Bogolan Painting

Textiles, Mud Painting
Elementary
Four 50 minute classes

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Learning Statement:

Students will gain an understanding of bogolan (mud cloth) from the West African country of Mali. They will explore the textile’s role in Mali’s culture while thinking about the different ways people use mud cloth. Students will explore using symbols as expression, as well as compare traditional functions and contemporary applications of bogolanfini. Students will gain perception of Mali’s geographic position in comparison to the United States, culminating in the creation of their own works inspired by traditional bogolan.

State Benchmarks and Standards:

- **ART.I.VA.E.2**: Use art materials and tools safely and responsibly.
- **ART.II.VA.E.4**: Select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning.
- **ART.III.VA.E.2**: Identify various purposes for creating visual art.
- **ART.IV.VA.E.1**: Know that the visual arts have a history and specific relationships to various cultures.
- **ART.V.VA.E.1**: Explain how visual arts have inherent relationships to everyday life.

Context-Background information:

- **Bogo** means clay or mud.
- **Lan** means with or by means of

Bogolan is a painted textile which originated in Mali, West Africa. It is painted with vegetable and mineral dyes and has been created by Bamana women for countless generations. The Bamana is the largest ethnic group in Mali.

Traditional bogolan is worn in rural areas by women as wraps (skirts) and by hunters as tunics. The mud and symbols of the bogolan have protective and healing value for the wearer. The symbols function as a form of writing. Traditionally, women wear bogolan during initiation rites, marriage and childbirth and may be buried wearing their wrapper. Hunters are seen as men of great power and knowledge in Bamana culture. The designs on the hunters’ tunics are believed to protect them from animals in the bush and to control spiritual forces.

Cloth for bogolan is made of hand woven cotton strips sewn together for a particular garment. After using a mordant, the mud mixture is painted on as a background or shadow leaving the design in white. The process may be repeated three times. The leaves, bark and mud used in the process are also used in traditional medicine. Consequently, moral principles, historical references and medicinal knowledge are coded in bogolan with symbols. Today, bogolan is also produced for purely commercial or aesthetic purposes such as for wall hangings or school uniforms.
Class Discussion:

Through guided discussion, talk about the different ways people use African textiles. Discuss contemporary uses and attitudes of traditional art, and how people bring traditions into the future. Many artists today paint with mud prepared in the traditional way. It is contemporary, it is still art, and it is still African.

**Materials:** (25 students)

- Slip (stoneware or terracotta)
- Containers for the ‘mud’
- Rit-Dye™ in a dark color (brown, black, or dark green)
- Medium to thick cotton, preferably canvas
- Letter to parents explaining that fabric dye will be used in class
- Small paintbrushes
- Worksheets with African bogolan patterns on them
- Scissors that cut fabric
- Masking tape
- Example project
- Buckets
- PowerPoint on Bogolan

**Class 1:**

**Preparation:**

- Visit the *Threads of Change: The Transformation of West African Textile* website about bogolan and its culture. Show the PowerPoint slide show with examples of traditional, commercial and fine art, as well as the slide show about culture, people, and geography.
- Cut cloth to a 1x2 foot piece, one for each student.
- Prepare source material worksheets showing many different bogolan patterns.
- Send a reminder letter to parents that the next two sessions will be spent using fabric dyes and to dress accordingly.

**Activity:**

- Begin class with a PowerPoint discussion about bogolan and its functions. Explain the project, showing the example, and how it relates to the history of bogolan.
- Introduce the first steps in this project.
  - Gather cloth and a pencil.
  - Look at the source material print-offs to get ideas for African inspired designs.
  - Draw the symbols, reminding students that they will be painting the areas around the symbols.
  - Students may use bogolan traditional symbols or add symbols important to them in their daily lives. They can create symbols to express important values in their family or community.
• Set students to work on drawing their pattern. This drawing can be done directly on the cloth or on the cardboard if thin cotton is used. They should have a pencil drawing complete by the end of the hour.

**Class 2:**

**Preparation:**

- Teacher will mix up the ‘mud’. 1 package of powdered Rit-Dye or 1 bottle liquid dye to 1 half gallon of slip. Teacher may need to do test swatches to make sure the mud dyes the fabric accordingly.
- **Supplies:** student’s work, masking tape, mud, bowls for mud, paintbrushes, smocks, and fabric.

• Begin class with a demonstration of the day’s steps.
  - Place fabric square on the table spread out. If thin cotton is used place the cardboard, drawing side down and tape the cloth onto the back of the cardboard. If canvas is used, this step is not necessary.
  - Use the mud to gently paint the pattern designs and image onto the fabric. Start at the very top and move down in levels so the mud doesn’t get smudged. Use the drawing on the fabric in pencil.
  - Make sure lines are thick and bold when painted with the mud.
  - Students should understand that mud will forever dye their clothing.

• Students should finish painting by the end of the class period. They also should remove their fabric from the cardboard carefully. Fabric can be placed on a drying rack and cardboard pieces can be stacked for later use.

• Wash all of the fabric pieces in **cold** water briefly to remove the mud-dye. This can be a supervised student activity. Lay wet fabrics on paper on the floor to dry or outside in the sun. Ta-da! Done.

• Once finishing their bogolanfini, students will fill out a quick written response to four questions about their project. This will be used to evaluate their understanding. Ask:
  - How is bogolanfini traditionally used in Mali?
  - How do people use bogolanfini differently today?
  - What part of your project was inspired by bogolanfini?
  - What was your favorite part of this project?

**Evaluation:**

• Did the student utilize materials to the best of their ability in a safe and respectful manner?
• Did the student express thought and creativity through a well crafted final product?
• Does the student have a basic understanding of bogolanfini; it’s traditional and contemporary use, and the Malian culture?
• Did the student use elements in African bogolanfini to inspire their project?

**Rubric:**

• **O- (Outstanding!)** Student completed the assignment and went above expectations. Student shows a high level of exploration of traditional and modern bogolanfini by putting forth
much effort. Student demonstrates high interest in craftsmanship. Student learned about Malian culture, and utilized that knowledge to inspire their project. Student was attentive in class and worked well with others along with being respectful of materials.

- **G- (Good Job)** Student met expectations when completing the assignment. The student followed the assignment and demonstrated a basic understanding of craftsmanship as well as traditional and modern bogolanfini. Student understands Malian culture and utilized the knowledge to inspire their project. Student was attentive in class and worked well with others along with being respectful of materials.

- **S-(Satisfactory)** Student completed the assignment on time yet did not meet all expectations. The student shows little understanding of craftsmanship and/or traditional and modern bogolanfini. The student shows little understanding of Malian culture. Student may have been off task in class and or had confrontation while working well with others. Student may have shown a lapse in judgment in regards to handling materials respectfully.

- **B-(Below Satisfactory)** Student did not finish the assignment. Student shows little to no effort or value of craftsmanship and/or traditional and modern bogolanfini. The student shows no understanding Malian culture. Student may or may not have been disruptive in class and or treated materials disrespectfully.

**References:**