

# **NIGERIAN TEXTILE ARTS: RESIDENCY PLAN FOR JOHN STANFORD INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL**

## **Authors:**

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## **Project Title:**

Introducing Nigerian textile arts and techniques

## **Arts Area:**

Visual arts

## **Grade Level:**

All School, kindergarten through fifth grade, including elementary-age Bilingual Orientation students

## **Time Frame:**

Each of fourteen classes will meet with the teaching artist, Toyin Ajayi-Frankel, four times: grades will be grouped for the introductory session (slides and textile/clothing samples); classes will then meet separately, in three 35-45 minute sessions, depending on ages of the students, over the course of a week, with additional time for set-up, clean-up, transition, and conferring with teachers. Before the residency Toyin will present a one-hour teacher training and a short session for parents. Following design and dyeing sessions with students, Toyin will assemble the final products, for presentation to the school community, approximately two weeks after completion of sessions with students. Dates: December 2002 – February 2003.

## **Project Focus:**

This residency will introduce elementary students to traditional and contemporary examples of Nigerian textile (fiber) arts. Students will learn about the roles textiles play in both traditional and modern settings in Nigeria: as markers of ethnic identity; as historical/archival records; as tools for communication; as art pieces. Through their introduction to textiles students will also learn about the diversity of peoples and cultures in Nigeria. They will explore how specific symbols, ideas, environmental elements, and other cultural materials inform the images used and ideas expressed in Nigerian textile arts.

Students of different ages will use various dye-resist techniques, adapted from Nigerian methods, for designing textiles: simple stencils with paste-resist (grades K-1); freehand drawing with paste-resist (BOC); *adire eleko* (batik; grade 2); *adire eleso* (tie and dye; grade 3); design and painting on fabric, with glued and sewn embellishments (grades 4-5). Each student will produce an individual item (headband) and will contribute to a group project, which Toyin, with design input from students, will assemble and sew, with help from parents: a traditional robe (grades K-1); a large banner (BOC); a quilt (grades 2-3); a wall hanging (grades 4-5).

## **Resources and Materials needed:**

- 20 Yards of 100% cotton, of different weights
- 60 oz of procion dye.
- 12 pounds of soda ash
- 1 queen -size quilt lining.
- 32 oz fabric paint
- threads [ in various colors] & needles
- corn Paste [adaptation of traditional starch-resist, made from cassava]
- 2 bottles of fabric glue.
- 1 *adire* cloth (traditional indigo fabric) from Nigeria
- 1 *aso oke* (hand woven cloth) from Nigeria
- beads, pom poms, plastic beads, and other art materials for embellishment
- plastic drop cloth, to cover the floor for dyeing fabric
- cardboard for stencils
- pencil for each student
- dye bucket (large “home size” garbage can)
- brushes in various sizes (large for K-1 students)

## **Learning Goals:**

Goal #1: Students will learn about traditions associated with traditional and contemporary Nigerian textiles.

- A. Students will learn about different types and functions of textiles in traditional and contemporary Nigerian life. Students will learn that the diversity of textiles reflects the diversity of peoples and cultures in Nigeria.
- B. Students will see samples of traditional and contemporary African textile art, and will draw comparisons with various types and roles of textiles in their own lives.
- C. Students will understand the significance of specific colors in Nigerian textiles.

Goal #2: Students will create their own textile arts, using techniques and materials reflective of Nigerian traditions.

- A. Students will learn arts concepts and vocabulary of textile arts (see key vocabulary).
- B. Students will practice and develop specific skills and techniques for designing textiles (dye-resist).
- C. Students will learn safety precautions for working with fabric dyes.
- D. Students will reflect and refine their techniques, in moving from creation of a simple individual project to collaboration on a group project.

Goal #3: Students will communicate ideas and feelings through their textile arts.

- A. Students will experience the creative tension or challenge of adapting culturally specific colors and symbols for their own expressive purposes.
- B. Students will communicate and adapt their personal aesthetic choices in collaborating on a group project.

**Arts EALRs addressed by this residency:** 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 (introductory session); 2.1, 2.3; 3.1, 3.2, 3.3; 4.4

**Pre-Residency Activities for Classroom Teachers** (see JSIS librarian to borrow many of the resources listed below, on special loan for the duration of the residency from Seattle International Children's Festival)

1. With maps, photographs, and online resources, introduce/reinforce students' knowledge of the size of the African continent, the diversity of landscapes within the continent, and the different ways of living/cultures within Africa. Emphasize that, while many people still live in villages, many people, particularly in Nigeria, live in very large cities.

- See Africa Online for a simple comparison, with child-friendly graphics, of Africa's size and population (20.3% of planetary surface; 14% of population) to those of other continents (perhaps most striking is the comparison with Asia, where 60% of the world's population lives on 29.8% of the planetary surface). The U.S.A. could "fit inside" the area of Africa three times. This site also provides games and activities for children. [The structure of this site is changing: as of 12/3, access this component through [www.africaonline.com/site](http://www.africaonline.com/site); then click on "kids zone," scroll to the gray box and click on "Learn about Africa," then scroll to the bottom of the page and click "Land."
- *A Day in the Life of Africa*, is a collection of 250+ photographs from the Tides Foundation, all captured on one day, February 28, 2002. As Kofi Annan says in his introduction, it provides a "complex and nuanced portrait" of the continent. Particularly handy for working with young students is the small map of Africa that accompanies all photographs, with the place where individual photographs were taken indicated. Especially useful to prepare for this residency: photographs on facing pages of a traditional Dogon village in Mali and the modern port of Alexandria (pages 184-185; village vs. urban settings); the photograph of Oshodi Market in Lagos (page 65: size; urban environment; diversity of clothing; variety of colors); photographs of contemporary fashion in Lagos and Kampala, Uganda (pages 206-207; use also with textiles, below). See also *Another Africa*, photographs by Robert Lyons and essay/poems by the Nigerian (Igbo) writer Chinua Achebe: many diverse images from Western Africa (though none from Nigeria).
- In the preface to *A is for Africa* (and other titles on shapes, counting, and colors; see below), Ifeoma Onyefulu says that although she took all her photographs in the villages of southeastern Nigeria, where she grew up as a member of the Igbo people, they are intended to "reflect the rich diversity of the continent as a whole . . . what the people of Africa have in common: traditional village life, warm family ties, and above all, the hospitality for which Africans are famous." While you may question whether she can accomplish this aim exclusively with images of the village/traditional life of one people, nonetheless, for the purposes of this project, her books do provide many compelling, child-friendly images, particularly of the variety of colorful textiles. See also the poems and paintings in *The Distant Talking Drum* by Isaac Olaleye: several poems mention bright clothing; one poem, "Village Weavers," is about weaving cloth and dyeing it with herbs.
- For a quick overview for young students of diversity within Nigeria, use the three books on Nigeria by Anne Rosenberg in Bobbie Kalman's *The Lands, Peoples, and Cultures* series. Nigeria, the "Giant of Africa" is one of the largest countries in Africa (the size of California, Nevada, and Oregon combined), has the largest population in Africa, and the

world's largest "black" population. This series' many colorful photographs include urban as well as rural scenes, and emphasize the great variety of peoples (470 ethnic groups, with predominant peoples the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani). The Yoruba and Hausa are also among the ethnic groups in the older "alphabet" book, *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions* by Margaret Musgrove. *Nigeria: The Culture* includes a very useful two-page spread called "Getting Dressed" which focuses on clothing; the other photographs also reflect the colorful range of textiles. *Nigeria* by Patricia Levy, in the *Cultures of the World* series, also discusses clothing differences among ethnic groups, and includes many colorful photographs.

2. Discuss the messages that textiles/clothing communicate through their colors (see below) or imagery.

- "Talking T-shirts" with young students: each student wears a shirt that tells something about her/him, and works with a partner to "decipher" the message of each other's clothing. Some shirts will communicate a message directly, or through a logo (what *does* the "Nike" logo on your shirt say about you?); some shirts will "say" that they're the wearer's favorite color, or remind him/her of a favorite occasion. Does contemporary America have any culturally specific colors?
- Use photographs of Nigerian textiles (pages 60-81) in *Painted and Dyed Textiles from Africa* by John Gillow to look at how design motifs are used. Included are: lizards, rodents, snakes, and birds (tropical animals that may protect the wearer); an umbrella within a diamond shape (royalty); images of a king, based on images of the British king and queen during a Silver Jubilee in the 1930s; an elephant. Observe how they are combined with non-narrative elements (tie dye "flowers" or "explosions"). Does the clothing of your students make use of any similar motifs?
- With older students use *African Kings* by Daniel Lainé to survey the range of brightly colored textiles with which African royalty (at least the men) adorns itself. The book begins with photographs of twenty-five kings and princes from Nigeria; kings from many other countries are photographed as well. Or discuss with students the irony that indigo blue, a dye once reserved for royalty, now colors "blue jeans" (derives from *bleu de Gênes*, or Genoa blue), the worldwide "uniform" for work or casual wear.

3. Integrate the subject of this residency with the current focus of the visual arts curriculum on color.

- In Ifeoma Onyefulu's *Chidi Only Likes Blue*, a sister teaches her younger brother his colors by looking at what surrounds them: the red caps of chiefs, the yellow of *gari*, a grain made from cassava, the green of *akwukwo uma* leaves. The juice from the *uli* tree is black, and is used to decorate village houses (how many black-painted houses do students see in contemporary America? Why?) In her residency, Toyin will elaborate on the idea of colors with culturally specific messages.
- For older students, Level Five of the SRA visual arts curriculum resource offers a lesson on monochromatic colors (Unit 2, page 46), which suggests lining up students by the value of their jeans (lightness/darkness of color; not monetary!) and using this exercise to introduce "value," "tint," and "shade" as arts vocabulary. Or look at examples in John Gillow's book (see above), in which various tints of blue are created when dye begins to penetrate the dye-resist medium. Adept readers interested in history or science can use the short background readings for teachers provided with this residency plan.

## **Residency Plan:**

### **Session one: introduction to textiles**

The teaching artist, Toyin Ajayi-Frankel, will use images, slides, and samples of textiles and other materials from Nigeria to explore the diversity of cultures in Nigeria, the use of colors, symbols, and different types of textiles to express that diversity, and materials and techniques for producing different textile arts. She will also lead students in a discussion to identify images, colors, symbols, and other objects in their own environment that express the culture in which they live.

### **Session two: design**

**Grades K-1 (35 minutes):** Toyin will provide cardboard stencils in two designs; students will use large brushes to apply corn paste (room temperature; washable) to fabric. They will first practice this technique on their individual headbands, then work in groups of four to stencil a long strip of fabric for the K-1 traditional robe. **Note to teachers:** by the Friday before session two, please give Toyin a list of all students' names in your class (for labeling headbands) and designate the groups of four in which students will work on the group project.

**BOC (45 minutes):** As above, except that students will draw (with brushes to apply corn paste) rather than stencil their designs. Each student will practice this technique on an individual headband, then produce a square for the class banner.

**Grades 2-3 (45 minutes):** Toyin will demonstrate the *adire eleko* technique for grade 2 (batik, in which corn paste can be used to draw representational images and/or complex designs) and the *adire eleso* technique for grade 3 (tie dye, which requires somewhat better fine motor skills and is used to create more abstract images). Students will first practice the technique on their individual headbands, and then create a small individual piece for the class quilt.

**Grades 4-5 (45 minutes):** Toyin will provide a wall hanging with the outline of a woman carrying a baby, and will show samples/demonstrate techniques for painting on fabric and embellishing fabric with glued and appliquéd elements. Students will practice these techniques on individual headbands; each of the four classes will be responsible for designing one part of the group hanging: the baby; the upper half of the woman's body; the bottom half of the woman's body; the background.

### **Session three: paint/dye (Note: students should wear smocks, and/or clothing that can be stained)**

Toyin will discuss the importance of particular colors in Nigerian cultures (especially indigo blue), and will demonstrate how paints/dyes were traditionally made, and are made now. She will review safety aspects of working with paints/dyes. Students will then paint (grades K-1) or dye (other groups; dye bath already prepared) their headbands and group project pieces.

### **Session four: design group project**

Before this session Toyin will have washed and dried all cloth pieces. Using samples, Toyin will guide students in designing the group project. Small groups will work with paper patterns to suggest which fabric strips should be juxtaposed, how borders, if any, should be used, how design elements should be integrated and embellished.

### **Assessment Strategies**

- Lesson-to-lesson carryover: Before the residency classroom teachers will assess knowledge about West Africa/Nigeria through a baseline measurement of their choosing: anecdotal evidence; work with maps; defining vocabulary; K-W-L charts. Toyin will reinforce key vocabulary and learning goals at the beginning of each lesson.
- Completion of Visual Art Product/Creative Process: Teachers will record attendance and participation in residency sessions; Toyin (and volunteers) will record completion of individual headbands and participation in the collaborative group project.
- Self-Evaluation: Students will use simple checklists/rubrics at three times during the residency: after designing their headbands; after collaborating on their group project (collaborative techniques as well as arts strategies); when assessing the group product assembled by the teaching artist.

### **Key Vocabulary**

Geography: Africa; West Africa (region); Nigeria; ethnic group

Vocabulary from SRA visual arts curriculum resource to review with students, as age-appropriate: color, color intensity, color scheme, color wheel, complementary color, primary color, secondary color, cool color, warm color, value, shade, tint, monochromatic, fabric or textile, fiber.

*adire*: Yoruba word for resist dyeing with indigo.

*adire eleko*: Yoruba technique whereby designs are painted or stenciled on to the cloth in a resist substance before dyeing it with indigo.

*adire eleso* [other sources, *adire oniko*]: Yoruba dyeing technique using tied resists.

appliqué: decoration or ornament made by cutting pieces of one material and plying them to the surface of another.

batik: Javanese method of resist-dyeing using wax.

dye: a coloring agent that soaks into the fibers or the surface of a textile.

substantive dye: a dye that does not require the use of a mordant to make it permanent.

adjective dye: a dye that has to have a mordant to make it permanent.

aniline dye: a chemical or synthetic dye derived originally from coal tar (the first in 1826).

mordant: a metallic salt which combines chemically with the dye to fix it permanently.

embellish: to decorate, or make beautiful, as by ornamentation

indigo: a blue dye made from plants of the genus *Indigofera* or produced synthetically. "The hue of that portion of the visible spectrum lying between blue and violet, evoked in the human observer by radiant energy with wavelengths of approximately 420 to 450 nanometers; a dark blue to grayish purple blue." Etymology means "of or from India."

*lafun*: Yoruba word for the traditional cassava-based starch used as a resist medium for making *adire* cloths.

motif: a repeated figure or design.

resist: a substance (such as paste, starch, or wax) or technique (such as tying or stitching) used to prevent dye from penetrating certain areas of a fabric, in order to create a design in contrasting colors.

stencil: a sheet (plastic, cardboard) in which lettering or a design has been cut so that ink or paint applied to the sheet will reproduce the pattern on the surface beneath.

tie-and-dye (or tie dye): a widely used resist technique in which portions of a textile are enclosed within tightly drawn thread ties to prevent them from taking up the dye; the technique results in patterns (often circular) that stand out in the original color of the cloth against a dyed background.