



Activity: Hunter's Shirt

Explore the cultural traditions of Mali!

Grade Level:	Grades 3-5, Grades K-2
Collection:	African Art
Culture/Region:	Africa
Subject Area:	History and Social Science, Visual Arts
Activity Type:	Hands-On Activity

OBJECT INFORMATION

The Bamana (bah-mah'-nah) people, one of many ethnic groups in Mali, are an African farming and hunting culture living on the western edge of the Sahara Desert. Tunics such as this *Hunter's Shirt* traditionally play an important part in rituals and ceremonies occurring before a hunt. These activities, which often take place at the boundary between village and wilderness, prepare hunters to go into the world of dangerous animals and spirits. The hunters call on supernatural energies to assure safety and success.

This *Hunter's Shirt* is made of white cotton strips that were sewn together and then dyed with bark. The cloth is decorated with charms that are believed to have special powers. Animal teeth, claws, horns, and fur, considered good-luck charms, are attached to the hunter's shirt along with secret pouches called basi. The Bamana people believe that if the basi are opened, the charms inside lose their power to ward off evil and bring good fortune to the wearer. Although hunting is a disappearing practice in most of Africa, these tunics are still worn during festivals, processions, and other gatherings as symbols of success.



Hunter's Shirt, 19th–20th century

Bamana culture (Mali), cotton, leather, shells, metal, mirrors, animal horns, skin, claws, fur
Gift of Robert and Nancy Nooter

DISCUSSION

Use the following suggested questions and discussion points while looking at the *Hunter's Shirt*:

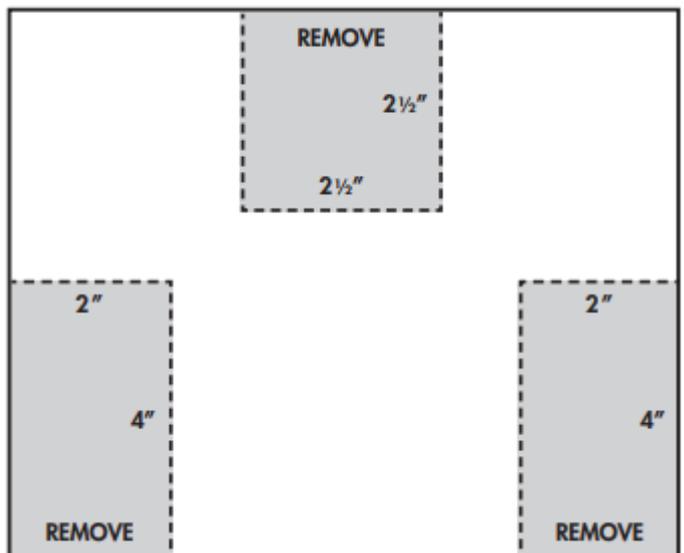
- What material was used to make the Hunter's Shirt?
- What features of this shirt indicate it belonged to a hunter? (teeth, fur, leopard skin, leather)
- There are natural and man-made objects on the shirt. Point to things that are from nature, such as plants and animal fur, teeth, and claws.
- Point to things that are man-made, for example the bell, mirrors, coins, and string.
- What is texture? How does the cloth feel? Is it soft or rough? What about the animal fur or the bell?
- When did the hunter wear this shirt?
- Would it be a good idea to wear the shirt while hunting? Would the ringing bell make the animals run away?

ACTIVITY

The Bamana are well known for their earthdyed textiles. The Hunter's Tunic is dyed with bark. Cloth can also be dyed with mud. Mud cloth (bogolan) has become a symbol of Malian identity.

Make your own mud-cloth hunter's tunic and design it with marks and shapes that mean something to you!

1. Start with a brown paper grocery bag or brown craft paper cut into an 11" x 18" rectangle.
2. Fold the paper in half and cut out smaller rectangles (about 2" x 4") at both open corners to make the shirt shape.
3. At the center of the fold, cut a 2½" square for the neck opening. (See diagram.)
4. Decorate the shirt with animal skins, claws, and charms that you draw and cut out, and then glue onto the shirt. You can even make secret pouches (basi) that have hidden charms inside!



Alternatively, designs can be made on heavy white cotton fabric by using liquid school glue as the resist (the white part of the design) and letting it dry before applying the tempera.