General Art

Exploring Aesthetics through African Art

Clay Mask Unit

Content Standards for Visual Arts:
1.3 Research and analyze the work of an artist and write about the artist's distinctive style and how it contributes to the meaning of the work (homework assignment).
2.5 Create an expressive composition, focusing on dominance and subordination.
3.4 Discuss the purposes of art in selected contemporary culture(s).
4.3 Formulate and support a position regarding the aesthetic value of a specific work of art and change or defend that position after considering the views of others.

Eagle Expectations:
(2) Demonstrating reflection and critical writing, speaking, and listening
(4) Completing projects using a variety or resources
(9) Expressing ideas through oral, written, numeric, physical and/or creative means
(10) Participating in opportunities for cultural enrichment both at school and in the community
(12) Participating in collaborative and cooperative learning experiences
(14) Demonstrating personal accountability and intellectual independence
(16) Acknowledging and respecting cultural and ideological diversity and individual differences in the classroom and the community

ELD Standards:
Reading Comprehension
Intermediate: Read and use detailed sentences to orally identify main ideas and use them to make predictions about informational materials, literary text, and text in content areas.
Early Advanced: Apply knowledge of language to achieve meaning/comprehension from informational materials, literary texts, and texts in content areas.

Unit Objectives:
Students will investigate various aesthetic stances and relate these stances to their exploration of African art ceremonial masks. They will discuss the purposes of African art and formulate and support a position regarding the aesthetic value of a specific work of art and change or defend that position after considering the views of others.

Students will then create an expressive ceramic mask, focusing on dominance and subordination—based on their research of African mask forms and traditional designs including both ancient Egyptian and tribal images.

Standards-Based Assessment:
Student’s expressive clay mask composition will be assessed using the General Art Studio Rubric—students will be assessed for each of the following:
1) following directions/effort, 2) craftsmanship/technical skill focusing on dominance and subordination, and 3) originality/content. Students will also be graded on their pre-drawings (assessed using the same art rubric scale).
Students will create a graphic organizer defining the purposes of African masks—students will be assessed using the graphic organizer rubric scale.

Students will write a one-page reflection that formulates and supports a position regarding the aesthetic value of a specific work of art and change or defend that position after considering the views of others. Students will be graded on the writing rubric scale.

**ELD Intermediate:** Students will read the assigned text and use detailed sentences to orally identify main ideas of aesthetic theories and make predictions about these theories in reference to African art. Students will be orally assessed of their comprehension of aesthetic theory and the 5 stances.

**ELD Early Advanced:** Students will apply their knowledge of language to achieve meaning/comprehension from the text. Students will be orally assessed of their comprehension of aesthetic theory and the 5 stances.

**Visual Arts Content Standards Vocabulary:**

**additive sculpture** Refers to the process of joining a series of parts together to create a sculpture.

**aesthetics** A branch of philosophy; the study of art and theories about the nature and components of aesthetic experience.

**asymmetry** A balance of parts on opposite sides of a perceived midline, giving the appearance of equal visual weight.

**balance** The way in which the elements in visual arts are arranged to create a feeling of equilibrium in a work of art. The three types of balance are symmetry, asymmetry, and radial.

**contrast** Difference between two or more elements (e.g., value, color, texture) in a composition; juxtaposition of dissimilar elements in a work of art; also, the degree of difference between the lightest and darkest parts of a picture.

**design** The plan, conception, or organization of a work of art; the arrangement of independent parts (the elements of art) to form a coordinated whole.

**dominance** The importance of the emphasis of one aspect in relation to all other aspects of a design.

**elements of art** Sensory components used to create works of art: line, color, shape/form, texture, value, space.

**expressive content** Ideas that express ideas and moods.

**function** The purpose and use of a work of art.

**motif** A unit repeated over and over in a pattern. The repeated motif often creates a sense of rhythm.

**organic shapes** Refers to shapes or forms having irregular edges or to surfaces or objects resembling things existing in nature.

**pattern** Anything repeated in a predictable combination.

**sculpture** A three-dimensional work of art either in the round (to be viewed from all sides) or in bas relief (low relief in which figures protrude slightly from the background).

**subordination** Making an element appear to hold a secondary or lesser importance within a design or work of art.

**subtractive sculpture** Refers to sculpting method produced by removing or taking away from the original material (the opposite of additive).

**texture** The surface quality of materials, either actual (tactile) or implied (visual). It is one of the elements of art.

**Materials:** Students will need reference material, plastic bags, a rolling pin, measuring sticks, trimming tools, a water dish, glazing material as well as acrylic paints, brushes and palettes.

**Prior Knowledge Link (Pre-Lesson Activities):**

Aesthetics Introduction: Students will be shown a variety of objects and decide whether or not these common objects could be considered ‘art’. Students will then write their own definition of ‘what art is’ and share with a partner. Cooperative groups will combine definitions into one group definition. Students will
then orally compare and contrast their various definitions with the definitions of the aestheticians.

**Presentation/Practice:**
1. Students will read a handout on the 5 aesthetic stances—students will take notes as we review each stance together.
2. Students will then be shown a variety of art images and choose which stance best reflects each work of art.
3. Using their text, *Art in Focus*, students will work in pairs to read the section on aesthetics and write short essay answers on the *Theories of Art* handout. Each question requires students to read the material for content as well as requiring students to make subjective inferences about each aesthetic stance.
4. Using a photo from the text, students will then draw a series of African mask images based on each of the aesthetic stances.
5. Students will read a handout on African ceremonial masks. As students complete their design ideas, we will discuss the multiple purposes of the African mask art form.
6. Once students have explored multiple design ideas, they will produce a final design in color, creating an expressive composition that focuses on dominance and subordination.
7. Following a demonstration of slab rolling, design transfer, attaching clay and pressing in the subordinate areas, students will begin their clay mask:
   a. Roll a 3/8 inch slab.
   b. Place Xeroxed mask design over slab and trace image.
   c. Press in subordinate design areas
   d. Slip and score dominate design areas
   e. Finish off design by smoothing all edges
   f. Bisque fire.
   g. Glaze fired clay.
   h. Paint unglazed space—dominant design areas.

**Further Study:**
1. Students will create a pencil drawing of a work of art in their home that best depicts their personal aesthetic stance. Students will write a brief paragraph explaining their stance and why they chose their particular artwork.
2. Traditional African masks were often created out of fear in order to ‘scare away’ evil spirits that frightened villagers. Students will create a pencil drawing of a fear they have had to overcome and write a description of HOW they overcame this particular fear.
3. In honor of Black History Month, students will research and analyze the work of a significant African American artist and write a one-page diary entry about the artist’s distinctive style and how it contributes to the meaning of their work. Students will also reproduce one of their artist’s most famous works.
4. Student work will be displayed in the main office to be shared with the school community.

**Reflection:**
1. Students will be given an evaluating handout to individually critique their own clay mask as well as the artwork of others. They will formulate and support a position regarding the aesthetic value of a specific work of art and change or defend that position after considering the shared views of others.

**Reading Target:**
Throughout this unit, students will be asked to read from the textbook and various handouts. They will work collaboratively to answer questions requiring students to make subjective inferences about each
aesthetic stance and, in particular, their own most prominent aesthetic stance. Since the required reading and essay questions focus on student opinion and the formulation of personal aesthetic valuing skills, the level of comprehension is high as all essay questions are heavily linked to prior knowledge. For example, in the pre-lesson activity, students are asked to state their own definition of art. An essay question later in the lesson asks the students to explore why they would or would not consider a specific aesthetic stance to be valid, thereby linking their personal aesthetic stance to the aestheteician’s stance.