

### OVERVIEW

**GRADE 1 & 3 ARTIST: CLAUDE FERGUSON**

## AFRICAN ARTS: Designing Dogon Masks

This lesson will introduce students to the traditional practice of African mask making by discussing the rites and ceremonies and implementing the various design principles used primarily by the Dogon tribe. We will create 2-D designs in pencil and color the finished drawing with markers.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the difference between “Western” and “African” concepts involving the fundamental use of the mask.
- Students will appreciate the influence of African art on western contemporary artists.
- Students will utilize formal design principles used by the Dogon tribe to create original models as drawings.
- Students will understand use of color temperature and its effects.

### LESSON BACKGROUND

This lesson sets the stage for defining what an “African Mask” is. Dogon masks come from the Dogon tribe of Mali in Northwest Africa. The mask is used in dancing and music ceremonies. Masks are made to represent animals found in Africa including birds, rabbits, elephants, and giraffes. The decorations and features (eyes, nose, mouth and ears) of the masks are made with geometric shapes such as squares, rectangles, triangles and circles. These geometric shapes can also be found in other African art such as sculpture and painting.

## MATERIALS

### Paper

Drawing paper 11 x 17" (minimum size of 8.5 x 11" and at least 60 lb. paper weight)

Construction paper or scrap paper of various colors

Wide range of markers/ pencils

Scissors

Elmer's glue or glue sticks

## RESOURCES

Azel, Jose. *"The Dogon People of Mali."*

[Online] Available.

<http://wpni01.auroraquanta.com/pv/dogon>  
October, 2006.

Hollyman, Stephenie. *Dogon: Africa's people of the cliffs.* N.Y.: Harry N. Abrams. 2001.

PBSKids.org. *"Africa for Kids: Make a Mask."*

[Online] Available.

<http://pbskids.org/africa/mask/index.html>  
October, 2006.

Rainier, Chris. *"Unique Dogon Culture Survives in West Africa."* [Online] Available.

[http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/05/0529\\_030529\\_dogon.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/05/0529_030529_dogon.html)  
October, 2006

## VOCABULARY

**Design:** A plan, drawing, or outline made to serve as a guide or pattern. An arrangement of different parts or colors; pattern. To make a plan, drawing, outline of; make a pattern for.

**Motif:** A repeated design, shape, or pattern; a decorative repetitive design.

**Symmetry:** The same on both sides of a central dividing line. Geometric objects that are equally positioned about a point, line, or plane that bisect the object.

**Color temperature (hot vs. cold):** Cool colors are those containing more blue such as blue-violet. Hot colors contain more red and/or yellow such as orange. The temperature of a color is determined by how much red or blue the color contains or how closely it is related to those colors (more blue= cooler, more red=hotter).

**Exaggerate:** to make something appear more noticeable or prominent than is usual.

**Pattern:** A repeated decorative design. A regular or repetitive form, order, or arrangement.

**Intensity:** the strength, power, force, or concentration of something.

**Improvisation:** something performed or done without any preparation or set text to follow.

**Contrast:** Something that is different, compared with something else. To compare or arrange different things in a way that highlights their differences, ie. putting a circle next to a square.

**Rhythm:** A pattern of elements suggesting movement or pace in something such as a work of art. The regular pattern of beats and emphasis in a piece of music or stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry. Any regularly recurring pattern of activity such as the cycle of the seasons, or night and day.

## INTRODUCTION



If available, show images of African masks. Discuss the materials used to make the masks; ask students where the artists might have found these materials. Discuss the designs on the masks. Designs use geometric shapes and often use repetition to form a pattern.

The masks are symmetrical; if the masks were bisected or cut in half down the middle, they would appear the same on both sides. Some masks combine animal and human features for example, a mask may have a face that looks like a human's but it may also have whiskers or feathers. Most masks use exaggeration to emphasize the features.

Discuss the use of African masks. Masks are frequently used in ceremonies that involved music and dancing. Each mask represents something important to the Dogon people and each mask has a purpose. For example, animal spirit masks are for protection; fertility masks promote healthy birth; forest masks promote a great harvest. Ask students what types of things are important to them. What do they hope for or want? Would they like the weather to change or their sports team to win? What symbols would they use to represent these important things on their own masks?

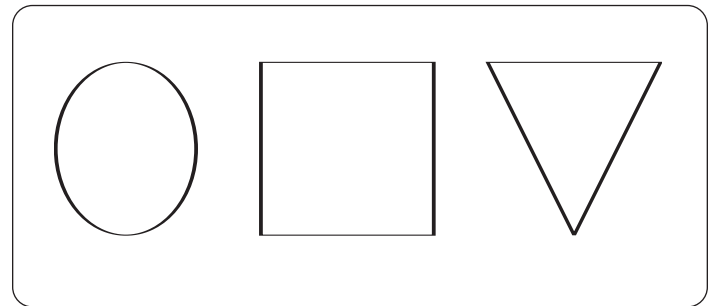
If possible, listen to African music and watch African dance performances. Discuss the similarities between the masks, dance and music such as the repetition of beat, or rhythm (in music) the repetition of movement (in dance) and the repetition of pattern or forms (in visual art and masks). Discuss the way that African art influenced contemporary artists and designs in popular culture

(for example, African art was a significant influence on the Cubist art movement, in particular on the art of Pablo Picasso). Ask students if they have geometric patterns on their clothing or in their homes. If resources are available, show African textiles such as cloth.

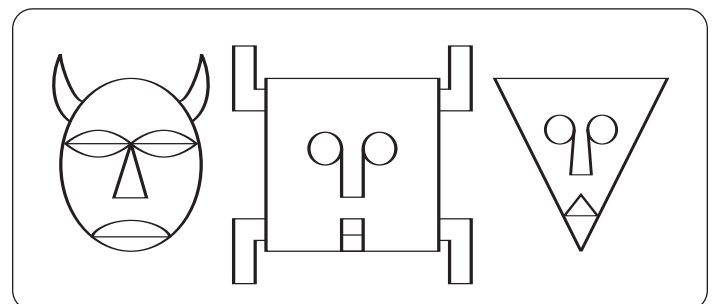
## STEP BY STEP

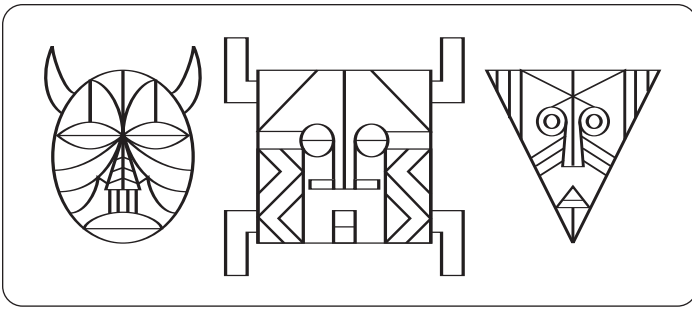
### Preparation

1. Review examples of African masks. Point out examples of geometric shapes, symmetry and exaggerated facial features.
2. Draw three large shapes on the board—circle or oval, square and triangle. These will be the outline of the masks.



3. Use the large shapes as the outline for the masks. Use smaller geometric shapes (circles, rectangles, squares, triangles etc.) to add human and/or animal features to each larger shape. Be sure that the features and designs that you draw as an example are symmetrical. Exaggerate the relative size of the masks' facial features (making them very small or unusually large.)





4. Draw a dotted line down the center of the mask. Discuss how the designs and shapes on each side of the line mirror one another; the masks' designs are bilaterally symmetrical.

5. Give each student an 11 x 17" sheet of paper (8.5 x 11" can also be used) and several markers/pencils.

6. Ask students to choose the base shape of their mask. Tell them to draw a large oval or circle, square or triangle that nearly covers the whole page. Stress that they should try and make it as large as possible on the paper.

7. Tell them to use a pencil to draw a light dotted line down the center of the shape. The features of their mask should be the same on either side of the line, or bilaterally symmetrical.

7. Ask students to recall the purpose of their mask. What will it represent?

8. Tell them to add features and symbols.

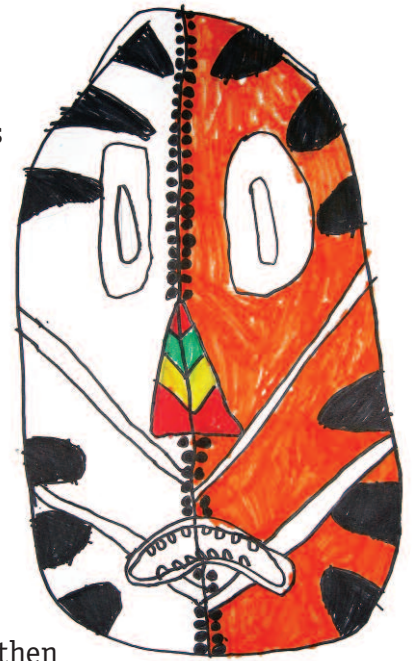
9. Allow students to cut and paste shapes onto their masks. Remind them to cut two pieces of every shape so that each side of the mask will be symmetrical.

10. Coloring the masks: Remind students that by putting a cool color (such as blue) next to a hot color (such as red) they will create contrast. (Hot colors include red, yellow, orange, brown. Cool colors include blue, green, purple.)

### During the Lesson

Remind students that masks should have a purpose. Ask students what purpose their masks have.

Suggest that they add symbols of both animal and human features to the mask designs. Some students may make designs that are too complex. Tell them to make the largest features or shapes first, then the smaller details. Tell them they should always work on both sides of the mask at once. For example, if they add a shape or design on the right side of the mask, they should also add it on the left. This will help them to keep their mask design symmetrical and will also allow them to complete their design without running out of time. Remind students that they should be able to color their mask. Ask students to consider the colors they want on their mask and what the colors mean to them. Coloring the masks will make them look very different.



Help students pace their work. Tell them how much time they have to finish their designs/coloring.

### Concluding the Lesson

*Cleaning up:*

Allow 5 to 10 minutes for clean up.

*Post-project discussion:*

Ask students to bring their masks to a sharing circle. Have them share the intent of their own masks or have students guess the intent of the animals being represented in other masks. Ask students to identify examples of symmetry, repetition, patterns, exaggeration, colors, and contrast in their own masks or the masks of classmates. Ask them to select something they really like about their work and something they would change.

*Variations:*

Lesson can also be used to teach poetry/writing. Students can write a story about their mask, its purpose and what it represents. They can write a detailed description of their mask or draw a “mask map” showing what each symbol or shape represents. Students can write a poem about their mask.

The masks could be used in conjunction with lessons about music, drumming and/or dancing. Students could cut out masks and use string to tie

masks on. They could create dances that use repetitive movement and rhythm.

Math lessons that deal with symmetry, repetition, pattern and rhythm could draw on visual elements used in mask design.

History lessons about Africa or African history could use the mask as a way to help students understand and experience African culture.

## STANDARDS

### Grade 1

- 1.3 Identify and emphasize the elements of art (line, color, shape/form, texture, value, spacing) in nature, in the environment, and in works of art.
- 2.4 Plan and use variations in line, color, shape/form, and texture to communicate ideas or feelings in works of art.
- 4.2 Identify and describe various reasons for making art.
- 4.3 Students discuss how and why they made their work of art.
- 3.3 View and then describe art from various cultures.
- 4.1 Discuss works of art created in the classroom, focusing on selected elements of art (e.g., line, color, shape/form, and texture).
- 4.4 Select something they like about their work and something they would change.

### Grade 2

- 1.2 Perceive and discuss differences in mood created by warm and cool colors.
- 2.4 Create a painting or drawing, using warm or cool colors expressively.
- 2.5 Use bilateral or radial symmetry to create visual balance.
- 3.3 Identify and discuss how art is used in events and celebrations in various cultures, past and present, including the use in their own lives.

**NOTES**