Artful Adventures

AFRICA

An interactive guide for families

Your African Adventure Awaits You! See inside for details
ART OF AFRICA

Africa is a very large continent with many countries, states, and territories. The continent contains large, urban cities as well as rural regions and is home to more than 1,000 ethnic groups who speak a variety of languages and dialects. Each ethnic group has its own traditions and customs. In many areas, traditional rituals have given way to the pace and conveniences of modern life. By studying the objects that were used in traditional ceremonies and rituals, we are able to learn about the social and religious customs that were once practiced. We are going to look at a few of those objects today.

The African gallery is on the lower level of the museum. Walk down the stairs and turn to your left. Walk through the Chinese and Japanese galleries until you come to the African gallery.

The first piece we are going to look at is straight ahead, in the large case against the wall.

IKENGA

This twentieth-century Igbo Ikenga figure was made by a Nigerian sculptor who was probably from the village of Nteje. It was carved from one piece of wood. Ikenga represents power and leadership. Men would pray to it and give it gifts of nuts, wine, and sometimes a rooster or a ram. They believed that Ikenga would save them from enemies and bring them wealth and good luck.

What does he have on his head?_______________________________________

Ikenga is always shown with horns, symbols of power and aggression. This artist has turned the horns into an elaborate headdress.

What is he holding in his hands?_______________________________________

The details of Ikenga figures differ depending on the status of the owner. This figure is holding a staff, the symbol of authority, in one hand and an elephant tusk, symbolizing power and leadership, in the other. This Ikenga probably belonged to a man or group of men with wealth and power.

There are several masks in a case on the right as you first enter this gallery. Can you find them?
MASKS

Masks play an important role in the traditional rituals and ceremonies of many African cultures. Although the specifics of the rituals vary from one ethnic group to another, the masks are generally used to represent spirits, or supernatural beings, in social and religious events. They are part of elaborate costumes worn by dancers and musicians in these ritual ceremonies. Many African cultures believe that spirits dwell inside the masks and are brought to life during the masquerades, the dramatic performances by fully costumed figures.

The masks usually take the form of a human or animal face. Since they are intended to represent a spirit or supernatural being, they are not realistic—they don’t look like a person or animal would look in real life. Instead, they are often abstract and geometric, or made of different shapes.

Have you ever made a face using geometric shapes like triangles, rectangles, circles, and ovals? Give it a try on the mask below.
**HEADRESTS**

In South Africa headrests were commonly used as pillows. People would rest their heads on them to protect their elaborate hairstyles while they slept. They believed that a headrest also helped its owner sleep well and have good dreams. Headrests were so valued that they were often buried with their owners or passed on within families. Can you find the other headrests in this gallery?

One of the headrests has a handle. Can you find it? This would have been especially convenient for traveling.

**CHAIRS**

This chair was made about 100 years ago in central Africa by a Chokwe artist from the Congo or Angola. A throne for a Chokwe chief, it is elaborately carved and decorated.

What are the people on the chair doing?

Can you find a man with a drum? Dancers?

These figures show us that the chair belonged to an important person. When the chief wasn’t using the chair, it was stored on its side. If the chief visited another village, a chair-bearer would carry the chair for the chief.
Thank you for joining us today to explore the art of Africa. Don't forget to stop at the information desk to collect a sticker for your Artful Adventures Passport. We hope that you enjoyed your visit to the Princeton University Art Museum and that you will come back again to join us for another Artful Adventure!

On the next page you will find some suggestions for ways that you can continue your African Adventure at home:
ART PROJECT: MAKE YOUR OWN AFRICAN SHIELD

You will need:
Cardboard or cardstock
Scissors
Colored construction paper
Tape or glue
Crayons, colored pencils, or markers

Draw an oval shape on cardboard and cut it out. Draw a similar oval shape on one or more pieces of construction paper and cut it out.

Cut the construction paper oval into geometric pieces that can be reassembled, like a puzzle, on the cardboard. Tape or glue these pieces to the cardboard to make a design on your shield. Use the crayons, colored pencils, or markers to decorate. Use leftover scraps of cardboard to make a handle for the back of your shield and tape it into place. Chenille stems or twine can also be used.
Suggested reading

Picture Books

The Best Beekeeper of Laibela: A Tale from Africa, by Christina Kessler; illustrated by Leonard Jenkins
I Lost My Tooth in Africa, by Penda Diakite; illustrated by Baba Wague Diakite
Anansi and the Magic Stick, by Eric A. Kimmel; illustrated by Janet Stevens
The Village that Vanished, by Ann Grifalconi; illustrated by Kadir Nelson

Non-fiction for young children

A is for Africa, by Ifeoma Onyefulu

Fiction for older children

One Hen: How One Small Loan Made a Big Difference, by Katie Smith Milway; illustrated by Eugenie Fernandes
Tales from an African Drum, by Charles Robinson

Non-fiction for older children

Atlas of Africa, by Karen Foster
Tales from Africa, compiled by Mary Medlicott; illustrated by Ademola Akintola; foreword by Vincent Magombe

All of these books can be found in the children's section of the Princeton Public Library.