

Crossing Cultural Bridges

Project Overview

Project History

Early in 2002, representatives of The Albuquerque Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, met with the Director of The Albuquerque Museum of Art and History and with the Director of the African American Studies Program at the University of New Mexico to discuss the possibility of staging an exhibition of African art in Albuquerque. An organizing committee was formed and, after some investigation, the museum learned about an important traveling exhibition of African Art called *Resonance from the Past: African Sculpture from the New Orleans Museum of Art*. The exhibition organized by the Museum for African Art in New York was subsequently booked at The Albuquerque Museum for the venue of May 14 to August 13, 2006.

As discussions progressed, a wider community collaboration led to a project called *Crossing Cultural Bridges* that included not only the exhibition, but expanded to educational programs related to the primary goal of “increasing knowledge in our communities of the traditions of African art and the relationship of those traditions to African American cultural contributions to the United States.” These programs included: an African Arts & Culture curriculum; a two-week African Arts & Culture Teachers’ Institute; five traveling mini-teaching exhibits; and the formation of a state-wide teachers’ network to support the ongoing project. To form the network, the state was divided into five regions, each with three-member master teacher teams who were funded to attend the African Arts & Culture Teachers’ Institute in Albuquerque and then to share the information in day-long workshops in each region. These master teachers would form the network to promote the curriculum state-wide

and assist in the supervision of the five traveling teaching exhibitions.

The Albuquerque Museum also engaged in collaborative programs in conjunction with the exhibition by: working with native West African consultants on the exhibition design; sending artists to the schools; and staging African Arts & Culture Family Days, tours and performances throughout the exhibition. The Albuquerque Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, assisted with the planning of the Family Days and brought community groups to the museum for tours and performances. Members of The Links were also invited to participate in docent training and give tours of the exhibition.

Proposed as a national model, the intent of the *Crossing Cultural Bridges* project is to reach out to ordinarily underserved communities through collaborations among community institutions, in this case, museums, schools, universities, state and city government, community organizations, foundations and private members of the community.

Programs

The African Arts and Culture curriculum, a key component of the project, was developed by university faculty and graduate student interns. Five content themes were identified for exploration: (1) African cultures and arts are highly diverse and complex; (2) African art must be understood as a dynamic lived reality in which artists produce and communities use art in complex socio-cultural contexts; (3) African art is dynamic and has always changed over time as a result of cultural interaction, historical pressures, community needs, and creative innovative artists; (4) the study of African art has commonly ignored the arts of women; and (5) contemporary African artists create many art forms using diverse materials, technologies, forms of expression and functions.

The themes and curriculum served as a spring board to the two-week **African Arts and Culture Teachers' Institute** held at The Albuquerque Museum in June of 2006. In the Institute, New Mexico master teachers were given the opportunity to learn about the arts and culture of Africa from experts in the field as well as to review the curriculum, explore museum and community connections, and formulate their own curricular

adaptations. Final editing of the curriculum, based on input from the teachers participating in the Institute, was undertaken by museum education staff. DVDs covering significant events of the Teachers' Institute were developed to accompany the curriculum. **Teaching mini-exhibits**, one for each of five state regions, were designed by The Albuquerque Museum to be used in conjunction with the curriculum.

Collaborating Agencies

Gratitude is expressed to all the collaborating participants and agencies for making the *Crossing Cultural Bridges* project possible.

The Albuquerque Chapter of the Links,
Incorporated

The Albuquerque Museum Foundation

Albuquerque Public Schools

City of Albuquerque Department of
Cultural Services

The Albuquerque Museum of Art and
History

New Mexico Jazz Workshop

State of New Mexico

Department of Education

Office of African American Affairs

Office of Cultural Affairs

The University of New Mexico

College of Education,

Art Education Department

College of Arts and Sciences

African American Studies Department

Office of Educational Outreach

Project Participants and Roles

Members of the Original Organizing Committee

The Links, Incorporated/Albuquerque Chapter

President, Marie Kotomori followed by
Erica Landry and Florence Bowers

Project organizer and Chair of
Services to Youth, Jean Harris

Project organizer and
Connecting Link, Joe Harris

Chair of the Arts, Audrey Worrell
followed by Pat Rosenak

The University of New Mexico

Dr. Shiame Okunor, Director of the
African American Studies Program

The Albuquerque Museum
of Art and History, City of Albuquerque
Department of Cultural Services

Dr. James C. Moore, Director

Ellen Landis, Curator of Art

Crossing Cultural Bridges Project Participants

Project Organizers

Jean and Joe Harris, The Links,
Incorporated/Albuquerque Chapter

Project Director

Chris Steiner, Ph.D.,
Curator of Education, The Albuquerque Museum

Participants

Tom Antreasian, Curator of Exhibits,
The Albuquerque Museum – exhibition designer,
Teachers' Institute presenter, traveling outreach
mini-exhibition consultant.

Stuart A. Ashman, Secretary for the New Mexico
Department of Cultural Affairs – advisor.

Elizabeth Becker, Associate Curator of Education,
The Albuquerque Museum – school outreach
program coordinator, African Arts & Culture
Teachers' Institute program assistant, Family Days
coordinator.

Florence Bowers, President, The Links,
Incorporated/Albuquerque Chapter – advisor.

Vicki Breen, Arts Consultant, State of New
Mexico, Public Education Department – art
teachers' network assistance.

Andrea Cermanski, Graduate Student, Art
Education, University of New Mexico -
curriculum writer (Units I and V).

Catherine Cross Maple, Ph.D., Deputy Cabinet
Secretary, State of New Mexico Public Education
Department – outreach assistance.

Douglas Earick, past Program
Manager/Coordinator for the College of Arts &
Sciences Office of Educational Outreach,
University of New Mexico – advisor for Teachers'
Institute and state outreach components and
representative of Dean Vera Norwood.

William A. Fagaly, The Françoise Billion
Richardson Curator of African Art, New Orleans
Museum of Art – exhibition consultant.

Doris Jackson, The Links,
Incorporated/Albuquerque Chapter – selection
committee for the Regional Trainer Awards.

I. Gene Jones, The Links,
Incorporated/Albuquerque Chapter – selection
committee for the Regional Trainer Awards.

Janet Kahn, Coordinator of Fine Arts,
Albuquerque Public Schools – advisor for school
outreach.

Erica Landry, The Links,
Incorporated/Albuquerque Chapter Public
Relations Chair – advisor.

Tom Lark, The Albuquerque Museum Curator of
Collections – traveling outreach mini-exhibition
consultant.

Sarah Madigan, Graduate Student, Art Education,
University of New Mexico - curriculum writer
(Units II and III).

Gustav Ntiforo, Ph.D., Albuquerque Public
Schools Art Teacher and University of New
Mexico Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art
Education – curriculum development, African Arts
& Culture Teachers' Institute instructor and co-
coordinator, exhibition design advisor.

Shiame Okunor, Ph.D., immediate past Director,
African American Studies Program, University of
New Mexico – curriculum development, African
Arts & Culture Teachers' Institute instructor and
co-coordinator, exhibition design advisor.

Nancy Pauly, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Art
Education, University of New Mexico –
curriculum development, African Arts & Culture
Teachers' Institute instructor and co-coordinator.

Erin Prindle, Graduate Student, Department of
Art Education, University of New Mexico and
Museum Education Intern, The Albuquerque
Museum – curriculum writer (Units IV) and
principal curriculum editor for museum, Teachers'
Institute assistant.

Pat Rosenak, The Links,
Incorporated/Albuquerque Chapter – planning
sub-committee for Teachers' Institute.

Theresa Sedillo, Senior Office Assistant
for Education, The Albuquerque Museum,
coordination assistance.

Roslyn A. Walker, Ph.D., Senior Curator of the
Arts of Africa, the Pacific, and the Americas, and
the Margaret McDermott Curator of African Art,
Dallas Museum of Art – program consultant.

Regional Trainer Teacher Awards

Southwest

Mary Falcon Flores, Las Cruces,
Las Cruces Public Schools

Dayna Griego, Santa Clara,
Deming Public Schools

Amanda “Jane” Sutherland, High Rolls,
Tularosa Public Schools

Regional Teachers’ African Arts Workshop
held in Las Cruces, September 30, 2006

Southeast

Creighton L. Edington, Socorro,
Los Lunas High School

Phyllis Muhovich, Roswell,
Roswell/Hagerman Municipal Schools

Nathaniel H. Raynor, Alamogordo,
Berino Elementary School

Regional Teachers’ African Arts Workshop
held in Roswell, October 7, 2006

Northwest

Anni D. Elwell, Fort Wingate,
Gallup/Juan de Oñate School

Eileen McDaniel, Farmington,
Bloomfield/Central Primary

Betsy Soltero, Thoreau,
Thoreau Elementary School

Regional Teachers’ African Arts Workshop
held in Las Vegas, October 21, 2006

Northeast

Rey Luján Gaytán, Springer,
Cimarron Municipal Schools

Sharyn Gray, Santa Fe,
Santa Fe/Wood Gormley Elementary

Joan “Holly” Searer, Miami,
Cimarron High School

Regional Teachers’ African Arts Workshop
held in Gallup, October 14, 2006

Central

Robyn Lyn Darling-Greenley, Los Lunas,
Albuquerque/Barcelona Elementary School

Prisca Marie Ricks, Albuquerque,
Albuquerque/Lavaland Elementary School

Stacy Leigh Tidrow, Albuquerque,
Albuquerque/Highland High School

Regional Teachers’ African Arts Workshop
held in Albuquerque, October 28, 2006

Contributors

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The Albuquerque Chapter
of the Links, Incorporated

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University of New Mexico,
College of Arts and Sciences

University of New Mexico,
College of Education

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Albuquerque Museum Staff – May, 2006

Cathy L. Wright, Director	Wanda Keahey, Office Assistant	Joey Sanchez, General Service Worker
Tom Antreasian, Curator of Exhibits	Tom Lark, Curator of Collections	Theresa Sedillo, Senior Office Assistant
Linda P. Armenta, Accountant	Robin McClannahan, Graphic Artist	Joy Serna, Senior Office Assistant
Danny Barela, Custodian	Matthew Manninen, Preparator	Joseph Shores, Preparator
Elizabeth Becker, Associate Curator of Education	Mark Montaña, General Service Worker	Deborah Slaney, Curator of History
Brian Bolman, Office Assistant	John Novotny, Maintenance Supervisor	Chris Steiner, Curator of Education
Nicolasa Chávez, Associate Curator of History	Thomas Connor O'Laughlin, Assistant Director	Anthony Vargas, Exhibit Fabricator
Douglas Fairfield, Curator of Art	Steve Pettit, Preparator	Leslie Venezuela, Public Relations and Marketing
Glenn Fye, Photoarchivist	Lupe Pollock, Office Assistant	Ramona Zamir-Gonzales, Senior Office Assistant
Lester Garcia, Custodian	Robert Prichard, Registrar	
Patricia Gonzales, Administrative Assistant	Roberto Ramirez, Lead Custodian	
Glen Gunderson, Exhibit Fabricator	Leslie Rendon, Office Assistant	

The Albuquerque Museum is a Division of the
Cultural Services Department of the City of Albuquerque

Martin J. Chávez, Mayor



www.cabq.gov/museum
Information 311 or 243-7255

Guidelines for Teaching about African Art

Nancy Pauly, Shiame Okunor, and Gustav Ntiforo, 2006

It is important to point out to students that studying cultures other than one's own can be very important, but that people can also misunderstand each other if we are not cautious.

1. Generalizations

We must be careful not to make broad generalizations about large groups of people or art. We recognize that cultures change over time. There are many people, who identify themselves with a culture, who think differently than others and do things very differently. We run the risk of over-generalizing when we talk about cultures and people in only one way. It is best to qualify statements with words such as *many*, *some*, or *a few* people do something.

2. Valuing

When looking at and discussing the art and cultures of people other than ourselves, we should be aware that some words and concepts (such as *primitive*, *developing*, and *native*) have been used for hundreds of years to devalue African people and their cultures. Avoid value judgments. Read books critically to see if authors are suggesting that some arts or cultures are inferior or superior. Read to see if book authors are claiming that Africans learned to make art from Europeans when they did not.

3. Commonalities

Ask students to find commonalities between their cultures and African cultures. Often you will find that some African people have used art in ways that are broadly similar to the ways people have used art in the United States.

4. Differences

Then, after looking at similarities, notice the differences between the ways some Africans use art in comparison with the students' experiences. Difference is not good or bad; it's just different. Remind students that learning about African art can open up new ways of thinking.

5. Contexts

When discussing art, help students to understand the contexts in which it is made.

6. A Word for "Art"

It is interesting to note that African people did not have a word that conveyed the modern European concept of "art" as something separate from life. However, most people across the African continent commonly created things that were intended to convey expressive, aesthetic, and metaphoric meanings in many aspects of their lives.

7. Stereotypes

Discuss stereotypes by asking: Have you ever been misunderstood? Has anyone every misunderstood a photograph of you? How? When some Africans think about people in the United States, they think that all the men are cowboys with guns, all the women are thin with blond hair, and all the people are rich. Why is that? Those stereotypes about Americans are found in the books, movies, and television that some Africans see. For example, in 2006, Nancy Pauly asked a 10-year-old Namibian boy to tell her his favorite TV shows. He replied, "*Bart Simpson* and *Baywatch*." He might have thought that all people in the U.S. do things like the people of *Baywatch* and all the kids are like *Bart Simpson*. However, this boy had a brother who went to college in the United States and he had met many people from the United States who visited Namibia; therefore, he also had other ideas about people from the United States.

8. Diversity

How can we encourage our students to think about diversity? We can try to hear multiple voices in our classes and encourage students to always ask questions, to wonder about things, and to speak up if they have knowledge or another point of view. This curriculum will attempt to address some important enduring ideas in some African cultures.

9. Living Curriculum

Please supplement this curriculum with other perspectives, voices, examples, and artworks. This is intended to be a living curriculum.

General Guidelines for Teachers on Representation of African Cultural Groups

Nancy Pauly, 2006

1. Make as few generalizations as possible.

When you do generalize, carefully base your statements on information. Qualify your statements by using words such as *most*, *some*, or *a few* people do something.

2. Be as specific as possible.

In other words, describe the specific person or people, places, times, and historical context as much as possible, rather than referring to people as African, which is a term for the whole continent. This would be like describing someone as North American if they lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

3. Contextualize all educational materials (stories, videotapes, written materials) as much as possible.

That is, try to give the historical and present-day context about who made the materials and why they were made.

4. Encourage empathetic understanding and cross-cultural similarities rather than emphasizing dissimilarities between African cultures and the students' cultures.

5. Relate the curriculum to a student's life, if possible.

Ask students to relate specific art, history, environmental concerns, family life, and democratic struggles to similar concerns in U.S. history or current situations within students' own communities. Encourage students to see connections to similar local issues and suggest potential local actions, if applicable.

6. Present many Africans' points of view, when possible.

For example, try to find quotes from artist in their own voices, whenever possible.

7. Always identify sources.

8. Present African people as capable of solving their own problems rather than as dependent on the ideas of others or charity.

Give examples of how African people in different countries have conceptualized and proposed problems and solutions for their countries and themselves. Discourage making outsider judgments about issues in African countries, that is, avoid asking students to solve problems for African people.

9. If you write curriculum for others to teach, identify information pertinent about yourself as an author.

Information, such as teaching experience, current position, and other experience, can inform future readers about you as the curriculum author.

