

Kente Cloth art + social studies

Kente is the name for the beautifully-colored, traditional woven fabric of West Africa. Like most African art forms, Kente expresses more than just visual appeal — it represents history, status, religion and social values. Originally, it was reserved for royalty and only used for sacred functions. Today, it is still associated with special occasions and social status.

Colors in Kente cloth have specific symbolism:

YELLOW: Royalty, wealth and spirituality.

PINK: Gentleness, tenderness and a calm spirit.

RED: Seriousness, sacrifice and struggle.

BLUE : Good fortune, peacefulness and harmony.

GREEN: Growth, prosperity and good health.

PURPLE: Earth, nature and healing.

BLACK: Maturity and wisdom.

This lesson plan can be used with African cultural studies, as a Kwanzaa craft or in celebration of Black History month.

Grade Levels 2-5

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

Preparation

1. Cut colored tissue paper into 1"W and 1/2"W strips.

Process

1. Fold both sheets of black paper in thirds vertically: using the ruler, mark 4" from either side and fold in. Unfold, place a glue strip down each vertical edge and press down. You now have two 4" x 18" strips.
2. Using the pencil and ruler, measure and mark a line 1/2" from the edge down one side. This is a "stop" line, do not cut through it. Repeat for second black strip.
3. With scissors or decorative-edge scissors, cut a series of lines from the opposite



Materials

Blick Tissue Paper, assorted colors, (11308-1007) 12" x 18", share one package of 100 sheets across classroom

Blick Tissue Paper, black, 12" x 18", pkg of 50 sheets, (11308-2007), one per student

Blick Glue Stick (23872-1030), one per student

Tonic Studios® Kids' Scissors, (57150-6005), one per student

Armada® Paper Shaper Scissors, 24-piece classpack (57082-1024)

18" Wooden Ruler (55425-1018), one per student

Blick Economy Graphite Pencils, package of 12, (20302-2009) one per student

side right to the "stop" line. Cut waves, zig-zags or straight lines 1/2" to 1" apart. Leave about 3" at the bottom for fringe. Repeat for second black strip.

4. Select color strips — two 1"W and two 1/2"W for each black strip. Begin to weave by gluing the end of one color strip to the top edge, right against the "stop" line. Weave by lifting the next cut piece over the color strip, skipping a cut piece, then lifting the next one over. Repeat until you reach the end of the cut lines and secure the color strip with glue.

5. Repeat the weaving process with the remaining three color strips. The last color strip will need to be glued to the black tissue along the entire edge to confine it.

6. Repeat the color weaving on the second black tissue strip. Cut fringe on the bottom edge of each piece and glue the top edges together to form one long, 4"W x 26" woven piece. Place around neck for ceremonial wear or hang to display.

National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

K-4 Students use different media, techniques and processes to communicate ideas, experiences and stories

5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

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

K-4 Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures

5-8 Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures