

# African Embossed Leather Box

## (art + social studies)

The Tuareg people live in the southern regions of the Sahara and have operated trade caravans across the desert for over two millennia. Historically, they are a nomadic people, but contemporary Tuareg are settled traders and artisans, renowned for creating beautiful jewelry and leatherwork. Small, hand-tooled cases made from fine African leather are prized throughout the world.



This lesson plan creates African-inspired art using inexpensive paper-maché boxes covered with new Leather Bookcloth. Lightweight, but very strong, this paper-like sheet cuts easily with scissors, and may be embossed with patterns and textures. Colorful beads may be glued or stitched onto the surface.

### Grade Levels 5-12

*Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.*

### Preparation

1. View patterns and symbols found in West Central African art. Resources: [African Arts and Cultures](#) (70177-1001) [Hands-On Culture West Africa](#) (71836-0005)
2. Coat the outside of the box with black acrylic paint as a base, allow to dry. Paint the inside of the box with a contrasting or metallic color, or use the black on the inside, too.

### Process

1. Cut the leather bookcloth to cover the mache box. Patterns for round and square boxes are listed below, adjust as needed.
2. Emboss the leather for the box sides

### Materials

[Leather Bookcloth](#), Black (12760-2070) or Brown (12760-8010), 17" x 19" piece, cut to make 9 round boxes or up to 7 square boxes (patterns provided on following page)

[Paper Maché Mini Boxes](#), square (60001-8371) or round (60001-8341), one per student

[Ten Seconds Studio Embossing Mold Set](#) (60517-1040) 6 piece mini set for patterns

[Blick 12" Plastic Ruler](#) (55403-1012) one per student

[Grifhold Burnisher](#) (56901-0000) one per student

[Acme Titanium Scissors](#) (57059-1007) one per student

[Blick Artist's Acrylic Ivory Black](#) (00624-2255), one 8-oz jar for 25 boxes

[Delta Sobo® White Glue](#) (23820-1004)

[Blick Scholastic Golden Taklon Flat](#) size 1/2" (05859-4012)

### OPTIONAL:

[Assorted Metallized Beads](#) (60776-1001) 1-lb package, distribute throughout class

[Indian Seed Beads](#) (60725-1000) package of assorted colors, 3-4 per class

[Beading Needle](#) (62981-1006) one per student

[Heavy Duty Black Thread](#)

[Ten Seconds Studio Metal Texturity Tools](#) (60516-1002), set of 6

[Coppertone Tooling Foil](#) (60504-8125)

[Jacquard Lumiere Colors](#) assorted metallics, (02953-) one jar per 20 boxes, for inside color

## Process, continued

with one of the Ten Seconds Studio Mold Sets. Place leather right-side up over the pattern and hold firmly in place. Emboss by pressing against the mold through the leather using a ball-tip burnishing tool. The patterns are designed for repetition, so move the mold and realign if needed.

3. Assemble the lower section of the boxes. Apply glue evenly to the back of the leather bookcloth with a brush:

**Round box** - glue the 2-7/8" diameter base piece first, then the wrap the 9-1/4" long side piece, aligning the edges to the bottom of the box. The side piece is not as tall as the box, to allow room to fit the lid.

**Square box** - glue the 2.75" base first, then wrap the the 11" wide x 1.75" high piece around the sides, aligning the edges to the bottom of the box.

NOTE: Paper clips may be helpful to hold leather in place while the glue is drying.

4. Design the lid of the box. Place newspapers or magazines beneath the leather bookcloth and emboss designs on the back side with the ball-tip burnisher. Decorate by stitching or gluing beads into patterns and designs.

**Round box** - apply the 3" diameter top first, then wrap the 9-3/4" long side piece on the rim.

**Square box** - glue the 3" top first, then wrap the 12" long x .75" high piece on the outer rim.

5. One the glue has dried, the embossed designs can be pushed again from the front side to add depth, definition and texture. Use the Ten Seconds Studio Texture Tools or the ball-tip burnisher.
6. Finishing options:

**Leather Cord** - to mask seams and add a professional, finished look, glue leather cord around the edges.

**Large Metal Beads** - glue a bead in the center of the lid for a handle, or to the base of the box as feet.

Side of Box - 9.25" wide x 1.125" high

Side of Lid - 9.75" wide x .5" high

Base of Box  
2.875" dia.

Top of Lid  
3" dia.

*Pattern for  
a round  
box*

Side of Box - 11" wide x 1.125" high

Side of Lid - 12" wide x .75" high

Base of Box  
2.75" x 2.75"

Top of Lid  
3" x 3"

*Pattern for a  
square box*

**Copper Foil** - Cut embellishments for the corners and lids from foil, glue in place. Also helpful in masking seams

**"Antiquing" the Leather** - Add an aged look and

further definition to the texture with a glaze of acrylic paint. Use black paint on the brown leather and a gray mixture of 5 parts black to one part Titanium White on the black leather. To "antique", brush paint over the embossed pattern, then quickly wipe off the surface with a tissue. The paint will remain in the lower areas.



*Close-up view of "antique" texture, created with black acrylic paint on brown leather*

## National Standards

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

### 5-8

Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks

### 9-12

Students reflect on how artworks differ visually, spatially, temporally, and functionally, and describe how these are related to history and culture

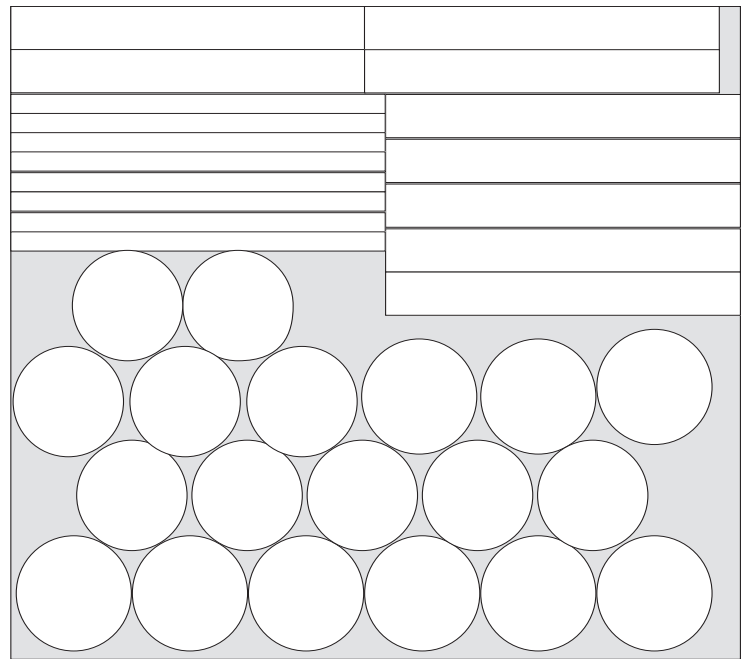
Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

### 5-8

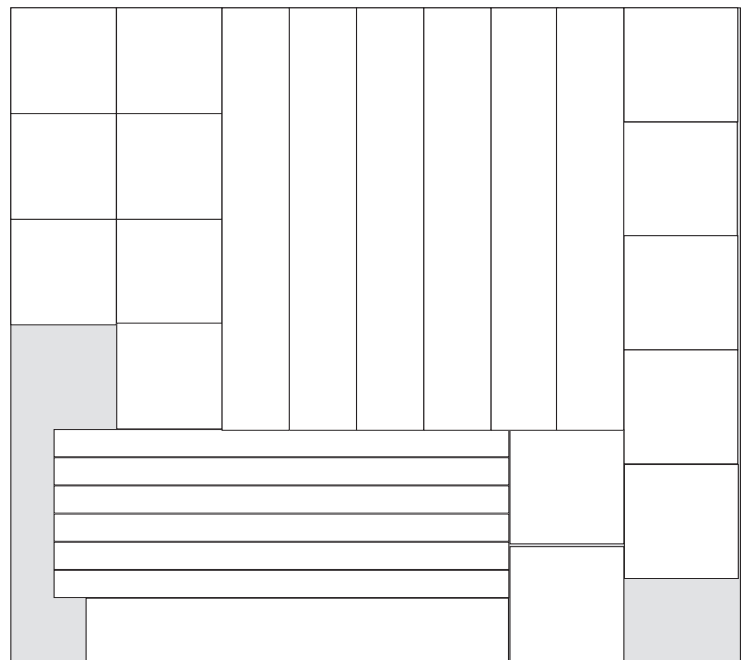
Students analyze, describe and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art.

### 9-12

Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.



*Layout suggestion to cut 9 round box patterns out of one sheet of leather bookcloth*



*Layout suggestion to cut 7 square box patterns out of one sheet of leather bookcloth*