

# A F R I C A N T E X T I L E S

African clothing is known for its colorful & bold fabrics, a tradition stretching back thousands of years. Highly coveted, the cloths have been traded across continents, worn by kings, & used as currency.

Africans pass down cloth-making techniques: strip weaving, tie dying, painting, & hand stamping. Their fabrics, rich in history & design, influence art & fashion throughout the world.

Clothes can give clues about a person's work, play or background. For example, African villagers wear different handmade textiles for ceremonies than for everyday. Try using old techniques to design new fabrics!

## ADINKRA CLOTH

Can you imagine wearing clothes that give a message? In Ghana, Adinkra cloths have symbols representing proverbs, historical events or everyday objects. Since Adinkra means "goodbye," the cloths are often worn at funerals or farewells. The Asante people stamp symbols onto fabric with pieces of carved calabash dipped in dye. They join the fabric parts together with colorful stitching & proudly wear their "symbol cloths."

See Adinkra cloths at: [www.marshall.edu/akanart/adinkracloth.html](http://www.marshall.edu/akanart/adinkracloth.html)

### Stamp a Cloth

- ◆ What message would you wear? Be happy? No pain, no gain? Live together in peace? Choose a message & draw a symbol to represent it.
  - ◆ Cut the symbol out of craft foam & glue it to a base to make a stamp. (Wood block or cardboard squares glued together.)
  - ◆ Divide your fabric strip or paper into sections.
  - ◆ Press your stamp into a sponge with black paint & print to fill a section. Trade stamps to fill other sections with different designs.
  - ◆ Add a strip of colors between sections.
- Join pieces to make a larger "cloth."



## MUD CLOTH

Could you make a beautiful cloth using mud & rotted leaves? In Mali, women dye cloth yellow using old leaves. Then, using rich mud as their dye, they paint around stars, fish bones, squares & zigzags. Finally, they bleach the yellow dye away leaving stark white designs surrounded by rich brown.

Learn more about mud cloth from the Smithsonian site:  
<http://www.mnh.si.edu/africanvoices/mudcloth>

### Make a Mud Cloth

- ◆ Create your own bold designs: paint lines that dance, writhe & wriggle using yellow paint on white paper.
- ◆ Paint the background shapes around your lines using dark brown paint.
- ◆ When the paint has dried, "bleach" the yellow lines by painting them white.

Many thanks to  
Xanadu Gallery, Menlo Park,  
for their loan of textiles:

## KENTE CLOTH

Can you imagine a cloth made only for kings? In the past, Ghana's Asante people wove Kente cloth for royalty. Men wove bright colored threads & traditional patterns into long narrow strips of fabric. Their designs had meanings about ideas, sayings or memorable moments. The strips were sewn into a large cloth that was worn like a toga.

See more Kente cloth at the Smithsonian site:  
<http://www.nmfa.si.edu/exhibits/kente>

### Create Contemporary Kente

You don't need to be a king to wear Kente. Many people today wear this cloth as a sign of pride in Africa or African heritage.

- ◆ Make your own Kente cloth strips using red, green, yellow, black and blue colors.
- ◆ Weave short paper strips over & under slits of varied widths cut into a long paper strip OR design & paint geometric patterns on long paper strips.
- ◆ Join the papers to make a larger "Kente cloth."

## WRAP UP WITH THE MERCURY NEWS

### African Newspaper Figures

- ◆ Roll a long newspaper tube. Fold in half & tie at the neck with string.
- ◆ Roll a short tube of newspaper. Slide it between the "shoulders" of the figure. Tie the waist with string.



- ◆ Use your handmade African textiles to dress your figure. Add beads, felt & yarn to complete the costume.

### Look in the Mercury News

Clothes give hints about a person. Cut out pictures of people wearing different outfits. Write sentences about their lives from clues you see in their clothes. Imagine switching outfits among your people. How might that change their stories?

Everyday clothes now use traditional designs from African fabrics. Look through the newspaper for designs that have been borrowed from other situations (ex. military fabric, animal fur designs, printed words, etc.)