

Hunter's Shirt



Hunter's Shirt, 19th–20th century
Bamana culture (Mali)
Cotton, leather, shells, metal, mirrors,
animal horns, skin, claws, fur
33½ x 50 in.
Gift of Robert and Nancy Nooter, 95.66

Object Information

The Bamana (bah-mah'-nah) people, one of many ethnic groups in Mali, are an African farming and hunting culture living on the western edge of the Sahara Desert. Tunics such as this *Hunter's Shirt* traditionally play an important part in rituals and ceremonies occurring before a hunt. These activities, which often take place at the boundary between village and wilderness, prepare hunters to go into the world of dangerous animals and spirits. The hunters call on supernatural energies to assure safety and success.

This *Hunter's Shirt* is made of white cotton strips that were sewn together and then dyed with bark. The cloth is decorated with charms that are believed to have special powers. Animal teeth, claws, horns, and fur, considered good-luck charms, are attached to the hunter's shirt along with secret pouches called *basi*. The Bamana people believe that if the *basi* are opened, the charms inside lose their power to ward off evil and bring good fortune to the wearer.

Although hunting is a disappearing practice in most of Africa, these tunics are still worn during festivals, processions, and other gatherings as symbols of success.

Concept

Students will be introduced to Mali's ancient and contemporary practices by studying the *Hunter's Shirt* of the Bamana culture. They will explore geography, trade, natural resources, and cultural traditions.

Map

Have students view a detailed map of Africa and locate present-day Mali, the Niger River, and the Sahara Desert. Ancient Mali was much larger and included parts of seven current countries. It was located between the salt mines of the northern desert and the gold mines to the south. Salt was so important for preservation of food and the health of both people and livestock that it was traded pound for pound with gold. Students will discuss the importance of these trade items as well as iron, copper, ivory, pepper, and fabrics.

Observation and Discussion

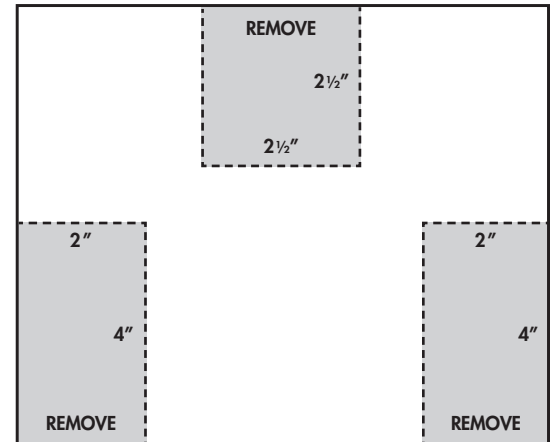
Use the following suggested questions and discussion points while looking at the *Hunter's Shirt*.

- What material was used to make the *Hunter's Shirt*?
- What features of this shirt indicate it belonged to a hunter? (teeth, fur, leopard skin, leather)
- There are natural and man-made objects on the shirt. Point to things that are from nature, such as plants and animal fur, teeth, and claws.
- Point to things that are man-made, for example the bell, mirrors, coins, and string.
- What is texture? How does the cloth feel? Is it soft or rough? What about the animal fur or the bell?
- When did the hunter wear this shirt?
- Would it be a good idea to wear the shirt while hunting? Would the ringing bell make the animals run away?
- Why was salt so important to the people of Mali?
- What do we use salt for?
- Would you trade or barter a pound of salt for a pound of gold?
- What do your clothes say about you?

Activity

The Bamana are well known for their earthen-dyed textiles. The *Hunter's Tunic* is dyed with bark. Cloth can also be dyed with mud. Mud cloth (*bogolan*) has become a symbol of Malian identity.

Students can make their own mud-cloth hunter's tunics and design them with marks and shapes that mean something to them. Give each student a brown paper grocery bag or brown craft paper cut into an 11" x 18" rectangle. Ask them to fold the paper in half and cut out smaller rectangles (about 2" x 4") at both open corners to make the shirt shape. At the center of the fold, they should cut a 2½" square for the neck opening. (See diagram.) Students can decorate the shirt with animal skins, claws, and charms that they draw and cut out, and then glue onto the shirt. They can even make secret pouches (*basi*) that have hidden charms inside.



Students can also draw designs with white crayon or oil pastel and paint over them with brown tempera. (This type of design can also be made on white construction paper). Alternatively, designs can be made on heavy white cotton fabric by using liquid school glue as the resist (the white part of the design) and letting it dry before applying the tempera.

For examples of traditional Mali mud-cloth designs, visit http://www.mnh.si.edu/africanvoices/mudcloth/index_flash.html.

Closure

Encourage the students to share their ideas about their mud cloth and symbols.

SOLs

Visual Arts K.1, K.2, K.3, K.4, K.7, K.9, K.11, K.12, K.13, K.14, K.16, 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.12, 1.13, 1.17, 1.20, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.13, 2.21, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.11, 3.13, 3.16, 3.17, 3.19, 3.23, 3.26, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.8, 4.17, 4.18, 4.21, 4.22, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.9, 5.11, 5.12, 5.13, 5.18, 5.20

English K.1 a, K b–g, K.3 a–f, K.8 a,c,d,f, 1.1 a,b,d, 1.2 a–e, 1.3 a–d, 3.1, 4.2 b, 5.1 a

History K.3, K.4 b, K.4 c, K.8 c, 1.4 b, 1.4 c, 1.4 d, 1.6, 1.8, 1.11 a, 2.3, 2.12, 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7

Math 1.17

Science K.2, 1.5, 1.7 c, 3.3

Educational Media Resources

Recommended Films, Videos, and DVDs

Dama: The Dance of Life

ED-468

8 min. | 1996 | VM | VHS

Elementary school through adult

This video, filmed in Mali, introduces the viewer to the powerful Dama spectacle through an exciting experiential format. A funerary dance of Mali's Dogon people, the Dama celebrates creation and the life cycle as it conveys the spirit of the deceased to the next stage of existence. The video captures the dramatic landscape of the Bandiagara Cliffs, home to the Dogon since the 1400s. Also shown are the vibrant masks and amazing dances that characterize the Dama, including the dance of the Great Mask, a brightly colored wooden mask more than seventeen feet tall.

Five African Art Facts

WA-481

11 min. | color | 1995 | VM | VHS

Elementary school through adult

Join Shelby as she greets young visitors to the African art collection at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Listen as she explains the fascinating secrets of the *Ga Wree-Wree Mask* and the uses of the *Yoruba Eshu Staff*. View examples of African art and discover more about the beliefs and cultural values of the people who created them. This video introduces students in grades 3–6 to general concepts that aid in understanding and appreciating traditional African art. A teachers' guide for this program is available on request.

African Art

ED-548

22 min. | 2003 | VHS, DVD

Elementary school through adult

This program provides an introductory overview of the visual arts of sub-Saharan Africa, from cave paintings to ceremonial masks, in the context of ritual and daily life. It underscores the power of symbolism, simplification, and abstraction from nature; the importance of preserving skills and stylistic traditions from the past; and the blurring of distinctions between art and craft, aesthetics and utility.

African Carving: A Dogon Kanaga Mask

AT-19

19 min. | color | 1975 | PFI | VHS

Middle school through adult

The Kanaga mask is used in religious rituals of the Dogon, a people who live in the west African Republic of Mali. The carving of the Kanaga mask is itself an important ritual. The carver must find a suitable *tagoda* tree from which to create the mask and make appropriate prayers and offerings so the tree spirit will allow the use of its wood. This film, by noted photographer Eliot Elisofon, sensitively documents the mask-carving ritual and the role of the mask in a sacred ceremony.

Mali: Ancient Crossroads of Africa

ED-515

60 min. | 2002 | VM | VHS

Elementary school through adult

Join Richard Woodward, curator of African Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Cheick Oumar Diarra, Mali's ambassador to the United States; and Virginia educators as they discuss Mali as a focus of the Virginia Standards of Learning for social studies. View a classroom oral-history program in the tradition of Mali's griots (royal musicians who preserve history and culture through song and dance). The program concludes with a powerful performance of traditional songs and stories presented by Djimo Kouyate, a West African griot and direct descendant of Balla Fasseke Kouyate, the griot who advised Mali's legendary founder, King Sundiata Keita. *(From the Virginia Department of Education Hour)*

Africa's Enduring Arts: Now and Then

WA-458

16 min. | color | 1993 | Lucerne | VHS

Elementary school through adult

This video is a lively introduction to the arts of Africa. Although best known for traditional mask-making, African artists also produce other sculptural forms. Textiles, metal objects, and crafts are created by the many cultures living on this vast continent. See contemporary artists mix traditional and modern forms to create a vibrant, new, hybrid style.

Fabric of African Life: Introducing West African Textiles

ED-441

29 min. | 1995 | IMOA | VHS

Middle school through adult

Explore the rich variety of clothing, costumes, and textile arts from Mali and other parts of western Africa. Three engaging teenage students host the program with interviews and historical and technical background. A teacher's study guide is included.

Note: These and other audiovisual resources related to VMFA's collection may be accessed through our website:

http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Statewide_Programs/Films,_Videos,_and_DVDs.aspx

VMFA Educational Media Resources

Link to Related Works of Art at VMFA

<http://www.vmfa.museum/Collections/African/>

Links to Related Programs:

Teen classes

<http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Teens/Teens.aspx>

Families and kids

http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Kids_+_Families/Kids_+_Families.aspx

Tours

<http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Educators/educators.aspx>

Teacher workshops

http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Educators/Teacher_Workshops/Teacher_Workshops.aspx

Please check <http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/> regularly to learn about new tours and other educational opportunities.



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