

A PAST AND PRESENT INTERWOVEN: HOW THE AFRICAN IDENTITY REEMERGED IN AFRICAN - AMERICAN ARTS

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OVERVIEW

The purpose of my unit is to explore how fiber and the textile arts provide a connecting thread weaving the past and present of African and African-American art over time and space, through slavery and freedom into an intricate fabric encrypted with the legacy of a people “conveying indigenous personal and cultural memory.” Art Institute of Chicago, [African American Art](#).

This unit will examine and explore traditional African Arts focusing on the textile arts. The investigation will explore the regeneration of certain African tendencies though often disguised, in the creations of the enslaved artisans transported to America via the Middle Passage. Though the slave trade separated Africans from the linguistic and cultural traditions of the homeland many found ways to interlace present circumstance with past knowledge. The fibers of the cultural link to an ancient ancestral legacy remained strong through “colonialism, emancipation, discrimination and self-assertion” as Africans sought to “make do, ” to recreate, to improvise yet another view of their humanity through their art.’

For elementary school students art activities provide an effective way to transmit complex content in a way that has meaning for them. Students in the upper grades are being exposed to cultures of the world and events which have changed the course of history. They are becoming aware that their own ancestors arrived on these shore in various ways, some by choice, some by chance, and some through circumstances beyond their control.

In the visual arts we discuss the nature of art and how artworks serve as primary and secondary source, documenting and interpreting history. One of the goals of visual arts is to develop the decoding skills necessary to investigate the multi-layered aspects of art. The transplanting of Africans to America is one of the events which changed the course of American history. We will discuss some of the important elements in the artworks from West African culture and compare them to the utilitarian works created in America. The fiber arts were chosen because of its inherent expressive nature which seems particularly suited to students at this age who especially enjoy tactile experiences.

RATIONALE

Students will have an opportunity to experience a different way of knowing through the decoration and manipulation of natural fibers in the creation of original fabric artworks. Artworks serve as a primary means of communication for society. Using the Adinkra symbols to create pieces of textile art will allow children of this age to speak in yet another medium as they create a sort of code cloth. The creation of a story cloth is well suited to children whose world is quite often filled with imaginary, characters, myths and legends. It can connect to other subject areas within the school curriculum. Using colorful and varied textured yarns and other natural fibers students will be able to experiment with pattern and hue to create woven cloth in a style not unlike the Akan weavers of the Kente cloth. Utilizing fiber to connect the African past to the works made by slaves, I will be able to make my students aware of how art is sometimes the result of past traditions, but when the need arises, the improvised result of present circumstance.

According to many scholars elements of an African past remain alive as fragments in every part of the cultural life of African-Americans from the music, to dance, to speech, to religious practices, and of course the visual arts. In Africa the visual arts were an essential part of the society, providing information about the religion, philosophy, and, social customs. This is very important on a continent three times the size of America where over 1000 different languages are spoken, and there are around 800 million people. The need to be able to recognize people from a great distance was important on a continent where tribes were often at war and traveling hunting parties needed to recognize friend or foe. The use of large shapes and bright colors became a useful way to display tribal affiliation. We will be able to recognize that tradition reborn in the African-American tradition in the arts. The use of those same or similar symbols in utilitarian objects revealed lineage.

I want to engage students in a dialogue about the nature of bondage, the loss of country, culture and custom the slaves had to endure. I want them to try to imagine suddenly being removed from all they know and given a new role they did not choose. What would it feel like to have your style of life completely changed? How would they feel about leaving family and friends behind never to see them again? We will discuss how and why slaves found ways to create objects that might be symbolic of their past life and traditions. They will have an opportunity to view a variety of artworks from the African continent and compare them to works made by African-American artisans that reveal past motifs and iconography.

Student will view examples that will include:

- sweet grass baskets
- Kente cloth
- Adinkra cloth
- Mud cloth
- African-American quilt making
- pottery
- wrought iron decorative work found in architectural design
- Metal work from Africa: charms, plaques, jewelry

OBJECTIVES

In my unit my students will meet multiple goals of the Arts and Humanities Standards for the Pittsburgh Board of Education:

- Students must describe, evaluate, relate, and respond critically to various works from the visual and performing arts and literature on the basis of an aesthetic understanding of the art form.
- Students must understand important features of the art works.
- Students must be able to relate the artworks to their cultural and historical context and discuss what meaning these works have for them.

I feel that the diverse population that I serve has an understanding of the importance of maintaining traditions. It will be useful to have students discuss some of their own

cultural traditions so that comparisons can be made about clothing, foods, religious practices, visual arts, music or dance. We will discuss how each culture is unique, possessing a particular belief system that makes certain practices significant and important for descendants to preserve. Involving the learner in activities connecting tradition to art opens the door to comprehension, analysis, and evaluation, skills necessary in understanding the symbolic language of art.

Students in the 4th and 5th grade have a base knowledge of the elements of art and the principles of design. In our discussion of art forms they can identify key elements the particular artist has emphasized. They have been exposed to some of the major periods in the history of art and understand that culture plays a major role in how an artwork may appear and the types of iconography it will contain. As they become aware of the roles and functions of artists in cultures, times and places, they will be able to appreciate that art forms representing ethnic groups unlike their own are no less beautiful or meaningful. Fiber art is an enjoyable medium for children of this age because of its inherent abstract and expressive nature, eliminating the anxiety that can sometimes be associated with trying to make a thing look “real.” As we will discuss, textile arts on the African continent were not simply items of adornment, but had great communicative and social significance. Thus exploring the fiber arts in Africa, making connections to the work of the African American artisans in America, and creating original fabric artworks will allow students to be engaged in all aspects of the visual arts: design, production, history, culture, and ceremony.

It will be necessary to give students background information about the African continent. Too often students have a distorted view of cultures that are not their own, either through misrepresentations in the media or through simple lack of exposure. Just as African American history has often been left out of the teaching of American history, so too has African Art and African American Art too often been left out of “so called” comprehensive studies.

The learner will discover through maps and comparative measures that Africa is a huge continent over three times the size of the United States. As we said earlier there are nearly 1000 different languages spoken on the continent. The use of visual arts and the importance of visual arts in African culture is wide ranging and deeply rooted and often deeply religious in nature. A study of the arts of the continent would show an amazing array of art works. The students will discover that artworks are not static and predetermined but ever changing.

One can be amazed at the beauty of ancient rock paintings or astounded at the methods used to create the intricate metalwork such as those found on the royal plaques from Benin. Africa is known the world over for its daring and meticulous weaving methods where weavers literally challenge themselves to continuously reinvent old patterns in new circumstances and for powerful mask-making and sculptural traditions, still other areas for exploration.

The traditional sculptural forms found in mask-making as well as in the spiritual power figures made use of bold geometric planes which clearly impacted the painting styles of European artists like Picasso and George Braque. Some would say the connection to the Cubist Art movement is undeniable. Masterful terra cotta works as well as elaborate and highly stylized woodworking traditions are other well recognized areas of expertise which found their way out of Africa. Art making traditions on the continent are deeply embedded in the intellectual and spiritual life of the people and their communities. This is an important thing to stress as we progress through the unit. It was difficult for the transplanted African to find a new context for these traditions in America.

Africans enslaved found ways to preserve their heritage in the utilitarian objects they created in America due to their changed circumstance. While in Africa the visual arts were a key component in many different ceremonies of a spiritual nature including funerals. In America these ceremonies were not permitted by the Protestant slaveholders. Slaves then had to reinvent ways to channel these cultural leanings into the utilitarian objects they created according to their plantation role. The objects were hand made of natural materials such as wood, earthen clay, woven fabrics, grasses, and forged metals. In African culture fabric creation and decoration is not just a way to adorn one self but serves also as a powerful and expressive medium. I have chosen textiles as a major focus of the discussion. As in other traditional societies art forms are encoded with ideograms and pictograms to transmit important features of the culture. Some scholars believe woven textiles may well have been the ancestors of written words.

Students will find through our explorations and close examinations that African people held the arts in very high regard making them an integral part of the spiritual life of the people. Careful choices were made about how an artwork was used and for what occasions, by whom and for whom. Aesthetic consideration about form and composition depended on the artworks function.

According to Henry Louis Gates and Kwame Anthony, in the Encyclopedia of the African and African- American Experience, African American Art can be defined as work which has been shaped thematically, stylistically, formally and theoretically by the confluence of black Atlantic cultures.” And though it is clear that the institution of slavery sought to stamp out through denial the humanity and authentic identity of the African, it is also clear that a culture so accustomed to “looking back” would not allow that heritage to be extinguished. The Sankofa bird image found in many artworks from Africa is symbolic of looking back to the ancestors for inspiration, protection, and knowledge. To revere and seek advice from unseen forces, to honor and revisit past traditions was not lost despite the forced labor, brutality, deprivation, separation from loved ones, and the many other grim realities of slavery.

As one examines the large categories of African Art there are many common groupings: masks, sculpture, fetishes, beadwork, terracotta, and of course the decorative arts. It is not surprising then that enslaved artisans transplanted to America flourished in the arts of woodworking, ironwork and pottery. African women artisans wove and dyed fabric to make exceptional pieced and appliquéd quilts, some were even rug weavers. While some were taught these skills upon arrival, many more most likely had past experience in these crafts. According to Melvin Sylvester, in African Americans in the Visual Arts: A Historical Perspective. Some of the slave artisans were allowed to hire themselves out keeping some or all of their earnings, and in some cases using their earnings to purchase their own freedom and that of their families. This alone denoted superior skill as work by slave artisans would be judged far more critically than that by other non-African artisans.

John Hope Franklin notes in From Slavery to Freedom that in Charleston South Carolina the census of 1884 recorded that there were more slave carpenters than there were free Negroes and whites. There were equally as many slave coopers. Other slaves in non-agricultural labors were tailors, shoemakers, cabinetmakers, painters, plasterers, and seamstresses. Owners realized these special skills enhanced both the value of the slave and could actually increase their own income when they hired the slaves out despite resistance from white artisans.

Painters Joshua Johnson and Henry Ossawa Turner were among the first African - Americans to rise to prominence in the American art world. In both cases they were artists of considerable talent facing many obstacles to acceptance in the Western world.

There was little trace of an African past in their works as European standards defined the nature of art. Though Tanner was the first African American artist to be admitted for formal training at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1883, he like many other African American artists found it necessary to leave America in order to find acceptance and recognition of their talents.

The Harlem Renaissance, a watershed of creativity and artistry was not yet underway. Seeds planted during the Post-Reconstruction era bore fruition as the Great Migration took place. The intellectual explosion in music, literature, and art which embraced Negro history and tradition, the “New Negro” as he was called by Alain Locke and others had no need to hide his “cultural dualism” and indeed, celebrated it.

“And Still I Rise,” the poem by poet laureate Maya Angelou provides metaphor for the enslaved and disenfranchised African American artist in his struggle to negotiate his new environment in America. Despite the yoke of oppression enslaved metal-smiths, potters, woodworkers and fiber artists held tight to ancestral legacy and maintained certain “Africanisms.” Clear evidence can be found in the dyeing and weaving of fabric and baskets, the making of quilts and even the weaving of specialized fishing nets such as those created by the Gullahs on the Sea Islands which link to a past cultural context. In works both aesthetically beautiful and useful, African artisans sought and found a way to reconcile their “twoness”...“an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts; two strivings: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” W. E. B. Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk.

Melville J. Herskowitz first identified “Africanisms” in African-American culture. John Michael Vlach in The African American Tradition in the Decorative Arts writes that such “Africanisms” are not to be taken lightly or considered mere “idiosyncrasies” but instead “assertive proof of an alternative history.” According to Paul Bohannon ethnic identity cannot be lost because “all elements of a culture are encoded twice, once in reality and once in the mind.”

Students will need to know what the concerns of the African peoples are in the making of their artworks so that they can make links to objects made in America by the slaves. When discussing African art there are many different groupings or themes, all of which had a specific function in the various tribal groups. The following will provide some background in formation for teaching about African influences.

Important themes to discuss are:

1. Continuity via the survival of families and communities
2. Careful child rearing and the importance of harmonious relationships
3. Maintaining the land through careful stewardship of crops.
4. Proper respect for elders and ancestors who were believed to have power over the fortunes of the living
5. Transitional life stages such as the child's passage to adulthood where specialized societies would transmit specialized knowledge and skills which would preserve past traditions.
6. Commemoration of the dead through elaborate and ritualized burial ceremonies. Masks and textiles were often part of these ceremonies. They could be used for healing, protection and instruction invoking the unseen forces of the spirit world.
7. Beauty and status are another focus of the arts of Africa. The art of personal adornment encompasses the use of elaborate hairstyles, scarification, and the use of specific textiles which can communicate to the viewer things like marriage status, ethnicity, identity, social status, and wealth.

Other art forms which crossed the Middle passage were pottery making, metal-smithing and furniture making. Metal smiths from Africa did the metalwork on the plantations. Pottery making in Africa is one of the oldest art forms dating back to the fourth millennium B.C.E. in Nigeria. Known for its durability and capacity to withstand extreme temperatures, African pottery had both utilitarian and ritual functions. In the Western Sudan women potters were often the wives of blacksmiths. In other cases potters were members of specialized guilds. The pottery was almost always hand built utilizing a variety of techniques in construction and design. In America notable stylistic similarities can be found in the Afro-Georgian and Afro Carolinian face vessels. These clay vessels are modeled depicting human faces. Potters embellished the works with a variety of facial expressions and suggested emotions. The expression on the faces of the vessels reveals close similarities to the faces on sculptural figures from Africa. The figures show large inlaid eyes, wide, open mouths with enormous teeth. A similar style of pottery can be found among the Kongo people who made similar face jugs. While no one knows their actual purpose, some could seem quite threatening. One might even see a link to some of the power figures on African sculptural traditions.

The wheel thrown pottery made by men had a utilitarian use as storage containers. One famous potter was a slave called Dave who signed his work with rhyming couplets at a time when most blacks were not permitted to learn to read and write.

Charleston South Carolina is home to the Sea Islands communities where women artisans have crafted Sweet grass baskets from the time of slavery until the present day. The Sweet grass baskets are almost identical in styling and patterning to those found in West Africa, a tradition handed down for three hundred years. Fanner baskets made by slaves were critical to the rice growing industry in early America. Again knowledge from the motherlands proved important to life in the new world.

In Africa woodcarving artistry was used both in sculpture and in furniture making. Furniture could be both for everyday use or highly personal or ceremonial. An example is the Akan stool, considered so personal an object that when the person died they were often seated on the stool while being prepared for burial. The carving and sculptural nature of some of these works may seem echoed in some of the amazing carved walking sticks made by slaves and ex slaves.

Metalwork in Africa dates back to the first millennium B.C.E... The ability to transform molten metals into iron gave blacksmiths a kind of supernatural aura and specialized place in the community with special privileges and status. The blacksmith often crafted art objects which could be used in ritualistic acts to promote healing and mediation. Iron was used to strengthen structures, while, bronze, copper, gold and silver were used in objects to increase the prestige of the current leader. Goldsmiths were chiefly responsible for making objects for personal adornment like rings, bracelets, anklets, pendants, beads and necklaces. In America these metal smiths often worked in forges which produced beautifully intricate wrought iron fences which in some cases followed European traditions and in others restyled symbols of African origin.. A traveler in Maryland noted in 1796 that all of the iron forges were operated by blacks.

And of course, as we have said the textile arts are of great significance to many African peoples, with a long history of conveying identity and history. The artful use and construction of textiles is a way to illuminate social status and the heritage of the wearer. This is particularly true of the Asante people in the use of Kente cloth which is often called prestige cloth.

So important were textiles to ceremony in Africa that they acquired a ritual object status instead of simply being viewed as mere artworks or crafts. Their role of transmitting important cultural knowledge was essential. Adinkra cloth is believed to be encoded with the entire history, beliefs, attitudes, religion, and underpinnings of the societal structure of the Akan people.

Textile Traditions

In Africa many textiles were made by men. In America many of these traditions were transformed into women's roles. Let's start with the weaving traditions of West Africa. The Kente cloth made by the Asante and Ewe people is one of the most renowned of all of the African textiles. These two groups are considered masters of the art of weaving.

Combining bold and brilliantly colored patterns, the use of geometric shapes and the characteristic daring design explorations, Kente cloth is admired the world over for its beauty. Originally the cloth was chiefly made for royalty and was to worn on very special occasions.

Weaving traditions allowed the weaver a great deal of flexibility when it came to alternating patterns. Since the ultimate goal was to create a large piece of cloth made of many separate and unique weaves' joined together instead of one repeated pattern over a large area. The weavers ability to recreate and alter old patterns was highly regarded as this was viewed as a rebirth of ancestral power for both the creator and the wearer of the piece. It was believed that by breaking with old patterns evil spirits could be thwarted in their attempt of affect the individual. According to legend evil is believed to travel in a straight line. Breaking the pattern by changing the direction would confuse the spirits and impede their progress. The wealth, power and status of a person were often displayed via the cloth worn. This was particularly true when it came to priests or royalty. The improvisational weave patterns, the use of bold bright colors, asymmetry, and large shapes are to be found in African –American quilt making traditions as we will later discover.

The weaving technique which best exemplifies some of these methods is the strip weaving techniques of the Ashanti and Ewe. Often times due to trade with other nation brightly colored silks and taffetas purchased would be unraveled so that their bright colors could be incorporated in to the fabrics being created. Both tribes are masters at this particular style in which long strips are woven on a narrow loom. These strips could then be cut into different shapes and joined together in various fashions. This particular type pf cloth production is extremely meticulous and labor intensive. The long narrow lengths of cloth are produced on narrow looms and then joined together to create rectangular pieces. Rulers of many kingdoms displayed their wealth through fine textiles made especially for their use in court.

The Kente cloth of the Ashanti people is considered the cloth of Kings. It was regarded as royal and sacred to be used only in times of extreme importance. Its aesthetic beauty was further enhanced by the expressive nature through use of symbolic meanings. The

king controlled the production of the cloth for use by his household and those official and political allies under his jurisdiction. The cloth itself is a dazzling array of multicolored patterns and geometric shapes bold designs. Often the cloths were chosen for their names which might be related to an historical event, important chief or queen mother. Like other textiles Asante kente has embedded in its design and production certain traditional concepts.

In America the improvisations necessary to create Kente cloth were infused into new media and materials. Among them of course is quilt making. Quilts are not a craft of African origin. However, the African adapting to his changing circumstance was able to use African textiles inspirations in creating utilitarian objects in America like quilts. According to Robert Horton in Calico and Beyond: The Use of Patterned Fabric in Quilts, the six major design features most notable in African American quilts are:

1. Vertical strip organization
- 2 .Bold color
3. Large design elements
4. Asymmetry
5. Multiple patterning
6. Improvised rhythm

These descriptors may be true of a selection of African American quilts but still others do not fit into this particular pattern. There is a broad range of styles to be explored in any study of African American quilts. Looking back at the discussion of Kente cloth many of these same elements are present. While many historians who wrote about African American quilters dismissed most slave quilts as inferior in quality and workmanship a closer look reveals design concepts that were not European aesthetically based, but instead an African interpretation of the materials at hand.

Many slaves made appliqué style quilts. It is believed that this style of quilting is directly related to the tapestries of Benin and the slaves from Benin West Africa, In Benin the tapestries were composed to represent stories from oral traditions. Appliquéd animal figures represented kings or other central figures in important proverbs. The exquisite Bible quilts made by ex-slave Harriet Powers who was from Benin are believed by scholars to a clear link to African tradition in their use of animal symbolism. She was known too to combine Christian symbols with those of the African cosmology of the Bokongo people, thus again evidence of reemerging Africa in America. Though Harriet Powers was extremely religious and some of the squares represent stories from the Bible,

other squares tell other stories from her life. The frequent use of animal symbols to tell a story bears an extremely close resemblance to the work of the Fon tribe of the Dahomey (now Benin).

This appliqué style also provided opportunities for the use of shapes representing charms to safeguard the user. Oftentimes the symbols represented words in the natural language which were akin to a sacred and protective script. Certain symbols were believed to be particularly powerful. The diamond for instance represented at each point a key aspect of the life cycle; birth, life, death, and rebirth. The circle too was said to represent continuity of the life cycle.

Many slaves were of course expected to adhere to the European traditions of their owners but still found ways to disguise the improvisational design elements derived from African mythology and cosmology. Evidence of the continued use of African cosmology is found in the images of the sun, the Congo cross, and the frequent use of red and white. These design styles are believed to be derived from the Shango cults of Nigeria. The snake motif, symbol of Damballah, the God of fertility and intricate flowers representing Erzulie, the Vodum Goddess of love found their way into slave-made textiles.

Patchwork quilts made from various size scraps of fabrics were also made by slaves. Slaves may have added their own improvisational elements such as stripes to frame geometric patterns. This practice is believed to be influenced by the strip weaving techniques of the Ashanti and Ewe of West Africa. According to Monni Adams in her description of African textiles, "African's show a taste for interrupting the expected line; they compose through juxtapositions of sharply differing units, through abrupt shift in form."

Patchwork designs were another way to create designs similar to those found in the Adinkra fabric decoration methods. Adinkra cloth originated with the Asante people who hand painted and hand embroidered cloths that were stamped with traditional design symbols which have a name and meaning derived from a historical or religious origin, a proverb or a human attitude. In Africa Adinkra was used in sacred ceremonies and rituals. Initially it was primarily used in funerary rights and so was called the "goodbye cloth." In America traditional designs and motifs were simply reinvented. Though ceremonial use was undoubtedly prohibited, personal use and personal symbols could be disguised. Safe houses along the Underground Railroad were said to sometimes display quilts which contained symbols well know to the African trying to escape the bonds of slavery, yet another example of textiles communicating information.

EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS AND STRATEGIES

The instructional methods in this unit will be used to address these primary goals: (1) provide students with an enhanced view of African Art, 2) increase their knowledge of American history in general and the infusion of African American culture within it, 3) provide a window into the lives of enslaved African Americans and make connections to changed lives of others who came to America by choice or chance, 4) use African and African American art as a vehicle to enhance the learners ability to acquire lifelong learning skills as we investigate and create a dialogue around the roles and function of art in African societies and it's retention in the work of enslaved artisans in the new world.

In this unit I have tried to examine some of the traditional methods of textile production used in Africa and transplanted to America. In exploring the styles and techniques used in the dyeing, weaving, and printing of fabrics used to make decorative cloths such as Kente and Adinkra , as well as Kuba and Mudd cloth we can examine embedded meanings in the artistic choices made in their creation. These activities serve to help students to perceive and interpret details and expressive content, and make aesthetic choices which enable the ultimate goal of achieving visual literacy for all students.

Studies have demonstrated that motifs found in appliquéd story cloths and intricate basket weaving patterns show that traditions were not lost during bondage but reformed into a new reality. The ever present “twoness” transformed into a sort of “second sight.” Just as Adinkra symbols are to be found on the iron gates of grand Southern mansions, wrought by enslaved blacksmith, the sculptors hand is evidenced on intricately carved walking sticks so too did African artistry survive in the stripped, pieced, patchwork and appliquéd quilts and coverlets made by African American women. Ever resilient and improvisational, African American women dyed, spun and wove. They crocheted and made rugs. Cotton, the source of such misery ironically provided one of the few ways for African- African American women in particular to, ”write down” their heritage and history.

As we said earlier in our discussion textiles in Africa were akin to words because of their expressive nature and their ability to transmit personal identity and cultural beliefs. The learner will acquire new knowledge as we survey a variety of fabric production techniques.

Some of the different types of textile arts that will be examined are:

- woven Asante or Ewe Kente cloth
- Mud painted Bamana or boglolanfiniw cloth
- Indigo resist dyed Yoruba Adire cloth
- Stamped Asante Adinkra clot-cut pile Kuba raffia cloth
- basket making traditions
- African appliquéd prestige cloth
- African American quilts

ACTIVITIES

One of the many goals of a multicultural education is help students become accustomed to and accepting of the mythologies of cultures other than their own. It must challenge their assumptions and help them to discover humanity the world over is linked in multiple ways. Our study will engage the students critical thinking skills as we decode the surviving,"Africanisms" in fabrics, baskets and quilt making techniques and bridge the past to present. This unit is suitable for children with a broad range of ability levels as it focuses on texture, pattern and rhythm, areas that seem appropriate for the kinesthetic nature of elementary age children.

Creating the instructional setting

- Students will see maps of the continent of Africa which will show the topography of the land and help them to understand how many different nations are on the continent?
- Students will have an opportunity to examine various types of decorative cloth from Africa
- Students will see examples of other traditional artworks from Africa, including sculpture and metalwork and basketry
- Students will make comparisons between works made in Africa and works made in America
- Students will engage in discussion using appropriate art terminology

- to discuss the presented artworks identifying the type of artwork, the time period from which it came, the method used to create the art work and the purpose for which the artwork was created.
- Students will have an opportunity to view on video Asante weavers using a strip loom to create Kente cloth. They will have an opportunity to look at the masterful use of pattern improvisations to design with the prized cloth.
 - Students will see how African artists use Adinkra symbols to decorate cloth and “talk” about their heritage and beliefs
 - Students will examine the basketry methods and materials used in Africa and now found in the Carolinas with the hope of identifying similarities
 - Students will have an opportunity to look at different types of quilting techniques used by African-American quilters including, pieced, striped and appliqué techniques and compare them to methods used in African fabric creation and decoration.
 - Students will have an opportunity to look at some of the appliquéd prestige cloth used to tell about the accomplishments of important individuals.

Production activities for visual arts

- The first production activity for students will be weaving on a modified strip loom. We will view a video on contemporary weavers in Africa who still use the strip loom method. We will see examples of Kente cloth and discuss how the weavers manipulate color and pattern to create infinite possibilities in design.
- The second production activity will give students the opportunity to study the use of Adinkra symbols on artwork and understand what the symbols mean as they use them to stamp fabric to create their own “talking” cloth.
- The third production activity will be the creation of a story cloth. Students can tell a favorite story in cloth or a story about themselves and their family with symbols that represent important event or achievements in their own lives.

Additional activities could include the following:

- Decoration of faux Adire cloth with a resist dying technique using a paste method.
- Creation of simple coil baskets made with jute and colored yarns.
- Construction of coil method clay pottery.

- Tooling of relief designs of power figures like those found on royal palaces created by African goldsmiths on copper or other school quality heavy grade art foils.

RESOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1966. This comprehensive work details the history of African Americans from their arrival on American shores to genesis of the modern Civil Rights Movement. *The American Historical Review* commented about the original edition: "The book is done with such thoroughness and subtlety that it must stand as a classic indication of how the multidisciplinary approach can enrich historical understanding." For a complete overview of the experience of African Americans in America this book is indispensable. The current edition includes recent scholarship on topics such as the slave trade, post-Civil War urban life, the origins of the black church, and the black family.

E. Franklin Frazier, PhD, *The Negro in the United States*, the MacMillan Company, 1957. Frazier is a sociologist by training and has written one of the first comprehensive examinations of black culture, black families, the black church, black institutional structures, and provides the most thorough and comprehensive analysis of black history. Most importantly Frazier was one of the first writers to theorize that African American culture still contained certain "Africanisms" or vestiges of the African past. This work is considered the Bible of black culture and life as it combines sociological methodologies and insights historical analysis.

John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 3rd Edition, Alfred A. Knopf. 1967. Franklin is considered the dean of Afro American historians. His in depth analysis of the period of history from slavery to freedom is unparalleled. It should be considered as essential reading for the student of history and certainly as a companion piece to the Frazier work giving the reader a thorough sense of African American History.

Dallas Museum of Art, *Black Art: Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African American Art*, 1989. This book explores what has long been overlooked in studies of American art—the fact that “Africanisms” have survived in and influenced the nature of African- American Art. According to the Library Journal, the study brings together research by prominent scholars in one volume. “Expanding on Robert F. Thompson’s pioneering study, *Flash of the Spirit* (Random, 1984), it encompasses the full spectrum of black American visual art from folk art to fine art.”

Peter Adler and Nicholas Bernard, *African Majesty: The Textile Art of the Ashanti and Ewe*, Thames and Hudson, Ltd. London 1992. This book provides outstanding examples via 130 color plates of the breath and beauty of Ashanti and Ewe weaving traditions. The teacher interested in study of traditions in textile history in African culture or tribal art will find this book extremely useful for examining weaving methodologies and information on the ways the fabrics were used. This book is an eye opener when it comes to understanding the mastery of the weavers, the attention to the most subtle detail and symbol.

Frank Willet, *African Art, An African Introduction*, Praeger Publishers, New York and Washington, 1971. Willet surveys and analyzes the immense array and powerful expressive forms to be found on this vast continent. One gets a sense of the magnitude of confluence of many ethnic groups as he examines all the sources and manifestations of expression. The complex, social, religious, political and practical functions are explored. This historical view ranges from Stone Age Art to present day. It helps to put African Art in its rightful place among the great creative achievements of mankind. The book includes magnificent reproductions of remarkable art making traditions from the continent.

The Art Institute of Chicago, Department of Museum Education, *African American Art*, 1997. This manual is written for teachers and is an excellent introduction to the visual legacy of African Americans. It covers a broad range of aspects within the study of African American art but is particularly focused on the art of the Harlem Renaissance between the years 1920-1940. The manual contains slides and study guides, timelines, glossaries and many useful classroom applications and reproductions of outstanding works. This would be a useful guide for all teachers of the visual arts but a great aide also to teachers of the mainstream curriculum as they attempt to make cross- curricular connections.

The Art Institute of Chicago, Department of Museum Education, *Arts of Africa*, 1998. A comprehensive guide to the collection of the Chicago Museum of Art, this manual is an extremely useful tool in understanding the modes and complexity of African Art.

It spans works from ancient to modern including slides and other reproductions with multiple avenues for study approaches. It includes glossaries, maps, classroom applications, pronunciation guides and other useful tools for the teacher.

Gladys-Marie Fry, Ph. D, *Stitched From the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Ante-Bellum South*, Dutton Studio Books, New York, 1990. This important book serves as a catalog for an exhibition that traveled from the Museum of Folk Art in New York City to the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. to the Huntsville Museum of Art in Huntsville Alabama. The purpose of the collection is to illuminate the work done by slave women whose work has too often gone unacknowledged. It provides beautiful examples of quilts and the quilters, information about the plantation lifestyles and the meanings and methods used in quilt making traditions.

John Pitcon, *The Art of African Textile: Technology, Tradition and Lurex*, Lunt Humphries Publisher London 1995. This work explores an astonishing array of styles, techniques and motifs. One really gets a true sense of the expressive nature of these textiles as an advanced art form. It is filled with exceptional illustrations and discusses the changing and fluid nature of this expressive art form.

Tonya Bolden, *Wake Up Our Souls: Celebration of Black American Artists* Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 2004. This book could be used primarily to take a look at the artistic traditions of African American Artists from the late 18th century to a number of contemporary artists. It focuses on a select group but makes important points about the underpinnings of subject matter and the lives of the artists.

Time Life Books, *Voices of Triumph: Creative Fire*, 1994 A broad spectrum book that includes dance, theater, visual arts, literature; this work discusses black achievements. It attempts to tie many of these to historical and political movements

John Michael Vlach, *The Afro American Tradition in Decorative Arts*, University of Georgia Press, 1990. +This book covers the range of decorative art traditions. For the purposes of this unit it covers many of the subjects listed, basketry, quilting, pottery, metalwork and other textile arts. It also looks back to African traditions.

APPENDICES

THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF THE NATIONAL STANDARD FOR ART EDUCATION IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

1. CONTENT STANDARD UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING MEDIA, TECHNIQUES AND PROCESSES

Achievement Standards Students

- a. Know the difference between materials, techniques, and processes**
- b. Describe how different materials, techniques, and processes cause different responses**
- c. Use different media, techniques and processes to communicate ideas, experiences and stories**
- d. Use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner**

2 CONTENT STANDARD USING KNOWLEDGE OF STRUCTURES AND FUNCTIONS

Achievement Standards Students

- a. Know the difference between visual characteristics and purposes of art in order to convey ideas**
- b. Describe how different expressive features and organizational principles cause different responses**
- c. Use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas.**

3 CONTENT STANDARD CHOOSING AND EVALUATING A RANGE OF SUBJECT MATTER SYMBOLS AND IDEAS

Achievement Standard Students

- a. Explore and understand prospective content for works of art**
- b. Select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning**

4 CONTENT STANDARD UNDERSTAND THE VISUAL ARTS IN RELATION OF HISTORY AND CULTURE

Achievement Student Standard

- a. Know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationship o various cultures**
- b. Identify specific works of art as belonging to a part culture, times, and places**
- c. Demonstrates how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art**

5 CONTENT STANDARD REFLECTING UPON AND “ASSESSING THE CHARACTERISTICS AND MERITS OF THEIR WORKS AND THE WORKS OF OTHERS

Achievement Student Standards

- a. Understand that there are various purposes for creating works of art**
- b. Describe how people’s experiences influence the development of specific artworks**

6 CONTENT STANDARD MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN VISUAL ART AND OTHER DISCIPLINES

Achievement Student Standards

- a. Understand and use similar and difference between characteristics of visual arts and other disciplines**
- b. Identify connections between visual arts of others disciplines in curriculum.**

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES STANDARDS FOR THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA AND THE PITTSBURGH BOARD OF EDUCATION

1. All students describe meanings they find in various works from the visual and performing arts and literature on the basis of aesthetic understanding of the art form
2. All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures, showing that they understand the important features of the works
- 3..All students relate various works from the visual and performing arts and literature to the historical and cultural content within which they were created
4. All students produce, perform or exhibit their work in the visual arts, music, dance or theater, and describe the meanings their works has for them.

