



Ivory and African elephants

GRADES 7-8

Museums like Agnes need to preserve, interpret and share their works of historical ivory art like this figure. Through these works, we can learn a bit about the people who made them and the context in which they were made.

Explore the many facets of this ivory figure with the following activities.

ART ACTIVITIES

Create a detailed drawing

Figure was featured in an Agnes exhibition called *The Art of African Ivory*. You can learn more about the exhibition and find images of the artworks [here](#). Select a sculpture from this exhibition and make a detailed sketch of it. Focus on the contours, shadows, shapes and texture of the sculpture while you're drawing. Think about the form of the ivory object. How has the material influenced its shape and how it has been carved?

Sculpt an animal

Elephants have long been honored in Lega communities, due to the traits that they feel elephants embody: wisdom, kinship, character and morality. Take a few minutes to think about your own values and the traits you admire in yourself and others and write down two or three. Brainstorm an animal that embodies these traits. Sculpt your animal using a moulding material such as polymer clay. Embellish the surface with designs, words or symbols that reflect the traits you have chosen.



Lega Artist, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Figure
unknown date, ivory
Gift of Justin and Elisabeth Lang, 1984
(M84-017)

If you'd like to extend the lesson beyond visual art, here are some other activities

Learn more about The Art of African Ivory

Learn more about this sculpture, the Justin and Elisabeth Lang Collection and threats facing African elephants by reading the exhibition publication [here](#). You can also watch international scholar, educator and humanitarian Dr Johnnetta Cole discuss historical African ivory art, wildlife conservation and museum responsibility [here](#).

Investigate an object

In Lega communities, ivory objects like the figure seen above would have been handed down through generations. Find an object in your house that's been handed down through generations and trace its history: What materials is it made of? Where was it made and who made it? Who has owned it in the past? What's the future of this object, where do you think it will end up?

Finally, make a map that documents the life of the objects. Include all the places it (or the materials) has been.

Research a vulnerable or endangered species

Some examples include the African elephant, giant panda, black rhino and polar bear. Consider the following questions:

- What factors have led to the species being endangered?
- What is being done to protect the species?
- How can you advocate for wildlife conservation?

GLOSSARY

Values: Things that you think are important in the way you live and work.

Endangered species: Groups of living organisms such as plants and animals that are facing a high risk of extinction in their natural habitats.

Poaching: The illegal hunting, capturing or trade of wildlife. Poaching is a major threat to wild animals around the world.