

Discovering the Arts

Modern African Art and Artisans

Teacher's Guide



Grade Level: 9–12

Curriculum Focus: Fine Arts

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

Meet modern-day African artisans and explore their works, culture, and the legacy of their art.

Onscreen Questions

- What challenges do African artisans face?
 - How do many African artisans learn their crafts?
 - How is African art functional?
 - What challenges or obstacles are specific to female artisans in Africa?
-

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Explain the difference between artists and artisans.
- Discuss some of the common themes among artisans, such as traditions, materials, process, and inspiration.
- Describe other modern-day African artisans and their work.

Materials

- *Discovering the Arts: Modern African Art and Artisans* video
- Computer with Internet access

Procedures

1. Read the following quote from Derme Morou, the bronze sculptor featured in the video:

“I am both an artist and an artisan. Perhaps I should explain. In our trade, we make things which are useful, and we make things which are purely decorative, things which are just to be looked at, to give pleasure. Since I do both, I am both an artisan and an artist.”
2. Discuss the difference between an artist and an artisan. Make a list of the types of artisans featured in the video: bronze sculptor, potter, blacksmith, leatherworker, weaver. Why are these people considered artisans? Are they artists as well? Why or why not?
3. Next, discuss some of the common themes featured about African artisans in the video:
 - Training: How did these artisans learn their crafts? How are they passing on their crafts to others?
 - Materials: What are some of the materials artisans use? How do they get these materials?
 - Process: How do artisans produce goods? What are some tools that they use? How do they depend on others in the community?
 - Inspiration: How does an artisan feel about his or her craft? Where does an artisan get his or her inspiration?
4. Have students explore different modern-day African craftspeople. The African Crafts Web site lists various artisans along with portfolios of their work. Examples of artisans include weavers, beadmakers, recyclers, plastic crocheters (crochets with plastic bags), ceramists, leatherworkers, cloth dyers, quilters, tie-dyers, stamp carvers, puppeteers, drum makers, and blacksmiths:
 - African Crafts: Craftspeople
<http://www.africancrafts.com/artists.php?sid=99581519365428635668426280519282&type=artisan>
5. Have each student choose an artisan from the Web site and read about his or her work and crafts. Each student should then print out or draw pictures of three of the artisan's works. They should also record important facts about the artisan, such as:
 - Name
 - Country
 - Type of craft
 - Common materials
 - Themes or symbols
 - Process or tools

- Source of inspiration or ideas
 - Training (how the artisan learned the craft, and how he or she is passing it on to others)
6. Set up an “African market” around the classroom. Have students place their craft images on their desks and play the role of the craftspeople. Let students take turns walking through the “market,” asking questions about the different crafts.
 7. When everyone has had a chance to learn about other artisans, have students regroup and discuss what they learned. Ask students to describe some of their favorite craftspeople. Are they artisans, artists, or both? Why?
 8. End the class with a discussion of modern-day artisans in your community. Who are they? What do they create?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students clearly made the distinction between artist and artisan; answered several questions about common themes of artisans in the video; provided a thoughtful, clear description of the artisan they researched, including all of the requested information.
- **2 points:** Students adequately made the distinction between artist and artisan; answered some questions about common themes of artisans in the video; provided a satisfactory description of the artisan they researched, including most of the requested information.
- **1 point:** Students could not make the distinction between artist and artisan; answered few or none of the questions about common themes of artisans in the video; provided a vague or incomplete description of the artisan they researched, including little of the requested information.

Vocabulary

artisan

Definition: Someone who is skilled at a craft

Context: Some artisans teach their crafts to younger generations in order to keep them in the villages.

blacksmith

Definition: Someone who makes and repairs iron and metal objects

Context: Blacksmiths in Africa are highly valued because they create and fix tools.



bush

Definition: A wide, natural area covered with plants, where few people live

Context: A bronze sculptor sometimes gets ideas by going into the bush and watching farmers and animals.

forge

Definition: The place (or actual furnace) where metal is heated and hammered into metal objects

Context: Children brought the wood back to the village, where it was used in fires at the forge.

ore

Definition: A mineral from which a particular metal, such as gold, can be extracted

Context: The blacksmith used to go to the mine to get ore, but today he buys it at market.

Academic Standards

National Art Education Association

The National Art Education Association has developed national guidelines for what students should know and be able to do in the arts. To view the standards online, go to artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards.cfm.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- People, Places, and Environments
- Culture

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Geography: Human Systems – Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics
 - Arts: Art Connections – Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines
 - Career Education: Arts and Communication: Role of Culture – Knows a range of arts and communication works from various historical and cultural periods
-

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How to Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. The Bronze Sculptor (10 min.)

Follow an African bronze sculptor through the process of creating a sculpture to learn how he began his craft and what makes it unique.

II. The Potter (10 min.)

Watch an African potter as he digs for clay and creates beautiful pots in an outdoor kiln. Learn about life for such artisans.

III. The Blacksmith (10 min.)

Blacksmiths in Africa are highly valued because they create and fix tools. Learn about blacksmithing from a long-time African blacksmith.

IV. The Leatherworker (10 min.)

Discover how one African leatherworker helped his village by teaching his craft to local youth.

V. The Weaver (9 min.)

Visit a local African weaver to learn how she acquired her skill, why she continues to weave, and what she likes about her profession.

Curriculum Units

1. Creating Bronze Sculpture

Pre-viewing question

Q: What hobbies or interests do you share with your parents, grandparents, or other family members?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Where do the African sculptors get their bronze?

A: The bronze comes from used car parts, machine parts, and reprocessed pieces from the electrical company. The sculptors make a bronze alloy by mixing the bronze with copper and zinc.



2. Bronze Artist and Artisan

Pre-viewing question

Q: Is there a difference between being an artist and an artisan?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What happens to a bronze sculpture after it is molded?

A: After it is molded, a bronze sculpture is set to cool before workers pour water on it. The right amount of water can help it cool, but too much too soon will make the bronze contract. Once cooled, the mold is broken and the sculpture is ready.

3. African Bush Clay

Pre-viewing question

Q: What have you learned from your parents or other family members?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Where does the African potter get his clay?

A: The potter combines clay from the bush and clay from his village. He digs up bush clay in the morning and evening every day.

4. Making Clay Pots

Pre-viewing question

Q: What objects are often made of clay?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What happens to the pots after they have been fired?

A: After firing the pots, the potter waits until the fire dies down. The next morning, he removes the ashes from the pots, which he cleans and checks for breakage. Then, the acceptable pots are brought to market or sold in the village.

5. African Blacksmithing

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about blacksmithing?

A: Answers will vary.



Post-viewing question

Q: How has blacksmithing in Africa changed over time?

A: Early on, African blacksmiths had to mine the ore they used. They dug deep to find it, then brought it back to the village and heated it until it turned to iron. Blacksmiths no longer have to go the mines and can spend more time working at the forge. They go to the market to buy iron, which comes from recycled machine parts, farm machinery, and other sources.

6. Making a Leather Briefcase

Pre-viewing question

Q: What objects are often made of leather?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Describe how leather is prepared before it is made into an object.

A: It takes almost three days to make an item such as a briefcase. First, the leatherworker buys a tanned goatskin. Then the skin must be oiled and washed in warm water to remove the surface oil. It is ready to be worked with once it has dried.

7. Working with Leather

Pre-viewing question

Q: How would you define success?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What might be the most difficult aspect of working with leather?

A: Answers will vary.

8. A Female Weaver in Africa

Pre-viewing question

Q: What kinds of objects are woven?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What is the African weaver's business strategy?

A: According to the weaver, it is better to weave for advance orders because she will know how much she will be paid for an item. She calculates how much it will cost to make a piece and charges accordingly. If she weaves something that has not been ordered and tries to sell it at the market, she knows she may not make her money back.