tenderness.
- It comes from the proverb: *Akoko nan tia ba na enkum ba*, which means: “When the hen treads on her chicks, she does not mean to kill them,” or “parental admonition is not intended to harm the child.” It means that parents intend to direct their children toward a better use of their lives.
- Does the symbol remind you of a hen’s foot?

Adinkra symbols relating to animals.

http://www.welltempered.net/adinkra/htmls/adinkra_index.htm

1. “Spider’s web” relates to wisdom and creativity. What do you think is wise and creative about spiders? Does this image remind you of a spider’s web?





2. “Crocodile” relates to being adaptable. What do you think is adaptable about a crocodile? (They live on land or water.)

3. “Two-headed Crocodile” relates to democracy and unity in diversity.

The crocodile with two heads has one stomach. It means that things such as food and other resources must be shared by all. Who do you think would wear an adinkra cloth with this symbol? What is the importance in diversity?



4. “Snake climbing the raffia tree” relates to determination, honesty and hard work.

Why do you think these characteristics are related to a snake climbing a tree? Are these important characteristics to you?

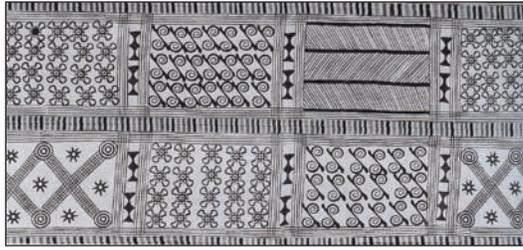
5. Do you recognize this symbol from the stamps we looked at?

It’s ram’s horns. It relates to humility and strength. Does this design remind you of ram’s horns? What is humble and strong about rams?



Adinkra cloth designer at work in Ntonso near Kumasi, Ghana.

- If you want to buy adinkra cloth in Kumasi, Ghana, you would go to a trained artist, like this man, for his or her adinkra cloth.
- The artist offers his opinion and expertise in choosing the most appropriate symbols for the wearer. He chooses the appropriate stamps that have been carved into a gourd.
- To create the stamp ink, Badie tree bark is boiled and mixed with iron slag.
- The artist divides the cloth into squares or rows using a comb dipped in dye.
- The symbols are then stamped within these rows or squares.



Adinkra cloth, 20th century, Ashanti, Ghana.

- Notice the lines around this piece and between the blocks of symbols.
- Do these lines add interest to the piece? Why or why not?
- How would it look if the artist left these out?

Resources

1. Adinkra cloth. Mid-20th century, Ashanti, Ntonoso, Ghana. <http://du.edu/duma/africloth/3775.jpg>
2. Photograph of Adinkra stamps. <http://du.edu/duma/africloth/adinkra.stamps.html>
3. Adinkra symbols. <http://www.marshall.edu/akanart/adinkracloth.html>
4. Adinkra symbols relating to animals. (http://www.welltempered.net/adinkra/htmls/adinkra_index.htm)
5. Photograph of Adinkra cloth designer at work in Ntonso near Kumasi, Ghana. (#5 & 6 from <http://www.marshall.edu/akanart/adinkracloth.html>)
6. Photograph of Asantehene Nana Osei Tutu II wearing adinkra cloth.