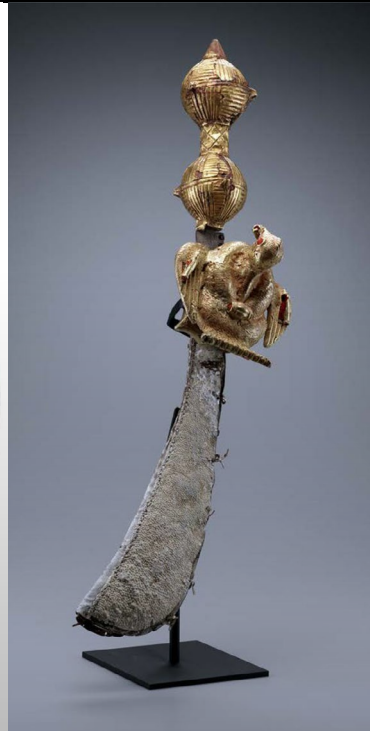


SECTION

1

INDIGENOUS
GHANAIAIAN
ARTWORK



THE CREATIVE JOURNEY (FROM CAVES TO THE 21ST CENTURY)

Arts Across Time

INTRODUCTION

This section will help you learn about the artworks of the indigenous Ghanaian people, some of which are still relevant and used in our environment or communities today. This section will engage you in eight interrelated topics that will guide and assist you in the appreciation, analysis, and documentation of Ghanaian art history from the pre-colonial era to our contemporary times.

At the end of this section, you should be able to:

You, as a learner, are expected to study and work on the following in the weeks ahead

- Record and analyse:
 - the major indigenous Ghanaian art periods and their related artworks;
 - the materials used in the artworks and how they were produced;
 - the uses of the artworks and their relevance in socio-cultural contexts.
- Describe the contributions of major indigenous Ghanaian art periods and artworks to art history of Ghana.
- Identify and explain the role of materials in the environment used as basic media for creative expression in indigenous Ghanaian art.
- Research and record myths and legends in major indigenous African cultures and their artworks.

Key Ideas

- Indigenous people are local people who can trace their lineage back to their ancestral roots.
- In Ghana, the indigenous people are of different ethnic origins, such as the Ga, Ewe, Akan, Dagomba, Sandema, Fante, etc.
- The various artworks produced by the local people are termed indigenous arts.
- Indigenous arts can be either visual or performance-based.
- Indigenous Ghanaian people make many different types of artwork and crafts.
- Artworks and crafts were important and formed an integral part of the daily lives of indigenous Ghanaian people.
- The history of Ghanaian artworks can be traced from the pre-colonial era to modern times.
- Examples of indigenous artworks and crafts include body painting, jewellery, leather bags, mortar and pestles, carved stools, linguist staffs, umbrellas, palanquins, and more.

- Analysing the characteristics and functions of design ideas in indigenous artworks and crafts can help you become more creative.
- Recognise and gain awareness of the diversity in art and design among Ghanaian ethnic groups.
- Artworks and designs of the various ethnic groups have their own cultural significance.
- Interrelatedness exists between the arts, history and culture in Ghanaian society.
- Myths are supernatural tales explaining natural phenomena or cultural practices, whereas legends are stories based on historical events but embellished over time.
- Myths and legends help in preserving history, teaching moral values, explaining natural occurrences, and establishing community laws.
- Myths and legends inspire the design and making of various forms of art.

INDIGENOUS GHANAIAN ARTWORKS

Ghanaian arts are frequently crafted to mirror our cultural beliefs, as these art forms are an essential component of our daily existence. The values encompass our character, conduct, routines, and convictions that are perceived as useful for those who engage in or employ them. Values such as honesty, respect, honour, hospitality, and hard work are highly esteemed. Our cultural values encompass all aspects of our behaviour—our choice of clothing, how we communicate with our friends, neighbours, and others, what our religious beliefs are, as well as the rituals associated with significant life events like birth, puberty, marriage, and death.

Our fundamental social ideals are captured in our artistic expressions, which shape our overall perspective on life across generations. Arts are an integral aspect of our lifestyle and we cannot be separated from it.

- *Use your notepad or your visual arts notebook to make notes from the Ghanaian Art information that follows. What does indigenous mean?*

Types of Indigenous Ghanaian Art

Ghanaian art forms can be categorised into two groups for ease of discussion: the visual arts and performance art. Under the visual arts, we have wood carving, metalsmithing, pottery, calabash and gourd work, beadwork, blacksmithing, sculpture, architecture, body arts and painting, among others. The following are identified under the performing arts: music, dance, drama, and verbal art. Sometimes, the performances of the indigenous people are more of artistic expressions than just entertainment. During ceremonies, the indigenous people pour libations as a type of prayer to their ancestors and the supreme God. The words spoken during libations are a mix of titles, wise sayings, and poetic phrases, chosen carefully and spoken with rhythm.



Fig. 1.1: Some Pre-Colonial Ghanaian artworks produced by various ethnic groups

Pre-Colonial Ghanaian Artforms (Before 1471)

There might seem to be less documented evidence regarding Ghanaian indigenous arts before the arrival of the Europeans. However, legend has it that most of the ethnic cultures in Ghana (such as the Ewe, Asante and Ga people) have a history of migration from the former Ghana Empire in Sudan and an ancestry with the Kushite Empire and ancient Egyptian civilisations. The ancient Egyptian, Kushite, and Ghana empires were all known as great civilisations of the ancient world, where various artistries, like fibres, gold, pigments, stone carvings, etc., were explored. The making of these artworks by the indigenous ethnic cultures in Ghana could have been possible prior to the arrival of the Europeans. It is not surprising that various forms of funerary pots, terracotta, and other ritual objects have been found in some parts of Ghana recently. Recent archaeological discoveries at Kintampo reveal carved pieces dating back between 5000 and 500 BC (see Fig. 1.2).



Fig. 1.2 Archaeological discovery of ancient Ghanaian artworks at Kintampo

Colonial Ghanaian Artworks and Designs (1471–1957)

During the colonial period (roughly 1874–1957), Ghanaian art and design experienced a complex interplay between tradition and European influence. Early in the period (pre-1920s), traditional art forms like wood carving, precious metalwork, and textile weaving continued to thrive, but some patronage shifted towards items desired by Europeans.

The introduction of Western education in the 1920s led to the establishment of the Achimota School in 1927, one of the first art schools in sub-Saharan Africa. Here, a “multiculturalist” approach emerged, encouraging the study of both indigenous and European artistic techniques. This period (1920s–1940s) saw the rise of prominent artists like Kofi Antubam and Ernest Victor Asihene, who incorporated European styles like portraiture with traditional Ghanaian art. Overall, the colonial period in Ghana presented both challenges and opportunities for artistic expression, resulting in a unique blend of cultural influences.

Post-colonial Ghanaian artworks and designs (1957–Present)

In the post-colonial period (from around 1957 onwards), Ghanaian art and design experienced a surge of self-expression and a renewed focus on national identity. Artists actively explored themes of independence, pan-Africanism, and social commentary. The 1960s saw the rise of the “Osagyefo” style, named after Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah. This movement embraced bold colours, symbolic imagery, and large-scale murals to celebrate Ghanaian heritage and national pride. Later decades witnessed a variation of styles and media, with artists like El Anatsui—who made sculptures from recycled materials and Felicia Abban an artist who made paintings addressing social issues, pushing the boundaries of contemporary Ghanaian art. The post-colonial period has been a time of artistic liberation and innovation, with Ghanaian artists using their work to engage with global issues while staying rooted in their cultural heritage.

Contemporary Ghanaian Artworks and Designs

The contemporary period of Ghanaian art (roughly since the 1990s) is characterised by a vibrant and diverse scene. Artists continue to explore themes of identity, history, and social justice, but with a more global perspective. There's a strong emphasis on experimentation with new materials and media, with artists like Ibrahim Mahama incorporating found objects into installations and multimedia works. Technology also plays a growing role with artists like Selly Raby Kane, using digital tools to create thought-provoking pieces. Internationally recognised figures like El Anatsui (renowned for his sculptures made from recycled metal bottle caps) have brought Ghanaian art to the forefront of the global art world. The contemporary period is a dynamic time for Ghanaian art, with artists pushing boundaries and expressing themselves in innovative ways while still drawing inspiration from their rich cultural heritage.

Contemporary Materials and Technologies Used in the Arts

In recent times, artists have used a wider range of materials and processes, including digital technology, for creating their compositions. Artists are moving beyond traditional mediums, incorporating found objects and everyday materials. Sculptures made from jute sacks, paintings incorporating plastic waste, and textiles with a twist of wax prints can often be seen in public. These innovative approaches reflect Ghana's social and economic realities while also commenting on global consumerism.

Ghanaian Visual Arts from the 17th to 20th Century

Title	Date	Culture	Medium	Classification
GoldWeight: Geometric	18th–19th	The Akans	Brass	Metal – Implements
Funerary Vessel	17th–20th	The Akans	Terracotta	Ceramics – Containers
Memorial Head (Nsodie)	1800	The Akans	Terracotta	Ceramics – Sculpture
Memorial Head (Mma)	19th–20th century	The Akan (Kwahu) traditional area	Terracotta	Ceramics – Sculpture
Female Fertility Figure (Akuaba)	20th century	The Asantes	Wood, beads, string	Wood – Sculpture
Linguist Staff: Ceremonial Stool, Chain, and Swords Motif (Okyeame poma)	1930s	The Asantes	Wood, gold foil	Wood – Sculpture

Kente Cloth	19th–20th century	The Asantes or Ewes	Silk, cotton	Textiles – Woven
Prestige cloth (Adinkra)	1960s	The Asantes	Cotton, wool	Textiles
Appliquéd Battalion Flag (Asafo)	1957	The Fantes	Cotton	Textiles
Container (Kuduo)	18th–19th century	The Akan people	Brass, pigment	Metal – Containers
Soul Washer’s Badge (Akrafokonmu)	18th–19th century	The Akans (Asante tribe)	Gold	Metal – Ornaments
Spoon	19th–20th century	The Asantes	Brass (hammered)	Metal – Implements

Table 1.1 Ghanaian Visual Arts From The 17th To 20th Century

Have you seen on the internet, TV, magazines, or in your locality, work by Ghanaian artists who use found materials in their work? What were your thoughts on seeing the artists explore or use such materials? Record your thoughts in your notepad or your visual arts notebook.

Activity 1.1

Whether working individually or as part of a group, study and discuss the information presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Identification of various Ghanaian artworks across time

Art Periods	Artforms	Artworks	Materials	Methods	Uses
Pre-colonial Period (before 1471)	Pottery	Pots, earthenware, vase,	Clay	Modelling	Utilities, Funeral rituals
	Cave art	Paintings, direct printing	Natural pigments such as ochre, kaolin, oxides, animal blood & fat, etc.	Drawing, painting, printing and spraying	Sympathetic art

	Body Art	Coiffure, body painting, ear piercing, cicatrisation	Natural pigments such as ochre, kaolin, oxides, animal blood & fat, fibres, twines, etc.	Body painting, coiffure, piercing, cicatrisation, face marking etc.	Body adornment, medicinal purposes, identification purposes, rituals, etc.
	Sculpture	Fertility dolls, drums, canoes, funerary works	Wood, clay	Modelling, carving and engraving	Fertility dolls, utilities

Activity 1.2

Working on your own, with a group of friends in your school, or with neighbours from another school.

1. Search within your community including homes, shrines, galleries, art shops, museums, palaces or by consulting elders, visiting the library or searching the internet to gather information on Ghanaian artworks from pre-colonial to contemporary times.
2. Record in a manual or digitally annotated album a list of some of the Ghanaian pre-colonial artworks you discovered during your search.
3. Reflect on and discuss, giving at least four reasons, why you are confident that our forefathers were artistic geniuses and critical thinkers.
4. As a young artist, develop a strategic plan that will help you safeguard the artistic legacy of our ancestors and to challenge and improve on their great works.
5. Present your findings orally to your peers in class for discussion.
6. Make the necessary amendments and additions to improve your write-up using the suggestions from your peers and teacher to enhance your manual or digital portfolio.

NOTE: Seek appropriate permission before taking photographs of artworks.

Activity 1.3

Undertake this activity on your own to test your understanding

The Information Centre in your community is celebrating Indigenous Arts and Culture Day. You, as an Art and Design student have been invited to make a ten-minute pictorial presentation. How would you plan to complete this task successfully?

Here is a selection of helpful points to guide you

1. Read about the Ghanaian art periods and their corresponding dates.
2. Outline the major characteristics of the artworks and designs produced in each of the periods.
3. Select artworks and media that interest you for each of the periods you would like to talk about.
4. Write a brief description of what you wish to say as an introduction to your presentation (e.g., greeting the audience, narrating background philosophies, and the concepts of indigenous arts in Ghana).
5. Select suitable pictures of artworks that describe each of the art periods.
6. Complete the write-up with suitable contributions.
7. Present your complete presentation in class for discussion and peer review.
8. Use the feedback to improve your write-up and file in your manual or digital portfolios.

Extended Reading

Follow the links below to search and learn more:

- A sample video on libation: <https://youtu.be/X9wBlgwzHn4>
- Research article on libation: <https://bit.ly/4bsJ5hO>
- Article on Ghanaian Post-colonial Art: [1321096](https://doi.org/10.1321096)
- Reading on contemporary Ghanaian Art: [contemporaryghanaianart](https://www.contemporaryghanaianart.com)
- Pre-colonial Ghanaian Art: [ART-AND-TECHNOLOGY-IN-PRE-COLONIAL-GHANA](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/317602?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=akan&pos=30&imgNo=1&tabName=object-information)
- <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/317602?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=akan&pos=30&imgNo=1&tabName=object-information>
- <https://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/mysteries-ancient-figurines-found-ghana-be-revealed-00973>
- <https://www.komaland.com/Excavationsneu.htm>
- <https://northeastghana.com/tusugu-cliff-dwellings/>
- <https://www.ghanamuseums.org/archaeo-sites-others.php>
- https://www.academia.edu/15633557/Ghanaian_Interweaving_in_the_Nineteenth_Century_A_New_Perspective_on_Ewe_and_Asante_Textile_History?email_work_card=view-paper
- https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/317679?where=Ghana&ao=on&ft=*&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=4

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIGENOUS GHANAIAN ARTWORKS

In this lesson, you will explore the rich cultural heritage of Ghana through an analysis of some artworks from different ethnic groups. By examining the types of art and design works, their themes and names, the ethnic groups who created them, the materials used, surface textures, modes of creation, and the contexts in which they were used, you will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Ghana's diverse artistic traditions. You will be required to apply the knowledge gained from the previous lesson, Indigenous Ghanaian Artworks.

The characteristics of Art and Design Artworks

The general characteristics of artworks can be seen in form, size, shape, line, colour, texture, tonal values, perspective, design composition, as well as surface quality. These traits are common in most art and design works. However, indigenous Ghanaian art and design works may have other unique characteristics.

Consider the following examples for your reflections:

1. Sankofa. Ashanti Gold Weight



Fig. 1.3 Sankofa. Ashanti gold weight. (from the 14th century)

Type of art and design work: Sankofa Ashanti gold weight is a small handcrafted brass or bronze weight that is used in the weighing of gold dust, a form of currency among the Ashanti people of Ghana.

Probable theme and name: Sankofa, which literally means it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.

Ethnic group(s): The gold weights were created by the Akan people, particularly the Ashanti tribe, who were skilled in metalwork and trading.

Material: It is made of gold, brass, or bronze, which were alloyed with copper to create a durable, yellowish metal that was perfect for the intricate designs.

Surface texture: It is smooth and polished, with intricate details and patterns that are carved into the metal using specialised tools.

Mode of making: Hand crafted using the lost-wax casting method.

How it is used: Primarily used to weigh gold dust, it also served as a means of communication and storytelling, with each design representing a different proverb or message.

Context: Sankofa Ashanti gold weights are not only culturally significant but also historically important. They date back to the 15th century, and their production continued well into the 20th century.

2. Ashanti Stools



Fig. 1.4 Ashanti stool

Type of art and design work: This is a traditional furniture, known as Ashanti stools, or Obi ntese

Probable theme: It represented social status, governance, and tradition.

Ethnic group: Used mostly by the Asante people

Materials used: Wood (usually hardwoods like mahogany, rosewood, or ebony)

Surface texture: It is smooth and highly polished, showcasing the beauty of the wood grain.

Mode of making: Handcrafted by specialised artisans.

Use: The stools are highly prized possessions that symbolise social status, power, and authority. They are used as thrones by chiefs and other permanent members of society, as well as for ceremonial purposes.

Context: Ashanti stools have a rich cultural and historical significance in Ghana. They embody the values of the Asante people, including respect for tradition, social hierarchy, and the importance of family and community.

3. Sirigu Wall Paintings



Fig. 1.5 Sirigu Wall Paintings

Type of art and design work: Sirigu paintings are vibrant, hand-painted murals that adorn the walls of homes and community buildings in the Upper East of Ghana.

Probable theme: The themes of Sirigu wall paintings typically revolve around the local flora and fauna, traditional stories, and cultural symbols of the Kassena people. These murals are known as Gurunsi murals.

Ethnic group: Kassena people, in the upper east part of Ghana.

Materials used: Natural pigments derived from local plants and minerals, such as red clay, white limestone, charcoal, and crushed laterite.

Surface texture: The surface is typically rough and textured, which adds to the charm and vibrancy of the murals.

Mode of making: Sirigu wall paintings are made using a technique called ‘griot painting’, where a trained local storyteller, called a ‘griot’, sketches the design on the wall using a stick or their fingers. The colours are then applied by a group of community members using homemade brushes made from feathers and grasses.

Use: The murals are used to beautify and add character to the homes and community buildings, as well as to preserve and celebrate the local culture, history, and identity of the Kassena people.

Context: Sirigu wall paintings were traditionally done by women in the Kassena society who were responsible for the decoration of the homes. However, in recent years, men have also become involved in the painting process.

To provide you with a visual guide to the diverse indigenous Ghanaian artworks, we'll create a table that will categorise and compare the different types of art, their characteristics, and the eras in which they flourished.

Activity 1.4

Try this activity individually, in pairs, or in groups. If you are doing this at home, you can arrange to do it with a friend from your school or a neighbour from another school.

1. Use the scenario below to perform the tasks that follow.

You have been recruited as a member of a detective team at an art museum. A new exhibit package containing several of Ghana's pre-colonial artefacts has arrived. The package is filled with amazing objects from the past however, some museum team members doubt the authenticity of the works. Your profession as an art historian and artist is to authenticate these artworks.

- a. Based on your knowledge on the Ghanaian pre-colonial artforms, develop a detailed observation guide or checklist that would help you to analyse and prove that the works were really from pre-colonial Ghana. (*You may use digital tools if possible*).
 - b. Use the guidelines developed to analyse the characteristics of at least five pre-colonial Ghanaian artworks.
 - c. Present your work in class for discussion and peer review.
 - d. Use the feedback from your peers and teacher to improve both the observation guide and the analysis reports.
 - e. Upload your final reports to your personal or group digital or manual portfolios.
2. Study and use the table below as a guideline to help you identify, describe, analyse, and categorise the pre-colonial to contemporary Ghanaian artworks.

Table 1.3: Identification and description of indigenous artworks according to ethnic groups

Local Name and Picture of Artwork	Type of Artwork/ Craft	Media/ Material and Technique	Function/Use	Ethnic group(s) that made it
Aba (Ewe language)	Straw Mat	Hand woven	Sleeping, resting, also for fencing a house or making shelters.	Anlo, Agave

Extended Reading

Use the links below to search and learn more:

- Characteristics of indigenous Ghanaian art. <https://bit.ly/4b6sO2e>
- Concepts, Philosophies and Ideas of indigenous Ghanaian art. <https://bit.ly/3Uu8Mrd>
- Characteristics of religious indigenous Ghanaian art. <https://bit.ly/44spgF7>

SOCIOCULTURAL RELEVANCE OF GHANAIAN INDIGENOUS ARTWORKS

In the previous activities under the previous lessons, we were able to identify and describe some indigenous art forms and their characteristics. Which aspects of the activities did you enjoy most? Share your experiences with your peers. Now that you know some indigenous art forms or artworks, can you now identify, analyse, and describe their sociocultural relevance to the indigenous Ghanaian people? Getting to understand the relevance of the artforms produced by the indigenous people will help you appreciate how they used art in their daily lives.

When designing and making artworks, the indigenous Ghanaian people considered various contexts. Context in art and design means the circumstances, conditions, or situations in which the artworks were created, presented, and interpreted. The contexts for indigenous Ghanaian arts include the history of the people, cultural practices, social life, political or rulership systems, the philosophy, cultural symbolism, and values of the people. Now, let us expand these contexts further.

Historical context

Ghana has a rich and complex history, encompassing various kingdoms, empires, and migrations. Artistic expressions often reflect these historical events and the stories passed down through generations. Symbols and motifs might reference significant leaders, victories in battle, or trade routes that shaped the development of Ghanaian cultures.

Cultural context

Art and design are deeply woven into the fabric of Ghanaian cultural practices. Traditional clothing, hairstyles, and body adornment all hold symbolic meaning and serve specific purposes. Masks, sculptures, and pottery used in ceremonies and rituals help connect communities to their ancestors and spiritual beliefs.

Social context

Artworks often depict scenes from everyday life, showcasing traditional professions, social interactions, and celebrations. These artistic representations provide valuable insights into the social structures, community values, and ways of life within Ghanaian societies.

Political context

Rulers and leaders traditionally commissioned artwork to display their power, wealth, and lineage. Symbols of authority, regalia worn by chiefs, and elaborate palace decorations all served as visual representations of the political system and social hierarchy.

Philosophical context

Ghanaian art and design are not merely decorative; they express the underlying philosophies and worldviews of the people. These philosophies encompass:

Spiritual beliefs: Artworks connect communities to the spirit world, honouring ancestors and seeking guidance from deities.

Concept of time and space: Circular patterns or layered designs might represent cyclical views of time or the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms.

Relationship with nature: Animals, plants, and natural elements depicted in art can symbolise respect for the environment and the delicate balance between humans and nature.

Symbolism context

Symbols are a vital language in Ghanaian art and design, conveying complex meanings and messages. These symbols can be:

- **Geometric shapes:** Triangles might represent strength, spirals could symbolise growth, and squares could depict harmony.
- **Stylized figures:** Animal figures might embody specific qualities like bravery (a lion) or wisdom (an owl).
- **Ga Samai (Ga symbols):** Similar to other Ghanaian art forms, Ga Samai represent the Ga people's philosophies and belief systems through symbolism. They are embedded with proverbial sayings and reflect how people are also connected to nature and family values. <https://thegadangme.com/ga-samai/>
- **Ewe Dzesiwo (Ewe Symbols):** Ewe Dzesi are a vital part of Ewe cultural identity, connecting the people to their heritage and belief systems. However, the Ewe Dzesiwo, like the Ga Samai, are not as popular as the Akan Adinkra symbols. https://kayfreesm.pics/product_details/24209924.html
- **Adinkra symbols:** These unique Akan symbols, with specific meanings and proverbs, are a rich source of cultural knowledge and values. <https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/>

The pictures below present the Akan Adinkra symbols and some interesting names and designs of the Ga Dangme Samai (symbols) and Ewe Dzesiwo.

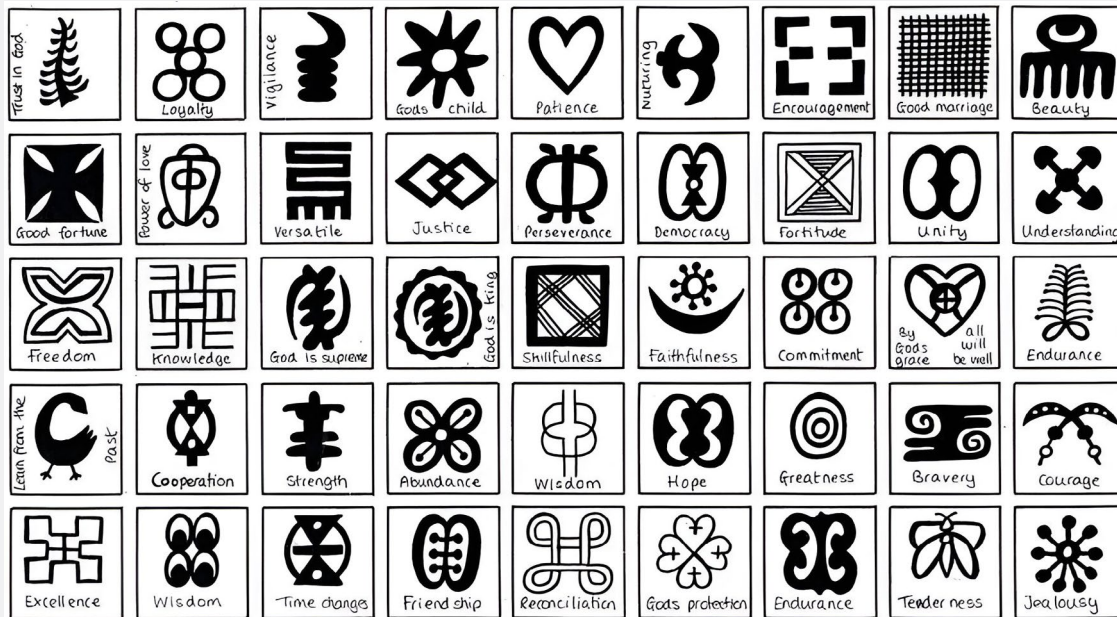


Fig. 1.6 Examples of Akan Adinkra symbols Source: <https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/>



Fig. 1.7 Examples of Ga Samai (GaDangme symbols)

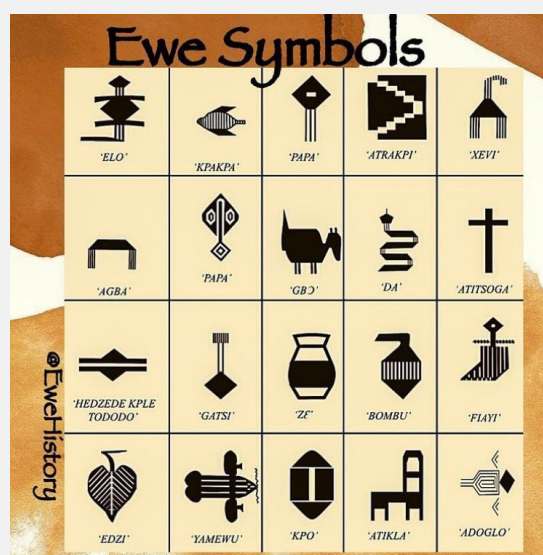


Fig. 1.8 Examples of Ewe Dzesiwo

Now, carefully read and analyse some socio-cultural relevance of the indigenous Ghanaian artworks presented in the paragraphs below. As you read, try to compare the examples to some of the indigenous artworks you have seen in your community and think about their value and uses.

Educational and Cultural Preservation

In most cases, Ghanaian indigenous artworks are used to educate people in the community, whether they are children or adults. For example, the linguist staff, drums or traditional symbols are used to educate individuals including elders or chiefs in political positions. At the same time, these art forms are used as a means of preserving

the culture of the people, which makes them a very relevant aspect of the sociocultural lives of the indigenous Ghanaian people.



Fig. 1.9 An example of a linguist staff head used to educate individuals or elders on the importance of consulting others when making vital decisions

Promotes Tourism

Ghana's indigenous artworks are like treasures that many people love to visit. Tourists come from different places to see them in villages and towns. This brings money to the local people and the government through tourism. For instance, the beautiful wall paintings in Sirigu, the floating village of Nzulezu, and the colourful canoe carvings in Anomabo all attract tourists. Take a look at the pictures in **Fig. 1.10** below.



Fig. 1.10 Floating village of Nzulezu and Sirigu Wall Paintings serving as tourist attractions.

Expresses Personal and Collective Experiences or Artistic Expressions

Indigenous Ghanaian artworks are used as forms of both personal expressions and collective experiences. For example, during festivals of the various ethnic groups, individuals belonging to an Asafo group or certain special groups may paint their bodies and faces in designs of their choice. However, these body decorations are done by all members as a collective artistic experience. Similarly, a dancer may decide to dress in a particular artistic costume to express their status as warriors, kings, elders, or personal beliefs or philosophies. Describe what do you see in Fig. 1.11 below.



Fig. 1.11 Photograph from Aboakyer festival showing examples of body paintings and costumes used as forms of personal or collective experiences.

Highlighting history and beliefs

Indigenous art forms are used as a means of highlighting the history and beliefs of the people. You may have seen some installation arts (e.g., assembled pots, cowries, red cloth, wood carvings, etc.) at a shrine or in front of the homes of some families. These installations, or arranged artistic objects, are representations of what the people believe and practice. Some of the beliefs include belief in ancestors, lesser gods, the supreme God, animism, etc. Also, the artworks are used to highlight important recent historical events. For example, the golden stool and the sword Okomfo Anokye buried in the Asante land help to remember him as a legend. Among most of the indigenous people in southern Ghana, there is a common artwork called the Posuban, which is a three-dimensional artwork that represents various warriors of the people and is used as a shrine.



Fig. 1.12 An example of Posuban - historical shrine at Mankesim

Enshrine societal norms and promote cultural heritage

Artworks of the indigenous people reflect their social norms. Social norms are part of the indigenous people, and they may slightly vary in every ethnic group. Can you describe some of the social norms in your community? The most common of the social norms among the indigenous Ghanaian people is their hospitality. Welcoming visitors and providing them with comfort is important to society. Hence, a visitor's room, chair, mat, cloth, and other artworks are created and kept in case a visitor shows up. These practices form part of the cultural heritage of the people. They are also designed into traditional symbols, decorations, or other art forms to help preserve the culture of the people.

Foster Creativity and critical thinking

Making indigenous artworks requires creativity and innovation. It takes a lot of critical thinking and innovation to make the various artworks. The pre-colonial artworks show us how early Ghanaians were both creative and thoughtful. These artworks weren't just made for fun; they used their imagination and problem-solving skills to create beautiful and meaningful pieces. Take, for example, the Ayowa design used for blending spices and vegetables; it was thoughtfully made to serve its purpose.

Modern Influence

Ghana's rich tapestry of artistic tradition continues to inspire a new generation of artists who bridge the gap between ancestral craftsmanship and contemporary expression. Let us explore five contemporary Ghanaian artists, and how they draw inspiration from their indigenous roots, incorporating traditional methods into modern artworks, thus preserving their cultural heritage while pushing creative boundaries.

1. El Anatsui

El Anatsui is an artist of international acclaim, known for his monumental works. This is often achieved with the aid of the recycling weaving process employing liquor bottle caps and copper wires, which are woven into highly decorative cloths. All these relate to the traditional Ghanaian craft of kente cloth weaving: the method of weaving and the energetic patterns that mimic what one would find on common Ghanaian textiles. His piece "*Gli*" (wall) is a series of panels that evoke change and connections, mirroring Ghana's historic and cultural fluidity.

Click on the link to read more about El Anatsui and his works:



2. Ibrahim Mahama

Known for his installations using jute sacks previously employed in the cocoa trade, Ibrahim Mahama's art comments on issues of commerce, labour, and displacement. His piece, "*Out of Bounds*," envelops architectural spaces with these textured materials, evoking the gritty reality of trade and labour that has historical ties to colonial and post-colonial economic practices in Ghana. Mahama's method resonates with the indigenous practice of using every available resource to create both utilitarian and artistic expressions.

Click on the link to read more about Ibrahim Mahama and his artworks:



3. Ato Delaquis

Delaquis integrates vibrant colours and bold patterns characteristic of Ghanaian visual language into his paintings. His works often feature scenes of daily life rendered in a style that pays homage to the traditional Ghanaian palette and form. For instance, his painting "Market Day" illustrates the bustling energy and colour

of local markets, a central aspect of Ghanaian culture, using techniques that reflect the rhythm and hues of traditional Ghanaian textile designs.

Click on these links to read more about Ato Delaquis and his artworks:



4. Ablade Glover

Ablade Glover's bold oil paintings are a tribute to the hustle and bustle of the Ghanaian marketplaces. His work in very thick impasto techniques further underlines a textured quality that comes as close to the textural depth of indigenous Ghanaian textiles as is possible, such as kente. His work, from the vibrant colour and chaos of modern Ghanaian life, not only celebrates complex craft and design but also traditional weaving.

Click on these links to read more about Ablade Glover and his artworks:



These artists epitomise the fact that modern Ghanaian art is a living practice of re-invention rather than a mere continuation of old traditions. Each work talks of the past and the present, traditional ways that are preserved and given new meaning and vision for issues and aesthetics of the present. It is these kinds of artists who make sure that the Ghanaian artistic traditions are still active enough to mould and inspire the local and global art communities. It is the meeting of the old with the new that goes on to describe the dynamic character of Ghanaian art and, through that, the contribution it makes in defining the cultural and artistic landscape across the globe.

Activity 1.5

Reflect on these questions alone or with your friends

What other indigenous Ghanaian artworks of socio-cultural relevance do you know? You can also search for and learn more about various indigenous artworks and write about their socio-cultural relevance.

To do this, you can consider the steps below.

1. Make a list of artworks produced by some of the indigenous Ghanaian people in your community.
2. Examine and describe the sociocultural relevance of the sample indigenous artworks of the Ghanaian people identified.
3. Ask elders in your community or search the internet to find out why the indigenous people produced these artworks. (You can find some examples of the relevance of indigenous Ghanaian artworks by clicking this link



4. Write down your findings and present them orally in class for discussion.
5. Compare your information to some of the examples on the socio-cultural relevance of Ghanaian indigenous arts below.
6. Study Table 1.4 and use it as a guide to present your findings.

Type of Work	Period/ age of the artwork	Uses	Context and area of relevance

Table 1.4: Socio-cultural relevance of indigenous Ghanaian art

7. Working either on your own or in groups at school or at home.
 - Discuss the relationship between indigenous artworks and modern Ghanaian designs.
 - Use the information you generated in Table 1.4 to design a storyboard or concept map showing the sociocultural relevance of selected indigenous Ghanaian artworks using any suitable resources.
 - Present your storyboard or concept maps in class for discussion and review.
8. Study the example of a storyboard or concept map below and share ideas with your class friends on how to create your own.

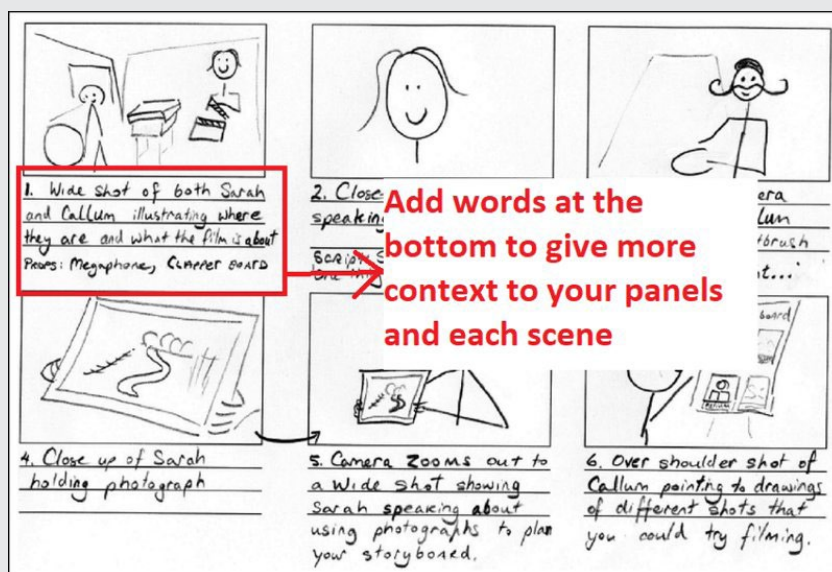


Fig. 1.13: An example of a storyboard

Extended Reading

- How to create storyboards: <https://animost.com/tutorials/animation-storyboarding/>
- Find out more on GaDangme Samai: [ga-samai](https://www.gadangme.com/ga-samai)
- Read more about Ewe symbols here:
[Traditional Symbols Adinkra Ga and Ewe Symbols.pdf](#)
- <https://www.adagya.com/the-most-watched-festival-you-dont-want-to-miss-aboakyer-festival/>
- <https://bit.ly/3J8na3k>
- <https://elanatsui.art/>
- <https://elanatsui.art/biography>
- <https://ocula.com/artists/ibrahim-mahama/>
- <https://www.culturalencyclopaedia.org/ato-delaquis-artist>
- <https://octobergallery.co.uk/artists/glover>

WORKS OF ART AND DESIGN PRODUCED BY VARIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS IN GHANA

In this lesson, we are going to explore the art and design forms of various ethnic groups in Ghana.

Ghana is known for its traditions and cultural practices. It is a country steeped in its varied cultural heritage, dating back to the many ethnic groups living in the region. The Akans, Ewes, Dagombas, and Gas are a few examples of the many ethnic groups that bring their own heritages to complement the nation's flair for art and design. The Akan, Northern tribes and Ewe are noted for making beautiful gold jewellery, are producers of traditional symbols, and colourful handwoven cloth, both of which are in high demand across the continents as African symbols. On the other hand, the Ewe and other Akan people are prominently identified as master carvers of various wooden dolls with varied functional purposes to narrate historical stories and cultural beliefs. Equally, the Dagomba are proficient in leatherworking, drum-making, and many other crafts contributing to their vibrant music and dance cultures. The Ga people highly express their traditional and artistic side through the Ga fantasy coffins, which are well designed in shapes reflecting the life or dreams of the deceased, thus portraying their strong belief in life after death.

What is the purpose of this lesson?

The artistic expressions mentioned become imperative in understanding cultural diversity and history in Ghana. Understanding centuries of knowledge, beliefs, and tradition in an artistic piece such as textiles, sculptures, or musical instruments develops appreciation. The understanding and appreciation of such uniqueness highlights the complex mosaic that is the Ghanaian identity. Such appreciation fosters the highest sense of national pride and brings about cultural understanding and unity.

Some Art and Designs of Some Ethnic Groups in Ghana

Ghana is rich in cultural diversity, and its art forms are varied and vibrant, often reflecting the traditions, beliefs, and practices of its numerous ethnic groups. Here are some of the prominent art forms in Ghana and their associated ethnic groups:

Akan Adinkra Printed Cloth

Adinkra cloth is from the Akan ethnic groups, specifically the Asante and Fante people. The Adinkra symbols are stamped onto the cloth using carved calabash stamps and a dye prepared from the bark of the *Badie* tree. The Adinkra symbols are often associated with proverbs, values, human behaviour, animal behaviour, plant life, shapes of objects, and historical events. The craft of Adinkra cloth-making, a skill passed down through generations, is not merely an artistic enterprise but a language of symbols, each carrying its own meaning and significance within the Asante society (specifically

the people of Ntonso in the Ashanti region). Adinkra symbols visually represent the Asante people's values, beliefs, and philosophies.

The cultural importance of Adinkra cloth goes beyond its aesthetic appeal. It serves as a medium for the Asante people to express their thoughts, beliefs, and social values.

It is worn at important ceremonies, such as funerals, and conveys messages of wisdom, resilience, and the cyclical nature of life and death, reminding wearers and onlookers of the virtues and philosophies that guide their lives.

Understanding the craft of Adinkra cloth-making offers not just insight into the artistic practices of the Asante people but also into their way of life. It embodies the connection between the Asante people and their ancestors, serving as a bridge between the past and the present and ensuring the continuity of their rich cultural heritage.



Fig. 1.14 A man dressed in printed Adinkra Pattern Cloth

Hand-woven Cloth

Hand-woven clothes are associated with the Akans (particularly the Asante people), the Ewes, and some ethnic groups in Northern Ghana.

1. Akan kente

The kente cloth hails from the Asante Kingdom (people of Bonwire), dating back to the 17th century. It was developed by the Akan people, and it used to be only worn by royals during ceremonial events and special occasions. The woven patterns on the kente cloth were influenced by how a spider, commonly known as 'Ananse', wove its web. The art of kente weaving has traditionally been passed on from one generation to another, with details being passed from father to son within the weaving families.

Asante kente patterns and colours are meaningful in their own regard. They either reflect historical events, ideas of philosophy, moral values, or social codes. For instance, black symbolises maturation and intensified spiritual energy; gold for status and serenity; green for renewal and growth; and red for political and spiritual moods, bloodshed, and sacrificial rites.

The loom, a device used for weaving kente is typically a horizontal wood structure on which kente is woven. The loom weaves narrow strips of the kente cloth (approximately four inches wide), and then the strips are sewn together (with a sewing machine), to obtain larger pieces of the cloth. The whole process of weaving is very delicate; it may last for weeks or even months, depending on the complexity of the patterns or designs required and how large the cloth is. Usually, people dressed in kente typically have a royal demeanour.



Fig. 1.15 Asante Kente

2. Ewe Kete

The Ewes, found in the Volta Region of Ghana, practice hand-weaving of cloth, which they call kete. Though it is not known when their weaving practices started, it is believed that the practice has been with them for centuries, even before they migrated to settle in pre-colonial Ghana. Their style of weaving the kete is different from that of the Asante kente. The Ewe people can weave motifs like animal figures into their patterns, which other weaving ethnic groups cannot imitate. This makes their hand-woven cloth unique. At times, the kete weavers even use their designs for story narration, and some designs are encoded by proverbs, historical events, and the values of the culture.

Kete is typically made from silk and cotton. Weaving takes place on a traditional loom called Agba (for this reason, the Ewe people also call their hand-woven cloth Agbamevo). With a treadle, every thread is placed on the loom according to the design. This requires a high level of skill and patience because accurate hand movements with coordination are highly necessary for complex patterns. Unlike the Asante Kente, which often features bright designs and multi-coloured patterns, Ewe Kete can sometimes be identified by its more sombre colours.



Fig. 1.16 Examples of Ewe Kete Cloth

Ewe weaving uses colors and patterns which are crucial in communicating specific ideas or sentiments. For instance, the colour red symbolizes death or political strife, green represents growth, gold or yellow signifies wealth, and blue represents love, peace, and harmony. The patterns used, which include geometric shapes, animal motifs, and symbolic representations, tell a comprehensive story about the weaver's intentions, the wearer's status, and the community's values. These patterns also serve as a visual language understood by those within the culture, representing wisdom, bravery, love, or unity.

3. Northern Fugu or Motane

It is sometimes referred to as *Fugu* or the *Motane* garment. It is worn traditionally by the people in the northern regions of Ghana, primarily by the Dagomba, Mamprusi, and other related ethnic groups such as the Gonja and Kusasi. This special attire carries a lot of cultural and social importance for these communities.

The handwoven cotton fabric is mainly done by men within the community. Men weave the locally grown cotton yarn into narrow strips of fabric on hand looms, after

which the pieces are then sewn together to form the garment. The cloth is very light in weight, allowing free air passage, hence making it more comfortable and suitable for the hot and dry climate in the northern regions of Ghana.

The **Fugu** or **Motane** cloth is usually sleeveless, free, and running in nature. It is worn as a tunic down to the knees or slightly lower. Often, the garment is embellished with complicated embroidery, especially around the neckline, hem, and seams. The patterns of the embroidery decoration are either plain and simple or geometrical with symbols and motifs representing elements of traditional beliefs, spirituality and the cultural value within a community.

The designs, colours, and embroidered patterns of the cloth are often carriers of messages about the wearer in terms of identity, social status, and cultural heritage.

The northern cloth is a culturally rich and visually stunning garment widely worn during festivals, weddings, funerals, and other cultural events. It is also widely used as an everyday garment, mostly by men in the north. The production and use of the cloth represent the resilience and creativity of such communities in the face of altered social and economic dynamics.



Fig. 1.17 Examples of Northern hand-woven cloth (Fugu/Motane) and a fugu dress

Pottery

Pottery is an ancient and culturally rich art form that is practiced throughout various regions of Ghana, each area showcasing distinct styles and techniques that reflect their unique histories and traditions. Following is a detailed overview of pottery among the Asante, Fante, Ewe, Ga, and Northern peoples of Ghana. The **Asante people**, primarily those located in the Kumasi area, are renowned for their pottery. It is an artform that is deeply intertwined with their royal and spiritual traditions. Asante potters, usually women, do not use a potter's wheel; instead, they create pieces using the coil and pinch techniques. The towns of Pankrono and Mfensi are especially famous for their pottery, which is characterised by large, ornately designed pots and vessels, often used in traditional ceremonies and rituals. Asante pottery frequently features symbolic designs that reflect proverbs, with the blackening effect achieved through firing techniques using plant materials and minerals.

In coastal towns like Winneba and Mankessim, the **Fante people** produce distinct pottery that often includes decorative, figurative sculptures on the lids of pots and containers. The Fantes are known for their vibrant, utilitarian ceramics used in everyday life and special occasions. The pots are usually hand-built using a combination of the

coil and pinch methods and are often fired in open pits. They also incorporate colourful painted designs, making their pottery pieces not only functional but also decorative.

The **Ewes** are famous for their pottery, which is essential to both their daily and ceremonial lives. Places like Vume and Sogakope are particularly known for their pottery crafts. Ewe pottery is famous for its smooth finishes and symmetrical shapes, often decorated with intricate incised patterns. These patterns, apart from being decorative, also serve the function of identifying the clan of the potter. The Ewe potters work mainly with women, local clay, and low-temperature firing, giving the pottery a distinct reddish-brown colour.

In **Northern Ghana**, more so among the communities in and around Tamale and Bolgatanga, pottery takes on a whole different form and significance. The people of these areas, including the Dagomba and the Gurunsi, make use of bold geometric designs and more substantial, robust forms suitable for the drier climate. Pottery here is typically used for storage, cooking, and water-harvesting needs. The firing process often involves using dung and straw, which imparts a unique, smoky appearance and strengthens the pots.

In the Greater Accra Region, the **Ga people**, particularly around towns like Ga Mashie and Tema, are known for their distinctive pottery styles, which often reflect the coastal environment. Ga pottery frequently features shapes and motifs inspired by marine life, with a notable use of glazes that add a shiny, durable finish to the vessels. These pots are widely used in normal days of life and even in traditional Ga ceremonies like the Homowo festival, in which pottery is one of the very significant components of the celebratory functions.

Pottery is a cultural heritage passed down through generations, primarily by women, and is an essential part of Ghana's artistic expression. Each ethnic group has its own stylistic approach, technique, and cultural relevance, making pottery an integral part of local economies and everyday life. Its importance transcends its utility in representing integrated cultural practices and preserving a heritage that continues to transform.



Fig. 1.17 Examples of indigenous pottery

Pottery can be considered a very significant medium of cultural identity, expression, and heritage among people of different ethnic backgrounds. For example, geometrical patterns by potters in the North or symbolic motifs in Ashanti pottery often tell a story or represent cultural proverbs, hence linking the present generation to the past. Some significance of pottery are.

- **Social and Ritual Significance:** Pottery plays a significant role in Ghanaian societies, particularly in royal ceremonies and marriages. In Asante culture, royal pots are used to symbolize chieftaincy, while Ewe pottery is used for performance in funerals and marriages, highlighting its spiritual and social significance.
- **Economic Impact:** Pottery is a crucial income source for many, particularly women, who are the backbone of Ghanaian pottery centers. It provides a livelihood for those practicing pottery, and its wares are sold in local, national, and international markets, promoting local economy growth and sustainability.
- **Artistic Innovation:** Ghanaian pottery, despite its tradition, is a field of artistic innovation, constantly evolving to meet evolving tastes, technology, and market demands. This combination of tradition and innovation not only preserves the art form but also modernizes it in the current world.
- **Educational Tool:** Pottery serves as an educational tool in a community, transferring knowledge and skills from one generation to the next, ensuring the survival of cultural practices and traditional skills that may otherwise be lost.
- **Environmental Relationship:** Ghana's pottery production uses locally sourced clay and plant materials, demonstrating a close relationship with the environment and promoting ecological awareness through sustainable practices, thereby enhancing the community's subsistence on the land.
- **Symbol of Resilience and Adaptability:** Pottery in Ghanaian cultures is a testament to their resilience and adaptability to modernity. It represents the community's ability to preserve heritage while being flexible. Ghanaian pottery serves as a link to the past, a means of cultural preservation, an economic source, and an artistic expression. It is a highly held art form, celebrating the richness of Ghanaian culture and showcasing the resilience of these communities.

Woodcarving

Wood carving in Ghana is a vibrant and ancient art form that spans several ethnic groups and regions, each with distinct styles and cultural significance. This art form not only serves as a way of preserving the rich cultural heritage of Ghana but also plays a crucial role in the daily and spiritual lives of its people.

One of the most famous wood carving centres in Ghana is the Ashanti Region, particularly around the city of Kumasi. The Asantes are renowned for their skill in wood carving, which has been passed down through generations. They primarily use wood from the *Sese* tree for their crafts. Artisans here create a variety of items such as stools, fertility dolls (known as *Akuaba*), masks, combs, linguist staff, and sculptures that are important to their traditional beliefs and ceremonies. The famous Ashanti stools, for example, are not merely furniture but hold a deep spiritual significance, symbolising the soul of the Ashanti people.

In the Eastern Region, the wood carvers are known for their artistic masks and figures, which often serve religious purposes. The masks are used during traditional dances and festivals and are believed to embody the spirits of ancestors. Similarly, the Krobo

people, famous for their beads, also engage in wood carving, producing artefacts that often incorporate both wood and beads.

The Nzema and *Ahanta* ethnic groups in the Western Region of Ghana are also notable for their wood carving craftsmanship. They create elaborate masks and figures used in traditional festivals like the *Kundum* Festival. These carvings are believed to harness spiritual energies and are essential in rites that bond the community and the spiritual world.

The Ewes in the Volta Region are famous for their detailed symbolic sculptures and ceremonial objects. The carvings often represent deities or are used in worship practices. Ewe carvers are particularly known for their complex designs and the use of symbolism to convey traditional narratives or ideals. The wooden dolls of the Ewe, known as *Venovi* or *Ewe dolls*, serve functions beyond play. Traditionally, they are fertility dolls believed to bestow fertility and good fortune on their owners. These dolls are often characterised by their abstract form with exaggerated features, and simple design. They are carried by women who wish to conceive, symbolising their hope for future children. The design and use of these dolls underscore the Ewe's deep connection to spirituality and the importance of lineage and family in their culture.

In the Northern region, the Dagomba and Gonja communities produce functional items such as bowls, drums, and other musical instruments from wood. These items, while useful, are adorned with carvings that imbue them with cultural significance and beauty. The talking drum, for example, is not just a musical instrument but also a means of communication within and between communities.



Fig. 1.18 Examples of wood indigenous wood carving

Woodcarving in Ghana is not just an art form but a reflection of the people's spiritual, cultural, and historical essences. Each piece, whether elaborately carved or simple, serves a purpose and reveals how art can be informed by the cultural and historical contexts of its development. Below are some significance of woodwork:

- **Cultural Significance in Ritual and Ceremony:** Wood-carved objects are crucial in Ghanaian rituals and ceremonies, such as chieftaincy and succession ceremonies. The Ashanti people use decorated stools as thrones, symbolising legitimacy and authority. In the Volta Region, the Ewe people use carved figures in worship practices, dedicating them to deities or using them for healing rituals.
- **Spiritual Relevance:** In Ghana, wood carvings hold spiritual significance, with some communities believing they can house spirits or act as mediators between the spiritual and physical worlds. Masks, worn during traditional festivals by the Nzema and Ahanta, are believed to embody ancestors' spirits and are invoked during dances and ceremonies to bridge the gap between the living and spiritual realms.
- **Social and Economic Impacts:** Wood carving is a vital social and economic activity, providing livelihoods for artisans and contributing to the local economy through domestic sales and exports. It is particularly popular in tourist-friendly areas and serves as symbols of community identity and pride, reflecting unique attributes of the ethnic groups.
- **Educational and Historical Value:** Wood carvings are valuable educational artifacts that provide historical insights into Ghana's cultural heritage. They serve as tangible links to the past, allowing schools and museums to teach about migration, conquest, and transformation, providing a rich historical narrative that textbooks may not cover.
- **Preservation of Culture:** Wood carving is a valuable method for preserving culture, as it combines traditional practices and languages with modern influences. Elders teach younger generations, passing down knowledge and skills through generations, ensuring the preservation of cultural practices and beliefs that may be lost.

Beadwork

Beadwork is a type of bright art among various ethnic groups throughout Ghana. This craft is not only about creating beautiful ornaments but also a form of communication in which colours and patterns bear definite meanings. Look for how these different communities within Ghana communicate cultural identity, history, and values through beadwork. In Kumasi, the heart of Ashanti Region, beadwork is part of royal regalia and day-to-day life. Generally, beads are mainly made of glass and richly coloured. Gold, green, and red beads are the most common ones that represent the trio of wealth, fertility, and political power respectively. Among the participants who attended the *Akwasidae*, a festival to thank the Asante's ancestral spirits and the Ashanti king, elaborate beaded necklaces and bracelets, which showed respect and belonging, were worn.



Fig. 1.19 Examples of indigenous blended bead and metal jewelry

Among the Ewe people in Kpando, bead-making is an ancestral craft that passes from one generation to the next. The Ewe people of Kpando are noted for their indigenous, unique skills in making beads, mostly from glass and old recycled bottles. They are frequently worn during special ceremonies, from marriage rights to initiation ceremonies. Patterns and colours that people will choose most often will tell of family history and personal accomplishments.

Also, among the Dagomba people living in Tamale, beads form one of the leading components in aesthetic adornment and spirituality. They are worn daily, signifying beauty and social status, and are used extensively in rituals and healing. White beads signify purity and spirituality, while black beads symbolise maturity and wisdom.

In the Eastern Region of Ghana, the Krobos, located at Krobo Odumase also work with beads. Beads produced at Krobo have a tradition that dates back centuries. Both the durability and design of the Krobo beads are remarkable. The beads are a significant component of the diverse life events that range from puberty rites (*dipo*), marriage, and death rites. The very beautiful and vibrant colours they exhibit, such as yellow, blue, and pink, are what make the beads unique and the most sought-after.

The Significance of Ghanaian Beads

- i. **Cultural Significance:** Beads are a significant tool of cultural expression in Ghana, used to wear traditional attire and beautify possessions during ceremonies and festivals. Different patterns, colors, and styles represent different ethnic groups and sub-ethnic groups with traditional knowledge and aesthetic preferences. For example, the Krobo people pass on their traditions and values from one generation to the next.
- ii. **Social Significance:** Beads play a significant role in defining an individual's identity, social status, age, gender, and marital status within a community. They represent social rank within the community, such as chiefs and high-caliber individuals. Beads are also central to occasions like marriages, where they form an intrinsic part of the dowry and represent the social bond between families.
- iii. **Political Significance:** Politically, beads are symbols of power and governance, mostly to be worn during political functions. They form the regalia for chiefs and

kings, and in this instance, beads don't mean mere decorations but also a sign of power and leadership.

- iv. Spiritual Significance:** Beads are used in various religious and rituals for protection, curing, and communication with the spiritual world. They embody spiritual energy and act as talismans against evil spirits or misfortune. White beads, for instance, are associated with purity and protection. Beads in Ghana are more than ornaments; they reflect the beliefs, histories, and aspirations of the people in their daily lives and grand ceremonies, showcasing the central role of art and symbolism in social, cultural, political, and spiritual life.

Murals and Wall Paintings

Murals and wall paintings are a vibrant and expressive art form found among various ethnic groups across Ghana. These artworks are not just decorations but also serve as a means of communication, often reflecting the values, beliefs, and histories of the people who create them.

The Gurunsi people, living in the Upper East Region of Ghana, are famous for their boldly patterned wall paintings. The paintings are deeply symbolic and tied to the cultural and spiritual lives of the community. The walls of their homes are made from mud and then beautifully adorned with natural pigments that create geometric patterns. Each pattern has a meaning, often related to social status, family history, or spiritual protection.



Fig. 1.20 Gurunsi earth houses

Click here to explore the Gurunsi Earth Houses:



In the northern part of Ghana, the Dagomba people also express their culture through wall paintings. Their traditional homes, known as 'round huts', feature walls decorated with motifs that depict folk tales, proverbs, and important historical events. These murals are usually created using earth tones, which blend naturally with the landscape, and are often refreshed annually as part of community festivals.

Moving to the Western Region of Ghana, the Nzema people engage in a unique form of wall painting that involves both abstract and figurative designs. These murals often illustrate local legends and folklore, with a particular emphasis on animals and natural

elements, symbolising different virtues and aspects of life. The process of painting is communal and acts as a social activity that strengthens bonds within the community.

In southern Ghana, the Asante people incorporate wall paintings into their traditional buildings, particularly palaces and religious structures. These murals often feature stylised representations of animals, human figures, and adinkra symbols, each carrying specific meanings related to Asante philosophy and ethics. The use of gold and vibrant colours in Asante murals represents royalty and the spiritual connection between the community and their ancestors.

Murals and wall paintings not only beautify the environment but also preserve and transmit cultural knowledge and history from generation to generation. They offer a glimpse into the community's soul, making them an essential part of Ghana's rich cultural heritage, ensuring the essence of their culture remains visible.

Basket Weaving

Basket weaving is a colourful, integral craft of all the peoples from all over Ghana, expressing the greatness of their cultural heritage and the skill that has been practically transmitted over generations. The importance of the craft goes beyond the mere provision of functional objects. It is, at an equal measure, an opportunity to express one's personal artistic vision and communal values. Here, we seek to look at the way the people of Ghana have fine-tuned the craft in several towns, hence introducing unique features and functionality in their basket weaving.

The *Frafra* people around Bolgatanga are well known for their highly coloured Bolga baskets. The Bolga basket is made of elephant grass, sun-dried, dyed in striking colours, and at times patterned with designs. This basket has a very firm handle and is round in shape. Its large size makes it excellent for carrying goods to and from the market. This basket has a functional aspect of a product and is of great importance in this community by offering a significant income.

Basket weaving is also a popular craft among the Asantes. The Asante baskets bear kente cloth designs in most cases, both bright in colour and complex in pattern. These baskets are mostly used for ceremonial purposes during festivals or royal events and hold a lot of cultural significance.

The Ewes produce baskets that are typically characterised by tighter weaving and finer materials, allowing for more detailed and delicate patterns. Ewe baskets are often smaller and used for storing precious items or as gift baskets during important community celebrations.

The Ga people create baskets mainly for fishing. These baskets are designed to be durable and water-resistant, often treated with natural substances to withstand the salty ocean environment. They are also used to store fish and other seafood, showing the functionality of basket weaving in daily life.



Fig. 1.21 Bolgatanga basket weaving

Indigenous Metalwork Art

Metal work in Ghana is a historical and traditional art form that cuts across several ethnic groups in the country. Metalworking in this country is done both for functional and decorative artefacts that generally speak to the values of culture in the communities. Now, let us look at the metalwork traditions in some selected ethnic groups and towns in Ghana including their characteristics and the functionality of the metal artefacts.

1. Asante Gold weights and metal designs

The Asantes, a popular metal-working ethnic group in Ghana, specialise in producing gold and brass artifacts using the lost-wax method. This process involves creating a wax model and surrounded by clay, which is then fired to melt the wax, leaving a mould filled with molten metal. Ashanti metal objects are highly detailed and decorated with symbolic motifs, such as adinkra symbols, representing traditional wisdom and proverbs. They also produce ceremonial swords, jewellery, and gold weights, which were historically used for weighing gold dust. Gold weights, known as mrammou in the Akan language, are small brass objects used for measuring gold dust and was historically the currency in the Akan society, are also well-regarded for their artistry and wisdom. Each piece is carefully crafted to represent proverbs, historical events, or aspects of daily life, serving as a tangible connection to the values and philosophies of the Akan people. Also, ceremonial swords and jewellery serve as symbols of status and authority within the community.

2. Dagomba Blacksmithing

The Dagomba people from the Northern Region of Ghana, particularly around Tamale, are also known for their expertise in blacksmithing. The blacksmith holds a revered position in Dagoma society, as ironworking is considered a sacred craft. Dagomba blacksmiths traditionally forge iron tools and weapons using simple forges and bellows made from local materials. The designs are straightforward, emphasising functionality over decoration. The primary purpose of these metal tools is to aid in agricultural activities and household tasks, which are essential for the sustenance of the community.

Dagomba metalwork is functional, primarily focused on creating objects for everyday use. The designs of the objects include decorative elements that reflect

the spiritual and cultural beliefs of the Dagomba people. Some of these objects are farming implements such as hoes and cutlasses; iron swords and knives are ceremonial and used in traditional rites.

3. Ga-Dangme Metal Crafts

In the coastal areas of Accra, the Ga-Dangme people engage in metalworking, which includes the crafting of fishing equipment and traditional musical instruments. Metalwork by the Ga-Dangme often involves the use of both iron and aluminium, with items designed to withstand the harsh, corrosive marine environment. Fishing hooks, anchors, and fittings for boats are common, reflecting the community's close relationship with the sea. Additionally, they create iron gongs and bells used in traditional music and ceremonies, linking their craft to cultural expression.

4. Brass Casting in Techiman

The Takyiman people in Bono East Region of Ghana are well known for brass casting through the lost wax technique. It is the lost wax technique of making brass by first designing an object from wax, embedding the object in clay, melting the wax away, and then pouring molten brass into the clay mould. Brass Gold weights, such as small brass figures, were historically used to measure gold dust. These weights are often in the form of geometric shapes or stylised figures. Brass containers were used for storing precious items and as ceremonial objects. These brass items were not only functional but also bear cultural symbols and motifs that teach moral values and history.

5. Ewe Metal Craft

The Ewe people in Ho are also noted for their intricate metalwork in creating musical instruments, particularly bells and gongs used in traditional music ensembles. Metal bells and gongs are used to keep rhythm and call attention in various ceremonies. Wind instruments made from metal often accompany dances and communal events. Each instrument is crafted to produce a specific tone, reflecting the Ewe's deep connection to music as a means of communication and celebration.

Indigenous Architecture

Reflecting the rich cultural heritage of environmental adaptation, the indigenous architecture of Ghana represents the diversity of the country's ethnic groups. Not only practical but also expressive in aesthetic and cultural value, the unique architectural styles have been developed for each group. Here is an easy-to-understand, informative overview focusing on a few ethnic groups and their architectural art forms:

1. Asante Architecture – Kumasi

The Asante people, living in Kumasi, are very well known for the breathtaking traditional earth, wood, and straw huts in the area. The features most unique in Asante architecture are the wall decorations by way of carving, and bright colours such as black, red, and gold, which are the colours of the Asante nation. Many of those buildings had steep straw-covered roofs and were sometimes surrounded by

fences made of carved wood. The designs not only beautify the buildings but also carry symbolic meanings, often related to proverbs and historical events.



Fig. 1.22 An example of Asante architecture

2. Dagomba Architecture – Tamale

In the northern regions, particularly around Tamale, the Dagomba people construct their homes from mud bricks and straw in a style known as the ‘roundhouse’. These round structures are designed to keep the interiors cool in the hot climate. The walls are often decorated with geometrical patterns made using natural pigments, which hold significance for the family’s or lineage’s social status. Of particular importance is the central courtyard, which serves as a meeting point for family and community-based activities.



Fig. 1.23 An example of Dagomba architecture

[Ethnic minorities in Ghana: the Dagomba and the Konkomba](#)

3. Ewe Architecture – Ho

The Ewe people around towns like Ho, build with materials readily available in their environment. Their houses typically feature walls made of mud or clay, with roofs of hay or corrugated metal. The layout often includes a central courtyard, which is essential for family and communal interactions. The Ewe also utilise vibrant colours and patterns in their homes, which reflect the community’s artistic flair.



Fig. 1.24 An example of Ewe architecture

4. Fante Architecture – Cape Coast

The Fante, located in towns like Cape Coast, are known for their brightly painted homes made of coral stone and clay. The coastal environment influences the architecture, with high-pitched roofs and large windows to ventilate and cool the interiors. Decorations include geometric patterns and motifs that are painted on the exterior walls, reflecting the maritime culture and the people’s connection to the sea.



Fig. 1.25 An example of Fante architecture

5. Gonja Architecture – Bole

At Bole in the Savannah region, the Gonja homes are constructed primarily from mud and feature flat roofs, which are sometimes used for drying grains and other produce. The architecture includes large compounds with multiple family units. Decorative elements might be minimal but include practical features like grain storage facilities within the compound.



Fig. 1.26 An example of Gonja indigenous architecture

6. Nzulezu – Stilt Village Architecture

Nzulezu is a village in the Western Region of Ghana that is built on stilts that extend right into the middle of Lake Tadane. The entire village, from the homes to the school and community centre, is built from raffia palm wood that doesn't rot under wet conditions. The design, for that matter, is not only practical in protecting the residents of the village from floods but also has a sense of beauty that makes it plain and in a state of grace with nature. The stilt houses interconnect with one another by way of wooden pavements, making it probably one of the best examples of living in harmony with the environment.



Fig. 1.27 An example of Nzulesu indigenous architecture

7. Larabanga Mosque – Sudanese-style Architecture

The mosque of Larabanga is hand-crafted in the manner of Sudanese architecture; it is made of mud mixed with dried reeds and is well suited to the dry, hot climate of the area. It is located in the Northern Region and is one of the old mosques in West Africa. The mosque features wooden sticks protruding out, which are not only structural but also serve as decoration. Its distinctive façade includes a protruding *mihrab* and is often decorated with patterns made from different coloured mud. The design reflects a fusion of Islamic architectural principles with local building traditions.

Ghanaian indigenous architecture is a diverse array of environmental adaptations and cultural expressions, deeply rooted in the people's cultural life and expressions. These styles are not just about shelter creation but are a living art instilled with traditions,

beliefs, and identities, demonstrating how architecture is deeply connected to the people's cultural, social, political, and spiritual lives.

Here's how these dimensions manifest in the architecture.

- **Cultural Significance:** Indigenous architecture is like a living canvas; it can reflect cultural identity and aesthetics. All the architectural elements, from the materials to the constructive techniques and decorative motifs, attest to the history, tradition, and environment of the people. For instance, the use of vibrant colours in a Fante village or the symbolic carvings in an Asante palace can signify cultural narratives or societal values.
- **Social Significance:** Traditional buildings are designed to facilitate social interaction and uphold community values. The common features, like central courtyards in Ewe and Dagomba settlements, promote communal living and gatherings. These spaces are vital for social rituals, celebrations, and meetings, reinforcing social cohesion and community support systems. The spatial arrangements within compounds often reflect social hierarchies or family structures, indicating the roles and relationships among residents.
- **Political Significance:** Architecture can also signify political power and governance. For example, the Asante royal palaces are not just residences but symbols of authority and governance, hosting important political discussions and decisions. Similarly, the placement and structure of chiefs' compounds in various communities can reflect political organisation and control, serving as a central point for leadership and governance.
- **Spiritual Significance:** Many indigenous architectural forms are imbued with spiritual meanings. Structures are often built with specific orientations, dimensions, or materials that are believed to bring good fortune or offer protection. The Larabanga Mosque, for instance, is not only a place of worship but also a spiritual landmark believed to be divinely inspired. Traditional beliefs may dictate certain rituals during the construction process to bless the buildings or ward off evil spirits. Some buildings also became centres for spiritual ceremonies, apart from being regarded as shrines and holding a central place in religious life for communities.

Summarily, indigenous architecture in Ghana portrays an epitome of the ways of life that sum up the cultural, social, political, and spiritual distinctions of the people. This document provides insights into the traditions communities adopt, celebrate, and perpetuate through their heritage, reflecting both past and present practices.

Activity 1.6

1. Engage in these activities with a friend or in small groups: Form your own small groups, attempting to ensure that each member of the group has different career aspirations.

2. Explore the indigenous Ghanaian art and design works of any five (5) ethnic groups and discover their unique materials, techniques, symbols, and uses.
3. Write a detailed report on how this knowledge about indigenous works can inspire and be useful in your future career aspirations.
4. Orally present your group's write-up for discussion and peer review in class. *(You can also present it to your parents, guardians, or any other elderly person in case you are not in school.)*
5. Use the comments from the discussion and peer review to improve your report.
6. File your written or typed reports in your digital or manual portfolio.

Extended Reading

Visit the links and references provided to familiarise yourself with the arts and designs of other ethnic groups in Ghana.

- <https://www.motac.gov.gh/artworks/>
- <https://gmmb.gov.gh/>
- <https://ghanagoods.co.uk/>
- <https://youtu.be/CR3JJGkq54>
- <https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/kente/strips.htm>
- http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/asan_3/hd_asan_3.htm
- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-africa/west-africa/ghana/a/adinkra-cloth>
- <http://www.adinkrasymbols.org>
- <https://www.adireafricantextiles.com/textiles-resources-sub-saharan-africa/some-major-west-african-textile-traditions/ewe-kente-cloths-from-ghana/>
- Learn more about Ga Adangbe traditional symbols here: [Ga Symbols.pdf](#)
- Boatema Boateng, "Adinkra and Kente Cloth in History, Law, and Life" (presented at the Textile Society of America biennial symposium, Los Angeles, 2014), pp. 1–10.
- Samuel Baah Kissi, Peggy Ama Fening, and Eric Appau Asante, The Philosophy of Adinkra Symbols in Asante Textiles, Jewellery and Other Art Forms, *Journal of Asian Scientific Research*, volume 9, number 4 (2019), pp. 29–39.
- Selase, G. R., & Christopher, M. (2013). The role of art forms in the celebration of festivals: A case study of Asogli Yam Festival, Volta region, Ghana. *Arts and Design Studies*, 12, 35-40.

CONTRIBUTION OF INDIGENOUS GHANAIAN ART TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF GHANAIAN ART HISTORY

In Lesson 3, you learned how Ghanaian artworks from the past tell the stories of the people who made them. It shows how important their beliefs and history were to them. In this lesson, you will learn to identify and describe some of the major contributions of indigenous Ghanaian art forms to the development of our art history. This knowledge is important to help you value your personal artwork and that of others as a contribution to artistic development in Ghana and globally.

As the indigenous people continued to produce a variety of artworks, they were also developing and shaping the history of Ghana. In what ways do you think the artworks made by the indigenous people contributed to developing Ghanaian art history today?

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following questions.

- How would we know the types of swords or costumes used in the past if they were not produced and preserved?
- How do we understand, preserve, and improve on the various tools, materials, and techniques they used?
- Could we have boldly said our ancestors were critical thinkers and innovative artists if they had not produced designs?
- Without the unique artworks created by the indigenous people, could there have been some art forms, like the drums, costumes, and traditional symbols that identify us as Ghanaians?

Now below are some major contributions of indigenous art to the Ghanaian art history.

- 1. The artworks capture our artistic traditions:** The drums, costumes, and symbols you mentioned are all art forms themselves! They were created and passed down through generations, becoming a part of Ghanaian culture.
- 2. They help prevent the loss of artistic knowledge and our identity:** Without these artworks, the knowledge of how to create them and the stories behind them might be lost. We could forget the specific designs, rhythms, and meanings that make them uniquely Ghanaian.
- 3. It helps current artists think like detectives:** Imagine a detective trying to solve a case with no clues. It's tough! These artworks are like clues that help us understand what makes Ghanaian art and culture unique.
- 4. Indigenous arts are like a window to the past:** Without these artworks, it would be like looking at a blank wall, trying to understand what clothes people wore or how they fought. The pictures, sculptures, and other artworks left behind are like windows, revealing what our ancestors used and how they lived.
- 5. They serve as a source of ideas by learning from the old masters:** By seeing the tools and materials they used, we can understand the techniques they used. It

is like receiving tips from master craftspeople, helping us to improve our own skills and perhaps even invent new things based on their ideas.

6. **They provide proof of how genius our ancestors were:** If there were no artworks, it would be hard to say for sure how creative and innovative our ancestors were. These artworks are proof that they were brilliant thinkers capable of designing amazing things. They demonstrate how Ghanaians have always been artistic and resourceful.

Activity 1.7

Do this activity either on your own or in groups at school or at me.

1. Study and reflect on the nature of the selected indigenous Ghanaian artworks. (**Note: You can reflect on some of the sample pictures of indigenous artworks presented under previous lessons or topics.**)
2. Write an article to be featured in your school's magazine, on its social media platforms, or as a blog post on the school's website, describing examples of how indigenous arts from various ethnic groups have contributed to the development of Ghanaian art history over the years. If your school does not have any of the above, write the article neatly on paper to be posted on a notice board on the school compound. You could also type and print out the article if you have access to a computer and a printer.
3. Generate a sample layout plan for how you would like the article to be arranged or presented.
4. Present your article and the layout design to your peers and/or teacher for review.
5. Use the feedback from peers and teacher to improve the article and layout design for filing in your manual and/or digital portfolio.

NB: You can use digital or manual flowcharts, concept maps etc. to support your write up.

Extended Reading

- Read more on the contribution of indigenous art: [labi.pdf](#)
- Watch these two videos on Bonwire Kente weaving: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2hy3TvHxnM> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZruK30k5Xf8>
- Watch a video on traditional beadmaking in Krobo: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AxYHeM8dVE&t=14s>
- Watch these two videos on Basket weaving in Bolgatanga: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKAhKkOwRqQ> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85mm_gb7Bhg

IDENTIFYING BASIC MEDIA USE IN THE MAKING OF INDIGENOUS GHANAIAN ARTWORKS

In the previous lessons, we discussed indigenous Ghanaian artworks. In this lesson, you will examine the basic media used in their creation.

What is media in art?

Media are the materials used to create art and design work. It includes paint, inks., sculpting materials (such as wood, ivory, etc.), fabric, glass, and any other material that can be worked into a visual form. It influences the style and meaning of art and design. Most of the basic media are found in our environment. Creative expression, on the other hand, helps to determine how materials, tools, and ideas can be used in creating art and design works that have some socio-cultural relevance.

Take a close look at the pictures below. They are basic materials commonly found in the Ghanaian environment. Imagine these materials in your own surroundings. Do you see a spot of clay in your backyard? Or perhaps some grass growing along the side of the road? These aren't just ordinary items; they are potential materials for artistic expression, waiting for your touch.



Fig. 1.28 Heap of clay



Fig. 1.29 Anthill



Fig. 1.30 Piles of logs



Fig. 1.31 bamboo

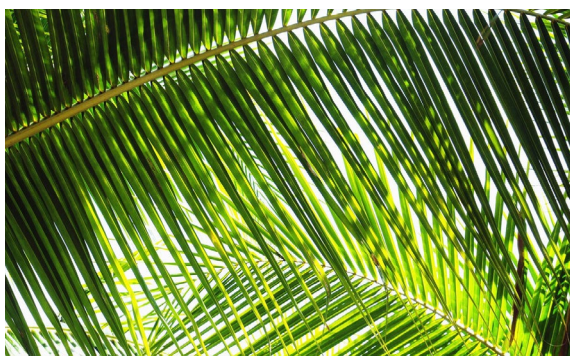


Fig. 1.32 (Palm leaves



Fig. 1.33 Straw

Some Examples of Art Materials in our Environment

The environment possesses all the necessary materials, both natural and man-made, for the creative process, allowing us to utilise everything in it to create art.

Some common materials in the environment that are used in making indigenous Ghanaian art include clay, wood, bones, ivory, gourd or calabash, bamboo, hide, fabric, seeds, glass, shells, pearls, dyes from plants, twigs, raffia, palm fronds, etc. Each material has its own distinctive qualities. Artists may combine related or unrelated materials to create functional and decorative artworks for society. Some of the objects created from these materials include pots, hats, bags, necklaces, mats, fertility dolls, drums, sandals, palanquins, swords, buildings, quivers, etc.

How materials relate to the community's socio-cultural issues

Indigenous Ghanaian art materials are considerably expressive of the socio-cultural context of the community. The discussion below relates to how some of these materials relate to Ghanaian culture.

- i. **Wood:** This is a fundamental material in Ghanaian art. It is used for carving sculptures, masks, and functional objects. The choice of wood species often carries cultural significance. For example, the Akan people use sese wood for their intricate carvings. The wooden sculptures and masks represent ancestral spirits, gods, and historical events. Involved in the rituals, ceremonies, and festivals is an intertwined link between the community and its past and spiritual beliefs.
- ii. **Clay:** In the arts, clay is used for pottery and ceramics. Pottery has been made in Ghana to create domestic ware, figurines, and decorative objects. While it functions for storage and cooking, it is also an assertion of cultural view. Shapes, patterns, and symbols on clay artefacts communicate cultural identity and heritage.
- iii. **Bamboo:** It is used for making baskets, mats, and similar utilitarian wares. Those woven products are both utilitarian and culturally important. They are used in daily life and also symbolise craftsmanship and community cooperation.

- iv. Calabash:** Calabashes are versatile; they can be hollowed out to create containers, musical instruments (like the Kora), and even art. Calabashes are used for the purposes of hospitality in serving food and beverages at communal feasts.
- v. Glass:** Glass beads form an integral part of Ghanaian culture. Such beads are used on traditional clothing, jewellery, and other adornments. Beads are used to represent social status, spirituality, and identity. Various colours and patterns represent different things.
- vi. Bones and ivory:** These materials are usually used for intricate carvings. Bone and ivory sculptures usually depict human figures, animals, or mythological beings. They are cultural and, at times, spiritual valuables to represent ancestors, spirits, or gods.
- vii. Raffia:** The leaves are woven into mats, hats, and baskets. Raffia arts, therefore, become functional in everyday use but are also symbolic of craftsmanship and community skills, mainly made during communal work sessions.
- viii. Twigs:** Twigs and branches are also used in making fences, huts, and other related structures. They can symbolise resourcefulness, adaptability, and a closeness in the relationship between the human being and nature.

Activity 1.8

1. Take a walk around your community and look out for interesting natural or man-made materials that could serve as inspiration for your next art project.
2. Now, create a detailed list of all the materials you come across.
3. Discuss with your classmates how these materials could be creatively combined in art projects that reflect cultural themes.

Extended Reading

Click on the links below and watch videos about some basic materials used in creating artworks.

- <https://youtu.be/LVYybfZ7qrw>
- <https://youtu.be/OmmU69h4Vzk>
- <https://youtu.be/Xs2hAWuPmSg>
- https://youtu.be/OZLNb_fbGks
- <https://youtu.be/Siygqs-IGPw>
- https://youtu.be/Hf_HjlaaCo

HOW MATERIALS IN THE ENVIRONMENT ARE USED IN MAKING ART AND DESIGN WORKS

In the previous lesson, you were able to identify some basic media used by the indigenous people in making their artworks. Which aspects of the lesson did you enjoy most, and why?

In this lesson, we shall further investigate the materials the indigenous people used for making their creative works. In this lesson, we shall identify and explore how the indigenous people obtained their materials for the various artworks they produced. Learning about this is important to help identify possible materials in your environment or community to produce your artworks.

To help understand how the indigenous people used materials in their environment to create artworks, let us first identify some vital localised sources. There are two main sources of materials for making artworks: natural or man-made sources. Do you remember learning about this in junior high school?

Natural sources of art materials

These include all-natural materials that can be used for creating artworks. Our indigenous people were innovative, exploring natural objects and materials in their environment to create various artworks. This shows they were very aware of their immediate surroundings. Study Table 1.5 below and consider other objects that could be added to the group.

Table 1.5: Types of natural sources of art materials used by the indigenous people

Animal Sources	Plant Sources	Earth Sources
Blood, hair, bones, skin, hide leather, shells, horns, claws, feathers, eggs, etc.	Seeds, leaves, fruits, oils, pigments, tubers, canes, sticks, fibres, ropes, logs, ashes, charcoal, straw, etc.	Kaolin, clay, pebbles, rocks, sand,

Man-made sources of materials

These are objects created by humans. Usually, these objects are picked, assembled, or recomposed with other materials to form new works. Look at the items in Table 1.6 and reflect on other man-made materials that can be added to the list.

Table 1.6: Types of manmade sources of art materials used by the indigenous people

Chemicals	Found Objects	Fibres	Digital/ Non-Physical Media
Inks, dyes, paints, glue, gum, cement, etc.	Metal scraps, plastics, etc.	Cords, threads, twines, cloth, etc.	light, sound, laser, fire, computer, LCD/LED screens, etc.

How Materials in The Environment Are Used by Indigenous People in Making Art and Design Works

To make art and design works, the indigenous people explored various art and design processes. In art, these processes are termed techniques. You might have seen someone making a basket, painting their face or body, or even creating a building in your community. Can you tell the processes they use? Usually, the type of process an artist may use to create a design or artwork depends on the materials available or the materials the artist likes to use.

In recent times, the advancement of technology and digital knowledge has added new media to the creation of art and design. A combination of traditional art media with other digital media is termed hybrid art (Read more from here: [hybrid art](#)).

In short, artists can produce and complete a design or artwork by manipulating the materials they have through a step-by-step process. The time to process and complete certain works can vary a bit. For example, how long it does it take to make a basket, a kente cloth or a printed cloth? Why not ask a local artist to tell you more?

Some common techniques or processes for making artworks or designs include weaving, stitching, welding, carving, colouring, casting, modelling, installation, etc.

Activity 1.9

Working either on your own, in pairs, or in groups, undertake the task below and present your findings in class for discussion.

1. Make a list of indigenous artworks and designs.
2. Use the table below as a guide to provide information on materials, techniques and processes used to create the works and designs identified.

Name of Artwork/Design and image(if possible)	Type of Material(s) Used	Techniques or Processes Used in Making them

Activity 1.10

Working either on your own, in pairs, or in groups, tackle the task below as well as you can and present your findings in class for discussion.

1. Create a report for a regional art and cultural exhibition analysing three pre-colonial Ghanaian artworks. You should refer to the artworks that you identified in **Activity 1.9**.
2. Write a comprehensive report comparing and contrasting the materials and techniques used in their creation. *(If possible, use technology like digital tools or drawings to enhance your report and make it visually engaging.)*
3. Present the reports to your siblings, peers, and/or teacher for review.
4. Improve the quality of the reports using feedback from siblings, peers, and/or teacher and file them in your manual or digital portfolios.

Extended Reading

- **Hybrid Art:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hybrid_art

MYTHS AND LEGENDS IN MAJOR INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CULTURES

You have now reached the final lesson for this section. There are two important aspects left for you to learn about, which drive the creation of artworks by various indigenous African cultures. This lesson will enrich your understanding of indigenous African cultural heritage through the lens of its myths and legends, highlighting their influence on both traditional and modern artistic and creative expressions.

What are myths and legends in African culture?

In simple terms, a **myth** is a traditional story that explains something about the world or our culture, even if it might not be scientifically true or proven.

A **legend**, on the other hand, is a popular story, often about brave heroes or historical events, that might be partly true or entirely fictional. Both myths and legends have influenced the cultural perceptions of many ethnic societies or cultures across Africa. Most communities have one or two stories to tell about individuals or events that people might find difficult to believe. Some communities have artworks to prove their myth, while others do not. Do you know about any myth or legend in the community where you live, or have you heard about any of these hard-to-believe stories about any culture? Well, whether they really existed or not, myths and legends have roles in African cultures.

The Role of Myths and Legends in African Cultures

Myths and legends form the backbone of cultural identity across African societies, serving as sources of ancestral wisdom and moral guidelines. These narratives offer more than just entertainment; they are essential tools for passing down knowledge, explaining natural phenomena, justifying cultural norms, and connecting the past with the present through storied heritage.

Nature and Purpose of Myths and Legends

Myths in African cultures often involve supernatural elements and are used to explain the origins of the universe, the creation of the world and its creatures, and the customs that define social norms. They are deeply embedded in the spiritual beliefs of the community and often serve to justify the authority of rulers and priests. Legends, while also steeped in the supernatural, are more likely rooted in historical events and personalities. They typically glorify heroes, immortalise pivotal battles, or explain the significance of landmarks through tales of heroic deeds and divine interventions. These stories are vital in preserving the oral history of a culture, especially in societies where written language may not have been predominant historically. They embed historical and environmental lessons that help communities navigate their world, imparting values and wisdom to younger generations in a memorable and engaging way. The

next topic discusses examples of some popular myths and legends in Ghana and other African cultures.

Selected Myths and Legends in African Cultures

Asante

The Asante of Ghana have a rich tradition of legends, notably the tale of the Golden Stool. This legend speaks of Okomfo Anokye, a high priest who conjured the Golden Stool from the heavens, declaring it the soul of the Asante nation. This stool is not merely a piece of furniture but a sacred symbol of unity and legitimacy, believed to hold the spirit of the entire Asante people (learn more about other Ghanaian myths and legends here: [6-Things-in-Ghana-with-Mysterious-and-Fascinating-Origins](#))



Fig. 1.29 A digital art of Okomfo Anokye conjuring the golden stool (Art by: Kelvin @lk_e_l_v_i_nl)

Zulu

The legend of the Zulu people of South Africa narrates the story of Shaka Zulu, a warrior king whose conquests and tactics transformed the Zulu into a formidable nation. This story, mentioned and passed down from generation to generation, captures the essence of leadership and the complexities of human emotion, using it as a guide for personal and societal conduct.



Fig. 1.30 Digital art of Shaka Zulu

Baoule

Queen Abla Pokou was the queen of Baoule, and the founder of the Baoule Nation.

The 18th-century epic migration under the aegis of Queen Abla Pokou identifies the Baoule people of Côte d'Ivoire. Fleeing conflict in the Ashanti Empire, Queen Pokou led her people westward. At a critical moment, they came to the formidable Comoé River, which was impassable. According to legend, the spirit of the river demanded a sacrifice for safe passage. With great sorrow, Queen Pokou sacrificed her only son, throwing him into the river. In return, the river spirits calmed, allowing her people to cross safely. This act of immense sacrifice led to the naming of her people as Baoulé, meaning "the child is dead." This story underlines themes of sacrifice, leadership, and the deep maternal love of a queen for her people.

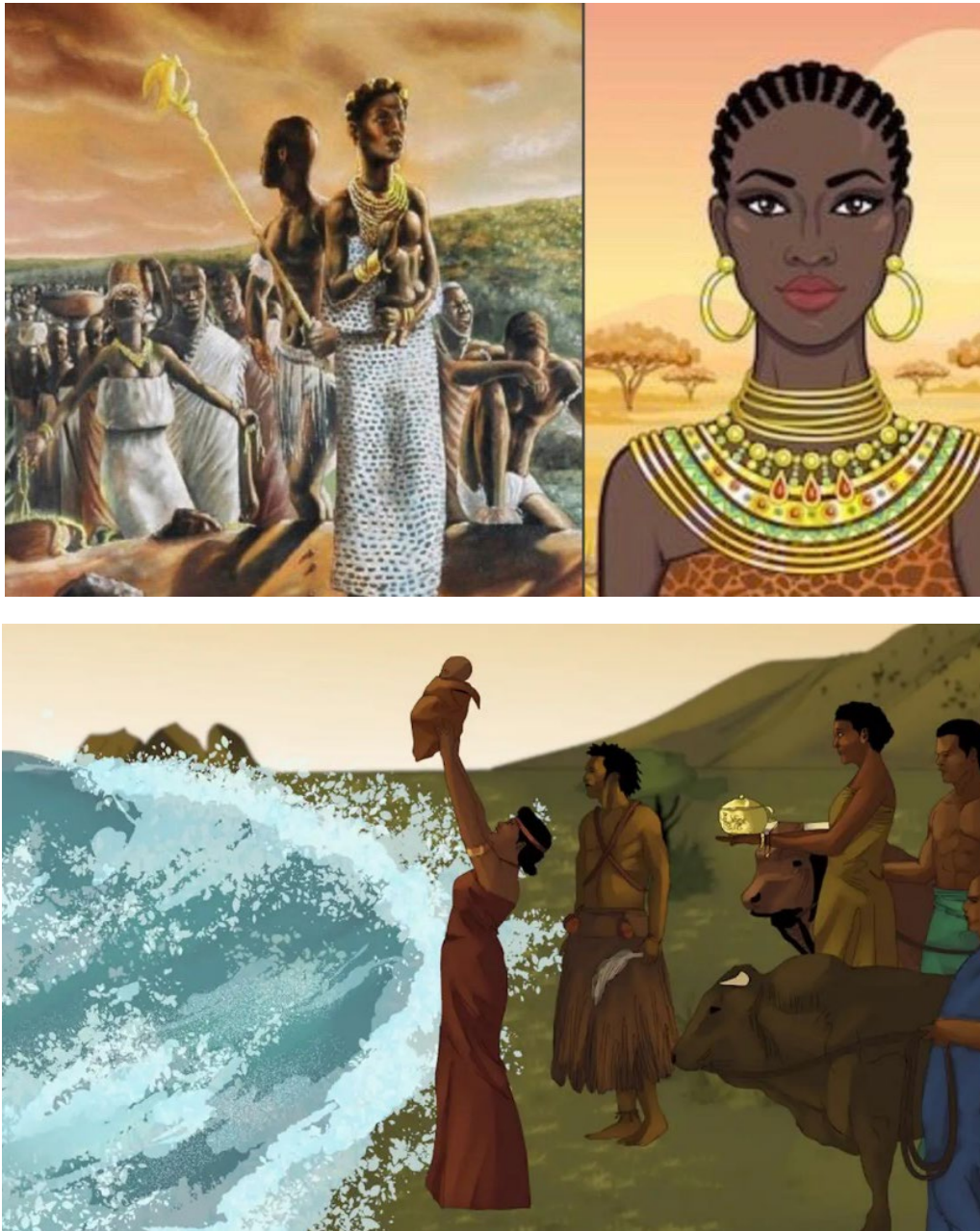


Fig. 1.31 Image of Queen Abla Pokou and her people

Bambara

***Chiwara*, the mythical antelope, that teaches agriculture**

In Mali, the Bambara have a *Chiwara* epic myth that tells how agriculture began. The *Chiwara* is a mythical creature, part human and part antelope, said to have been the bringer of agriculture to the people. The legend describes how the *Chiwara* taught the people to sow and harvest crops effectively. To honour this mythical creature, the Bambara created the *Chiwara* headdress, which is worn during agricultural festivals to honour the spirit of agriculture. These headdresses are intricate and represent the antelope's shape, symbolising fertility, hard work, and the importance of agriculture to the Bambara's survival.



Fig. 1.32 Image of the Chiwara



Fig. 1.33 Image of the Chiwara headdress

These headdresses are elaborate and stylised representations of the antelope and are worn during agricultural festivals. They are beautifully crafted from wood and often adorned with beads, metal, and fibres. The design of these headdresses varies, symbolising different attributes of the *Chiwara*, such as endurance, grace, and fertility. These artefacts not only celebrate the myth but also serve to encourage good harvests and honour the spirits of the land.

Artistic Expressions Derived from Myths and Legends

African mythology and legends have formed not just the continent's cultural and social landscapes but have also been influential in both traditional and contemporary art forms. This is how bright the storytelling from Africa is integrated into a tapestry of African art– in every item, a narrative gadget that keeps the values and lessons of those ancient tales alive.

- **Influence on Art:** Art in African societies quite often serves more than simple aesthetic purposes. Art is a vehicle used to transfer historical events, spiritual beliefs, and societal values from one generation to the next. Myths and legends have provided a rich pool of inspiration where themes, characters, and moral tales

are vividly represented in various works of art. Many of these artworks are central to communal rituals and ceremonies. They are usually made to invoke the essence of the myths they depict, thereby calling up the power and protection of ancestral spirits.

- **Contemporary Relevance:** The myths and legends of that time were brought to life by the painting and now, in modern times, they are revived in artistic presentation. Modern artists still play on those traditional themes, but with modern techniques and perspectives that bridge the gap between what is ancient and what is modern. Through modern media, El Anatsui and Yinka Shonibare, two world-class contemporary African artists, reconfigure these legends and attach historical and cultural pasts to the global dialogue of art. Their works challenge perceptions, invite reinterpretation, and ensure the vitality and relevance of African myths in the global art scene.

Through these artistic expressions, the rich tapestry of African mythology continues to inform, inspire, and resonate within and beyond the continent, showcasing the enduring power of art as a conduit for cultural and historical identity.


Activity 1.11

Try this independently or with a group.

1. Study and discuss, using the table below as a guide, to provide information on myths and legends in indigenous African cultures along with their associated artworks.

Use your knowledge and understanding gained from studying the table to complete it.

Table 1.7: Myths and legends in selected African cultures and artworks associated with them.

Culture	Myth/Legend	Artwork	Image of Artwork
Asante	Komfo Anokye and the Golden stool	Golden stool	

Activity 1.12

Try this activity individually or in groups.

1. Develop a manual or digital pictorial diary of Ghanaian indigenous or contemporary artworks attributed to myths and legends in indigenous African cultures using the guidelines below:
 - a. Search for indigenous artworks related to myths and legends using available resources such as magazines, journals, or the internet (if possible).
 - b. Create visual representations of the artworks by drawing, colouring, or taking your own photographs.
 - c. Clip and paste images and photographs from manual sources into a book or album.
 - d. Paste images downloaded from the internet. You can also include photographs you have taken yourself.
 - e. Add annotations and short notes to identify the artworks.
 - f. Present your work in class for discussion and peer review.

NOTE: *Ensure to seek permission before taking any photographs and reference the sources of any downloaded images.*

Extended Reading and Resources

- Learn more about Myths and Legends in other Ghanaian ethnic cultures here: [6-Things-in-Ghana-with-Mysterious-and-Fascinating-Origins](#)
- Belcher, S. (2005). *African myths of origin*. Penguin UK.
- Arnott, K., & Kiddell-Monroe, J. (1965). African myths and legends.
- [Chapters - Art & Life in Africa - The University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art \(archive-it.org\)](#)
- <https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/bright-continent/chapter/chapter-4-6-kingdom-based-art/>
- Read more about the Baoule People here: [pics..htm](#)
- Myths and Legends of African culture: [Legends of Africa](#)
- Myths about other Ghanaian cultures: <https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/6-Things-in-Ghana-with-Mysterious-and-Fascinating-Origins>
- Learn more about the *Chiwara*: <https://masksoftheworld.com/blog/pair-of-chi-waras-from-mali/>

REVIEW QUESTIONS

It is time to reflect and test your knowledge and skills. Now try out these review questions in your exercise book to check your personal level of knowledge and understanding.

Note: You can type them if you have access to any digital device.

1. In tabular form, make a list of ten (10) indigenous artworks with their matching ethnic groups and note who made or produced them.
2. You are, watching a movie with your friends. Suddenly, they start talking about how the artistry in the movie reflects the country's culture. They were curious to know if your ethnic group's traditional symbols and art do the same. How would you advance your arguments to demonstrate your knowledge of your ethnic group's indigenous artworks?
3. Select and analyse a picture of a Ghanaian art form of your choice (e.g., kete cloth). Describe its design elements (colours, patterns) and explain their possible cultural significance.
4. Choose an indigenous Ghanaian art form and research its characteristics. Design your own artwork inspired by this form, incorporating its unique elements and explaining your creative choices.
5. Design a single-page pictorial poster to educate the general public on the distinctions between *Asante Kente*, *Ewe Kete*, and *the Northern Fugu/Motane*.
6. List three materials used in indigenous Ghanaian art and discuss why they are preferred.
7. How do the properties of these materials influence the techniques used in art creation?
8. Ananse, the cunning spider trickster from West African folklore, is known for his ability to outsmart characters stronger and more powerful than himself. How might a myth featuring Ananse be used to explain the importance of critical thinking and resourcefulness in Ghanaian culture?
9. What are the main art forms of the ethnic group in Ghana?
10. Discuss the differences and similarities in the art forms of these ethnic groups.
11. In what ways do the art and designs of ethnic groups in Ghana reflect their cultural values?
12. How have historical and social contexts shaped these art forms?

Answers to Review Questions

Make sure you complete all the review questions before looking at the answers to the questions. Compare your own answers to those below to evaluate your performance. How did you perform?

Question 1: In a tabular form, make a list of ten indigenous artworks with their matching ethnic groups and note who made or produced them.

The table below presents examples of indigenous artworks and the ethnic groups that produced them

SN	Ethnic Group	Artwork/ Artform
1	Ewe	Kete cloth
2	Kasena	Ntogstasi masks
3	Ga	Akrafie drums
4	Frafra	Bopoto baskets
5	Asante	Adinkra symbols
6	Fante	Posuban
7	Dagomba	Duala masks
8	Krobo	Beadwork
9	Mankrogu	Black pottery
10	Asante	Kente

Question 2: You are, watching a movie with your friends. Suddenly, they start talking about how the artistry in the movie reflects the country's culture. They were curious to know if your ethnic group's traditional symbols and art do the same. How would you advance your arguments to demonstrate your knowledge of your ethnic group's indigenous artworks?

Answer: This question requires logical reasoning and creative self-expression, both written and oral. The learner is expected to mention some of the Ghanaian artworks from their ethnic group and describe them in relation to their cultural significance.

Question 3: Explain how the indigenous traditional symbols reflect the values and beliefs of the indigenous Ghanaian people.

Answer: Indigenous traditional symbols use geometric shapes, animals, and everyday objects to represent proverbs, concepts, and social values. For example, the Ga Adangme symbol called Waobii ([Ga_Symbols.pdf](#)) teaches the importance of the uniqueness of all persons in society, just as all human fingers are not the same.

Question 4: Select and analyse a picture of a Ghanaian art form of your choice (e.g., Kente cloth). Describe its design elements (colours, patterns) and explain their possible cultural significance.

Answer: The Asante Kente cloth has horizontal or vertical strips of bold colours like gold, green, and blue. The colours form interesting patterns that have various interpretations. These colours could represent wealth (gold), growth (green), and royalty (blue), depending on the specific pattern and its origin. The patterns also represent some proverbial sayings that may also reflect the status of individuals in society, e.g., kings and queens. They are worn during important occasions, like festivals.

Question 4: Choose an indigenous Ghanaian art form and research its characteristics. Design your own artwork inspired by this form, incorporating its unique elements and explaining your creative choices.

Answer

This question requires your creativity. But here is how you can approach it:

- a. You may choose to design a piece inspired by a traditional symbol or design pattern on a woven mat or a body painting.
- b. Then research specific symbols or designs and their meanings, and develop a new symbol or design.
- c. Use the idea or design to create an artwork, which could be on fabric, pottery, or in a digital format.
- d. Write a statement explaining the design and the new work you created, discussing why and how you chose and incorporated the symbols in your new design and artwork. Additionally, describe what your design and artwork can be used for.

Question 5: Design a single-page pictorial poster to educate the general public on the distinctions between Asante *Kente*, *Ewe kete* and the *Northern handwoven cloth*.

Answer: The response to this question should be diverse. Learners are expected to identify and give detailed descriptions of the characteristics of all the Ghanaian handwoven cloth types, using pictures to support their descriptions.

Question 6: List three materials used in indigenous Ghanaian art and discuss why they are preferred.

Answer: Clay, wood, and raffia are preferred for their availability and cultural resonance. Their malleability, texture, and durability influence techniques such as moulding, carving, and weaving.

Question 7: How do the properties of these materials influence the techniques used in art creation?

Answer: Properties such as flexibility, strength, and colour affect artistic choices and methods, reflecting both aesthetic and practical considerations.

Question 8: Ananse, the cunning spider trickster from West African folklore, is known for his ability to outsmart characters stronger and more powerful than himself. How might a myth featuring Ananse be used to explain the importance of critical thinking and resourcefulness in Ghanaian culture?

Answer: A myth featuring Ananse outsmarting a larger or more powerful opponent could emphasise the value of critical thinking and resourcefulness in Ghanaian culture. You argue by writing on this:

Ananse's reliance on wit rather than physical strength could represent the idea that intelligence and problem-solving are more valuable than brute force.

His ability to overcome challenges through cleverness could highlight the importance of resourcefulness and using what is available to one's advantage.

The consequences of Ananse's tricks could serve as moral lessons, teaching Ghanaians about the importance of using their cunning for good and the potential pitfalls of trickery.

By using a relatable character like Ananse, the myth can convey these cultural values in a way that is both entertaining and memorable.

Question 9: What are the main art forms of the ethnic group in Ghana?

Question 10: Discuss the differences and similarities in the art forms of these ethnic groups.

Question 11: In what ways do the art and designs of ethnic groups in Ghana reflect their cultural values?

Question 12: How have historical and social contexts shaped these art forms?

NOTE: For answers to questions 9 to 12, please refer to the lessons as explained in the text.

Acknowledgements



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