



## OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- Study fabric patterns in Ghana Adinkra Cloth
- Be introduced to Adinkra symbols and their meanings
- Create a 12" x 36" Adinkra Cloth wall hanging

No one really knows the exact origin of adinkra cloth, but the Asante people of Ghana, Africa, have a legend of how it came to be. They say the leader of the Asante people had a golden stool which symbolized his power and had great religious significance. A neighboring king, named Adinkera, admired the stool and made a copy of it for himself. The Asante people were terribly offended, taking it as an insult to their leader and their religion. Asante warriors attacked and killed Adinkera, taking the printed cloth he was wearing as a trophy of war. This was said to be the first adinkra cloth of the Asante people.

Adinkra is one of the highly valued, hand-printed, and hand-embroidered cloths with 19th century origins traced to the Asante people. At that time, adinkra cloth was made for use by royal and spiritual leaders during sacred rituals and ceremonies. Originally the cloth was worn primarily at funeral ceremonies (the word "adinkra" means "goodbye" in the Asante language). The cloth is stamped with many traditional designs having Asante names describing their meaning — so adinkra is not just a beautiful piece of cloth or item of clothing, it carries a message as well. Each of the adinkra symbols has a name and meaning derived from a religious or historical event, proverb, human attitude, plant life, animal behavior, or form and shape of inanimate and man-made objects.

Adinkra cloth is still used in sacred ceremonies today, however, its use has now expanded to many different social activities — festivals, weddings, initiation rites, church services, and naming ceremonies. It is also used for interior decoration and accessories for clothing.

The older, traditional method of adinkra printing used long strips of cloth, decorated in

Cote' d'Ivoire  
(Ivory Coast)

Ghana

# AFRICAN RHYTHMS RISING

## ADINKRA CLOTH OF GHANA

repeated designs which were sewn together with brightly colored thread. The stitch pattern used to join the strips uses a sequence of colors repeated at regular intervals. The modern method uses one large piece of fabric with the checkerboard pattern created using the edge of a piece of cardboard dipped in ink to mark off the rectangles for stamp printing. Borders may also be created by dragging a wooden comb dipped in ink across the cloth. In Ghana, the stamps are carved from pieces of calabash (gourd) shell with handles made from strong sticks. The stamps are dipped into a black dye (made from boiling tree bark from the badie tree), then pressed onto the cloth. Traditionally, the black designs were stamped on matte black or russet-colored cloth because those colors were used in mourning. More recently, they are stamped on white or brightly colored fabrics and used for decorative purposes. For this lesson students will use off-white muslin printed with various colors of washable ink. To create a more traditional cloth, use printed fabric and only black ink.

## ADINKRA SYMBOLS



Gye nyame — symbol of the omnipotence and immortality of God.



Funtun funafu denkyem funafu won afuru bom nso worididi a na wo ko. “Sharing one stomach yet they fight over food.”



Nsoroma — a child of the heavens. Symbol of dependence on God.



Nkonsonkonso — link or chain. Symbol of human relations.



Osrām ne nsoroma — the moon and star. Symbol of loyalty, faithfulness, harmony, and love.



Nyame dua — an altar or place of worship.



Nyame nwa na mawu — “God does not die, and so I don’t die.” Symbol of the all-knowingness and ever-presence of God.



Akoma — the heart. Symbol of love, patience, goodwill, and endurance.



Finhankra — symbol of safety and security in a home.



Nkyin kyin — changing one’s self. Playing many roles.



Dwanimen (Ram’s horn). Dwonnin ye asis a ode n’akorana na ennye ne mben. “It is the heart and not the horns that leads a ram to bully.” Concealment.



Aya (the firm). This word also means “I am not afraid of you.” A symbol of defiance.



Hye wo nyhe — “The one who burns you be not burned.” Symbol of forgiveness. Turn the other cheek.

## DAY 1 INTRODUCTION

Students should spend one day researching a variety of printed fabrics from Africa. This will give them background information about the area and the meaning behind each of the symbols.



## DAY 2

Discuss the meanings of the different adinkra symbols with the class and how they apply to their own lives. (See left for a list of symbols and their meanings.) Give students several 4" x 6" pieces of paper and drawing pencils. Have students select and draw two adinkra symbols repeatedly on separate sheets of paper.

## DAY 3

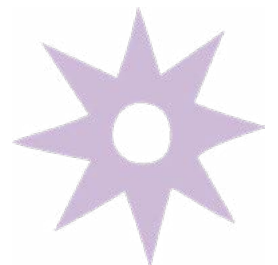
Give each student one piece of Nasco Safety-Kut™ and show them how to lay their design face down on the block and rub the back with a ruler to transfer the design. Using the two designs they have selected, have them transfer one design onto each side of the Safety-Kut™ block. Give students a quick demonstration on the safe use of lino-tools and let them use the rest of the class period to carve their designs.

## DAY 4

Have students print their designs on scrap paper using water-soluble markers to check for any areas that may need to be carved deeper. (It is better to check the print now than to ruin a print later.)

## DAY 5

Students select washable printing ink colors for their project. A brayer is used until the ink makes a “crackle” noise or you see a fish scale design on the ink tray. Tape the muslin to the table across the top of the muslin, this will create a nice 1" white border when finished. Students then print a checkerboard pattern (meaning every other one). There will be six rows. Allow to dry overnight.







## DAY 6

Students use their second design to fill in the checkerboard design. Once again, allow to dry overnight.

## DAY 7

Each student is given a 12" dowel rod. Dowel rods may be notched with a saw. Using approximately 36" of string, lay the string across the dowel rod and through the notches. Use glue or tape next to the notches so that the string doesn't pull out. Fold the top of the muslin over the dowel rod until fabric touches fabric. Then use a stapler that has been opened to staple the fabric onto it. This sometimes takes a few practices. (Fabric or craft glue will also work.)







## MATERIALS LIST

- 4" x 6" Nasco Safety-Kut™ Printing Block (one per student) — 9704655
- 12" x 36" Muslin (cut one per student) — 9742432
- Washable Printing Ink — 9718148
- Washable Markers — 9739519
- Dowel Rod, 12" x ¼" dia. (one per student) — 9734600(A)
- White String
- Lino Cutters — 9701402
- Brayers — 9705248
- Inking Trays — 9722405
- 4" x 6" Pieces of Drawing Paper (several pieces per student)
- Drawing Pencils



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