

UNIT V

African Art and Identity

Suggested Grade Level: 9th –12th

Unit Overview

There are many ways to communicate personal meaning. In this unit we will learn about how some Africans have expressed meaning through identification. After looking at kente cloth as one form of traditional identity expression in Africa, students will produce art works which challenge them to reflect on their own choices for identification and personal meanings in life. This unit explores essential questions like: What are the meanings we communicate to the world through our appearances? How does society contribute to our identity? How much of our identity is forced on us by society and how much is our own choice? This unit provides four lesson plan ideas.

Lesson 1 explores traditional and contemporary uses of kente cloth and the celebration of cultural heritage. Students will create a small weaving inspired by kente cloth, paying close attention to color and pattern.

Lesson 2 explores adornment and identification. Students will look at how some people identify themselves in African culture. They will explore how different ethnic groups in Africa identify themselves through clothing, hairstyles, and jewelry. Students will reflect on their own identification and create self-portraits with objects that communicate something about them.

Lesson 3 focuses on the role society plays in shaping one's identity. Students will reflect on stereotypes they feel are imposed on them and create *Stereotype Resistance Art* using collaged images from magazines.

In Lesson 4 students express identity uniquely through the creation of mixed-media paintings. After exploring African artists who have experimented with the notion of multiple, self-created identities, students will express their own individuality by creating a unique painting. This painting will incorporate personality characteristics, adornments or physical features that the students would like to have in their self-portraits.

UNIT V – AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY

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UNIT V – AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY

Lesson One

Pride and Identity – Kente Cloth

LESSON PLAN

Kente is a ceremonial cloth among the Ghanaians. It is used on joyful occasions. In the past, kente cloths were worn only by very important personalities such as Bonwirehene (chiefs) and Asantehene (the king). These days, it is a very popular symbol in Ghanaian parliament and court decorations. Ghana’s first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah used the kente very extensively to represent Ghana in the area of costume.

Background Information

Please see the **Study Guide** section of this lesson.

Objectives

The students will:

- Look at and learn about history, use, and making of kente cloth from the Asante kingdom in Ghana.
- Understand pattern, color, and weaving techniques.
- Create a unique weaving.

Elements or Principles

pattern, color

Techniques

weaving

Materials

cardboard or cardboard looms (varying dimensions such as 4 or 5 inches by 12), yarn or other weaving materials, string for warp

Vocabulary (see glossary)

weaving, pattern, warp, weft, loom, symbol, proverb

Engaging Students

Have students identify the color pattern in the examples of kente cloth. There are color patterns in many things we use every day. What is something that you use that has a color pattern? (Possible answers include sheets, towels, curtains, rugs, wrapping paper, and flags). All the kente cloth patterns are woven by hand. An artist weaves different-colored strings of yarn together to make the piece of cloth. What colors were used for this pattern?

Essential Questions

- How is Kente cloth related to identity?
- How can a student incorporate ideas of identity into their weaving? Could it be through design, symbols, or quality to be used for adornment?

Activity

1. Create the Loom: Students start with their 12" cardboard and draw a 1/4" border on the top and bottom edges. Across the top and bottom cut notches 1/4" apart and cut down to the 3/8" line. Use a strong string for the wrap (crochet string will do) and thread the string vertically into the fringe pieces. Students may warp all the way around the cardboard or use only the same side of the board not wrapping completely around the board with the string. When finished tie off

the end with the beginning of the string on the back. Now you have a loom and are ready to weave.

2. Students select three to four colors of yarn for weaving. Have students think about pattern, color, repetition in their design. Revisit the kente cloth designs, patterns, and colors.
3. Refer to the weaving technique images.
4. To end, warp loops either with a dowel or twig or by making fringe.

Reflection

Have students write about and/or discuss their choices concerning color and pattern and their experiences with the weaving process.

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 art.

UNIT V – AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY

Lesson One

Pride and Identity – Kente Cloth

STUDY GUIDE

Kente Cloth

The strip-woven cloth called kente, made by the Asante peoples of Ghana and the Ewe peoples of Ghana and Togo, is the best known of all African textiles. Its renown has spread internationally, so that it is now one of the most admired of all fabrics in many parts of the world. Kente has its origins as festive dress for special occasions – traditionally worn by men as a kind of toga and by women as an upper and lower wrapper. Over the past forty years the cloth has been transformed into hats, ties, bags, shoes, and many other accessories, including jewelry, worn and used on both sides of the Atlantic. Individual kente strips have found a permanent home in the United States and are especially popular when worn as a “stole” or applied to academic and liturgical robes.

Appearing in contexts both sacred and profane, kente has come to evoke and to celebrate a shared cultural heritage, bridging two continents. Kente is the textile of choice for African Americans on many occasions of heritage and achievement. With its vivid colors enmeshed in a visually compelling geometry, it has occupied a prominent role in the worlds of design, fashion, and politics during the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, it has been a potent symbol in the context of many of the most important African and African American ideologies of the period.

The legend of kente cloth is revealed in the story of two young men. One day two young men went to farm and saw a huge spider (ananse) weaving its web on the cropland. They liked the spider’s accomplishment so they watched it silently for a considerable length of time. They both observed it for a couple of days until they knew how the spider made the web. They thought of making cloth in the same way so they started to weave the first cloth in the underbrush without telling anybody in the town until they had finished weaving the entire cloth. The two men named the

first kente cloth Oyokoman, their royal clan. It was artistic fabric designed with affluent colors and compassionate texture. Soon afterward, they showed the newly woven kente cloth to Nana Bobie Ansa, the chief of Bonwire at the time. The chief was thrilled with the work so he urged the two friends to come and weave for him. They were so obliged to hear the chief’s request that they created a metaphorical and most prestigious cloth exclusively for their chief. The latter told the then Asantehene, Nana Osei Tutu, what his two royal family members had done and he gave the cloth to him.

The rectangle in the kente cloth depicts the territorial power of a male ruler and the zigzag stands for prudence and the application of political wisdom of the Asante people. The most popular design is the adwinasa which means verbatim that the artist’s skill is exhausted. There are other significant kente names which have contributed to the culture and legacy of Ghanaians.



Adwin asa

Symbol of creativity, ingenuity, mastery, innovation, elegance, royalty and perfection.

From the expression: Adwin asa
 Literal translation: All motifs have been used up.

The cloth length is completely filled with weft floats that hide all the warp threads. The elegance of the cloth lies in the skillful use of several motifs to fill up the cloth length. This level of perfection, associated with the master weaver and the cloth, was worn in the past by the royalty.

The adwinasa designs are themselves given names and meanings. Examples include *Oyokoman*, *Obi te obi so*, and *Mmaa ma*. http://www.marshall.edu/akanart/kentecloth_samples.html

Asante Chief (Perani & Smith, 1998, p. 115, plate #7)

- In addition to the Yoruba people, several other African groups have kings who wear special clothes. Here is another leader. He is the Asantehene or Asante king of Ghana.



- What is he wearing?
Notice he is wearing special Kente cloth. He is also holding a gold-handled, elephant-tail, flywhisk that can only be owned by the Asantehene. When he is "enstooled," the ceremony when he becomes Chief, he sits very briefly on the Golden Stool. The Golden Stool is a sacred symbol representing both the spiritual and material worlds holding the Asante people together. After that brief coronation, he sits on other stools as he does here.

Kente is woven by men on narrow looms. The strip is woven 2 1/2" to 4 1/2" wide, but is often a continuous strip as long as 200 feet or the length

of a football field. When the strip is finished, it is cut into equal pieces and sewn together.

Rexford Anane

Rexford and some few other weavers at Bonwire in Ghana have revived the art of weaving kente with six heddles (*asasia*) and two sets of warp threads simultaneously. In the picture we see Rexford stretching out the two sets of warp threads. This (*asasia*) technique of weaving was believed to be lost as the old weavers passed away. This technique is an innovation to be found only in Bonwire among the kente weavers of Ghana.



UNIT V – AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY

Lesson Two Adornment and Identification Pastel Self Portrait

LESSON PLAN

This lesson will provide an introduction to how some people identify themselves in African cultures. We will explore how members of different groups on the African continent identify themselves through clothing, hairstyles, jewelry and other forms of adornment. Students will reflect on their own identification and create self-portraits including objects that signify meaning to them. How does one express his or her identity? How do Africans express identity in a similar way to you? How do they do it differently?

Background Information

Please see the **Study Guide** section of this lesson.

Objectives

The student will:

- Compare how various African ethnic groups have expressed identity through clothing, jewelry and body art.
- Learn approaches to drawing the head and face.
- Learn application techniques for pastels.

- Create meaningful self-portraits which communicate aspects of his or her identity.

Elements or Principles

line, rendering 3-dimensional objects 2-dimensionally, contour shading

Techniques

line, shape, shading.

Materials

One 12" x 15" piece of white multimedia paper and sketch paper per student, box of pastels, kneaded erasers (one per 2 students), art gum erasers (cut in half- one per 2 students), pencils, masking tape, rulers, tissues (lotion free), reproduction showing skull and placement of facial features, 1 hand-held mirror per student

Vocabulary (see glossary)

adornment, adorn, identification, identity, portrait, self-portrait, shading, erasure, hatching, cross-hatching

Engaging Students

Today we are going to look at photographs to discuss how clothing, jewelry and body art may express aspects of identity. We will begin with photographs of Africans to appreciate their styles. Then we will think more about how we express identity in our own lives through clothing, jewelry and possessions. Finally, you will create a self-

portrait incorporating at least two signifiers of your "identity."

- Discuss identification with the students. What is it? Identification can refer to the ways that people identify themselves or other people as belonging to groups. All identities are socially constructed and carry multiple meanings based on who is identifying whom. Societies define groups according to broad social categories such as gender, ethnicity, religion, or class. People are defined in more personal ways as mothers, students, doctors, or teachers. Within schools, some students identify themselves within groups. People can choose to shape how others identify them by the things they wear or the attitudes they take.
- Is there just one way that we identify ourselves? Do you change how you dress or act in different contexts (school, church, going to the mall, relaxing at home, holidays, etc.)? With different people?
- What are ways we communicate who we are to the world? (Teacher will write these on the board)

Essential Questions

- How does one express his or her identity?
- How do Africans express identity in a similar way to you?
- How do they do it differently?

Activity

1. Teacher should have students fill out the following chart.
Discuss chart in groups or as a class.

	List a kind of:	Context in which it is worn:	Possible messages this item might imply in that context:
Clothing			
Hairstyle			
Jewelry			
Shoes			
Hair accessory/hat			
Other possession			

- Students should discuss with each other if they agree on the meanings and groups associated with each adornment/possession. This could result in discovering that adornments have multiple meanings depending on who is interpreting what. (Adornment means a decoration or ornament that is commonly added to render people more attractive to themselves or others.) After discussing findings from groups, ask students which of the adornments/possessions they wear seems to communicate most about their identity? Least?
2. Students now think about how they can represent themselves in a realistic self-portrait, including at least two signifiers of "identity." This could be hairstyle, jewelry, clothing or even some kind of possession. Sketch out some ideas on how you could incorporate signifiers of your identity into a self-portrait.
 3. Now we will be drawing self-portraits by first investigating basic facial structure. Describe where the facial features are placed. Describe the muscles that are in the face and ask the students to feel their faces, feeling the location of muscles and bones.
 4. Ask one of the students to measure where the eyes are in comparison to the chin and forehead. The middle! Continue talking about the spatial relationships between eyes, ears, nose, mouth, chin, top of head, etc.
 5. Pass out drawing paper. Have them make a sketch of their face in pencil. Do this step by step with them on the chalkboard. Start with the oval, measure the middle, make eyes, nose mouth, ears, etc.
 6. Pass out pastels. Discuss drawing techniques and how to make different marks on the paper (using the side, point, erasing with each eraser, darkening a part and erasing it, blending with tissues).
 7. Now with a new sheet of drawing paper have the students work on a final drawing, while you walk around the room helping them and reminding them of different drawing techniques, facial proportion, and shapes of the facial features. Emphasize that each student's face will be different, and each facial feature won't be in the same exact place as the other student's.
 8. Importantly students now add adornments that express an aspect of his or her personality.

Reflection

Hang the students' artwork in the front of the room and ask the students which pieces they feel are the most successful in terms of expressing something about themselves. Why? Which pieces use shading to mold the facial features? Which pieces look the most like the students? Which are interesting and expressive because of the adornments? What are the similarities between their self-portraits and the ones they viewed earlier?

New Mexico Visual Arts Standards/Benchmarks

- 4A) Explore the influence of personal experiences, imagination and the dynamics of culture to works of art.
- 5A) Understand and distinguish multiple purposes and motivations for creating works of art.
 - 5A-1) Demonstrate the use of the elements of art to express moods and feelings in one's own art and the art of others.
 - 5B) Understand contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.
 - 6A) Compare and describe artwork of various eras and cultures.

UNIT V – AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY

Lesson Two

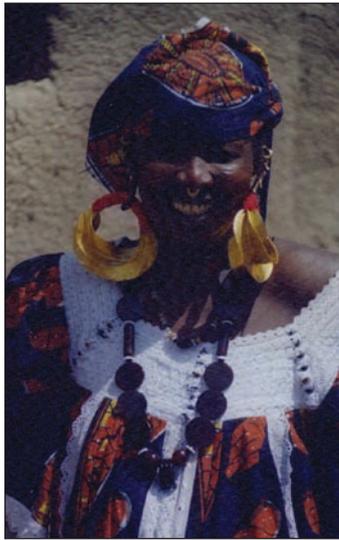
Adornment and Identification

Pastel Self-Portrait

STUDY GUIDE

Let's look at photographs of Africans from various ethnic groups to appreciate cultural identity and how it can be expressed. Keep in mind that as we look at these photographs, we are only seeing one moment in time. Just as we have no fixed identity, neither do Africans.

Malian woman wearing gold earrings, Fulani people, Mali. Photograph by Andrea Cermanski.



These gold earrings are worn by wealthy and prestigious people in Mali. In the past, they were also used as a form of currency. If a woman wanted to make a large purchase, she would scratch the appropriate amount of gold off of her earrings. These earrings can be worn in one of three ways: through the earlobe, attached to a headband, or over the ear. These earrings are made by a method called shallow forming which creates curves and domes in sheet metal. The reflections produced on the curved shapes make

What jewelry in our culture communicates status?

the final product look thicker. After a crescent shape is cut from a flat sheet of metal, it is heated and then hammered with a mallet into the shape desired by the artists. The crescents are then fused together to make the final product.

Lower page:

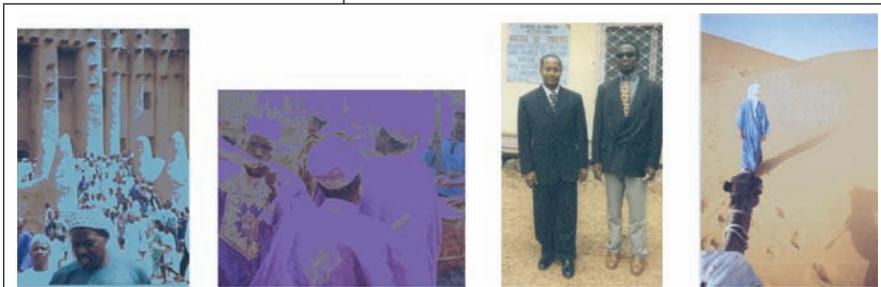
(Image 1) Look at the image of the mud building on the left. This is a famous mosque in Djenne, Mali. The men are wearing traditional Muslim dress.

(Image 2) Is the dress of these Muslim men similar to the Fulani Muslim men from Cameroon? Explain. Do you see any women in the photograph? (No, women are not allowed to enter a Mosque in the Muslim faith. Muslims go to Mosque to pray on Fridays, but are required by the religion to pray five times per day no matter where they are.)

(Image 3) What do you guess about the profession of the two men in suits? (The man on the left is a magistrate, and the man on the right is the Minister of Transportation for the Littoral Province.) Do they look western educated based on their clothing?

(Image 4) This is a man named Mohammed who is a camel guide for tourists in the Saharan desert in Morocco. Why is Mohammed's clothing practical for his context? (His clothing protects him from the sun.)

Four photographs from Morocco, Sao Tome, Cameroon and Mali dealing with context. Photographs by Andrea Cermanski.





Karo men
(<http://goafrica.about.com/od/ethiopia/ig/Omo-River-Tribes-Ethiopia/Karo-Warriors-Omo-River-Ethio.htm>)

There are about 3,000 Karo people in Ethiopia and they live on the banks of the Omo River in Southwestern Ethiopia. The Karo are known for their face and body painting which they do for dances and ceremonies. Often this painting resembles the spotted feathers of a guinea fowl. The paint is made by pulverizing locally found white chalk, yellow mineral rock, red iron ore and black charcoal. Feather plumes are inserted into their clay hair buns, which can take up to three days to construct and are usually remade every three to six months.

Do we have body art in our culture? Can you think of times when people you have seen put paint on their faces such as football fans or Halloween masquerades?



Winnie Fischer, 2004
photograph by Tracey
Derrick, South Africa.
(Africa Remix, 2005)

Courtesy of the artist

- What can you infer about Winnie by her clothing?
- Look at the background which shows her kitchen. What can you infer about her based on her kitchen?
- One of Tracey Derrick's goals is to make her subjects look proud. Does she succeed?

Tracey Derrick is South African photographer who focuses on social documentary, much of it involving people in South African townships.

These townships are also called *Shantytowns* and are cramped with many poor and working class people. These shantytowns attract people from all over the country who move to the city from villages to find work. South Africa had perhaps the most brutal form of colonialism, with the setting up of *apartheid* in 1948. Apartheid means *apart* and resulted in a set of racist laws which restricted black South Africans from having freedom. Apartheid had many similarities to segregation for African Americans in the U.S. South Africans rebelled against this, and finally got rid of apartheid laws.



Algeria,
Portraits by
Omar D. C-
print
photograph
(Africa Remix,
2005)

Courtesy of the artist

Omar D. is a photographer who lives in Paris and Algiers. Originally an ophthalmologist, he pursued photography in 1971. In his work he likes to focus on representing the things of everyday life.

These photographs are of Berbers. Ethnic Berbers (who were the earliest known inhabitants of North Africa) are about 17 percent of the population in Algeria. In parts of Algeria, Berbers maintain a strongly separate identity, speaking their own languages rather than Arabic. Many rural Berbers live by cultivating crops and raising livestock, while others have a nomadic or semi-nomadic life as traveling herders and traders.

- Look at this woman's traditional Berber jewelry.
- What do you guess about her status from looking at her jewelry?

In contrast to Algerian Arab women, Berber women have more freedom in their lives. (<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/ontheline/explore/journey/algeria/ethnic.htm>) An Algerian would know these women were Berbers by their dress. Many Arab women, especially older women, follow the Islamic tradition and wear a veil (*hijab*) in public. In the Souf region in eastern Algeria, women are so heavily veiled that only their eyes are visible. In the east, most women wear black, while in the central and

western areas, most women wear white. Berber women, however, do not wear a veil. They usually dress in long skirts, blouses and shawls with floral patterns. (<http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/algeria/family.html>)

Resources

1. Malian woman wearing gold earrings, Fulani people, Mali. Photograph by Andrea Cermanski.
2. Four photographs from festival day in Dschang, Cameroon. Photographs by Andrea Cermanski.
3. Four photographs from Morocco, Sao Tome, Cameroon and Mali dealing with context. Photographs by Andrea Cermanski.
4. Karo men, Ethiopia (<http://goafrica.about.com/od/ethiopia/ig/Omo-River-Tribes--Ethiopia/Karo-Warriors--Omo-River-Ethio.htm>)
5. Pictures of Harari wedding in Harar, Ethiopia (<http://www.zawaj.com/weddingways/harar.html>)
6. Photograph of Himba woman, Maria, Namibia (<http://rossputin.com/blog/index.php/a/2005/07/>)
7. Photograph of Maria's daughters, Namibia (<http://rossputin.com/blog/index.php/a/2005/07/>)
8. Photograph of Herero woman, Namibia (<http://www.aloveyworld.com/webnamib/htmg/b/nam002.htm>)
9. Winnie Fischer, 2004 photograph by Tracey Derrick, South Africa. (Africa Remix, 2005)
10. Algeria, Portraits by Omar D. C-print photograph, Algeria. (Africa Remix, 2005)
11. There is a lesson plan entitled African Art and Personal Adornment (Volume 11) available at the Detroit Museum of art and RESA at http://www.resa.net/smart/lesson_pdfs/11_DIA/11_dia_lesson_2.pdf
A video and CD by the same name are available through RESA at (734-334-1416) <http://faculty.cva.edu/LMI/lesson06-selfportraits.html>

UNIT V – AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY

Lesson Three Identity and Society Conceptual Collage

LESSON PLAN

This plan will explore the role society plays in shaping one's identity. Students will reflect on stereotypes they feel are imposed on them, and create "Stereotype Resistance Art" using collaged images from magazines. How much of our identity is our choice, and how much is shaped by others? How does society play a role in shaping identity?

Background Information

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

Objectives

The student will create an art work in response to stereotyping in society.

Elements or Principles

asymmetrical and symmetrical balance

Techniques

printmaking, collage

Materials

magazines, newspaper, photographs, collage glue, colored markers, scissors, 12 x 15" Bristol board.

Vocabulary (see glossary)

stereotype, diptych, triptych, symmetrical, asymmetrical, exaggeration

Engaging Students

Today we will explore what plays a part in forming our identity. We will look at an African artist who deals with identity formation and stereotyping. Then we will make stereotype *resistance* art. During the previous lesson we discussed ways we identify ourselves through adornments such as clothing, body art, and jewelry. Now let's discuss how society plays a role in our identity:

Essential Questions

- Do you consider yourself to be a part of a certain group (sporty, preppy, etc.)? What are the labels or assumptions associated with those groups? Which of these stereotypes are true for you? Which aren't? Who do you think creates stereotypes?
- Where do you get ideas for how to dress or wear your hair? What kinds of products to buy? What kind of music to listen to? What kinds of posters to put on your bedroom wall?
- Do any of these media sources give you ideas about how to dress, products to buy, etc.? If so, how? (advertisements, commercials, movies, music videos, television programs)
- Do any of these media sources reinforce stereotypes? If so, how?

Activity

1. Sketch and journal ideas for ten minutes about some ideas on how to address society's influence on identity. Record images or ideas people may have about you or a group with which you are associated. Are some of the perceptions true? Are some false? In what ways can you use art to address other people's ideas about you or the group you belong to? How can you inform others through art by addressing a misconception and countering with a truer image? If you wish to strengthen good images about your group and community, how can art be used to do this? How does society try to shape your identity?
2. Students will use these images to create a conceptual collage art piece that involves three parts: (1) text to comment on images and ideas others may have about you and your true perception of your own identity; (2) printmaking techniques to create the

background and overall mood or setting for your two-dimensional work (could be as simple as monoprint); and (3) images either drawn, painted, or collaged. All three components should be combined into one unified and balanced art piece that communicates a concept about your identity and experiences.

Teacher is encouraged to share his/her sketches and ideas. Teacher should demonstrate incorporating images and ideas into one work. Teacher should do two examples—one with asymmetrical balance, one with symmetrical. (Another option would be to have two teacher examples prepared before class.)

Reflection

Students will be asked to keep their work on their desk as students walk around to view everyone's creations. Students will try to guess the artist's intention before each discusses his or her work in more detail, explaining the process. Students will be asked:

- What was your idea?
- How did you use balance to create meaning in your piece?
- What did you think about this assignment?
- Do you think this project has helped you to understand your peers better? Why or why not?

New Mexico Visual Arts Standards/Benchmarks

- 4A) Explore the influence of personal experiences, imagination and the dynamics of culture to works of art.
- 5A) Understand and distinguish multiple purposes and motivations for creating works of art.
- 5A-1) Demonstrate the use of the elements of art to express moods and feelings in one's own art and the art of others.
- 5B) Understand contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.
- 6A) Compare and describe artwork of various eras and cultures.

UNIT V – AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY

Lesson Three

Identity and Society

Conceptual Collage

STUDY GUIDE



Siemon Allen,
Newspapers,
2002,
newspapers,
tracing paper,
polystyrene,
pins (*A Fiction
of Authenticity:
Contemporary
Africa Abroad*)
Courtesy of the artist

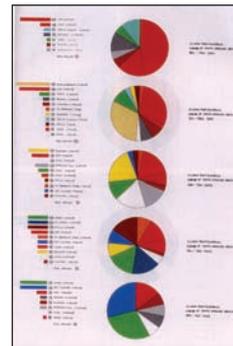
Siemon Allen

Allen is from South Africa, but currently lives in Richmond, Virginia. He is interested in how the image of South Africa contributes to nation building and identity formation. (Fitzgerald, 2003) Allen became interested in the idea of imaging South Africa as a result of the complex nation building and identity crisis the country has experienced since Independence in 1994. Aware of the effort toward improving its image in the world, Allen became interested in how that image was portrayed in his current home, the U.S.

Newspapers is his collection of two years of newspaper articles about South Africa from The St. Louis Post-Dispatch. They are arranged in a minimalist grid. The artist uses sheets of vellum to cover up parts of the newspaper. This creates a push/pull between the dulled, covered, barely readable areas of the newspaper and the brightness of the uncovered newspaper text and color images. In the display of newspapers, it can be seen that months go by when his country's issues don't appear in the newspaper. This shows how absence plays a part in building a country's image. His work highlights who decides what is important and how that plays a role in imaging a country. It is about the power of the media.

What Allen eventually realized was that South Africa's image in the U.S. "is a fabrication of American imagination as delivered by its 'media.'" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.7). Allen himself wonders, "whether these newspaper images are constructed by the US media for a US audience and whether, by re-presenting this image, do I perpetuate stereotypical or limited notions of South Africa? Conversely, I also wonder if this project (and its evolution) might not allow the audience to re-focus on important issues from South Africa that they might have on any given day's news coverage overlooked." (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.8)

Take a look at Allen's pie graphs. These pie graph charts show how much media attention South Africa got in various categories. Some of the categories include: AIDS, crime, medical/science, obituary, sport, disaster, apartheid, business, arts/culture, and so on.



- Why do you think he chose to count the number of articles written in each category?
- What stories do you think may not be told in this newspaper? How could these untold stories affect our image of South Africa?

- How do you think these newspaper articles could contribute to an image of South Africa? Stereotypes?
- Who do you think decides what topics will be covered in a newspaper?
- Is his piece balanced symmetrically or asymmetrically?

Resources

Siemon Allen, *Newspapers*, 2002, newspapers, tracing paper, polystyrene, pins (from *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad*)

Wangechi Mutu, *Machine head*, Ink and collage on paper (from www.momentaart.org/pas_pro/mutu.html)

<http://www.miamiartmuseum.org/exhibitions-current-mutu.asp> www.momentaart.org/pas_pro/mutu.html

UNIT V – AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY

Lesson Four

Expressing Identity Uniquely

Mixed-media Painting

LESSON PLAN

In this lesson we will explore African artists who have experimented with creating multiple self-identities in their art. Students will express their own individuality by creating a unique painting or photograph. Using their imagination, they will incorporate personality characteristics, adornments or physical features they would like to have or accentuate. The self-portrait is a way for the students to express themselves uniquely.

Background Information

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

Objectives

The student will:

- Understand how society plays a role in shaping identity.
- Create an imaginative self-portrait.

Elements or Principles

exaggeration, balance, emphasis, expressionism

Technique

expressive painting, abstraction

Materials

A variety of painting and drawing media such as acrylic paint, oil pastel, charcoal, colored pencil, marker, watercolors, pencils, scissors, acrylic glazing medium, and collage materials such as magazines.

Vocabulary (see glossary)

individuality, fantasy, abstract, juxtaposition

Engaging Students

What do you do to express your individuality? In the last two lessons we looked at how people communicate identity through adornment. Today we will be looking at artists who express unique visions of themselves. These artists use a variety of artistic techniques to express their own individuality. After exploring these artists, students will create an expressive self-portrait.

Essential Questions

- How have other artists expressed their individuality through art?
- What artistic forms and embellishments would be most appropriate to express your individuality?
- Can you stretch your imaginations to create a fantasy self-portrait?

Activity

1. Think about what makes you unique. Close your eyes and visualize your unique characteristics. Take it a step further and visualize your fantasy image of yourself.
2. What colors do you see – bright or subdued, one color or many? Try to see the colors in your mind.
3. Think about shapes, lines or forms in your image. Describe them in your mind.
4. Does your face or body image interact with these colors, shapes, lines and/or forms? Is there movement? Do things look realistic? Abstract?
5. Now it is time for the students to open their eyes and do sketches trying to represent their emerging unique identity. The sketch needn't be limited to the face or figure, but can gain contextual impact and richness by combining with other elements (shapes, images). A range of art media should be available for the sketches.
6. After this exercise, students may share their sketches with each other and discuss how they could turn their sketches into a painting. The teacher may do a demonstration of some possible techniques.
7. Students are ready for the mixed-media art work in which they may use several media to give full expression to their visualization. Choices can include pencils, charcoal, oil pastels, markers, colored pencils and/or watercolors, magazines, photographs, digital self-portraits. The work could use the collage technique.
8. For technique ideas, students can refer to the work of the artists presented in the Study Guide section:

- Ingrid Mwangi—uses repetition to show how her frontal self-portrait changed drastically from beginning to end.
- Middle Art—uses realism, humor and juxtaposition with famous people to create meaning in his full body self-portrait.
- Samuel Fosso—uses costume and playfulness to express multiple identities. His works are very colorful and incorporate meaningful props and backgrounds.
- Gebre Kristos Desta—uses color, abstraction and expressive lines to create mood.

Reflection

Students will write about their self-portrait including the concept and the artistic decision-making process. They may choose to illuminate their fantasy as a literary piece. After the teacher talks about mutual respect for the artistic efforts of classmates, students may discuss their work and interact with their fellow artists.

**New Mexico Visual Arts
Standards/Benchmarks**

- 4A) Explore the influence of personal experiences, imagination and the dynamics of culture to works of art.
- 5A) Understand and distinguish multiple purposes and motivations for creating works of art.
 - 5A-1) Demonstrate the use of the elements of art to express moods and feelings in one's own art and the art of others.
- 5B) Understand contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.
- 6A) Compare and describe artwork of various eras and cultures.

UNIT V – AFRICAN ART AND IDENTITY

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STUDY GUIDE



Ingrid Mwangi, *Fertility*, nine piece photography work, C-prints mounted on three green boards, text written with chalk, 1996, Kenya. http://www.ingridmwangi.de/pho_fer.htm

Courtesy of the artist

- This is a self-portrait that Mwangi repeated many times and changed slightly each time.
- Notice the subtle progression that results in a dramatic difference between the initial and last portrait.
- How does Mwangi use metaphor in this piece?

Mwangi was born in 1975 in Nairobi, Kenya and resides in Ludwigshafen/Rhein and Nairobi. She studied sculpture and painting in Germany. She and her husband collaborate on installation, photography and performance pieces which are exhibited around the world. (www.art2006.com.au/artists/acmi/mawangianthutter.html)

Middle Art (Augustin Okoye), *Self-Portrait*, Oil on plate, 1970, Nigeria. (*An Anthology of African Art the Twentieth Century*)

- What do you think he is saluting?
- How does juxtaposition and text create meaning?
- How does Middle Art create an image of himself in this piece?
- What does his facial expression convey?
- How does Middle Art use humor in this piece?



Middle Art was born in the Nri region in Nigeria and now works in Onitsha, Nigeria. He studied to be a sign painter as a youth and decided to change his name to Middle Art, which is a

popular name in the region. Although most of his early work included business commissions, he painted a few signs to promote his business. (*An Anthology of African Art the Twentieth Century*)



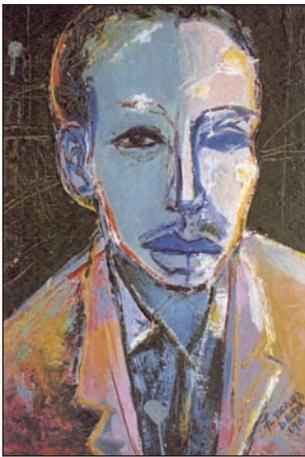
Samuel Fosso, *The chief: He who sold Africa to the colonials*, from the series *Serie Tati*, autoportrait I-V, C-print photograph, 1997, Central African Republic (*Africa Remix*, 2005)
© Samuel Fosso, Courtesy JM.Patras/paris

- Discuss the possible meanings of symbols in this piece.
- What do you think Fosso is trying to communicate in this?
- How does it feel when you dress up? Do you enjoy taking on the persona of someone else?

Samuel Fosso was born in 1962 in a small village in Cameroon. He started his own photographic studio in Bangui, capital of the Central-African Republic, as a precocious 13-year-old and began to make self-portraits only a year later, which have now earned him international recognition. *Studio Photo Nationale* was the studio Fosso opened as a teenager. He started dressing up and filming

himself when he had extra film at the end of rolls shooting clients. Although this started out as a joke, he continued to do it on a regular basis and eventually became recognized for it.

Fosso is now one of the most accomplished African photographers. His work is embedded with role-play, suggesting dreams enacted in a fantasy world that he creates using costumes, backdrops and props. Although he was not intending it, his work connects to our post-modern era and has been compared to Cindy Sherman. Fosso's approach reflects on *African-ness*: the local and global issues that affect the African sense of self-identity.



Gebre Kristos
Desta, *Self-portrait*,
1961, Ethiopia.
(*An Anthology of
African Art in the
Twentieth Century*)

<http://www.ethiopianart.org/articles/index.php>

<http://www.ethiopianart.org/articles/articles.php?id=16>

- Desta's piece incorporates bold color and expressive line.
- What do you think this communicates about his identity?
- Here's a quote from Desta:
"An artist goes beyond the matter of the story and therefore the realistic is insufficient. The artist seeks to find another language to express what is beyond. This could be the reason for abstract paintings."
Gebre Kristos Desta, 1969
- Do you agree with Desta's feelings about abstract painting?

Gebre Kristos was one of the most admired and respected artists of the twentieth century in Ethiopia. He is "largely responsible for introducing non-figurative art in Ethiopia" and is regarded as one of the most important abstract artists in sub-Saharan Africa and is the best known abstract expressionist in Ethiopia. As he was an abstract expressionist painter, his works on national themes do not contain the same historical, religious, mythological, nor narrative content as some of his fellow artists. Fascinated by his country's history, religious myths, legends, and cultural issues, without forsaking historical accuracy or advocating myths, he chose a subject which allowed for freedom of his personal insight as well as his personal expression. He also painted several paintings following the political climate of the country before fleeing in 1979, like many other citizens in fear of the ruthless persecution of the Derg.

Resources

Ingrid Mwangi, *Fertility*, nine piece photography work, C-prints mounted on three green boards, text written with chalk, 1996, Kenya.
http://www.ingridmwangi.de/pho_fer.htm

Middle Art (Augustin Okoye), *Self-Portrait*, Oil on plate, 1970, Nigeria. (*An Anthology of African Art the Twentieth Century*)

Middle Art, *Middle Art Receives a Prize from the Hands of Sardauna de Sokoto*, Oil on fiberboard, 1966 (*An Anthology of African Art the Twentieth Century*)

Samuel Fosso, *The Liberated American Woman of the 1970s*, from the series "Serie Tati, *autoportrait I-V*," C-print photograph, 1997, Central African Republic. (*Africa Remix, 2005*)

Samuel Fosso, *The chief: He who sold Africa to the colonials*, from the series "Serie Tati, *autoportrait I-V*," C-print photograph, 1997, Central African Republic. (*Africa Remix, 2005*)

Gebre Kristos Desta, *Self-portrait*, 1961, Ethiopia. (*An Anthology of African Art the Twentieth Century*)