

## **Yoruba Divination Bowls**

**Instructor:** Tish Kilpatrick

**Targeted Grade Level(s):** 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade and Up

**Content Area(s) Covered:** Social Studies, Art, Math

**Anticipated Duration:** 4-5, 40 minute periods

### **Rationale:**

Our third grades study different countries and each classroom teacher concentrates on a particular country. I do this lesson with the teacher that concentrates on the African continent

It is important that students understand that different ethnicities have different belief systems. At the same time, there are things in common among our different belief systems.

### **Objectives:**

Students will:

- Learn how objects are used by West Africans to interpret the meanings and messages of the spirit world.
- Learn how objects in West Africa help the family make use of the spiritual world.
- Learn that, on a broader scale, many religions, in general, believe in a spiritual realm of the world
- Learn the art process of paper maché.

### **Resources/Materials Needed:**

- Chanda, Jacqueline (1993). *African Arts and Cultures*. Davis Publications, Inc.
- Leslie, Dr. Agnes Ngoma. (2005, Spring). Taking Africa to the Classroom. *Irohin*. A publication of the Center of African Studies, University of Florida.
- Oliver-Smith, Kerry & Valarie Pothier-Forrester (1991). *The Art of West Africa-Teaching Guide and Slide Presentation*, Dept. of Education-Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art
- *Art of West Africa-(Curriculum II) Teaching Guide and Slide, Presentation* Samuel P. Harn Museum

## **Procedures:**

### Period 1

**Discussion:** (From *Art of West Africa-Curriculum II*, there is an excellent question answer guide with slides available. Their motivation is below.)

1. Discuss how some human beings believe in a spiritual realm of the world. What do you mean when you say spirit? Can you touch a spirit? Can you see it? What do you think of when you say Holy Spirit? Religion is a way that people recognize what they see as a superior intelligence and creative power in the universe. There are nine main religions practiced in the world and there are thousands of others as well. What religions can you think of? Many people believe in one God; and many believe in many gods; and many more do not believe in a god at all.
2. Many different religions are represented in Africa. Christianity and Islam are widely practiced .In West Africa, many people believe in a more traditional religion with a supreme god. This god provides a spirit world with beings who can affect the well-being of the living. The spirit world includes gods, dead heroes, ancestors, and nature spirits with good and bad intentions. What are some good things a spirit might do for you? What would that spirit look like if you could see it?
3. In West Africa, art objects are important to communicate with the spirit world and to understand one's destiny. Destiny is related to the word destination. What do you think of when we say destination? Destiny or fate is where you're going in your life, the plan of your life's future. Can you control your destiny? Some people believe that your life is planned for you before you are born. In Nigeria, the Yoruba believe that people can understand their destiny by reading special messages from the spirit world. They do this in a ceremony called Ifa. It is performed to foretell future events or to discover hidden knowledge. This is a domain of the spirit world governed by the God of Order, also called Ifa. Can you think of ways you might read your destiny?"
4. Show the slides of the tapper and the divination bowl and of the Yoruba Priest and explain the process of divination. The tapper calls the attention of the spirit. The Priest chants and sings and shakes the divination bowl. Then he reads the position of the palm nuts, or whatever other objects he uses.

## **Preparation/Demonstration**

### (Period One and Two)

1. Have enough tables covered with newspaper and have several large plastic tubs or plastic shoe boxes filled about 2in. with wheat paste at the tables. Have several boxes, some filled with newspaper strips and some with school paper towel strips. Each student gets a plastic butter container and wraps a piece of plastic wrap around the outside of it and puts his/her name in the inside of the bowl. (The plastic wrap is necessary to keep the strips from sticking to the bowl.)
2. Take a paper towel strip first and run it across the surface of the wheat paste. Wring it out between two fingers and start putting the pieces crisscross across the outside bottom of the bowl. Then, wrap strips of paper towel around the top-side of the bowl. When the outside of the bowl is covered, cover it again with the newspaper strips until the paper towel cannot be seen. When the newspaper is covered, put the last layer of paper towel strips on until the newspaper is completely covered. The students must wring each piece out carefully and smooth it as they go.
3. If you want the bowls to have a pedestal, students can cover a Styrofoam cup as well. The bowls need to dry upside down (5-7 days). If you need to do the paper maché process more quickly or in one period, you could cover a Styrofoam meat tray with a single layer of paper towel and leave it on the tray.

### Period 3

1. Carefully release the paper bowl from the plastic bowl and trim the top-edge. I usually have the students put a black piece of gummed paper around the edge. Masking tape would work well too. If they made a pedestal, have them glue the cup to the bottom of their bowl.
2. Have visuals of African symbols available at each table.
3. Talk about pattern and petition. Have the students use Sharpie Markers and work their designs on their bowls.

#### Period 4/5

1. Students are still working on their patterns. When they are finished, I give them six chips and a worksheet that they use to make their divinations. (I glue a 12 x 18 white sheet of paper to a 12 x 18 black sheet of paper and cut it into 1 in. squares for the chips. These represent the palm nuts.)
2. First, they must figure out how many different combinations can occur (Math!). I tell them that the 'fortunes' must be generic that could apply to anyone.
3. They draw in the combinations (ex. One white-five black) and write their divinations. We spend some time in the class using our divination bowls with each other.

#### **Informal/Formal Assessments:**

Students were evaluated on the following criteria:

- Students successfully use the paper maché process to make a bowl.
- Students successfully make repetitious designs and patterns on their bowl.
- Students successfully write out their divinations

#### **Evaluation/Reflection**

Students love the paper mache process!

For those students that are frustrated writers, I make sure that I have them help each other and I go around and have them dictate to me what they want their divinations to say.

I think it is important to understand your student/parent population and make sure that you approach the discussion about spirits carefully.

