

West African Kingdoms

GRADE 3



Based on images of two works of art from VMFA's collection, these activities will provide students with background information before their visit and, afterwards, encourage them to use critical thinking skills to draw conclusions from what they saw. The works may or may not be shown on your guided tour, but they are related to the tour theme, and the pre-visit activities will help prepare students for the interactive component of the tour.

Tour Description

Survey evidence of power, wealth, and family, as well as symbols from several West African cultural groups. Travel ancient trade routes, discuss natural resources, and see the spectacle of royalty on this tour through our African galleries.

Tour Objectives

1. The student will learn about several cultural groups from West Africa by observing masks, textiles, sculpture, jewelry, and symbols.
2. The student will locate West Africa on the map.
3. The student will discuss the physical characteristics of West Africa that helped develop trade routes and ancient civilizations.
4. The student will discover natural, human, and capital resources that support the economy in West Africa.

Virginia Standards of Learning for Grade 3

The following SOLs are for the tour and follow-up activities:

History and Social Science

- 3.2 The student will study the West African Empire of Mali by describing its oral tradition (storytelling), government (kings), and economic development (trade).
- 3.4 The student will develop map skills by
 - a) locating Greece, Rome, and West Africa;
 - b) describing the physical and human characteristics of Greece, Rome, and West Africa; and
 - c) explaining how the people of Greece, Rome, and West Africa adapted to and/or changed their environment to meet their needs.
- 3.7 The student will explain how producers in ancient Greece, Rome, and the West African empire of Mali used natural resources, human resources, and capital resources in the production of goods and services.
- 3.8 The student will recognize that because people and regions cannot produce everything they want, they specialize in what they do best and trade for the rest.

Visual Arts

- 3.6 The student will create works of art that communicate ideas, themes, and feelings.
- 3.11 The student will identify how works of art and craft reflect times, places, and cultures.
- 3.13 The student will identify how history, culture and the visual arts influence each other.
- 3.15 The student will examine the relationship between form and function in the artifacts of a culture.

English

- 3.9 The student will write for a variety of purposes.

Pre-Visit Activities

Object 1: Mali



Chi Wara Headdress,

19th–20th century

Bamana Culture (Mali)

Wood

Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund,
77.93

The Bamana [bah-mah'-nah] people, one of many ethnic groups in Mali, are farmers and hunters who live on the western edge of the Sahara Desert. This Chi Wara headdress is part of a mask ensemble the Bamana use that relate to agricultural cycles. Two animals can be seen in this wood carving. The snout makes reference to the armadillo—an animal that burrows in the ground, similar to the way a farmer tills the soil. The tall thin antlers represent an antelope, an animal that is highly regarded among the Bamana. The antelope on the mask actually represents a supernatural being named Chi Wara. According to Bamana mythology, Chi Wara was the first farmer, a wild beast that taught mankind how to cultivate the fields.

Chi Wara masquerades take place during annual ceremonies when young men learn the agricultural skills they need to become successful farmers, who can provide for their families and contribute to the community. Performers don the headdress on top of their head and cover their bodies with raffia. As they perform they remain bent over, because an excellent farmer hoes the ground continually without straightening to take a rest.

Pre-Visit Activities

Questions

- Can you tell what this object is and how it would be used?

Answers will vary. Students may detect the abstract representation of an animal in the design. This is the headdress of a mask ensemble. It would be worn on top of a person's head.

- Discuss the design of this headdress. Describe the lines and composition.

Students may notice the abstract quality of the image. The negative space creates an interesting pattern. The lines are angular and wavy in certain areas.

- Two animals can be seen in this headdress. What are they?

An aardvark and an antelope

- Discuss the characteristics of these two animals and how they might be significant to Bamana farmers.

Aardvarks burrow in the ground to search for their food. Antelopes are fast and graceful animals. Answers about significance to farmers will vary.

- Think about a profession other than farming. What animal would best represent that profession?

Answers will vary.

- Look at a map of West Africa and find Mali. What large desert do the Bamana people live near? Why is it important for the Bamana to annually recognize Chi Wara?

The skills of farming are still critical to sustaining life on the edge of the Sahara Desert, and the Chi Wara masquerade continually educates Bamana people on the importance of agriculture. The Bamana farm mostly millet, which is a small-seeded cereal crop. Resistant to high temperatures and drought, millet grows nicely in Mali. Millet is a natural resource that is used to make many different types of food dishes in Mali, and it was also used in trade.

Object 2: Nigeria



King's Beaded Robe, early 20th century
Yoruba culture (Nigeria, Republic of Benin)
Glass beads, string, velvet, wool, damask
Kathleen Boone Samuels Memorial Fund and Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund,
96.36

The Yoruba [yoro-BUH] have created—and continue to produce—some of Africa's most dazzling beaded objects, notably royal regalia such as crowns, necklaces, footwear, footstools, and even entire garments. These objects are reserved for important state occasions and public appearances.

In this robe and other beaded regalia, the king becomes a symbol of the spiritual power, material wealth, and general well-being of his kingdom.

Since ancient times, beads made of shell, stone, clay, metal, and glass have been used to decorate vestments and objects of status in Africa. Glass beadmaking dates back more than a thousand years in some regions of western and southern Africa. As early as 300 BCE, glass beads were also imported from Rome and Egypt and were used in trade across the Sahara Desert to western Africa.

Pre-Visit Activities

Questions

- What is this robe decorated with?
Glass beads
- What colors do you see?
Predominantly red, blue, and yellow
- Does this garment look special to you? Who would have worn something like this?
Yes, it is special. The elaborate designs and intricate beading suggest that it would have been worn by royalty or a high-ranking official. In fact, we know this garment would be worn by a Yoruba king.
- When elaborate clothing like this is worn, what message does it send?
Beautiful clothing can speak to a person's wealth, power and status. Through observation we can assume the wearer was an important member of the community.
- Do you have any beaded jewelry?
- How heavy do you think this robe is?
It is about 10 to 15 pounds.
- Beads of all sorts have been symbols of wealth and spiritual power for a long time. For many years beads were traded as commodities or, in some cases, used as currency. Some of the most famous trade routes went across the Sahara Desert. What other items were traded along those routes?
Salt and gold
- Traditionally, among the Yoruba, kings would employ a group of specialized beadworkers to create an array of beaded objects (like our robe).

Post-Visit Activities

- What did you learn today? Pull out your K-W-L chart and fill in the answers. Ask if the questions they had before the visit were answered.
- Ask what their favorite image was and why?
- Show students the two images again and ask what they remember about the seeing the works of art in the galleries. Did they look different than expected? What did they learn about the subjects of the two works of art as well as the works themselves?
- Have students draw an image of their favorite work of art and add as many details as they can.
- Ask the students to think about some of the objects they saw today and what an equivalent might be in their own culture.
- Make a list of the works of art students remember from the tour and ask them what natural resource each was made from and if the object was made by a person who specialized in a trade or profession.
- Have the students write about their family or community traditions.
- Please let us know how your students have been inspired by VMFA! Visit our tumblr page and submit images of student works at: <http://vmfaeducation.tumblr.com/>



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