

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Explore the

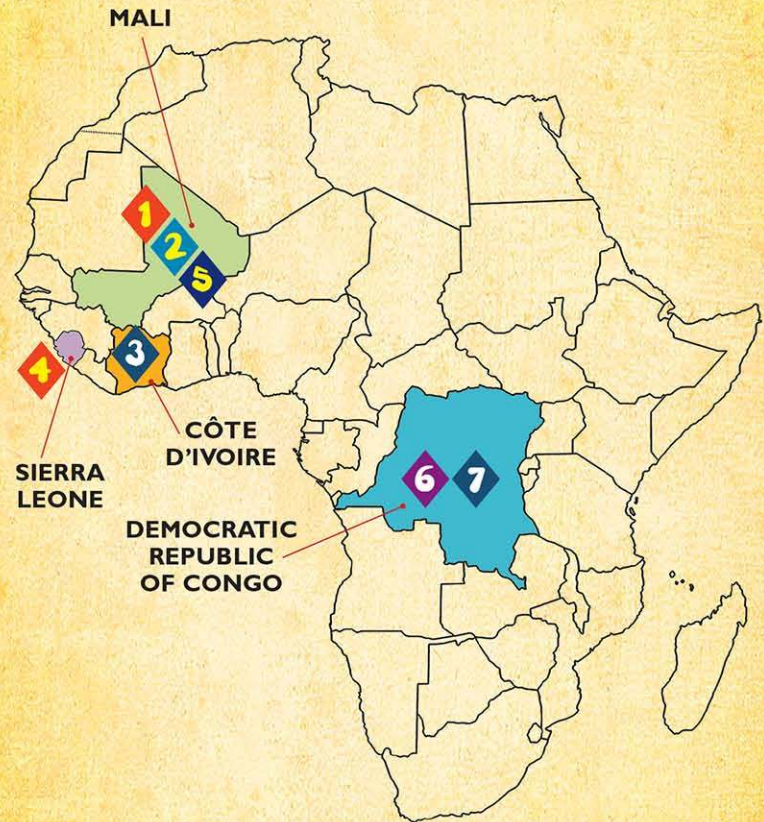
# African Art Galleries

SECRET WISDOM

Family  
Guide

## MAP OF AFRICA

Showing the countries and  
cultures the works of art in  
this guide are from



### ARTWORKS AND CULTURES

- 1** **2** Bamana peoples
- 3** Senufo peoples
- 4** Mende or Sherbro peoples
- 5** Dogon peoples
- 6** Yaka peoples
- 7** Luluwa peoples

Border and cover background details from Interior Hanging, 19th century, Mali or Ghana, Niger River, Fulani peoples (?); Rogers Fund, 1971 (1971.30)

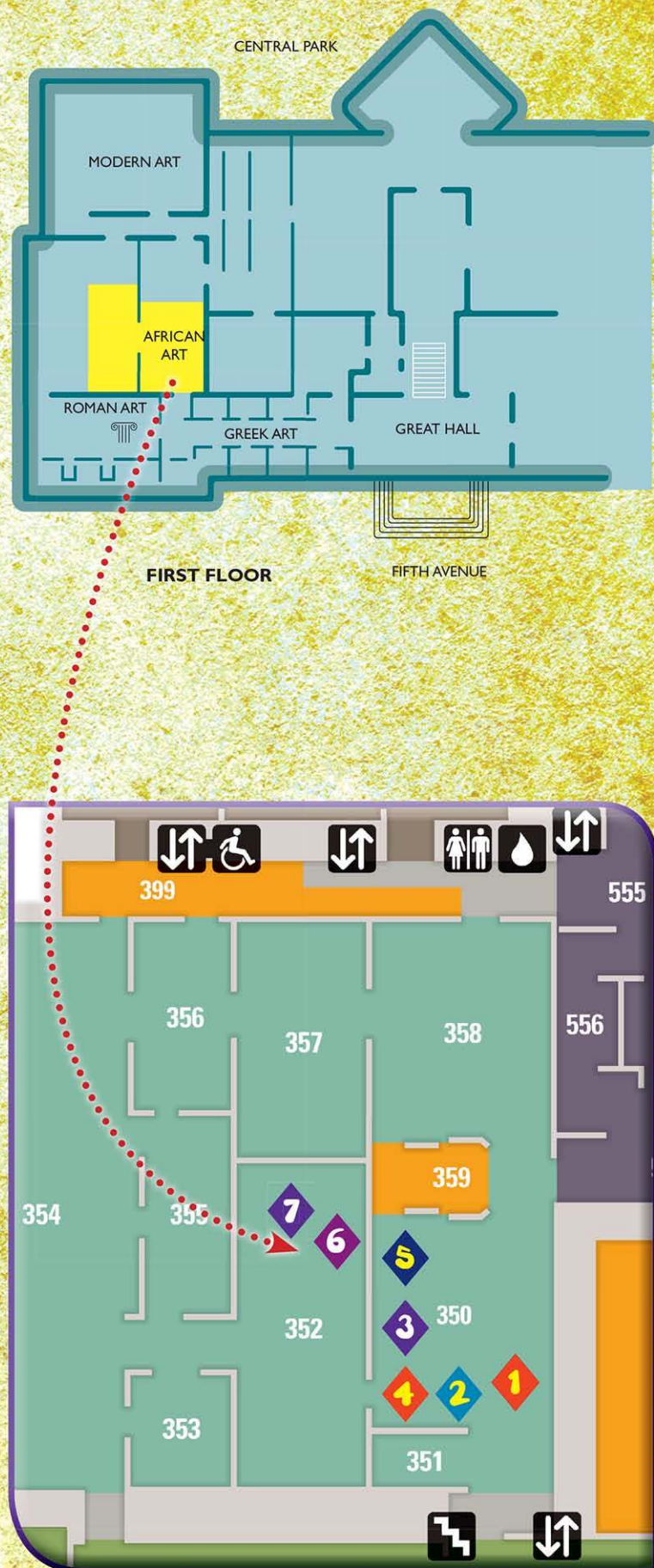


**IMAGINE** what it must be like to have all the members of your community come together to raise you. This is how it is in many parts of Africa. One way that African elders pass along knowledge and values to kids like you is through organized groups, called *associations* or *societies*. As a young member of these, you take part in rituals that move you to the next stage of your life.

Begin your own learning adventure here! Follow the numbers on the map of the African Art galleries here to find the numbered artworks in this guide.

### KEEP IN MIND

Sometimes we have to move works of art or even close galleries to prepare for exhibitions. When in doubt, ask a guard for help!





# 1 STORY

**L**isten to this story, child.  
Long ago, our people did not have enough food. The spirit of the mythical half-man, half-antelope named **Ci Wara** [chee-WAH-rah] taught our ancestors to dig into the earth and plant seeds. Sadly, our people got wasteful and Ci Wara buried himself back in the earth. To honor him, they carved headdresses and danced.



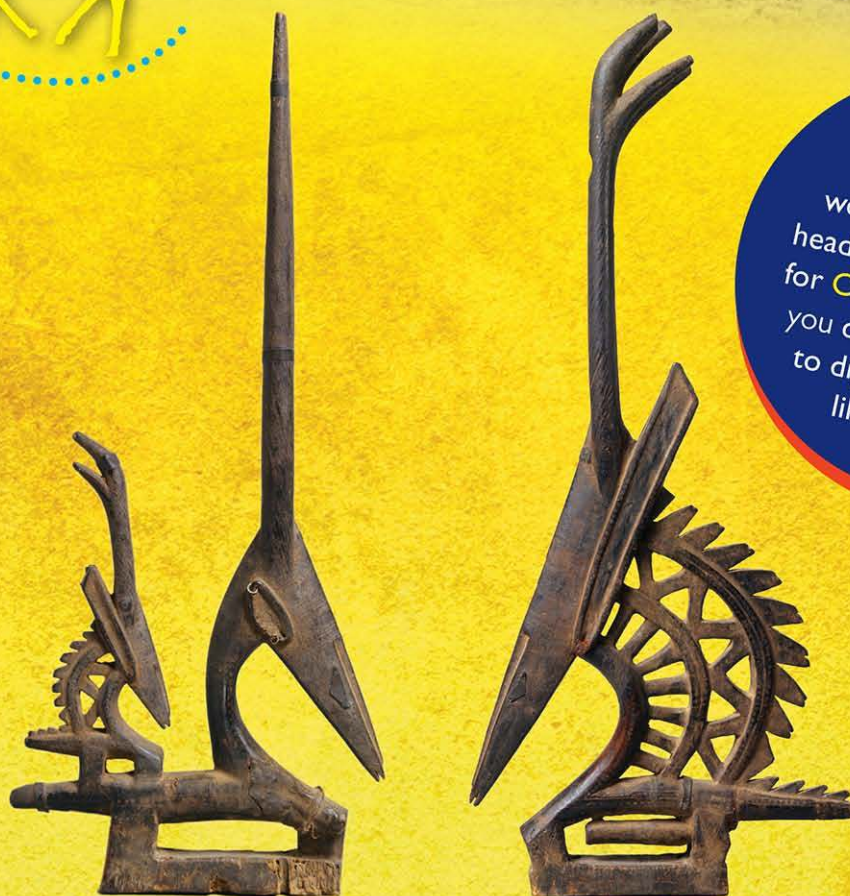
## DID YOU KNOW?

Many Bamana villages in Mali continue this tradition today. As young men dance in pairs wearing antelope headdresses, they use long sticks to dig into the earth like farmers. The bend of the male headdress reminds the Bamana people of the sun's radiance.



## ACTIVITY

Picture yourself wearing one of these headdresses and dancing for **Ci Wara**. How would you dance and pretend to dig into the earth, like a farmer?



Above: *Ci Wara* dance  
(Photograph by Edmond Fortier, Visual Resource Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

Left: Headdresses: Male (right) and Female Antelope (left) (*Ci Wara*), 19th-early 20th century, Mali, Bamako region, Bamana peoples; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1964 (1978.412.435, 1978.412.436)



## 2 RESPECT



**A**s a member of the Bamana community, you look at this sculpture of a mother and child with respect. Her name, **Gwandusu** [gwahn-DOO-soo], means strength and passion. Each year, before important festivals, the elders adorn her with jewelry and polish her with oil so she glistens in the sunlight. They place her in the middle of other carved figures to honor her as a leader.

### DID YOU KNOW?

This mother sits high on her throne to show her power and ability to protect. Notice the hunter's cap she wears and the dagger on her arm. Unlike this sculpture, real Bamana women never wear these attributes of male leaders.

### ACTIVITY

Who is a leader in your community? Draw this person and list words that describe what makes her or him a leader.





## 3

## GROWTH

**Y**ou live in a Senufo village in Côte d'Ivoire. You enter the Poro society as a young person. As elders of this secret group, we prepare you to lead your people when you're an adult. You must master one level of knowledge before moving onto the next. When you see this bird headdress in a Poro ceremony, let it remind you of how the elders protect and guide you.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

The bird in the headdress represents the yellow-casqued hornbill found in Senufo villages. Members of the Poro believe the hornbill is a symbol of intelligence and power.

**ACTIVITY**

How do you change year after year? Who helps you grow up?

Write a note to that person here:





# 4 DANCE

**L**isten to the beat of the drum and the sound of the rattle. As a Mende girl you dance. You feel your feet hit the ground and your raffia costume swing in motion. Look out through the slits in the mask to see everyone gathered for this celebration.



How do you feel wearing this mask?

Raffia is a plant material made of leaves from the raffia palm tree.



## ACTIVITY

What secret knowledge do you have? Whisper to the person next to you something only you might know but want to share.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Each year, Mende members of an all-women secret society in Sierra Leone gather in a hidden place to admit new members into their community. They wear masks like this during initiation dance performances.

A dance leader wearing a helmet mask with young girls and attendants participate in an initiation, Kenema District, Sierra Leone. (Photograph by Chad Finer, 1970. Courtesy Pascal Imperato.)

Top right: *Helmet Mask*, 19th–20th century, Sierra Leone, Moyamba region, Mende or Sherbro peoples; Gift of Robert and Nancy Nooter, 1982 (1982.489)



## 5 SPIRIT

**F**or six days, you have watched the men of your village perform in different masks, including this one. Wearing bright red and yellow, they dance with energy to honor the dead.

### DID YOU KNOW?

What do you see when you look at this mask? Only members of the village know its full meaning. They see it often during their lifetime and every time they do, they understand more about it.

*Mask (Kanaga), 20th century, Mali, Dogon peoples; Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1987 (1987.74)*

### ACTIVITY

Circle the words that best describe this mask.  
Add three words of your own.

ROUGH THICK GEOMETRIC  
SMOOTH POWERFUL JAGGED  
SHARP CURVY WEAK



*Dancers wear Kanaga masks during the Dama ceremony, Sangha, Mali. (Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, 1970. EEPA EECL 3474, Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.)*

## 6 TRANSFORM



**Y**ou are a Yaka boy and have passed a series of tests. Now it is time to make your mask. You use wood, paint, dried plants, and ashes from older masks.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Boys wear masks like this to celebrate the end of initiation. Girls and women are not allowed to see them. During initiation, elders pass along special information about the Yaka peoples' history and values. Boys prove their strength and courage during tests. The Yaka believe that this transforms boys into men. Their custom is to set fire to the masks after the celebration and save the ashes.



### ACTIVITY

What texture stands out most about this mask?  
Draw it here.



*Mask, 19th–20th century; Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yaka peoples; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.235)*

*A masked dancer performs during a Yaka nkhandu initiation, Muola Buanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo. (Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, 1951. EEPA EECL 4373, Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.)*



7

## CARE



An important woman in your village owns this wooden sculpture. She honors the figure through song and rubs the wood with oil. She cares for this delicate mother and child sculpture because it helps guard her and her babies from harm.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Children are very precious to the Luluwa people. This mother and child are part of a group of sculptures that protects the health and well-being of pregnant women and their newborns.

## ACTIVITY

What details do you notice on this sculpture?  
Sketch your favorite detail here.



*Maternity Figure (Bwanga bwa Cibola)*, 19th–early 20th century; Democratic Republic of the Congo, Luluwa peoples; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.282)

This family guide is made possible through gifts in memory of Sandy Lindenbaum.

## Education

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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