

Introduction to African Culture

Identifying Groups by the Way They Adorn Their Bodies

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Overview

Costumes are history. To involve yourself in the study of what people wore exposes you to their past, lets you walk in their present and allows you to speculate on what their future might look like. This unit will address the multiple issues that define why the people of Africa adorn themselves the way they do. You notice I didn't relegate this unit only to the history of African clothing, but to the present way of dressing as well.

Although this unit is written with the Costume Majors of Rogers Creative and Performing Arts in mind it will be useful to anyone interested in historical clothing. Teachers of social studies and language arts could use this model to teach about the continent of Africa with the teacher of Home Economics and fine arts. If the students come away with a hands on project so much the better because this creates a livelier interest in the subject.

Because the Pittsburgh Pennsylvania Public School System, where I teach, has a heavy interest and investment in high literacy achievement, this unit will have a major focus on reading, research, and writing. It will utilize the individual and combined talents of the Social Studies, Language Arts, Visual Arts and Library departments as an interdisciplinary work. It should be able to stand-alone if any of these areas desires to use some part of this for individual lessons.

Rationale

Students of Costume Design should have as much basic information as possible about as many diverse groups of people as possible. It is infinitely easier to build a show when you know some specifics about the people upon which a show is based. To this end I want to introduce my students to the peoples of Africa.

When we study the continent of Africa we need to take into consideration the natural resources provided and the geography of the land. We must also appreciate the ramifications politics has on the resources available at any given time to the inhabitants of the land. And we need to comprehend what kind of caste systems, ceremonial traditions, religions and taboos, exist in each of the individual countries and townships.

One purpose of doing this type of research is to show the students that many changes occurred in these areas as wars and uprisings created new lines of rulers and consequently new avenues of natural resources, new gods, and new fashion looks as the old is assimilated with the new lifestyles. It must be understood that what might have been acceptable in one time frame and under one ruler may not have survived another. Consequently if we are to dress a show we must be correct in so many ways that we will neither offend any group, nor present an unauthentic look.

Another purpose of this research is to challenge the students to work with other academic and arts forms to create a work that can be evaluated by rubrics in each of those areas.

Background

The African continent has long been an enigma to me. The sheer size and scope of the continent makes it a challenge to understand. Africa is a large and varied continent with more ethnic groups than any other place on earth. It is divided into 54 independent countries. Within these countries there are multiple family groups and villages. These groups speak a reported 1700 languages and dialects. They each have their own history, culture and customs. Some of these groups prospered for thousands of years and were highly developed societies before the peoples of Europe came into being. Others arose in the past few hundred years as a means of

adapting and assimilating to their changing world. Whether they have been around for thousands of years or only the last few hundred the people of Africa are said to be the product of three distinct cultures, Native Africans, Islamic and European. These have coexisted or merged throughout the continent.

Europeans wrongly viewed African nations as needing their help to become [*as civilized as they were*]. This notion colored the behavior of Europeans towards African nations. Had they looked beyond their own biases the Europeans would have seen great kingdoms whose merchants had gold to trade, where justice was dispensed in their courts, where their women were adorned in beautifully crafted jewelry and where kings ruled in much pomp and splendor.

Because of these three cultures, Africa should hold the title as the largest Melting Pot. The United States couldn't claim this honor until much later in world history. Every major continent historically held only people of their kind, a single race of people. My research indicates that people of different races came to settle in many coastal areas of Africa and mated with the people living there. Further proof of the racial mixing is evident in pictures found on the walls of caves from tens of thousands of years ago. One such group, the Mongolians were said to have traveled from Asia and landed in east Africa. They mingled with local inhabitants and permanently settled on Madagascar where the people have dark skin and the slanted Mongolian eyes.

More proof of the diversity of the population on the African continent is the number of languages spoken there. The following list is, at best incomplete, and at best, a sample of diversity: Hebrew, Arabic, Amharic, Berber, Cushite, Ancient Egyptian, Hausa, and languages of the Lake district. Twi, Iuganda, Zulu, Afrikaans, Yoruba, Wolof, French, Rwand, Tamahag Khoisan, Mandingo, Maasai, Igbo, and Dinka are some of the languages spoken by African families

As costumers we identify people by the way they adorn their bodies. This is true not only of this great continent but also of modern day teens, and rock stars, or historical groups like the Romans and Babylonians. In order for my costume students to accomplish this they must study the peoples of the targeted country. They must learn to correctly and adequately research the lifestyles and replicate the clothing of the group they are assigned.

Given the number of ethnic groups it will be a challenge to specifically identify anyone as coming from a particular area. It would be foolish to assume we can remember all of the various types of clothing related to any given group. But it is within the realm of reality to expect costume students to grasp a particular silhouette, jewelry type, face make up, color association, fabric type etc. that will assist them in their design and construction of costumes.

While researching the history of African clothing I discovered that most of the books on the subject of historical clothing focused on European fashions. This was also true of other non-Caucasian ethnic groups. Many books had no pictures or descriptions. The focus was on the way they lived. Many spoke of the fact that in warmer climates little was worn. Some showed pictures of the people of the area but often we had to guess what the fabric was, etc.

The resurgence of interest in the continent of Africa has brought forth newer information on the history of lifestyles that includes the clothing worn and the weaving of cloth used to make this clothing. This lets us know that at this particular time we can only look to books with a specific subject matter to gather information on non-Caucasian fashions.

One interesting note about fashions is that popular looks often follow political awareness. So when countries become the focus of the world, people notice what they are wearing. The designers of today are making good use of the designs of African history [costumes]. African influences are frequently seen in styles of clothing, comfortable clothing, bright colors in fabric design, jewelry, shoes, and hats.

Objectives – The student will be able to

- Have a workable basic understanding of the cultures of the African continent
- Use a variety of research tools and techniques to locate, evaluate and extract relevant information [web sites, books, libraries, etc,]
- Master writing skills and further reading comprehension
- Use this information to complete a paper to be presented to the larger body. Gr.6 will have min.2 pg. Gr. 7 & 8 will have min 4 pg. Typed 1.5 space. Min 4 sources. Two of which will be books.
- Design and construct a wearable art piece that replicates traditional African adornment
- Maintain a weekly journal of reflections
- Compile a portfolio of their work to be presented at years' end

Because interdepartmental teaching is encouraged by the administration of my school the objective for my department will be to collaborate with other teachers on a project that engages the skills of both the arts and academic areas.

Strategies/ Classroom Activities

The teacher must decide how students will approach the work. Some suggestions are listed below.

- Assign a specific geographical area to a team. Have them study a specified number of the family groups within the area, with a focus on the similarities among the groups in lifestyles
- Allow individual students to select different family groups to research. A lottery might be helpful to ensure that each student has a different group or area to focus on.
- Have students compare the historical and current lifestyles of a selected country
- Assign student groups to research ceremonial masks, make-up, or facial scarring
- Have one group to focus on the meanings behind the special cloths worn i.e. Kente cloth for ordinary people and for the king
- Make a power point presentation on the daily life of a village
- Make the comparison of major religious theories the focus of the paper
- Take on the identity of a village member. Write your paper in his words.
- Research the life of a famous man or woman to better understand the culture of a specific African group.
- If the construction of an African arts project is to be a part of the process encourage the students to choose fairly early what this will be. It will allow for the timely acquisition of necessary supplies

Lesson Plans will be separated according to class grade. Anyone using this can choose the level they want and build it to suit their purposes.

Equipment / Supplies needed for all grades

- Overhead projector
- Tv/Vcr
- Videos of Historic Africa
- Textbooks and periodicals
- Personal Journals for reflections
- Folders for picture morgue
- Fabric/sewing supplies
- Paper/markers/scissors
- Measuring equipment [rulers - tape measures]
- Pottery making equip/paints
- Jewelry making supplies
- Cardboard, buckram, plaster of paris, etc. for mask making

Day one [1]

- **Grade 6** Brainstorm about what the students have heard about Africa. Write all ideas on the board for discussion
- **Grades 7 & 8** Discuss cultural lifestyles of a variety of groups
- **All grades** Show pictures that validate/deny the statements the children made, Use the overhead projector if the pictures can't be cut from books

NOTE: Inform students that there is no word for TRIBE in any African language. This is a European invention and Africans dislike very much being labeled a tribe.

Day two [2] All grades

- Discuss/Define the meanings of the word Adornment. And the reasons why people do so.
- View video on African culture. This can be borrowed from your public library. Our S.S. teacher has several.
- Take notes and answer questions on teacher made video/evaluation form See appendices # 2

Day three [3] All Grades

- Discuss how paper is to be structured. Students given the teacher made forms for notes/outline See appendices # 3
- All students/teams will be assigned 2/3 groups to investigate in broad terms. Teacher will decide with student input the information they will look for.

Day four [4] All grades

- Work in the library to get enough information to narrow your search to one specific group, activity, area, etc.
- Discuss with teacher facts found and the direction your research will take

Day five [5] All grades

- Students select the group they will focus on. They will gather notes on outline form #3

Day six [6] All grades

- Bring Preliminary 1st draft to school. Do PEER review of this draft during class time
- Teacher reviews draft. Returns draft within 2 days

Day seven [7] & eight [8]

- Begin Picture Morgue – use textbooks, library books. Scan pictures. Print out. Using current fashion books select pictures that suggest African fashion
- Cut and mount the pictures selected. This is for reference purposes as we select costumes for shows that come up. It negates the necessity of the same research at another time
- The students can be divided into groups to create a picture gallery
 1. Face paint
 2. Jewelry
 3. Dress styles
 4. Hair styles
 5. Ceremonial dress Masks
 6. Body painting/Scarring
- This makes the children focus on the subject and reinforces their learning

NOTE: Teacher will use this time, as students work independently, to discuss the 1st draft with each one. Second draft is due in completed form the Friday of week three.

Day nine [9] All students

- Teacher will demonstrate and share a variety of options for replicating wearable or useable or decorative art objects from Africa.
- Students will select a piece they will construct

Day ten [10] All students

- Students will select the supplies necessary to the completion of their project.
- Each student will sketch design ideas, or select patterns prior to starting projects

NOTE: Grade 6 will select from

1. Hats
2. Scarves
3. Simple beaded jewelry
4. Unpainted pottery gotten from the art department or outside source (Color Me Mine – Pottery Barn etc.)

Grade 7 will select from

1. The items used in ceremonial activities. At Rogers CAPA this coincides with the curriculum for grade 7 as they study Africa and make face masks as part of the learning process.
2. In other classrooms the students can select from the grade six list if the teacher wishes to do so

Grade 8 will

1. Design and construct wearable items
 - Dresses with tied headwear to match
 - Dashikis with pants to match
 - Simple sandals
 - Earrings
 - Necklaces
 - Bracelets

Day eleven [11]

- All students will begin work on their personal African Project
- Projects are due as listed
 1. Grade 6 the Friday of week three
 2. Grade 7 The Friday of week three
 3. Grade 8 The Friday of week four

NOTE: 1. The Monday following completion of all arts projects the student will share both their written piece and their constructed piece. This should take two days. ALL STUDENTS WILL COMPLETE A SELF EVALUATION

2. Because the classes at Rogers CAPA are two periods daily for grade 6 and three periods daily for grades 7&8 this time frame will change for those who teach in single period slots.

Appendices

#1 List of Possible African cultures to research

CULTURE	LOCATION
Acholi	Uganda
Adja	Benin
Aduma	Benin
Afar	Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia
Agni	Ivory Coast
Ahanta	Ghana
Aizo	Benin
Akan	Ghana
Akposo	Togo
Alar	Zaire
Amba	Uganda
Amhara	Ethiopia
Ambro	S.Africa
Ana	Toto
Anaak	Sudan, Ethiopia
Ashanti	Ghana, Ivory Coast
Baganda	Uganda
Baggara	Sudan, Chad
Bagisu	Uganda
Bakele	Gabon
Baliga	Uganda
Bakota	Gabon
Balante	guinea-Bissau
Bambara	Mali
Bamileke	Cameroon
Banda	Central African Republic
Bantu	
Banyaruanda	Uganda
Banziri	Central African Republic
Baoule`	Ivory Coast
Barwe	Zimbabwe
Basoga	Uganda
Bateke	Congo
Batoro	Uganda
Beja	Sudan, Ethiopia
Beri	Sudan
Berberi-Manga	Niger
Bemba	Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Bete	Ivory Coast
Beti	Cameroon

Bini	Nigeria
Bobo	Burkina Faso
Bokora	Uganda
Bomvana	S.Africa
Bopgandi	Zaire
Bor	Sudan
Bunga	Central African Republic
Bunji	Zimbabwe
Bwaka	Zaire
Chaga	Tanzania
Chamba	Togo
Chewas	Malawi
Chokwe	Angola, Zambia, Zaire
Dagomba	Ghana
Daju	Chad
Damara	Namibia
Dan	Ivory Coast
Danakil	Ethiopia
Dialonke	Guinea
Dinka	Sudan, Ethiopia
Diola	Niger
Djerma	Niger
Dodoth	Zimbabwe
Dogon	Mali, Burkina
Duma	Zimbabwe
Dumara	Nambia
Edo	Nigeria
Enenga	Gabon
Evalue	Ghana
Ewe	Togo, Ghana, Benin
Falasha	Ethiopia, Israel
Fang	Cameroon, Gabon, Guinea
Fanti	Ghana
Fingo	S.Africa
Fon	Benin
Fula	Gaambia
Fulani	Sudan
Fungwe	Zimbabwe
Ga	Ghana
Galla	Ethiopia, Kenya
Galoa	Gabon
Gonja	Ghana
Govera	Zimbabwe
Gurma	Togo

Gurunsi	Burkina Faso
Gusii	Kernya
Gwena	Zimbabwe
Ha	Tanzania
Hausa	Nigeria, Niger
Haya	Tanzania
Hehe	Tanzania
Hlubi	S.Africa
Hutu	Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Tanzania
Ibibio	Nigeria
Ibo	Nigeria
Igbo	Nigeria
Ijan	Nigeria
Ila	Zambia
Isaa	Djibouti
Iteso	Uganda
Jie	Uganda
Jola	Gambia
Jonaam	Zaire, Uganda
Kabrai	Togo
Kalenjin	Kenya
Kamba	Kenya, Tanzania
Kanuari	Niger
Kaoko	Nambia
Karamojong	Uganda
Karanga	Zimbabwe
Kavango	Nambia
Keiyo	Kenya
Khoisan	Botswana, Namibia, S.Africa
Kikuyu	Kenya
Kimbundo	Angola
Kipsigis	Kenya
Kissi	West Africa
Koranki	Guinea
Korekore	Zimbabwe
Kotokoli	Togo
Kongo	Angola, Zaire, Congo
Kpele	Guinea, Liberia
Krim	West Africa
Kunari	Nigeria
Kru	Liberia, Ivory Coast
Kunari	Nigeria
Lamba	Togo
Lango	Uganda

Lebu	Senegal
Lega	Central Africa
Leya	Zimbabwe
Lilima	Zimbabwe
Lobi	Burkina Faso
Loko	West Africa
Loso	Togo
Lozi	Zambia
Luba	Zaire
Luhya	Kenya
Lunda	Zaire
Lungu	S.Africa
Luo	Kenya, Tanzania
Luvale	Zambia
Maba	Chad
Makonde	Tanzania
Makua	Mozambique
Malinke	Senegal, Mali, Guinea
Mandjia	Central African Republic
Mandyako	Guinea-Bissau
Marakwet	Kenya
Marka	Mali, Niger
Marya	Ethiopia
Massai	Kenya, Tanzania
Matheniko	Uganda
Matopo	Zimbabwe
Mbaka	Central African Republic
Mboshi	Congo
Mbum	Central African Republic
Mbunda	Angola
Mbuti	Zaire
Mende	Sierra Leone
Mensa	Ethiopia
Mesarit	Chad
Mholo	S.Africa
Mina	Togo
Miniaka	Mali, Niger
Moba	Togo
Mongo	Zaire
Moshi	Ghana
Mossi	Burkina Faso
Mopndo	S.Africa
Mwera	Tanzania
Nama	Nambia

Nanzwa	Zimbabwe
Ndau	Zimbabwe
Ndebele	Zimbabwe, S.Africa
Ngonia	Zambia
Ngquika	S.Africa
Nguni	S.Africa
Nohwe	Zimbabwe
Nubia	Sudan
Nuer	Sudan
Nupe	Nigeria
Nyai	Zimbabwe
Nyakyusa	S.Africa
Nyamwezi	Tanzania
Nyubi	Zimbabwe
Nzima	Ghana
Okande	Gabon
Oromo	Ethiopia, Kenya
Orungu	Gabon
Ovambo	Angola, Namibia
Ovimbundu	Angola
Padhola	Uganda
Pakot	Kenya
Parpels	Guinea-Bissau
Peul	Mali
Pian	Uganda
Pokot	Kenya
Pondo	S.Africa
Sabaot	Kenya
Salamat	Chad
San	Namibia, Botswana, Angola
Sanga	Congo
Sara	Chad, Central African Republic
Sarakole	Mauritania
Seke	Gabon
Senufo	Ivory coast, Mali, Niger
Serahuli	Gambia
Serer	Senegal
Shabi	Zimbabwe
Shambaa	Tanzania
Shangaan	Mozambique
Sankili	Ethiopia
Sherbo	WEST Africa
Shilluk	Sudan
Shira	Gabon

Shona	Zimbabwe, Mozambique
Somali	Ethiopia, Kenya
Somba	Benin
Singe	Zaire
Soso	West Africa
Sotho	Lesotho[S.Africa}
Sukama	Tanzania
Susu	Guinea
Swazi	Swaziland {S.Africa}
Tatog	Tanzania
Twara	Zimbzbwe
Teda	Chad
Tembu	Southern Africa
Teme	Sierra Leone
Terik	Kenya
Themba	S.Africa
Tigrai	Ethiopa
Tiv	Nigeris, Cameroon
Toma	Guinea
Tswana	Botswana, S.Africa
Tuareg	Algeria, Mali, Niger
Tubu	Niger
Tugen	Kenya
Tuken	Kenya
Tukulor	Senegal, Mauritania
Turkana	Kenya
Tutsi	Rwanda, Burundi
Twa	Burundi, Rwanda
Twi	Ghana
Ungwe	Zimbabwe
Vai	Liberia Sierra Leone
Venda	S.Africa
Wati	Togo
Wolof	Senegal, Gambia
Xosha	S.Africa
Yao	Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique
Yoruba	Nigeria, Benin, Togo
Zalamo	Tanzania
Zande	Tanzania
Zezuru	Zimbabwe
Zigula	Tanzania
Zulu	S.Africa

#2

Video Information / Evaluation Form

Name _____ Date _____

Video Title _____

A. Subject Overview

B. Five Specific pieces of information stated in the video

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

C. State one piece of information that made an impression on you.

D. Your Opinion

- Interesting YES NO
- Creative YES NO
- Useful YES NO
- Did you learn something new YES NO

#3

Research Outline Form

Name _____ Date _____

Topic _____

Family Name _____ Geographic Region _____

Languages spoken _____

Geography of the land

Natural resources available

Political history

Religious values

Cultural values around Family, Community, Humanity, Brotherhood

Ceremonial Practices and what they mean

Art forms practiced [Sculpting, Painting, carving, weaving]

Housing

Educational systems [historical/ current]

Career options [historically/currently]

Non-African ethnic groups that share the living space

Specific adornment choices that identify this group [Facial scars, tattoos, head wear, jewelry, face paint, body paint, clothing styles, fabric colors, weaving styles etc.]

Bibliography – Teacher

NOTE: The number of books both professional and school generated is so extensive I hesitate to suggest any that I find to be appropriate for my class. Each of us has our own ideas as to what works for us. I can only say that the net at this time has thousands of sites that respond to any topic pertaining to Africa and all of the information we wish to tap into is there for the taking.

Addison, John “Ancient Africa” New York John Day 1970

Bethwell, George & Jacques Maquet “ Dictionary of Black African Civilization “
New York, Leon Amiel 1974

Gruber, Ruth “Rescue – The Exodus of the Ethiopian Jews” New York, McMillan
1987

Haskins, Jim and Biondi, Joann “From Afar to Zulu” dictionary of African
Cultures Walker and Co. USA. 1995

July, Robert “A History of the African People” New York: Charles Scribner’s
Sons 1974

Moss, Joyce and George Wilson “Peoples of the World. Africans South of the
Sahara” Detroit: Gale Research 1991

Murphy, E. Jefferson “Understanding Africa” Thomas Cromwell New York 1978

Vlahos, Olivia “African Beginnings” New York, Viking Press 1997

Bibliography – Student

NOTE: There are so many books and web sites on the subject of Africa that it is quite unnecessary to formulate a list. Each school district and school building has books appropriate for age level etc. and should be accessed for this unit.

Web Sites

<http://www.artnet.com/guggenheim/africa>

<http://www.webcat.library.wise.edu>

<http://www.resa.net/smart/dia/module.htm>

<http://www.kangausa.com>

<http://www.tk-designs.com/sankofa/headwrap.htm>

<http://www.nmafa.si.edu>

<http://www.zaarysse.com>

<http://www.eb.com>

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/>

<http://t3.preservice.org/TO301035/clothing.htm>