



Fig. 3.9

Belt mask. Edo peoples, Kingdom of Benin, present-day Nigeria, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Brass. H: 19.05 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of the Wellcome Trust. X65.9087.

# Unit 3

## LESSON 16: STATUS AND PRESTIGE

### A Wall of Status and Prestige, Africa, Asia and the Americas

#### Lesson Summary and Objectives

Through a study of twelve works on display, students investigate how works of art can convey status and prestige. Provided with short commentaries on the objects, they should determine how the works confer status and then add to the list prestige objects of their own choosing, justifying their selections with short written discussions on the objects. Students will

- Study twelve works of art to investigate how art can convey an individual's status and importance.
- Explore objects of power in their own lives through a creative writing activity.
- Make judgments about works of art that express notions of power and status.

#### Background Information

Personal power and prestige can be expressed through articles worn on the body, carried, displayed near an individual of importance, or displayed in a place of importance in the home. These may include emblems, insignia, or jewelry; objects made from rare and precious materials; labor-intensive works of art; and things of beauty, refinement, elegance, and grace. This section, *Status and Prestige*, features articles in a variety of materials, from gold, ivory, jade, and brass to hippopotamus teeth, shell, and feathers.

Prestige objects can be found in almost every culture worldwide, and their role often is to augment a person physically and metaphorically. Dramatic garments aggrandize their wearers, emblems extend their owners' reach, and worldly possessions signal wealth and power. Through the ownership of such objects, a person symbolically becomes more than him- or herself.



Tusk, Kongo peoples, Loango Coast,  
Democratic Republic of the Congo.  
Circa 1850. H: 42 cm.  
Fowler Museum at UCLA.  
The Jerome L. Joss Collection.  
X91.297.

# Unit 3

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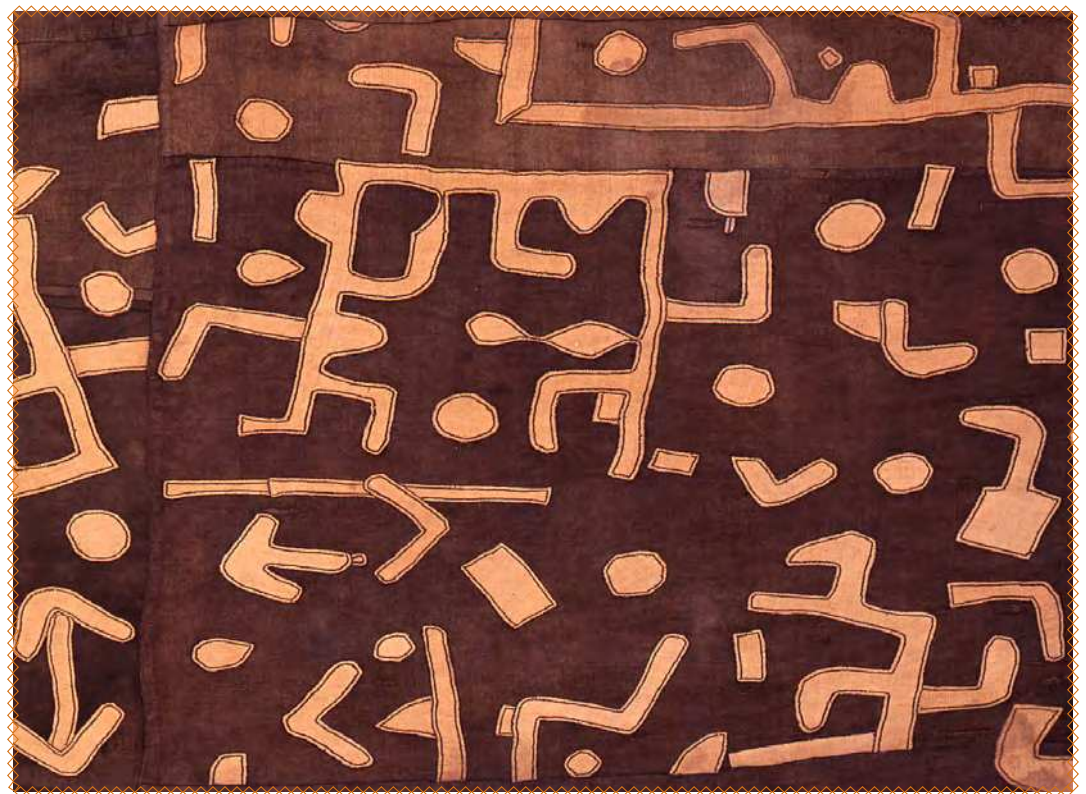
### A Wall of Status and Prestige, Africa, Asia and the Americas

#### About the Artist

Even though only one object on this wall carries the name of its artist-maker, (the counselor staff made by Osei Bonsu [1900-1977]) we can say with some assurance that the makers of most, if not all, of the objects displayed here, held status of their own by virtue of their skills and talents.

Some of the objects here are the result of concentrated, long-term labor by a single artist; others result from more erratic attention given to the production after satisfaction of regular daily chores, such as farming, were completed.

Some of the artists worked alone to create a piece, and other objects (i.e., the Loango tusk, on page 159) represent the cooperative work of members of recognized guilds. And while the working of some materials was the prerogative of only men, and others that of women, some pieces were customarily produced by members of both groups. The Kuba cloth on display (detail below), for instance, bears geometric designs added by women to the raffia leaf fibers that had been woven by men.



#### Detail

Skirt. Kuba peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 19<sup>th</sup> century.  
Raffia, natural dye. L: 404 cm.  
Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of the Christensen Fund. X86.904.





## LESSON 16: STATUS AND PRESTIGE

### A Wall of Status and Prestige, Africa, Asia and the Americas

#### Curriculum Connections

## 1. Proclaiming Status

### Activity

In the *Art and Power* section of *Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives* one wall displays over twenty objects of status and prestige representing a variety of cultures. Some of these are included here as **Handout STATUS AND PRESTIGE**.

Information about these objects, in the form of museum labels, accompanies their illustrations in a simplified format. Typically on the first line the artist is identified if known. If the artist is unknown, the object is identified, followed on the second line by the people with whom it is associated. The third line tells the date of manufacture (sometimes beginning with “circa” when dating is problematic). The last line names the material(s), usually with the most important or prevalent material listed first. Sometimes, as in these labels, additional information about the object is given.

**Osei Bonsu (Kumase, Ghana 1900-1977).**

Counselor’s staff.

Circa 1930.

Wood, gold leaf

Carried by the chief’s counselor on all public occasions, the staff is an important piece of Akan regalia, and conveys the importance of the chief and of the counselor who acts as his spokesperson and advisor.

The objects are included here because their use or display calls out the high standing of an individual. As students look at the variety of pieces with their annotations, they should try to determine why an object confers prestige by the culture for whom it was made. Is it because the object is made of rare or precious materials? Is it because the execution of the work required an extraordinary amount of time or skill? Is it because wearing or displaying the object is the prerogative of a select few?

What other qualities might make any of the objects worthy of display on this *Wall of Status and Prestige*? Students will be able to respond to the above issues on the **Handout STATUS AND PRESTIGE**.

Let students also select one or more of the objects as subject for discussion on how (or if) students consider it a work of art. In what way does (or did) it add to the prestige or status of the owner or wearer?

# Unit 3

## LESSON 16: STATUS AND PRESTIGE

### A Wall of Status and Prestige, Africa, Asia and the Americas

#### Activity

You can have students categorize the objects into lists of a) items that are worn on the person or carried, and b) those that were used for display or decoration. For further consideration have students select an object from each category as the subject of an essay or story on how they feel when they wear the piece or when they come into a room where it is displayed.

Although it is not stressed, students could benefit from locating the continent for each object, and include Asia, Africa, and the Americas as categories for discussion.

#### Activity

Tell the class that this wall could be enlarged to accommodate three more cases. Have them decide what in their culture they would place in this display. Include at least one object to be worn or carried and one for display or decoration. A written language activity, prose or poetry, would elaborate on the experience.



Necklace. Zande peoples,  
Democratic Republic of the Congo.  
18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century. Hippopotamus  
teeth, hide, metal. H: 33 cm.  
Fowler Museum at UCLA.  
Gift of the Wellcome Trust. X67.881.



## LESSON 16: STATUS AND PRESTIGE

### A Wall of Status and Prestige, Africa, Asia and the Americas



#### Photograph Captions

#### Handout STATUS AND PRESTIGE

A. Royal stool ornaments, Asante peoples, Kumase, Ghana. Before 1874. Gold. H: 12.5 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of the Wellcome Trust. X65.8524, X65.8525

B. Belt mask, Edo peoples, Kingdom of Benin, present-day Nigeria. 18<sup>th</sup> century. Brass. H: 19.05 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of the Wellcome Trust. X65.9087

C. Headdress, Paiwan peoples, Taiwan. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cotton, glass beads, teeth, claws, hair, feathers, shell, fiber, yarn, bamboo, metal, brass. H: 47 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Museum purchase. X65.8159

D. Pectoral (*sipatta*). Isneg peoples, Apayao, northern Luzon, Philippines. Early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Shell, beads, string. H: 24 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mrs. W. Thomas Davis. X85.446

E. Necklace, Zande-Mangbetu peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo. 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century. Hippopotamus teeth, hide, metal. H: 33 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of the Wellcome Trust. X67.881

F. Necklace, Yemen, obtained in Israel. 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Silver. H: 37 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene L. Trope in memory of Sophia Friedman. X77.486

G. Jaina figure in ceremonial garb, Maya, Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, or Honduras. Late Classic, 600-900 C.E. Ceramic, pigment. H: 20 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Promised gift of Barbara and Joseph Goldenberg. X2005.18.3

H. Dish for o'olikin oil, Tsimshian peoples, British Columbia, Canada. 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wood, paint. L: 24.5 cm, Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of the Wellcome Trust. X65.7474

I. Container, sarimanok bird, Maranao peoples, Mindanao, Philippines. 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wood, horn, metal. H: 22.8 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mrs. Elizabeth Lloyd Davis. X82.1545

J. Osei Bonsu (Kumase, Ghana, 1900-1977), Counselor's staff. Circa 1930. Wood, gold leaf. H: 38.5 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Steve and Linda Nelson. X88.680a-c

K. Tusk, Edo peoples, Kingdom of Benin, present-day Nigeria. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century, probably commissioned by Oba Osamwende. Ivory. H: 179.7 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of the Wellcome Trust. X65.9129

L. Skirt, Kuba peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo. 19<sup>th</sup> century. Raffia, natural dye. H: 404 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of the Christensen Fund. X86.904





## LESSON 16: STATUS AND PRESTIGE

### A Wall of Status and Prestige, Africa, Asia and the Americas

#### Note to Teachers:

This lesson is part of the curricular materials developed to accompany the exhibition *Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives*. Although this and companion lessons are self-contained, each will be enhanced when used in conjunction with others in this resource. Addressing several lessons within each unit will facilitate the incorporation of the study of world arts and cultures into your curriculum.

The lesson is based on works in the third section of the exhibition called *Art and Power*. In this gallery works are introduced that serve to define and assert power. See “Unit Three—Art and Power” for an introductory statement on the unit, along with some provocative “Questions for Thought,” and suggestions that will inspire the students to relate the unit to their own lives.

Images of objects to be shown to students may be printed as handouts (from within each lesson), viewed online at the *Intersections* web link <http://collections.fowler.ucla.edu>, or downloaded from the curriculum page on our website.

In this unit the topics and lessons are

**Lesson 12: Empowering Leaders:** Leadership Art of the Cameroon Grassfields, Africa

**Lesson 13: Negotiating Gender:** Portrayal of a Hunter: *Ere Egungun Olode*, Nigeria

**Lesson 14: Negotiating Gender:** Powerful Mother: *Ere Gelede*, Nigeria

**Lesson 15: Status and Prestige:** To Make the Chief’s Words Sweet: A Counselor’s Staff, Ghana

**Lesson 16: Status and Prestige:** A Wall of Status and Prestige, Africa, Asia, and the Americas

**Lesson 17: Harnessing Spirits:** Pacific Northwest Arts, United States and Canada

**Lesson 18: Harnessing Spirits:** The Hornbill: Bird of Prophecy, Malaysia



These photographs illustrate objects on the *Wall of Status and Prestige* and each is identified by a letter (A-L). Match the illustrations to the examples of museum labels on the accompanying 2-page handout by writing the correct letter in each box. Use the lines at the end of each label to express how the object denotes status or prestige.





# Handout: STATUS AND PRESTIGE

## FOR THE STUDENT



### Benin belt mask

Edo peoples, Kingdom of Benin, Nigeria; Circa 1550-1650 B.C.E.; Brass

Edo chiefs wore this mask, its cheeks decorated with frogs. As frogs live in two worlds—those of land and water—royalty was thought to travel between the human and spirit worlds. This mask denotes status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



### Pectoral

Isneg peoples, Philippines; Early-mid 20th century, Shells, beads, string

On special occasions Isneg men and women wore cut shell pectorals suspended from a beaded collar. This pectoral denotes status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



### Necklace

Zande-Mangbetu peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo; 18th-19th century; Hippopotamus teeth, hide, metal

The necklace effectively announced the wearer's skill as a hunter or his authority as a ruler who claims the rights to all big game animals. The necklace denotes status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



### Bird container

Maranao peoples, Philippines; 19th-early 20th century; Wood, horn, metal

This sarimanok bird container, probably from a sultan's household, was used to hold lip wax or betel-chewing ingredients. The container denotes status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



### Jaina figure in ceremonial garb

Maya peoples, Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras; Late Classic, 600-900 C.E.

A figure such as this shows us how early Maya peoples displayed status and prestige through dress, jewelry, and ornamented headdress. These figures denote status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



### Skirt

Kuba peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo; 19th century; Raffia, natural dye

Both men and women wear these textiles with bold geometric patterns. The skirts are markers of status and wealth and have been used as currency and in marriage negotiations. They are given to the family of a deceased person so he or she will be recognized in the land of the dead. This skirt denotes status and prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



## Tusk

Kongo peoples, Loango Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Circa 1850; Ivory

European images of fact and fantasy—Queen Victoria and unicorns—share this elephant tusk with African elephants, leopards, and chimpanzees. This tusk denotes status and prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



## Dish for oil

Tsimishian peoples, British Columbia, Canada; 19th century; Wood, paint

The bowl in the form of a reclining male figure was a prestige item in a potlatch, a celebration that required elaborate feasting and gift giving. The bowl denotes status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



## Osei Bonsu (Kumase, Ghana 1900-1977)

Counselor's staff; Circa 1930; Wood, gold leaf

Carried by the chief's counselor on all public occasions, the staff is an important piece of Akan regalia, and conveys the importance of the chief and of the counselor who acts as his spokesperson and advisor. This staff denotes status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



## Royal stool ornaments

Asante peoples, Kumase, Ghana; Before 1874; Gold

These precious metal objects were attached to a chief's stool but when the British destroyed the Asante capital they took possession of the pieces and removed them to Britain to be made into jewelry. These denote status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



## Headdress

Paiwan peoples, Taiwan; Early 20th century; Cotton, beads, feathers, teeth, claw, hair, shell, fiber, yarn, bamboo.

With decorations of precious beads and wild animal teeth, this was the property of a person with high status. This headdress denotes status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.



## Necklace

Yemen, obtained in Israel; 19th-early 20th century; Silver

Jewish silversmiths in Yemen made valuable heavy necklaces of solid silver that were worn by both Muslim and Jewish women. Many such necklaces were taken to Israel when Yemeni Jews emigrated there. This necklace denotes status or prestige because \_\_\_\_\_.

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**Benin belt mask**

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