

Leadership

AFRICAN GALLERY

GRADES 6-12

What does leadership look like?

Visit VMFA's African Art Gallery to see how different cultures define and visualize the qualities of a leader.



Get Ready!

Please make sure you visit the **VMFA Teacher-Directed Tour** page at <http://vmfa-resources.org/teacher-directed-gallery-tour-instructions/> for directions on using these guides and booking your visit.

Get Set!

Produce complete copies of this packet for all teachers and chaperones. Students only need copies of pages 4–8. Here are directions:

- Use the gallery map to find the African Art Gallery.
- Follow the floor plan on page 4 of your packet to find the selected objects.
- As you lead students to each stop, read the appropriate information on pages 5–8.
- Allow the group time to answer questions at each stop. Encourage them to read the label copy posted by each object to find some of the answers.
- The answer key and further discussion points can be found on pages 9–12.

Go!

We hope you enjoy your experience at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts!

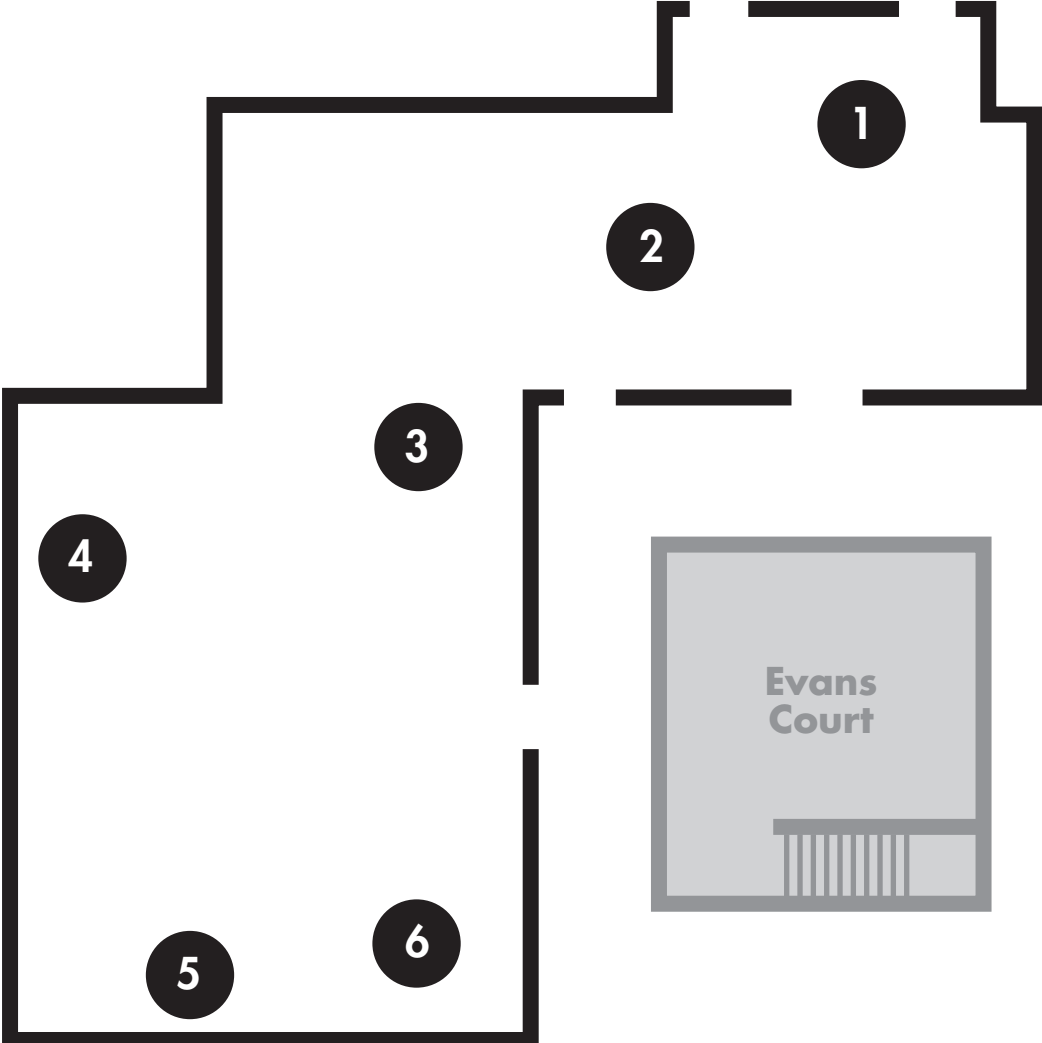
Related Virginia Standards of Learning

World History II.5: The student will demonstrate knowledge of the status and impact of global trade on regional civilizations of the world after AD 1500 (CE) by describing Africa and its increasing involvement in global trade.

World History II.14: The student will demonstrate knowledge of political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of independence movements.

World Geography 4: The student will locate and analyze cultural characteristics of world regions: Sub-Saharan Africa.

Floor plan for the Dominion Resources African Gallery. Tour stops 1-6



Leadership Objects and Questions



STOP 1

The Senufo [seh-noo-fo] people are mostly farmers and skilled artisans who live in the countries of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire. This statue symbolizes Senufo beliefs about ancestry and community. The bird is known as "mother of the *poro* child," associating it with the elders or "mothers" who act as guardians.

What is *poro*?

How was this object used?

What type of bird does this represent?

Discuss the function of this object. Can you think of any similar traditions you have in your family or community?



STOP 2

This mask embodies the guardian spirit of the female Sande society (of the Mende People in Sierra Leone).

What is Sande?

What do the holes under the chin suggest?

What type of earrings is she wearing?

How does your culture idealize moral and physical beauty?

Leadership Objects and Questions



STOP 3

The Lega [lay-gah] people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo follow a lineage hierarchy called the Bwami Society. Find the ceremonial headdresses worn by men and women of Bwami.

What do the Lega call Bwami?

What do these hats represent?

Who would wear this specific hat—a man or a woman?

Observe the materials on the various hats. What do the buttons tell us about the time period in which this hat was made?



STOP 4

The Yoruba [yooroo-buh] people of southwestern Nigeria have a long and rich tradition in bead making. Find a pair of slippers made for a king.

What is the significance of the face on these slippers?

What does the color blue signify in Yoruba regalia?

How is identity revealed through dress?

Leadership Objects and Questions



STOP 5

In the Cameroon, Bamum [bah-moom] kings have traditionally employed a variety of rich objects that symbolize sovereignty, such as this striking blue and white textile.

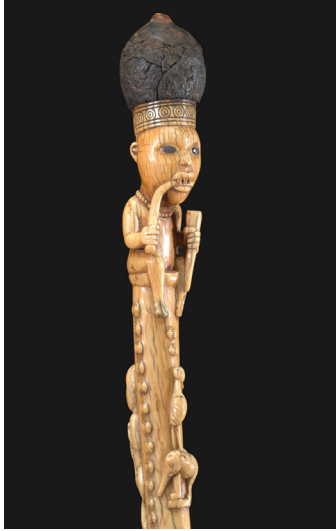
How was this thirty-foot cloth used?

What is the name of the famous Bamum king who first patronized this type of art?

What natural resource did artists apply to the cloth to keep it white in certain areas?

Ndop cloths became symbols of loyalty to the Bamum state during European colonialism. How might a textile represent loyalty?

Leadership Objects and Questions



STOP 6

Find this symbol of office from the Kongo People of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

What is this figure chewing on and what does it signify?

What types of shells are represented on the staff?

What is the significance of the bird?

If you had to create an insignia for a ruler, what type of object would you produce?

Leadership Answer Key and Discussion Points

STOP 1

Statue of a Bird, 19th–20th century, Senufo culture (Mali, Cote D’Ivoire, Burkina Faso), wood, paint, iron. Gift of Robert and Nancy Nooter, 85.1541

Answers

- *Poro* is a male social institution concerned with ancestry, family, and village unity.
- This object is used as a statue and a headdress.
- Hornbill
- Answers will vary.

Discussion

This statue symbolizes Senufo beliefs regarding ancestry and community. According to myth, the bird and four other primordial animals—the snake, the turtle, the crocodile, and the chameleon—were present with the first man and woman. Sometimes the bird itself is called “the first ancestor.” Two young birds perched on its winglike flanks introduce the theme of successive generations.

The animal represented in this statue is identified as a hornbill. Generally one male and one female hornbill will remain together as a monogamous couple and work in tandem to create a safe nesting site to lay their eggs. The nesting site is usually a hole in a tree or rocks. About a week before incubation, the mother hornbill will begin to build a wall of mud around the hole, leaving just enough space to enter. Once she is in, the father hornbill will finish packing the hole, leaving just enough space to pass food to her and the chicks. When the chicks and female are too big to stay in the nest, they break out. This nesting habit is a metaphor for rebirth or regeneration, which is well suited to the purpose of this mask and the *poro* society. The young men who mount these heavy statues on top of their heads are proud for successfully making it through the *poro* society and are ready to show off their strength to the community.

STOP 2

Sowei Helmet Mask, 19th–20th century, Mende culture (Sierra Leone), wood, cowrie shells, string. Kathleen Boone Samuels Memorial Fund, 82.206

Answers

- A women’s society
- That something was once attached
- Cowrie shells
- Answers will vary.

Discussion

This helmet mask is worn as part of a costume that completely conceals the body of an elder of the women’s society who, when wearing the mask, is identified as *sowei*. *Sowei* is the guardian spirit responsible for educating the next generation of young women. The formal attributes associated with the *sowei* mask express ideals of goodness and beauty—high forehead, rings around the neck, downcast eyes, small pursed lips, and elaborate hairdo. The *sowei* mask is an unusual mask in Africa, for it not only represents a female spirit, but is danced by female members of the women’s society. Throughout the continent, most masks, even those representing women, are usually danced by men.

Leadership Answer Key and Discussion Points

STOP 3

Bwami Society Woman's Hat, 20th century, Lega culture (Democratic Republic of the Congo), woven raffia, buttons, string. Kathleen Boone Samuels Memorial Fund, 94.1

Answers

- The fruit that came from above
- Mystical burden that a member bears
- Woman
- European-made buttons began to replace cowrie shells as status symbols in the early twentieth century as the western presence grew in the eastern Congo.

Discussion

The Lega are located in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. One of the most remarkable aspects of this culture is its lack of centralized authority in the form of kings or chiefs. For them, cultural unity is maintained through Bwami, a moral and ethical society to which nearly all Lega men and women belong. Bwami consists of a series of grades that can be ascended through good personal character, family support, education, wealth, and initiation. These grades provide members with a series of lifelong goals that enable its adherents to “climb the slopes of the sky.” Bwami differs from most African initiation societies that focus on rites of passage at adolescence since Bwami members graduate to different grades throughout their lives. Bwami continues to reveal new secrets until the initiate dies. It is not a secret society per se, for everyone is aware of it; but the objects used to teach the association's principles are maintained secretly by initiates of each grade, as is the knowledge of their configurations, handling, display, and interpretation. None but the most senior officials know which particular configurations and combinations of objects are appropriate at any given time.

STOP 4

Royal Slippers, 20th century, Yoruba culture (Nigeria, Republic of Benin), glass beads, cloth, string, leather. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Hammer, 93.103.1–2

Answers

- Oduduwa [oh-doo-doo-wa], the first Yoruba king
- More than 1,000 years ago
- Yemoja [yeh-mo-ja], the mother of waters whose qualities cool and soothe

Discussion

The Yoruba 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. The use of these objects is reserved for important state occasions and public appearances. The Yoruba king is the head of a town and is often seen heavily adorned in elaborate and colorful clothing. Beads carry cosmic powers. Ancient Yoruba coral beads were dug from the sea and thought to attract the blessings of Olokun [olo-koon], the goddess of sea and wealth. When stranded together, beads stand for unity and togetherness, a message that a king would want to portray to his people. Oduduwa's face is often seen on Yoruba royal regalia. In addition to being the first Yoruba king, he is also recognized as one of the primordial Orisa [or-ee-sha] or deities. His face on the slippers ensures that the wearer will see a clear path to walk and avoid “stumbles” along the way.

Leadership Answer Key and Discussion Points

STOP 5

Ndop Cloth (Royal Blue and White Cloth), late 19th–early 20th century, Bamum culture (Cameroon), cotton. Gift of Dr. L. Marian Wouters, 2002.514

Answers

- To define an outdoor space for the king when seated on his throne to set him apart from non-royals
- King Njoya (1873–1933)
- Cassava starch paste
- Answers will vary.

Discussion

Bamum kings have long surrounded themselves with large, sophisticated visual displays that declare their economic, sociopolitical, and religious authority. These royal treasuries include various objects such as thrones, sculpture, masks, and textiles. This type of cloth, called *ndop*, was first patronized by Njoya, the renowned king of the northern Cameroon region during the late 19th century. This thirty-foot-long cloth is assembled from many thin strips of plain-woven cotton and then stitched together. The geometric patterns were created by applying cassava starch paste to ensure that some areas of the cloth would remain natural cotton and others turn deep blue when submerged in a vat of indigo dye. The *ndop* cloth became part of a complex court art that asserted power and independence and distanced the Bamum culture visually from colonial powers.

Leadership Answer Key and Discussion Points

STOP 6

Royal Scepter, 19th century, Yombe group, Kongo culture (Democratic Republic of the Congo), ivory, iron, earth, resin. Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 85.591

Answers

- Root used to make healing powers, which is a sign that his reign will continue to prosper
- Cowrie shells
- Spiritual transcendence

Discussion

This richly carved ivory scepter is one of many important symbols of a Kongo chief's authority. It abounds with signs of his rank, which were invested with strict meaning and regulations of use. The top of the scepter depicts the chief seated on his throne. He holds a medicine horn in his left hand and chews on the root of a *munkwisa* plant to activate its curative power. *Munkwisa*, a plant of the ginger family, is used in medicinal brews. Its root, a sign of authority and purity, is used in investitures (ceremonies conferring authority) to assure that the chief's power will grow from year to year. Atop his crown, a large knob of resin seals in earth and materials that have been packed into the head, signifying the king's transcendental powers. The throne, the medicine horn, the root, the crown, and the earth all proclaim the chief's importance as a spiritual leader. They also symbolize his role as a special type of *nganga*, one who has the knowledge and skills to control magical potions. Below the king is a sword-bearing figure, a court attendant who holds one of the king's symbolic knives, another important element of royal regalia. Another reference to the chief's greatness, a great bird astride an elephant, is carved on the front of the scepter. The elephant symbolizes his lordly status, and the bird stands for his power to transcend the earth. This detail has also been interpreted as an allusion to the myth of an elephant carrying the first queen mother to the land settled by the Yombe. The scepter ends in a point, like a larger staff that a chief may use to stab into the earth to invoke the protective spirit of the leopard. Completing the ornamentation are representations of cowrie shells, indicative of wealth, and a woman's anklet encircling the lower portion of the scepter, manifesting a typical Kongo desire to balance male and female elements



VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

200 N. Boulevard | Richmond, VA 23220 | www.VMFA.museum