



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2001 Volume II: Art as Evidence: The Interpretation of Objects

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## **Rites of Passage: Initiation Masks in French Speaking Black Africa**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 01.02.06  
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This curriculum unit is designed to introduce middle school or high school students to aspects of African cultures through the study of masks in the initiation ceremonies in French-speaking black Africa. The unit can be used in French classes levels 3, 4, or 5, African literature, Art history class, African American literature or World History class. The time needed to teach this unit is between three to five weeks, depending on the constraints of the curriculum.

My objectives are to learn about culture in French-speaking Africa, to learn about initiation rites in black Africa, and to establish parallels between initiation rites in Africa and the stages youngsters go through socially and religiously in the United States. In addition, the students will analyze several African masks (most masks at the Yale Art Gallery are from French-speaking African countries). In their analysis of the African masks the students will follow an adapted version of Professor Prown's object analysis methodology.

The last objective is for the students to create their own masks and imagine a story/myth behind them. The unit requires the use of the school media center, the public library, and the use of the Internet to help the students in their assigned research. It also requires at least one trip to the Yale Art Gallery where the students will have a close encounter with African masks.

(Recommended for French, grades 3-5, African literature, Art History, African American Literature, and World History, grades 7-12.)

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