

Hofstra University Museum JPMorgan Chase Art Travelers through Time: Literacy and History through Art

LONG ISLAND
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
LICF
a division of
THE NEW YORK
COMMUNITY TRUST



Skull Medicine Object
(Nkisi Mbumba)
19th-20th Century
Bone, rattan, pigment
HU96.55

WHAT: Baboon Skull Medicine Object (nkisi mbumba) of the Vili and Yombe people

WHERE: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Africa

WHEN: 19th/20th Century

WHY: Concern with spiritual powers is key in many African cultures. These powers often involve representations of familiar animals that take on human characteristics and spiritual powers. The animals become the focus of rituals, stories and beliefs. Primates, one of the most abundant mammals found in western Africa, often symbolize the wild spirits of the bush or the mysterious world outside the village. In art, monkeys represent spirits that can ward off enemies. The Vili and Yombe people believe that spirits inhabit special mysterious objects. These "power objects," called "*nkisi mbumba*" are usually containers that hold spiritually-charged materials which, through rituals, become channels for activating the spiritual forces. This skull owned by the Museum is housed in an intricately knotted holder and may have served as a container for magical medicinal substances that healed.



Vocabulary

Hollow

Primate

Skull

Symbol



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

In what ways are world communities similar and different?*

The monkey symbol is often thought to represent medicinal or curative power. The Vili and Yombe people believe it carries the magical powers of healing and is, therefore, a sacred place to store medicine.

Writing Activity: Have your students think about a symbol of their choice that can be thought of as having some magical power. Create a fable about this powerful object and the positive impact it may have had on others. What does your object symbolize? What good did or does it bring to others?

Science Activity: Create a two-panel brochure. Panel 1: Research and describe how we treat common illnesses such as a cold or the flu today. Panel 2: Compare today's treatment with how people in the past treated disease.

* Based on Focus Questions from the NYS 3rd Grade Social Studies Curriculum

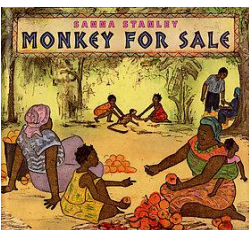
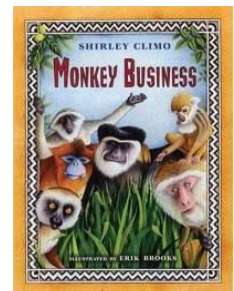


Resources

Children's Books

***Monkey Business: Stories from Around the World*, by Shirley Climo**

This collection of fourteen stories, facts, and lore about monkeys from Africa, Asia, and the Americas will answer all of the monkey questions you never knew you had.



***Monkey For Sale*, by Sanna Stanley**

It's market day in a Congolese village and young Luzolo, together with her friend Kiese, arranges to free a monkey captured by a greedy vendor at the market.

Web Link



This May 2009 video documents how X-radiography was used by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History to identify a similar medicine skull.
<http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/animals/primates.html>