

STYLE AND MEANING

KEY TERMS

- Geometric
- Origin Story
- Trickster
- Volumetric
- Yoruba



CLOSE LOOKING

MANY OF THE SYMMETRICAL BEADED, painted, and woven motifs covering the face and neck of Ngaady Mwaash (pronounced enGAdee mwash), meaning “the woman of Mwaash,” are borrowed from the linear and geometric patterns of textiles made by the Kuba people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.¹ One complicated design of alternating black and white painted triangles is called “the

FEMALE MASK (NGAADY MWAASH)

Late 19th–early 20th century

Artist Unidentified
Kuba kingdom, Democratic Republic
of the Congo
Wood, cloth, copper alloy tacks, plant fibers,
cowrie shells, glass beads, and paint
Gift of Alan Wurtzburger, BMA 1954.145.77



Ngady Mwaash performs at a funeral.
Southern Kuba, community of Boganciala,
Congo (Kinshasa).

Photo: Patricia Darish and David A. Binkley, 1982

king's house," a reference to the royal status of Mweel (pronounced mWHEEL), first queen of the Kuba kingdom, whom Ngaady Mwaash embodies. Other designs include a lattice-patterned hairstyle made of cowrie shells, a material used in African trade that symbolizes status and wealth. As is the case with many royal masks, the nose and mouth of Ngaady Mwaash are hidden behind a band of cloth decorated with alternating blue and white beads that flank a row of cowrie shells. This band falls from the bridge of the nose down and over the chin. Three parallel lines of turquoise beads form the eyebrows. Red, white, and black stripes running from the mask's eyes to the jawline are called "tears" and may reference tears shed at funerals.

The mask's carved wood face is attached to a cloth-covered framework—including two wooden ears—that forms the top, back, and sides of the head. A triangular hat recalls those worn by female diviners of the Kuba people. Its inclusion suggests the relationship between Ngaady Mwaash and the spiritual world.²

ART IN CONTEXT

THE KUBA NGAADY MWAASH AND YORUBA (pronounced YORubah) Aroni (pronounced AROHnee) masks in this lesson represent two very different styles of mask making. The former is geometric (characterized by lines, shapes, and patterns). Its surface is made from an assortment of materials—copper tacks, plant fiber, beads, shells, cotton, and raffia. In contrast, the Aroni mask is volumetric (emphasizing three-dimensional form). Unlike the Kuba mask, which is covered with many decorative elements, Aroni's surface was once covered with a single material—bright, multicolored paint. When seen in performance, the arrangement of the elements of art—color, line, shape, texture, space—provide clues to the masks' identity and character.

The Kuba people live along the Sankuru River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The kingdom comprises more than 10 ethnic groups united under a single king.³ The history and origin stories of the Kuba people play a key role in the Ngaady Mwaash performance.

Although the delicately featured Ngaady Mwaash has an elaborate combination of materials and patterns, visual order is maintained through their symmetrical arrangement. The harmony and balance of the composition reflect the beauty and comportment essential to Mweel's role as first queen of the Kuba kingdom. An observer described her graceful and stately dance:



Kuba kingdom, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Her performance style is sensuous as the body, legs, arms, and hands of the dancer move in fluid gestures.... [that are] accentuated with the use of a flywhisk held in one hand. The long skirt and overskirt worn by the Ngady Mwaash masked dancers prohibit the flamboyant torso and leg movement characteristic of male masquerade performances.”⁴

Ngaady Mwaash appears primarily in masquerades performed at funerals of initiated men, ceremonies for dignitaries, and male initiation rites, all of which commemorate the creation of the Kuba kingdom. Ngaady Mwaash never appears alone but with one of two male masked figures. One of these figures may be the powerful king Woot (pronounced wote), said to be Mweel’s brother and husband. Their relationship created the first man and woman from whom all Kuba royalty descends. The other figure with whom she may appear is Bwom (pronounced bwom), a man from the surrounding forest, who opposes Woot’s authority and vies for Mweel’s attention. As with most African masquerades, a man performs the part of Ngaady Mwaash.

RELATED ARTWORK

UNLIKE THE HIGHLY DECORATED and relatively flat Ngaady Mwaash, the Aroni mask of the Yoruba people was carved of wood in a series of curved lines and rounded, repeated forms. Aroni’s volumetric, dome-like cheeks contrast with its concave, sunken eye sockets. The form of its tubular curved horns is repeated in the shape of the ears. The bridge of the nose and the nostrils are prominently ridged. Instead of the soft melding of one form into the next as seen on the Kuba mask, planes on the Aroni mask meet abruptly in ridges formed by obtuse and acute angles. In its original state, Aroni would have been brightly painted. Here, just a little pink is visible on the tongue that protrudes from the hinged jaw. The combination of forms are intended to evoke the face of a monkey, an apt association since Aroni is a trickster forest spirit.

On Aroni’s forehead, a spherical calabash gourd called an “ado” holds magical medicines that the capricious spirit can use in a number of ways. Before entering the forest, hunters ask Aroni to make the chase fruitful. But, Aroni is unpredictable. He may use the potion to help huntsmen find prey, or he may, on a whim, trick them and use it to make hunters lose their way and vanish.

Honoring the ancestors, Aroni performs in annual celebrations with a suite of masks that include animal spirits—snakes, hyenas, lions, rams, insects, and monkeys, among others—as well as human entities, such as husbands and wives, people drunk on alcohol, foreigners, and



TRICKSTER MASK (ARONI)

Early 20th century

Artist Unidentified
Yoruba region, probably Oyo, Nigeria
Wood, encrustation, and plant fiber
Purchase with Exchange of Funds from Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Gerofsky; Gift of Irene Gulck; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alan Meyers; Gift of Dr. Joseph H. Seipp, Jr.; and Gift of Alan Wurtzburger, BMA 1983.83

mothers of twins. The elaborate masquerade is highly interactive and humorous as spirits and entities appear without warning.

[Sometimes maskers] set up a large encircling mat wall (that sometimes dances by itself) in the center of the performance space. At the most appropriate dramatic moment, the mat wall will collapse to reveal a miracle like a fish or crocodile with snapping, gaping jaws.... Monkey masquerader[s] jump down out of trees or from rooftops.... Masked attendants escort [Aroni] about the performance area while drummers play rhythms associated with songs for Aroni and audience members give alms and sometimes come forward to seek blessings.⁵

Yoruba lore suggests that Aroni has only one arm and one leg. The masker communicates these physical aspects by performing with an arm behind his back. He may also hop up and down with his legs together in a tight cylindrical costume or lean on a staff and move in a way that suggests he has only one leg.⁶ Aroni's elaborate costume often includes natural materials that allude to the forest in which the spirit dwells. One observer noted that rough burlap costumes were painted green and decorated with roots, leaves, and vines.⁷

Aroni's wild and unpredictable nature can only be communicated through a combination of mask, costume, and performance. His dramatically painted, monkey-like face; a costume that exaggerates his physical characteristics; and a masquerade that is both energetic and erratic must all be present to tell the tale of the forest spirit.

The Yoruba are a collection of kingdoms in southwest Nigeria and Bénin. The Oyo kingdom, in which the BMA Aroni mask was probably made, is part of the Yoruba. The kingdoms have numerous densely populated urban areas that support a market economy. In each urban center or town, a council of chiefs usually assists a traditional leader in decision making.⁸



Yoruba masquerade representing Aroni.
Egbada, Yoruba, Nigeria.

Photo: Henry John Drewal, 1978. Courtesy of the Henry John and Margaret Thompson Drewal Collection, Eliot Eliston Photographic Archive, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹ Katie Dowling, *Arts of Africa* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1998), 63.

² David A. Binkley, "Ideology of Male and Female Movement: A Kuba Mask (Ngady Mwaash)," in *See the Music Hear the Dance*, ed. Frederick John Lamp (Munich: Prestel Publishing, 2004), 172.

³ "Kuba," University of Iowa Museum of Art, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/peoples/show/Kuba>.

⁴ Binkley, "Ideology of Male and Female Movement," 173.

⁵ Henry John Drewal, "A Spectacle of Miracles: The Yoruba Forest Spirit Mask (Aroni)," in *See the Music Hear the Dance*, ed. Frederick John Lamp (Munich: Prestel Publishing, 2004), 145.

⁶ Marilyn Hammersley Houlberg, "Notes on Egungun Masquerades Among the Oyo Yoruba," *African Arts* 11, 3 (April, 1978), 61.

⁷ Drewal, "A Spectacle of Miracles," 145.

⁸ "Yoruba," University of Iowa Museum of Art, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/peoples/show/Yoruba>.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1:

Comparing and Contrasting Geometrics and Volumetrics

Grades: K–2, 3–5

Subjects: English Language Arts, Visual Arts

Students will look closely at the Female Mask and the Trickster Mask and describe the two artworks. Using the following questions, students will explore the similarities and differences between the two objects in a class discussion. The teacher will record student responses in a Venn diagram on a black/white board.

- What colors do you see?
- What shapes do you see?
- What textures do you see?
- What forms do you see?
- What materials do you think these artworks might be made from?

As students offer responses, the teacher will share contextual information about the objects, explaining that Yoruba art favors volume while Kuba art emphasizes geometry. The teacher will then introduce the terms “geometric,” meaning the geometric elements of lines and shapes (such as circles and squares), and “volumetric,” meaning elements that take up three-dimensional space (such as cubes and orbs).

The teacher will divide students into pairs and ask them to identify the geometric elements of the Kuba mask and the volumetric elements of the Yoruba mask. Teacher will then invite student pairs to share their observations.

To extend this activity, student pairs can be given several images of other artworks, either from this resource or from other resources, such as the BMA collections page at <https://artbma.org/collections/index.html>. The student pairs can discuss whether they think certain artworks are more geometric

or volumetric, supporting their assertions with examples from the images. The teacher will then invite student pairs to share examples of how they categorized certain artworks for class discussion.

ACTIVITY 2:

Exploring the West African Trickster Character in Art and Literature

Grades: 3–5

Subjects: English Language Arts, Visual Arts

Students will examine the Trickster Mask and each write down at least five descriptive words. The teacher will then ask the following questions to guide the discussion, recording responses on a black/white board.

- What colors do you see?
- What shapes do you see?
- What textures do you see?
- What forms do you see?
- What materials do you think these artworks might be made from?

As students share their responses, the teacher will note relevant information about the context and meaning of the object, explaining that the mask was intended to depict Aroni, a spiritual entity from the Yoruba region in Nigeria. They can also share the contextual photo from this resource that shows Aroni in performance, with a full costume and brightly painted mask (as the Trickster Mask would have originally appeared).

The teacher will then read an illustrated West African trickster story, such as one focused on Anansi, the spider trickster, as told by the Ashanti people of Ghana. (Anansi is linked to wisdom, folktales, and linguistic talent and is most often associated with oral narratives.) After students listen to the story, the teacher will divide them into groups of four and ask them to discuss the trickster using the following questions.

- What does it mean to trick someone? When can it be good and when can it be bad?
- How does the trickster actually trick other characters?
- What does this say about the trickster?
- What does this say about the other characters in the story?
- What lessons can be learned from this trickster story?
- What connections to your life can you find in the story?

After group discussion, the teacher will ask all students to share their responses to the questions above. Each student will write a one- to two-paragraph text explaining his/her understanding of the West African trickster using evidence from the discussion of the object and the illustrated book.

STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

Grade 1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.2. Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.

Grade 2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.2. Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.

Grade 3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

MARYLAND STATE CURRICULUM

Visual Arts

Grade 1

1.2.b. Use color, line, shape, texture, and form to represent ideas visually from observation, memory, and imagination.

1.3.a. Explore and discuss the qualities of color, line, shape, texture, and form in artworks.

2.1.a. Observe works of art and identify ways that artists express ideas about people, places, and events.

Grade 2

1.1.a. Describe colors, lines, shapes, textures, forms, and space found in observed objects and the environment.

1.2.a. Describe how artists use color, line, shape, texture, form, and space to represent ideas visually from observation, memory, and imagination.

2.1.a. Observe works of art and describe how artists express ideas about people, places, and events.

2.2.b. Communicate a variety of reasons for creating artworks, such as feelings, experiences, events, places, and ideas.

Grade 3

1.1.a. Describe similarities and differences between the elements of art in observed forms.

1.2.a. Compare and describe how artists communicate what they see, know, feel, and imagine using art vocabulary.

1.2.b. Represent ideas and feelings visually that describe what is seen, felt, known, and imagined.

1.3.a. Describe how the elements of art and principles of design are organized to communicate personal meaning in visual compositions.

2.2.a. Discuss and compare how selected artworks from different times or cultures are similar or different (e.g. common themes, content, form, and style).



Female Mask (Ngaady Mwaash). Late 19th–early 20th century. Kuba kingdom, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, cloth, copper alloy tacks, plant fibers, cowrie shells, glass beads, and paint. Gift of Alan Wurtzburger, BMA 1954.145.77



Trickster Mask (Aroni). Early 20th century. Yoruba region, probably Oyo kingdom, Nigeria. Wood, encrustation, plant fiber. Purchase with exchange funds from Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Gerofsky; Gift of Irene Gulck; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alan Meyers; Gift of Dr. Joseph H. Seipp, Jr.; and Gift of Alan Wurtzburger, BMA 1983.83

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial data. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses, income, and any other financial activities. The text explains that proper record-keeping is essential for identifying trends, managing cash flow, and preparing for tax obligations. It also notes that consistent record-keeping can help in detecting errors or discrepancies early on, allowing for prompt corrections and preventing larger issues from arising.

The second section focuses on the role of technology in modern accounting. It highlights how software solutions have revolutionized the way businesses handle their finances. From automated data entry to real-time reporting, these tools have significantly reduced the risk of human error and increased the efficiency of financial operations. The text discusses various types of accounting software, including cloud-based systems that allow for easy access and collaboration. It also touches upon the importance of data security and backup procedures when using digital tools to protect sensitive financial information.

The third part of the document addresses the challenges of budgeting and financial forecasting. It explains that creating a realistic budget is a complex task that requires a deep understanding of the business's operations and market conditions. The text provides tips on how to set achievable goals, allocate resources effectively, and monitor progress against the budget. It also discusses the importance of regular reviews and adjustments to the budget as circumstances change. Additionally, the document covers the basics of financial forecasting, including the use of historical data and industry trends to predict future performance. It stresses that accurate forecasting is crucial for strategic decision-making and long-term business success.

The final section of the document provides a summary of key takeaways and offers some concluding thoughts. It reiterates the importance of a disciplined and systematic approach to financial management. The text encourages businesses to stay organized, up-to-date, and proactive in their financial practices. It also mentions that seeking professional advice from accountants or financial consultants can be beneficial, especially for larger or more complex businesses. The document ends with a positive outlook on the future of financial management, suggesting that with the right tools and mindset, businesses can achieve their financial goals and thrive in a competitive market.