Teacher Notes

The Art of African Ivory
Introduction

Our school programs challenge students to develop critical thinking skills. We ask questions and set tasks requiring students to:

Observe
Interpret
Compare
Create

In order to support acquisition of flexible and imaginative thinking skills. These skills are paramount for student development and are an integral part of the 21st-century learning framework.

A recent study by the University of Arkansas found that art gallery field trips are valuable for the development of critical thinking skills, historical empathy and tolerance of other viewpoints.

For more information please see:
www.educationnext.org/the--educational--value--of--field--trips/

The first half of the Art of African Ivory program visit, which takes place in the gallery space, establishes key ideas. These ideas are developed in the second half of the visit through a creative hands-on project in the studio. We encourage you to use this booklet to prepare your students for their visit to the Agnes, and to extend the experience in your classroom.
Focus Exhibition
Winter 2019

The Art of African Ivory

Selected from the Justin and Elisabeth Lang Collection of African Art, this exhibition explores the themes of community and cultural traditions as expressed through works made from elephant ivory. While the term African art might suggest a continent-wide style, viewers will explore the unique works from three different cultural groups including the Yoruba, the Igbo and the Lega. These objects function in a variety of different ways, from calling for guidance to exhibiting prestige. Desired worldwide by a variety of different bodies, ivory can be used to discuss history alongside current philosophical questions about ecological and wildlife preservation.

This exhibition was curated by Dr. Shannen Hill.

Program

Elementary (Grades 1-8)

The Art of African Ivory

In this 90 minute long program, students spend half the time in The Art of African Ivory exhibition and half in the Andre Biéler Studio. In the gallery, we introduce key aspects of the use of ivory in Africa, shedding light on some of the cultural traditions surrounding it. Students will be able to achieve a greater understanding of the variety of unique cultural practices in another area of the world. In the Studio, students will have a chance to create art that connects to the themes learned in the exhibition.

The Agnes offers a two-part program delivery model for groups larger than 30 students. Half of the class begins in the gallery space and the other half begins in the studio; they switch places at the 45-minute mark.

We align our programs to the current Ontario Ministry of Education’s Curriculum documents, in order to support teachers in meeting curricular objectives.

Curriculum Connections:

Education in the arts is essential to students’ intellectual, social, physical and emotional growth and well-being. Experiences in the arts- in dance, drama, music and visual arts- play a valuable role in helping students to achieve their potential as learners and to participate fully in their community and in society as a whole. The arts provide a natural vehicle through which students can explore and express themselves and through which they can discover and interpret the world around them. (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2009)
The Ministry of Education has issued a guiding framework for experiences in the arts. The framework includes three goals: **participation, analysis and appreciation**, and **integration**. Within the framework, expectations have been grouped under three headings: **Creating and Presenting/Performing**, **Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing** and **Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts**. Our program strives to meet and exceed the Ministry’s program expectations.

**Visual Art**

Students will:
- Interpret a variety of works of art and explore the creative process through African artists’ works
- Identify and critically analyze the social contexts of works of art through interpretation
- Identify key design principles and elements
- Create an object that expresses a personal response

**Social Studies (Grade 1-6)**

Students will:
- Understand aspects of heritage and identity among the Lega, Yoruba and Igbo People
- Discuss the importance of materials in culture (how we use them to seek guidance, build community, assure morality and hold prestige)
- Discuss how different cultures relate to the same materials

**Geography (Grade 7-8)**

Students will:
- Understand some differences in central and west African culture and art

**History (Grade 7-8)**

Students will:
- Discuss the history of elephant poaching in Africa
- Discuss the historical cultural practices of the Lega, Yoruba and Igbo people.

**Before the Visit**

The following are suggested discussion topics and activities to help prepare students for their visit. **Please note:** we ask that students wear name tags during the program.

**Gallery Visit**

Discuss the nature of a public art gallery with your class. Art galleries collect, research, protect, preserve and display original works of art for the benefit of current and future visitors. Ask your students if they have been to an art gallery before. What types of art did they see at the art gallery? Why is it important to visit original works of art, instead of viewing reproductions or images on the Internet?
Expectations
Discuss proper behaviour and gallery etiquette with your class. The three main rules to remember art: Do not touch the art because oils on our hands can contain salt that can damage the surface of works of art. No running. No food or drinks (including gum).

Themes in the Exhibition/Program
- Community and culture
- Beliefs and values
- Diversity

Ideas to discuss in the Classroom before the Visit
- What do your students know about Africa?
- What do your students know about the country of Nigeria, Benin, The Democratic Republic of Congo?
- What does community mean to your students?
- What does “seeking guidance” mean to your students? Can they think of ways they seek guidance?
- What do your students know about ivory? Is it a material they are familiar with?

Works of Art That Will Be Discussed

Yoruba Artist, Nigeria, *Divination Tapper (Iroke Ifa)*, 19th–20th century, Ivory.

Lega Artist, Democratic Republic of the Congo, *Pendant*, unknown date, ivory.

Lega Artist, Democratic Republic of the Congo, *Figure*, unknown date, ivory.
Extending the Visit into the Classroom

Your visit to the Agnes can be extended to your classroom upon your return. Here are a few ideas to support extensions:

**Visual Art**
- Have the students create African Ivory inspired artwork, utilizing materials like foam or soap to create their own carvings.
- Have students paint or draw scenes from Yoruban, Igbo or Lega folklore.

**Language Arts**
- Have the students write about traditions in their own lives, that may be unique to their family or culture. Include a description of the event, and why it is important to them.
- Have the students write a journal entry based on how they feel about the artworks they encountered at the gallery. Was there anything they particularly liked? What did they learn?

**Social Studies**
- This exhibition features artwork from the African continent. Students can “take a trip” to the continent, and learn specifics about how life may differ from that in North America. What is the weather like? What foods are native to the continent? What do the people wear? Keep in mind it is a hugely vast landmass and these things are very different across each country and region.
- Discuss how people’s environments influence the materials that they use (Ivory is used in Africa due to the elephant population). Have students identify what types of materials they saw in the exhibition, and discuss what materials might be used in a North American context.
Science
- Have students study elephants (and other African animals). What do they eat? Where do they live? Have your students make a poster for each animal.

History
- Have your students research the history of elephant poaching for the ivory trade. When did this practice start? Where was the ivory primarily sent? What actions have been taken in our current world to protect the elephants and discourage poaching?
- Have your students research the Igbo, Yoruba and Lega peoples. What makes these cultures unique? What are some cultural practices?

Resources
Agnes Etherington Art Centre:
The gallery website, which includes information about the collections.
[https://agnes.queensu.ca/](https://agnes.queensu.ca/)

African Art- Encyclopedia Britannica
A resource that includes information on both a variety of visual art forms in Africa, as well as the peoples who make them.
[https://www.britannica.com/art/African-art](https://www.britannica.com/art/African-art)

Art and Life in Africa- The University of Iowa
This website has extensive information on the various countries in Africa, as well as the peoples that live there.
[https://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/countries/](https://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/countries/)