

Winter Exhibitions 2004 Bermuda National Gallery - Bermuda's art museum 1

Lesson Plan: Kente Cloth - What is that old blanket?

Social Studies, Visual Arts and Language Arts

Objectives:

Recognize *kente* cloth as an African ceremonial cloth.

Make a paper weaving using a *Kente* cloth design.

Understand the principles of pattern - to define pattern as lines, colors and shapes that repeat or alternate.

Create own personal meanings for colors.

Give the opportunity for students to express their opinions on their work.

Activities:

Look at the image of the kente cloth and discuss.

Ask questions: What is the first thing you notice? What shapes and patterns do you see? What do you think it is used for? Where do you think it came from? How do you think it was made?

Read *kente* cloth worksheet

Discuss what they have learnt from the worksheet. Ask questions: Who are the Asante? Where do they come from? What is *kente* cloth? Who is Kwame Nkrumah?

Read through the questions and find the answers from the worksheet.

Show and discuss what the colors mean in the *kente* cloth – use *kente* cloth colors sheet.

Discuss color. Ask questions: What is your favorite color? What do certain colors mean to you? This will help associate color as a form of symbolism. Encourage them to write down meanings for their colors.

Discuss making a weaving and the visual elements to create a pattern.

Demonstrate how to paper weave - use paper-weaving worksheet to guide students through.

When completed ask students to prepare a written and verbal presentation to discuss their personal designs:

Why they choose those particular colors, the reason they used a certain percentage of particular colors and the name of their weaving. Does it tell a story or is it a reflection of their personality - likes/dislikes?

Keywords: *Kente*, pattern, warp, weft, loom, strip, weaving, symbolism

Extension lessons:

Research more on Asante culture and other aspects of Asante artwork

Research other African peoples and their artwork - Dogon, Yoruba, Bamana etc.

Re-read legend about weaving and using their imagination to literary weave the legend of weaving and Anansi into a story about their weaving.

Assessment:

Evaluate work sheet answers

Verbal questioning and answer to:

Identify *kente* as African ceremonial cloth

Describe where and when *kente* is worn and by whom

Describe how *kente* cloth is made

Written description of colors and associated meaning/s

Evaluate paper-weaving design, in the criteria include:

Use of symbolic colors

Pattern created by repeating and alternating lines and colors

A design that symbolizes a statement or proverb, which could be linked to personal identification

Resources:

Images of: *Kente* cloth, man working on a loom and a *kente* cloth being worn

Kente cloth worksheet and *kente* cloth question and answer sheet

Kente colors worksheet and paper-weaving worksheet

Needed: rulers, scissors, glue sticks, 12" x 18" construction paper variety of colors, 2" strips of colored construction paper, 1/2" strips of colored construction paper

Kente Cloth

A close up section

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Kente Cloth, Mmeeda: Something that has not happened before

Asante, Ghana

Cotton and Silk, 80 x 126 inches

Kente cloth weaver, early C20th postcard.

<http://www.adire.clara.net/kenteintro.htm>

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A king wearing *adwinasa kente*

http://www.marshall.edu/akanart/cloth_kente.html

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What is that old blanket?

That old blanket is a *kente* cloth.

Kente Cloth

An original *kente* cloth is a cloth made by the Asante in Ghana, a country in Africa. *Kente* cloth is special as it is worn as a piece of clothing and each cloth design has a name and a special meaning.

The Origins

The origins of *kente* cloth date back to 12th century in Ghana, Africa. In the past royalty and important figures of society wore the cloth, for special occasions but today *kente* cloth is worn by people of all social status. Each design of cloth has a deep symbolic meaning and is used to say something - a form of social and political commentary. It is a visual representation of moral, social, ethical, philosophical values, history, social code of conduct and religious beliefs.

The *Kente* Cloth in the National Gallery

The name of the *kente* cloth in the National Gallery is *mmeeda*, which means "something that has not happened before." The term *mmeeda* holds it to be a symbol of ingenuity, perfection, innovation, uniqueness and exceptional achievement.

This particular *kente* cloth design was worn by Kwame Nkrumah, a political leader, when his party won an overwhelming victory in an election – the cloth symbolized the event as "it had not happened before."

More about Kwame Nkrumah

Nkrumah was important in Ghanaian history as he went on to lead Ghana to independence on March 6, 1957, becoming the first president in 1960 and eventually founded the Organisation of African Unity. Ghana was the first colonial country to gain independence in Africa. Kwame Nkrumah would wear *kente* cloth strategically for political situations, another design he wore was *Adwini asa* meaning "my skill is exhausted" or "I have done my best."

In 1960 he presented to the General Assembly of the United Nations the largest known *kente* cloth, measuring 12x20 feet, called Obaakofo Mmu Man or "one head cannot go into council" (two heads are better than one). By the time Nkrumah was removed from office in 1966, he had worn *kente* cloth to major political situations and in doing so he had helped to launch *kente* as a cloth as a symbol for ideas and beliefs, and made people realize the significance of the *kente* cloth design.

African Colors

The choice of colors is important in each *kente* cloth design, as each color has a meaning. Nkrumah's choice of colors reinforced his status of leadership. His choice of colors for the Ghanaian flag has symbolic meaning. Red for the blood of those who died in the struggle for independence, gold or yellow for the country's mineral wealth, green for the rich forest and black for the star of freedom for all Africa. These colors can be seen again and again for other African countries.

Making a *Kente* Cloth

To make a *kente* cloth the Asante hand weave the yarn on a narrow horizontal loom. The weaver will make strips of cloth that are about 3-5 inches wide and about 5-6 feet long.

Men, usually do weaving on traditional narrow looms, but women are involved in sewing the strips of cloth together to form larger garments and marketing the finished product.

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Kente is made from cotton, silk, rayon, and 'shiny' [lurex] thread. Then many strips are sewn together to make a wider piece of cloth for both men and women. A man's cloth may contain up to 24 strips and measure about 5x8feet. A woman's two-piece cloth may contain 8-12 strips each. .

The Weaving Legend

In the oral legend, told by the Asante, the spider Anansi taught the art of weaving to two brothers who had discovered his web while on a hunting trip. Anansi also taught them how to spin and dye the threads. Since then the Asante have used the strip looms Anansi taught them to build.

Object Made By Weaving

Objects made by strip weavers include blankets, bags, sheets, rugs, tent dividers, pillows, umbrellas, shawls, head cloths, trousers, and robes. Strip-woven fabric is stronger and more durable than most imported cloth and it is also more traditional than the mass-produced machine designs that are being made today.

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Question and Answer Sheet - Kente Cloth

Why is *kente* cloth so special?
_____ 2

The Origins

In the past who would wear *kente* cloth?
_____ 1

Who would wear it today?
_____ 1

When would you wear a *kente* cloth?
_____ 1

The *Kente* Cloth in the National Gallery

What is the name of the *kente* cloth in the National Gallery and what does it mean?
_____ 2

Kwame Nkrumah has worn this *kente* cloth design, who was Kwame Nkrumah?
_____ 1

More about Kwame Nkrumah

Why was he important in Ghanaian history?
_____ 3

What is the biggest *kente* cloth?
_____ 1

Who was it presented to?
_____ 1

How did Nkrumah launch *kente* cloth as a symbol for ideas and beliefs?
_____ 1

African Colors

Why are colors so important in a *kente* design?
_____ 1

Write down the colors that are in the Ghanaian flag?
_____ 4

List the colors can you see in the Gallery's *kente* cloth.
_____ 7

Making a *Kente* Cloth

Kente comes from the word "kenten," what does "kenten" mean?
_____ 1

Write how a *kente* cloth is it made?
_____ 2

Is it traditionally men or women who weave *kente* cloths?
_____ 1

The Weaving Legend

Who taught the two brothers to weave in the legend about weaving?
_____ 1

Object Made By Weaving

Name 5 objects made by strip weavers.
_____ 5

Total out of 37

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Kente Cloth Colors

Colors in the *kente* cloth design have symbolic meaning. Below are a list of colors and their meanings.

YELLOW can mean the yoke of an egg, ripe fruits and vegetables and gold. It symbolizes preciousness, royalty, wealth, spirituality, vitality and fertility.

PINK is seen as a lighter red and is connected with tenderness, calmness, pleasantness and sweetness.

RED is linked with blood. Red is used as a symbol of heightened spiritual and political mood, sacrifice and struggle.

BLUE is associated with the blue sky. It is used to symbolize good fortune, peacefulness, harmony and love related ideas.

GREEN is associated with vegetation, planting, harvesting and herbal medicine. It symbolizes growth, vitality, fertility, prosperity, fruitfulness and abundant health.

PURPLE is viewed in the same way as maroon and is used in rituals and healing purposes. Females mostly wear purple cloths.

MAROON has a close resemblance to red-brown which is associated with the color of Mother Earth. It is associated with healing and the power to repel malevolent spirits.

WHITE is linked with the white part of an egg and the white clay used in spiritual rituals, healing rites and festive occasions. Sometimes it symbolizes contact with spirits and deities. It is used in combination with black, green or yellow to express spirituality, vitality and balance.

GREY derives its symbolism from ash. Ash is used for healing and spiritual cleansing rituals to re-create spiritual balance when spiritual blemish has occurred. It is also used in rituals for protection against spirits.

SILVER is associated with the moon. Silver ornaments are usually worn by women and are used in naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies and other community festivals. It symbolizes serenity, purity and joy.

GOLD is important for the value and social prestige associated with the precious mineral.

Gold dust and gold nuggets were used for making exchanges (like money) and for making valuable royal ornaments. It symbolizes royalty, wealth, elegance, high status, supreme quality, glory and spiritual purity.

BLACK is important because of the idea that new things get darker as they get older. Black symbolizes spiritual energy, talking with the spirits, antiquity and spiritual potency.

Information adapted from: <http://www.african craft.com /educ/ index.htm>

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Paper-weaving

- ❖ Using the large construction paper create the warp (this is the threads that are attached to the loom) by firstly choosing the color for the background.
- ❖ Fold paper in half and draw lines vertically from the fold line up, leaving a gap approximately 1 1/2" from the top.
- ❖ Cut along where you have marked.
- ❖ Review symbolic meaning of the colors associated with *kente* cloth.
- ❖ Ask students to think about three or more colors to choose for their *kente* paper weaving.
- ❖ Decide on the colors for the weft strips (weft - is the threads that are weaved in and out of the warp threads on the loom).
- ❖ Explain that the students can make a pattern using these colors.

- ❖ Advise students to layer the colored paper to create multi-colored weft strips in advance of weaving. Let them be creative but remind them that they need to copy their weft strip design, as part of a pattern design is repetition.
- ❖ Weave pattern of weft strips over and under.
- ❖ Line all weft strips even with edge of loom and glue down on both sides of weaving to prevent strips from sliding out.
- ❖ Additional narrow strips can be woven over and under warp.