

Adinkra-Inspired Pillows

(art + history; art + social studies)

Students will repeat a design with handmade stamps. They will learn about traditional African fabric design, dyeing and decorative stitching. Rather than copy a traditional art form from another culture, students will be inspired by their symbols and techniques and apply those to their own images to make the work personally significant.

Adinkra cloth from Ghana, West Africa, contains symbols that are stamped on the fabric with black dye made from the bark of a badie tree. The stamps have meanings, giving the garment not only a beautiful design, but also a message. These are usually worn for special occasions, such as funerals, and are made from long strips, divided into squares and stamped with designs carved from Calabash. The strips are sewn together with colorful yarn.



Grade Levels 7-12

Preparation

1. Look at various examples of weaving and fiber arts from Africa and discuss the meaning and making of traditional Adinkra cloth design symbols. Consider the possibilities of designing symbols that are personally significant.

Process

1. Students should create preliminary sketches of simple designs for stamps on newsprint. Transfer design onto the Flexi-Cut material with a graphite pencil and carefully cut it out with scissors. Design does not have to be one piece, it could be multiple pieces that work together. Peel and stick onto the block to make a stamp. Repeat to make 2 or 3 stamps that work together as a theme.
2. Cut muslin into 19" x 6" strips. Each pillow will need three strips. Choose colors for the stamps that will coordinate with one another and with the dye.

Materials

Blick Flexi-Cut Printing Plates (40406-1006), package of 12, size 4" x 6", cut to 2" x 3" pieces, need three per student

Blick Mounted Linoleum Blocks, (40404-1001), 2" x 3", need three per student

Unbleached Muslin, 38" wide (63104-1338), need one 19" x 18" piece (1/4 yard) per student

Jacquard® Textile Colors, assorted colors (01208-) 8-oz bottles, need at least three per class

Polypropylene Brayer, 2" (40100-1002), share four across classroom

Procion MX® Cold Water Dye, assorted colors (01302-) need at least three per class

Polyester Flufferfill (66902-1006), need one bag per six students

Creativity Street® Embroidery Floss (63100-1009), 24-skein set, share across classroom

Embroidery needles

Blick All-Purpose Newsprint, 9" x 12" sheets (10204-1003), need one sheet per student

Blick Economy Graphite Pencils, box of 12, (20302-2009), need one per student

Buckets or large containers for mixing dye

Scrap corrugated cardboard to catch drips
Clothesline for hanging cloth to dry

Process, continued

3. Brush acrylic paint on the stamps or use a small brayer. Stamp the designs the length of the fabric. Dry and iron.
4. Prepare cold water dyes according to instructions on label, then color each strip of muslin. They may all be the same or all different colors. Hang pieces up to dry.
5. Sew the strips together using a traditional Adinkra stitch. This is also called a baseball stitch. Lay each piece next to one another and sew up on each side, weaving under the cloth from side to side. Taping or pinning the cloth together as you sew will help keep it in place.
6. Fold the pillow over and whip stitch around the edges of 3 sides. Stuff loosely with fiberfill and sew the remaining side.

**Lesson Plan and Artwork submitted by
submitted by Gail T. Krug, Grand Haven, MI**

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National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

9-12 Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

9-12 Students reflect on how artworks differ visually, spatially, temporally, and functionally, and describe how these are related to history and culture

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

9-12 Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making