

GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER



PASSPORT TO UNDERSTANDING

A JOURNEY THROUGH WEST & EAST AFRICA

www.globaleducationcenter.org

AFRICAN FABRICS - KENTE (GHANA)

The Meaning of Kente Cloth

The history of African kente cloth goes back to the 12th century, when these colorful fabrics were worn by African royalty. The name kente comes from the word "kenten" (basket), because of the cloth's resemblance to a basket-woven design. Each kente pattern is distinct and has its own special meaning. Many people around the globe are proudly wearing kente cloth today to show their unique sense of fashion and their connection



Information from www.africaimports.com

www.globaleducationcenter.org

AFRICAN FABRICS - ADINKRA (GHANA)

Adinkra is a cotton cloth produced in Ghana that has traditional Akan symbols stamped on it. There are over 50 Adinkra symbols that represent popular proverbs and maxims, record historical events, express particular attitudes or behavior related to depicted figures, or concepts uniquely related to abstract shapes. It is one of several traditional cloths produced in the region. The Akan people (of what is now Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire) had developed significant skills in weaving by the sixteenth century, including the creation of Adinkra. It is said that Adinkra means good-bye and that in its early history, Adinkra cloth was relegated to use by royalty and spiritual leaders to be used for important ceremonies such as funerals.

It is said that the Asante King became the owner of a royal Adinkra robe after a military conquest of a neighboring people, and he learned about the special ink (Adinkra aduru) used in the process of printing the symbols onto the cotton fabric. Over time the Asante incorporated their own philosophies, cultural traditions, and folklore into the symbols, further developing Adinkra symbology. The symbols were also used in metal work and on pottery.

Adinkra cloth has grown in popularity and, while it is more widely available, it is still crafted in much the same way - stamping the symbols onto the cloth using the original Adinkra aduru, which is made by boiling the bark of the Badie tree with iron slag. Because the ink is not fixed, Adinkra cloth is never washed. It is still used in Ghana for special ceremonies and events. While some Adinkra cloth is exported commercially, it lacks the hidden meanings, symbolism and proverbs of traditional Adinkra.



Info from <https://www.thoughtco.com/origin-and-meaning-of-adinkra-symbols-4058700>

ADINKRA SYMBOLS



AFRICAN FABRICS - MUDCLOTH (MALI)

The Meaning of Mud Cloth

Each piece of mud cloth has a story to tell! The symbols, the arrangement, color and shape, all reveal different secrets. Social statues, characters and occupation, these are all things which a piece of mud cloth communicates. Even now African people are very careful about what they wear, as each fabric, color and dress is interpreted by others. What you wear shows what kind of person you are! Below are just a few of the many symbols you'll find in a piece of mud cloth. There are many symbols not shown here which you may find. Patterns and varieties are endless. Also, many meanings differ depending on the region, ethnic group, or individual.



This represents a bed of bamboo and millet leaves. It is said that the pattern is used by a woman who wishes to show her superiority to a co-wife. However, the pattern is extremely popular, so a woman wearing it is not always making that assumption.



This design represents the spindle. A very old and traditional design.



"The Brave Mans Belt" This pattern is worn to signify that the wearer is brave and fearless. It is a representation of a belt that warriors used to wear before going out to battle.



"Wosoko" ~ This pattern has a unique story behind it. A farmer had a sickle he particularly liked. It worked well for him and he thought it deserved its own pattern. This pattern is named the back of the sickles blade.



Iguana's elbow. A very common pattern. This may represent good fortune as an iguana can lead a hunter to water. The iguana is also symbolic of African born people in warfare with foreign powers.



This design represents a crocodiles fingers. A very popular design.



This is another very popular pattern that represents the flower of the calabash.



This pattern means wealth and luxury. It is supposed to represent the cushions of rich women from the Mauritania area. These women are considered very wealthy: they don't have to work, just put their heads on pillows.

Information from www.africaimports.com

Even without meanings being well known, mud cloth has become tremendously popular lately in the western world. An extraordinarily beautiful fabric: the unique and exotic colors and designs combine with a hand-spun, hand-woven fabric to produce a rich and elegant textile.

AFRICAN FABRICS - INDIGO ADIRE (NIGERIA)

Adire are indigo resist dyed cotton cloths that are made by Yoruba women in southwestern Nigeria. Resist-dyeing involves creating a pattern by treating certain parts of the fabric in some way, such as with wax, to prevent them absorbing dye. Strips of the dyed cloth are sewn together with the typical piece of adire being rectangular or square. Dyeing was traditionally done in large earthenware pots sunk into the ground. The dye is made from indigo leaves that were gathered and allowed to ferment, by adding the indigo to water softened with caustic soda. The cloth is then dipped into the dye and pulled out quickly to let it oxidize, which is what gives it its traditional blue color. This process is repeated several times with the cloth taking on a darker hue with each dipping. Sometimes after it has been dyed the cloth can be beaten with a mallet so it took on a sheen.

Before dying, cloths are created in a variety of ways to create patterns that are revealed after dying. Raffia and starch are the two most common forms of resist used in the production of adire. Raffia is tied on the fabric in much the same way as tie-dyed patterns are created using rubberbands or string. Patterns can also be created by sewing them with raffia before dying. When using starch as the resist it would come from cassava flour and be applied to one side of the fabric, applied using a stencil or freehand with a metal tool similar to a comb.



AFRICAN FABRICS - ASOKE (NIGERIA)

Asoke is a strong fabric created and worn by the Yoruba people of Nigeria. The luxurious material is worn for special occasions. When making this Asoke fabric, each strip is woven and bound together that creates an uneven looking weave. A variety of patterns and colors are used and includes many other types of material such as cotton, polyester and silk. Usually woven by men and women, the fabric is used to make men's gowns, called agbada and hats, called fila, as well as women's wrappers, called iro and he



AFRICAN FABRICS - KORHOGO (IVORY COAST)

Korhogo Cloth always tells a story. It is very similar to mudcloth. It is produced in the Ivory Coast in West African and is named after the village of Korhogo in the northern part of the country.

Korhogo cloth is produced by painting a design on hand spun, hand woven, and hand painted cotton fabric. This is often done using a stencil; and the painting is done with a specially fermented solution that turns black after a reasonable amount of time has passed. Korhogo cloth is used in making clothing and craft items. It is most popular as a truly authentic wall decoration.

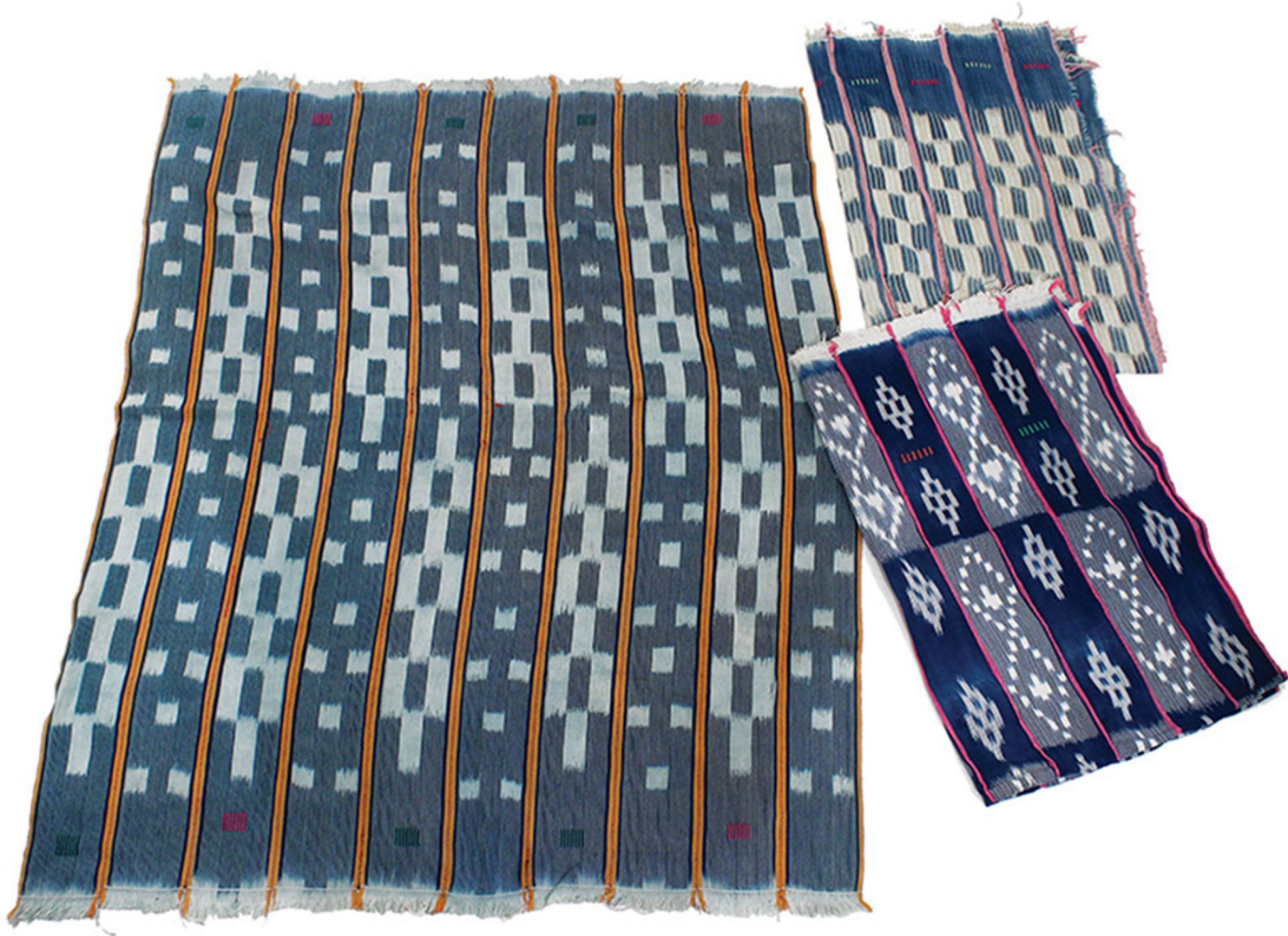


Some meanings: The goat signifies male prowess from the beginning of time; the crocodile signifies male fertility; the lion signifies royalty; the Guinea fowl signifies inner beauty; the fish signifies vitality and abundance; the chicken signifies fertility and grace; the bird signifies freedom; the tree signifies society's shadow; the swallow signifies life's interdependence; the hunter signifies life's mysteries.



AFRICAN FABRICS - BAOLUE (IVORY COAST)

Baoule cloth is a hand-loomed strip cloth textile from the Ivory Coast of Africa that comes in an endless range of colors. As the name suggests, it is made by the Baoulé people, the majority ethnic group in Côte d'Ivoire. Baoulé cloth is a traditional African fabric, made using ancestral methods of hand weaving. Baoulé loincloths are part of Côte d'Ivoire's artisanal and cultural heritage.



AFRICAN FABRICS - KUBA CLOTH (CONGO)

Kuba cloth is created by the Kuba people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, originally created from bark but later made of raffia. The leaves of the raffia tree are gathered and dyed then woven into different patterns and designs, with each having its own unique meaning. There are different groups among the Kuba people with each having their own way of making Kuba cloth as well as their own unique designs and meanings. The Kuba live in the rainforests and believe their cloth helps to express their personal and group stories as well as the meaning of life. In Kuba culture, men are responsible for raffia palm cultivation and the weaving of raffia cloth. The cloth is produced on inclined, single-heddle looms and then used to make their clothing and to supply foundation cloth to female members of their clan section. The cloth is coarse when it is first cut from the loom, so it is then pounded in a mortar, which softens it and renders it ready for the application of surface decoration, often stitched like embroidery, for which women are responsible.



AFRICAN FABRICS - PYGMI CLOTH (CONGO)

The Mbuti Pygmies live in the Ituri Forest which lies in the Northeast corner of Democratic Republic of the Congo. This cloth is made from the bark of trees of the forests of the Congo. Handmade and decorated and no cloth looks the same.



AFRICAN FABRICS - BATIK

Batik painting from Kenya, created through the process of dyeing fabric by covering areas of cloth with a dye-resistant substance to prevent them absorbing colors. Batik is thought to be over 1,000 years old with historical evidence demonstrating its use in the early centuries AD in Africa, the Middle East and in several places in Asia.



BANANA LEAF PAINTINGS (KENYA)

Banana leaf paintings from Kenya are collages of individual banana leaves and each work is individually created. Artists create wall hangings, greeting cards, and framed pictures from the banana leaves, many of which depict village life, wildlife, or family and friends.



MASKS IN AFRICA

Masks have special meaning in Africa, worn for various rituals, ceremonies, and other cultural traditions. The mask in this culture box was created by a Massai artist. The Massai people, who traditionally herd cattle in East Africa, pass these masks down from generation to generation to honor their ancestors. When doing this, it is believed that the ancestors will pass down blessings to the owner.

While many Massai still follow traditional lifeways, herding cattle and living a somewhat nomadic life, many live in cities and towns and have vocations similar to the many jobs and careers in our country.



Information from www.africaimports.com
www.globaleducationcenter.org



TOYS, GAMES & OTHER AMUSEMENTS

MANCALA

Mancala is an ancient count-and-capture games that can trace its origins back to 300 to 700 CE in ancient Ethiopia. The word mancala means "to move" and is a derivative of the Arabic word naqala. There are many versions played by different people in West Africa under various names such as Wari, Warri, Awari, Oware, and Wouri. It was introduced to countries in Asia where it has many different names through Arab trade. Mancala was brought to North America through the trans-Atlantic slave trade when people from Africa and the Caribbean were forcibly enslaved and forced to fight to save remnants of their cultures. Other names for this popular game that has simple rules but deep strategy include Bao in countries in East Africa such as Kenya and Tanzania; Ouril in Cape Verde; and Omweso in Uganda. The commercial version offered most often in stores in the U. S. is called Kalah with rules derived from the Warra version popularized in Louisiana.

There are many different ways to play mancala. Information on the history and various rules for playing can be found at <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/mancala-411837>.

The modern version sold in American toy stores, played with colored glass stones



A traditional Oware board from Ghana, typically played with cowrie shells, stones, seed pods



www.globaleducationcenter.org

TOYS AND OTHER AMUSEMENTS

Dolls handcrafted in the country of Ghana in West Africa wear some of the vibrant fabrics common to the area.



Hand-carved animals created by artisans in the country of Kenya, representing some of the many animals of the savannahs of Africa.



TOYS AND OTHER AMUSEMENTS

Bottle cap toys handmade in Kenya from recycled bottle caps displaying the ingenuity of African artists with a long history of recycling.



AFRICAN INSTRUMENTS

Dununs and Djembe

The djembe is the most popular drum to have evolved out of The Great Mali Empire of West Africa and has made its way to all parts of the globe. It is a goblet shaped drum carved from a single piece of hardwood and typically covered on its head with a goat skin. Its sounds are sharp and powerful, giving great voice to the djembe orchestra. It is accompanied by a set of dununs, a trio of drums that make up the bass ensemble. They are cylindrical drums with heads on both ends, typically covered with cow's hide. The largest of the drums is called the dununba (often spelled doundounba), providing a deep bass sound, often referred to as the foundation of a rhythm and often called the Mother Drum. The mid-sized dunun is called the sangban, which defines the rhythm with complex arrangements. The smallest of the three drums is the kenkeni, which has a higher pitch, keeping time for the rhythm and often tying the sounds of the dununba and the sangban together. The djembe and dununs can trace their origins back to The Mali Empire by the Mandé people, originally custom-made by village blacksmiths. Many say that the djembe holds the spirits of the tree from which it is carved, of the animal who gave up its life to give the djembe its head, and of the carver who created the drum. Moreover, the djembefola who plays the drum has a responsibility to honor those spirits as well as the spirits of the ancestors who have passed down stories and music through generations.



AFRICAN INSTRUMENTS

The Kora

The Kora is a long-necked harp or lute of the Malinke people of West Africa. Dating back to The Great Mali Empire, the kora was played by griots or jalis, who are oral historians blessed with sharing the stories, songs, customs and traditions of ancestors, from the beginning of time through the present. Griots and jalis still carry on the traditions today, accompanying their stories and songs with the melodic beauty of the kora. The kora's body is composed of a long hardwood neck that passes through a calabash gourd that serves as a resonator. The calabash is covered by a leather soundboard. The kora has 21 strings attached to the neck with leather tuning rings. The griot plucks the strings with the thumb and forefinger of each hand, holding the harp with the remaining fingers. There are many mini-koras, typically created for tourists or for children, that do not have the beautiful sound of the true kora; however, they are good for showing what the unique instrument looks like (in miniature form).



AFRICAN INSTRUMENTS

The Balafon

The balafon is the predecessor to the wooden xylophone and is hand-crafted with between thirteen and twenty-one wooden keys on a wood frame over resonators made from calabash gourds. The keys are struck with mallets to produce a beautiful melodic sound. The balafon dates back to The Great Mali Empire and, like the kora, was played primarily by the griot or jali, oral historians who to this day share the history, stories and traditions of the people through music and song. The balafon has moved beyond just being played by the griot to become a popular instrument in West African music and dance groups but retains its important place in the history of the great people of the Mandinka Empire.



AFRICAN INSTRUMENTS

Crafts people in Africa make percussion instruments out of all kinds of materials. Below are just a few of the smaller hand instruments used throughout parts of Africa that have made their way into the broader music making around the world.

Bambara Rattle (Mali)

The Bambara rattle made in Mali is a common instrument throughout West Africa and the Afro Latin Diaspora. It is made of wicker and straw.



Dugi Dugi (Tic Toc Drum) (Kenya)

The Dugi Dugi made in Kenya is a small drum on a stick, sometimes with one drum head and sometimes with two, one on each end of a stick. The head(s) has two short strings that dangle a bead, one on each side. The beads swing around and strike the front and back of the head (s) as the stick is twirled between the palms or fingers. While this drum is made in Kenya, almost every culture in the world has some version of this instrument.



AFRICAN INSTRUMENTS

Crafts people in Africa make percussion instruments out of all kinds of materials. Below are just a few of the smaller hand instruments used throughout parts of Africa that have made their way into the broader music making around the world.

Shekere

The Shekere is a percussion instrument that consists of a dried hollowed gourd of which the larger half is covered with netting that is woven with shells, seed pods or beads. It can be played by shaking, tapping, rubbing the beads or by pulling the netting with the hand. It is a popular instrument throughout the world, known by different names in different parts of Africa.



Sistrum Rattle

The Sistrum Rattle is based on an ancient Egyptian percussion instrument used in ceremonies and rituals. This sistrum is handmade of strong wood, metal wire, and recycled metal bottle caps. It creates a mellow tambourine-like sound.



AFRICAN INSTRUMENTS

Thumb Piano (Kalimba, Mbira, Sansa, Karimba, Gongoma)

The origin of the kalimba or thumb piano, known by many different names throughout Africa, dates back around 3,000 years with the switch from bamboo to metal tines around 1,300 years ago. It is believed that the instrument had its origins around the area of present day Cameroon, although it is a popular instrument today throughout the continent of Africa and throughout the world. While early kalimbas from that area and today in sub-Saharan Africa typically had from 6 to 10 tines, much larger ones with up to 21 to 25 tines evolved in the area that is modern day Zimbabwe. These larger mbiras were known as *mbira dzavadzimu*, or "big mbira of the ancestral spirits." As the kalimba spread across Africa, different groups created their own unique version, making modifications in design, such as how many tines the instrument had or what sort of mounting board or gourd. Each group created their own unique tuning to support their different musical styles.



POPULAR WEST AFRICAN CLOTHING FOR MEN

Throughout the continent of Africa, there are many different styles of clothing. In West Africa, there are beautiful, colorful fabrics from which are made both traditional clothing as well as contemporary styles. While many people wear the same styles of clothing as people in our country, there are many times when traditional clothing is worn. Popular styles of clothing are worn by people of African descent who are living throughout the Diaspora, including the styles included in this cultural museum box.

Men's Dashiki



Kufi or Kofia



POPULAR WEST AFRICAN CLOTHING FOR WOMEN

Throughout Africa, women have created various styles of clothing and continue to make unique fashion statements both at home and throughout the globe. The beautiful fabric of people such as the Ashanti (Asante) people in Ghana are vibrant, colorful, and steeped in tradition but popular today for modern designs. Traditionally, it was the men who wove the beautiful fabric although women would do the spinning. The Ashanti are a subgroup of the Akan, the largest ethnic group in Ghana, and they are also the creators of the popular Anansi the Spider tales.



A Gele is a traditional head wrap made popular by women throughout West Africa. They consist of strips of fabric that can be tied in many different ways, simply such as the one in this photograph or very intricately for special events, such as weddings and festivals.

Commonly called a Lappa or Wrappa, 1.5 to 2 yard pieces of traditional African cloth is used as a simple wrap skirt in many parts of Africa. They are also popular here in America as traditional apparel in a West African dance class. The fabric is wrapped around the body and tied at the waist, sometimes with ties that have been sewn to the fabric and sometimes by merely wrapping, tucking and tying the fabric.

