

Lesson Title: African Masks: The Clay Tradition

Your name: Rachel Vredenburg

Number of Students: 20

Grade Level: 5th

Length of each class period: 40 minutes, 3 days

LESSON Rationale

This lesson ties into black history month by incorporating the history and cultural significance of African Masks into the lesson. By studying cultural anthropology as well as the contemporary influence of African masks, students will understand that there are different purposes of traditional African masks. Students will use clay slab-building techniques to create Bas relief sculptures. They will use choice-based learning to create their own personalized, hand-built clay design over the course of two class periods. By learning about this subject and creating their own examples, students will reinforce the information they learned during class. This includes the evaluation of African mask styles and analyzing these cultural associations. Students will use technical skill such as slipping, scoring, and smoothing to practice clay craftsmanship for the duration of this project. It is important to share relevant artists that are influenced by the African mask tradition. By connecting to these artists, students will have a better understanding of how art may function outside the classroom, in museums, and how themes are passed down through different generations.

The big idea of this lesson is Cultural Anthropology. Specifically, students will study the cultural context in which African masks are created and worn. By focusing on the cultural purpose of these masks, they learn about the intrinsic meaning behind these forms. Students will then be excited to make their own version inspired by their own interests and patterns. This encourages an individual approach to artmaking and creativity among individual students.

PROCESS

Clay slab building

ARTISTS:

LOIS MAILOU JONES (1905-1998)

She was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1905 and attended the High Schools of Practical Arts. She graduated from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and continued her education at the Boston Normal School of Arts and the Designers Art School in Boston. Moved to France and traveled frequently to Africa and Haiti. Longest surviving artist of the Harlem Renaissance, and died at the age of 98 in Washington D.C (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018).

ZINA SARO-WIWA: Zina Saro-Wiwa is an artist who lives and works between Los Angeles, the UK and Port Harcourt, Nigeria. She uses sculpture, photography, and even videography to draw attention to her cultural identity, history, and ecological context in modern

society. She was featured among 25 artists in the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition, *Disguise: Masks and Global African Art* (Brooklyn Museum, 2016).

BIG IDEA(s): Cultural Anthropology

LEARNER OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to identify the cultural significance of African Masks

Students will observe patterns and characteristics of African Masks

Students will use clay techniques including pressing, cutting, carving and adding

Students will create their own personalized masks incorporating pattern and texture.

Students will be able to analyze and describe different types of African masks.

Students will be able to create high or bas relief sculptures using clay.

Students will be able to scratch and stick clay successfully.

Students will be able to glaze their African masks neatly and with attention to detail.

Students will be able to clean up properly.

3 National Standards for Visual Arts (VAS) (list numbers and full description for each standard) [National Visual Arts Standards At-A-Glance • National Art Education Association \(arteducators.org\)](#)

VA:Cr2.1.5a; Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice.

VA:Re.7.2.5a: Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.

VA:Re9.1.5a; Recognize differences in criteria used to evaluate works of art depending on styles, genres, and media as well as historical and cultural contexts.

3 VA State Standards of Learning (SOL) in the arts: [Visual Arts | Virginia Department of Education](#)

5.6 The student will explore and examine cultural and historical influences of art.

(c.) Describe similarities and differences among art and artists from a variety of diverse cultures and experiences.

5.10 Create sculpture in high or bas relief, using 3 dimensional media, including clay.

5.15 The student will execute and complete works of art with attention to detail and skill in the use of art materials.

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR UNIT

A. Art Supplies: 20 Masonite boards per class, 25 lbs of clay per class. 20 clay tools, 20 forks, 6 cups for water (1 per table), at least 6 different colors of glaze to represent the rainbow.

Additional Materials: (What books, images, websites, handouts, and other reference materials did you consult in planning this lesson and/or use in presenting it to your students? Include any links to museums or other resources you used. *Include a link to your presentation for introducing artists and the unit/lessons to your students.*)

[Dogon Mask Dance](#)

[PowerPoint Presentation](#)

[Mask Making Video](#)

VOCABULARY/DEFINITIONS:

Abstract: Inspired by something real, but stylized

Ceremonial: Used In a ceremony to add reverence and spiritual power

Texture: The surface quality of an object.

Slipping: Adding slip to join pieces of clay

Scratching: Method of joining two pieces of clay

Smoothing: using water to smooth the surface of the clay and remove clay burrs.

Additive: Adding more clay for a raised design

Subtractive: Taking clay away or pressing a design into the clay to create texture

MOTIVATING STUDENTS: PERSONAL and SOCIAL RELEVANCE

Students will be excited to learn about the origin of the African masks and it's spiritual/ceremonial purposes. Students are already excited for Black History Month and will be further motivated by the choices available such as animal inspired, pattern inspired, and textural elements in the mask-making process that they can incorporate into their own work. By customizing their own mask, they will form a personal connection with the project.

UNIT PROCEDURES

A. Teacher/Classroom Prep:

Teacher will print out templates of the mask shape for students to practice their sketches, prepare a PowerPoint presentation, prepare pre-cut clay slabs, prepare cups of water, prepare plastic clay tools for each table, prepare glaze, and assemble brushes on the counter.

B. Pre-assessment:

Students will watch the African mask dance video and mask making video and use their observational skills to discuss what they saw and when these masks might be used.

C. Behavioral Expectations:

Students are expected to sit in their assigned seats, listen while the teacher is talking, and participate in any class discussion.

D. Organizer:

The teacher will create a PowerPoint to share important ideas and vocabulary with students. The teacher will conduct different demonstrations at each stage of the projects so that students may follow along and build certain skills such as slipping and scratching, adding, and subtractive relief methods.

E. Extension Activity:

Students may draw something inspired by the lesson afterwards, but they only get one day with clay and will likely need all available time to complete this activity.

UNIT SEQUENCE (scripting and timing).

3 days/classes:

Teacher Actions

DAY 1 5th grade (8:15-8:55)

8:15 Teacher will greet students and invite them to take their art seats

8:17-8:25 Teacher will present the PowerPoint, introducing African masks and some of the artists. Teacher will pay special attention to stylistic markers such as color, pattern, and anamorphic characteristics.

8:26-8:28: The teacher will pass out the mask sketch template so that students may create their design on paper first. The teacher will ask students to print their names on it. Teacher will help students who may be stuck or need help with ideas. The teacher might color along with students under the document camera to help brainstorm.

Expected Learner Actions

DAY 1 3rd grade (10:15-10:55)

8:15 Students will say hello to Mrs. V and Mrs. T as they enter the classroom and find their art seats.

8:17-8:25 Students will listen to the PowerPoint presentation and participate in the discussion of African Masks and their cultural significance.

8:26-8:28: Students will write their names on the color preliminary sketch worksheets as they receive them. Students will keep their listening ears open while Mrs. V sketches along with students.

8:30-8:35 Students will ask questions like “why does it look like that?” “Remember from the sideshow, distinct cultures use different patterns and inspirations when building their masks” “Like inspired by a tiger?” “Yes! That is exactly right.”

8:36-8:46: Students will listen and follow along with the quick slipping and scratching demo.

8:30-8:35:40 Teacher will walk around and answer any questions students have about their mask sketch worksheets. Students will also brainstorm what colors they want to use with crayons. . The teacher will note that they may not make paper airplanes.

8:36-8:46: teacher will conduct a quick slipping and scratching demo so that students may try the technique before beginning their mask projects next class

8:50- Teacher will announce cleanup and call each table to clean up their area.

8:52- Teacher will make sure that all worksheets have been collected for next time.

8:55: Homeroom teacher will pick students up and teacher will say goodbye to them as they leave.

DAY 2

8:15: Teacher will greet students as they arrive and ask them to please find their art chairs.

8:17-8:20: Teacher will recap the previous day by asking students who we talked about last class? Teacher will recap the previous day by asking students what we talked about last class? What were they for? What were they inspired by?

8:20-8:24 Teacher will demonstrate how to add and subtract clay as well as refresh students' memory on slipping, scratching, and smoothing the surface of their clay.

8:25-8:50: Teacher will walk around and encourage students as they spend time on the first hand-building day. Teacher will help individual students that may have trouble creating their desired shape. Teacher will ask reinforcing questions like "what patterns and textures will you carve? Remember to scratch and smooth your clay! "

8:50 Teacher will announce cleanup, and students will bring their boards and clay up to Ms. V so I can write their names on the back.

8:54: Teacher will call students by table to line up.

8:55: The homeroom teacher picks up students and the teacher says goodbye as they leave.

DAY 3 (2 weeks later)

8:50- Students will clean up their spaces and wash their hands.

8:52- Students will turn in all worksheets to the teacher and line up.

8:55: Homeroom teacher will pick students up and they will say goodbye to Mrs. T and Ms. V as they leave.

DAY 2

8:15: Students will say good morning as they come in and find their art chairs.

8:17-8:20: Students will listen to the recap and answer questions they remember from last time such as "We talked about African Masks!" and "They were for dancing!" and "Sometimes they looked like animals!"

8:20-8:24 Students will excitedly pay attention to the demo under the doc camera as they know that the more they talk, the less time they have to work..."

8:25-8:50: Students will use their sketches as a guide and bring their sketches into reality until cleanup. They will raise their hand and ask the teacher for help if they are having trouble making a certain shape, patterns, etc.

8:50 Students will bring their projects on their boards up to Ms. V and use walking feet to wash hands.

8:54: Students will use walking feet to line up by the door.

8:55: The homeroom teacher picks up students and they say goodbye to Mrs. T and Ms. V as they leave.

DAY 3 (2weeks later)

8:15: Students will say good morning as they come in and find their art chairs.

8:17-8:20: Students will listen to the recap and answer questions they remember from last time such as "We talked about African Masks!" and "They were inspired by animals and patterns!"

8:20-8:24 Students will efficiently receive their clay projects and take them back to their seats to work.

8:25-8:30: Students will listen to the glaze demo and respond to teacher questions such as the number of layer (2-3)

8:15: Teacher will greet students as they arrive and ask them to please take their seats.

8:17-8:20: Teacher will recap the previous clay day by asking students what they started making? What inspired some of their designs?

8:20-8:24 Teacher pass out fired clay projects to the quietest tables first.

8:25-8:30: Teacher will conduct a glazing demo emphasizing multiple layers so that it fires evenly.

8:30-45 walk around and encourage students as they layer the glazes on their projects. The teacher will help individual students that may have trouble glazing their final product. The teacher will ask reinforcing questions and encouragement like "what patterns and textures will you create? I love how you added zebra stripes! "

8:50 Teacher will announce cleanup, and students will bring their boards and clay up to Ms. V so she can store them in the plastic storage tub.

8:54: Teacher will call students by table to wash hands and line up.

8:55: The homeroom teacher picks up students and the teacher says goodbye as they leave.

8:30-45: Students will pick up where they left off last class in adding details to their masks. They will raise their hand and ask the teacher for help if they are having trouble smoothing their projects, adding final patterns, etc.

8:50 Students will bring their projects on their boards up to Ms. V and use walking feet to wash hands.

8:54: Students will use walking feet to line up by the door.

8:55: The homeroom teacher picks up students and they say goodbye to Mrs. T and Ms. V as they leave.

ADAPTATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Students having trouble dealing with the texture may use gloves when forming their masks. Students who need extra time may be allowed to come back as their homeroom teacher permits. Teacher will ask for "all eyes to me" on her during the presentation so that there is no temptation to talk or not pay attention to the materials. Teacher will also set the expectation that there are limited hand-building days, and they must let Ms. V talk so it doesn't cut into the work time. Asking fun questions on the presentation day is another way to engage learners:

ie. “what animals inspired these masks?” and “what occasions might these masks be used”

DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGIES: (These should also be reflected in the unit sequence. When will you integrate these strategies into your planning? Be specific in your scripting/sequencing.)

- Flexible grouping
- Open-ended activities
- Exploration by interests
- Negotiated criteria
- Anchoring/Extension activities
- Independent studies
- Tiered activities/products
- Journal prompts
- Multiple levels of questions
- Scaffolding
- Choice: Learner profile, Readiness, Interest

ASSESSMENT & DOCUMENTATION OF TEACHER/STUDENT LEARNING

- A. Assessment: *(How will you collect information on what students gained from your unit? How will you evaluate that information? (Refer back to **Learner Outcomes** to decide how you will know if students learned what you hoped they would learn. Assessment strategies can include exit tickets, a list of questions you will ask students at the closure of the lesson, the critique, etc.)*

The scaffolding in this lesson will start immediately with the class discussion of the videos and a preliminary worksheet in which students will brainstorm their own design based on what they learned in the powerpoint. Next, they will expand their ideas and technical skills in clay as they slip, score, and smooth their pieces.

- B. Documentation:

Photos of student’s in-progress work will indicate that they understand the prominence of color, pattern, and texture in this projects. Further, their attention to detail and ability to create clay masks will serve as the culminating assessment. Finally, student’s answers during the recap at the start of each day will show that they are retaining and building on the historical and cultural significance of these African-style masks.

PROCESS IMAGES



Step1: Gather materials including clay tools, clay, forks, Clay boards, cups, and brushes



Step 2: Cut the template into the desired shape



Step 3: Add features like the nose and ears using the slip, scratch, and smooth method to adhere them. Use a subtractive method where you want areas to be sunken (eyes and mouth)



Step 4: Create a pattern using impressions into the clay and smooth out the surface!

Once fired, glaze your mask any color and admire your final piece!

References

Brooklyn Museum. (2016, April). *Brooklyn Museum: Disguise: Masks and Global African Art*.

www.brooklynmuseum.org.

https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/disguise_masks_global_african_art

Junichi Nakane. (2012). Dogon Mask Dance [YouTube Video]. In *YouTube*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whAY9R-_7ac

NOVICA. (2019). How is it made? The Making of African Masks. In *YouTube*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAx6etYBuHE>

Saro-Wiwa, Z. (2016). *ZINA SARO-WIWA*. ZINA SARO-WIWA.

<https://www.zinasarowiwa.com/artworks/the-invisible-man>

The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. (2018). Lois Mailou Jones | American painter and educator. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lois-Mailou-Jones>