



Africa: Masks and Beading Traditions

Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading

Africa is the second largest continent in the world. Because of its vast size, it has many remarkable physical features. The Nile River, the Serengeti National Park, Mount Kilimanjaro, the Great Rift Valley, the Sahara Desert and a huge rainforest are all located in Africa.

In addition to many physical features, Africa is also home to many people. In fact, scientists have found evidence that the first humans lived in Africa. Early Africans lived in family groups, known as tribes. Each tribe developed distinct cultural traits including language, religion, celebrations, and artistic expression. The location of the tribe determined their culture. For example, tribes living near the rainforests developed differently than those living on the huge grasslands.

Eventually, countries formed across the continent. Today, there are about 54 countries on the continent of Africa. Although each country of Africa has a unique history and culture, two cultural traits that many African tribes have in common are the use of masks and beads. The art of making beautiful beads using natural items such as clay, stones, ivory and bone was an ancient practice in Africa. The beads were used as jewelry and ceremonial decoration. Today beads are made from materials such as glass, but continue to be an important part of the culture in many areas.

The use of masks has also been an important part of the culture of many African tribes. Usually carved from wood, masks were used in ceremonies to represent people or animals. Today, masks are carved and sold as a way for local women to make money. This ecotourism helps some people in Africa have a better life.

Source: *National Geographic, Book of Peoples of the World: A Guide to Cultures*





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Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answer the following questions about Africa.

1. Africa is the second largest _____ in the world.
2. What is a tribe? _____
3. What is the meaning of culture? _____
4. What factor caused the tribes of Africa to develop their own distinct cultures? _____
5. Look at the list of physical features found in Africa. Which ones have you heard about? _____
6. Name two cultural traits that many different people in Africa have in common: the use of _____ and _____
7. What are masks usually made of? _____
8. Why do you think this is so? _____
9. Originally, what natural items were used to make beads?

10. What do you think is meant by the term ecotourism? _____
11. Why is ecotourism important for the people of Africa?





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Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading **KEY**

Answer the questions based on the reading about Africa:

1. Africa is the second largest **continent** in the world.
2. What is a tribe? **a family group**
3. What is the meaning of culture? **The way of life for a group of people**
4. What factor caused the tribes of Africa to develop their own distinct cultures? **Where they lived/ location of their tribe**
5. Look at the list of physical features found in Africa. Which ones have you heard about? **Answers will vary, but should come from list found in first paragraph**
6. Name two cultural traits that many different people in Africa have in common: the use of **beads** and **masks**
7. What are masks usually made of? **wood**
8. Why do you think this is so? **There are many trees in most parts of Africa so wood is available**
9. Originally, what natural items were used to make beads? **Clay, stones, ivory and bones**
10. What is ecotourism? **Local people make cultural items to be sold to tourists (and the rest of the world)**
11. Why is ecotourism important for the people of Africa? **the money made from selling handmade items helps them survive and improves their living conditions**