
Kente Cloth-Inspired Weavings



Grade: 3rd grade

Medium: Textiles - yarn

Learning Objective: Students will:

- Learn the over/under weaving technique.
- Observe 2 traditional weaving techniques
- Use art vocabulary
- Use good craftsmanship

Author: Juliette Ripley-Dunkelberger

Elements of Art

Color: Light reflected off objects. Complementary colors are directly opposite each other in the color spectrum: red/green, blue/orange, yellow/purple. These pairs contain all 3 primary colors.

Line: A mark on a surface between two points.

Texture: the way a work feels when touched or the portrayal of the quality of a surface. Some words to describe texture are: rough, smooth, coarse, soft, gritty, prickly, or slick.

Principles of Design

Contrast: refers to the arrangement of elements with very different qualities next to each other to create visual interest. In this lesson it's color.

Pattern: the repetition of the elements of art in an organized way.

Additional Vocabulary

Craftsmanship: A way of working that includes following directions, demonstrates neatness and the proper use of tools.

Loom: structure or frame that holds the tension in the warp threads to allow the weft threads to move through.

Knit fabric: created by interlocking loops of threads.

Woven fabric: created by threads which are interlaced in a over under process.



knit



woven

Sew: to use needle and thread to attach separate pieces of fabric along edges called **seams**.

Textile: a type of cloth or woven fabric.

Warp: threads are the stationary threads that run lengthwise and are under some tension.

Weave: to interlace threads in a consistent pattern that results in fabric.

Weft: are the threads that move through the warp, going over and under it to create a fabric.

Materials & Supplies

- Loom: sturdy 10" square paper plate or sturdy cardboard (cardboard looms can also be purchased*)
- Weaving materials: Bright solid-colored yarn, ribbon, fabric strips (1"-1.5" wide), plastic bags cut into strips, in lengths no longer than 36".
- Plastic Crewel needles, class set
- Scissors
- Tape
- Liquid glue
- Stickers or masking tape to label weavings

Context (History and/or Artists)

Wrapper(detail)

Ewe peoples, Ghana

Cotton, rayon
National Museum of African Art
Teaching Collection, ED85-12



Wrapper(detail)

Ewe peoples, Ghana

Cotton, rayon
National Museum of African Art, National Museum of Natural History, purchased with funds provided by the Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, 1983-85, EJ10702



Weaving is one of the oldest surviving crafts in the world, starting approximately 12,000 years ago, starting with interlacing branches for shelter and containers. 20,000 - 30,000 years ago early man developed the first string by twisting together plant fibers. Producing string and thread started the development of weaving, spinning, and sewing.

Weaving is one of the primary methods of textile production and it involves interlinking a set of vertical threads with a set of horizontal threads. The set of vertical threads are known as warp and the set of horizontal threads are known as weft. Kente cloth is a hand-woven fabric, woven in strips, which originated in Ghana (West Africa). The patterns and colors differ according to gender, status, and region of Africa. Historically, Kente cloth was the attire of royalty from the Akan ethnic group. The weaving of Kente cloth is a skill passed from generation to generation.

“Kente” comes from the Akan word “kenten”, which means “basket”. It’s also known as “nwentoma”, which means “woven cloth”. The Akan people of Ghana have been weaving Kente for centuries. The tradition is thought to be inspired by the weaving patterns of a spider’s web.

Wearing African clothing is a wonderful way for many to celebrate their culture and their heritage and to commemorate the beauty of the land. Wearing African clothing means so much more to many people than simply being a fashion statement. African clothing can be a symbol of status, creativity, and allegiance to tribal roots.

Today, Kente is woven from cotton, rayon, and silk and is worn by many people, usually for special events like weddings, naming ceremonies, or funerals. The colors and patterns of the Kente cloth are chosen to fit the event. Like the tartan patterns of Scotland, the pattern and color combination have meaning and are often tied to specific families or groups of people. To wear this cloth without an understanding or tie to the culture can be insulting to its roots.

Advanced Preparation



Prepare the looms for students with an odd number of warp threads.

1. Make cuts along the top of bottom of the cardboard.
2. Tape the yarn end, with a 3” tail, onto the back of the loom.
3. Wrap the yarn around, snuggling down into each cut.
4. Finish wrapping the warp thread on the back of the plate and tie to the starting thread. Make sure this is secure. You can add tape over the knot to be sure.



- Find examples of knit fabric and woven Kente fabric to show.
- Invite 3 or more other volunteers to help you in the classroom.

Discussion Points

- Post vocabulary and briefly go through it. Use whenever possible during the lesson.
- Point out the difference between woven fabric and knitted fabric. Pass around the examples so students can feel the texture and examine the kind of weave used.
- Show examples of fabric to the class and have students identify if it is woven or knitted.
- Ask students to identify woven materials around the room.
- Have students create hand motions for “over” and “under”.
- Talk about the Kente traditions. Stop after describing their use of color to identify clans or events. Think of colors in our culture that send a message. (Christmas, sports teams, school colors, flag colors, traffic signs, color coding in class) What colors have personal meaning for you? (no wrong answer)
- Can color represent a feeling? (no wrong answer)

Reflection Point (Assessment of Learning Objectives)

Students will:

- Learn the over/under weaving technique.
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- Use good craftsmanship

Instructions for Lesson

1. Students write their names on their looms.
2. Allow students to pick some yarn to start with that is in a color they resonate with.
3. **Demonstrate** starting the first yarn. Make sure all students can watch this happen.
 - a. Gently thread the needle with the yarn.
 - b. Pull the first yarn end through the top left notch to the front to anchor it, leaving a 3” tail.
4. Demonstrate weaving from left to right in an over/ under pattern through the warp.
 - a. At the end, loop under the current warp, turn around and over, and continue weaving under/over, moving right to left.
 - b. Demonstrate gently pulling the yarn to tighten and pushing it up to the top as you weave, keeping the weaving flat, not bumpy or bubbly.
5. Assist students to get started.
6. Once the students have worked a bit, stop them to **demonstrate** tying a knot between two yarns to join a new piece.
 - a. Take off the needle.
 - b. Tie the knot between the two yarns.
 - c. Thread the needle with the new end of the yarn.
7. When students finish, or when you need to stop, **demonstrate** how to double-back the weft yarn, weaving a few under/overs backwards and then tie a knot onto the warp thread to secure it.
8. Removing from the loom: Volunteers collect the looms and follow the directions below.
 - a. Turn over the weaving, gently cut the warp threads across the middle of the loom.



- b. Tie the warp threads two by two in square knots on both the bottom and the top to secure the weaving.
- c. Add a small sticker with the student’s name to the back of each weaving.

Optional: Play music from Ghana in the background during the lesson.



References and Attributions: Lesson written by Juliette Ripley-Dunkelberger. Additional information can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.weavedesign.eu/weaving-history/>

<http://www.Artistsupplysource.com>; www.theweavingloom.com;

<https://happyhooligans.ca/cardboard-loom-weaving-activity-for-kids/> ;

<http://nationalclothing.org/africa/64-ghana/279-african-kente-cloth-patterns,-colors,-and-sacred-meaning.html>. <https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/kente/strips.htm>.

Notes for Educators

21st Century Thinking Skills

Thinking flexibly, persisting, questioning, creating, innovating, listening with empathy, taking responsible risks, observing, making connections, visualizing, sequencing, predicting, comparing/contrasting, determining main idea, finding evidence, problem solving, cause and effect, determining point of view, decision making.

WA State Learning Standards

(VA:Cr2.1.3) a. Create personally satisfying artwork, using a variety of artistic processes and materials.

(VA:Cr2.2.3) a. Demonstrate an understanding of the safe and proficient use of materials, tools, and equipment for a variety of artistic processes.

(VA:Re7.1.3) a. Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art.

(VA:Re9.1.3) a. Evaluate an artwork based on given criteria.

(VA:Cn10.1.3) a. Develop a work of art based on observations of surroundings.

Arts Integration Opportunities

- Students write about the colors they chose and why they have personal significance.
- Students write about what they learned about the over /under technique of weaving and how that changes what they think about Kente cloth.
- Students read Ghanan folk tales or learn more traditions of Ghanan culture.
- Look for other cultures that have special colors to designate clans (Scotland, Haida tribes of PNW) or talk about flag and national colors.