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Rites of Passage: Initiation Masks in French Speaking Black Africa

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by Radouane Nasry

Introduction

African art is more "conceptual" than perceptual. It usually conveys ideas rather than describes the visible world. This is why a mask is often a composite, combining aspects of several things, animals for instance, but not resembling any specific thing. African masks can represent ancestors, spiritual figures, and/or mythological characters. To wear a mask and its associated costume is to conceal one's own identity in the guise of another. Whether this other is an ancestor, a spirit or anything else, the ceremony marks a time of transition for its wearer since he or she takes on the identity of the mask. Masks are worn either as facemasks to cover the face or as helmets to partially cover the head or as crests to rest upon the head. Masks are made of many different materials of which wood is the most common.

This unit is designed to introduce middle school or high school students to aspects of African cultures through the study of masks in the initiation ceremonies, namely in French speaking black Africa. The unit can be used in French classes levels 3, 4, or 5, African literature, Art history class, African American literature or World History class. The time needed to teach this unit is between three to five weeks, depending on the constraints of the curriculum.

The African mask is not an accessory made for theatrical purposes. The name of the mask also refers to the name of the dance that it performs. In Africa, the "mask" incorporates four different inseparable components: it is not only the sculpted object, usually from wood, that is commonly called "mask", but it is also the man wearing it, the costume worn by this man and the spirit or ancestor represented. Furthermore, the "mask" refers to the performed dance itself. In the African belief, the mask is a sacred being, a spirit that uses the body of a man to manifest itself.

In order to fully understand African masks, one needs to study African belief systems. There are several ways of viewing the world that shape the making of masks. One is syncretism, the "reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief especially with partial success or heterogeneous result" (The American Heritage Dictionary). For example, Islam has been in Black Africa since the ninth century. It does not permit any kind of personification, yet the African carver has managed to reconcile this view with the tradition of mask making. One of the characteristics of African masks is abstraction. The fact that the carver could not reproduce images may have led to this characteristic.

Another important belief that shapes African thinking is totemism. A totem is "an animal, plant or natural object serving among certain tribal or traditional peoples as the emblem of a clan or family and sometimes revered as its founder, ancestor or guardian" (idem). Masks often play a central role in totemic rituals.

A third aspect that influences the creation of masks is the African concept of the origin of the universe. These different aspects are apparent in the different types of African masks.

Ideological Masks:

African cultures are holistic. They tend toward inclusion and unity rather than elitism. African art demonstrates this characteristic, as it tends to express harmony, unity and balance. Its main objective is to unify the community. Central to African thought is the idea of fusion and oneness with Nature. There is a sense of infinite unity with the cosmic order via the nyama, a vital force that is close to our concept of the soul. The nyama is immortal and is the animating principal of life. Unlike the soul, which is indivisible, the nyama is transmissible in whole or in part and can go from a human being to a plant, from an animal to a human being or vice versa. It is part of the Universal Energy, which links everything: man, animal, minerals, and plants. A person can lose nyama by bleeding for example, or gain nyama by eating. Masks can be the dwelling place of the spirit and invisible forces such as the nyama. When wearing a mask, a person augments his/her nyama.

Cosmogonic Masks:

Cosmogony is a specific theory or model of the origin and evolution of the universe. Cosmogonic rituals often include the reenactment of primordial events. These rituals give information about, for example, the ethnic group's origin and genealogy. They help participants and audience alike to connect to a higher cosmic order. They also include mythological teachings, which help mold the individual's pattern of thinking to that of the communal consciousness.

Myth played an active part in the African's everyday life. They were a vital social force. They not only supplied accounts of the tribe's origin but, (...) related precedents to present-day beliefs, actions and codes of behavior. It was taken for granted that beliefs and practices had existed unchanged since their adoption. Thus the reference to a precedent codified and sanctified the beliefs and placed them beyond question or change. (Segy, 1969, 25)

Masks play a central part in many rituals and often represent supernatural forces that determine the destiny of the community.

Fertility rite:

For the African, the earth is sacred and belongs to the ancestors. The earth is female, a life giver, the Mother Earth. If there is a disruption in any normal cycle such as the rain cycle or the absence of fertility in a woman, this means that the gods must be angry and should be appeased. Rites are performed to obtain harmony. Within these rites, masks are used to help restore normalcy.

Rites of passage:

Masks are used in various initiation ceremonies. These initiation ceremonies, also called rites of passage, have played an important role in African societies for centuries.

Secret societies are common in Africa as a whole. All have an underlying goal of carrying on tradition and maintaining order in the community. In general, life is viewed as a series of transitions and each transition calls for its own set of rites and rituals. One of the most important transitions is that from childhood to manhood or womanhood. A vehicle that is used through out these brotherhoods is that of initiation. It is usually associated with the most dramatic rites, for this is a crucial moment. At this point, a youth who is successful in his/her initiation becomes a full member of the community, contributing to its well-being. Secrecy is of the utmost importance in the initiation process, to learn the secrets is to become a member of a closed group.

The purpose of secrecy sometimes is to keep the magic power from the hands of unbelievers or enemies who might use it for sorcery, but in many other cases it is intended to make those who are excluded believe that the initiates have superior power. (Bettelheim, 1954, 228).

Outside the village, in an isolated place (called the bush), the adolescent, together with others of his age group, undergoes seclusion, the duration of which is different in each tribe. There, in the presence of the mask, they undergo tests designed to measure their physical and moral maturity and are given instructions that progressively reveal the knowledge of the universe.

The initiate must submit to tests of endurance, courage and intelligence. Later in the course of the masked dances, the meaning of the great imitation is recalled: the adolescent must suffer the death of his former state in order to be born into the state of adulthood. This rite of passage is a symbolic rebirth in the group with a new name and a new identity. This process has two main consequences: First, it has social significance that is expressed by the youth's consent to pass to the next generation, to accept and live by the ancestral law and customs of his tribe which constitute the base of an integrated, communal society. In a sense, it is tradition perpetuating itself. The second, perhaps more fundamental as far as the symbolic rebirth is concerned, resides in the fact that at an early age, the adolescent, or should I say the newly born adult, is conditioned emotionally to join a spiritual realm beyond his existence.

The initiate felt that, by following tribal laws, he would be spared agonizing personal decisions. He had no need to

revolt against accepted customs, which had been established by sacred ancestors, and had sacred and infallible meaning. He felt part of a community in direct contact with supernatural forces. As a member, he, too, could enter into the world of spirits." (Segy, 1953, 73).

Objectives:

As a teacher of both French and African literature, I sought a field of study that I would be able to discuss in both of my classes. So, I decided to work on the use of masks in the initiation ceremonies in French speaking black Africa. Based on the above, my objectives are:

To learn about culture in French speaking Africa through the use of African Art, especially the masks.

To learn about initiation rites in black Africa.

To establish parallels between initiation rites in Africa and the stages we go through socially and religiously.

To analyze several African masks.

To have the students create their own masks.

When describing the masks, my students and I will follow the methodology advocated by professor Jules David Prown. I will introduce the methodology of object analysis later in this paper (refer to unit activities).

Background information: The African mask is not ...

The African mask is not conceived as a work of art (artistic object). Susan Vogel, while describing how her Baule friends react to the objects that are important to them, says : "Art cannot be described from a Baule point of view at all, simply because their view does not include 'art' in the western sense of the word" (Vogel, 1997, 17). The mask is conceived to trigger among its audience, depending on the cases, a feeling of respect, fear, terror, courage, etc.

Usually we use our own culture's esthetics to judge whether or not art is beautiful. Specifically, when we encounter an African mask, we look at it in our habitual manner. For example, we would describe a Baule mask as being nice/beautiful because its lines and style go with our sense of "esthetic" beauty. On the other hand, we would describe a Dan mask as being ugly, because it expresses a deformed vision of the human face. In fact, African carvers have been considered a "founding stone" of expressionism and modern art. When

contemplating certain masks like the Bomileke of Cameroon, we automatically think: "This is Picasso." In reality, it was Picasso who was influenced by African art.

The African mask is not an inert object, which is the case of the ones that are displayed in museums like pinned butterflies in glass cases. In its African context, the mask is alive. It is a part of a whole, a costume and headdress worn by a lively and energetic man who speaks and dances and performs astonishing acrobatic movements. This man/wearer is surrounded by his interpreter, singers, musicians and others performing in front of a big audience in a magical / extraordinary ambience of mysticism, trance

The mask does not participate in acts of witchcraft, except in the case of some individuals who try to use the power of a mask in such acts. On the contrary, the mask is an instrument of social harmony. Some masks are even used specifically to uncover the deeds of witches.

The African mask is not a thing of the past. We may think that modern civilization would affect this ancestral custom. On the contrary, we witness an expansion of the mask in some countries. In the case of the Ivory Coast, the two main places of origin of masks are the south west (the We and Dan people) and the north (the Senufo people). Over the centuries, the custom of the mask reached the neighboring peoples (Bété, Guro and Baule). Reciprocal influences were many, to the point that we don't know whether some Guro masks are of Baule influence or vice-versa. For the "Bété" people, the mask is only about 45/50 years. It started more as an artistic way of expression than a religious one.

The mask: Definition

To define this complex concept, which is the mask, we can say that it is a religious, social, and political institution.

Religious

The masks are spirits sent by the African man to insure the mediation between God, the ancestors and the African. The masks are called upon in cases of major difficulties (illnesses, natural disasters, bad crops ...). They appear in the rites of passage such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. There is hardly any ceremony without the presence of the masks.

Social

The masks keep the good harmony of the community in the villages. They keep youngsters from going astray. They punish the guilty. They insure the continuity of knowledge of the secrets of nature, of tradition and of history. They are the active memory of the people. They are called upon in important moments of the year (harvest feasts for example). Some masks have the function of amusing the people in the village. For example, the Dan peoples of Liberia and the Ivory Coast have a mask named Kaogle. Its function is "the provision of rowdy entertainment which 'heats up' the public and spurs them to wild behavior." (Fischer and Himmelheber, 1984, 67). It is these secular masks that appear in the shows organized for tourists and foreigners.

Political

In some regions, mainly in the west of the Ivory Coast, the masks intervene in all the vital decisions made by the community: war and peace, order and justice, even in matters of the environment with some masks that prohibit the waste of natural resources from the forest. For example, the Dan have a mask named Zakpei. This mask appears only during the dry season. The houses of the villages were made of fiber and could easily catch fire. During the dry season, the wind can be much stronger and thus the houses were especially susceptible to fire. The masks search the village for cooking fires, overturn pots, and severely punish disobedient women. Since the houses in the lower plains are now built with corrugated iron and only a few villages maintain fiber roofed houses, the Zakpei mask is fading into history. Each mask has a specific function: the mask judge, the mask of wisdom, the mask of entertainment. In the frame of the law that regulates the masks, when the mask speaks, none goes against him. His decisions are without appeal.

Unit activities

As an introduction to the unit about masks we are going to study the poem "Prayer to Masks" by Léopold Sédar Senghor. (Rosenberg, 1997, 340). This poem reflects themes that will be discussed in the unit such as totems, the spirit of the ancestors, and their role in traditional African life.

Prayer to Masks

Léopold Sédar Senghor

Masks! Masks!

Black mask red mask, you white-and-black masks

Masks of the four points from which the Spirit blows

In silence I salute you!

Nor you the least, the Lion-headed Ancestor

You guard this place forbidden to all laughter of women, to all smiles that fade

You distil this air of eternity in which I breathe the air of my Fathers.

Masks of unmasked faces, stripped of the marks of illness and the lines of age

You who have fashioned this portrait, this my face bent over the altar of white paper

In your own image, hear me!

The Africa of the empires is dying, see, the agony of a pitiful princess

And Europe too where we are joined at the navel.

Fix your unchanging eyes upon your children, who are given orders

Who give away their lives like the poor their last clothes.

Let us report present at the rebirth of the World

Like the yeast which white flour needs.

For who would teach rhythm to a dead world of machines and guns?

Who would give the cry of joy to wake the dead and the bereaved at dawn?

Say, who would give back the memory of life to the man whose hopes are smashed?

They call us men of coffee cotton oil

They call us men of death.

We are the men of the dance, whose feet draw new strength pounding the hardened earth.

The following questions will be used in our discussion to help understand the poem:

Why is the speaker calling upon the masks?

What does the poem indicate about the traditional relationship between the living and the dead?

What themes are found in the poem?

The second activity is designed to introduce students to various elements of African art. I think it is worthwhile to expose the students to African art in a general manner before having them work with masks alone. This activity will give the students a feel of what they will be doing in the third activity, which is the application of the methodology of object analysis. Student will work in mixed-ability pairs and receive a certain number of laminated pictures, each of which contains an image of a piece of African art, be it a mask, a sculpture or an object. (For laminated picture reference see Materials for classroom use). The pairs carefully examine each picture, draw/sketch and describe the art piece, determine the material used to create it, and guess its purpose or function. A detail of the activity is as follows:

First, I will review the elements of African art with the students. They will write down the following key details in their notebooks.

Elements of African art:

Not made to be viewed in museums.

Served a variety of purposes: religious, social and political.

Symbolic, thus parts of some human figures are exaggerated.

Works are often attributed to specific cultures instead of individual artists.

Usually takes the form of sculptures of both humans and animals or functional items such as pottery.

Then, the next step is to give the students a series of questions to help them analyze a piece of African art. I will use a slide of a headdress mask, ChiWara/Tyi Wara. (For slide reference see Materials for classroom use). Among the questions I will ask my students are:

What do you see?

A carved figure with animal forms including horns, might be an antelope.

How big is the mask?

Approximately 40 inches.

What material is used?

Wood, metal, beads, fiber.

How realistic or true to nature is the mask?

The mask embodies both an antelope and an aardvark.

What makes it not realistic?

It is a composite form of more than one animal.

What is the emotional feeling you get from the mask?

Energy and contained power.

What are the possible meanings and / or purposes of the mask?

The mask represents the mythological hero of the Bamana, called TyiWara, usually half human, half beast, who helped the Bamana how to farm.

How might this mask be used?

Headdress fastened on a cap, worn on the top of the head, used in ceremonies and feasts during the planting and harvesting seasons by farmers who belong to the Tyi Wara society.

Once the students understand what I expect from them, I will distribute a student handout (see sample of handout on the next page).

I will explain to the students that for each laminated picture they will receive, they are to examine the piece and complete the corresponding section of the handout. The students will first draw a simple sketch of the piece in the laminated picture, describe what they see, then list the materials used to make it and guess the purpose and / or the functions. I will write on the board a series of examples of the functions of African art such as:

To promote health and/or well-being in community,
To give knowledge about one's responsibility in society,
To commemorate important people or ceremonies,

To maintain relationships with ancestors,
To communicate between humans and the spirit world,
To commemorate mythical events or figures,
To be used in initiation ceremony,
To be used for fertility of land and people.

I will focus on the fact that "art" in Africa serves many purposes and that sometimes an outsider would not always understand the function/meanings of a piece. I will encourage my students to guess even if they find it hard to understand the meaning of a piece of art. It is a way to develop their critical thinking.

Then, I will distribute the laminated pictures so that each pair of students has a different picture. Following the same procedure used for studying the slide of the headdress mask, the students will analyze the picture in front of them. Every time that the students are done with a picture, they will exchange pictures until they have worked on each one. Toward the end of the activity, I will tell the pairs that the picture on which they are currently working will be the one they will present to the rest of the class.

Sample of Student Handout

(figure available in printed form)

Object Analysis

The students will be introduced to the methodology of object analysis, which is carried out in three stages. Description, the first stage, is where the viewer begins with a substantial analysis that includes the physical dimensions, the materials used, and the articulation. The person also examines iconography, inscriptions or engravings. This first stage ends with "formal analysis" where the viewer describes the two-dimensional and three-dimensional organizations, including color, light and texture.

The second stage is deduction, where the viewer interacts physically, intellectually, and emotionally with the object.

The final stage is speculation. Based on the information in the first two stages, the observer formulates hypotheses, and then develops a program that validates the investigation of questions posed by the material

evidence.

One can appreciate a mask even without knowing everything about its meaning. But when one tries to figure out how the mask was used and why, one can only increase one's appreciation of the mask and, by extension, better understand the cultural tradition of the people who made it.

It is in this perspective that I thought the methodology of object analysis, or more properly an adaptation of it would be most useful, especially the first step, description.

As a teacher of French, levels 3, 4, and 5, I conduct my classes mostly in French. Thus the description will be very enriching for my students as far as vocabulary is concerned. There are areas that we don't usually refer to, or talk about, such as the two-dimensional and three-dimensional organizations/properties. It is true we use horizontal and vertical lines when we play crossword puzzles, but we don't get to use the geometrical shapes: triangle/triangular, rectangle/rectangular, circle/circular, angle/angular/ square, pyramidal, cylindrical...

To better serve our purposes in the comfort of the classroom, I am going to introduce an adapted version of the object analysis methodology. It is going to be done twofold: description and what I am going to call constructive speculation where I bring together both deduction and speculation.

In order to remain faithful to my objectives, the masks we are going to start with in the frame of object analysis are two initiation masks from French speaking Africa.

The first mask is by the Yaka people of the Congo. It is a male initiation mask (N'Kanda). This N'Kanda mask is a hand-held mask with a full raffia fiber cap surrounding it. It is oval with deep eye sockets, protruding eyelids and a thick upturned nose. The mouth is open, showing teeth. There are spaces between the teeth and one or two teeth are missing from the upper row. The mask is surrounded with a thick, dark rim. Above the mask is a mound of stuffed raffia cloth with a lizard draped over the top, the head extended forward looking toward the person viewing the mask. There are long thin curved protrusions extending upward and a fifth one hangs on the right. Horizontal lines are visible between the upper and lower teeth, as well as the upper and lower lips, and the opening of the eyelids. There are strong vertical lines in the raffia and in the protrusions on top of the mask. Also there are vertical lines between the teeth and both sides of the mouth. There are triangles painted all around the inside rim of the mask. The head of the lizard is also triangular, and so is the space between the second and third stick starting from the left. The mouth is rectangular. Curved lines are present on the raffia on the tip of the nose, the eyelids, the back of the lizard, and the sticks on top of the mask.

Brightest spot is the forehead. The colors of the raffia are blue and white. The materials used are wood, pigments woven raffia cloth, and raffia fiber.

Deduction/Speculation

The rim with triangles indicates a hope for a brighter future. The lizard is there to protect the initiates. The stick points upward to create a connection with a greater being, a divine ancestor. The raffia cloak increases protection. The teeth are clenched to ward off evil spirits. The eyes are closed to avoid visual contact with these same evil spirits. The raffia pointing down and the sticks pointing up suggests a link between mother earth and the divine. Along with the nose, the sticks are also phallic symbols, the one pointing down representing the ancestors and the ones pointing up representing the new initiates.

The initiates in front of the mask feel the strength and the power of the dance. They sense the protection of the lizard's gaze and are aware of the connection between themselves, the ancestors, the sick pointing down (sticks we don't see) and the ones reaching up. The sticks are the horns of the antelope and they are chosen here for fertility. The horn of the antelope represents the planted grain sprouting through the earth.

The second mask that we are going to analyze is made by the Songye people of former Zaire, the Democratic Republic of Congo. This twelve-inch mask is carved out of hard wood. There are bulging eyes, a protruding nose, a mouth that sticks out from the face. The forehead is a dome like shape whereas the lower half of the face is concave. The face is wider at the forehead and tapers down toward the base of the neck/chin. The eyes are partially open. The mouth is open with no visible teeth. The top of the lower lid is carved in a zigzag pattern. The bridge of the nose extends upwards between the eyes across the forehead to the top of the skull. There are visible holes evenly spaced at the level of the neck.

The entire mask is covered with carved diagonals and curved lines. The horizontal lines consist of the base of the eyelid and the top and bottom of the mouth. The nose creates a strong vertical line as do the sides of the mouth. The diagonally carved lines are

defined by strong vertical boundaries. The nose is a triangle as well as its left side. The four sides of the protruding mouth as well as the lips form rectangles. There is a curved line at the base and top edge of the eyelids. The crescent shape is repeated in the curved lines ascending from the eyes to the crown.

The colors are dark brown and white. The lined areas are rough; the nose, the mouth, and the bottom of the mask are smooth.

Deduction/Speculation

The mask could represent a chameleon, but on another level, the crescent shape of the eyes and the curved lines on top of them point to a relationship between the planet and the cosmos. The curved lines may also represent animal stripes.

I briefly mentioned in the introduction the general process of initiation that is common to many African cultures. The basic idea is that the initiate/adolescent dies a symbolic spiritual death. "The symbolism is expressed sometimes in a terrifying monster that swallows up the boys. After this 'death' the boys led by their mentors pass through the supernatural world of mythology. They experience this perilous journey through privation, humiliation and fear." (Wassing, 1988, 70) The moment he emerges from those tests the adolescent is symbolically reborn. The process is a transition from the relatively ignorant and irresponsible state of childhood to the state of responsible adulthood with all its secrets, responsibilities, privileges, and expectations. These secrets and responsibilities are taught by the masks who, during the initiation, become the ancestors themselves or become spirits and demons embodying the powers of nature.

For students to understand the different stages of initiation we are going to try and draw some parallels between initiation in Africa and our lives. So the question to answer is what kind of stages do we go through? As a Muslim, I am going to talk about how, in Islam, we go through circumcision sometime between birth and the age of seven. There is a ceremony that takes place in which the boy who is circumcised wears a traditional dress, usually white and green, two colors commonly used in the Islamic world.

The second major stage in Islam is at puberty when it becomes obligatory for the Muslim to fast the holy month of Ramadan. Up until this point, a child may fast as s/he desires: a day, several days, a week or more.

Once a girl has her first menstruation and a boy his first ejaculation, it is obligatory to fast during the entire month of Ramadan.

Similarly in Judaism, circumcision takes place eight days after birth. A bar mitzvah or bar mizvah, where the community recognizes the person as an adult, takes place at thirteen.

In Catholicism, baptism takes place at birth, first communion at seven and confirmation at puberty.

It is evident that puberty is celebrated as a crucial stage in the human cycle of life. The Africans believe that when a young man or girl reaches puberty he or she starts a new life. This implies individual and social recognition of the paramount importance of the sexual drive. Africans do not repress it, as we do, but acknowledge it and emphasize it at adolescence. (Segy, 1953, 60)

Following our objectives within the process of learning about African cultures through the analysis of their arts, my students and I are going to visit the Yale Art Gallery for a close encounter with the masks. Just before that I will divide them into groups of three or four, depending on the size of the class, and give each group an assignment to research one of the French speaking countries represented in the Yale Art Gallery. They will also find out about the different people living in their assigned country. By doing this, each group will know which mask(s) to focus on as part of our analysis.

Moreover, the students will experience their art first hand and see examples of the masks that we will have analyzed in class. An example of the masks the students will have already encountered is the headdress mask (Chi Wara) of the Bamana, also known as the Bambara, in Mali. As a matter of fact, the Chi Wara mask at the Gallery is a perfect example of the mythological creature of the Bamana that embodies both a human and an animal, the antelope. It is worthwhile to mention that the Chi Wara headdresses are carved pairs, one male and one female. A pair of dancers wear these masks, imitating an antelope that prances and pounds seeds into the soil. It is a dance to honor the Chi Wara and to ensure a successful planting season.

Another example of a mask that the students will have seen is the Kefwebe face mask of the Songye of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a cubistically conceived mask of which the surface is incised and colored in geometric patterns. Besides its use in male circumcision rites as an overseer and protector, the Kifwebe mask is worn by healers during their ritual dances.

Among the masks that I cited and that my students are going to encounter is the Kaogle face mask of the Dan people. The eyes of the Kaogle mask are deep-set triangular apertures. The forehead bulges pronouncedly over the pyramidal shaped cheeks. This mask in the Gallery is one of the best preserved illustrations of Kaogle masks.

The students' task at the Art Gallery is to choose a mask based on research and to analyze it according to our adapted version of Professor Prown's object analysis methodology. The students' analysis of the mask, the presentation they will do in class about their findings, how they link the mask to its cultural context, and whether the mask is or could be used in initiation rites will be the project of the marking period. Numerically speaking, it will be 25% of their grade for the marking period.

The last objective/activity is for my students to create their own masks. I will provide all the necessary material for such an activity: clay, plaster of Paris strips, water bowls or buckets, paper and plastic plates, balloons, wall-paper paste, paint brushes, acrylic paint, scissors, beads, shells, etc. It is up to each student to make his/her mask, whether or not it is a face mask (human or animal) or a helmet mask. This activity will

probably last two or three days to allow the material to dry before applying any paint on it.

How to make a face mask: Form and model clay around a round paper or plastic plate. Eye holes may be cut through the plate or modeled with clay. If extensions such as ears, teeth, wings, hair, etc are desired, model these and add carefully. Wrap the masks with moist paper towels and plastic so that the clay will dry evenly. Let dry.

Apply a thin coat of Vaseline so as to cover the entire clay mask. Moisten pre-cut "Plaster of Paris" strips with water. Drape them directly on to the clay mask, alternating horizontal to vertical 3 to 4 times. Let dry.

Gently remove the paper or plastic plate and clay. (The Vaseline makes this possible). The mask is now a face formed from the clay. Trim any edges with scissors. Paint the mask with acrylic paints.

How to make a helmet mask: Inflate a balloon (13-15 inch diameter). Prepare wall-paper paste for your class 20 minutes beforehand. Dip individual strips of pre-cut newspaper into wall-paper paste mixture. Stir mixture occasionally. Alternately apply layers 1-3. Smooth them as you layer the strips. Leave an opening approximately 4-5 inches in diameter where the balloon is tied.

Add layers 4 and 5. Let dry completely.

Pop the balloon and remove. Paint the type of face desired with acrylics. Cut the eye and neck openings.

Sample Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan I

Objectives

1. The students will be introduced to the notion of the African mask by studying "Prayer to Masks".
2. The students will learn about the culture in French speaking Africa through the use of African Art.

Focus

1. Define the mask in an African context.
2. Use different types of slides to show diversity in African Art.
3. Discuss the importance of the mask in African Art.

Procedure

The students will read and understand the poem "Prayer to Masks" by Léopold Sédar Senghor. I will use either the French or the English version depending on the class I am teaching (French or African Literature). To focus on the use of the mask, the students will answer a series of questions. (See unit activities.) Then the students will do the activity that is meant to familiarize them with African Art. This will help them learn some specific features about African cultures. (Refer to unit activities)

Wrap up

To review the elements of African Art the students encountered, I will hold a discussion centered on the following questions:

What are some of the elements of African Art you discovered in this activity?

What difficulties or challenges did you face while trying to figure out the meaning or function of these pieces of African Art?

What role does art play in your community and how is it different from art in Africa?

Lesson Plan II

Objectives

1. The students will learn about initiation rites in French speaking black Africa.
2. The students will draw parallels between the adolescents in Africa and themselves.

Focus

1. Introduce object analysis methodology.
2. Use slides of two initiation masks from French speaking black Africa as examples for analysis.
3. Talk about stages in life as far as religion is concerned.

Procedure

The students will be introduced to my adapted version of object analysis by leading them through an analysis of an initiation mask from the Republic of Congo. The second step will be for them to try and apply the methodology on another initiation mask from the Democratic Republic of Congo, former Zaire. (Refer to Unit

activities.) Then based on the analysis and the initiation rites that we are going to discuss, the students will talk about any stages they went through or celebrated in their lives.

Wrap up

A discussion will be held where the students are led to the conclusion that the passage from childhood to adulthood, though very different in Africa, can be found in our culture, for example, in different religious ceremonies and acts.

Lesson Plan III

Objectives

1. The students go on a field trip to the Yale Art Gallery.
2. The students will analyze a mask and present it to the class.

Focus

1. Make sure the students do the research on the assigned French speaking black African countries that are represented at the Yale Art Gallery.

Procedure

The fact that the students are assigned to do some research on a specific country in French speaking black Africa is going to define their choice of the mask they will analyze and present in the classroom. After the Art Gallery, I will provide them with a postcard or a picture of the mask they are working on. The students will apply the adapted methodology of object analysis and will present their work to the class as part of their project.

Wrap Up

After the presentations, we will have a discussion tying together the presentations and the research that the students have done.

Lesson Plan IV

Objective

1. The students will create their own masks in class.
2. The students will write a story about their mask.

Focus

Bring material needed for making the masks.

Procedure

(See Unit activities describing how to make a mask)

Students will present their masks and tell the story behind them.

Wrap up

The students will discuss what they liked and did not like about the unit.

Teacher Bibliography

Ayisi, EricO. *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture* . London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979. 125 pages. An excellent introductory volume at a level suitable for students. Good chapters on the Family, Household and Lineage, Sex and Marriage, and Festivals.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *Symbolic Wounds* . Glencoe: Free Press, 1954. Very interesting book concerning initiation rites in Black Africa. Discusses in detail some of the rituals in the initiation process.

Fisher, Eberhard and Himmelheber, Hans. *The Arts of the Dan in West Africa* . Wurich: Museum Rietberg Zurich, 1984. Although the title of this book mentions only the Dan and the Art, it includes examples from other groups in the area. It uses a very interesting classification of the Dan masks.

Gnonsoa, Angele et al. *Masques vivants de Cote d'Ivoire* . Colmar: S.A.E.P., 1985. Clearly defines the African mask of the Ivory Coast as being a tripartite institution: religious, social and political.

Meyer, Laura. *Black Africa* . Paris: Terrail, 1992. Well illustrated. Focus on the influence of religion and magic on traditional African Art. Traces back and explains the origins and reveals the secrets of black African Art. Very little on initiation rites though.

Price, Christine. *Made in West Africa* . New York: E.F. Dutton and Co, 1975. Many different forms of West Africa are featured in this book. Photographs of artwork and sculptures. The art objects are organized in alphabetical order by sculpture names.

Prown, Jules D. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterhur Portfolio* , vol. 17, no 1, Spring 1982, pp 119. This article explains in detail Prown's method for object analysis.

Rosenberg, Donna. *World Literature, An Anthology of Great Short Stories, Drama, and Poetry* . Chicago: NTC Publishing Group, 1997. A very good selection of world literature including selections from Africa (317-439), Latin America, The Far East, Continental Europe, among others.

Segy, Ladislav. *African Sculpture Speaks* . New York: Hill and Wang, 1969. A beautiful book filled with photos of African sculpture. This book gives much detail about the sculpture and where the ideas that inspired them came from.

Segy, Ladislav. *Masks of Black Africa* . New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1976. Very well illustrated, more than 260 photographs. Talks about myths, rituals and dances in Western and Central Africa.

Thompson, Robert Farris. *African Art in Motion* . Los Angeles/Berkely: University of California Press, 1986. An illustrated book that focuses on the History of African Art. It also gives detail information about various regions and how their art was influenced.

Vogel, Susan. *African Art, Western Eyes* . New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. In this catalogue/book, Susan Vogel puts aside our definition of art. She proposes a means for understanding Baule culture from the viewpoint of Baule individuals themselves. She uses their own comments about their every day life and how they interact with their objects.

Wassing, René S. *African Art: Its Background and Traditions* . New York: Portland House, 1988. Establishes an analysis of the various aspects of the African artistic tradition by placing the art within its cultural context.

Willett, Frank. *African Art, An Introduction* . New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971. An illustrated work, which explains standards and use of African art and makes a strong independent argument for West African origins.

Student Bibliography

Ayisi, Eric O. *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture* . London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979. 125 pages. An excellent introductory volume at a level suitable for students. Good chapters on the Family, Household and Lineage, Sex and Marriage, and Festivals.

Finley, Carol. *The Art of African Masks: Exploring Cultural Traditions* . Minneapolis: Learner Publications Company, 1999. A very good introduction to the African mask and how it is made. Discuss the different types of masks and their functions.

Fisher, Eberhard and Himmelheber, Hans. *The Arts of the Dan in West Africa* . Wurich: Museum Rietberg Zurich, 1984. Although the title of this book mentions only the Dan and the Art, it includes examples from other groups in the area. It uses a very interesting classification of the Dan masks.

Price, Christine. *Made in West Africa* . New York: E.F. Dutton and Co, 1975. Many different forms of West Africa are featured in this book. Photographs of artwork and sculptures. The art objects are organized in alphabetical order by sculpture names.

Segy, Ladislav. *Masks of Black Africa* . New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1976. Very well illustrated, more than 260 photographs. Talks about myths, rituals and dances in Western and Central Africa.

Materials for classroom use

Laminated pictures and slides: Teacher's Curriculum Institute, *World History Program: Empires and Kingdoms of Sub-Saharan Africa* , Palo Alto: History Alive, 1997.

Materials for mask making (listed in unit activity).

Overhead projector

Slide projector

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A rite of passage is a ceremony or ritual of the passage which occurs when an individual leaves one group to enter another. It involves a significant change of status in society. In cultural anthropology the term is the Anglicisation of rite de passage, a French term innovated by the ethnographer Arnold van Gennep in his work *Les rites de passage*, "The Rites of Passage". The term is now fully adopted into anthropology as well as into the literature and popular cultures of many modern languages. French Speaking Africans, Nairobi. 580 likes · 2 talking about this. L'Afrique d'abord +254 740 895859. Contact French Speaking Africans on Messenger. Arts & Humanities Website. Hours. Always Open. Page TransparencySee More. Facebook is showing information to help you better understand the purpose of a Page. See actions taken by the people who manage and post content. Rites of passage rituals celebrate the transitions in one's lives. Family and friends gather to bare witness, and impart wisdom, support, love, and strength in these crucial transitions. Most of the rites of passages are closely connected to the biological milestones of life, viz., birth, maturity, marriage/reproduction, and finally death. These rites and religious events prepare the person's transition from one phase of his/her life to another. Rites of passage are ceremonial events that mark the passage from one social status to another. Rites of Passage Examples in Different Cultures. Amish. Would you like to write for us? The significance of initiation rites of all kinds as seen by social scientists is the same as that of other rites of passage. Some emphasis is given to their didactic value and to their significance in sex-role identification. In some historically known societies of Africa, such sham battles between kin of brides and grooms may occur, with full societal approval, for years after a marriage during any kind of religious rite. Like rites at coming-of-age, ceremonies at marriage have often included clearly visible insignia of the new social status, in such forms as wedding rings, distinctive hair dress and garments, and tattoos, ornaments, or other embellishments that are regarded also as being decorative.