African and Asmat Art: A Brief Overview

The current installation of the Art Ark features African and Asmat art. Although these two genres are not geographically close, and Africa is made up of many cultures, there are enough similarities to provide unity of theme and make the combination logical. At the same time, there is enough variety to make the installation fascinating for preK-8 students and the adults who accompany them.

The Asmat (pronounced “ozmot”) are a group of people who live in the Indonesian portion of the island of New Guinea, occupying an area along the southwestern coast of that island. Dense forests, rivers, and swamps are prominent features of the area. Because of its harsh and remote location, the Asmat people have been fairly isolated for centuries. Outside influence has begun to creep in and affect some elements of the culture, but many elements have remained largely unchanged over many generations.

The art of the Asmat is highly recognizable and collected worldwide. The most remarkable art form is the bis (usually “beezh”) pole, a sculpture carved from the trunk and one root of the mangrove tree. Other prominent art forms include shields, costume items, canoes, and drums, with woodcarving being the most practiced form of art. Many of the art objects are used in ceremonies, and others are part of everyday life. Asmat art utilizes three colors only - white, red, and black - and makes striking use of bold lines. Much of their art is related to spiritual beliefs about ancestors and the world of spirits; thus, it is full of representations of humans and of animals with significant symbolic associations. The hornbill, for example, is viewed as a kind of bridge between this world and the next and is invariably found somewhere on every bis pole.

The term “African art” is too broad to convey much meaning, but there are some generalizations that can be made. Much of the African art in the Crocker’s collection and introduced in the Ark is West Form & Function: African and Asmat Art, a dynamic exhibition of sculpture, musical instruments, textiles, masks, and other objects from diverse African communities and the Asmat people of New Guinea.
African, from cultures such as the Ashanti in Ghana and the Yoruba in Nigeria. Like that of the Asmat, the art of these peoples conveys a great deal of cultural symbolism and plays central roles in ceremonies and in everyday life.

Some essential African art forms are represented in the museum collections and in the Ark. Kente cloth, with its bright colors and bold designs, immediately conveys a sense of Africa and is a representative example of the important art of weaving in many African cultures. Masquerade is another widespread cultural feature, requiring the use of many types of masks and other costume items. Adinkra symbols are pictographs that communicate the values and other important concepts of the Ashanti people of West Africa; they adorn fabric and other items and are created with special stamps carved from gourds by artists. Beadwork is an important art form, as is sculpture - countless human figures, household items, masks, musical instruments, ceremonial items, and other works are carved from wood; terracotta and other forms of sculpture are found in African art as well.

One common feature of both Asmat and African traditional art is that, in most cases, the creator of a piece is unknown. While observers of Western art can often associate a body of work with a particular artist, observers of these art forms focus instead on concepts such as an artwork’s context, form, and use. Careful observers will find that the elements of art and the principles of design can be applied universally and that doing so will open our eyes and our minds to an exciting understanding of other cultures, and an ability to see the world from someone else’s point of view.
Bold and Beautiful: A Lesson About Kente Cloth

Objectives
Students will identify, describe, create, and extend patterns using lines, colors, and shapes, as they create Kente cloth designs. Students will demonstrate beginning skills in using oil pastels and will follow simple oral directions. Students will explore and discuss the design and use of a common object from another culture.

Instructional Materials
Image/s of Kente cloth, or actual examples of Kente cloth
World map or globe

Art Materials
Strips of white paper, approx. 3-4” wide and 2’ long (such as adding machine tape)
Oil pastels, markers, or crayons in bold colors
Newspaper
Damp paper towels (for cleaning fingers)

Procedure
Introduction
Have the students look closely at the clothes they are wearing, as well as any other fabrics in the classroom. Invite them to suggest how the fabrics might have been created - what materials and tools were used, who might have made them, and so on. Ask whether fabrics and clothing are the same in other parts of the world, how they might be different, or why they may be different. Announce that they are going to learn about a very special type of fabric that was worn by kings in Africa. Point out Ghana on the map or globe in relation to the United States and explain that they are going to learn about a kind of cloth that comes from Ghana, a country in Africa.

Object-based Instruction
Display the images. Guide the discussion using the following questioning strategy, adapting it as desired. Include information about Kente cloth from the background material during the discussion.

Describe: What are we looking at? What colors and shapes do you see? How would you describe them? What kinds of lines are there?

Analyze: What colors or shapes repeat? What are some patterns? Where do the patterns seem to change? How do you think this was made?

Interpret: How do the colors in this cloth make you feel? Why do you think the weaver chose these colors? What other decisions did the weaver need to make while creating this piece of fabric? What else does this remind you of?
Judge: What do you like most about this artwork? What don’t you like? Do you think this would be a good fabric for clothing? Why or why not? Who might wear cloth like this? How does looking at this piece help you know more about people from Africa?

Connect: Do people work as weavers in the United States? What do they make? How do you think their work is the same or different from weavers in African countries?

Procedure
Students will use paper and pastels/markers/crayons to create a repeating pattern that imitates Kente cloth. Demonstrate all of the steps of the project before the students begin, emphasizing that each design will be unique. Provide cues for the steps on the board, either with simple written directions (i.e., "fold the paper") or with visuals (i.e., attach a folded strip of paper and an oil pastel to the board).

1. Have the students fold their paper strips in half, then in half again, and then in half one more time. When they unfold them, there will be eight equal sections.
2. In the top section, each student will create a unique design of either horizontal or vertical stripes. (Starting at the top helps keep students from smearing their designs.) Suggest that the stripes be in different widths. One stripe can include a repeated shape - three red triangles in a yellow stripe, for example. The design needs to fill the entire section.
3. In the next section, each student will create a second unique design, with the stripes going the other direction. (If the top section has vertical stripes, the second section will have horizontal stripes.) If the top section doesn’t have a stripe with a repeated shape, this section should include one. Again, the design needs to fill the entire section.
4. As the students create their designs, remind them to press firmly so the colors will be bold. Placing a pad of newspaper under the paper helps make the colors more solid and allows the students to color to the edges of the paper without coloring their desks. Remind them to try to avoid smearing the colors, but don’t make them overly concerned. If they’re working with oil pastels, using the paper towels to wipe their fingers when they change colors can help.
5. The third section of each strip will be a repetition of the first. Encourage the students to duplicate their design as exactly as possible.
6. The fourth section of each strip will be a repetition of the second. Again, encourage the students to duplicate their design as exactly as possible. Ask them what they think comes next; the fifth and seventh sections will contain repetitions of the first design, and the sixth and eighth sections will contain repetitions of the second.
7. Use the finished projects to decorate the classroom: Place them end to end to create a border, or attach them side by side to replicate the cloth. Groups of students could create panels that identify their groups.
Assessment
Before they begin, be sure the students understand the following expectations for the project:

1. Create two unique designs using lines (stripes), colors, and shapes that fill the designated space.
2. Alternate the designs in a repeating pattern, duplicating the designs as precisely as possible.
3. Demonstrate careful, thoughtful work.
4. Explore and discuss the design and use of a common object from another culture.

Assess the students’ mastery of the first two lesson objectives based on their meeting expectations 1-3 above.

Assess the students’ mastery of the fourth objective by asking them to describe where Kente cloth comes from (made by weavers in Africa), and what it’s used for (usually clothing). Encourage developmentally appropriate oral communication.

Adapting and Extending
The following are some suggestions for adapting this lesson to other grade levels or extending it to other lessons.

- Read one or more Anansi stories to the students. Share the Ashanti legend (found in the accompanying background information) that connects the invention of weaving Kente cloth to the observation of Anansi spinning a web.
- Show a video of Kente cloth weaving; many are available on YouTube.
- The colors used in traditional Kente cloth are full of symbolic meaning, many of which are described in the background material. The cloth often includes elaborate patterns as well; there are many websites that illustrate and describe them. Older students could research the patterns online and then create more complex designs, making artistic decisions about colors and patterns based on the symbolism to make their designs more personal.
- Watch for Kente cloth patterns in books and elsewhere. For example, many of the illustrations in Margaret Musgrove’s picture book Ashanti to Zulu include people wearing them.
- Base a writing lesson on the experience by asking students to describe their designs, reflect on their choices or on the images and/or artifacts they viewed, imagine what it would be like to be a weaver, and so on.
- Base a math lesson on the experience by incorporating measurement, classification, computation, and so on.
Kente Cloth Background Information

Kente ("ken tuh" or "ken tee") cloth is a brightly colored fabric of the Akan peoples from Ghana in West Africa. It is hand woven on wooden looms, traditionally by men. Highly esteemed and carefully crafted, the cloth was originally reserved for royalty; in modern times, it is widely used.

Weaving in Africa has ancient roots but Kente cloth weaving is relatively modern. According to legend, it was born when two friends observed Anansi the spider spinning a web. They imitated his actions to create a beautiful cloth, which was taken to the chief. He liked it so much that he declared it the royal fabric and wore it on special occasions. The Kente cloth as we know it today with its bold colors and striking patterns was developed by the Ashanti (one of the Akan groups) in the 17th century. Other nearby Akan peoples weave Kente cloth as well, with varying colors and patterns typical of each group.

The yarns used over time in the making of Kente have been of various types. In the past, locally grown cotton was spun into yarn, and sometimes yarn was obtained by unraveling cotton and silk cloths imported from Europe. Today, most of the yarns are produced by factories.

Kente cloth is woven on a loom in four inch strips of varying lengths. Strips are then laid carefully side by side and hand-sewn together to create panels of cloth, which are usually used for clothing. Wearing Kente wrapped and draped around the body, a piece of men’s clothing typically needs 24 strips, and a women’s, 14.

Kente is more than just a cloth; the colors and patterns are imbued with symbolic meaning. There are over 300 identified pattern symbols, representing moral values, philosophical ideas, historical events, proverbs, individual achievements, attributes of animal life, and so on. Thread colors are chosen by the weavers to enhance the design and to convey meaning; the list below describes what various colors represent.

- **Yellow (and Gold)** – royalty, prosperity, wealth (from egg yolk and the mineral gold)
- **Red** – death, funerals, sacrifice, struggle (associated with blood)
- **Pink** – femininity (associated with females)
- **Maroon** – Mother Earth, healing (from the color of earth)
- **Purple** – similar to maroon and pink (a feminine color associated with healing)
- **Blue** – peace, harmony, love (associated with the sky)
- **Green** – growth, vitality, crops, spiritual renewal (associated with plants and herbs)
- **Black** – maturity, spiritual energy, rites of death (things darken as they mature)
- **Grey** – healing rituals, cleansing rituals (associated with ash)
- **Silver** – peace, purity, joy (associated with the moon)
- **White** – purity, balance, ancestral spirits (used in festivals)

For a pre-K-2nd grade lesson using Kente Cloth, please see Bold and Beautiful.
African Mask Activity

Objectives
Students will use various materials (e.g., paper, glue, markers) and motor skills (e.g., cutting, stapling, collage) to create animal masks. Students will describe African masks and their uses. Students will create movements that correlate with their masks and selected music.

Instructional Materials
Images of African animal masks
Photographs of African animals
Recording of African music
(Recommended: African Playground by Putumayo)

Art Materials
Construction paper or heavier paper, cut in strips to form headbands (approx. approx. 3-4” wide and 2’ long)
Colorful paper scraps
Small paper plates
Markers or crayons
Seeds, feathers, raffia, small beads, string, etc.
Scissors, stapler, glue

Procedure
Introduction
Discuss with students the use of masks in African culture. All over the African continent, masks are one of the most prominent forms of art, and ceremonies that use them are an important part of many African cultures. Animals are frequently represented in masks, often chosen for the characteristics they represent. Here are some common examples:

Elephant – strength, royalty, patience, wisdom, longevity, happiness, luck
Lion – royalty, strength, courage, pride
Leopard – ferocity, aggression, courage
Antelope – farming, agriculture, speed
Buffalo – power, chiefs, heroes
Crocodile – strength, evil (masks are sometimes used to ward them off)
Lizard – life
Tortoise – old age

Birds – messengers between earth and the world of spirits

Object-based Instruction
Show the students several images of African animal masks, including some in the headdress style. Ask questions like the following:
Describe: What animal is represented? What colors and materials do you see?
Analyze Does this animal make noise? How does it move?
Interpret: Does this look like a friendly animal, or a fierce one?
Judge: What do you like most about this artwork? Is there anything you don’t like about it? Does looking at this piece help you know more about people from Africa? Why?
Connect: Do people use masks in the United States? What are they used for? How do you think the American use of masks is the same or different from mask-wearers in African countries?

Show the students the animal photographs and examples of African animal masks. Discuss with the students some prominent physical traits of each animal, as well as some of its other characteristics. For example, the elephant has a trunk and very large ears, and it is also very strong.

Procedure
Lead students in an activity to make their own animal masks and dance in a ceremony. Rather than making masks that cover the face, they will make masks in a headdress style. Demonstrate the steps of the project, including suggested ways to attach the collage materials to the paper plates. You may wish to list the steps on the board with words and/or pictures.

Before the activity, decide how to organize the materials. If the students sit in groups, you may want to put some materials at each table. Or you may set them out on one table and have a few students at a time select what they need.

1. Have each student select an animal to depict. If possible, make the animal photographs available to the students for reference while they work. Show students the materials they can use in their creations.
2. Using pencils, have the students sketch animal faces on their plates. They can then decide which features to add with the crayons/markers and which to add with the collage materials.
3. As they create their masks, circulate to help the students with the headbands and to discuss their work with them.

Conclude the activity with a celebration. Have the students gather in a circle wearing their masks. If possible, provide time for them to talk about what they’ve created. Explain that African masks are used in various ceremonies and other events. Play a recording of some African music and invite the students to dance, encouraging them to incorporate movements suggested by their chosen animals.
Assessment
Use a “+/−” to assess each of the following:

• The student demonstrates developmentally appropriate skill in the use of art materials and processes.
• The student engages appropriately in the discussions about African masks and about the creation of his/her own mask, as well as in the movement activity.
• The student demonstrates thoughtful and careful work.

Adapting and Extending
Consider adding these elements to the activity above, or using them in subsequent lessons.

• Read a picture book featuring African animals. There are several African animal alphabet books available; other good choices are Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain (Aardema/Vidal), Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears (Aardema/Dillon), and We All Went on Safari (Krebs/Cairns). You probably have favorites as well.
• Point out some animal symbolism used in the United States, for comparison and connection. For example, the eagle is featured on money and on the national seal, and the California state flag features a bear. Discuss the reasons for these symbols.
• Show a video of an African ceremony featuring masquerade. YouTube is a good source - search for “African mask dance”.
• Modify the procedure so students can make face masks out of paper plates, attached with string or held with popsicle sticks.
Asmat Mobile Activity

Objectives
Students will study examples of Asmat art objects. Students will incorporate Asmat pattern and symbols in decorating objects. Students will assemble a mobile to display their designs.

Instructional Materials
Images of Asmat art objects - a shield, a drum, and a spirit canoe
World map or globe

Art Materials
Red and black crayons or markers
Construction paper (3 sheets per student)
Optional: feathers, yarn, wire, beads
Scissors, glue sticks, hole punches
Drinking straws (about 8” long, 3 per student)
String
Paper clips (large, about 10 per student)

Procedure
Introduction
Asmat art objects display some distinctive characteristics. Items such as shields, drums, and spirit canoes are carved from wood and are sometimes decorated with items such as feathers, fibers, and shells. Pigment is often applied, and red, black, and white are the only colors used. Bold lines - straight or curved or zigzag - and animal motifs are common. Human figures are often depicted and usually represent ancestors.

Object-based Instruction
Show the students the Asmat art objects, and use the map or globe to show where the objects come from. Help the students focus on the uses and the distinct characteristics of each object. Make lists of the characteristics on the board for the students to refer to during the project. The following details and sample questions may be helpful:

Shield: Used in warfare, and sometimes carved to honor an ancestor. They usually have a white background with red and black geometric designs and patterns.
Describe: What kinds of lines do you see? Describe the symmetry.
Analyze: What are the repeating elements that provide unity? What are the unique elements that provide variety? What designs look like symbols?
Interpret: What might the symbols represent?
Judge: What do you like about this piece? What don’t you like? What is special about this piece?

Drum: Used in various ceremonies. Drums are carved from the trunk of a tree with various Asmat motifs. The drum head is usually lizard hide tied on with fibers; beeswax is applied to change the drum’s tone. Stored over fireplaces in homes, they darken over time from the skin oils of those who handle them.
Interpret: What recognizable figures are in the carving? What story do you think they tell? Notice the negative spaces in the carving of the handle. Why would someone spend so much time and effort to decorate an object like this?
Judge: What do you like about this piece? What don’t you like? What is special about this piece?

Spirit canoe: Carved to memorialize a person or persons who have died. The Asmat believe the spirits travel to a world beyond the sea in canoes such as this. The human figures represent people and are often adorned with feathers and other decorative items. The vertical red stripes were believed to help the canoe move more quickly.
Describe: Repetition provides a sense of rhythm and movement; what repeated elements can you find?
Analyze: How many people are making their final journey in this canoe? What is an important difference between this object and the other two? (This one is for art only - it’s not a utilitarian object.)
Interpret: Why do you think the canoe is bottomless?
Judge: What do you like about this piece? What don’t you like? What is special about this piece?

Procedure
Distribute construction paper to the students and have them draw a shield, drum, and canoe, each one on a separate sheet, using the images they viewed and the characteristics they listed to guide them. Ask that they draw the objects as big as they can on the paper; demonstrate if necessary. Have the students cut out the three items. If you’re using the optional decorative items, have them add them to their objects. On the back of each one, have them write their name and the name of each object; they should also punch a hole in the top of each object.

When their decorated objects are ready, have the students assemble their mobiles using the following steps:

1. Thread a 30” piece of string through three drinking straws and then tie a knot, forming a triangle. Cut the extra ends of string off.
2. Connect three paper clips into a chain and then hook it onto the string at one corner of the triangle. Make two more paper clip chains just like that and hook them at the other two corners.
3. Hook all three paper clip chains into another paper clip - this one will be the hook. Bend part of that paper clip out to make the hook easier to use.
4. Put a piece of string through the hole of one of your decorated objects and tie a knot, so it’s hanging from a loop of string. If you need help, tie the string around a friend’s finger. The
lengths of these strings can be different, depending on how you want your finished mobile to look. You might experiment to see what looks and balances best.

5. Hook one string loop into the bottom paper clip of each chain. Hang your mobile from the paper clip hook and enjoy watching it move.

**Assessment**

Assess the students’ finished projects using the following rubric:

3 – Outlines and designs reflect appreciable awareness of the characteristics of the Asmat art objects discussed. Mobile is assembled correctly with all steps followed carefully. Student demonstrates careful work and creativity.

2 – Outlines and designs reflect some awareness of the characteristics of Asmat art. Mobile is assembled correctly. Student demonstrates careful work.

1 – Project is attempted but reflects a lack of awareness of Asmat art characteristics and/or unsatisfactory completion of the steps.

0 – Did not attempt.

**Adapting and Extending**

Consider adding these elements to the activity above, or using them in subsequent lessons.

- Prepare some cards with descriptive terms written on them, and distribute them to students (maybe to pairs or trios of students) before the discussion. Have the students listen and watch for those features to be described or displayed as you talk about the images. Decide on a signal students will use to tell you when they have the card with the term you are describing or discussing – they might raise it high in the air. Use the cards to make the lists described above. Here are some suggestions for the cards:

  - **Shield:** white, oval shape, red and black, zigzag lines
  - **Drum:** fancy carving, dark wood, carved, animal designs, lizard skin, fibers
  - **Spirit canoe:** stripes, carved, repeated objects, hollow bottom, feathers, fibers

- Use the mobiles to decorate the classroom, or perhaps arrange to hang them in the library or the school office.
- Instead of making mobiles, the students could make small books of Asmat art that include drawings of the art objects. Older students might write a paragraph describing each object; younger students might simply label each one.
Soul Searching: A Lesson About Sculpture

Objectives
Students will identify and describe the elements of art and principles of design in a specific artwork, focusing on form, emphasis, and proportion. Students will sculpt three-dimensional objects and will create drawings both before and after creating their sculptures. Students will reflect on the success of their efforts and how their prior knowledge influences their response to art.

Instructional Materials
Image of Ibeji Figure from the Crocker Art Museum
A small, carved, wooden figure
World map or globe
Copies of the reflection worksheet “Thinking About Sculpture” worksheet

Art Materials
Homemade modeling clay or another modeling material
Butcher paper (or similar, to cover work surface)
Texturing tools (wooden sticks, plastic utensils, paper clips, etc.)
Paper and pencils

Procedure
Introduction
Show the students the small figure you brought. Explain where it came from and any special meaning it has. Talk about how it might have been created. If practical, pass it around so the students can examine it more closely.

Object-based Instruction
Display and discuss the image of the Ibeji figure. Explain that the artist is unknown, but that it comes from Nigeria. Point out Nigeria on the map or globe. Guide the discussion using the following questioning strategy, including information from the background material during the discussion and adapting the questions as desired.

Describe: What do you see in this image? Is the artwork two-dimensional or three-dimensional? The piece has a very recognizable form. What is it? (It’s a human figure.) Does it depict a male or a female? What is the artwork made of? What textures do you see? How would you describe the artwork’s color?

Analyze: How would you describe the symmetry? Notice how large the head is in proportion to the body. How does this show emphasis? Are there any other features that seem to have surprising proportions/emphasis? (Look at the hands and feet, for example.) Where do you see...
specific details? Can you describe them?

**Interpret:** What kind of feeling do you get from this artwork? What are some things that make you feel that way? Why do you think the artist emphasized the features he did? How would this artwork be different if it were made of a different color of wood or a different material, such as clay? What can we learn about the culture this artwork comes from? Why do you think it was created? If the figure were to suddenly come to life, what questions would you ask him?

**Judge:** What do you like about this piece? Is there anything you don’t like? Is there anything special about this piece?

**Connect:** Can you connect the things you’ve learned about this artwork with anything else you know about the art of Africa? How difficult do you think it is to create an artwork like this? What are some problems that might occur? What are some other ways sculptures are created? Have you ever tried to create a sculpture?

**Procedure**

Students will use homemade modeling clay (or another material) to create sculptures. The students will sketch what they plan to sculpt and will create contour drawings of their finished sculptures. They will also complete a worksheet reflecting on the process of creating their sculptures. This is a process-centered project; the sculptures won’t be left to dry.

Before the students begin, demonstrate and explain the procedures as necessary. You may want to write some of the steps and/or expectations for the project on the board.

1. Cover the work surfaces, distribute the play dough and sculpting tools, and provide a few minutes for free exploration with the dough. Have the students try making organic (free-form) and geometric (sphere, cylinder, etc.) forms.
2. Distribute paper to the students and ask them to sketch some ideas for their sculptures. Explain that they are to create a form that includes some textural details. Remind them to consider all sides of their sculpture in their planning, and to make artistic decisions that will help make their sculptures unique. When they’re satisfied with their sketches, have them create their sculptures.
3. When they’ve finished sculpting, distribute the “Thinking About Sculpture” worksheet. Have each student create a contour line drawing of his or her sculpture on the back of the worksheet and respond to each question in a complete sentence. Note: A contour line drawing is created by drawing as though the pencil (or other implement) is moving slowly along all the edges and ridges of the form, lifting the pencil as little as possible while creating the outline. The artist focuses on the object rather than the paper. Interior contours can be added in the same way; details can be added last.
4. Have the students clean up after the project. Collect the reflection worksheets for assessment. You may wish to collect the dough for future use, or you may prefer to send it home with the students.
Assessment
Assess the students’ sculpting activity using the following rubric:

3 - Effective planning sketch completed. Details and texture included on all sides. Student followed all directions, worked to develop new skills, and demonstrated careful, thoughtful work.
2 - Planning sketch completed. Details and texture included on most sides. Student followed directions, worked to develop new skills, and demonstrated careful work.
1 - Planning sketch may not have been completed. Sculpture doesn’t include details. Behavior and effort were sometimes insufficient.
0 - Did not attempt.

Assess the students’ reflection worksheets using the following rubric:

3 - Contour drawing completed well; all questions answered in complete sentences.
2 - Contour drawing completed; most questions answered in complete sentences.
1 - Contour drawing may not be completed; some questions are unanswered.
0 - Did not attempt.

Adapting and Extending
The following are some suggestions for adapting this lesson to other grade levels or extending it to other lessons.

- Use a hardening compound and allow the sculptures to dry, or use a clay that requires firing, if that option is available.
- Invite a sculptor to talk about and demonstrate his or her art with the class.
- Expand on the contour drawing portion of the lesson, either teaching it yourself or inviting someone else to teach it. How-to videos and books about contour line drawings are available; consider showing some to your class.
- The Sacramento area is home to a large number of public art sculptures. Find a listing of them at sacmetroarts.org, as well as information about walking tours. Distribute the information to your students so they can visit them with their families.
- Encourage students to visit the Crocker Art Museum to view the Ibeji figure and many other sculptures firsthand.
Thinking About Sculpture

Make a drawing of your sculpture on the back of this page. Then answer the questions below in complete sentences.

1. What is something you tried to do that worked well?

2. What is something you tried to do that could have worked better?

3. What is unique about your sculpture?

4. If you created this sculpture again, what would you do differently?

5. Think about the artwork you viewed at the beginning of the lesson. What surprised you? What do you understand better after learning about it?
Word Search Puzzle

Hidden in this puzzle are terms about African and Asmat art. The African terms are horizontal in the puzzle, and the Asmat words are vertical. Find each term, and write it in the correct list below. Knowing which terms are African and which are Asmat can help you find them! But if you’re not sure, finding them will help you know.

Two of the terms belong in both lists! You will find those words twice in the puzzle - once horizontally, and once vertically. Be sure to write those ones in both lists. When you’re finished, there should be seven words in each list. Good luck!

Terms to find:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African</th>
<th>Asmat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HEAD REST</td>
<td>MANGROVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHIELD</td>
<td>KENTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HORNBILL</td>
<td>DOLL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADINKRA</td>
<td>BIS POLE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African</th>
<th>Asmat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DRUM</td>
<td>CANOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANOE</td>
<td>BEADS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEADS</td>
<td>MASK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| K E M Y O S I Q B E A D S D V |
| R C S D I L M R X E D E H M K |
| R A V C Q R S D C H M W I C O |
| G N O H E A D R E S T B E U E |
| A O B X R P K U P H P N L L J |
| K E N T E A B M U B T J D W I |
| N R L F A V J E T I M E H A L |
| H Q S Y U F M A A S D R U M C |
| O I C A M O A C F P A Z L E N |
| R G W F A D N Z T O M G D B X |
| N A H N S O G E Z L U K I A I |
| B M A S K H R T A E Y D O L L |
| I H P E M A O E C R C W T Y O |
| L A J I C S V R Y E J T L I B |
| L K D G T A E L A D I N K R A |
Internet Research Activity

Objectives
Students will plan and conduct multiple-step information searches by using computer networks and modems. Students will research and discuss the role of the visual arts in selected periods of history, using a variety of resources. Students will identify topics; ask and evaluate questions; and develop ideas leading to inquiry, investigation, and research.

Instructional Materials
Internet Research Activity Worksheet

Procedure
Introduction
Use the students’ experience with the Art Ark as a springboard for a research project. Encourage students to reflect on objects they’ve seen, activities they’ve tried, and new awareness they’ve developed of other people and places. Have them brainstorm, individually or in groups, topics they’d like more information about.

Object-based Instruction
Complete this lesson after students have toured the Art Ark.

Procedure
After the students have generated some ideas, help them narrow their focus to compose one or two questions worthy of research. The questions should lead them to find facts as well as to draw conclusions from the information they find. Here are some sample questions:

- What are some important functions of beads in African cultures?
- What kinds of Asmat ceremonies include the use of drums?
- How have Adinkra stamps been used in the past, and how are they used today?
- Are some forms of art traditionally created by men and others by women in a particular culture?
- What are some reasons the Asmat people create art? How important are the artists in their society?
- What are some different kinds of African masks, and how are they used?
- Besides bis poles and ibeji figures, what are some other kinds of art that deal with death?
- What do they tell us about the people who create them?
Once they have their questions, help the students determine some key words to use in their search, and remind them to keep their searches focused and specific. Give them some tips for sorting through their search results to find the most helpful information. Review note-taking strategies such as collecting bibliographic information, recording details and definitions, summarizing information, and so on. It may be helpful to give the students copies of a form like the one below.

**Assessment**

Use the following checklist to assess each student’s performance in this activity. You might consider providing the checklist to the students prior to the lesson as a way of communicating the expectations for the assignment. If several of the listed items go unchecked, the student could be asked to spend more time completing them.

- Actively participate in the brainstorming process.
- Come up with a thoughtful question appropriate for research.
- Demonstrate appropriate computer skills - access the internet, use a browser and search engine, apply keyboarding and mouse skills.
- Find reliable online sources and cite them correctly.
- Demonstrate curiosity, and make good judgments about the value of information you find.
- Take useful notes that relate directly to your research question.
- Apply/share the information you find in an effective way.

**Adapting and Extending**

A research activity like this can easily lead to a written or oral presentation.
Internet Research Activity Worksheet

Name ___________________________  Date ____________

Research Question: ____________________________

Key Words to Try: ____________________________

Source:
Notes:

Source:
Notes:
Towers of Power

Objectives
Students will identify and describe the elements of art and principles of design in a specific artwork and will use artistic terms to discuss how art reflects cultural values. Students will compare and contrast artworks from two different cultures. Students will develop a set of criteria to assess an art form and will apply the criteria to analyze a specific artwork.

Instructional Materials
Images of bis poles
Image of a Native American totem pole
World map or globe
Asmat Bis Poles worksheet

Procedure
Introduction
On the board, draw a simple family tree diagram with space for you, your parents, and your grandparents. Explain that a family tree diagram is a way to represent a person’s ancestors, defining the word if necessary. Tell the students that different cultures have different ways of remembering and honoring their ancestors, and that sometimes those ways involve works of art.

Object-based Instruction
Bis poles are a striking form of Asmat art and are central to one of their most important cultural ceremonies, the bis feast, which is held to commemorate the dead and send their spirits off to the spirit world. Reaching heights of up to 20’, bis poles are created by male carvers, who are important figures in the Asmat community. A bis pole is carefully and artfully carved, with especially intricate, lace-like designs in the projection, (called the cemen). While the bis pole is very much connected with death, it is also symbolic of life. Not only does the projection represent power and fertility, the ancestor figures serve to change the status of the deceased from a dead relative to an ancestor, a being that continues to exist.
Display and discuss the bis pole image. Guide the discussion using the following questioning strategy, adapting it as desired. Point out on the map or globe where the artwork comes from.

Describe: What do you see? What is it made of? What recognizable objects are depicted? Is the artwork located indoors or outdoors? How would you describe the form of this artwork? (Is it flat like a painting?) Where do you see negative spaces (i.e. “holes”, such as the spaces between limbs or individual figures)?

Analyze: What objects repeat? How would you describe the texture of this artwork? Describe the artwork’s sense of balance. What are some features that provide unity (tie the piece together)? What are some features that provide variety? What are some things the artist needed to do to create this artwork?

Interpret: What kind of feeling do you get from this piece? What are some specific details that make you feel that way? How did the artist communicate that feeling? Do you think this was created by a modern artist or one from the past? Why?

Judge: What do you like most about this artwork? What don’t you like about it? Where would be a good place to exhibit this piece? How does this artwork help you know more about Asmat culture?

Connect: Does this artwork remind you of anything else you’ve seen? How are Asmat bis poles similar to Native American totem poles? How are they different? (Display an image of a totem pole.)

Procedure
Ask the students to list some characteristics of bis poles they’ve learned about during the discussion. As a group, make a list of criteria they would now use to critique other bis poles they observe, writing them on the board. The list might include items such as these:

- The characteristic top projection
- Artistic skill in the carving
- A mixture of human and animal figures
- Any unusual or unique elements
- A feeling of respect for the ancestors
- The inclusion of symbols
- Good use of the elements of art and principles of design (line, balance/proportion, texture, space, form, rhythm, etc.)

Divide the students into small groups, and give each group a small image of a bis pole (either printed or projected). Give them a few minutes to discuss the image, applying the criteria they’ve listed on the board. (You might wish to assign specific roles - recorder, presenter, etc.) Then provide time for each group to share their observations with the class.
**Assessment**
Circulate among the students during the small group discussions to assess their use of the vocabulary of art and their ability to apply the criteria to the specific artworks.

For a formal assessment of students’ abilities to compare and contrast bis poles and totem poles, use the graphic organizer included with this lesson, or something similar.

**Adapting and Extending**
The following are some suggestions for adapting this lesson to other grade levels or extending it to other lessons.

- Poets sometimes create poems about specific artworks. Use the students’ experience learning about bis poles as a springboard for a poetry writing lesson.
- Invite a woodcarver to class to demonstrate carving techniques and possibly lead the students in a simple project.
- Create a bulletin board display in the classroom that includes the bis pole images, related student work, and a map showing the location of the Asmat people.
- Remind the students that the Crocker Art Museum has actual bis poles on display, and encourage them to visit the Museum with their families.
Asmat Bis Poles

The Asmat people developed the bis pole to represent and honor their ancestors. Other cultures also have traditions and art forms that serve the same purpose. Using the diagram below, compare and contrast Asmat bis poles and Native American totem poles.

On the back, draw a bis pole that includes some of your ancestors, or design a new art form that could be used that way. Write a paragraph about your drawing.
Kente Cloth Background Information

Kente ("ken tuh" or "ken tee") cloth is a brightly colored fabric of the Akan peoples from Ghana in West Africa. It is hand woven on wooden looms, traditionally by men. Highly esteemed and carefully crafted, the cloth was originally reserved for royalty; in modern times, it is widely used.

Weaving in Africa has ancient roots but Kente cloth weaving is relatively modern. According to legend, it was born when two friends observed Anansi the spider spinning a web. They imitated his actions to create a beautiful cloth, which was taken to the chief. He liked it so much that he declared it the royal fabric and wore it on special occasions. The Kente cloth as we know it today with its bold colors and striking patterns was developed by the Ashanti (one of the Akan groups) in the 17th century. Other nearby Akan peoples weave Kente cloth as well, with varying colors and patterns typical of each group.

The yarns used over time in the making of Kente have been of various types. In the past, locally grown cotton was spun into yarn, and sometimes yarn was obtained by unraveling cotton and silk cloths imported from Europe. Today, most of the yarns are produced by factories.

Kente cloth is woven on a loom in four inch strips of varying lengths. Strips are then laid carefully side by side and hand-sewn together to create panels of cloth, which are usually used for clothing. Wearing Kente wrapped and draped around the body, a piece of men’s clothing typically needs 24 strips, and a women’s, 14.

Kente is more than just a cloth; the colors and patterns are imbued with symbolic meaning. There are over 300 identified pattern symbols, representing moral values, philosophical ideas, historical events, proverbs, individual achievements, attributes of animal life, and so on. Thread colors are chosen by the weavers to enhance the design and to convey meaning; the list below describes what various colors represent.

- **Yellow (and Gold)** – royalty, prosperity, wealth (from egg yolk and the mineral gold)
- **Red** – death, funerals, sacrifice, struggle (associated with blood)
- **Pink** – femininity (associated with females)
- **Maroon** – Mother Earth, healing (from the color of earth)
- **Purple** – similar to maroon and pink (a feminine color associated with healing)
- **Blue** – peace, harmony, love (associated with the sky)
- **Green** – growth, vitality, crops, spiritual renewal (associated with plants and herbs)
- **Black** – maturity, spiritual energy, rites of death (things darken as they mature)
- **Grey** – healing rituals, cleansing rituals (associated with ash)
- **Silver** – peace, purity, joy (associated with the moon)
- **White** – purity, balance, ancestral spirits (used in festivals)

For a pre-K-2nd grade lesson using Kente Cloth, please see Bold and Beautiful.
Homemade Modeling Clay

There are many recipes available for making modeling clay. The following recipe will make enough dough for three or four students.

2 cups flour  2 tbsp. oil  2 cups water
1 cup salt  1 tsp. cream of tartar

Mix ingredients in saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until dough leaves sides of pan. Remove from pan and knead for a few minutes.

This clay is great for any sculptural project, like the activity found in Soul Searching.
Bis Pole Background Information

Bis poles are a striking form of Asmat art and are central to one of their most important cultural ceremonies. According to Asmat tradition, death is never natural or accidental but is always caused by an enemy and must be avenged. After a number of deaths occur in a community, a bis feast is held to commemorate the dead, to send their spirits off in a fitting way to the spirit world, and to promise retaliation. In the past, retaliation was accomplished through violence (usually headhunting). Today, however, the Asmat no longer engage in warfare, and a bis feast is only ceremonial.

Reaching heights of up to 20’, bis poles are created by male carvers, who are important figures in the Asmat community. A bis pole is created in one piece, carved from an inverted mangrove tree. All of the tree’s roots except one are cut off; the remaining root makes the dramatic projection at the top of the pole and is the most distinctive feature of the art form. Sometimes red, black, and white pigments - the traditional colors of Asmat art - are added to areas of the pole.

A bis pole is carefully and artfully carved, with especially intricate, lace-like designs in the projection, (called the cemen). Some poles include three sections - the top projection, which includes symbols representing ongoing life and vitality; the middle section, which contains carved figures representing specific ancestors; and the bottom section, called the canoe. This section depicts an actual canoe or another symbol that represents the transporting of the spirits of the dead to the spirit world. The base is carved to a point, which is inserted into the ground when the pole is erected outside the village men’s house as part of the feast event. The pole usually faces a river, since rivers lead to the sea and the spirit world is thought to occupy a place beyond the sea.

While the bis pole is very much connected with death, it is also symbolic of life. Not only does the projection represent power and fertility, the ancestor figures serve to change the status of the deceased from a dead relative to an ancestor - in other words, to a being that continues to exist. And although a great deal of artistic effort goes into creating a bis pole, when the bis feast is over, the pole is carried out to the sago palm grove, where it is left to decay. The sago palm is the primary food source for the Asmat. As the bis pole, with all its imbued ancestral strength, returns to the ground, it nourishes the sago palms and provides ongoing spiritual and physical nourishment to the still-living Asmat descendants who have not yet made that final journey beyond the sea.
Bis Poles and Totem Poles - A comparison is natural. Totem poles are striking Native American sculptures that are also carved by skilled craftsmen from large trees. Other similarities between the two art forms are the use of symbols, the depiction of human beings, the stacking of images, and the ceremonial nature of their erection and use. Both are usually left to decay after use, and both are still made today. However, there are also important differences. Totem poles are usually much taller, with some reaching heights over 150’. Bis poles are always created in response to death, but totem poles have a variety of functions; some honor ancestors, but others are instruments of storytelling or celebrating beliefs, historical markers, or status symbols. Totem poles are usually carved on the surface only, without the negative spaces created by the more elaborate Asmat carving, and they are often colored with bright pigments. Their human representations are often faces rather than whole bodies, and they very often include animals. While totem poles lack the dramatic top projection characteristic of the bis pole, they can include other projections, such as wings or another animal body part. Despite their differences, though, both bis poles and totem poles provide important information about their cultures.

For a 6th-8th grade lesson using Bis Poles, please see Towers of Power.
Thinking About Sculpture

Make a drawing of your sculpture on the back of this page. Then answer the questions below in complete sentences.

1. What is something you tried to do that worked well?

2. What is something you tried to do that could have worked better?

3. What is unique about your sculpture?

4. If you created this sculpture again, what would you do differently?

5. Think about the artwork you viewed at the beginning of the lesson. What surprised you? What do you understand better after learning about it?