



Art In History

Basic Lesson Plan

EDU001

Bantu Migration

African Kuba Mask

3000 BC - 1100 AD



The Bantu Migration

(3000 B.C.–1100 A.D.)

Geography

The geography of Africa is as diverse as the many ethnic and cultural groups that live on the continent. The Sahara and Kalahari Deserts make up the desert zones of Africa. The Sahara Desert stretches across the northern portion of Africa, along the Tropic of Cancer. The Kalahari Desert is in southwestern Africa, along the Tropic of Capricorn. Together, these two deserts make up approximately 40 percent of Africa. There are also tropical rain forests located along the Equator. Tropical rain forests make up roughly 10 percent of Africa. There are small sections of the continent that are considered to be in the mild zone. These areas are mostly along the Mediterranean Sea and some sections of sub-Saharan Africa. The remainder of Africa is mostly savanna, or grasslands.

There are several major rivers that cross Africa. The Nile River is located in the northeast section of the continent. The Zambezi River runs through the area just north of the Kalahari Desert. The Congo River runs from the rainforest of western Africa into the Atlantic Ocean. The Niger River runs through far western Africa, south of the Sahara, and also empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

The Bantu

The homeland of the Bantu-speaking peoples is somewhere near the modern-day countries of Cameroon and Nigeria. The Bantu are not an ethnic group. Ethnic groups share a common culture. Rather, the Bantu are a group of people who share a common language. The term “Bantu” means “people” in many African languages. There are more than 300 Bantu languages used in Africa today, by more than 240 million Africans. Swahili is one of the languages that came from the Bantu, and is mostly spoken along the east coast of Africa. The word “Swahili” means “the coast.” Swahili remains the second most spoken language in Africa after Arabic.

The Bantu speakers were farmers. They grew crops along the Niger River. The Bantu speakers were subsistence farmers. Using a technique known as slash-and-burn farming, in which farmers would cut down trees and burn them to create open land. This open land was used for growing crops. After a few years, however, the land loses its ability to support crops. When this happens, the farmers move on to find more land for cultivating.

They were also skilled metalworkers. Once iron-making was discovered, the Bantu were able to make many of the farming tools they needed. Iron axes and hoes allowed the Bantu to cut down trees and to farm the land. The Bantu also created metal pieces from copper and bronze.

As early as 1000 B.C., the Bantu speakers began moving south into the Congo River basin. The land along the Congo River was rich enough to support farming, and the sunlight that came through the trees supported their crops. As the Bantu moved, they incorporated the customs and ways of life of the people they encountered.

Sometime around 500 B.C., the Bantu speakers began moving eastward. As they left the rivers of the tropical rain forest, they entered the savanna. At this point, they began to herd cattle and raise sheep and goats. Their movement continued across the continent until they slowly moved into modern-day Kenya and Tanzania. By 400 B.C., the Bantu speakers began moving south into sub-Saharan Africa. This pattern of migration continued until 1200. During the span of 2000 years, the Bantu had spread across most of southern Africa. They migrated to the modern-day countries of: Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and many others.

As the Bantu migrated, trade routes began to develop. Traders from Asia brought new ideas and crops to Africa. Crops that had originally been grown in Southeast Asia, such as bananas and yams, were now being grown in Africa.

Cultural expression was an important part of life for the Bantu speakers. Masks, stone reliefs, and carvings are common. Groups such as the Kuba created beautiful masks, while the Ndop people are known for their carvings. Other groups such as the Luba also created masks and other artistic pieces.

Many Bantu kingdoms were established during the 4000 years of migration, including the: Xhosa, Zulu, Swazi, Kuba, Kongo, Lunda, Lusa, Kitwara, Zanj, Monomotapa, Changamire, Alur, and Toro. Today there are many groups that can trace their heritage back to the Bantu-speaking people.

MAP 1: Africa's Geography



African Mask 3000 b.c.–1100 a.d.

Art in History's replica is an example of an African Kuba mask. Masks have been an important part of African society for thousands of years. African masks are spiritual symbols that have ritual, social, and artistic functions in the community. They are used during ceremonies, celebrations, initiations, crop harvests, marriages, war preparations, hunting, funerals, and burials.

Masks were usually worn by a chosen or initiated dancer of the community or village. They represent certain deities, spirits of ancestors, mythological beings, and animal spirits. It was believed that a mask transformed the wearer into the entity it represents. The ceremonies served as a supernatural means of communication between past and present, humans and nature.

There is an enormous variety of masks created in Africa. These masks are always featured as part of an entire costume, with a garment made of cloth and other materials. Most African masks are carved from wood, but can also be made of leather, fabric, and clay. The surface is colorfully painted with various designs. African masks are produced by skilled sculptors with a variety of tools. The tradition of creating masks is passed down within a family through many generations. Artists are highly respected in society. Their work embodies complex craft techniques, and a detailed knowledge of spiritual and social symbols.

Art in History's replica resembles a mask made by the Kuba people. The Kuba were well-known for their carved wooden masks. The most common pattern on their masks is made from repeating triangles. The masks are richly decorated with cowry shells, beads, string, bone, hair, metal, and fabric. The cowry shell was the currency of the Kuba people. Rows of cowry shells are attached to the masks. The shells represent divinity and wealth. Colored beads are often applied to the eyebrows, and sometimes a beaded band covers the nose and mouth. The diagonal lines below the eyes may represent tears, for when the mask is worn during a funeral or burial.

Rituals and ceremonies are an integral part of African life. Although mask ceremonies are less common in modern-day Africa, African masks are among the finest creations in the art world. They are valued by collectors and featured in many museums and art galleries. They can be found at Bayly Museum, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, and the Art Institute in Chicago. More information about African masks can be found in libraries and on line.

SAMPLE DIAGRAMS



Finished Examples



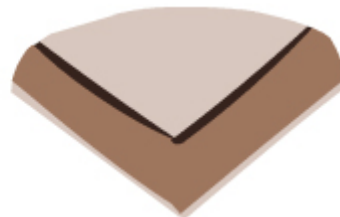
Finished Examples



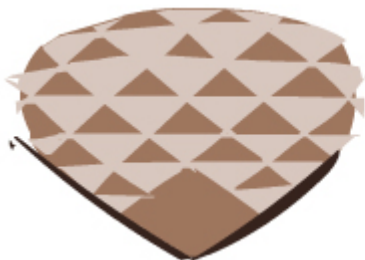
Finished Examples



A, B
Eyebrows



A, C
Forehead



A, C
Forehead



A, C
Forehead



A, C

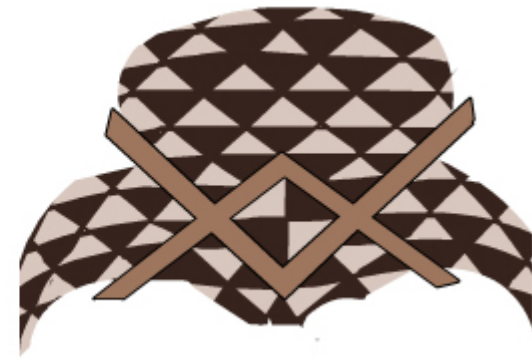


A, C

Forehead



A, C



A, C

Forehead



A, D

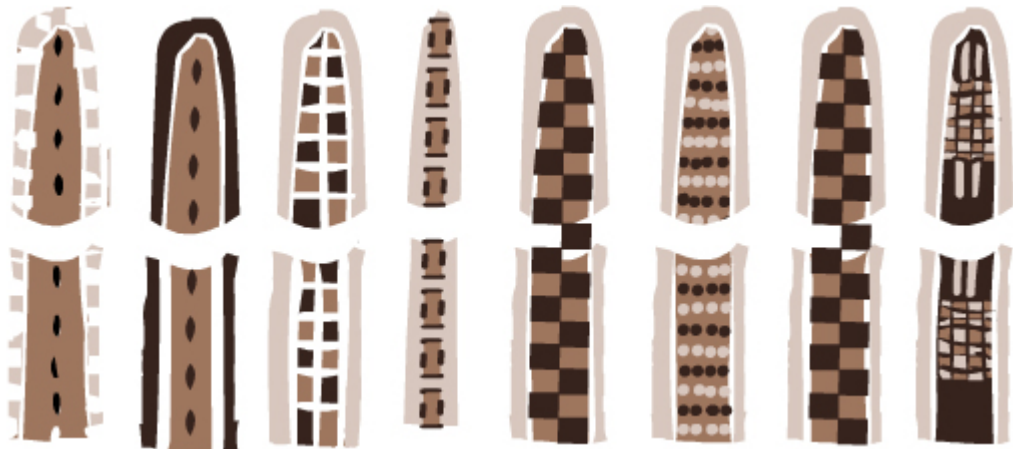


Mouth



A, D





A, D

A, D

Nose



A, E



A, E

Headdress



A, F



A, F

Face



A, F



Face



A, F



A, F



Face



A, F



A, F



Face



A, F



A, F

Face



A, F



Diagram and Motif Codes

A. The masks are decorated with a pattern of geometric triangles, which may represent the family and domestic life of the Kuba. They are decorated with colorful beads, cowry shells, and animal skins to indicate high rank and royal status. The masks are worn with costumes made from cloth, cowry shells, beadwork, feathers, and raffia. All designs have symbolic and iconographic meaning.

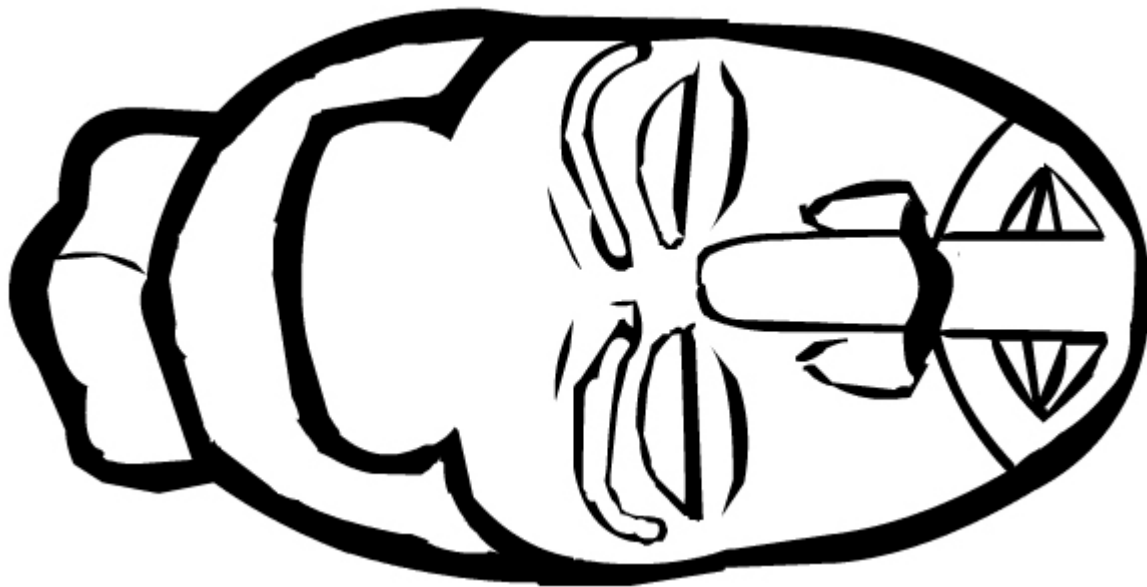
B. The eyebrows are usually decorated with beads to indicate wealth and status.

C. On the forehead is the characteristic triangle pattern which may represent the family and domestic life of the Kuba. It may also be associated with the scales of the pangolin (scaled anteater).

D. The mouth and nose are covered by a strip of fabric, a feature typically found on royal masks, and usually decorated by beads, cowry shells, or a combination of both.

E. Rows of cowry shells are attached to the masks. The cowry shell was the currency of the Kuba people. The shells represent divinity, wealth, high rank and royal status.

F. Lines painted down the cheeks may represent tears and recall the pain of death. The vertical lines below the eyes may also represent tears of joy and pain associated with being the queen mother.



STEP-BY-STEP PAINTING DIRECTIONS

(students can work in small groups)

I. APPLY THE BASE COLOR

1. Shake up the colored stains. Pour a small amount of **LIGHT BROWN** stain onto the palette. Use the sponge to give the mask a *light* coat of **LIGHT BROWN** stain so the piece is uniform in color. Allow this base coat to dry a few minutes before moving on. *NOTE: It is better to apply two lighter coats than heavier applications. If too much stain is used, the pottery will take longer to dry.*
2. When the mask is dry, students may write their name on the inside.

II. PENCIL SKETCH DESIGNS ON THE MASK

1. Using a pencil and paper, students should draw their designs. Next, they may begin drawing their designs onto the replica. *NOTE: Remind students before they begin drawing to SKETCH LIGHTLY on their pottery. Pencil lines are easily erased as long as they are lightly drawn. Pencil lines will be a map, or guide, for applying the stains. Designs should be checked for accuracy before any painting begins.*
2. Have the class practice using their brushes by painting thin lines on paper before they actually begin painting on their piece. This should ensure the desired results. Remember, if students create an area that must be re-done, the paint may be removed quickly before it has dried.

III. PAINT ON THE MASK

After students have finished sketching designs on their mask, they are ready to paint.

NOTE: To create a thin paint line dip brush in water first then in paint. This will liquefy resulting in a more fluid flow of paint.

1. Use the paintbrush and **BURNT UMBER** stain to paint the drawn motifs. Students may also use the **LIGHT BROWN** and **IVORY** stain to paint additional motifs. Allow a few minutes for the replica to dry.
2. Add finishing touches and apply additional **LIGHT BROWN**, **BURNT UMBER**, or **IVORY** stains as needed. Allow the mask to dry completely.