



## Educator Resources for

# *Cloth is Money: Textiles from the Sahel*

On view at the Fitchburg Art Museum, October 10, 2020 – June 6, 2021

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# Introduction

## The basics

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### What does the exhibition title mean, “cloth is money”?

In many African cultures, cloth represents wealth and status in different ways. In medieval Africa, bundles of cloth were accepted as a form of currency and textiles were valued in trade for their design and function. Even today, cloth also represents a person’s status through its role as clothing and household decorations.

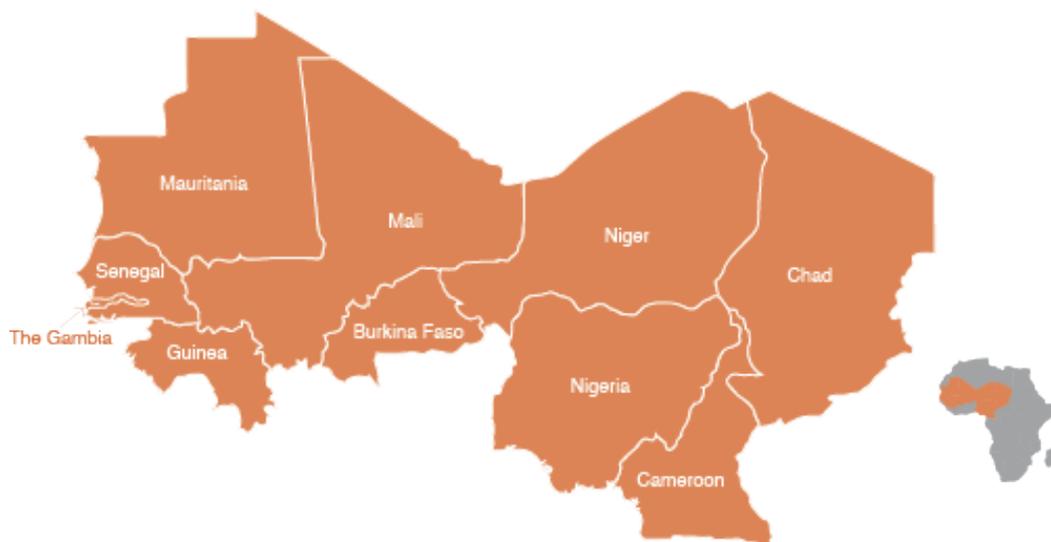
### What kind of art is in this exhibition?

Textiles, or art that is woven, make up the bulk of this exhibition. These textiles represent designs, values, and customs of different African cultures from the Sahel region. The traditions that shape these textiles date back to medieval African kingdoms.

### Where does this art come from?

This art comes from the Sahel region of western and north-central Africa, which separates the Sahara in the north and the savannas in the south. Some of the cultures represented are:

- The Amazir/Amazigh people, Libya, Tunisia
- The Bamana people, Mali
- The Fulani people, Mali, Niger
- The Songhai people, Mali



Map from the United Nations

## Exhibition overview

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Textiles from the Sahel—the southern border region of the Sahara—reach deep into the area’s complex past, evoking images of camel caravans, the trans-Saharan trade, and the rise of great medieval West African empires. The exhibition, *Cloth is Money: Textiles from the Sahel*, illustrates the complex and timeless value of woven cloth in this region by exploring weaving techniques, designs, and symbols alongside the rich history and cultural context of the Sahel.

Cloth represents culture and wealth in Africa more than any other medium. It is an asset that not only enhances the owner’s image (by literally increasing their size and adding visual interest), but that also converts into other goods. Historically, cloth was money, like cowrie shells, iron implements, or brass bracelets. Today, it is still valued for its expressive qualities, displayed during life-cycle ceremonies and as markers of status and achievement.

Though made between the 1960s and 1980s in the modern countries of Mali, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Libya, and Tunisia, the textiles in this exhibition have antecedents that date to the 11th century. During the medieval period, a robust trade network between North Africa and regions south of the Sahara created vast wealth and gave rise to the most prominent medieval West African empires: Ghana (300–1200 CE), Mali (1230–1600 CE), and Songhai (1230–1600 CE). Many products, including textiles, drove this trade, which, at the height of his power, made Mansa (“king”) Musa of Mali (1280–1337) the richest man in the history of the world. There is substantial evidence that these powerful West African kingdoms were both known in Europe and considered major players in world trade.

As a fundamental facet of the economic, social, and cultural development of the Sahel for centuries, textiles offer a dynamic view of the complex past and present of this region. Textiles remain the most widely appreciated art form in Africa and the Diaspora today, a part of people’s lives whether as fashionable clothing, family heirlooms, or aspects of their environment. As the renowned Ghanaian sculptor El Anatsui has said: “Textiles are to Africans what monuments are to Westerners.”

This exhibition aligns with the field’s growing interest in this region and is concurrent with two major exhibitions: [Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa](#) now at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African Art and [Sahel: Art and Empires on the Shores of the Sahara](#) now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This exhibition is made possible by the generous donation of John Hutchison, Professor Emeritus, African Languages and Linguistics, Boston University. It was organized by Consulting Curator for African, Oceanic, and Native American Art, Jean Borgatti, with Collection Manager, Aminadab “Charlie” Cruz Jr.

Learn more about the *Cloth is Money* exhibition at the Fitchburg Art Museum website: <https://fitchburgartmuseum.org/cloth-is-money/>

## Relevant content standards: Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Science, grade 6

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### Interactions among ancient societies in Western Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East [6.T3g]

Supporting Question: How did ideas spread across ancient societies in this region?

1. Describe the impact of encounters through trade, cultural exchange, and conquest among the societies and empires in the region, in particular, exchanges on land routes of the Silk Roads linking Europe, the steppes of West Asia, East Asia, and Africa, and the goods, languages, and cultural motifs exchanged (e.g., gold, ivory from Africa, grain from Western Asia)...

### Physical and political geography of Sub-Saharan Africa [6.T4a]

1. On a map of the world, locate the continent of Africa, the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea. On a map of Africa, locate the northern, eastern, western, central, and southern regions of Africa, the Sahara Desert, Mount Kilimanjaro, the Cape of Good Hope, the Great Rift Valley, Lake Victoria). Use other kinds of maps (e.g., landform, population, climate) to determine important characteristics of this region.
2. On a political map of the region, demonstrate map reading skills to distinguish countries, capitals, and other cities and to describe their absolute location (using latitude and longitude coordinates) and relative location (relationship to other countries, cities, or bodies of water); use knowledge of maps to complement information gained from text about a city, country or region.
3. Explain how absolute and relative locations, major physical characteristics, climate (including drought and desertification), and natural resources in this region have influenced settlement patterns, population size, and economies of the countries.

### Selected Sub-Saharan African states and societies, c. 100– 1000 CE [6.T4b]

Supporting Question: How did long-distance trade influence the development of early Sub-Saharan African states and societies?

3. Identify the locations, sources of wealth and importance of West African cities and empires, including the city of Timbuktu (beginning c.5th century CE), and the empire of ancient Ghana (beginning c. 700 CE).
  - a. Students will study the later empires of ancient Mali and Songhai in World History.
4. Explain the pivotal role these societies played in the trans-Saharan trade, the spread of Islam, and trade with North Africa, Europe, West Asia in gold, ivory, and slaves and the contributions of these societies to the modern world.

# Tips on teaching Africa

## Pedagogical frameworks for teaching Africa

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- **Thinking About...Teaching about Africa**  
<http://www.bu.edu/africa/outreach/teachingresources/tips-on-teaching-africa/issa/>  
 A list of key pedagogical concepts and questions that a teacher must ask in preparation for teaching most topics, but especially history and geography.
- **“Africa: Myth and Reality” *Social Education* Article (1994)**  
<https://www.bu.edu/africa/files/2016/02/Brown-After-Nairobi-1994.pdf>  
 A discussion of the importance of undermining myth and cultural fetishization by listening to African voices and discerning facts from fictions.
- **“I Didn’t Know There Were Cities in Africa!” *Teaching Tolerance* Article (2008)**  
<https://www.bu.edu/africa/files/2016/02/Randolph-et-al-Cities-in-Africa-2008.pdf>  
 Offers a review of the broad social, cultural, and political implications of viewing Africa stereotypically and a list of detailed suggestions for an anti-biased curricular approach.

## Sample entry points for discussing Africa in the classroom

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- **Chimamanda Adichie’s “The Danger of a Single Story” Ted Talk (2009)**  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)  
 A must-watch for educators and students alike. Adichie explains the importance of not relying on a single narrative to define any person, place, or culture. If excerpted, it can be appropriate for all ages. This talk should serve as the defining framework for why and how we should discuss area studies in the classroom.
- **“I Am Not Just An African Woman” *CS Monitor* Article (1996)**  
<https://www.csmonitor.com/1996/0701/070196.home.home.1.html>  
 Explores with feeling and humor what it was like for one woman to come to the U.S. and lose her identity as a Nigerian, as well as an educated person with a certain professional background. For middle and high school students, it offers a personal account of the difficulties of asserting one’s identity and how stereotypes can negatively impact people.
- **Bingo: The US-Africa Connections Worksheet**  
[https://www.bu.edu/africa/files/2016/04/US-Africa-Connections-Bingo\\_2016.pdf](https://www.bu.edu/africa/files/2016/04/US-Africa-Connections-Bingo_2016.pdf)  
 This activity is designed for middle school students who focus on finding peers who can answer ‘yes’ to many of the Bingo sheet questions, and then uncover how elements of their daily lives—food, music, language, games, etc.—are all connected to Africa and/or the African diaspora. It is an excellent way to ‘bring Africa home’ for most students.
- **The “How Big is Africa?” Poster**  
<http://www.bu.edu/africa/outreach/teachingresources/geography/curriculum/curriculum-guide/>  
 This poster offers an innovative and creative way to visualize the continent’s vastness and significant diversity. It is accompanied by lesson suggestions for various K-12 grades.

## Artists in traditional African art

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African art is not anonymous, and individuals, not groups, make art in traditional African societies. Artists are specialists who make art that is culturally appropriate for their gender. Traditionally, men work in wood, ivory, stone, and metal, including casting copper alloys and forging iron. Men who make objects for ritual use may be initiated into a cult or association to learn its secrets. Women weave baskets and make pottery wares for domestic and ritual use and model figurative objects out of clay or other pliable materials. They also decorate the exterior of their homes and shrines. The roles of males and females in art making, as in other spheres of African social life, are often complementary... Products made by both men and women working in the same medium, such as weaving or beadworking, are destined for use in different contexts.

Traditional artists' names do not appear with their works in museum installations and exhibition catalogues because we do not know them. The earliest collectors failed—usually for reasons of prevailing cultural and racial biases or the methods of the discipline (e.g., ethnologists study groups not individuals)—to ask, “Who made this?” There were, as recently as 1960, only a few ethnographers who inquired about the creators of the objects they collected in the field. These individuals include Frans Olbrechts, Hans and Ulrike Himmelheber, P. J. L. Vandenhoute, Philip Allison, Father Kevin Carroll, William R. Bascom, Roy Sieber, and William Fagg. Since then, Warren d’Azevedo, Robert Farris Thompson, **Jean Borgatti**<sup>1</sup>, Susan Mullin Vogel, Eberhard and Barbara Fischer, and Roslyn A. Walker have published works on individual artists.

Talented artists became famous and were known well beyond their communities. Having said that, there are instances where an artist’s name had been forgotten or it was intentionally suppressed in favor of greater glory to the object itself. In the absence of an interview with the artist, scholars obtain biographical information from the indigenous oral literature (among the Yoruba, for example, this is the person’s oriki or praise song), written accounts by Europeans who encountered the artist, and photographs or written descriptions of the artist’s work in situ...

... Materials found in the local environment—leather, animal hair and skin, cotton, palm and other fibers, feathers, shells, seeds, and beads—were used to make objects or to embellish them. New materials and techniques introduced through foreign trade were incorporated into the design and adornment of indigenous objects. Materials such as cowrie shells from the Indian Ocean and mirrors, glass beads, brass upholstery tacks, buttons, silk, cotton, synthetic textiles, and enamel paint from Europe and Asia enhanced the appearance of locally made objects, thereby increasing their prestige value and efficacy.

*Adapted from Roslyn A. Walker, The Arts of Africa at the Dallas Museum of Art (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 29-35.  
Retrieved from <https://collections.dma.org/essay/LjaAgnqO>.*

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Borgatti is the Consulting Curator for African, Oceanic, and Native American Art at the Fitchburg Art Museum and developed the *Cloth is Money* exhibition.

## African art in context

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Tradition-based African art is often characterized as “art for *life’s* sake” or “art as a matter of life and death” in contrast to “art for art’s sake”—an inherited 19<sup>th</sup>-century Western notion that art is self-sufficient, requiring no justification from a belief system outside of itself. Traditional African art served a purpose (and does still in some cultures) as an agent of religion, social stability, and social control. Art that has a purpose is not unique to African or other non-Western cultures but occurs in Western ones as well... African works of art were not meant to be viewed in a museum. Rather, they were placed in shrines and on personal or communal altars, carried in public processions, and worn as regalia or in a masquerade...

The history of African art, like the history of Africa itself, remains a work in progress. The reconstruction of Africa’s art history, especially south of the Sahara where conventional systems of inscription are absent, depends upon indigenous oral traditions and early European and Arabic documents from travelers, missionaries, merchants, and colonial officers. Sources of information also include linguistics, archaeology, and scientific dating methods such as radiocarbon dating analysis for organic materials and thermoluminescence tests on fired clay objects. X-ray procedures, including computed axial tomography (CT or CAT scan) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), are also being used for this purpose.

Appreciating African art requires a perceptual adjustment away from the western aesthetic of measuring the human form against the yardstick of classical Greek statuary, in favor of a different cultural lens. The proportions of the classical Greco-Roman figure—with the head being one-seventh of the standing figure—typify the Western ideal. The head-to-body ratio of *most* African figures is usually one to three or one to four. To the uninitiated eye, the head is out of proportion to the rest of the body. From a personal perspective, the African artist emphasizes that which is important—the head, because it is the site of the major sensory organs and an individual’s essential nature and destiny; sexual organs, because they are essential for reproduction; and the navel and breasts, because they provide nourishment. Hands and feet are sometimes accentuated because they are active and provide stability.

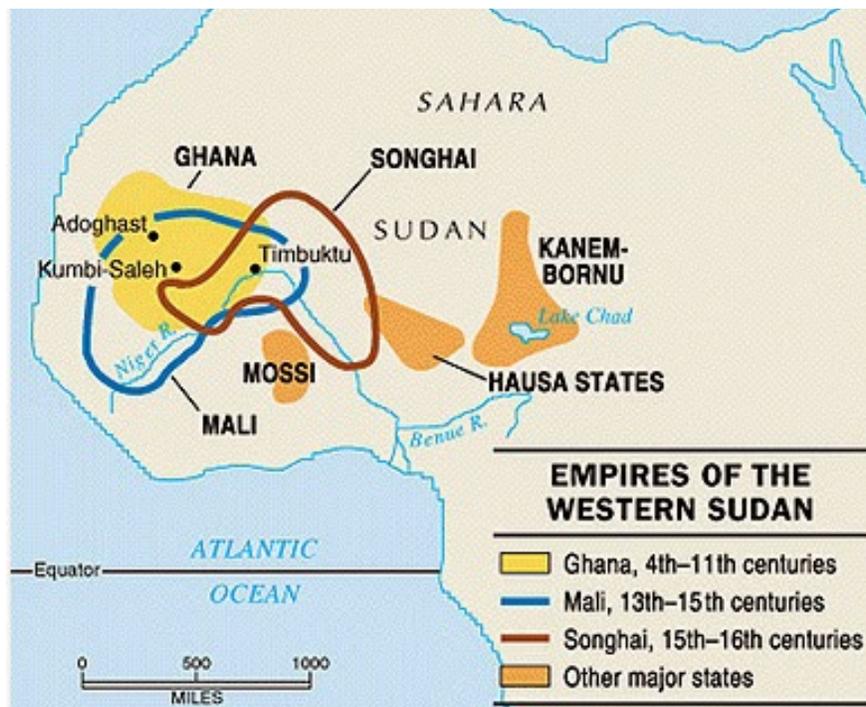
Ideal beauty and the height of virility or fertility (ephebism) rather than “the warts and all” realism are depicted regardless of the age or anatomy of the male or female sitter who may have served as a model for the spirit that is embodied by a mask or figure. The human form may be highly stylized or naturalistic. Almost invariably, the facial expression on African sculptures is calm. An elder’s beard is the only indication of age on the otherwise unlined, youthful face of a physically fit male. Exceptions to portraying ideal beauty are masks and figures that represent diseases and malevolent spirits, though there are exceptions to this general rule. In compositions that include more than one individual, artists use “social perspective” to identify the most important person in a group. That personage is depicted larger than others and is placed at the center of the composition. These facts and observations can serve as a rudimentary frame, or context, for the study and appreciation of African art.

*Adapted from Roslyn A. Walker, The Arts of Africa at the Dallas Museum of Art (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 29-35.  
Retrieved from <https://collections.dma.org/essay/oV18eGaO>.*

# Background information

## Overview: medieval African empires and trade

The first West African trading empires developed between 100–900 CE on the edge of the Sahara and at the ends of the trans-Saharan trade routes. Africa and Europe were connected by these routes, which expanded dramatically with the widespread use of camels in the region around 300 CE. Large wheels of narrow strips woven by men (next page) were transportable over long distances by camel trains, creating vast wealth and giving rise to three great West African empires: Ghana (300–1200 CE), Mali (1230–1600 CE), and Songhai (1230–1600 CE).



Each empire prospered by controlling their own trade routes that crossed the desert. Though many products, including textiles, moved along these routes, salt and gold drove the trade. For the people living between the coast and the desert, gold was more easily available than salt, but salt was essential for survival in the tropical forest. The desert people of North Africa mined salt, but not gold, which they wanted for ornaments to add to their personal splendor and for trade with other North Africans and Europeans. This trade made Mansa (“King”) Musa of Mali (1280–1337 CE) the richest man in the history of the world, who would today be worth more than 400 billion dollars. He is shown, crowned and holding a large gold nugget, on the Catalan atlas of 1375 (next page) —indicating that West African kingdoms were known in Europe at this time and were considered major players in world trade.



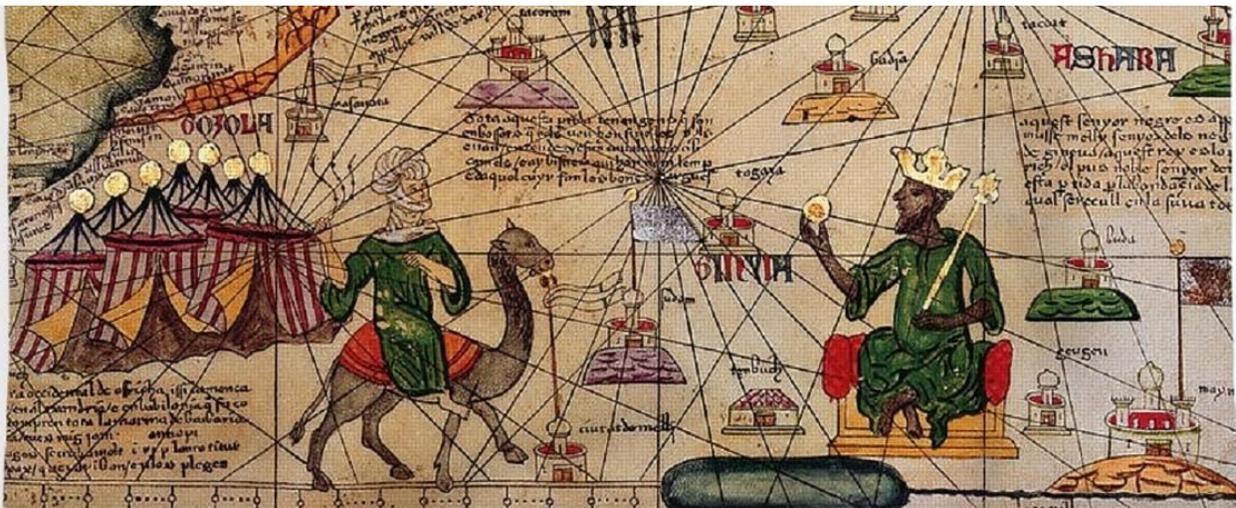
## Bundle of Men's Weave (*Aso Oke* – pronounced Ashow-kay)

Yoruba weaver, Nigeria

Cotton

Museum Purchase, Lagos 2014.25

Strip woven cloth (men's weave) is sold today bundled, just as the narrow-band cloth was rolled into great wheels for trading throughout the Sahel. The narrow strips are sewn together to make garments for both men and women.



Mansa Musa depicted in the Catalan atlas, 1375, crowned and holding a large gold nugget.

## Additional resources: medieval African empires and trade

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### Further reading

- Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History Essays:
  - o The Trans-Saharan Gold Trade (7th–14th Century)
    - [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/gold/hd\\_gold.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/gold/hd_gold.htm)
  - o Trade and the Spread of Islam in Africa
    - [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tsis/hd\\_tsis.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tsis/hd_tsis.htm)
  - o Inland Niger Delta
    - [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ind\\_1/hd\\_ind\\_1.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ind_1/hd_ind_1.htm)
  - o The Empires of the Western Sudan
    - [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wsem/hd\\_wsem.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wsem/hd_wsem.htm)
  - o The Empires of the Western Sudan: Ghana Empire
    - [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ghan/hd\\_ghan.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ghan/hd_ghan.htm)
  - o The Empires of the Western Sudan: Mali Empire
    - [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mali/hd\\_mali.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mali/hd_mali.htm)
  - o The Empires of the Western Sudan: Songhai Empire
    - [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sghi/hd\\_sghi.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sghi/hd_sghi.htm)
- Ancient History Encyclopedia: The Camel Caravans of the Ancient Sahara
  - o <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1344/the-camel-caravans-of-the-ancient-sahara/>
- National Geographic: Mansa Musa
  - o <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/mansa-musa-musa-i-mali/>
- BBC: Is Mansa Musa the richest man who ever lived?
  - o <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47379458>
- History Channel: This 14th-Century African Emperor Remains the Richest Person in History
  - o <https://www.history.com/news/who-was-the-richest-man-in-history-mansa-musa>
- Boston University: Kingdoms of Ancient and Medieval Africa
  - o <http://www.bu.edu/africa/outreach/teachingresources/history/kingdoms/>
- Khan Academy: Mansa Musa, Islam in Africa, and States and Empires of West Africa
  - o Before You Watch: Mansa Musa and Islam in Africa
  - o <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/whp-origins/era-4-regional/42-systems-restructure-beta/a/before-you-watch-mansa-musa-and-islam-in-africa-crash-course-world-history-beta>
  - o Mansa Musa and Islam in Africa
  - o <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/whp-origins/era-4-regional/42-systems-restructure-beta/v/mansa-musa-and-islam-in-africa-crash-course-world-history-16>
  - o Read: States and Empires of West Africa
  - o <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/whp-origins/era-4-regional/42-systems-restructure-beta/a/read-states-and-empires-of-west-africa-beta>
- Lumen Learning: Songhai
  - o <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldcivilization/chapter/songhai/>

## Videos

- Trans-Saharan Trade Network
  - o [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W85FXTRd7e8&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W85FXTRd7e8&feature=emb_logo)
- Ted-Ed video: Mansa Musa, one of the wealthiest people who ever lived
  - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3YJMaL55TM>
- Mansa Musa and Islam in Africa: Crash Course World History #16
  - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvnU0v6hcUo>
- The Legend of Timbuktu
  - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=li8UgaYLFFQ&t=53s>

## Virtual textbook

- World History: Journey Across Time, Student Edition: Chapter 13, Medieval Africa
  - o <https://www.itsmyhomework.com/6thGrade/JATTextbook/jat13MedievalAfrica.pdf>

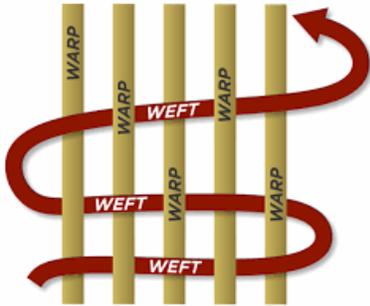
## Lesson plans

- National Geographic: The Trading Game (grades 6-8)
  - o <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/the-trading-game/>
- Edsitement: Trekking to Timbuktu: Trade in Ancient West Africa (grades 6-8)
  - o <https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/lesson-2-trekking-timbuktu-trade-ancient-west-africa-teacher-version>
- Rutgers: Unit Two: Early African Kingdoms and Arabic Trade Routes, 7-16th centuries (grades 6-12)
  - o <http://civiced.rutgers.edu/files/africa/unit2.pdf>
- African American Voices Lesson Plans: Outlining Three Great West African Civilizations
  - o [https://nanopdf.com/download/african-american-voices-lesson-plans\\_pdf](https://nanopdf.com/download/african-american-voices-lesson-plans_pdf)
- Crossing Borders/Breaking Boundaries VI: The Arts and Artistic Legacies of the West African Civilizations, 700 - 1600 c.e.
  - o <http://www.crbs.umd.edu/crossingborders/lessonplans/2006/smith.html>

## Food for thought

- “Man can live without gold but not without salt.”
  - o Roman Senator Flavius Magnus Cassiodorus, in the fifth century

# Introduction to weaving



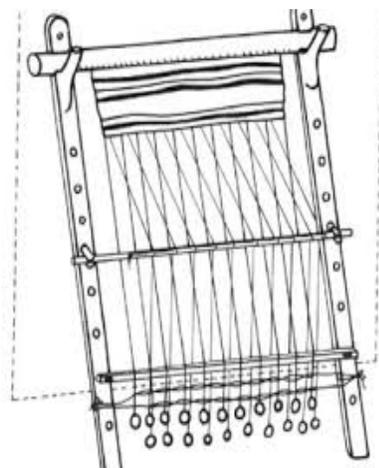
The simplest form of weaving involves moving a horizontal string under and over vertical strings in a repeating pattern. The vertical strings are called **warp** strings (yellow). The horizontal strings are called **weft** or **woof** strings (red).

Twisting long plant or animal fibers together by hand made the earliest forms of string or rope. Around 10,000-4,500 BCE, people began to use a weighted stick called a **spindle**. Fibers are attached to the end of the spindle and then spun. The spindle's weight keeps the fibers elongated as the weaver adds more fibers to the string. Spindles are still used by knitters and weavers today.

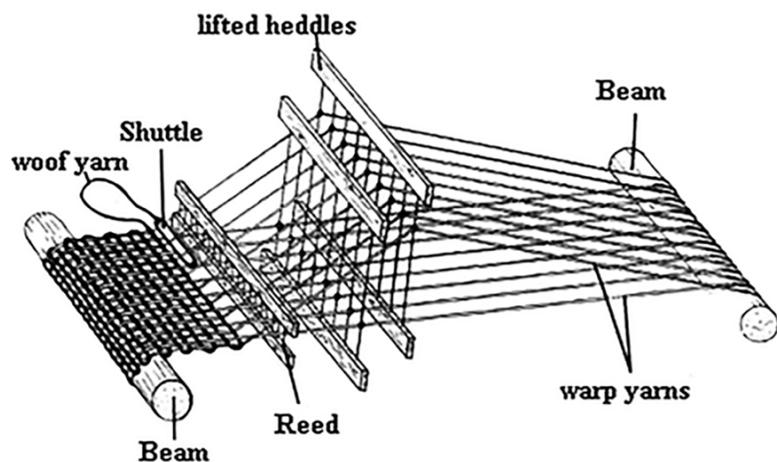


By 5,000 BCE, humans invented the **loom**, a device that holds and separates the vertical **warp** strings. This lets a weaver move the horizontal **weft** or **woof** strings through the warp more easily.

Modern weavers use more complicated looms to make more complicated patterns. The frame, heddles, and beams support and separate the warp yarns; the shuttle, reed, and batten are used to create and secure the woven pattern. Below are diagrams of simple and complicated looms.



Simple loom



More complicated loom



An Ashanti weaver in Ghana makes *kente* cloth by hand.

## Tools a weaver might use

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### Spindle with hand-spun cotton thread

Edo North (Edo State), Nigeria

Wood, cotton thread, calabash

20<sup>th</sup> century, by 1973

Purchased in Jattu Market, Edo North, Edo State, Nigeria, c. 1973.



### Shuttle holding a bobbin wrapped with thread for an Ashanti weaver (Ghana)

Wood, cotton or rayon

21<sup>st</sup> century, before 2017

Purchased in Ghana at the Artisan's Market, Accra 2017

The shuttle carries the thread of the weft yarn while weaving with a loom. Shuttles are thrown or passed back and forth through the shed, between the yarn threads of the warp in order to weave in the weft.



### Batten holding a bobbin wrapped with thread for an Ashanti weaver (Ghana)

Wood, cotton or rayon

21<sup>st</sup> century, before 2017

Purchased in Ghana at the Artisan's Market, Accra 2017

The warp yarn is passed through the heddles and beater in preparation for weaving. The beater or batten is a tool designed to push the weft yarn securely into place as the cloth is woven.

## Resources about West African textiles

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### Further reading

- Lumen Learning: African Clothmaking
  - o <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-arthistory/chapter/african-clothmaking/>
- Bogolan: The art of making mudcloth (with video)
  - o <https://afrolegends.com/2009/09/11/bogolan-the-art-of-making-mudcloth/>
- Mali Images and Sights: Bogolan cloth
  - o <https://web.archive.org/web/20091005012030/http://homepage.mac.com/melissanderle/mali/pages/bogolan.html>
- Heddels: An Introduction to the Indigo Dye Styles of Western Africa
  - o <https://www.heddels.com/2016/09/an-introduction-to-the-indigo-dye-styles-of-western-africa/>
- The magical art of African indigo dyeing with Monad London (contemporary clothing brand)
  - o <https://denimdudes.co/the-magical-art-of-african-indigo-dyeing-with-monad-london/>
- BBC: Mali's brocade: The best dyed cloth in the world?
  - o <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-27243785>
- PROTOChic: Fashion History Minor: Mali's Master Couturier Chris Seydou
  - o <https://www.protochic.com/stories/2017/2/24/fashion-history-minor-malis-master-couturier-chris-seydou>
- BBC: Ghanaian Covid-19-inspired fashion print designs launched
  - o <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53321016>
- CNN: The complex future of African fabric
  - o <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/african-textiles-dutch-future/index.html>

### Videos

- Artisans in Mali Hope to Bring Back an Ancient Fabric Style (bogolan)
  - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCpFlq62m70>
- The Bogolan Project
  - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcl8bWHcypw>
- More than Mud – Coulibaly & Brothers, Burkina Faso
  - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IK-QBg2zUc>
- CNN: Centuries-old dye tradition makes a comeback (adire, indigo dyeing)
  - o <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2016/01/04/inside-africa-yoruba-culture-spc-b.cnn>
- My African Adventure - Tie Dye in Bamako, Mali
  - o [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z\\_KWfCW04jY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_KWfCW04jY)
- XtraO #Discover: Watch how kente cloths are made & its history
  - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUvBoYzRghQ>
- How Ghanaians weave this traditional cloth in Ghana
  - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOabs796UVo>

## Look for African textile prints and scenes from African life in picture books

- *Deep in the Sahara* by Kelly Cunnane, Hoda Hadadi
  - o <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/14823568-deep-in-the-sahara>
- *Jamela's Dress* by Niki Daly
  - o [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/211600.Jamela\\_s\\_Dress](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/211600.Jamela_s_Dress)
- *Seeds of Change: Wangari's Gift to the World* by Jen Cullerton Johnson, Sonia Lynn Sadler
  - o <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7222455-seeds-of-change>
- *Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa* by Jeanette Winter
  - o Note: has one page that references and illustrates an instance of police violence
  - o <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4010047-wangari-s-trees-of-peace>
- *Zomo the Rabbit: A Trickster Tale from West Africa* by Gerald McDermott
  - o [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/836724.Zomo\\_the\\_Rabbit](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/836724.Zomo_the_Rabbit)
- *Chidi Only Likes Blue: An African Book of Colours* by Ifeoma Onyefulu
  - o [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/245962.Chidi\\_Only\\_Likes\\_Blue](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/245962.Chidi_Only_Likes_Blue)

## Food for thought

- "Textiles are to Africans what monuments are to Westerners."
  - o Ghanaian sculptor El Anatsui
- "African print is literally our first point of contact to our culture as Africans because when we are born, we are wrapped in a wax print. It is a major part of every African's heritage and every wax print tells a unique African story."
  - o Belinda Compah-Keyeke, owner and lead designer of Zoharous, an African fashion line, quote from <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/african-textiles-dutch-future/index.html>

## Resources about the people and cultures behind the art

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### General

- World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Mali
  - o <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce5bc.html>

### Amazigh/Amazir (Berber)

- University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art: Amazigh (Berber)
  - o <https://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/peoples/show/Amazigh+%28Berber%29>
- Encyclopedia Britannica: Berber
  - o <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Berber>
- World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Berber
  - o <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/berber/>
- Intercontinental Cry: Free People: The Imazighen of North Africa
  - o <https://intercontinentalcry.org/free-people-the-imazighen-of-north-africa/>
- The National: Opinion: Don't call us Berber, we are Amazigh
  - o <https://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/don-t-call-us-berber-we-are-amazigh-1.965334>

### Bamana (Bambara)

- University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art: Bamana
  - o <https://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/peoples/show/Bamana>
- Encyclopedia Britannica: Bambara (Bamana)
  - o <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bambara>

### Fulani

- Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History Essays: The Fulani/Fulbe People
  - o [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/fula\\_2/hd\\_fula\\_2.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/fula_2/hd_fula_2.htm)
  - o [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/fula/hd\\_fula.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/fula/hd_fula.htm)
- University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art: Fulani
  - o <https://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/peoples/show/Fulani>
- Encyclopedia Britannica: Fulani
  - o <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fulani>

### Songhai

- Encyclopedia Britannica: Songhai
  - o <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Songhai>
- Encyclopedia.com: Songhay
  - o <https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/africa/nigeria-political-geography/songhay>

## Exhibition highlights



### Mud Cloth (*bògòlanfini*)

Nakunte Diarra, Bamana people, Mali (Kolokani, Beledougou Region)  
Men's strip-weave, handspun cotton, earthen pigments

Nakunte Diarra has been making *bògòlanfini* (mud-dyed cloth) since the 1950s. She employs techniques learned from her grandmother and today is widely recognized as Mali's greatest living *bògòlan* artist.

In making *bògòlan*, Bamana women exploit the chemical composition of dyes to create design and color. The men's weave of handspun cotton is dyed yellow using a solution prepared from water and the leaves of certain plants. Women apply mud in the desired pattern, outlining the design and filling in the background. Mud "saddens" the yellow, turning it dark brown. The remaining design in yellow is then bleached with a carefully applied soda solution.

Historically, *bògòlanfini* was worn by both men and women for ritual protection—men when hunting and women after their initiation into adulthood and immediately after childbirth.



Women working on bøgòlan, Arkilla Kerka: Tekstilleja Lansii-Afrikasta (exhibition catalogue), 1992.



## Tie-dyed headcloth or shawl (*katfiya*)

Amazhir (Berber) artist, Southern Tunisia (Chenini district)  
 Wool, cotton thread, natural dyes (indigo, henna)

Older women wear headcloths dyed with indigo in order to cover their hair, as required in Islamic culture. The patterns are achieved by dyeing the base cloth a light color, and then tying bunches of small objects like date pits and pebbles into the cloth and then dipping each bunch into various colored dyes. After retying the fabric several times to achieve a multi-colored pattern, the entire cloth is then immersed in an indigo bath to give it an overall greenish-blue hue.

Indigo dye is extracted from the leaves of the indigo plant. The practice originated in India and then spread through Africa. This distinctive blue cloth was also once a form of currency.



Irmtraud Reswick, photograph of a woman wearing a flat-woven woolen shawl, draped over her head and shoulders, Matmata region, Tunisia, 1986.



## Striped Blanket

Fulani weavers (*malleebe* sub-group), Niger (Djerma/Zarma area)  
Men's strip weave, machine-spun cotton

Zarma blankets are an off-shoot of Fulani wool weaving, evident in the similarity between the motif blocks on the cotton wedding blankets and the weft-float patterns on the elaborate woolen marriage blankets, an example of which can be seen in FAM's lobby.

The *malleebe* weavers descend from families that were serfs to Fulani and Songhai masters. They took their knowledge of wool weaving with them when they migrated south in the early 20th century. They were also responsible for innovations in the weaving of cotton blankets in the 1950s—utilizing machine-spun and brightly-colored cotton yarn.

# Activities for students

## Close looking activities

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### Scavenger hunt for patterns and materials

These textiles each use unique patterns, processes, and materials. Some of these patterns have distinct names or meanings. See if you can find...

- A black and white blanket with two red stripes: these stripes are called “water sprinkled while watering the cows”
- *Dampe* pattern, meaning “checkerboard” in French
- *Gite ngaari*, meaning “eyes of the bull,” looks like diamond shapes that come in pairs
- A textile made with dark blue indigo dye
- A textile made with commercial (machine-made) yarn (hint: this yarn has some of the brightest colors in the exhibition)
- Fringe or tassels
- The textile you think has the *simplest* pattern (why do you think that?)
- The textile you think has the most *complicated* pattern (why do you think that?)

### Sketch what you see

Explore the textiles in the exhibition. Pick one that has a pattern that catches your eye, then sketch it on a piece of paper.

## Conversation prompts

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This exhibition is called *Cloth is Money*. In medieval Africa, cloth was as valuable as currency. Today, cloth represents wealth and power in the way people dress and decorate their homes. How does clothing represent wealth or power in our society?

What other purposes do we use cloth for besides clothing? (Examples that may come up: warmth, comfort, decoration, containers, bandages, signs...)

Where does your clothing come from? Do you know how it was made or who made it?

What do you wear to express your personality? Describe why you choose certain colors, patterns, and even types of clothing.

What is one cloth object you own that you think belongs in a museum? Consider who made it, how it was made, the way it looks, and any messages or stories it has to tell.

## Writing activities

*In accordance with MA State English Language Arts Writing Standards*

### Opinion writing: supporting a point of view with reasons and information

- Would you recommend learning about this exhibition to a friend? Why or why not?
- Which artwork do you think is the most emotionally moving? Why?
- The curator of this exhibition is Dr. Jean Borgatti. She is an expert on African and Oceanic art who has lived and taught in Africa and the United States for several decades. She is not African. Is it right for someone who is not from a particular culture to put together an exhibition about that culture? Why or why not?

### Informational/explanatory writing: examining a topic and conveying ideas and information clearly

- Imagine talking to someone who cannot see this exhibition. Describe one artwork with as much detail as you can.
- If you have ever made a weaving or done tie-dye, describe your memory of that process. How did you learn how to do it? What materials did you use? What were the steps? What did you see, touch, or maybe even smell? What did your finished product look like?
- Write a “museum label” for something you own that is made out of cloth. Write its name, what it is made out of (if it is a piece of clothing, you can check the tag for this information), who made it or where it came from, and what it is used for. Describe any interesting designs. If there is an interesting story about this object, add that too.

### Narrative writing

- Write quick notes about part of your visit to the Fitchburg Art Museum in the order that events occur, including conversations, new ideas you learn, and things you see. Develop your notes into a story back in the classroom.
- Read the labels next to an object to find out where what country it came from and how it came to the Museum’s collection. Turn those facts into a story.
- The process and designs for these works of art are traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. Write a story about a time you learned something from an older member of your family or your community.

### Stories, poems, and scripts using similes and metaphors

- Look at several artworks and make a list of similes and metaphors for each. Use these lists to write a poem about one artwork or the exhibition as a whole.
- Pick two works of art and write an imaginary conversation between them. What do they have to talk about?

## Art projects

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- #MetKids: Weave on a Mini Loom
  - o [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWLly-Um7\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWLly-Um7_0)
- Paper loom weaving
  - o <https://cassiestephens.blogspot.com/2015/01/the-weaving-series-paper-loom-weaving.html>
- Stick weaving
  - o <https://happyhooligans.ca/stick-weaving-y-shaped-stick/>
- Straw weaving
  - o <https://happyhooligans.ca/straw-weaving/>
- Crayola: Textile Quilt
  - o <https://www.crayola.com/lesson-plans/textile-quilt-lesson-plan/>
- Glue Batik
  - o Like bogolan, batik is a process of resist dyeing. This project could be adapted to focus on bogolan.
  - o <https://www.firstpalette.com/craft/glue-batik.html>

## Explore African empires and textiles at other museums

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- Smithsonian National Museum of African Art: Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time
  - o <https://africa.si.edu/exhibitions/current-exhibitions/caravans-of-gold-fragments-in-time-art-culture-and-exchange-across-medieval-saharan-africa/>
  - o Teachers Guide: activities, close looking, other resources: <https://africa.si.edu/exhibitions/current-exhibitions/caravans-of-gold-fragments-in-time-art-culture-and-exchange-across-medieval-saharan-africa/teachers-guide/>
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Sahel: Art and Empires on the Shores of the Sahara
  - o <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2020/sahel-art-empire-sahara/>
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art: The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End
  - o <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2008/african-textiles>
- Smithsonian National Museum of African Art: African Textiles
  - o <https://africa.si.edu/collections/collections/2942/african-textiles>
- British Museum: Social Fabric: African Textiles Today (southern and eastern African textiles)
  - o <https://artsandculture.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/social-fabric-african-textiles-today/IQKyNsyPc0L4lw>
- International Quilt Museum: From Kente to Kuba: Stitched Textiles from West & Central Africa
  - o <https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/exhibition/kente-kuba>
- Fowler Museum at UCLA: African-Print Fashion Now!
  - o <https://www.fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/african-print-fashion-now/>
- Philadelphia Museum of Art: Vlisco: African Fashion on a Global Stage
  - o <https://philamuseum.org/exhibitions/845.html>

# About the Fitchburg Art Museum

Founded in 1929, the Fitchburg Art Museum is a privately-supported art museum located in north central Massachusetts.

## Art on view (partial list):

*Discover Ancient Egypt*

*Evoking Eleanor* (about Fitchburg native, painter Eleanor Norcross)

19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> century photography from the permanent collection (usually);

Temporary exhibitions of contemporary art

## Museum hours

Wednesdays-Fridays, 12 – 4 p.m.

Saturdays and Sundays 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Closed Mondays and Tuesdays

## Admission

Free to all Museum members and children ages 12 and under.

Free to Fitchburg Public Schools staff and students

Free to Fitchburg State University staff and students

\$9.00 Adult non-members

\$5.00 Seniors, youth ages 13-17, full-time students ages 18-21



The Museum is wheelchair accessible.

## Directions

Directions to the Museum are on our website.

## Address and Phone Number

185 Elm St, Fitchburg, MA 01420

978-345-4207

Visit our website for more information: [www.fitchburgartmuseum.org](http://www.fitchburgartmuseum.org)