

Adinkra Symbols

Lesson plan by Alicia Butler

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Overview: In this lesson, the students will be introduced to the Ghanaian art form called Adinkra. This art form holds significant meanings and symbolism that provide insights into Ghanaian cultures. The students will learn about the history of Adinkra and the significance of its colors and patterns. They will also create a symbol representing their self-expression using ez cut blocks. The students will then print their symbols to create a repetitive design. This lesson also provides an excellent opportunity for the students to incorporate positive and negative space, organic and geometric shapes, and repetition into their art.

Essential Questions:

- What is the cultural significance of Adinkra symbols in Ghanaian history, and how have they been traditionally used in various aspects of life?
- How do artists use symbols to express emotions and ideas, and can you think of examples where symbols play a significant role in conveying a message?
- How does the choice of organic or geometric shapes impact the creation of an Adinkra-inspired symbol that represents each student?
- How does the process of printmaking contribute to the expression of identity, and how can colors be strategically used to enhance the meaning and impact of an Adinkra-inspired print?

Intended Grade Level: 4th-5th Grade

Intended Content Areas: Visual Art

Standard Alignment with NC Standards

Visual Art-

V.1 Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.

V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.

V.3 Create art using various tools, media, and processes safely and appropriately.

CX.1 Understand the visual arts' global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts.

CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.

CR.1 Use critical analysis to generate responses to a variety of prompts.

Social Studies-

5.H.1.6 Explain the significance of national symbols and traditions from various perspectives.

I.1.9 Make inferences from information in sources.

ELA-

RI.4.1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text explicitly states and when drawing inferences from the text.

W.4.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information.

RI.5.1: Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

Materials:

Introductory visuals/ articles/ slides

- [Resource Slides for Classroom Use](#)
- Center 1 Videos
- Center 2 Photos
- Center 3 Symbols
- [See/Think/Wonder Chart](#)
- [Adinkra Symbols](#)
- computer/chrome books

Sketching materials

- [Self Expression/ Adinkra Symbols Project Slides](#)
- Paper
- Pencils
- 11x9 or 12x18 sketch paper

Carving Materials

- [4"x 6" Rubber Carving Blocks](#) cut into 2"x 3" Blocks
- Pencil
- Permanent Markers
- [Linoleum Cutter Tools](#)
- [Bench Hook and Inking Plate](#) (not necessary, but can be helpful for safety)

Printmaking Materials

- Carved rubber block
- Brayers
- Index Cards (for test prints and final prints)
- Palette or Disposable Plates for Ink

- Various paper sizes for printing
- Printing ink (water soluble)
- Pencil for names

Suggested Length of Time: Five 45-minute sessions

Procedures

Day 1- Introduction & Centers

Introduce the Adinkra symbols project in class by briefly stating the project will be creating a personalized symbol inspired by Adinkra symbols that will be printed in a repetitive design. Today, students will do more in-depth research to increase background knowledge about the traditional process of creating Adinkra cloth from the Ashanti people. You can present the Adinkra Intro Slides with the [See/Think/Wonder chart](#) or have students work in centers. If using centers, one center will need access to computer videos.

-Show slides beginning with a map

-Introduce centers and interactive learning structure--[See/Think/Wonder chart](#).

-Students will rotate through 3 centers (6-7 min each). They will use the See/Think/Wonder chart to take notes. Depending on class size, 2 of each center will make group sizes smaller.

Center 1: Videos (also embedded in the slides)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAmJEMsbAU0> Part 2 The Stamps

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHOdSO6Rbb0> Part 1 The Dye Making

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeF3YdHMS0k> Part 3 Textile Printing

Center 2: Photos of symbols - review and add to the see/think/wonder chart

http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_q2pz5Zq4m0c/TJQnOm7_JwI/AAAAAAAAACaA/yRPtBuRT9Pw/s1600/Batiking1.jpg

http://globalmediacenter.ciee.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/28517_Study-Abroad_Ghana.jpg

<http://www.outofboundstours.com/wp-content/media/Ghana-2-1.png>

<https://thesevenworlds.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/a8e3c-1.jpg>

Center 2: Articles or book

<https://smarthistory.org/adinkra-cloth/> or [The Talking Cloth: Mitchell, Rhonda](#) - read and add to the see/think/wonder chart

Center 3: Symbol identification - select 2-3 symbols and try to understand how or why that symbol represents the assigned meaning. If time permits, choose the symbol you like the most and practice sketching it.

Symbol/ Meaning Sheet: [Adinkra Symbols](#) or <https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/>

Wrap Up- 10 min.

Back to group setting.

Around the class, share the info gathered at centers. Use sentence stems to help students reflect:

"I saw _____, and it made me think _____."

Day 2- Sketching Symbols

Students will brainstorm words that represent or have meaning (these instructions can also be found on the slides).

Ask students to:

- Think of a word or phrase that describes or is essential to you.
- Write that one word (or phrase) small in the top of a box.
- The teacher will give each person a word, too.
- You can also ask the people at your table for 1 KIND word (or phrase that describes you).
- Fill in the remaining blocks with KIND words or phrases that describe you or things important to you.
- Design a symbol for each word using a mix of geometric and organic shapes.
- Keep symbols very simple, and avoid tiny intricate designs that will be difficult to carve or print.
- Symbols should not be easily identifiable objects like soccer balls, pokemon, single hearts...
- Your symbol must be original.
- Think of words and feelings that describe what you are trying to portray.
- Then, match lines or shapes to those words to help brainstorm SIMPLE designs.
- After completing your sketches, narrow your choices to the final symbol you want to print. Redraw the selected symbol on the back of your sketch paper.

Day 3- Carving

The "carving" phase allows flexibility with various materials. While purchasing in bulk is for 4"x 6" Rubber Carving Blocks, efficiency in class can be achieved by cutting these blocks in half. Alternatively, Styrofoam sheets are suitable for "carving" using a pencil to make indentations. You can even experiment by affixing foam shapes to cardboard for

printing. This lesson will detail the carving and printing process using 2"x3" rubber carving blocks.

Ask students to:

- Sketch your final design using a pencil on the 2"x 3" rubber carving block.
- Use a permanent marker or a pencil color in the negative OR positive shapes - not both.

Day 4- Printmaking

Initial Test Print:

- Before printing, ensure students write their names on the back of the index card to identify their work.
- Have students make an initial test print on an index card. This allows them to see how much ink to use and feel the pressure needed.
- They can carve more if some areas are not printing correctly.
- Start with black ink for the first class to focus on printing basics.

Printing Process:

- Before printing, ensure students write their names on the back of the index card to identify their work.
- Roll the brayer in the ink until it's evenly coated. Roll the inked brayer onto the carved rubber block.
- Carefully place the inked block onto the paper and press down evenly. Peel off the block to reveal the print.
- Encourage students to repeat their designs on the paper, creating patterns or interesting compositions.
- Establish that each student must complete the paper before starting a new print. This encourages practice and results in unique and interesting designs for future use.

Day 5- Printmaking

- In subsequent classes, introduce different color schemes (warm, cool, analogous) to avoid muddy colors.
- Final Print/ Creating a Class Piece: Have each student contribute a final print on an index card. These can be combined into a collaborative class piece by arranging and gluing them onto a larger surface.

Optional Extension Activities:

- Symbolic Storytelling: Extend the lesson by having students write a short narrative or poem explaining the meaning behind their chosen symbols. This adds a storytelling element to their artistic expression.
- Adinkra Symbol Gallery Walk: Organize a gallery walk where students can explore and discuss each other's Adinkra symbols. This promotes peer interaction and allows students to appreciate the diversity of symbols and meanings.
- Adinkra Symbol Hunt: Organize a scavenger hunt around the school or local area where students search for symbols in their surroundings. This activity connects the lesson to the broader cultural context and encourages observation skills.

Additional Resources:

Articles:


<https://smarthistory.org/adinkra-cloth/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wonders/Kids/cloth/cloth.htm>

<https://kidworldcitizen.org/2011/12/17/adinkra-fabric-printing-from-ghana/>

<https://www.thoughtco.com/origin-and-meaning-of-adinkra-symbols-4058700>

Videos:

 Adinkra Symbols and Meanings

Website:

<https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/inscribing/adinkra.html>

https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/#google_vignette

Books: *The Talking Cloth*: Mitchell, Rhonda

Symbol Identification:

<https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/>

Printmaking Tips:

<https://www.boardingallrows.com/how-to-make-a-carved-rubber-stamp-for-block-printing>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jzYgxtUMM>