

African American Voices Lesson Plans

Lesson Plans: West African Wisdom:
Adinkra Symbols and Their Meanings

Subject: Art

Grade: Third

NGSSS: **SS.3.A.1.2- Utilize technology resources to gather information from primary and secondary sources.**



*“Sankofa”
“Go Back and Get It”*

Description/

Abstract of Lesson: The students will identify symbols and their meanings as it relates to the Adinkra people in West Africa. Students will design their own symbols as it relates to their own personal characteristics, talents and goals.

Objectives: Students will:

- Identify geographical location of Ghana, West Africa on map.
- Learn about the culture of the Ashanti people of Ghana.
- Study the definition of a symbol.
- Read and study Adinkra symbols.
- Create imitation metal repousse bracelets (with newspaper and tinfoil) using Adinkra symbol and other designs.

Materials:

- World Map
- 3"x 5" tooling foil
- wooden stylus
- newspaper pad
- Adinkra symbol templates
- Adinkra symbol/Ashanti design visuals
- 5"x 7" cover weight paper

- hot glue
- marker

Duration: One Day

**Lesson Lead In/
Opening:**

1. Display a map of the world to the students. Show them the continent of Africa. Explain how many of the ancestors of Blacks in the Americas/African Americans are from West Africa. Show the students where West Africa is located.

2. Review **VOCABULARY** for the lesson with the students:

Africa

Ghana

Ashanti

Adinkra

Symbol

Metal Repousse

3. Explain to students that they will be traveling to West Africa and that they are going to make some art like the Ashanti people make.

4. Show the students where Ghana is located in West Africa. Explain how the Ashanti people live there.

5. Show pictures of how the Ashanti people live. Pictures are available at the following website:

http://www.ashanti.com.au/pb/wp_8078438f.html?0.5926356974806681#Culture%20of%20the%20Ashanti%20People

6. Discuss with the students the type of designs that are found in the Ashanti's clothing and how they have different meanings. Explain that Adinkra symbols are commonly found on many things that they produce, including their clothing.

7. Explain to the students that just as the Ashanti use symbols in their way of life, so do we. Have a student read the definition for "symbol" and ask the students to give examples. (i.e. a cross meaning church, a circle with a slash through it meaning "not" or

"no", a plus sign for addition or minus sign for subtraction, etc.) Explain to the students that the Adinkra symbols used by the Ashanti people also have meanings.

8. Show the Adinkra symbols to the students (either on a smart board or overhead projector) and go over their meanings. The Adinkra symbols and their meanings can be found at the following website:

http://www.welltempered.net/adinkra/htmls/adinkra_index.htm

Activity:

1. Provide a chart to the students that displays the different Adinkra symbols, their names, pronunciations and meanings. Give students a few minutes to look at a few of the Adinkra symbols and what they mean.

2. Explain to the students that they are going to use an Adinkra symbol as a part of their design today in art.

Explain the following:

“There is a lot of gold in Africa. In Ghana, gold is used for money. It is shaped and formed into small bars called gold weights and decorated with beautiful designs. We are going to use metal foil that looks like gold on one side. The technique we are using is called metal repousse. Repousse is a French word for designing in relief by pushing the metal from both sides.”

3. Place the art material at the students’ work stations: 3"x 5" tooling foil, wooden stylus, newspaper pad, Adinkra symbol templates, 5"x 7" cover weight paper.

4. Follow these instructions (BE SURE TO DEMONSTRATE THE STEPS FIRST BEFORE HAVING THE STUDENTS INITIATE THEM THEMSELVES):

- First, in order to make the Repousse, we first going to need some padding underneath the foil. Use a whole newspaper (DO NOT CUT IT, DIVIDE IT OR TAKE IT APART!) Have the students put the newspaper under the foil.
- Next have the students choose an Adinkra symbol that best represents them. Have them place the Adinkra template on top of the foil. Have them trace the symbol using the wooden stylus. It will show from both sides of the foil. Whatever is drawn on the gold side pushes or bumps out on

the silver side. Whatever is drawn on the silver side bumps out on the gold side. Be sure to have them push from both sides.

- Have the students decorate inside and around the Adinkra symbol. For example: They can draw straight, wavy or zigzag lines, dots, dashes, spirals, X's, etc. After drawing the lines push from the other side between the lines. Have them make their design symmetrical. Have them draw shapes on one side and repeat them on the other side. After drawing the shapes have them push them out on the other side. Tell the students not to make too many shapes, or their design will look junky.
- **DON'T HAVE THEM USE ANY WORDS OR LETTERS IN THEIR DESIGNS. DON'T HAVE THEM FORCE THE FOIL.** If it bunches up or wrinkles, have them skip over it. Push out the foil lightly a little bit at a time. Try to smooth out the stroke lines by using very light pressure in different directions.
- Allow students to work independently for some time, then walk around the room and give assistance, suggestions, and encouraging comments.
- Take the students' work and hot glue their repousse to heavy weight paper. Have students use the red marker to write their name on the back as well as the name of the symbol and its meaning on the back too. You can also note that the art is from the Ashanti people of Ghana in West Africa. Do not use the marker anywhere else, only on the back of the frame.

Assessment:

Evaluate projects based on creativity, neatness and how well instructions were followed.

Additional Assignments:

- Location identification quiz on where Ghana is located.
- Quiz on how to read a compass on a map (i.e. Presenting a map of Africa and determining where West Africa is located).
- Vocabulary Quiz using terms in the lesson.

Suggested Books In Lesson:

Willis, W. Bruce (1998) The Adinkra dictionary: A visual primer on the language of Adinkra, Pyramid Complex

Robinson, Mimi (1998) West African Adinkra Symbols, Chronicle Books