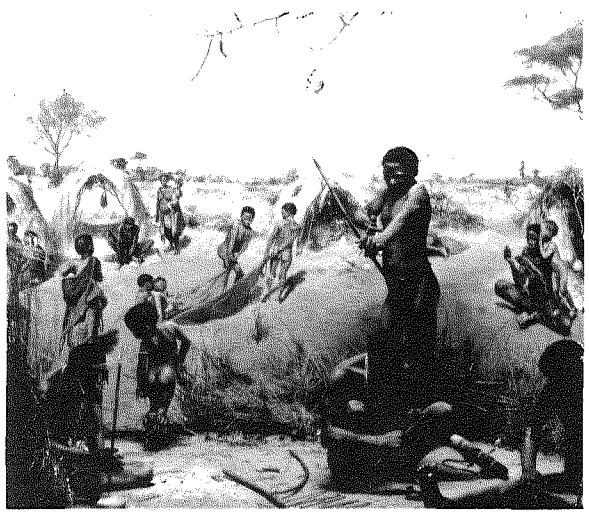
ART TO ZOO

News for Schools from the Smithsonian Institution, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Washington, D.C. 20560

FEB./MAR. 1980

Africa Behind and Beyond the Headlines

Based on materials by LAURA LOU MC KIE, *Education Specialist, National Museum of Natural History,* with the assistance of DR. GORDON GIBSON, *Curator, African Ethnology, National Museum of Natural History*



Bushmen camp (photograph of diorama, National Museum of Natural History). Men devote much of their productive time to hunting and preparing hunting weapons. Each man prepares his own bow, arrows, and spears. In this scene, one man is applying poison to an arrow while another is twisting a bowstring. The woman (in the foreground at left) is making beads from pieces of ostrich egg shell. In addition to their decorative uses, beads are important in trade. The Bushmen exchange them with neighboring peoples for iron used in arrowheads and knives.

What does Africa mean to you? Does it mean rain forests . . . talking drums . . . ancient kingdoms . . . modern cities . . . or maybe something entirely different? Through materials based on the exhibitions, programs, and collections of the Smithsonian Institution, this issue of *Art to Zoo* invites you and your students to find out more about Africa and its peoples.

A Changing Land of Many Contrasts

If your class were to set out tomorrow on a tour of Africa, you soon would discover that Africa is an enormous, diverse continent. Fully three times the size of the United States, it is a land of many contrasts. It has the world's largest desert, the Sahara, as well as huge expanses of tropical rain forest, thick with lichen, moss, and other plants of many kinds. The most common African landscape, however, is the grassland *(savannah),* where a wide variety of wild animals live, including some very large animals like the hippopotamus that you can't see anywhere else on earth. Climates in Africa range from extremely hot on the desert and in the rain forests to very, very cold on the highest mountains.

In keeping with this environmental diversity is Africa's great *cultural* diversity. There are at least 1,000 culturally distinct groups living in the various environments of Africa—groups which not only speak different languages or dialects but have basic ways of life that are profoundly different from those of their neighbors. In the past these groups ranged from small wandering bands to highly organized kingdoms of millions of people.

Today Africa is rapidly changing, but unless we know the nature of traditional Africa, it is hard to understand the changes taking place on various parts of the continent. That is why this issue of *Art to Zoo* is devoted especially to *traditional, sub-Saharan Africa* as represented by objects on exhibit at the Smithsonian.

Hall of African Cultures

The Hall of African Cultures in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History illustrates the cultural diversity of Africa and shows that the uniqueness of *how* people live in traditional Africa is strongly related to *where* they live. In any society there is always a vital interplay between environment and culture. A study of the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa can provide your students with some excellent examples of the various techniques used by man to obtain food, clothing, and shelter under varying environmental conditions.

Hunters and Gatherers Consider, for example, the Bushmen, a people small in stature and few in numbers who occupy a section of the Kalahari Desert Basin in southwestern Africa. To live in the land of the Bushmen means being able to survive severe heat and drought in summer and biting cold in winter. Although the Kalahari is a true desert with less than ten inches of rain per year, the face of the sand is hidden by grass and low scrubby bushes, and in places there are trees. Waterholes fed by underground springs are the chief source of water.

The Bushmen, like a number of other African peoples, are hunters and gatherers. This means that instead of raising crops or animals for food, they direct all of their energy toward finding and using every possible source of *wild* food available to them. The men hunt antelope and other game; the women and children forage for tubers, roots, nuts, and other edibles.

The family is the basic unit of Bushman society. A group of related families forms a band, which lives within a clearly defined territory and consumes the resources. Each band moves around inside its territory, collecting different foods during the different seasons. There is a strong bond of mutual dependence and cooperation within the group.

The Bushmen build temporary shelters out of grass pressed over a framework of sticks, and make their clothes from animal hides. They use bows and poison-tipped arrows for hunting and specially shaped sticks for digging up roots. In these and many other ways, they are highly resourceful in the use they make of their environment: the sinew from the animals they kill is used for making thongs and bowstrings; tortoise shells are used as dippers; and empty ostrich egg shells are used as water canteens until the shells become broken, then the bits are drilled and made into beads! When the Bushmen move, members of the band transport their few possessions with them in string carrying nets and skin bags.

Today there are approximately 50,000 Bushmen living in Angola and Botswana. Of these, only about 4,000 still live by hunting and gathering; the rest have turned to other means of subsistence, such as herding or farming. The Bushman population is constantly decreasing owing not so much to disease as to marriage to nearby herders and farmers.

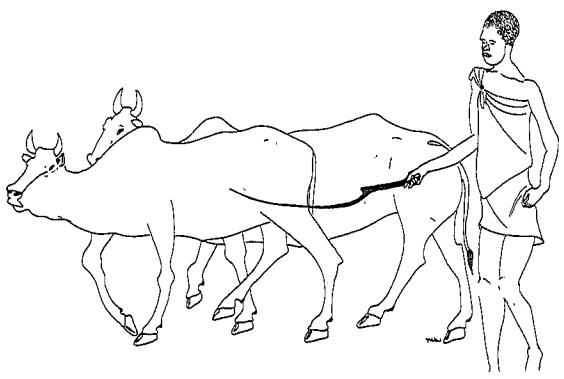
Herders Another interesting interplay between environment and culture can be observed among the Masai of eastern Africa.

Much of eastern Africa is composed of vast, dry stretches of thorny bush rooted in poor, sandy soil. Although there is plenty of rain year round in some parts of the region, most of the land is dependent upon seasonal rains, which tend to fall in one place

continued on page 2

Woman's beaded apron (Bushmen)

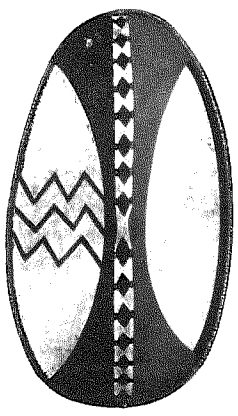
continued from page 1



Boy herding cattle, Masai

one year and in a different place the next. As a result, many (but by no means all) eastern African peoples are nomadic pastoralists, people who live by herding cattle, sheep, or goats. These herdsmen look upon their herds not only as a source of food but also as wealth, social status, and a sacred responsibility.

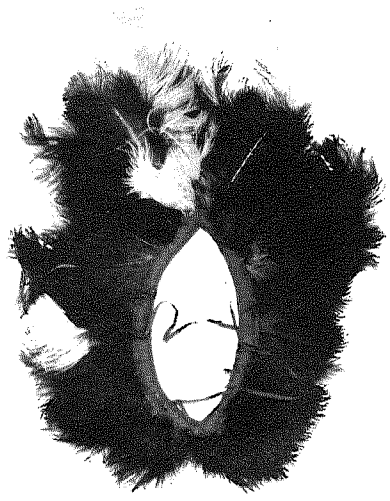
The Masai—who are cattle herders—live in the arid border region of northern Tanzania and southern Kenya. To them, cattle are sacred and are killed only on very special occasions. The main foods of the Masai are goat and sheep meat and cattle milk and blood. (Blood is taken in small quantities from the neck of the cow in a way that will not hurt the animal.) Nomadic pastoralism as practiced by the Masai is a hard existence. Keeping cows alive and productive on marginal grasslands among lions and other predators requires a lot of skill and a high degree of social and political organization.



Rhinoceros-hide shield (Masai)

The social and political system of the Masai provides a framework for their herder's way of life. Although the Masai are divided into a number of politically independent tribes, they have neither chiefs nor village headmen. A system of *age sets* is the important sociopolitical institution. The age set consists of all males who were initiated into adult society during a given period of time. Members of an age set remain together throughout life, passing through a series of age grades beginning with junior and senior warriors and progressing to junior and senior elders. Warriors have the main responsibility for protecting both family and flocks. Junior elders marry, have children, and prepare themselves to be senior elders who direct all the affairs to the tribe through a tribal council.

Today the Masai, like herdsmen in many parts of the world, are suffering privation because their grazing lands have been restricted by the expansion of agriculture and the establishment of political boundaries. As with many African peoples, the future of the Masai is gravely in question, and to survive at all, they will probably have to change not just their means of subsistence but their entire way of life.



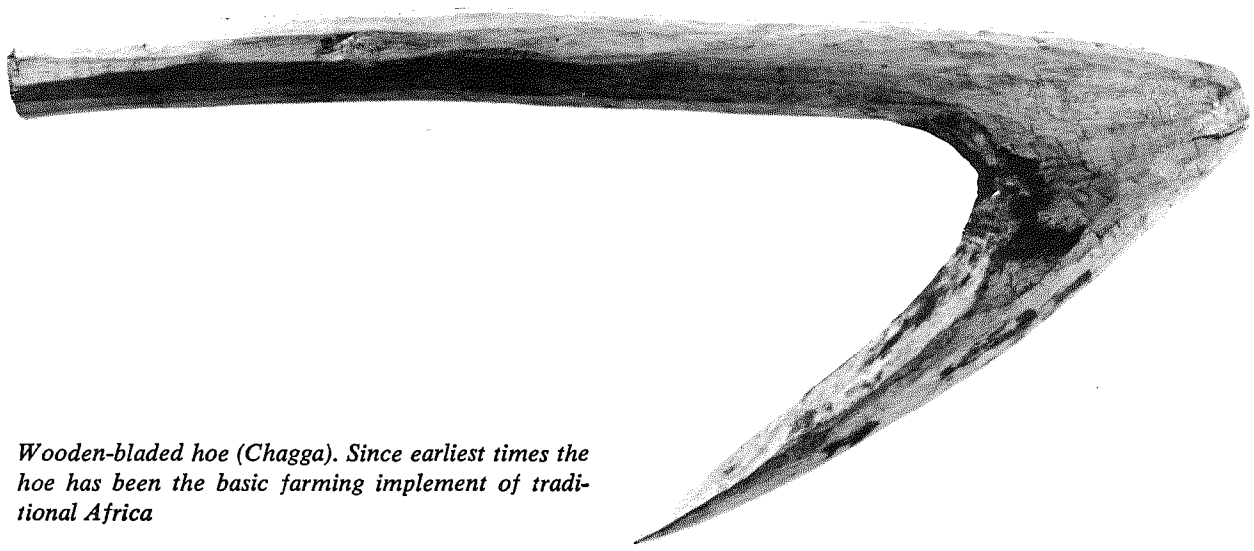
Masai ostrich-plume face ruff, worn around border of face in war

Farmers For many centuries agriculture, rather than hunting and gathering or herding, has been the most important economic activity in Africa. In general, Africans have specialized in the cultivation of grain crops in the more temperate areas and the cultivation of root crops in the tropical zones. Agriculture products and techniques vary greatly from area to area.

The Chagga, who live on the steep slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Kenya, are one example of an African farming society. The Chagga irrigate their fields with water from mountain streams and grow a variety of crops, including bananas, coffee, maize, and sugar cane. Cattle, goats, and sheep are raised to provide meat, milk, and fertilizer.

Up until fairly recently, the land of the Chagga was divided into hereditary chiefdoms, each one of which was in turn divided into a number of separately ruled parishes. In 1962, this age-old system was abolished by the central government of Tanganyika (now Tanzania) as part of a new policy for local government over the entire country. The chiefs were replaced by executive officers employed by a council, which operates similarly to the tribal council of the Masai.

The Chagga were one of the first African agricultural groups to enter into a Western-style market economy. In recent years they have become commercial coffee growers, marketing their crops through a cooperative farmers' organization.



Wooden-bladed hoe (Chagga). Since earliest times the hoe has been the basic farming implement of traditional Africa

Africa, as we have seen, is a land of great diversity—with more than 1,000 culturally distinct groups, a geographic area three times the size of the United States, and a climate that ranges from arid desert to tropical rain forest. It is a land where nomad, farmer, and city dweller often live side by side. Yet despite these differences, certain generalizations can be made about the cultural orientation of the African people as a whole:

- A belief in supernatural forces (especially spirits of the ancestors) plays a major role in everyday thought and action in most African societies—and there is throughout Africa a profound sense of oneness with the universe and of closeness to nature.

- Throughout traditional Africa, religion and politics are closely tied to one another. Ritual and religious beliefs are an integral part of government, and political leaders often have religious functions to carry out for the welfare of society.

- Art in Africa is seldom created purely for its own sake. Traditionally, an African artist was first of all a craftsman of useful objects that he also made beautiful. Whether his product was a mask carved for religious ritual, a piece of cloth woven for a ceremonial robe, or a necklace fashioned to ward off evil, it usually had some other function beyond that of pure decoration—and in serving that function was very much a part of everyday life.

Religion, politics, art: wherever you happen to go among herders, hunters, and farmers throughout traditional Africa, you will find that these three cultural elements are closely interwoven to create the richly textured fabric of everyday life.

Classroom Resources on Africa

Books for Students

Aardema, Verna. *Tales for the Third Ear from Equatorial Africa.* NY: Dutton, 1969.

Bleeker, Sonia. *The Masai.* NY: William Morrow, 1963.

———. *The Ashanti of Ghana.* NY: William Morrow, 1966.

———. *The Pygmies: Africans of the Congo Forest.* NY: William Morrow, 1968.

———. *The Ibo of Biafra.* NY: William Morrow, 1969.

Burton, W. F. P. *The Magic Drum: Tales from Central Africa.* NY: Criterion Books, 1962. [This book includes 5 rabbit tales.]

D'Amato, Janet and Alex. *African Animals Through African Eyes* and *African Crafts For You to Make.* NY: Julian Messner, 1971.

Feelings, Murel. *Mojo Means One: Swahili Counting Book.* NY: Dial, 1971.

———. *Jambo Means Hello.* NY: Dial, 1947.

Glubok, Shirley. *The Art of Africa.* NY: Harper & Row, 1965.

Lewis, Richard (comp.). *Out of the Earth I Sing: Poetry and Songs of Primitive Peoples of the World.* NY: Norton, 1968.

Musgrove, Margaret. *Ashanti to Zulu.* NY: Dial, 1976.

Price, Christine. *Talking Drums of Africa.* NY: Scribner's, 1973.

———. *Dancing Masks of Africa.* NY: Scribner's, 1975.

———. *Made in West Africa.* NY: Dutton, 1975.

Sturton, Hugh. *Zomo the Rabbit.* NY: Atheneum, 1966.

Turnbull, Colin M. *The Peoples of Africa.* NY: World, 1962.

Warren, Lee. *Dance of Africa.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

———. *Theater of Africa.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

Books for Teachers

Courlander, Harold. *Treasury of African Folklore.* NY: Crown, 1975. [Mr. Courlander has also compiled a series of books for children containing folk tales of various African peoples.]

Dietz, Betty W. and M. Babatunde Olatunji. *Musical Instruments of Africa: Their Nature, Use, and Place in the Life of a Deeply Musical People.* NY: John Day, 1965.

Kerina, Jane. *African Crafts.* NY: KDI-Lion Press, 1970.

Newman, Thelma R. *Contemporary African Arts and Crafts: On Site working with Art Forms and Process.* NY: Crown, 1974.

Films and Distributors

Pennsylvania State University, Audio-Visual Services, University Park, PA 16802:
Anansi The Spider, 11 minutes.
The Magic Tree, 11 minutes.
Africa Calls: Its Drums and Musical Instruments, 23 minutes.
African Religious and Ritual Dances, 19 minutes.
African Village Life Series (short films on Mali).

University of California Extension Media Center, 2233 Fulton St., Berkeley, CA 94720:
African Community: The Masai, 16 minutes.
The Hunters (Bushmen), 72 minutes.

Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corp., 425 Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611:
Pygmies: People of the Forest, 14 minutes.

Time-Life Films, Time and Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020:
"The Kingdom of Bronze," Program 6 to *The Tribal Eye.* 52 minutes.

Eliot Elisofon Archives, Museum of African Art, 318 A Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20002:
Tribute to Africa, 13 minutes.

Teaching Kit

Changing Africa: A Village Study Unit (multimedia kit). InterCulture Associates, Box 277, Thompson, CI 06277.

Teachers' Handbooks

African Cultural Heritage. Michigan 4-H Youth Programs. Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48823.

African Studies Handbook For Teachers, Center for International Education; School of Education, University of MA: Amherst, MA 01002, 1972.

West Africa: An American Heritage, Center for International Education; School of Education, University of MA: Amherst, MA 01002 (n. d.).

Teacher's Resource Handbook For African Studies, John N. Hawkins and John Maksik; Reference Series Vol. 16; UCLA African Studies Center: Los Angeles, CA 90024, 1976.

Teaching Africa Today: A Handbook For Teachers and Curriculum Planners, E. Jefferson Murphy and Harry Stein; The African-American Institute Citation Press: Scholastic Magazines, Inc., 50 West 44th St., NY 10036, 1973.

THE USEFUL ARTS OF AFRICA

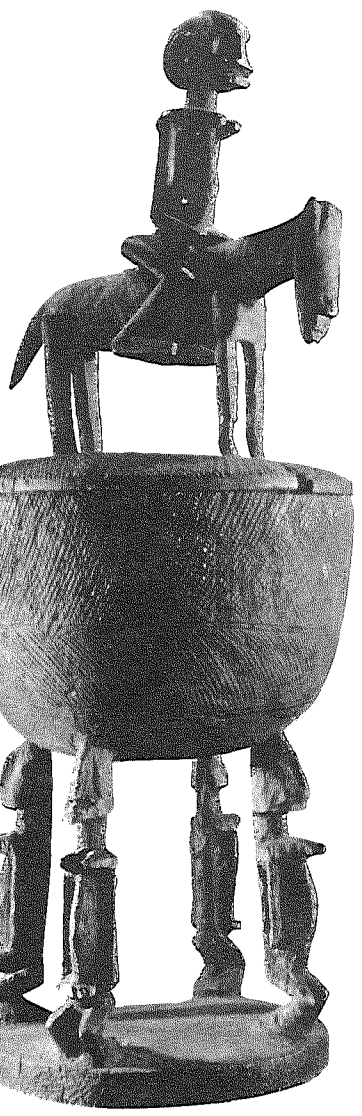
Animal for divination (or rubbing oracle). *Kuba, Zaire* In traditional Africa the need for diviners arose from the belief that most good and bad luck happening to individuals stemmed from the action of spirits. The diviner would rub a small piece of wood on the flat back of a statuette like the one shown here while asking questions requiring "yes" or "no" answers regarding the cause of the problem being diagnosed. Maybe, for example, the diviner's client was ill: Was the illness due to the action of some evil spirit—and if so, which one? When the wood stuck to the back of the statuette, the diviner would know that he had come up with the right answer to the cause of his client's problem.

Professional carvers make stools to order. *Ashanti, Ghana* Household and ceremonial stools of many different designs are to be found throughout Africa. Household stools, although generally plain, may be elaborately carved to suit the owner's taste. Ceremonial stools, the prerogatives of chiefs and other ranking persons, are often decorated with metal trim, beads, and other ornaments. Among the Ashanti of Ghana, ceremonial stools are handed down from chief to chief in some communities; in other Ashanti communities a new stool is commissioned each time a chief takes office.

Drum. *Ashanti, Ghana* Throughout traditional Africa music is an important part of everyday life. Everywhere you go in Africa you can find people singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments while they work, worship, or get together at parties and other social gatherings.

Except among herding and hunting peoples, drums are played throughout Africa. In forest regions, drums are made out of large hollow logs; in other areas, where wood is scarce, drums are made of gourds or earthenware.

The carved wooden drum shown here is used by popular entertainment bands among the Ashanti of Ghana. The female figure depicted on the front of the drum tells us that this particular instrument is the "mother," or heartbeat, of the group. Bands bring communities together, and the heart pendant suggests that love comes from the heart. Relief images around the sides of the drum recall Ashanti proverbs.



Cup. *Dogon, Mali* This type of cup is used for various purposes by the spiritual head of the Dogon community, who is called a *hogan.* The cup is sometimes employed for storing things like tobacco or as a communal vessel for people to eat from on feast days. Traditionally cups of this design were presented to a hogan at the time of his assuming office.

Woman with jewelry. *Bororo, Niger* In Africa, as in the rest of the world, people make and wear jewelry for many reasons—to show a person's wealth or position in society, as a charm to protect a person against harm or bring good luck, or just for the pleasure of wearing something that is beautiful.

Often Africans like to wear many different kinds of jewelry at once, as this Bororo woman is doing. The Bororo are a semi-nomadic cattle-herding people; and the women wear their jewelry as a kind of "bank account," so as to keep their wealth with them at all times. You can tell that this woman is married because she is wearing seven silver earrings in each ear. If unmarried, she would be wearing not earrings but brass anklets.

West African Markets

The African farming tradition is especially well-established in *West* Africa, where many different groups have for centuries lived in sedentary societies based on agricultural production. The first of these farmers raised only native African crops, such as bullrush, millet, sorghum, and West African rice. Then gradually, domesticated animals and food plants such as the peanut, taro, maize, and banana, as well as certain types of yams, were introduced from Southeast Asia and the Americas. As the economy expanded, towns grew into cities and highly organized kingdoms were formed. Arts and crafts flourished; and markets were established, which are still today an important part of West African life.

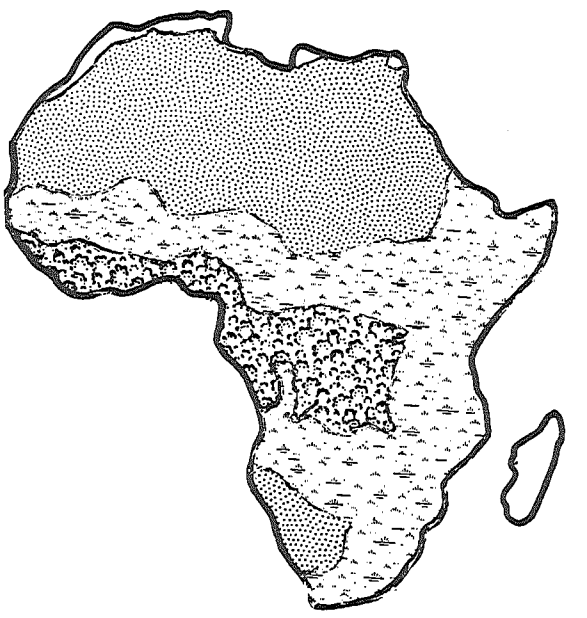
Held at regular intervals, in different villages, and often on different days of the week, each West African market has its own specialty and is part of a transportation network linking one village with the next. Traders travel from market to market on a well-defined circuit, taking with them not only their goods but also news from neighboring villages. Often such networks stretch over vast areas. In some places, markets are politically controlled by chiefs or committees of elders, who collect taxes on them.

Traders in agricultural produce are usually women, some of whom buy in wholesale markets and sell in retail ones, often many miles apart. Women sell products directly too, either to consumers or to exporters. Markets serve not only as places to buy and sell but also as important social centers, where you can go to meet friends and relatives, exchange gossip, and, maybe even find a husband or a wife!

Here is a picture of a Senegalese village market. Using an opaque projector, show the picture to your students. What conclusions can the children draw from the evidence to be found here about *(1)* the climate and *(2)* the kinds of goods people buy to use in their homes, in this part of West Africa?

The basin-shaped bowls being examined by the women in the foreground of the picture are hollowed-out calabash gourds. Calabash gourds are used throughout Africa to make useful and decorative objects of many sorts.

Senegalese market



Summing Up Map Exercises for Teachers and Students

I. Africa is a large continent with many different environments, including rain forest, savannah, and desert. Put each number listed below in the proper places on the map.

1. rain forest
2. savannah
3. Sahara desert
4. Kalahari desert

II. In Africa there are many groups of people living and speaking in many different ways. Listed below are the names of a few groups mentioned in this issue of *Art to Zoo*. Next to each group write the type of environment—*desert, mountain, savannah, rain forest*—its people live in.

Bushmen _____

Bobo _____

Dogon _____

Ashanti _____

Masai _____

Chagga _____

III. Now use an up-to-date map showing the *countries* of Africa to find out where these groups live.

Teaching from Objects: A One-Week Course

You don't have to live in Washington to study at the Smithsonian:

Join us next summer for "Teaching from Objects," a special, one-week course for teachers living more than seventy-five miles outside of Washington, D.C. Using Smithsonian collections and exhibits, participants will learn how to use objects, portrait paintings, and related community resources such as historic homes as *teaching tools*. Life in 19th-century America following the Civil War will serve as a theme for course instruction.

Because participants will work on group projects outside class, we urge that they reside in accommodations we have reserved in a conveniently located college dormitory. The cost per person will be nine dollars a night in a double room and twelve dollars a night for a single room. Participants will be able to arrange for their own meals.

Accredited by the University of Virginia, this graduate course will cost $99 ($33 tuition per credit hour) plus a $5 registration fee. The Smithsonian will charge a $25 materials fee, any unused balance to be refunded at the end of the course. No scholarships are available.

Two sessions will be offered: from July 6 through 12 and from August 3 through 9, 1980. Both sessions are open to full-time classroom teachers (grades three through twelve), school librarians (media specialists), and curriculum specialists. Interpreters for the hearing impaired can be provided for all class work.

Because each session will be limited to twenty participants, selection will be made on a competitive basis. Applications must be postmarked no later than April 6, 1980. For application form, including complete information, write:

National Seminar
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Arts and Industries Building, Room 1163
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560

The Smithsonian Institution, founded in 1846, is a vast complex of museums and art galleries, scholars and experts, with facilities here in Washington, D.C., around the country, and overseas. It owes its beginning to James Smithson, a wealthy English scientist, who willed his fortune to the United States "to found at Washington, under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men." Over succeeding generations, the Smithsonian Institution has carried out the terms of this bequest through scholarly activity in the fields of history, science, and art; through museum and library operation; and through the dissemination of information. In recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed on public education, with classes, films, lectures, musical events, guided tours, and other activities offered to growing numbers of children and adults.

ART TO ZOO
is a publication of the
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560

Editor: Ann Bay (202) 381-5351

Regular Contributors:

THE ANACOSTIA NEIGHBORHOOD MUSEUM
THE CHESAPEAKE BAY CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
THE COOPER-HEWITT MUSEUM OF DECORATIVE ARTS AND DESIGN
THE HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND SCULPTURE GARDEN
THE MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART
THE NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM
THE NATIONAL COLLECTION OF FINE ARTS and the RENWICK GALLERY
THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND TECHNOLOGY
THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY
THE NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK

Smithsonian Institution Press

Designer: Carol Hare
Associate Editor: Ruth W. Spiegel

Art to Zoo brings news from the Smithsonian Institution to teachers of grades three through eight. The purpose is to help you use museums, parks, libraries, zoos, and many other resources within your community to open up learning opportunities for your students.

Our reason for producing a publication dedicated *to promoting the use of community resources among students and teachers nationally* stems from a fundamental belief, shared by all of us here at the Smithsonian, in the power of objects. Working as we do with a vast collection of national treasures that literally contains the spectrum from "art" to "zoo," we believe that objects (be they works of art, natural history specimens, historical artifacts, or live animals) have a tremendous power to educate. We maintain that it is equally important for students to learn to use objects as research tools as it is for them to learn to use words and numbers—and you can find objects close at hand, by drawing on the resources of your own community.

Our idea, then, in producing *Art to Zoo* is to share with you—and you with us—methods of working with students and objects that Smithsonian education staff members have found successful. This is the second of four issues published in Nov./Dec., Feb./Mar., April, and spring/summer of this school year.

The logo for this issue of Art to Zoo *was designed and contributed by Benton & Bowles, Inc., Sam Cooperstein, artist.*

Pull-Out Page

African Adventure on Capitol Hill: The Smithsonian's Museum of African Art

A piece of Africa comes to life—right here in our nation's capital—when you visit the Smithsonian's Museum of African Art, located at 315 A Street, NE, in Washington, D.C.

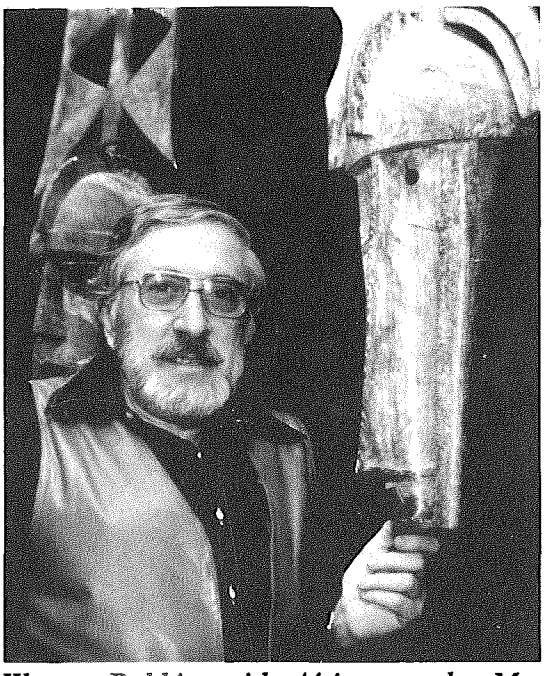
To walk through the galleries of this museum is to see African art not only in terms of its striking beauty but also in terms of the *people* who created that beauty. Recently we were treated to a tour of the Museum of African Art by WARREN ROBBINS, its founder and director.

"The purpose of the Museum of African Art is to help people in America understand more about African art and culture," Mr. Robbins told us as we entered a gallery containing a dramatic display of carved wooden masks and figures. "Each piece of sculpture that you will see in this museum has a story to tell, from which you can gain some insight into the values and beliefs of the African people."

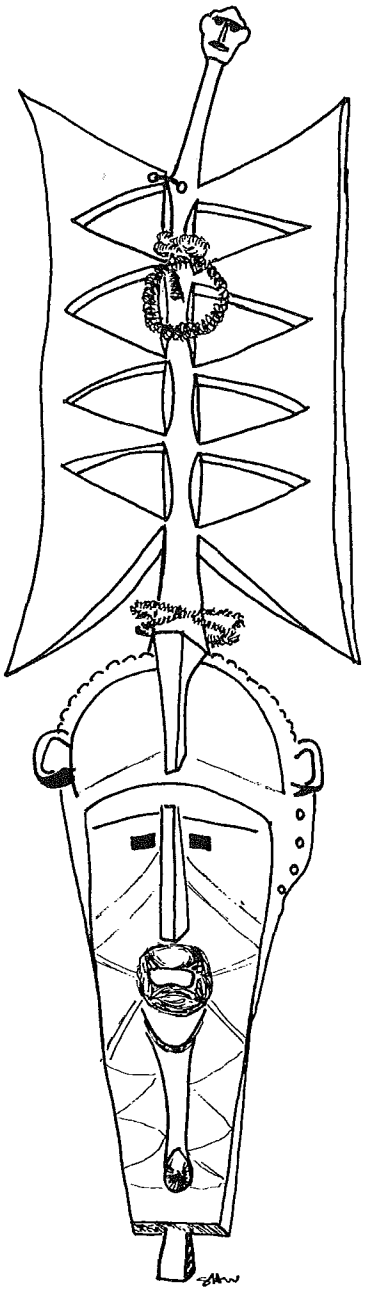
Then Mr. Robbins pointed out to us the large carved mask which we sketched for you (on *page 2*). A label told us that the mask had been made by the Bobo people of Upper Volta, a country in West Africa just below the great Sahara Desert. Mr. Robbins explained to us, "Masks like this are worn in special ceremonies in which the people are reminded of the teachings of their ancestors, who are called upon for guidance and support by the living relatives. You will notice that the face of this mask has the features of a human being. The tall structure on top is meant to suggest the flight of birds. Attached to the topmost point of the mask is a small carving of the head of a bird. Human and animal figures are often mixed in this and other African masks to indicate the relationship of all living beings and to show the respect that African people have for the animal world."

As we continued our tour of the galleries, we asked Mr. Robbins to tell us something of the history of the Museum of African Art. He told us that the museum opened in 1964 with a staff of two (himself and a volunteer assistant), a small collection of borrowed objects, and very little money. Since then the museum has grown considerably. Today it has a staff of forty and a permanent collection of more than 8,000 objects, including textiles, costumes, grass mats, baskets, jewelry, money, and furniture, as well as sculpture. Its location is on Capitol Hill right behind the Supreme Court, in a row of nine townhouses including one that was once the residence of the great 19th-century black orator and statesman Frederick Douglass. In 1978 Congress passed a bill, which President Carter signed, making the Museum of African Art part of the Smithsonian Institution.

continued on page 2



Warren Robbins with African masks, Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution



Wooden mask, Bobo, Upper Volta

Dogon rabbit mask, Mali. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon

continued from page 1

About 100,000 people from across the United States and around the world visit the Museum of African Art each year. These visitors include many groups of Washington-area school children, who take part in special programs led by African staff members. In addition to seeing the exhibits, the children play African musical instruments, observe and learn ceremonial dances, hear African stories, and sing African songs.

All of these kids agree that the Museum of African Art is a wonderful place to visit. Once inside the door of the museum you are caught up in a magical spirit of adventure that makes you want to stay and find out more about the sights you see and the sounds you hear. The gallery walls are painted in warm, earth colors, with spotlights on the exhibits. Often the whole museum vibrates with the beat of African drums, played by staff members and sometimes by the visiting children themselves. All of the exhibits are clearly marked with labels that tell the stories behind the objects. And mounted on the walls are magnificent color photographs of African people, village scenes, or the natural environment.

As we ended our tour of the museum, we asked Mr. Robbins why he thinks it is so important for people to learn about African art and culture. "For many years, very few Americans had any idea of what Africa was really like," he explained to us. "Because the way *Africans* lived and saw the world was so different from the way *we* lived and saw the world, we failed to recognize how creative and talented African people really are. Because until recently Africa did not have modern buildings and other products of technology, most Americans viewed it as an uncivilized place where there was nothing of importance to the rest of the world. It was called the 'Dark Continent.' And because many Americans had this wrong opinion about Africa, they tended to believe that black *Americans,* whose ancestors came from there, were somehow not as good as other Americans. By showing the truth about Africa—its art, its music, its dance—and by explaining the beliefs and human values of its people, we at the Museum of African Art hope to help both black and white Americans understand, appreciate, and respect Africa more."

So that is the story of the Museum of African Art, which began as one man's dream, on a shoestring budget, just sixteen years ago, and is now recognized the world over as a major center for the study of African art and culture.

But the story isn't over . . . and the museum continues to grow.

Make Your Own Rabbit Mask

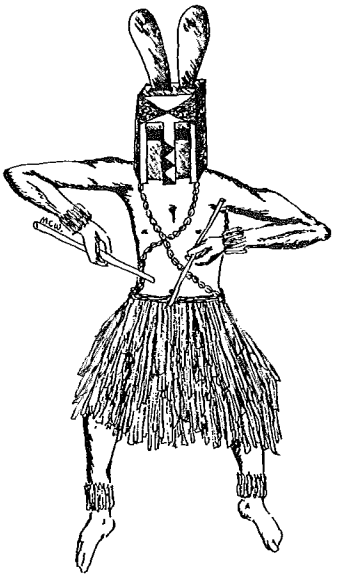
This paper bag "rabbit mask" for you to make was inspired by the carved, *wooden* rabbit mask *(shown here),* made by the Dogon people of Mali.

Animal masks—the rabbit mask is just one type—are made and worn by the Dogon people for a number of reasons. The Dogon believe that all living things have a life force, or "nyma," which lives on even after the body dies. When an animal is killed in the hunt, its nyma is set free. To make amends to the animal's spirit and to protect the community, a mask is carved as a resting place for the nyma. Other Dogon animal masks are worn at harvest festivals because animals are associated with the fertility of the land. Animal masks may also be worn in hope of giving to the community certain admirable qualities—such as swiftness, strength, or wisdom—which particular animals are thought to have. In America we do a similar thing in naming many of our athletic teams after animals: for example, the Detroit Lions, the Los Angeles Rams, and the Chicago Bears.

continued on page 3

On the West African savannah where the Dogon live, the rabbit must depend on speed and cunning for survival. In the folklore of the Dogon and other West African people, this weaker but clever animal overcomes stronger but less intelligent beasts such as the panther and the lion. In many stories it does this by somewhat questionable schemes for which it is usually caught and punished in the end. In general, the folktales about the rabbit contain the message that you cannot cheat others and get away with it for long.

The colors (red and white), decoration, and long ears mark this mask as a rabbit mask. It is worn as part of a costume consisting of raffia (grass) tufts tied at the wrists, elbows, and ankles, and a knee-length raffia skirt.

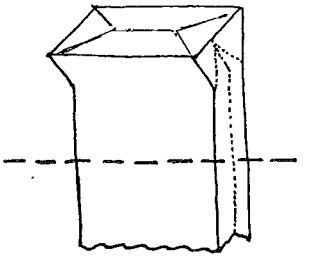


Directions

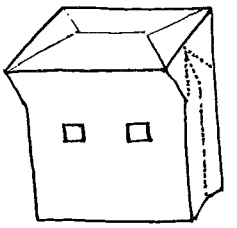
Things you'll need. A paper grocery bag or shopping bag big enough to fit over your head . . . glue . . . scissors . . . construction paper . . . and crayons. Also (if desired) paint and paint brushes or magic markers for decorating.

What to Do

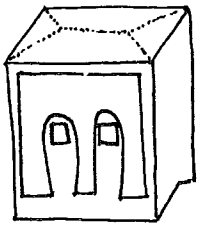
1. Cut across the bag about ⅔ of the way from the top.



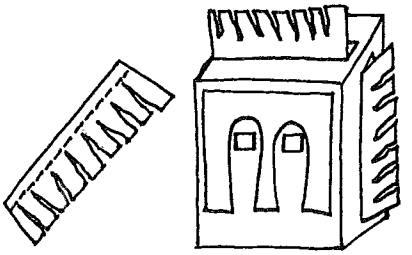
2. Place the bag over your head, and with a crayon, mark the two spots where the eyes should go. Then remove the bag from your head and cut the eye holes small and square to look like this.



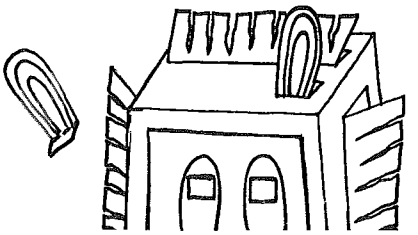
3. Now make the face of the mask. Draw a fat, square "M-shape" on a piece of construction paper. Cut out this shape and decorate it. Then paste it onto the front of the bag so that the center strip or "nose" of the "M" is positioned between the eye holes.



4. Take three strips of construction paper, 3½ inches wide, and make a series of 2-inch cuts (¼ inch apart) along one horizontal edge of each strip *as shown.* Now make a 1-inch fold along the long unfringed edge of each one of the paper strips. Paste the folded edges of the paper strips to the sides and top of the bag as we have done here.



5. Finally make ears for your mask. These should be about 5 inches tall and 0-shaped. After you have cut them out, make a 1-inch fold along the bottom edge of each ear. Then paste the folded edges to the top of the bag as shown.



To have fun with your mask, you may want to pretend to be a Dogon dancer dancing like a rabbit or acting out a rabbit folktale. You can find rabbit folktales in a number of the books listed in the bibliography on *page 2* of this issue of *Art to Zoo. Zomo the Rabbit* by Hugh Sturton, and W. F. P. Burton's *The Magic Drum: Tales From Central Africa,* are two good sources.

Three-faced helmet mask of wood and leather, made by the Ejagham people of Nigeria. (Only two of the mask's three faces are visible in this photograph.)

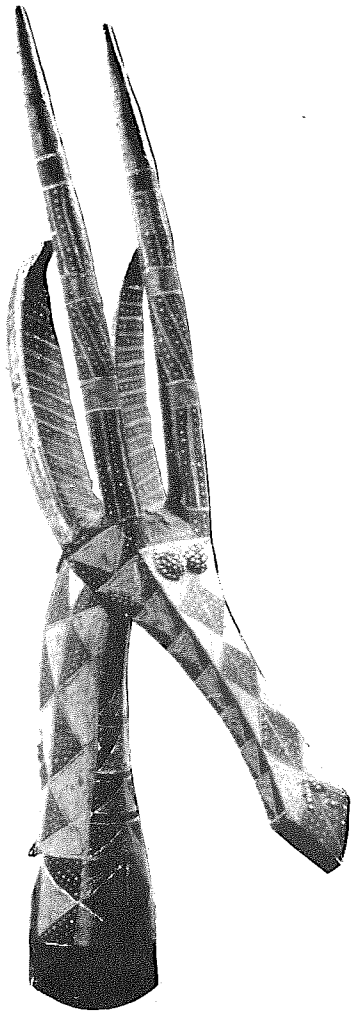
MASKS

Africa is famous for its masks. The masks of Africa are admired the world over for their beauty and their awesomeness, as well as for the splendid variety of their designs and forms.

African masks are made from different materials, including metal, palm leaf fiber, bark cloth, or most commonly wood. Often they are painted with natural pigments. Many are decorated with shells, beads, or fiber.

Masks play an important role in African religious and social life. In religious ceremonies they are worn by a dancer as part of a costume that covers the dancer's entire body. The Africans believe that when a mask is used in this way it takes on special powers that enable it to communicate with the gods. As the dancer whirls and bends and reaches to heaven asking the gods for help in dealing with the forces of nature, it is the dancer's mask that serves as the connecting link with the spirit world.

There are basically three different types of African masks: the *helmet mask,* which covers the wearer's entire head; the *face mask,* which covers only the wearer's face; and the *headdress mask,* which rests on top of the wearer's head on a small support made of basketwork or wood. The masks shown here are from the collection of the Smithsonian's Museum of African Art.



Wooden antelope headdress made by the Kurumba people of Upper Volta

Wooden face mask made by the Dan people of the Ivory Coast

fold along dotted line