

African Art and Personal Adornment: Overview

African Art and Personal Adornment
5200 Woodward Avenue
Detroit, MI 48202
(313) 833-7900
<http://www.dia.org>

About the DIA's African Art Collection

The Detroit Institute of Arts is the fifth-largest fine arts museum in the United States with more than 100 galleries and holdings of over 60,000 works of art. The DIA began building its collection of African art as early as 1890, making it one of the first American art museums to collect in this area. Today, the African collection is one of the finest in the world and includes more than 1,000 objects, about 200 of which are on view. The collection represents many of the continent's diverse cultures and artistic traditions.

Visit the DIA's website www.dia.org for more information about how to visit the museum and see many of the works of art shown in the program and these lesson plans.

About the program

Works of art offer a unique opportunity to discover diverse cultures from around the world and across time. This program examines what select objects at the DIA tell us about how some traditional African societies communicate messages of identity with clothing, hairstyles, skin markings, and jewelry. The works of art and related cultures are brought to life with artist demonstrations, storytelling, pictures, familiar examples from our own culture, expert interviews, and more. The program and accompanying lesson plans encourage students to think about issues of identity, communication, and diversity—as they relate to both traditional African societies and American culture—while exploring five major themes:

- In many traditional African societies, personal appearance can indicate much about a person's identity — including social status, economic status, occupation, and heritage.
- Visual symbols or styles in clothing, hairstyles, skin markings, and jewelry are a language that can communicate messages, much like words.
- African art and culture is not strange or primitive; many of the customs that we follow when we dress and the reasons behind them are similar to related African traditions.
- African art was traditionally made to be used by specific people for specific purposes in specific settings.
- African art is made by many distinct cultures with diverse traditions and beliefs, not by a single "African" culture.

Resources/Bibliographies

- Michigan Curriculum Framework Standards and Benchmarks <http://www.michigan.gov/mde>
- The Kennedy Center's African Odyssey Interactive features an opportunity to learn more about Africa from museum exhibitions and African art collections. <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/aoi/artsedge.html>
- This site provides detailed information about African countries and lists several more links to resources for teachers and students. http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Home_Page/AFR_GIDE.html
- This site suggests useful questions to ask students when studying African art. <http://www.thinker.org/fam/education/publications/guide-african/index.html>

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Lesson Plans

There are seven lesson plans for this module. These plans have been developed to reflect different content areas in the curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to use both of the introductory lessons to familiarize students with the cultural issues involved in the module, and to then use as many of the other lessons as seem appropriate to their content area. The lessons are provided as individual PDF files and can be accessed by clicking on the links below.

- Introductory Lesson: Exploring Beauty [[Lesson 1](#)]
- Introductory Lesson: Personal Adornment [[Lesson 2](#)]
- Art Lesson: Jewelry [[Lesson 3](#)]
- Art Lesson: Creating Adinkra Symbols [[Lesson 4](#)]
- English Language Arts Lesson: African Folktales [[Lesson 5](#)]
- Social Studies Lesson: Geography [[Lesson 6](#)]
- Social Studies Lesson: Scarification [[Lesson 7](#)]

MCF Curriculum Standards and Benchmarks

Note: The Curriculum Standards and Benchmarks for each lesson are included in overview of the lesson itself.