

A Kid's Guide to the PLU African Art Collection

About Africa

Africa is the second largest continent on Earth and is surrounded by two of the world's oceans, the Atlantic and the Indian. When thinking about Africa, you may imagine rainforests and big animals such as elephants, giraffes, and lions (but no tigers—there aren't any in Africa; they are only found in India). Although you can find these in some places it is important to remember that Africa is a huge continent full of large and small cities as well as rural villages and farms. In Africa there are many different types of ecosystems. You can find rainforests, grasslands, forests, and deserts to which people and animals have adapted their lifestyles . living harmoniously with their surroundings. How big is Africa? It is made of 53 countries, which is more than the number of states in the United States of America! Africa is also large enough that the continental US would fit in Africa three times! Or all of the United States, Mexico, Europe, China, India, Greenland, and Japan! Each African country is different from another, has its own distinct history, and contains many different ethnic groups, each with its own language.

To learn where all the countries are located and how to pronounce their names visit:

http://www.sheppardsoftware.com/Africa/Africa_GL_1024_768.html

About our Collection of African Art

Pacific Lutheran University's Collection of African Art contains objects from many different ethnic groups in different parts of Africa. The collection has masks, figures, and personal items. Each piece of art was given to the University by two very generous couples, Dr. J. Hans and Thelma Lehmann, and Dr. Oliver E. and Pamela F. Cobb. They gave this artwork so others can share their love and appreciation for the skill and creativity of the people who made them, even though we do not know the name of these artists. This is because the individuals who made these objects rarely signed their names. In some societies those who made object were individuals who made it for themselves or for their community; other were made by specialists in a community known for their particular ability to carve.

While reading through this guide, feel free to come back to this map and color in the different countries that some of the **masks, figures, and personal objects** come from.

Africa



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About Masks

Have you ever worn a **mask** with a Halloween costume or seen others get dressed up and wear a mask? Halloween night is a special event and celebrated across communities. People also wear masks for masked balls, to protect themselves in sporting events such as an ice hockey goalkeeper, for work as a deep sea diver, and of course many of your favorite movie characters wear masks—think Iron Man or Darth Vader,

Can you think of other mask wearers:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

When artists in African societies create masks it is also for special occasions, and while they are not creating a mask to get a treat such as candy, each African mask tells a story just as a Halloween mask represents a character and a story. People who wear masks also wear special clothing and accessories to hide their identity. Together, the masks and clothing are used in African performances called masquerades that typically include community singing and dancing. Masks come in many different shapes and sizes and are also made out of many different types of material. In PLU's Collection, there are masks made out of wood and one special mask made from braided fibers. Here is one created by the Bete people who live in Côte d'Ivoire. It is a **facemask** called a Gre mask. Do you think it is scary? What makes it scary? Would it be a good mask for Halloween?



Masks are not always made to just cover the front of the face. Here is another mask called a **helmet mask** that was created by the Makonde peoples who live in northern Mozambique and southeastern Tanzania. How do you think this mask is worn? Why do you think is called a helmet mask?



Another kind of helmet mask is the Sowei mask of the Mende people from Sierra Leone. Do you think this mask looks like a boy or a girl? What parts of the mask give you hints on how to answer that question?



And this is the mask made from twisted or braided fibers. It is called a Tere mask, and was created by the Bobo people of Burkina Faso. How many different color fibers can you count in this mask?



Questions to think about:

Do athletes ever wear masks to keep them safe during a game? In which sports?

If you could create a mask, what type of mask would you make and what would you decorate it with? Draw your own mask!

Here is the link to an African mask that you can print and color. It is a mask of the type worn by the Bwa people of Mali.

<http://www.artfactory.com/africanmasks/masks/bwa.htm>

I hope by looking at these different sorts of masks used in different societies you now understand how diverse and different masks used in African events and celebrations can be.

About Figures

Another type of object which can be found in Africa are **figures**. Figures can be carved out of materials such as wood or cast in brass and can be in the shape of a human or animals, or something entirely abstract. In your own household you may

own stuffed animals or dolls that are made to look similar to different kinds of animals or people. In PLU's Collection, there are several examples of figures that are made to look like people.

Some figures are used for religious reasons. For example, figures may be carved to represent an ancestor. Ancestors are members of the family who have died, but who in many African societies are still thought to have an influence on everyday events of the living. In the Moba society of Ghana, figures are created in order to ask their ancestors for good crops, fine weather, and good luck for the year.



Figures can also be used to show a person's status in their societies. They may also be put in special places within the community. In Mossi society, people often put a male and female figure outside the door of an important person's household. They are put there to tell everybody that this is the home of an important person and to help protect the household from bad spirits.

Questions to ask:

What kind of figures do you have around your household?

What are the figures made of? Wood? Glass? Cloth?

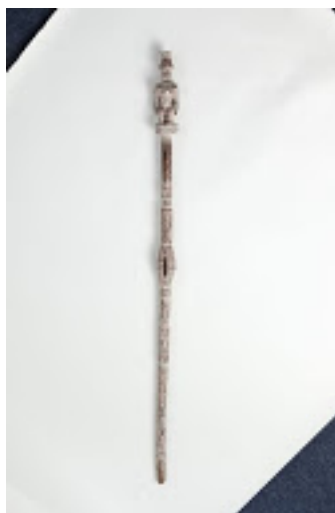
About Personal Objects

In PLU's Collection there are several objects that are used in everyday life and were **personal objects** that belonged to a specific person or family. These items are often not as obvious as other items of African art such as the masks and figures, which are widely recognized as African art. They can be as simple as a chair, a ladder, or a hat that you may have around your house. Just like the everyday items in your own home, each beautifully decorated to fit a person's personal taste.

In PLU's collection there is a granary ladder from the Dogon people of Mali. This ladder is an example of an item used to help in everyday tasks. Without this ladder, it would be difficult to store and then later retrieve the grain that the Dogon use in making the food they eat. What do farmers use in our country to store their grain? While many people might not consider this granary ladder to be a piece of art, we do because of its beautiful shape and the lovely patina - the shiny polished surface of the wood that results because of its near daily use. How do you think this granary ladder was made?



Personal objects may also be related to a person's status. These people may have received these objects due to their leadership or from doing something important. In PLU's collection there are leadership staffs that would have been owned by important men in the societies to which they belonged. People would recognize a person's status based on the decorations and the type of staff the person owned.



What symbolic objects do we use to recognize people who are leaders or are in important positions in our communities?

The chairperson of a meeting? _____

A bride? _____

A policeman? _____

There are also two pipes in the PLU Collection that were also undoubtedly owned by important people. What details do you notice about this pipe? What makes it unique?



This is a hat traditionally worn for special occasions by women from the Zulu people of South Africa. It is called an *isicholo* and can be made from hair or woven grass. It is always round and colored red by using ochre (ferric oxide), a naturally found earthy material related to iron.



Questions to think about:

What objects do you own that are decorated the way you like?

Do you have any personal belonging that others know right away belong to you?
How do they know?

Words it is Better Not To Use

There are certain words that are often associated or linked to Africa that it is better to avoid using because they suggest that Africa and Africans are not like other place and people. Consider using the words in **bold** instead.

backward:	customary; traditional
barbaric:	this is a generalization; according to whose definition?
chief:	leader (not all societies have chiefs)
costume:	clothes; traditional dress (it's not Halloween!)
dark continent:	Africa has always been in contact with the rest of the world even when Europe and North America were not
discovery:	really! — no one knew "it" was there and hadn't named it?
explorer(s):	travelers; eccentric travelers
hut or shack:	house; home
illiterate:	pre-literate; soon nearly everyone will be able to read and write
inferior or strange:	different
jungle:	rain forest or forest
natives:	people or Africans
no history:	every society has a history
nomad:	herder; pastoralist
pagan or heathen:	non-Christian, non-Muslim, non-Jew, traditional believer
primitive	less technologically sophisticated; generalization according to whose definition?
savage:	who defines what qualifies as savage?
tribe:	ethnic group, or simply use the ethnic name
unchanging	no society is static; all societies are always changing
uncivilized	what is civilized; who defines it?
warlike:	a generalization that is usually not true
witch doctor:	traditional healer; herbalist

Word Puzzle

U E Y O F E F M A S K F R G A
P U O R G C I N H T E O K R U
S E B L C R P G B X T F S A F
Q H F A A O E E T S V F A N F
Z W R I C N P D E A N N M A A
O W Q M G I O C A B O J T R T
E O U Y P U N I A E L V E Y S
T Z X W S A R D T A L I M F C
C A R V I N G E F I Y C L F F
W P S D O K W R S I D K E U B
S O G I M O I T B U G A H X C
P S O L I C U Q J S M J R Z L
W W Y D A O P R S U G Q E T S
S R E B I F D M K W F U B O N
D O N L T T F U X Y V O D Y C

AFRICA
ANCESTOR
CARVING
ETHNICGROUP
FIBERS
FIGURES
GRANARY
HELMETMASK
LEADER
MASK
PIPE
STAFF
TRADITIONAL
WOOD

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