Adinkra-Inspired
Self Portrait Pillows
Multicultural Lesson
Grade Level-High School
(can be modified for elementary and middle school)

OBJECTIVES

- Experiment with the idea of self portrait and symbolism
- Learn about Adinkra symbols and meanings
- Create a handmade stamp that represents self identity
- Compare today's use of symbols with those of traditional African Adinkra usage
- Create self identity pillow that reflects a personal design inspired by Adinkra symbols and techniques
- (optional) Compare cross cultural perspectives of Adinkra symbolism, Kwanzaa and Christmas.

Adinkra means “saying goodbye or farewell”, in the language of the Akan people of Ghana. Adinkra symbols are visual messages, in the form of figurative and stylized geometric shapes, printed on cloths used for mourning and other special occasions. These symbols originated in Ghana and are often made by woodcut stamps on fabric with black dye made from the bark of a badie tree. The symbols represent the wearers feelings and sentiment about the deceased. And when used for other occasions they represent concepts or original thoughts. The stamps have personal meanings, giving the garment not only a beautiful design, but also a message. Traditionally designed fabric was usually worn for special occasions, such as funerals, but can be seen on walls, pottery and even in modern merchandise.
Procedures

1. Discuss the idea of how artists express “self” in self portrait. Look at various examples of traditional portraits to experimental abstract and conceptual portraits.

2. Look at traditional African Adinkra cloth and textiles. Discuss the meanings of the symbols and how the cloths represent the people who wear them. Read the bottom of the Adinkra Cloth Symbols Chart Worksheet.

3. (Option read “The Talking Cloth” By Rhonda Mitchell to elementary levels.

4. Look up how Adinkra patterns are used today in our culture.

5. Ask students to write their name at the top of paper. Have students pass the paper around the room so that each student can write words that describe the name on the top of the paper. (remind them to use constructive descriptive words)

6. Now ask students to look at the Adinkra symbol chart and find symbols that match the list of words. Students may also add words that describe themselves to the list.

7. Ask students to think about how they would describe themselves as symbol. Discuss the ways in which we use symbols to communicate today. (Think emoji)

8. Sketch 3 examples of simple designs in sketchbook using “Workbook” format. Make a unique design that represents oneself as a means of self portrait. Students may use Adinkra symbols for inspiration and design.

9. Choose one to transfer the designs from paper to a rubber stamp block. Attach stamping rubber to a wooden block for support. on wood or cardboard blocks.

10. Draw or trace 3 small designs on stamp rubber. These designs should be about 3" x 3"

11. Cut 2 pieces fabric that will be used for the pillow. Sizes can range from 12x12 but no larger than 16x16. Choose colors for the stamps that will coordinate with one another and compliment the design.

12. Practice designs on scrap paper. Create at least 3 ideas. Choose one of the designs and stamp the pattern on the fabric.

13. Sew the fabric pieces together using a sewing machine or baseball stitch by hand. (This is a great opportunity to teach students how to use the sewing machine=life skills) Lay each piece next to one another and sew up on each side, weaving under the cloth from side to side. Taping or pinning the cloth together as you sew will help keep it in place.

14. Fold the pillow over and whip stitch around the edges of 3 sides. Stuff loosely with fiberfill and sew the remaining side.

RESOURCES

https://www.murrieta.k12.ca.us/Page/4065
https://www.zazzle.com/adinkra+symbols+pillows
Inspired by-Lesson page http://www.dickblick.com/multicultural/adinkrapillows/
Adinkra is the name given the colorful, hand-stamped and hand-embroidered cloths used for mourning and other special occasions by the Akan people of Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire (the Ivory Coast). Stylistic symbols called adinkra symbols are printed onto these cloths. Used for mourning, the symbols express the weaver’s feelings and sentiments about the deceased person. Used for other special occasions, the symbols convey such messages as hope, peace, bravery, faith, and love. Adinkra literally means “saving good-oye or farewell,” in the language of the Akan people, who comprise about one-half of the population of Ghana. Adinkra cloth symbols have been in use for hundreds of years and constitutes an ancient African weaving system of verbal and visual imagery. The symbols are figurative and stylized geometric images that embody poetic messages. Some of the symbols express the legendary history of the Akan people, and others are cultural metaphors and affirmations about philosophy, myths, legends, beliefs, rituals and social values. They contain multivariant meanings and profound truths. They provide a framework of moral values and lessons for the good life. They epitomize the African world view and their quest for truth and righteousness in the world.

The stamp designs are created from carved calabash which are dipped into a special red ink called adinkra aduro (adinkra medicine). The designs are then stamped onto a variety of colored cotton cloths to be worn for all occasions.

Heart of Africa Desiains Hartford, Connecticut
heartofafrica@gmail.com
Larissa Danowitz  
Overbrook High School-Pine Hill NJ  
High School Division Winner  
AENJ Breakfast and a Workshop

# KWANZAA PRINCIPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEC 26</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>28</th>
<th>29</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>31</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Umoja</td>
<td>Kujichagulia</td>
<td>Ujima</td>
<td>Ujamaa</td>
<td>Nia</td>
<td>Kuumba</td>
<td>Imani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Unity)</td>
<td>(Self-Determination)</td>
<td>(Collective Work &amp; Responsibility)</td>
<td>(Cooperative Economics)</td>
<td>(Purpose)</td>
<td>(Creativity)</td>
<td>(Faith)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- [Decide with your family how you will celebrate today and recognize the principle of Umoja.]
- [Decide with your family how you will celebrate today and recognize the principle of Kujichagulia.]
- [Decide with your family how you will celebrate today and recognize the principle of Ujima.]
- [Decide with your family how you will celebrate today and recognize the principle of Ujamaa.]
- [Decide with your family how you will celebrate today and recognize the principle of Nia.]
- [Decide with your family how you will celebrate today and recognize the principle of Kuumba.]
- [Decide with your family how you will celebrate today and recognize the principle of Imani.]

- To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.
- To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.
- To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers’ and sisters’ problems our problems and to solve them together.
- To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together.
- To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
- To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.
- To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.