

OPENING THE MEANING OF THE SENUFO DOOR

Students will explore the specialized style of the Senufo peoples' door panel through a series of citizenship and art experiences. They will demonstrate this knowledge and understanding by creating their own door designs to represent their own cultures, similar to the Senufo door panel style.

STANDARDS

OHIO LEARNING OUTCOMES

Fourth Grade Learning Outcomes

Citizenship

6. Identify or compare the customs, traditions, and needs of Ohio's various cultural groups.
8. Use maps and diagrams as a source of information to:
 - a. recognize continents by their outlines and major physical features.

Sixth Grade Learning Outcomes

Citizenship

5. Compare the gender roles, religious ideas, or class structures in two societies.
6. Draw inferences about the experiences, problems, and opportunities that cultural groups encountered in the past.

OHIO MODEL FOR THE ARTS

Sixth Grade

Goal II – Personal Expression and Production/Performance:

Communicating Through the Arts

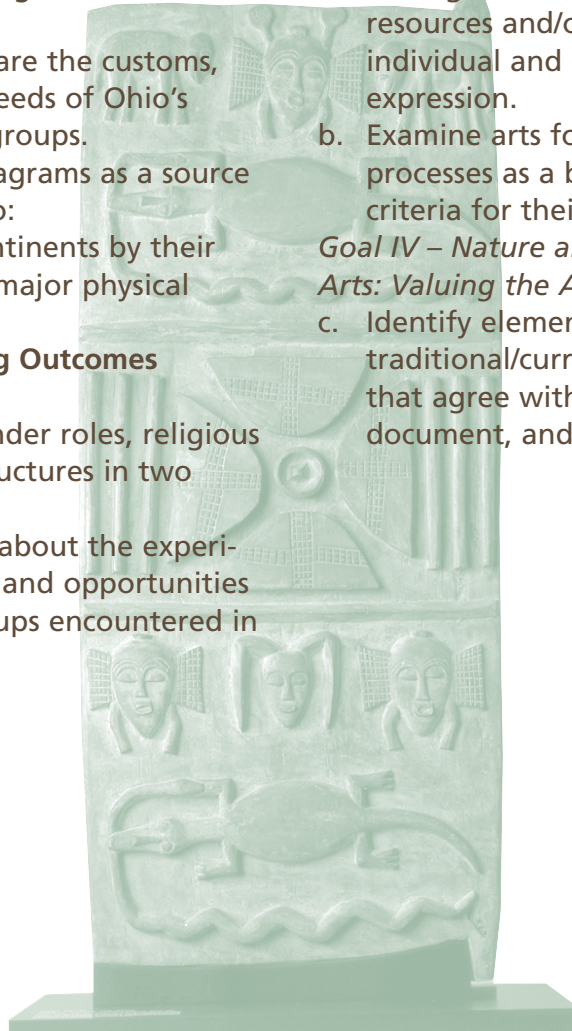
- d. Develop precision in the use of techniques and processes when creating and recreating works of art.

Goal III – Arts Criticism: Responding to the Arts

- a. Use places where actual works of arts are shared (theatres, concert halls, galleries, and museums) as resources and/or inspiration for individual and collaborative artistic expression.
- b. Examine arts forms and/or artistic processes as a basis for developing criteria for their own work.

Goal IV – Nature and Meaning of the Arts: Valuing the Arts

- c. Identify elements of other historical/traditional/current philosophies that agree with their own ideas, document, and discuss them.



READING THE SYMBOLS OF THE SENUFO DOOR

Senufo, Cote d'Ivoire

TITLE	Door Panel
DATE	20th century
MEDIUM	wood
DIMENSIONS	46¼ x 19 x 2"
CREDIT	Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Rogers
ACCESSION NO.	1995.155

This door panel was once the left half of a set of granary doors. Granaries made of dried mud and wood were used to store grain. This door is carved (and was probably originally painted with bright colors) with animals, ancestral portraits and symbols. It is divided into three even sections, the most important part being the center.



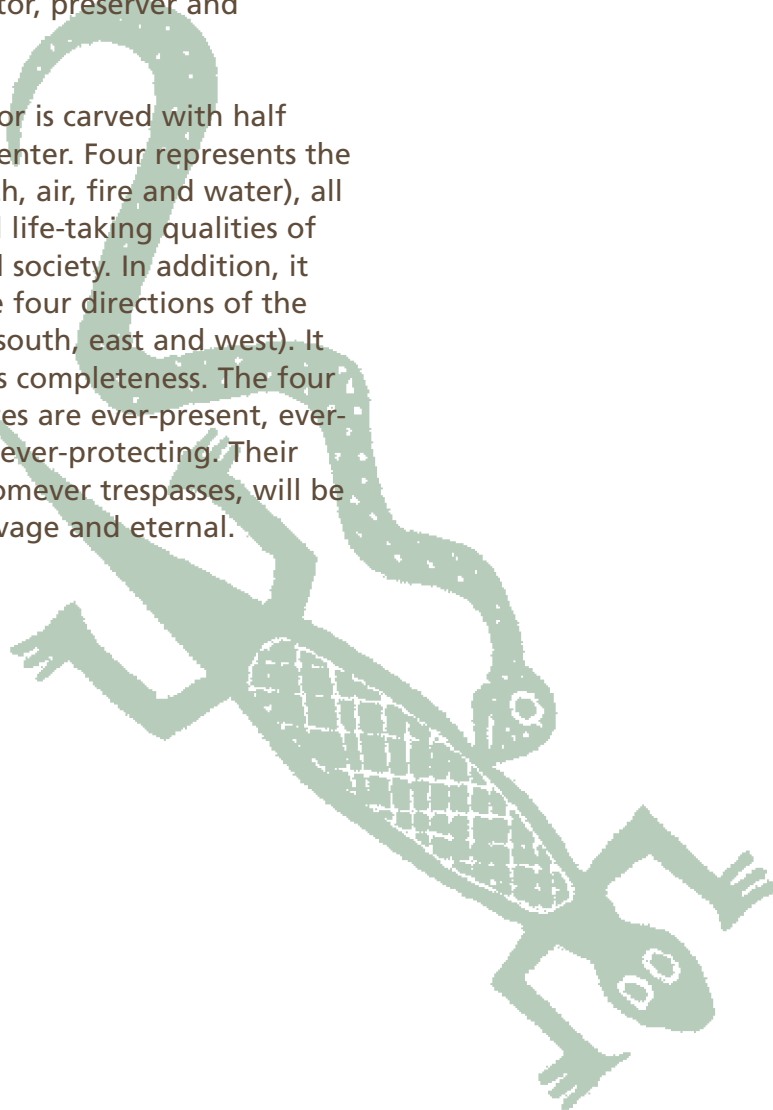
The door is lavishly carved with a variety of animals, each with vivid symbolic importance. The crocodile represents the power of the king and the duality of Senufo spiritual beliefs. The crocodile has long been both revered and feared by this culture. It lives on land and in the water and carries with it the power of each.

The snake, held by the crocodile, has many meanings. It is believed to move between the worlds of the seen and the unseen and to embody important powers and the fluid energy of water. In agricultural societies, serpents are also symbols of fertile soil and abundant rain. The snake symbol is used to ward off evil or destructive forces.

The two hyenas flanking the middle ancestor portrait at the top of the door are a clear warning to anyone who might try to steal grain from behind the doors. These carved hyenas tell would be thieves that stealing or harming the grain would be cruelly punished.

The door used other kinds of symbols, including numbers. The number three, which is used quite frequently in this door panel, is a sacred number to the Senúfo. The number three combines the number two and one and so it includes all life and experience. It is birth, life and death; mind, body and soul; past, present and future; man, woman and child. It also stands for the power of creator, preserver and destroyer.

Finally, the door is carved with half circles in the center. Four represents the elements (earth, air, fire and water), all life-giving and life-taking qualities of an agricultural society. In addition, it symbolizes the four directions of the world (north, south, east and west). It also represents completeness. The four ancestral figures are ever-present, ever-watching and ever-protecting. Their wrath, on whomever trespasses, will be immediate, savage and eternal.



INSIDE THE CULTURE: BEHIND THE SENUFO DOOR

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE SENUFO PEOPLE

The Senufo people are a relatively large African nation numbering about 2,500,000. Sharing a common language and culture, the Senufo speak nine major dialects within Senari, their common language, dividing the people into different language groups. Compared to most African groups, the Senufo have a more amiable history with European invaders, due in part to their large population. They were colonized by the French who were often less aggressive than other colonizing countries.

Furthermore, throughout their history the Senufo have worked together and have not had to fear external attack from other African peoples. The Senufo have maintained their ancient traditions while smoothly adopting French mores. The official language of Senufo lands is French, and political systems are based on French law.

THE HOME OF THE SENUFO PEOPLE

The creators of this door panel lived in what today is northern Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and primarily Burkina Faso. Family and kinship ties are important among the Senufo people and relationships are based upon respect for the wisdom and experience of elders. All members share in responsibilities and celebrations. Unlike many of their neighbors, the



Senufo have maintained a rather stable and comfortable way of life and avoided prolonged upheaval.

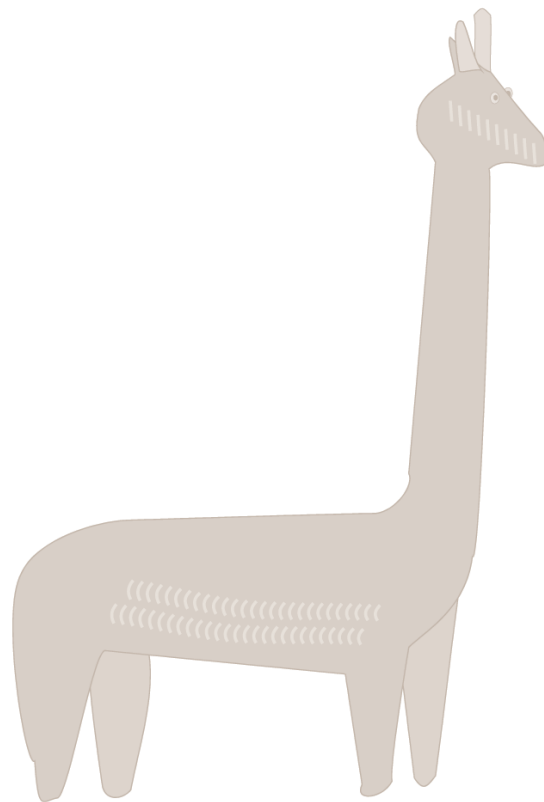
Farming is of prime importance to the Senufo and considered the most respected and noblest of professions. All Senufo engage in some farming during the growing season, May to late October, when rainfall occurs daily. The rest of the year consists of the dry season. The Senufo grow crops such as rice and yams. Cattle and other animals that the Senufo raise are not used as food, but as trade and in traditional ceremonies. They are aware of many environmental issues and seek to replenish the soil and pursue economic development that is not at the expense of their land and traditions.

BEHIND THE ART OF THE DOOR PANEL

Most African cultures have a tradition of richly carved door panels each with their own unique style. Carved door panels have historically been created for sacred places such as the palaces of kings and chiefs, secret societies and for community storage facilities. Typically, there were two doors on vertical hinges, each carved in low-relief, with the carvings facing the outside. The relief carving creates a shadow that gives the doors an illusion of depth. The idea was to demonstrate the importance of the people who lived inside or the items that were stored inside.

Carved doors were used not only as decoration, but also as historical documents or narratives. They told of important events or stories to those who approached the dwelling. Some stories carved on doors related to the many military conflicts that were taking place at the times the doors were carved. Military images of warriors and horses were traditionally used to symbolize power and leadership. Headgear and hairstyles worn by the figures in the door panels also gives an indication of their identities or positions in society.

The locks, which secured the two heavy wooden doors, were impressively elaborate in their carved designs. Locks are often carved in the form of an animal or human that represents an important mythological figure relating to creation or cultural history. These locks were created by blacksmiths and were constructed in three parts: the vertical beam, the horizontal beam and the key. The doors were placed between equally elaborate carved post and lintel openings. The incorporation of life-size figures and/or animals carved on the posts gave the impression of a freestanding sculpture that guarded the doorway. The lintels may also have been carved with geometric patterns to symbolize power and spirituality.



DIGGING DEEPER: THE CROSS-CURRICULAR EXPERIENCE



Through this lesson, students will describe the significance of door panels and symbols to the Senufo people. They will locate the homelands of the Senufo, compare and contrast modern American cultures to traditional Senufo culture and create door designs in the symbolic Senufo door panel style.

MATERIALS

- colored pencils
- digital or photographic camera
- sketch pads or drawing paper
- tempera paint (various colors)
- paint brushes
- paint pens or markers (various colors)
- construction paper
- markers
- school glue/glue stick
- tape
- scissors
- decorative items (*i.e., buttons, glitter, feathers, ribbons, leaves, twigs, sequins, etc.*)

VOCABULARY LIST

- **interpretation** – an opinion of something one hears, sees, feels and/or touches
- **political system** – the way a government is set-up
- **colonization** – the act of taking over land from another group of people
- **relief** – work of art in which shapes project from a flat surface into negative space (opposite of free-standing)
- **theme** – main idea of an artwork
- **three-dimensional** – artwork that can be measured in three ways: height, width and depth (artwork that is not flat)

- **portrait** – image of a person
- **positive shape** – shapes or forms in two and three-dimensional art (empty spaces surrounding them are called negative spaces or ground)
- **symbols** – visual images that stand for or represent something else

ESTIMATED TIME FOR COMPLETION

Four to five class periods

SUBJECT AREAS

Visual Arts, Social Studies and Technology

ACTIVITY

1. Ask students to identify the decorative items they may have in their front yards or front porches (an American flag, wreath, etc.). Discuss the significance of these different items. Explain to students that this is one way they differentiate their family from others in the neighborhood.
2. Help students to web what items constitute a family and discuss. The Senufo people differentiated their royalty and other important members of the community through decorative door panels. How do our doors symbolize our families and our social positions? List the different kinds of doors used in America, the purpose of each and its key design elements. Using a map or globe find the location of the school's state, city and country and the location of the Senufo lands.

3. Inform students that each Senufo door panel told a story that would extol the accomplishments of that particular family. Analyze various examples of Senufo door panels and discuss the meaning/story behind each (see Bibliography). Look at the photo or DVD of the Senufo door panel and have students write their interpretation of the visual symbols it presents. Ask students to share their interpretations and discuss.
4. Engage in a cross-cultural exploration of doors by viewing and discussing the poster series "Doors of ..." (e.g., *Doors of Cincinnati*, *Doors of Boston*, *Doors of Jerusalem*, etc.) in order to conclude that doors may reflect the aesthetics and values of other cultures. These posters may be acquired through local poster stores or thumbnail photos are found at the following sites on the Internet: <http://home.earthlink.net/~doorposter> and <http://www.barewalls.com/cgibin/search.exe?searchstring=door+posters>
5. Go on a walking tour of the neighborhood. Study different doors and hypothesize what the people who live there may be like. Have students sketch and explain each door using the Neighborhood Doors worksheets. Take photos of the doors with a digital or photographic camera. Hang the photos and the student sketches in the classroom to inspire students in their own door design.
6. Review with students the significance of the Senufo doors as well as the doors they have looked at from other cultures. Have them think about and discuss how these doors represented the people inside. Have students sketch ideas for a new door to the school building. How could the design symbolize the students and teachers of the school? What are the goals or characteristics that are unique to their school? Discuss the different ideas represented in each of the sketches.
7. Tell students that they will be working together to design a door to the classroom that represents all the students in the class. What has special significance to them and the classroom? Discuss with students how to create a visually interesting frame (i.e., *repetition of patterns, visual symbols used, etc.*). Have students sketch their ideas for the classroom door design. Students may choose to work on one design together or each student may contribute one panel to the door, similar to the Senufo door style.
8. Have students implement their design for the classroom door. Use markers and paint on construction paper or other materials to create the designs and to add embellishments. Encourage students to be as creative as possible and thoughtful in selecting the overall design (i.e., *stripes, polka-dots, stars, hearts, squiggly lines, triangles, checker boxes, plaid, etc.*). Students could embellish with found objects (i.e., *buttons, beads, ribbons, stamps, dried flowers, photos, etc.*).

NEIGHBORHOOD DOORS

NAME _____ DATE _____

Sketch doors found in the neighborhood. Write what you think the door says about the people who live there.

DOOR SKETCH #1

Explanation

DOOR SKETCH #2

Explanation

DOOR SKETCH #3

Explanation

NEIGHBORHOOD DOORS

NAME _____ DATE _____

DOOR SKETCH #4

Explanation

DOOR SKETCH #5

Explanation

DOOR SKETCH #6

Explanation

CULMINATING PROJECT RUBRIC

At the conclusion of the event or project this rubric is used to assess student participation and/or the event.

EVENT TITLE _____

STUDENT _____ SCORE _____

PURPOSE	4	3	2	1
QUALITY	Project is very clearly stated and answers the question	Project is clearly stated and answers the question	Project is somewhat clear and somewhat answers the question	Not clear
LEARNING	Exceeds expectations, dedication to the process is obvious with the use of exceptional detail and/or neatness	Reflects a dedication to the process with emphasis given to neatness and/or detail	Minimal dedication to the process, is completed with minimal neatness and/or detail	Project is lacking dedication to the process
CONCEPTS	Project reflects a deep understanding and creative application of concepts	Project reflects a clear understanding and application of concepts	Project reflects some understanding and application of concepts	Project reflects a lack of understanding of concepts
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING	Exceptional demonstration of thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, originality, risk taking, curiosity and imagination	Good demonstration of thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, originality, risk taking, curiosity and imagination	Limited demonstration of thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, originality, risk taking, curiosity and imagination	Project did not challenge or exceed basic knowledge skills
CONNECTIONS	Project exhibited and integrated many relevant and creative connections among curriculum, the students, the arts, artists and community resources	Project exhibited and integrated relevant connections among curriculum, the students, the arts, artists and community resources	Project attempted to make connections to curriculum, the students, the arts, artists and community resources	Project made a few unclear connections

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS AND EXTENSIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Using the door sketch scenarios from the Senufo assignment, instruct students to flesh out their scenarios into personal narratives.

Design a mascot by creating a list of animals, objects or numbers and identify their unique strengths and meanings in order to create a new mascot to represent yourself.

VISUAL ARTS

In the past many cultures decorated their architectural structures with doors carved in relief or with free-standing relief sculptures. Look throughout the history of art to highlight doors of great architectural significance. One example of this is the pair of bronze relief doors titled *Gates of Paradise* by Ghiberti

http://www.artchive.com/artchive/G/ghiberti/gates_of_paradise.jpg.html which were carved between 1425 and 1452 for the Baptistery in Florence, Italy. These doors illustrated stories from the New Testament and figures appear to project out to the space in front of the panel. The *Gates of Hell* <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/R/rodin/gates1.jpg.html> or <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/R/rodin/gates2.jpg.html> dating 1880 to 1917, are bronze doors

created by Auguste Rodin that were originally destined for the Paris Museum of Decorative Arts. The two panels show tragic views of the human condition. *The Thinker*

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/R/rodin/thinker.jpg.html>

one of Rodin's most famous sculptures is included in the lintel of the *Gates of Hell*. The figures are in high-relief, with portions of their heads and bodies projecting away from the base of the door. Discuss with students the significance of these doors and how they represented what would be found behind the entrance of the buildings.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Students will create a classroom door that represents an advertisement for specific roles in their school or personal community. Think of everyday activities that occur in the school day or in the community and create a door to let everyone know what's going on.

Look in magazines to collect pictures or use cameras and create a walking tour of your community to document doors, signs and logos. Discuss the message understood from the diversity of facades. Create a collage to cover the classroom door that has a specific message that is unique to that classroom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRINT RESOURCES

Metropolitan Museum of Art. *For Spirits and Kings: African Arts from the Tishman Collection*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981.

Rubin, Arnold. *African Accumulative Sculpture: Power and Display*. New York: Pace Gallery, 1974.

Thompson, Robert F. *African Art in Motion*. Los Angeles: UCLA, 1975.

Willet, Frank. *African Art: An Introduction*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 1985.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Art and Life in Africa
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Senufo.html>

Senufo—Tagba Peoples
<http://www.spurlock.uiuc.edu/senufo/Pages/introduction2.html>

Granary Door
 Teacher's Guide to African Art
<http://www.thinker.org/fam/education/publications/guide-african/36.html>

Granary Doors
 Art and Life in Africa
http://cas15.cas.uiowa.edu/pict_search.html
 (under "Type" search for "door")

Granary Door
 University of Pennsylvania
http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Sculpture/wddr_senufo.gif

Gates of Paradise by Ghiberti
 Artchive
http://www.artchive.com/artchive/G/ghiberti/gates_of_paradise.jpg.html

The Gates of Hell by Rodin
 Artchive
<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/R/rodin/gates1.jpg.html>
<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/R/rodin/gates2.jpg.html>

The Thinker by Rodin
 Artchive
<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/R/rodin/thinker.jpg.html>