



Wealth & Trade

Use this guide to lead students on an exploration of the African Art and find out more about prosperous cultures in Africa!

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| Grade Level: | Grades 3-5 |
| Collection: | African Art |
| Culture/Region: | Africa |
| Subject Area: | Fine Arts, History and Social Science, Visual Arts |
| Activity Type: | Resource Set |

Wealth & Trade

Africa is a continent rich in natural resources that gave rise to many wealthy empires. Metal, salt, and gold, as well as products such as beads and textiles, traveled many miles over vast trade routes. Use this resource to explore African Art and find out more about prosperous cultures in Africa!

Use the on-site version of this resource to guide students through the museum's African Art Galleries: [Wealth & Trade Gallery Tour](#)



Ehel (Tent Stake)

19th-20th century , Tuareg (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, ALgeria, Libya)

Medium: wood

Accession ID: 2005.19

The Tuareg [twa-regg] people are mostly nomadic and live in North and West Africa. Tuareg caravans played a primary role in carrying goods across the Sahara Desert until the mid-20th century. They use camels to help transport all of their goods and possessions from place to place. Tent poles, like the one featured here, are used to erect a tent and hold up its walls, as well as to hang mats, bags, and clothing.

For thousands of years, Tuareg economy revolved around trans-Saharan trade. Using five basic trade routes, Tuareg merchants were responsible for bringing goods from the great cities on the southern edge of the Sahara to the northern Mediterranean coast of Africa. From there they were distributed throughout the world. With the development of roads, much of the movement of goods and people is accomplished by trucks; however,

smaller camel caravans continue to cross the Sahara.

| What does it mean to be
nomadic?

Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: I See, I Think, I Wonder](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-i-see-i-think-i-wonder/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-i-see-i-think-i-wonder/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Contour Drawing](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-contour-drawing/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-contour-drawing/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Cinquain Poem](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-cinquain-poem/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-cinquain-poem/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Lines, Shapes, and Pattern Hunt](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/ef%bb%bf%ef%bb%bfsketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/ef%bb%bf%ef%bb%bfsketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/>)



Qur'anic Writing Tablet

19th-20th century , Hausa (Nigeria)

Medium: wood, leather, string, pigment

Accession ID: 95.83

Africa's extensive trade routes were very important for the exchange of ideas as well as goods. As different people came into contact on these routes we can see how they influenced each other, especially in art and religion. For example, the Islamic faith spread through North Africa.

Kano, where this board is from, is in northern Nigeria and is considered the center of Hausa [how-sah] trade and culture.

This tablet is a refined example of a type of writing board used in Islamic areas of West Africa for teaching both the reading and writing of verses from the Qur'an. This example is from the city of Kano, an Islamic center in northern Nigeria. In some cases the ink from these boards would be washed off with water and then consumed in hopes of being cured by the healing words of the Qur'an.

| What type of material did you
write on when learning to write?

Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: What Makes You Say That?](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-what-makes-you-say-that/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-what-makes-you-say-that/>)
- [Moving to Learn: Make It Move](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Beyond the Frame](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-beyond-the-frame/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-beyond-the-frame/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Creative Comparisons](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-creative-comparisons/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-creative-comparisons/>)



Dwa (Official's Stool)

19th-20th century , Akan

Medium: wood, brass

Accession ID: 2007.1

This stool is from the modern country of Ghana. Ghana has long been known for its rich and abundant resources of gold, which boosted trade and earned it the name "Gold Coast" in colonial times. European firearms, as well as other luxury goods, were also traded in this area. Stools like these are not for sitting but instead symbolize of leadership for the Akan [ah-kahn] people.

This stool is made from wood and is covered in brass with intricate hammered designs. The Akan people are very well known for their wise sayings or proverbs. On the seat of the stool, there are two birds. Each bird touches its tail with an egg. The egg is a symbol of the future; the tail is a symbol of the past. This image is called "Sankofa," which means "return and get it." It symbolizes the importance of learning from the past.

What is a symbol? What symbol would you choose to represent power?

Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: Ten Times Two](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-ten-times-two/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-ten-time>)

s-two/)

- [Moving to Learn: Strike a Pose](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-strike-a-pose/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Lines, Shapes, and Pattern Hunt](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/ef%bb%bf%ef%bb%bfsketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/ef%bb%bf%ef%bb%bfsketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Headlines, Tweets, and Memes](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-headline-s-tweets-and-memes/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-headline-s-tweets-and-memes/>)



King's Beaded Robe

early 20th century , Yoruba

Medium: glass beads, string, velvet, wool, damask

Accession ID: 96.36

The Yoruba [yoo-roo-BOO] have created—and continue to produce—some of Africa’s most dazzling beaded objects, notably royal regalia such as crowns, necklaces, footwear, footstools, and even entire garments.

For a long time people have believed that glass beads were not produced in sub-Saharan Africa. Instead they thought beads were only imported from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Thanks to archaeological evidence we now know that more than a thousand years ago the manufacture of red, blue, and green glass beads was an important industry in Ife (sacred city in Yorubaland). However, this King’s Robe is made of imported glass beads. Beads have for a long time been important accessories of royal regalia and valuable trade commodities.

Colors not only play an artistic role in Yoruba art, but also have special meanings. For example, many colors relate to particular Yoruba gods. Indigo blue (elu), sacred to Yemoja, the mother of waters, is associated with water and coolness and is believed to calm and soothe tension. The color white (funfun)—sacred to Obatala and Orunmila—calls to mind peacefulness and the sublime. Red (pupa) signifies hotness, danger, and vitality, and often represents Sango, the thunderstorm deity. Black (dudu) embodies the unpredictable and therefore is associated with Esu, the divine messenger (also known as a mischievous trickster)

How many different colors do you see? What do those colors mean to you?

Suggested Activities

- [Looking to Learn: Elaboration Game](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-elaboration-game/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/looking-to-learn-elaboration-game/>)
- [Moving to Learn: Make It Move](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/moving-to-learn-make-it-move/>)
- [Sketching to Learn: Lines, Shapes, and Pattern Hunt](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/sketching-to-learn-lines-shapes-and-pattern-hunt/>)
- [Writing to Learn: Headlines, Tweets, and Memes](https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-headlines-tweets-and-memes/)
(<https://www.vmfa.museum/learn/resources/writing-to-learn-headlines-tweets-and-memes/>)