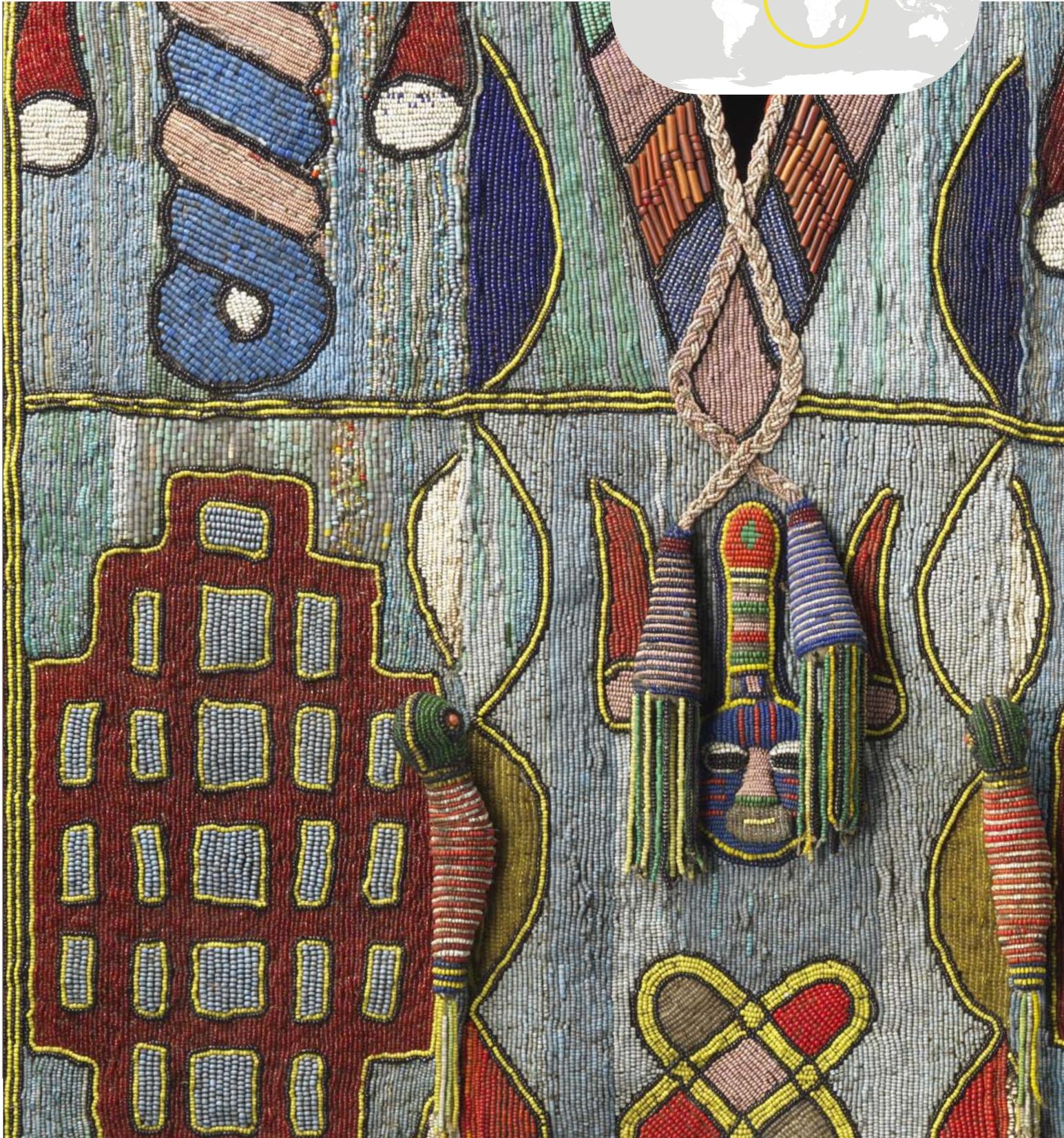
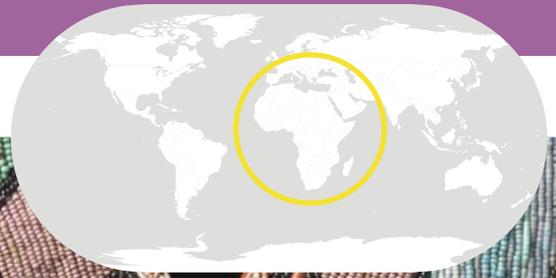


Arts of Africa





AFRICA, one of the oldest inhabited areas on earth, has fifty-five countries, nine territories, and two states. The continent is home to hundreds of ethnic groups who speak a variety of languages and dialects. Each ethnic group has interrelated but unique and ever-evolving beliefs, customs, and styles of art and architecture. Whether colorful Kente cloths made by the Akan of present-day Ghana or the sculptural stools of the Yoruba of present-day Nigeria, artistic forms reflect the range of African cultures and the important roles that art has played and continues to play in religious ceremonies, social celebrations, and daily life. This guide will help you learn more about the objects on view in the African gallery.

Sculpture

Much African sculpture was used in performances or other rituals; the objects were part of daily life and moved around with people. For this reason, most African art is three-dimensional and is meant to be seen from all sides.



Straight ahead of you, against the far wall, is a 20th-century Ikenga figure made by an Igbo sculptor. Ikenga figures represent power and the accomplishments of an individual or group. Men prayed to them and gave them gifts of nuts, wine, or, sometimes, a rooster or a ram. They believed that Ikenga would save them from enemies and bring wealth and good luck.

What does Ikenga have on his head?

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



Igbo artist (Nigeria), Ikenga, first half of the 20th century. Wood and polychrome, 116 x 30 x 30 cm. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2010-129)

Gold

The Akan peoples of present-day Ghana and southeastern Côte d'Ivoire have long taken advantage of the abundance of gold in their region to fashion dazzling bracelets, anklets, and other jewelry for the royal courts. You'll see a tall staff, carved in wood and covered in gold, that would have been held by the spokesperson for an Akan chief. This particular staff illustrates a proverb. Used by people worldwide, proverbs are especially important to the Akan, who use them at ceremonies, songs, and political exchanges to communicate ideas about life.



Akan artist (Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire), Detail of a spokesperson's staff (*okyea mepoma*), 19th–20th century. Wood and gold leaf, 155 x 21.5 x 11.9 cm overall. Bequest of John B. Elliott, Class of 1951 (1998-569 a-c)

Try to match the Akan proverb (in English and Twi) to its possible meaning.

Akan Proverb

Meaning

If it comes, it affects your relatives.
Ĕba a, ěka oni.

The owner has the first choice.

*The place we pass through in going,
we pass through in returning.*
Baabi a yĕfa ko na yĕfa ba.

Don't wait to be asked for something you know you should give someone.

*If a baby does not cry,
we still give it a drink.*
Oba nsu a, yĕma no num.

Trouble which affects one person affects the whole family.

*The person who has the sugarcane
chews the lower (sweetest) part.*
Obi a ode n'ahwedeĕ na owe n'ase.

You come back to where you started from.

Headrests

In one of the wall cases you'll see a display of headrests, which were commonly used as pillows in South Africa. People rested 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.

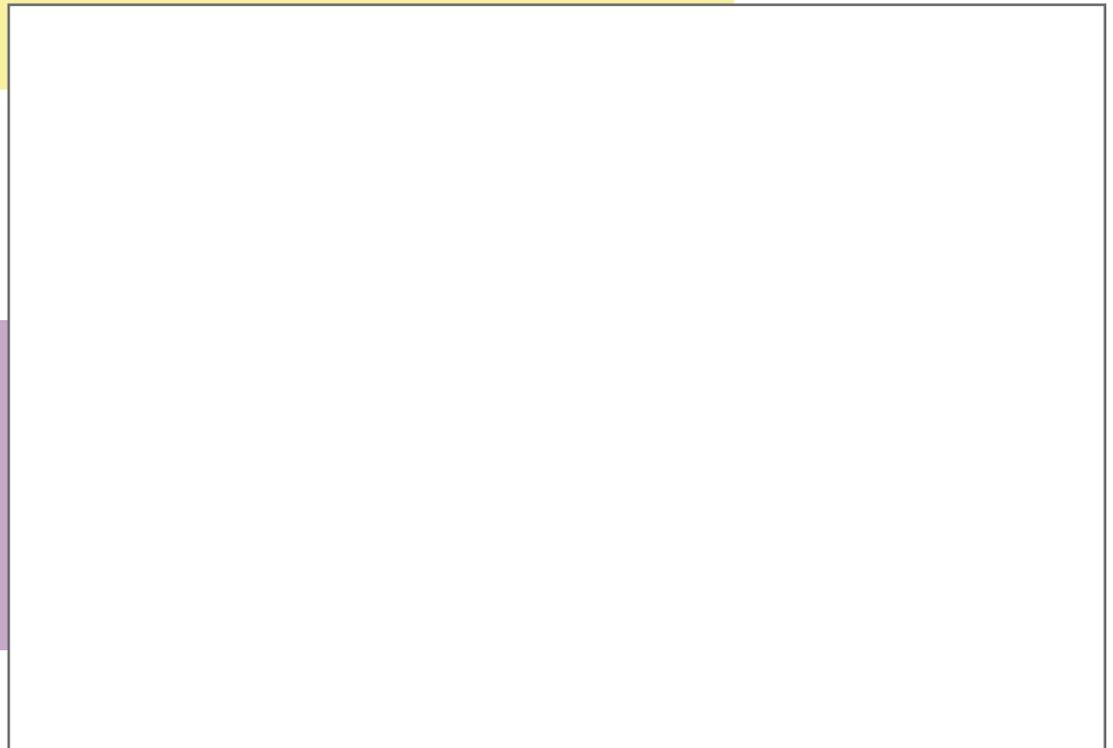


Tsonga artist (South Africa or Mozambique), Double headrest with snuff containers (*isigiki*), late 19th–20th century. Wood, 15 x 75 x 4.8 cm. Bequest of John B. Elliott, Class of 1951 (1998-539 a–c)

Some headrests have handles to make them useful for traveling; others have built-in snuff (tobacco) containers. **Find a headrest and list some of its special features.**

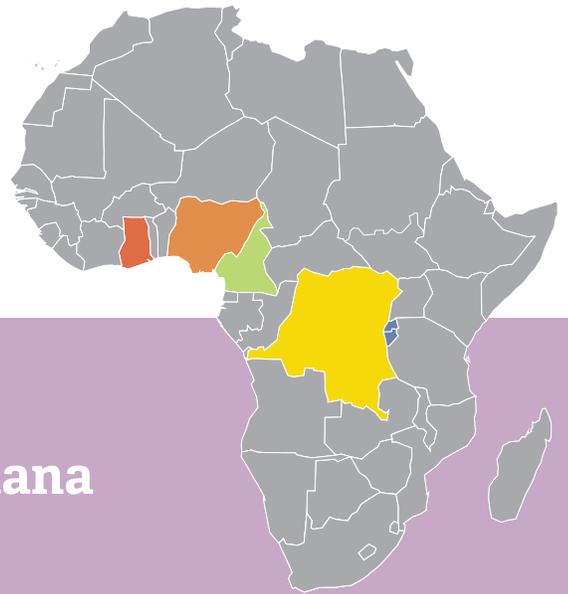
Headrests are beautiful and useful at the same time. **What's something you use every day that's also nicely designed?**

If you could design your own headrest, what special features would it have?
You can draw it here.



Where in Africa is it?

Use the labels next to each object in the gallery to learn where these objects are from. **Draw a line connecting the work of art to its country of origin.**



Ghana

Nigeria

Democratic Republic
of the Congo

Rwanda or Burundi

Cameroon

Masks

In another wall case you'll see several masks. Worn by dancers as part of elaborate costumes, masks played (and sometimes still play) an important role in the traditional rituals and ceremonies of many African cultures. Spirits were sometimes thought to dwell inside the masks and were brought to life during masquerades, dramatic performances by fully costumed figures.



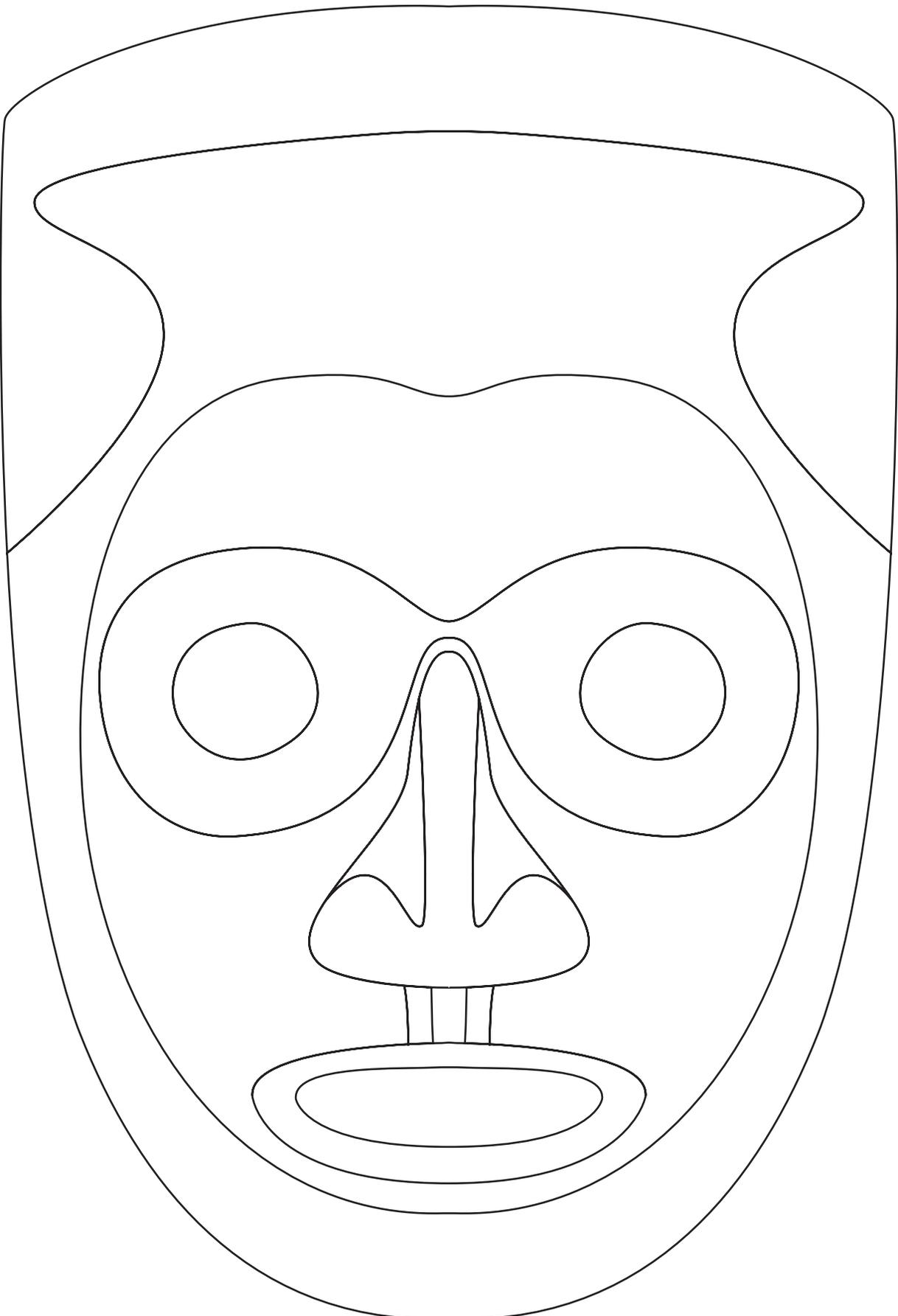
Kuba artist (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Mask, late 19th–20th century. Wood, raffia, shells, and feathers, 28 x 30.3 x 34.5 cm. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Melvin A. Scharfman (y1980-25)

This mask from the Kuba kingdom (in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) was probably used in initiation ceremonies for young boys as they passed into adulthood. The face, with its deep eye sockets and flaring nose, is carved of wood. The sloping forehead is decorated with feathers, shells, and raffia (a fiber made from palm trees). Many years ago, this mask may have been painted with the traditional geometric designs of the Kuba peoples, but its colors have been lost over time.

Activity for Home

At home, cover the mask on the opposite page with geometric designs, using the Kuba patterns on the right to inspire your decoration. You can even cut it out and decorate it with feathers or yarn.





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!

Suggested Reading

Non-fiction for Young Children

***Anansi the Spider:
A Tale from the Ashanti***
by Gerald McDermott

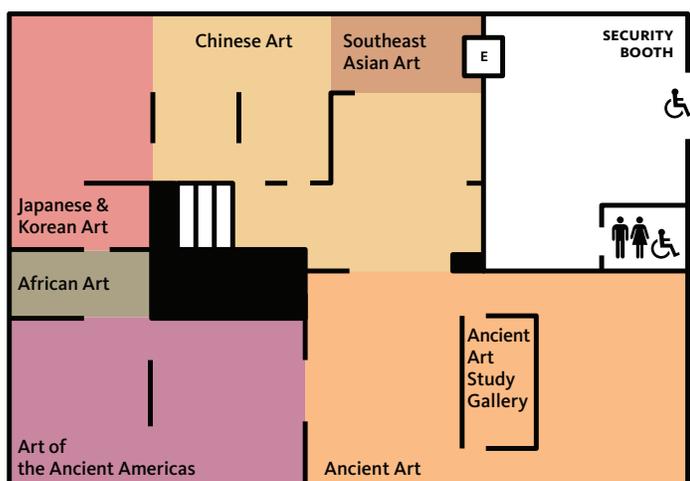
***The Spider Weaver:
A Legend of Kente Cloth***
by Margaret Musgrove

***Ashanti to Zulu:
African Traditions***
by Margaret Musgrove

Non-fiction for Older Children

Atlas of Africa
by Karen Foster

The Art of African Masks
by Carol Finley



Front cover: Yoruba artist (Nigeria), Tunic, late 19th–early 20th century. Glass and stone (jasper) beads, fabric, and thread, ca. 101.6 x 71.1 cm. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2012-77)

All photographs by Bruce M. White