

# Wealth and Trade

AFRICAN ART GALLERY

GRADES 3–5



Africa is a continent rich in natural resources that gave rise to many wealthy empires. Metal, salt, and gold, as well as products such as beads and textiles, traveled many miles over vast trade routes. Teachers, use this guide to lead students on an exploration of the African Art Gallery and find out more about prosperous cultures in Africa!

## 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 4–7. 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 5–7.
- 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 8–9.

## Go!

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

## Related Virginia Standards of Learning

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**History 3.2:** The student will study the West African Empire of Mali by describing its oral tradition (storytelling), government (kings), and economic development (trade).

**Geography 3.4:** The student will develop map skills by locating West Africa, describing its physical and human characteristics, and explaining how the people of West Africa adapted to and/or changed their environment to meet their needs.

**Economics 3.7:** The student will explain how producers use natural resources (water, soil, wood, and coal), human resources (people at work), and capital resources (machines, tools, and buildings) to produce goods and services for consumers.

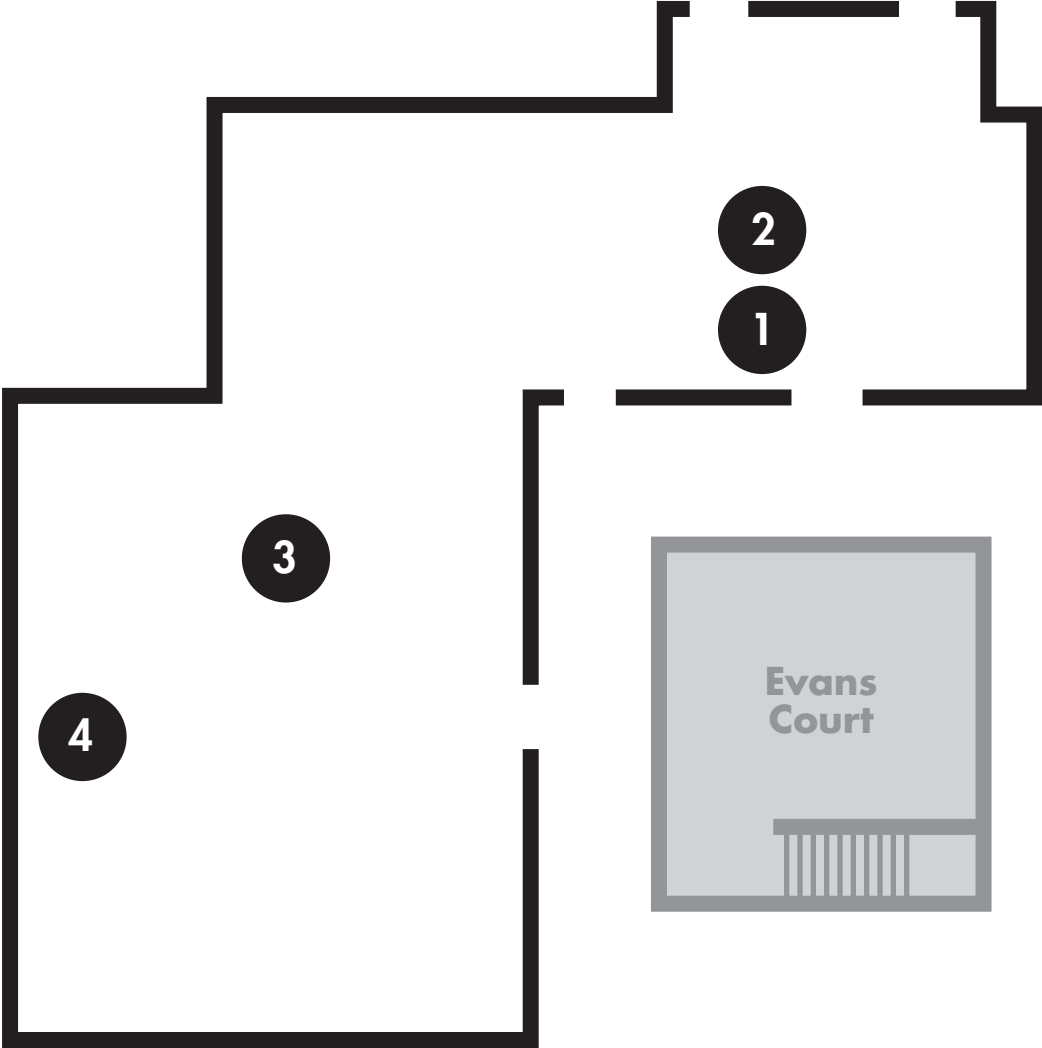
**Economics 3.8** The student will recognize the concepts of specialization (being an expert in one job, product, or service) and interdependence (depending on others) in the production of goods and services in ancient Greece, Rome, and the West African empire of Mali, and in the present.

**USI.4:** The student will demonstrate knowledge of European exploration in North America and West Africa by

- (A) Identifying the location;
- (B) Describing the characteristics of West African societies (Ghana, Mali, and Songhai) and their interactions with traders.

# Floor plan for the Dominion Resources African Gallery. Tour stops 1-4

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# Wealth and Trade Objects and Questions



## STOP 1

The Tuareg [tua-egg] people are mostly nomadic and live in North and West Africa. Tuareg caravans played a primary role in carrying goods across the Sahara Desert until the mid-20th century. Can you find Tuareg objects in the gallery?

What are they used for?

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What does it mean to be nomadic?

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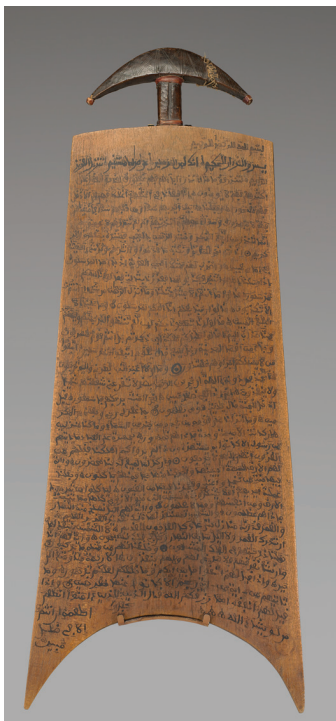
What are Tuareg houses like?

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What mode of transportation (animal) do you think the Tuareg use as they travel the Sahara desert?

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## STOP 2

Africa's extensive trade routes were very important for the exchange of ideas as well as goods. As different people came into contact on these routes we can see how they influenced each other, especially in art and religion. For example, the Islamic faith spread through North Africa.

Kano, where this board is from, is in northern Nigeria and is considered the center of Hausa [how-sah] trade and culture.

What was this object used for?

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What type of writing do you see?

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What type of material did you write on when learning to write?

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## Wealth and Trade Objects and Questions

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### STOP 3

This stool is from the modern country of Ghana. Ghana has long been known for its rich and abundant resources of gold, which boosted trade and earned it the name “Gold Coast” in colonial times. European firearms, as well as other luxury goods, were also traded in this area.

Stools like these are not for sitting but instead symbolize of leadership for the Akan [ah-kahn] people.

What is a symbol?

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Name a symbol for the United States of America.

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Can you find the firearms and weapons on this stool? How many do you see?

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What symbol would you choose to represent power?

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## Wealth and Trade Objects and Questions

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### STOP 4

The Yoruba [yoroo-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.

Who would wear a robe like this?

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What do elaborate clothing and jewelry say about a person?

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What is the name of the first Yoruba king whose face can be seen on the back?

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How many different colors do you see? What do those colors mean to you?

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# Answer Key and Discussion Points

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## STOP 1

**Tent Stakes (Ehel)**, 19th–20th century, Tuareg culture (Mali and several other nations), wood. Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, from the Robert and Nancy Nooter Collection, 2005.19–22

### Answers

- Tent poles are used to erect a tent and hold up its walls, as well as to hang mats, bags, and clothing.
- “Nomadic” means to move from place to place.
- Tents
- They use camels to help transport all of their goods and possessions from place to place.

### Discussion

For thousands of years, Tuareg economy revolved around trans-Saharan trade. Using five basic trade routes, Tuareg merchants were responsible for bringing goods from the great cities on the southern edge of the Sahara to the northern Mediterranean coast of Africa. From there they were distributed throughout the world. With the development of roads, much of the movement of goods and people is accomplished by trucks; however, smaller camel caravans continue to cross the Sahara.

## STOP 2

**Qur’anic Writing Tablet**, 19th–20th century, Hausa culture (Nigeria and other countries), wood, leather, string, pigment. Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund, 95.83

### Answers

- For writing verses from the Qu’ran
- Arabic
- Probably paper

### Discussion

This tablet is a refined example of a type of writing board used in Islamic areas of West Africa for teaching both the reading and writing of verses from the Qur’an. This example is from the city of Kano, an Islamic center in northern Nigeria.

In some cases the ink from these boards would be washed off with water and then consumed in hopes of being cured by the healing words of the Qu’ran.



## Answer Key and Discussion Points

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### STOP 3

**Dwa (Official's Stool)**, 19th–20th century, Akan culture (Ghana), wood, brass. Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2007.1

#### Answers

- A symbol is something that stands for something else.
- Bald eagle, Statue of Liberty
- Two rifles and a powder keg as the base
- Answers will vary.

#### Discussion

This stool is made from wood and is covered in brass with intricate hammered designs. The Akan people are very well known for their wise sayings or proverbs. On the seat of the stool, there are two birds. Each bird touches its tail with an egg. The egg is a symbol of the future; the tail is a symbol of the past. This image is called “Sankofa,” which means “return and get it.” It symbolizes the importance of learning from the past.

### STOP 4

**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

#### Answers

- A king
- That they have power, wealth, and status
- Oduduwa [o-doo-doo-wah]
- Answers will vary.

#### Discussion

For a long time people have believed that glass beads were not produced in sub-Saharan Africa. Instead they thought beads were only imported from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Thanks to archaeological evidence we now know that more than a thousand years ago the manufacture of red, blue, and green glass beads was an important industry in Ife (sacred city in Yorubaland). However, this *King's Robe* is made of imported glass beads. Beads have for a long time been important accessories of royal regalia and valuable trade commodities.

Colors not only play an artistic role in Yoruba art, but also have special meanings. For example, many colors relate to particular Yoruba gods. Indigo blue (*elu*), sacred to Yemoja, the mother of waters, is associated with water and coolness and is believed to calm and soothe tension. The color white (*funfun*)—sacred to Obatala and Orunmila—calls to mind peacefulness and the sublime. Red (*pupa*) signifies hotness, danger, and vitality, and often represents Sango, the thunderstorm deity. Black (*dudu*) embodies the unpredictable and therefore is associated with Esu, the divine messenger (also known as a mischievous trickster).



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