

African Art in Context and Concept

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Overview

African Art in Context and Concept is a multilayered writing course that uses African art as a springboard for response writing. The unit contains ideas for helping students to make improvements in writing. Also included are unit-supporting thumbnails of African countries and the art of various ethnic groups, which will be used to prompt writing, speaking, and research activities.

The three curricular components that comprise this unit are writing, art appreciation, and anthropology. The writing component will cover creative writing and “constructed response” as seen on the student’s PSSA testing. Art appreciation and exploration will aid in the gaining of knowledge of materials, art techniques, and traits of various works of art in order to help the students with the construction of well-supported responses. The anthropology component will help to build a deeper understanding of various African countries, people, cultures, etc., while the students construct well-supported responses.

Several art categories and topics will be covered in this unit. African seats and neck rests will be used to begin the unit. The students will explore the idea of "ownership." Next, the types and uses of dolls in various African cultures will be used to encourage students to look at how we stereotype one another based on cultural assumptions, or *ethnocentrism*s. The use of African masks, as well as the "holistic approach" to how they are used in performance, will be used to illustrate the meaning of "living art." Divination/ritual objects and body "art" will be used in order to demonstrate how many similarities there are between what students typically think of as "odd" and the parallels to things in their lives. Gold weights will be used to discuss "verbal art." The proverbs and folktales that these weights represent will lend to the analyzing of how we pass on culture. Museum curators, collecting, and the categorization of African art will be the culminating unit topic.

This stand-alone course was designed for the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students in the Humanities Department of the Pittsburgh Public Schools gifted education program. These students have extremely high cognitive abilities and need strength-based enrichment activities in addition to what they receive in the mainstream curriculum.

Each student attends the center one day per week. The students have the rare, college-like opportunity to choose the courses they will take each semester. Each course meets for one hour each week over a 16-week semester.

Because these students have the opportunity to work with their intellectual peers at the center, there is a tendency for the students to master concepts and finish projects expediently. For this reason, this course also includes routines and independent research projects in conjunction with daily activities. Those students who finish daily projects quickly will have standard-supporting "free time" activities to keep them learning!

Rationale

The underlying goal of this unit is to discover African Art from an African perspective; to see its beauty in the context in which it was

created. The rationale for creating a course using African art as a springboard for learning how to write more effectively stems from my school district's philosophy of integrating writing across all content areas. This applies to all content areas as well as to all learners. As a gifted education teacher, the underlying focus behind all course development is the pedagogical principle of process skill improvement. At the center, we focus on higher-level process skills, such as the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation phases of higher-level thinking and the fluency, flexibility, and originality phases in the creative thinking process. Key issues, such as cultural awareness and diversity support, also drive my rationale.

As a communications teacher, I must consistently weigh and measure new ways of presenting age-old fundamentals. The cultural implications underlying the study of African art supports this quest by offering a unique forum for essay development. The students' writing will be guided by these questions: *Can the students organize their thoughts? What is the most effective way of doing so? Can the students write clearly by sticking to one topic and reinforcing that idea? Can they convey messages to a specific audience? Can they use and demonstrate an understanding of why supporting resources and examples need to be used?*

The many reasons for executing the course in this manner are based on my teaching style. Students need to **do**, not just see and hear. Communications and art history can be particularly difficult subjects to teach because the lecture-style teaching methods most frequently used are not accessible to all learners. African Art in Context and Concept incorporates hands-on learning experiences rich in audio, visual and kinesthetic accessibility. By linking communications, art, history, and technology, I hope to inspire students to read and write by rooting the fundamentals deep within a curriculum rich in analyzing, researching, and writing.

Objectives

By the end of the course the students will be able to create an educated definition of "art" as well as a working definition of "verbal arts." They will be able to explain why it is necessary to study African Art contextually. Critiquing artwork based on the context in

which it was created by cataloging sketches, background information and personal opinions of various works of African Art will be a routine activity. They will partake in researching and discussing current and historical events in African nations in order to drive the writing of routine descriptive, constructed response essays that meet at least a level three on the district's rubric. As they develop writing skills, they will evaluate and critique the qualities of constructed response essays from different sources. The students will write a compare and contrast essay on a chosen topic of African art that meets at least a level three on the district's rubric. They will also read and analyze the similarities and differences in the different folktales of West African ethnic groups. Lastly, the students will be able to devise a plan for displaying African art sample as a thoughtful curator would.

Strategies

Because the gifted students master concepts quickly, a higher level of *guided* autonomy must be granted in order to keep the classroom running smoothly and productively. I use the term 'guided' because the teacher should always deliberately choose each type of activity to fit the course objectives. Each routine, independent research project, and daily lesson should help to set-up and/or support the other.

The first part of my overall teaching strategy is the use of class-entry routines. (See *Figure B.*) Having structured time immediately upon entering the classroom establishes the classroom as a work place and supports the professional teaching objective of 'using class time wisely.' Additionally, it gives the teacher a few precious minutes to organize and review lesson plans and student data!

The inquiry method is used for the majority of the lessons in this unit and is part of the routine. *Inquiry* means that the initial material given to the students is not whole. Only enough is given to lead the students into questioning what they already know about a topic and to allow them to make inferences about the material.

The 'Know-Want to Know-Learned', or 'KWL' organizer is based on the inquiry method. Prior to starting a new topic, the

students will always be asked what they already know about the subject being presented as well as what they would like to know about it. As an anticipatory set, this strategy reveals what material will be focused on and pulls the students' personal connections into the lesson.

For the routine, I intend to present an artifact at the beginning of each class and have the students respond to it, *without prior knowledge or given information*. Possible questions could include:

- Is this art? Why or why not?
- Make a prediction about the purpose of this object. Why do you think this?
- Based on your knowledge of past artifacts, where do you think this work might have originated?

In addition, I would also ask that the students brainstorm a list of any words that the work conjures up. They would also sketch the artifact in their daily journal. Middle school teachers may argue the validity of using precious class time to allow the students to sketch, but for many students, the act of visually recreating the object will help connect them to it in a kinesthetic way. The more modalities used to access the presented material, the better the rate of retention in a broad-based spectrum of learners.

As the underlying purpose of this unit is to strengthen writing skills, the students will always be given a writing prompt question or statement prior to the delivery of material. (See "Activities" section.)

Next, I would let the students share their responses and then tell them the country of the artifact's origin. The students would then research facts about the country on their own, again reassembling to share. This will lead into a brief lecture about the main idea or purpose for using the particular work.

Tiered teaching is a method frequently used in mainstream classrooms. This means that varying requirements are given to individual students on an academic or ability-needs basis. Contrary to popular belief, there is a definite need for differentiated

instruction even among groups of gifted students. Having higher-level activities ready is a must.

One component of the tiered teaching strategy is to have fun, yet educationally sound, independent projects that students can work on in the event that they finish daily activities before the other students. I strive to create projects that grant each student a bit of independence. For African Art in Context and Concept, I have selected an independent research project based upon the country of the African seat chosen during the first day of the course. (See “Activities” section.) The students will be given guidelines, but their overall focus and presentation will be their choice, as *self-directed learning* is a gifted process skill.

“Accountable talk” refers to the way students should be instructed to interact. For example, when wishing to respond to comments made by another student, the responder should be instructed to use phrases such as, “I (dis)agree with John. I do (not) believe that GI Joe is a doll. In the text, (student should back ideas with support.)

Next, we have the use of the writing process. Students need to take part in all six components; prewriting, writing, responding, revising, editing, and publication. Ideas for helping students with this process are listed in the appendices. (See *Figure A.*)

Yet another helpful (and time saving) strategy is to use the district created rubrics for reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Another effective strategy is the use of student (or teacher created, if need be) work samples. Having examples establishes expectations and gives the students a place to begin.

Last but not least, we have the use of games. Game use in a classroom can prove intimidating, as it is often referred to as “filler” or “non-academic,” but if the teacher can create game-like activities that support the objective of the lesson or the overall focus of the course, then it’s a win-win situation. (See “ASL” lesson in the “Activities” section for an example.)

Unit Information

Prior to teaching this unit, a teacher should have several questions answered.

Is it Art? How do we decide what art **is**? This often argued question becomes even more definitively difficult when you add in the category of African art. African art cannot be restricted to any Western, formal definition of art.

African Art is, in itself, a paradox. Africa is not a stagnant country, nor is it unified. Despite this fact, Westerns often view African products as part of a whole, making generalizations regarding the classification of its products. However similar the works of African art may appear, these similarities are superficial. Unlike the Western ideology of “*art for arts sake*,” African artifacts need to be examined in the context in which they are both created and used before they can be labeled or mislabeled by any Western definition of art.

In Africa, beauty and functionality can go hand-in-hand, but whether or not this is purposeful depends on the context in which it was made as well as the concept that the work may represent. Products may intentionally be made aesthetically pleasing, but the function of this beauty is not always “for arts sake.” The artistic quality is superceded by its cultural context and concept.

To illustrate this point, look at a wood carving from the Baule group of Cote d'Ivoire. (*For image sample, see Pemberton 22*) Africans who produce stylized art with exaggerated features do so to symbolize specific traits deemed desirable by its people. It is rare in African art to see art made in the likeness of the aged, even when the works are made to represent elders. This is similar to American Colonial-period art in which images of aristocrats were painted with exaggerated features in an attempt to make them appear strong and powerful. From a Western point of view, employing such a technique would render such a work as “art.” In addition, many African works seem to be in abstract form. This is also a technique that is rendered “art” by Westerners.

How Did Westerners Acquire African Art? Westerners may wonder how many of the works of African art arrive outside of Africa. In the case of mid-1800's art from Benin, the British attempted ethnocide, taking much of the elaborate metal-work to Europe.

Often, ethnic groups are aware that foreigners are interested in their crafts and works. Many works are discarded by certain African ethnic groups when the works out-live their usefulness in ceremonies. This adds irony to the facts that Westerners often tend to seek works that have been 'used' in ceremonies. Many African 'middlemen' watch as traders question this use and 'run' to acquire pieces that satisfy this request.

There also seems to be more studies done on products from the western coastline of Africa, which implies accessibility via water travel through Europe. Missionaries have also been known to transport works out of Africa.

How Do You Know if a Product is Authentic? Throughout my studies on African art, I have uncovered many of the techniques used to determine authenticity. Some range from the simple, others to the scientific. As in all cultures, the environment provides Africans with many of the materials used to create its products. An example of the "simple" would be the use of horses in African sculptures. Because horses are not native to Africa, the use of a horse in the sculpture can imply one of two things: Either the sculpture is not authentic, or the subject of the sculpture was meant to be shown in an aristocratic or powerful position, such as in Dogon sculptures..

An example that falls between both categories would be material classification. Although it is easy to visually identify the type of material used, such as wood, clay, or metal, the properties of the material can help identify material native to a specific region.

The age of wood can be estimated by its patina, or *the coloration or discoloration of the surface*. Masks and costume works that appear to worn interiors imply wear. This can indicate authenticity; however, "authenticity" can be faked.

How Do You Label the People and Products of Africa? Tribe is a label that should be eliminated when speaking or writing about Africa. This word has negative implications: One thinks of *primitive* or *uncivilized* when this word is used. The underlying goal of this unit is to discover African Art from an African perspective; to see its beauty in the context in which it was created. For the purposes of this unit, ethnic groups will be referred to as group, people, clans, cultures, or sub-division.

Another point of clarification is the use of the term “Westerner.” *Westerner refers to ethnic groups living outside of Africa who are not living in or have emigrated from Africa.* More specifically, this term references Americans and Europeans. Although many viewers of African Art may be willing and able to consider the cultural, contextual, and conceptual significance of a work of African Art through study, it is important to remember that a “Western” view of African context can be limited by lack of a “true” African perspective. If one has not lived in Africa, then the viewpoint is limited.

What Sources Can You Trust? Africa is not a stagnant country, nor is it unified. Prior to presenting information on African countries, the teacher should verify that no major political or culture changes have been made. Examples of changes that occur frequently can be as trivial as the formal renaming of a country, *such as Zaire to the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1970’s*, and as poignant has occupational turn-over.

Another important point to verify prior to delivering this unit is that many sources misrepresent African countries as having their cultural and financial centers as the country’s capital, despite the formalized capital being another location. This can be very misleading and should be cross-references against multiple sources for purposes of credibility.

Unit-supporting Thumbnails of Sub-Saharan African Countries and the Art of Ethnic Groups within Them.

Benin (*Ben-een*)

Until 1975, Benin was known as Dahomey. The capital is Porto-Novo, but the cultural and financial hub of the country is Cotonou.

Agriculture makes up most of the country's economy. Most of the rain forests in this country have been cleared. For this reason, palm trees are currently the most abundant timber left. Animism is still the most widely practiced religion, although many in Benin's population practice the Islamic faith.

Iron ore is an abundant natural resource. Benin is historically known as a place of master iron working. Iron heads were created in the likeness of members of royalty. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, the iron heads increased in size, yet the habit of creating *ikharo*, or raised, decorative rings at the base of the sculpture, continued. Men were noted by a series of three rings, while women were identified by four. These rings can help to identify when the works were made, as well as helping to identify whose likeness the work was made in.

The bronze casting and the lost wax technique were used to create many of the art works. *(Many jewelers still employ these techniques when creating metal jewelry today. The wax castings are usually discarded and may store owners will give them away if asked.)*

Fon – Wood carving is common (and head-sculptures made of wood generally denote a person not of a royal lineage.)

Divination trays are used in this ethnic group. The rectangular or half-moon shaped trays are elaborately carved (*relief sculpture*) and are used in order to help deliver messages to and from the 'spirit world'. The board is covered with white chalk. The diviner (*person who carries out the ritual*) then throws objects such as palm nuts onto the board and interprets the markings they make on the surface. *(For image samples, see LaGamma, 37 and Willett, 79.)*

The small bronze figurines made by the Fon make a good argument against the narrow labeling of African art. African works are often thought to be produced for symbolic or ritual purposes as

well as for practical use. In the case of the Fon, the bronze figurines are given as gifts and thought of as prized and cherished decorative pieces. They are clearly “art for art’s sake.”

Burkina Faso

The irony of Burkina Faso is that it is poor in monetary resources, but rich in culture. In English, Burkina Faso translates to “land of the honest people,” and as a primarily agrarian country, these people earn their country’s title by toiling away after livestock; their main means of export earning. The 105, 792 square foot, well-wooded grasslands of this country produce poor soil and a dry climate which lends itself to a lack of vegetation; the northern part of the country is much less productive than the southern part, which has more water sources (river valley).

Ouagadougou is the capital. Most of those who live in Burkina Faso abide in clans and the main language is French, though many clans speak native languages.

Bwa - This group creates masks in the likeness of animals. With the exception of the “grass” masks, the animal-image masks are painted with striking black, white, and red geometric patterns. The children “play” at mask making, creating representations of masks worn by elders.

Ewe (Eh-Vay) – The masks of this ethnic group rank among my favorite. Animals are usually the subject of their masks, but the animal form itself represents an idea. These animal masks are usually decorated with intricate, repeating black and white geometric shapes. *(For image samples, see “Website” list.)*

Mossi – The nearly abstract dolls of this ethnic group are usually made by blacksmiths and tend to have long cylindrical bodies that lack arms or legs. They have few facial features, but can be identified by scarification pattern and the unique, flat shaped head. *(For image sample, see Cameron 33 and Figure C.)*

Nuna- Like the Ewe, the animal masks of this ethnic group are usually decorated with intricate, repeating geometric shapes that

are usually colored brown and cream. *(For image samples, see "Website" list.)*

Cameroon

Hydroelectricity, fueled by the Sanaga River, and the diversity of the many land-derived resources make Cameroon one of Africa's most financially and educationally developed countries. The country's land structure dictates how its inhabitants sustain life. For example, the nomadic Hausa and Fulani of the northern savanna follow livestock. The Bamileke, Doula, Ewondo and Fang of the less arid regions are settled agriculturalists.

Bamileke-(Ba-ma-lee-kay) This ethnic group's name translates to "the people who live over there," which was a name given by people living east of the grasslands in the region. The masks produced by this ethnic group are often colorfully and elaborately decorated with thousands of small beads. The masks generally look like animal forms, but the animals attributes are the purpose for the creation, rather than animal worship itself. *(For image samples, see Website list.)*

Fang-Wonderful examples of African seats can be found in this ethnic group. Elaborately decorated seats were reserved for groups members held in high esteem. *(For image sample, see Willette 115.)*

Also used in Fang ritual practices are wooden figures that have bags with 'magical materials' tied to them. These figures also make for good art-based arguments. The Fang create the figurines to represent ancestors, but in appearance the figures look infantile. This is done intentionally, as the Fang believe that infants are the least removed from the spirit world.

Fali – This ethnic group creates stick-like beaded dolls ("Ham Pilu") without arms, legs or distinctive facial features. *(For image sample, see Cameron 30)*

"In Cameroon, when a young Fali man becomes betrothed, he makes a doll (ham pilu) from wood and decorates it with hair, beads, and other small objects. He then gives it to his fiancée, who

wears it in a baby carrier on her back. The doll is a symbol of their marriage commitment and represents their future child. The man gives the doll the gender that he desires for his first-born. The young woman cares for the figure until the promised child is born; at this point, the couple carefully stores the doll away." (Cameron, 31.)

Cote d'Ivoire (*Coat-Day-Vwar*) **(The Ivory Coast)**

Cote d'Ivoire has one of the strongest economies in Africa. Oil refining is a major industry here, but most of the people make a living in farming. Yamoussoukro is the official capital, but the financial hub of this country is Abidjan.

Akan – See *Ghana*, as it is a neighboring country of Cote d'Ivoire and the Akan ethnic group lies across this boundary.

Baule (*Ba-ou-lay*) – Wood carving common. Also common are scarification patterns, protruding eyes, large calves that symbolize development due to rigorous work. (*See Figure G.*)

The dolls created in this ethnic group tend to look more like statues and are often painted red and adorned with fashionable clothing. The keep 'dolls' called spirit spouses which are thought to be representations of husband's and wife's other-world spouse. It is thought that if the spirit spouse is treated poorly, then relations between the living husband and wife will be troublesome.

Dan-The Dan create beautiful carved sculptures in the likeness of the living. (For image sample, see Willett, 194)

Senufo – For these people, beauty equals moral goodness, so the aesthetically pleasing nature of their products captures the ideology of their people, rather than a desire for beauty itself.

Wood carving is very common in the Senufo culture. Elaborately carved wooden staffs are made and given as contest prizes and for rites of passage. Male and female images are often presented separately.

The Senufo are also known for animal jewelry made of metal. The primordial animal images are often used: Crocodile, python, chameleon (*which is symbolic of wealth through fertility*), turtle, and frog.

Gabon

Libreville is the capital of Gabon. Gabon is a country rich in mineral resources, including uranium and petroleum. It is known for its unique timbers; ebony, kevazingo, mahogany, and okoume. Because mineral resources are in high demand, this country is often exploited; however the need for mineral exports had some-what helped to protect Gabon's timbers. The gross domestic product of Gabon is around \$4,000; the highest in all of Africa.

Many languages are spoken in Gabon, but most ethnic groups, including the Fang, are Bantu-speaking.

Kota – Held ancestors remains in bark boxes, covered in bronze or gold, covered with big heads and little bodies used like puppets for initiation rituals.

Fang – This ethnic group creates and uses boxes much like the Kota, but their decoration is less stylized - *no gold or bronze plating*.

There is a unique and art-based twist to the sculptures created by the Fang. First, the body compositions of many human-like figures are created to symbolize life cycle. They are a combination of youthful and elder physical traits. For this reason, the untrained, or misinformed, eye may view the oddities of such works proportions as lacking artistic value. (*For image sample, see Willett, 150 and Figure H.*)

Gambia

The people of Gambia live in a caste system. The members of the 'noble cast' are not to take part in creative endeavors, such as writing music, carving, and painting, although these things are a major part of the Gambian culture. Every society in Gambia has its own drum beat rhythm. A *greo*, or musician and historian, is held in

high-regards and captures the people's history in oral/musical storytelling.

Gambian art includes batik, a art form that uses wax to resist colors on various fabrics in order to create patterns and images.

Ghana

Ghana has one of Africa's most stable economies. Exports include gold and cacao. It had abundant natural and sought-after hardwoods such as ebony, mahogany, and odum.

The densely-populated capital city is Accra. After years of political upheaval, Ghana became a democracy in the 1990's. Most of Ghana rivers are narrow, so only small watercraft can be used for transport.

Akan – Wooden stools/seats are a cherished artifact in this ethnic group. Commonly use gold and gold plating. Created gold weights in likeness of animals which represent proverbs and folktales. (*For image samples, see Bassani.*)

Asanti- The ethnic groups creates wooden, paddle-shaped dolls (*Akua mma*) that have no legs. The neck of the doll is long and slender, which is a replication of the idea of beauty in Asanti culture. The sex of the doll is marked just above the base, and most of these dolls are female, as the Asanti can be described as a matrilineal culture. The dolls are carried to insure fertility and healthy birth. (*For image sample, see Cameron, 30, Willett, 108.*)

The Asanti people used gold dust as currency and the brass weights they used for measurement often represented proverbs. (*For image sample, see Willett, 131.*)

Mali

Despite having rich mineral reserves, most of the people in this country are extremely poor. Only about ten percent of the population is employed and roughly only seventy percent are literate. Employment comes from the few manufacturing jobs

available in Mali. The country's climate is dry and drought is common, making fishing and cropping a hardship. With food often in scarce supply, feuding with neighboring country Burkina Faso is usual.

Dogon (Doe-gone)– Human images are often very thin with long, slender arms and legs. Sculptures are usually stiff, frontal, and symmetrical. They are generally seated. (See Figure D .) The scarification patterns are unique and displayed on almost all Dogon human figures. Male and female ancestor figures are the same height, which might demonstrate equality among the sexes. The man, however, often has his hand on or around the female figure, denoting a protective position.

Dualism or twining is often used, as twins symbolize fertility, prosperity, and good fortune. They are also carved into elaborately decorated doors. These doors often guard food storages.

Nigeria

Although Abuja was chosen as the official capital in 1991, Lagos, the former capital, is the largest city in Nigeria and acts as the hub of industrial and commercial development.

Nigeria is home to more than 250 ethnic divisions, with roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population being dependent on agriculture. Despite such a large populous of rural dwellers, the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ of Nigeria's population live and work in urbanized areas. Nigeria's off-shore petroleum abundance makes it the world's leading exporter of oil. Social and political unrest have often risen from the commercialization of Nigeria's vast resources which also includes various minerals and native wood products.

Igbo (Eee-boh) – Wood carving common. Masks are elaborately colored and decorated. They are worn by men for ceremonies, but usually represent female spirits. (For image sample, see Willett, 91.)

Nok – Terracotta frequently used. Heads show elaborate dress and ornaments, usually with protruding eyes and large, stylized features.

In structure, they appear similar to heads produced by Benin ironsmiths.

Yoruba – Wood carving is common. Beading is also used, such as in crowns for royalty. Statue and doll figures generally have enlarged heads and eyes because their people believe the head and eyes are soul-gates, however the sculptures tend to look more “naturalistic” than many other African sculptures. (For image sample, see Willett, 196.)

Twining is also common. Those who study the cultural implications of African “art” seem to agree that most works represent and embody the ideological principles of the individual ethnic group, the reverse of the Western principle of “art for art’s sake.” To paraphrase Fredrick John Lamp:

Dualism is a common theme in Yoruban society. Opposing forces, such as good and evil, are evident in all aspect of their physical and spiritual belief system. For this reason, even numbers are preferred, thus rendering the birth of twins as ‘luck’ (Lamp, 114).

In Yoruban culture, those who create works of art are held in high regard. They celebrate such artists through *oriki* (citation poetry). This is done in a naming ceremony. The person’s “poem” grows as he or she tackles new accomplishments (Visona).

Democratic Republic of Congo, or DRC.

Zaire was renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1970's. The Congo river cuts directly through this country. DRC has thick forestation. Due to political upheaval, this large country is still underdeveloped.

Lega-Like the Dan of the Ivory Coast, this group also uses a hierarchical mask-creation, but whereas the Dan value aesthetics, it is unheard of in Lega culture to devalue a work based on aesthetics. The objects practicality and usefulness to society is what grants a work its true value. Possession of inherited, old objects is considered a sign of prestige to the Lega people. (See Figure F.)

Luba- This ethnic group uses gourds and “frictional” divination objects. Diviners use the objects to ‘speak’ to their ‘consulting spirit.’ (For images samples and further information, see LaGamma, 14.)

Many ritual works encourage the fertility of women. Many carvings are devoted to spirits that provide the blessings of fertility and protection of children at birth.

Many of the masks created by this group would undoubtedly be considered art by Western standards. The faces are nearly abstract, with large, protruding almond-shaped eyes that resemble the Suku and the Yaka masks. Many of the Luba ceremonial masks are concave and elaborately carved in circular, symmetrically lined patterns. (For image sample, see Willett, 146.)

Pende (Pen-Day) – Pende masks have very similar traits to the Ewe. Despite having a welcoming, non-frightening appearance to Westerners, Pumbu, a mask worn only in times of serious trouble, actually evokes feelings of great fear within the Pende people. (For image sample, see Visona, 392.)

Songye (Song-Ay) – Many of the masks, or kifwebe (*kiff-eh-bey*), of this ethnic group seem almost abstract. Scarification patterns cover the entire facial area. The eyes, in an almond shape, protrude, as does the square-shaped mouth. Like the Suku and the Yaka, raffia is also often used which appears beard-like.

Suku (Soo-Ku) - White (ash) face masked with raffia often used. These masks are carved entirely from wood, including the animal-form figures that usually protrude from the top of the head piece. (For image sample, see Willette 145.)

Yaka (Ya-Ka) - As with the Suku, white (ash) face masks adorned with raffia are often used. Many times, the masks of the Yaka appear to have a ‘hat.’ (For image sample, see Visona, 390.)

Both the Suku and the Yaka masks are almost entirely for initiation rituals called *mukanda*. This is a case where the word ‘mask’ cannot be limited to a head-covering. For the Yaka and the

Suku, these initiation masks cover nearly the entire body and serve as a spiritual means of protection for the young men undergoing the rites of passage. The masks embody the spirit of ancestors. Red and white divisions on such masks as the Kakuungu, represent an ancestor with negative traits and is meant to frighten young men into respecting elders.

Proposed Classroom Activities

Component 1: Writing

Terms to cover in this section: Response writing, convention control, support, process

1. Response Writing

The students will examine “prompted response” samples from various testing resources and use them as the format for their writing.

The first step in this process would be to give students a short essay and ask them to edit. They should be directed to decide what phrases or sentences seem ill-placed, under-supported, or off-topic. Following this discussion, the students should offer suggestions as to what might need to be done in order to remedy the problems with the essay.

At the start of each new lesson, each of the students will be given writing prompts so that they will understand what I want them to be thinking about as we view and discuss the lesson’s topic or focus point. The students will each write their own response and then be asked to share their response orally. Both the writer and the listeners will be asked to seek out positive points in the pieces as well as constructively critiquing the piece to point out necessary adjustments.

2. “Adopt-a-Country” Power Point-Guided Presentations

See “Activity 1.”

Component 2 and 3 Activities: *Contextual and conceptual study of African art.*

Terms to cover in this section: Context, concept, aesthetic value, assimilation, acculturation, ethnography, abstraction, proportion, symmetry, asymmetry, relief sculpture, provenance, twining, dualism, lost wax technique, bronze casting.

Each lesson begins with a writing prompt question or statement. I would present this question while the students are working on the class-entry routine so that they understand the intended focus.

Activity 1: *Take Your Seat (Exploration of African Seats)*

Writing Prompt: *Explain the value of an everyday item that you have in your home (or a family members home) that you value similarly to the culture of your "African Seat?"*

Focus Ethnic Group and Country: *All (For image samples, see Bassani.)*

This activity will introduce the students to the class-entry routine and set them up for the long-term research-presentation project. My suggestion is to make this a dramatic entry by taping images of African seats on each student's desk. Allowing the students to pick their "seat" will help to create interest and connect them to their choice.

Ask the students to make predictions about the use and creation of the "seat," without actually telling them that it **is** a seat. Lecture or let the students read information on the use of the seats in various African cultures. Have the students create a "thumbnail sketch" of the country from where their seat originated and present it to one another.

Activity 2: *ASI (Art Scene Investigation)-African Masks*

Writing Prompt: *How do art historians differentiate between masks of specific ethnic groups?*

Focus Ethnic Group and Country: *Various*

For this lesson series, I plan to have the students view several (3-5) works of art that, untold to them, have distinct characteristics that can help them figure out where the work is from. For example, a series of masks may be shown, but the works could be in varying materials, such as region-specific timber, clay, bronze, or could have scarification or painted shapes and symbols that can help the "Art Scene Investigator" narrow in on a specific region.

The students should be treated as true "ASI" agents by being given gloves, goggles, and magnifying glasses.

The students will first make notations about the similarities and differences of the works, and then categorized like works. *(If real mask samples are unavailable, distribute colored pictures that denote the specific materials and dimensions of the work.)* They should make a prediction about from what part of Africa the works could be. Next, distribute a thumbnail of mask-facts of various ethnic groups and countries, such as "_____ is the only known region to have _____ timber," and, "People of _____ group create masks that have protruding eyes," etc. Allow the students to deduce the correct country and ethnic group of the works.

This lesson will lead into a discussion about how to categorize African art.

Activity 3: *African Masks-What is Beauty?*

Writing Prompt: Define beauty as you feel it is best summed-up in your culture. Is beauty defined the same way in all cultures? Should all cultures be held up to the same definition? How are the Lega and the Dan different in their treatment of beauty?

Focus Ethnic Group and Country: *Lega of DRC and the Dan of Cote d'Ivoire*

This lesson addresses the concept of aesthetic value. The students will be guided through the questions listed above as they learn about the ideas of what value 'art' has for the Lega and the Dan.

Activity 4: *African Dolls*

Writing Prompt: GI Joe is (is not) a doll: How does the concept and use of dolls differ between Westerners and Africans?

Focus Ethnic Group and Country: *Fali of Cameroon, Asanti of Ghana, Baule of Cote d'Ivoire (For image samples, see Cameron, 30.)*

This lesson addresses the difference between how Westerners view “dolls” versus the African view. The students will be asked to look at several “dolls” ranging from the familiar like Barbi and GI Joe, to the abstractness of the Asanti paddle dolls. They will take part in a discussion regarding the cultural context of these works.

Unlike masks, sculptures and dolls are rarely similar across ethnic groups. Dolls meant to be used as playthings are often worn down, due to excessive handling. There are many cultural parallels between the use of certain dolls in Western culture and African culture, such as teaching a young girl how to take care of an infant or smaller child.

Activity 5: *Divination/Ritual Products*

Writing Prompt: Choose an ethnic group and explain how its divination objects are similar or different from ideas and objects used in your own religion.

Focus Ethnic Group and Country: *All (For image and background samples, see Cameron.)*

This activity gives the students a chance to read, summarize and present information. Small groups of students will be given various articles about divination which cover several ethnic groups. The students will be asked to read and summarize important, unique, and interesting facts within the article. They will each present their summaries. “Accountable talk” will be used after the presentations to discuss how the divination objects vary in use. *(For articles, see LaGamma, 33-37, 44-45, 61-62.)*

Activity 6: Body Art

Writing Prompt: Can you judge a book by its cover? Use an instance in your life to help support your answer. Tie in the African art principles we discussed today.

Focus Ethnic Group and Country – Various

This activity focuses on idiomatic phrases and uses the pairing of African adornment images and popular American artists as a writing prompt. The students will be asked to view various images of body adornments from several cultures, including 'American' tattoos. We will discuss the origin and meaning behind several "mutilations" used for beautification.

Activity 7: Art Speaks!

Writing Prompt - How are art and poetry similar?

Focus Ethnic Group and Country – Fang of Gabon

This activity focuses on the metaphorical idea behind many works of African art. After viewing sculptures from the Fang, the students will be asked to brainstorm what meaning could lie behind the form and style of the sculpture. Next, a brief lecture on what metaphors are, and what metaphorical ideas underlie the Fang sculpture, will take place. *(See above Thumbnail Sketch of the Fang.)*

Activity 8: Gold Weights and Proverbs

Writing Prompt – Can art also be craft?

Focus Ethnic Group and Country – Akan of Cote d'Ivoire *(For image samples see, Phillips.)*

For this lesson, the students will review the idea of art as metaphor. A discussion on the similarities between art and craft will follow. The students will view several "gold weight" samples and learn of the proverbs that they represent.

Activity 9: Folktales and Language Arts

Writing Prompt - Is art always physical?

Focus Ethnic Group and Country- Efik-ibibio of Nigeria

For this lesson, the students will read, summarize, and present folktales from various African ethnic groups. A discussion on how folktales are a valid art form will follow.

Activity 10: Performance- the Holistic Approach to Studying Art

Writing Prompt – How does your music represent the mask?

Focus Ethnic Group and Country – Various cultures of Burkina Faso and Gambia

This activity is based on the “whole” approach of studying African performance artifacts. I may either teach basic note reading and have the students create a drum line to “perform” based on “personification” of a particular “costume” or I may ask the students to choose a song from a popular artist that they feel captures the essence of the mask and have them explain this in essay form. The four main purposes for ritualistic dance are as follows:

1. Communicating with the spirit world (dead or unborn)
2. Control of nature
3. Honoring people (living or ancestors)
4. Transitions and initiation rites

Many museums have begun to exhibit African ritual outfits and artifacts in a sense-encompassing manner. For example, a headdress or mask may be accompanied by the music that is played while it is used in performance.

Unlike the theatrical 'story-telling' performances that Westerners are accustomed to, African masks most often convey a concept rather than being a representation of a person or thing. No known African word exists for only the mask, or facial covering: *The mask equates the whole ensemble.*

Activity 11: Adopt-a-Country Presentation

The students will give their PowerPoint-driven presentations on the country they chose during the first lesson. The “audience” will use a scoring guide to help the student understand the strengths and weaknesses of the presentation.

Activity 12: Museum Curators and the Categorization of African Art

Writing Prompt – Explain the most culturally-sound methods of displaying these pieces of African art?

This is the culminating activity for this unit. The students will demonstrate their contextual knowledge and appreciation of African art by viewing several art works and deciding and explaining how to display them.

Annotated Bibliography

Materials for Art and Cultural Studies

Bassani, E. and Bocola, S. African Seats. Prestel, Munich, 1995.

Contains images and details about seats from various African ethnic groups.

Bingham, Jane. African Art & Culture. Chicago, IL: Raintree, 2004.

Discusses why various types of African art were created and how each was used.

Bramwell, Martyn. Africa: The World in Maps. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publication Co., 2000.

Contains maps, images and facts on each country in Africa.

Cameron, E. Isn't S/He a Doll?: Play and Ritual in African Sculpture.

Includes images of 'dolls' and sculptures from various African ethnic groups.

Herreman, Frank. To Cure and Protect: Sickness and Health in African Art. New York: Museum for African Art, 1999.

Gives information about various practices used in African rituals.

LaGamma, Alisa. Art and Oracle African Art and Rituals of Divination. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000.

Contains images of divination artifacts and explanations of usage.

Lamp, Fredrick John. See the Music, Hear the Dance: Rethinking African at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Prestel, Munich, 2004

Contains images and descriptions of African performances.

Phillips, Tom. Africa: The Art of a Continent. Prestel, Munich, 1999.

Contains images of gold weights and several proverbs represented by the images.

Steiner, C. African Art in Transit. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Contains information about the ironies of how African art make it to America.

Visona, M., et. al. A History of Art in Africa. Prentice Hall, 2000.

Contains information on various cultures and mask images, including the Pende and Yaka.

Willett, Frank. African Art. Third Edition. New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 2002.

Covers many cultures artistic products in the context by which they were created in an attempt to separate African art from the "Western" divisions and definitions of art.

Webster's New Geographical Dictionary. G. & C. Merriam Co. Springfield Massachusetts, 1972.

Contains pronunciation keys for (presumably) every country and city in the world.

Materials for Writing Help and Story Gathering

Capaldi, G. Africa: Customs, Cultures, Legends, and Lore. Torrance, CA: Good Apple, Inc. 1997.

Contains art projects, pull outs, posters, and cultural information about various ethnic groups in Africa. An Asanti "lost wax" explanation is listed along side of a recreation project for "bronze weights."

Jefferson, M. & Skinner, E. Roots of Time: A Portrait of African Life and Culture. Third Edition. Asmara, Eritrea: African World Press. 1997.

Contains explanations of practices of various African ethnic groups.

Rosenberg, Donna. World Literature: An Anthology of Great Short Stories, Drama, and Poetry. Chicago, IL: National Textbook Co. 1992.

Contains a collection of stories from specific regions in Africa.

Supporting Websites

<http://www.chatham.edu/host/olkes/default.htm>

This is a gallery website for the Olkes Collection at Chatham College.

http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~bcr/African_Mask.html

Contains mask images samples and conceptual descriptions of various sub-Saharan ethnic groups.

<http://www.hamillgallery.com/BAMILEKE/BamilekeBeadwork/BamilekeBeadwork.html>

This is a gallery website full of various images of African art.

<http://www.unitedstreaming.com>

This is a subscription website that contains downloadable education videos. Several videos on Africa are included.

Standards

Arts and Humanities

9.2. Historical and Cultural Contexts

9.3. Critical Response

9.4. Aesthetic Response

Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking

1.1. Learning to Read Independently

1.2. Reading Critically in All Content Areas

1.3. Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature

1.4. Types of Writing

1.5. Quality of Writing

1.6. Speaking and Listening

1.7. Characteristics and Function of the English Language

1.8. Research

Appendices

Figure A - The Writing Process Guide Sheet

Figure B – Routine Sheet

Figure C – Mossi, doll. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.

Figure D – Dogon, wood sculpture. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.

Figure E –Writer's Rubric

Figure F - Lega, wood mask. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.

Figure G - Baule, wood statue. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.

Figure H-Fang, wood sculpture. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.

Figure A - The Writing Process Help Sheet

The Writing Process

Prewriting

- Brainstorm
- Examine examples
- Keep an idea journal
- Bounce ideas off of peers
- Make a list of things you already know or care a lot about
- Classify ideas into categories
- Focused free write (Quick, randomized-but-focused writing on a given topic)
- Question like a reporter (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?)
- Interview people who know something about a topic (primary resources)
- Search for books or internet information about the topic (secondary resources)
- Graphically organize ideas (Draw webs or graphics to represent and make connections of or between ideas.)
- "Leads" (Create a few opening sentences to help narrow in on a topic.)
- Compare and contrast
- Create figures of speech (Create analogies, metaphors, similes to help establish a connection between what you know and what idea you have about the topic.)

Writing (Draft 1):

- Decide on an audience
- Make a general outline that includes the main idea
- Get your ideas down on paper, not worrying too much about grammar, spelling, etc.
- Use transitions (First, next, therefore, in conclusion, etc.) to help organize your thoughts
- As you write, keep asking: "Is this focused on my topic, subject or theme or have I gone another direction?"

Responding:

- Allow a peer to read your ideas and offer support

Revising (Draft 2):

- Expanded upon your ideas
- Make necessary additions and deletions
- Check varying of sentence length
- Polish language (Refine your details - add figures of speech)
- Repeat the **responding** process as needed

Editing:

- Proofread (Remember: Word processing programs don't pick up homophones!)
- Allow a peer to proofread
- Repeat the **responding** and **revising** process as needed

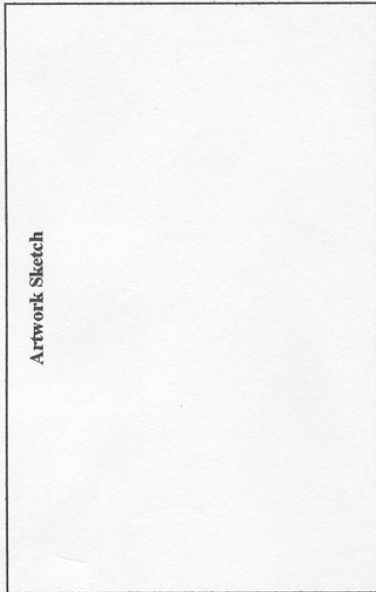
Publication:

- Share your work with others
- Enter contests
- Display your work
- Submit your work to magazines, newspapers, etc.

Figure B – Routine Sheet

African Art Routine Log

Respond in COMPLETE sentences, so that you can read your answers aloud.



What category do you think this artwork falls under? (Example: Sculpture, Painting, Craft)

Explain whether or not you believe this is art:

Make a prediction about the country **and** the use of this piece:

This piece is from: (Country) _____ (Ethnic Group) _____

Five Facts about this Country:

Ethnic Group Information

Today's Writing Prompt

Figure C – Mossi, wooden doll. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.



Figure D – Dogon, wooden sculpture. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.



Figure E –Writer's Rubric

		4 Advanced	*3 Proficient	2 Basic	1 Below Basic			
Focus	<input type="checkbox"/>	Essay is clearly focused on the topic and purpose. Introduction is engaging and clearly identifies the subject and provides all necessary background information	<input type="checkbox"/>	Essay is focused on the topic and purpose. Introduction identifies the subject and provides all necessary background information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Essay is somewhat focused on the topic and purpose. Necessary background information is missing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Essay lacks focus and may not identify the subject.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Numerous and insightful writer's thoughts and feelings about the subject are included.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Several writer's thoughts and feelings about the subject are included.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Few writer's thoughts and feelings about the subject are included.	<input type="checkbox"/>	None included or shows a lack of understanding of piece.
Content	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conclusion clearly states why the subject is significant and conveys a strong, overall impression.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conclusion mentions why the subject is significant and conveys an overall impression of the essay.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conclusion sums up the essay but omits statement of significance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conclusion is weak or missing.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong logical organizational pattern (spatial order, order of importance, chronological order) is consistently used throughout the essay.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Appropriate organizational pattern (spatial order, order of importance, chronological order) is used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Writing is not clearly organized	<input type="checkbox"/>	Writing lacks an organizational pattern and/or may be just a list of thoughts.
Organization	<input type="checkbox"/>	Precise transitional words and phrases are used effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Appropriate transitional words and phrases are used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Few transitional words and phrases are used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Transitional words and phrases are missing or inappropriate.

Style	<input type="checkbox"/> Precise words and figures of speech are consistently used to bring sensory details to life.	<input type="checkbox"/> Precise words and figures of speech are sometimes used to bring sensory details to life.	<input type="checkbox"/> Precise words and figures of speech are seldom used.	<input type="checkbox"/> Vague words make ideas unclear.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Rich and vivid words are used. Smooth, varied, and flowing sentences are used to give the piece a polished feel. Writer's voice is strong.	<input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is appropriate for grade level. There is some variety in sentence structure. Writer's voice is present.	<input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is limited. The writer lacks a variety in sentence structure. Writer's voice is weak.	<input type="checkbox"/> Word choice may be confusing. All sentences may be short or begin the same way. Writer's voice is missing.
Conventions	<input type="checkbox"/> There are almost no mistakes in conventions.	<input type="checkbox"/> There may be some mistakes in conventions, but they do not seriously affect understanding.	<input type="checkbox"/> Mistakes in conventions sometimes make the paper hard to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/> Many mistakes in conventions make the paper hard to understand.

Figure F-Lega, wood mask. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.



Figure G-Baule, wood statue. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.



Figure H-Fang, wood sculpture. Olkes Collection, Chatham College.

