

Classroom Activity

Shaping Sacred Animal Masks

Essential Questions	How do artists evoke animal characteristics in human masks? How are masks used in ceremonial art and dance?
Grades	K–6
Time	One class period
Visual Art Concepts	Symbol, storytelling, mood
Materials	Air drying clay (such as Crayola® Model Magic®), markers, pencil, paper. Optional: cardboard (pre-circles), clay tools, mixed-media materials (such as beads, buttons, or fibers).
Talking about Art	<p>View and discuss the image of the <i>Mask</i> (19th century) included in the printed and digital curriculum.</p> <p>What do you see? Describe the face that you see and the qualities that you notice. What animal might it represent? What might the animal be feeling? How might the mask have been used or worn? What do you notice that makes you that?</p> <p>This mask depicts a buffalo, a sacred animal for the Luba culture of Central Africa. The buffalo is also a symbol for Mbidi Kiluwe, an important Luba hero. In the epic of Mbidi Kiluwe, the hero battles a rainbow-breathing serpent named Nkongolo Mwamba. Kiluwe defeats the "red"-skinned snake to become a "black" majestic buffalo, and introduces the Luba people to the sacred kingship, the way of life that defines their civilization. The battle between "red" and "black" is a cultural dichotomy similar to the concept of yin and yang, or complementary and contrasting forces. The buffalo is also a symbol of this dichotomy. It is, at the same time, docile and aggressive, visible and invisible, in and out of water, and active at night's beginning and end.</p> <p>Luba masks are rare and little is known about this 19th-century mask's origin or use. It was likely created and performed to recount the epic of Mbidi Kiluwe for spiritual ceremonies that incorporated both art and dance.</p>

Making Art

What kind of animal do you feel like today? Do you feel sluggish like an ox or active like a cheetah? Choose an animal that describes your mood and think about the qualities of this animal. How does it move, act, and think? Does it prance, run, or jump? Create a dance that portrays this animal, using your body to express the feeling and mood of this creature.

Translate your dance into a drawing, by sketching two faces of your animal. The two faces should represent two different qualities of your animal, or two different actions or moods. You will use these sketches to create a miniature double-sided mask of your animal.

Use a small circular piece of cardboard to serve as the dividing line between the faces. Place the piece of cardboard on the table then mold a small sphere of clay on top. Use your fingers to pinch and push the clay to form the shape of the animal's head. Use clay tools or a pencil to add facial details and expression. Next, flip the cardboard and sculpt the second head and face on the reverse. Be careful to keep both faces intact while you work.

Lastly, add color on top of the clay with markers. If you have mixed-media materials, try pushing beads, buttons, or threads into the clay for a tactile touch. When finished, let the double-faced mask dry overnight, leaning on a large circular piece of cardboard as a base.

Reflection

Perform your dance for fellow students, incorporating the miniature mask into your steps and movement. Ask students to guess what animal your mask and dance evoke. Ask a volunteer to take your mask and invent a new dance based on his or her interpretation of the animal.

Curriculum Connection

For a literary connection, compare this mask of Mbidi Kiluwe with the story of another culture hero, such as the Mesoamerican deity Quetzacoatl or the Greek soldier Odysseus. How do art, dance, and literature record culture and pass on collective knowledge?

Classroom Activity

Storytelling with Memory Boards

Essential Questions	How do artists translate memories into sculptures? How do they tell stories using line, color, and rhythm?
Grades	3–8
Time	Two class periods
Visual Art Concepts	Line, color, composition, rhythm
Materials	Corkboard or bulletin board (pre-cut rectangles or circles), spools of yarn in various colors, pushpins, and scissors
Talking about Art	View and discuss the image of the <i>Memory Board (Lukasa)</i> (19 th century) included in the printed and digital curriculum.

What do you see? What materials do you recognize? How did the artist arrange the materials? Describe the configuration of the individual pieces and the lines that they create. How would you describe the overall composition, or arrangement of visual elements?

This sculpture, made of wood, beads, and metals, is a mnemonic device, a tool that helps people convey information and commit information to memory. This particular device is called a *lukasa* board and the Luba people of central Africa used the *lukasa* to recall collective memories and cultural stories. It is a handheld library of Luba historical knowledge that encodes memories of the past to retell in the present.

The unique arrangement of materials documents narrative events. Different parts of the story are communicated by the forms, colors, and sizes of the individual pieces. For instance, one bead represents an individual person and circles of beads represent a place. Significant relationships between people and places are indicated by a line of beads that describes the trajectory of the story. The *lukasa* configuration was not set in stone and was often restrung and reorganized in a myriad of ways. A "man of memory" would touch the surface of the tablet, recall specific information, and present the information as a narrative to an audience. As with any performance, no two recitations were alike because Luba historians performed the story for different listeners at different moments. The making and reading of the *lukasa* formed an important practice for indoctrination into the Mbudye Association, the Luba's spiritual society, and is a tradition that is still practiced today.

Making Art

What mnemonic devices do you use to record and remember information? A mnemonic device can take many forms, such as a saying, song, or dance. Create your own mnemonic *lukasa* board to document a special event from your life.

What story will you record? Write your story in words, including important people, places, and actions. Using colored pushpins and colored string, how will you assign meaning to each material? Use pushpins to represent people and places. Differentiate between individual people and places by assigning each person and site a specific color. For instance, blue pins could represent people while red pins represent places. Then, choose a color palette of various colored yarn to represent the elements of your story. Primary colors of yellow, blue, and red can distinguish the beginning, middle, and end of the narrative. Perhaps warm colors convey dramatic moments in the story, while cool colors represent calm and harmonious scenes.

Before you begin stringing the story, choose either a circular or rectangular piece of corkboard to serve as your base. The shape of your base will dictate the rhythm, or movement, of your story, as you experiment by laying different configurations of pins and string on the base. Start by placing your "people" and "place" pushpins, then weave and tie the yarn around the pushpins to connect the people and places with the trajectory of your narrative. Try many different arrangements until you have reached a composition that best tells your story.

Reflection

Pair up and perform your story for a partner. Use your *lukasa* as a storytelling device, touching each pushpin as you describe a person or place and following the lines of string as you progress through the story. Next, switch partners and retell your story to another friend. How did the story unfold as you performed it? How did the story change as you retold it? How would you tell the story differently if you performed it for your parents, grandparents, a sibling, or a teacher?

Curriculum Connection

As an added literacy connection, ask students to continue writing their stories in words. Perhaps they can extend the stories to recall different actions or later events. Using the second writing as inspiration, have students restring their *lukasas* to tell new parts of the same story.

Classroom Activity

African Headrests: Ancient to Modern

Essential Question	How do art objects help people navigate life and the world beyond?
Grades	6–12
Time	One class period
Visual Art Concepts	Line, shape, symbol, form, function, motif
Materials	Pencil, colored pencils, paper
Talking about Art	View and discuss the image of the <i>Anthropomorphic Headrest</i> (19 th century) included in the printed and digital curriculum. Compare and contrast with the <i>Funerary Headrest</i> (c. 2513–2374 BC) featured on the reverse. For a digital image of the <i>Funerary Headrest</i> , visit LACMA online at http://collections.lacma.org/node/244880 .

What do you see? Describe the lines, shapes, and three-dimensional forms that you notice. Which forms are recognizable and what might they represent? What material did the artist use to make this? What steps might the artist have taken? What do you see that makes you say that?

How might think this object have been used? The curved platform on top identifies it as a utilitarian headrest. Wooden headrests such as these were popular among the Luba people of Central Africa, especially among high-ranking officials. They served the everyday function of keeping elaborate hairstyles intact during sleep—hairstyles that described one’s marital status or cultural role. Headrests were also believed to be conduits for messages from Luba ancestors, conveyed in the present through the prophecy of dreams.

Compare and contrast the 19th century Luba headrest with an ancient Egyptian headrest. What similarities do you notice? What differences do you find? How did the artist customize this headrest? The lines and shapes are hieroglyphs, or symbols that convey meaning in the ancient Egyptian’s formal writing system. The hieroglyphs are carved within a cartouche (a long oval shape or frame with a horizontal line at one end), which typically displays the name of a king or royal official.

More than 4,400 years separate these two headrests, but they both tell us about the time and place in which they were created. Ancient Egyptian headrests were often made of wood, but this stone example was likely made for the afterlife. It would have been placed inside the tomb, close to the head of the mummy within or on top of the coffin. It served as protection against the unknown in the afterlife. While the Egyptian headrest served a commemorative function, the modern Luba headrest was an everyday object. Intimately valued by

the Luba, they were also used in burials, accompanying the owner to the world beyond. The importance of the headrest is shared by many African cultures, supporting the idea of continued use from antiquity to today.

Making Art

What might these headrests tell us about the ancient Egyptian cosmology and modern Luba culture? What do the everyday objects that you use say about you?

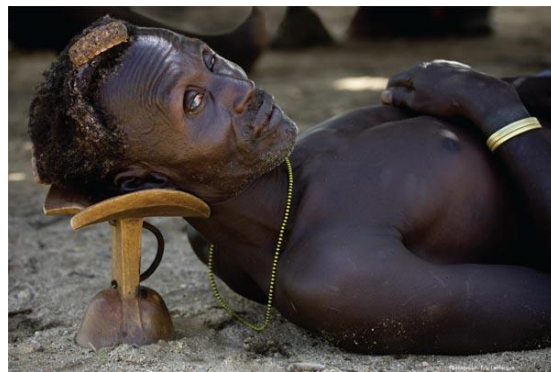
Sketch a design for your own headrest. How will you change the basic elements of the headrest (platform, shaft, and base) to create a 21st-century look? How will you customize the design to describe you? Incorporate favorite shapes, symbols, colors, and motifs (or themes) to communicate a message about you.

Reflection

Share your sketch with a partner then make a word bank of adjectives that describe you. Where does your partner see evidence of these attributes in your design? If your partner could summarize a message about you, what would he or she say? How would your partner change or alter the design to enhance the message that you are trying to send? Switch and answer the same questions about your partner. Record your findings and present them to the rest of the class.

Curriculum Connection

Extend the lesson by transforming the headrest design into a miniature model. What material will you use to translate the design in three dimensions? How will you engineer the structure and adhere the materials to ensure balance and support? If you were to take this design to scale in a functional material, how much material would you need and at what cost?



Left: *Funerary Headrest*
Egypt, 5th Dynasty, circa 2513–2374 BC
Furnishings; furniture, Granite, 7⁷/₁₆ x 6⁵/₈ in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Gift of Robert Miller and Marilyn Miller Deluca (M.80.199.107)
Photo © 2013 Museum Associates/LACMA

Classroom Activity

Sculpting Your Familial Lineage

Essential Question How do artists honor important people through the design of everyday objects?

Grades 9–12

Time Two to three class periods

Visual Art Concepts Line, shape, form, pattern (organic and geometric), texture, symmetry, sculpting techniques (reductive and additive process), function

Materials Soft density Balsa-Foam®, clay carving tools, clay wire cutter, Tacky Glue®, glue brushes, paper towels, pencil, paper. Optional: tempera paint, paint brushes, assorted beads, string, and scissors.

Talking about Art View and discuss the image of the *Caryatid Stool* (19th century) included in the printed and digital curriculum.

What do you see? Describe the lines, shapes, and patterns that you notice. Are they organic (curvy) or geometric (angular)? What recognizable figure do you see? How is this figure integrated into the overall form of the object? What do you think this object might have been used for? What do you see that makes you say that?

This object was designed with a function, or use, in mind. It was used as a stool for seating and was designed for a Luba king. The Luba of Central Africa used seating to distinguish members of the royal court. The Luba spiritual society, called the Mbudye Association, also incorporated seating into initiation rites. Seats ranged from simple woven mats, to animal skins and furs, to modeled clay thrones adorned with geometric and figurative representations. Sculptured wooden stools such as the *Caryatid Stool* were reserved specifically for kings and spiritual mediums.

The stool served an important function for the Luba people. It was (and still is) a metaphorical symbol for the seat of power. "Men of memory" who have been initiated into the Luba royal court can actually "read" a Luba stool as a text. The motif that adorns the platforms (the circular, disk-like seat and base) represents a particular capital or site of kingship, while the female figure speaks to the role of women as political agents who hold up the seats of power. Artists specialized in stools such as these and kings commissioned different stools from different workshops according to the sculptor's unique strengths. Many details were added to adorn the stool, such as scarification patterns and stylized hairstyles for the female figure (cultural signifiers of beauty for the Luba people) as well as the colored glass beads.

Making Art

Create a model stool out of balsa foam that honors your unique familial lineage. First, think about a culture that you and your family identify with. This could be your family's country of origin or a people with which you identify. Are there lines, shapes, or colors that speak to this culture? Make a quick sketch of a pattern (lines, shapes, or colors that repeat in a particular order) that speaks to your family's heritage. This pattern will adorn the platforms of your stool.

Next, think about important people in your family and the qualities that they evoke. This could be a family member who displayed heroism or overcame hardship in order to better your life or the lives of others. How will you incorporate their image and attributes into the form of your stool? Make a quick sketch of the figure, including identifying details such as props, dress, or a hairstyle. Make sure that the form of the figure is symmetrical (identical on both sides) to provide structural support for your functional design.

Finally, translate your sketches into three separate sculptural parts, using soft density balsa foam and clay sculpting tools. You may think about pre-cutting the foam into disks (for the platforms) and tall rectangular prisms (for the shaft) using a clay wire cutter. Sculpt two identical platforms and a symmetrical figure to serve as the shaft. For the figure, sculpt by taking material away from the solid prism. This is referred to as the reductive process, while sculpting a form by adhering smaller pieces together is called the additive process. Focus on sculpting simple forms (head, torso, arms) as opposed to fine detail. Be careful not to take away too much material, as this can hinder the structural integrity of the shaft. For the platform, consider using the side of the clay tool to create readymade impressions on the rims. Experiment with different techniques to create unique marks and cuts.

Lastly, the three pieces of the stool together using Elmer's Glue and a glue brush. The platform on top will serve as the seat while the platform on bottom will serve as the base. Remember, this is a miniature version of your stool and will not be used by a life-size sitter, but it should stand on its own without assistance.

If you have more time to allot to the project, use tempera paint and paint brushes to approximate the patina of wood. For added adornment, string necklaces or bracelets out of beads and tie them onto the central figure featured in your stool.

Reflection

Take your model stool home and share it with your family. How did you integrate your family's culture into the design? Who did you honor in your sculpture and why?

Curriculum Connection

For a math connection, have each student start with two identical cones and a cylinder. Before sculpting, ask students to calculate the volume or space occupied by three parts. After sculpting, ask students to estimate the volume of the final sculpture.

The Art of an African Kingdom: Luba Masterworks from Central Africa

Selected Resources

LACMA Curriculum Materials

Evenings for Educators resources include an illustrated essay, color images, classroom activities, and related resources. Printed curriculum is available through LACMA's Education Department.

Art from Zaire

October 1995

African Art

October 1997

Ancestors: Art and the Afterlife

November 1998

Music for the Eyes: The Fine Art of African Musical Instruments

February 2000

Online Resources

Luba Art and Culture

A Home for African Art

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
<http://lacma.wordpress.com/2013/07/03/a-home-for-african-art/>

Read about the inauguration of LACMA's African Art galleries on *Unframed: The LACMA Blog*, featuring the exhibition *Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa*.

Kingdoms of the Savanna: The Luba and Lunda Empires

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/luba/hd_luba.htm
Explore the emergence of the Luba empire through essays and maps from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*.

African Art

The Museum for African Art

<http://www.africanart.org/education/resources.php>
The Museum for African Art's teacher guides include images, sample lesson plans, and bibliographies related to African art and current issues in Africa.

The Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art

<http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/resources.html>
View artist interviews and installations from the National Museum of African Art. Stream *Radio Africa*, a free radio station featuring African rhythms from the collections of Smithsonian Global Sound.

PBS TeacherSource

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/africa/tools/index.html>
Explore Africa, from its diverse eco-systems to its kaleidoscope of cultures, through interactive lessons.

UCLA African Studies Center

<http://www.international.ucla.edu/africa/outreach/>
Learn about professional development opportunities for classroom teachers and online multimedia curriculum.

Harvard University Committee on African Studies

<http://africa.harvard.edu/for-educators/bring-africa-to-the-classroom/>
Bring Africa to the classroom using modules designed for K–12 classrooms. Topics include "Introduction to Africa: Geography and Culture" and "South African Apartheid and the Transition to Democracy."

Books for Teachers

Clarke, Christa. *The Art of Africa: A Resource for Educators*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007.

A collection of lesson plans, classroom activities, maps, and more, inspired by forty works of African Art from the Metropolitan.

Roberts, Mary Nooter, and Allen F. Roberts, eds. *Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History*. Munich: Prestel for the Museum for African Art, New York, 1996.

An exploration of the relationship between memory and history through mnemonic devices, wooden figures, ornamented staffs, and axes from the Luba kingdom.

Roberts, Mary Nooter and Allen F. Roberts. *Luba (Visions of Africa)*. Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2007.

An examination of the role of visual and performance arts in Luba traditional politics and the transmission of historical knowledge through art objects.

Willett, Frank. *African Art*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2003.

A survey of art from the distinct peoples and cultures that comprise the African continent.

Books for Students

Fredericks, Anthony D. *African Legends, Myths, and Folktales for Readers Theatre*. Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2008.

Plays based on traditional African folklore to enhance literacy instruction.

Mooney, Carla and Megan Stearns. *Amazing Africa Projects You can Build Yourself*. White River Junction, VT: Nomad Press, 2010.

A journey through the vast continent of Africa through 25 projects tied to ancient civilizations and tribes, cultural traditions, and unique wildlife.

Roberts, Mary Nooter and Allen F. Roberts. *Luba*. New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 1997.

A chapter book on the Luba kingdom from central Africa, including history, art, and culture.