

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

LONG ISLAND
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
LI
CF
a division of
THE NEW YORK
COMMUNITY TRUST

Nigeria, Yoruba, *Helmet Mask*, 19th-20th century,
Wood and pigment
Gift of Josephine and Sol
Levitt, HU89.16



http://www.randafricanart.com/Yoruba_gelede_mask_birds.html

WHAT: Gelede Headdress of the Yoruba People

WHERE: Southwestern Nigeria, Africa

WHEN: 1950's

WHY: The Yoruba people, one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa, perform Gelede masquerades to curry favor with "the Great Mother" (Iya Nla) and her disciples, "the Powerful Mothers." These "goddesses" have spiritual powers over the continuation of the community by ensuring fertility of women and agriculture and the respectful law-abiding behavior of community members. During the public spectacles, performers wear elaborate costumes and headdresses, such as the one above, carved in the form of human heads which support superstructures often depicting birds, serpents, and human activities. These

headdresses represent the ideals of the Gelede society. Performers dance, sing and tell stories to both educate and entertain, with the ultimate goal to promote social harmony and the well being of the community.

On the mask above, the woman's head is holding a bowl. It sits gracefully on a tri-lobed hairstyle, typical of the Yoruba women, which balances and supports the bowl. The Gelede masquerades reflect the Yoruba view of women, honoring them as the preservers of the community.

Map of Nigeria, Africa



Nigeria is located in West Africa and borders with the Republic of Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the north. Its coast in the south lies on the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean.



Vocabulary

Agriculture

Masquerade

Fertility



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

In what ways are world communities similar and different? What are the symbols of citizenship in world communities?*

Writing and Social Studies Activity: The *Gelede* headdress was worn to pay tribute to an important woman figure among the Yoruba people. Each student should identify a woman who has made an impact on or plays an important role in his/her life. They should describe and explain their choice of the woman they are honoring and her relationship to their community and/or their family.

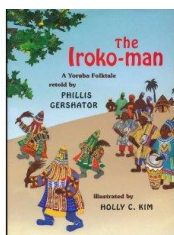
Art Activity: The top part of a *Gelede* headdress depicts a symbol relating to the woman who is being celebrated or honored. Have students create their own symbols for the woman they are honoring. These symbols can be attached to a paper “headdress” hat. While wearing their “headdresses” students can share their writing piece with the class.

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



Resources

Related Children's Books

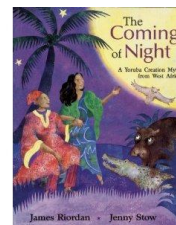


***The Iroko-Man: A Yoruba Folktale* by: Phillis Gershator**

When the terrifying Iroko-man tries to take a woodcarver's first-born child as partial payment for bringing fertility to his village, the father must find a clever solution.

***The Coming of Night: A Yoruba Creation Myth from West Africa* by: James Riordan**

Riordan's retells the Yoruba myth, vividly illustrated by Jenny Stow, which explains how Night was brought to earth.



Web Links



Gelede Mask Dancing: YouTube Video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQF47pXw6hQ>

Images of Other Gelede Masks:
<http://www.michaelbackmanltd.com/944.html>

