



Spirits in Stone:

The New Face of African Art

A Teacher Resource Guide for Grades K-8

San Diego Natural History Museum

Dear Teacher:

Welcome to "*Spirits in Stone: The New Face of African Art*". These stone sculptures are created by the Shona, Zimbabwe's oldest indigenous population. Back by popular demand, the Shona exhibit will be on display from October 25-November 9, 2003.

This exhibit provides a wonderful opportunity to integrate content areas from the California Science and Social Studies Content Standards. World geography, history and cultural diversity are easily connected to geology and natural resources as you discover the geographic location of this African nation, learn about its peoples, their culture and traditions, explore the geomorphic processes that have shaped the land and study the rocks and minerals that provide the raw material for these beautiful stone sculptures.

We hope that the enclosed materials will help you prepare for and enjoy your visit. If you have any questions regarding this guide please call the Education Department, 619.255.0202.

Education Department Staff
San Diego Natural History Museum

Background Information

Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia) is a small country in southeastern Africa. The country is about the size of the state of Montana. Zimbabwe means "stone houses" and refers to the Great Zimbabwe Ruins. They are Africa's largest stone ruins south of the Egyptian Pyramids. Between 800 and 1200 years ago the Great Zimbabwe was a large trading center. Pieces of Ming Dynasty pottery and Etruscan and Roman coins have been found in recent excavations. Once held as belief, it is now known that the ancient peoples of the Great Zimbabwe were the ancestors of today's Shona people, a group that makes up about 80% of Zimbabwe's population.

The Great Dyke, a major geological formation in Zimbabwe, provides much of the stone, principally serpentine, used for the Shona sculptures. A variety of minerals in the rock produce stones of many colors. This uplifted mass (dyke) runs 310 miles through the country from the Zambezi Valley in the north to the Limpopo river in the south.

Stones have been carved in Zimbabwe for over a thousand years. However, it was not until the 1950s and 60s that the carving attracted international attention. While, in the past, the carving was done by men there is now a growing group of women who are recognized as carvers and gaining fame around the world. The stone is often carved with simple tools made from scrap metal, such as old truck springs. The rough stone is sanded with wet sandpaper. Before sandpaper, river sand on a rag was applied by hand. A lustrous polish is obtained by firing or heating the sculpture and coating it with wax (usually caruba wax). Earlier techniques used plant oils or beeswax.

Most carvers sculpt from a vision in their mind. They do not pre-sketch or pre-shape their work. The carvings are not religious objects and are not worshipped, but are considered to be expressions that show respect for ancestral spirits. Each sculpture has a deep and personal meaning for the artist.

Pre-visit Activities

Materials: map of Africa or world map, geology books, rock and mineral field guides

- Locate Zimbabwe on a map.
- On your map locate the Zambezi River Valley and Limpopo river (site of the Great Dyke).
- How is a dike formed? Look in a geology book or a rock and mineral field guide.
- Serpentine is the rock most often used for Shona carvings. Find out about the characteristics of serpentine. Use geology or rock and mineral field guides for references.
- Find out about the culture of the Shona people. How is it like yours? How is it different?
- Find out about the Great Zimbabwe Ruins.
- If you could talk to a Shona carver, what questions would you ask?

Museum Visit Preparation

- Provide an adequate number of chaperones, one for every 6 to 10 students.
- Provide chaperones with field trip information and their duties in advance of the trip.
- Review Museum manners and the importance of staying with chaperones.
- Generally, students are not to touch the sculptures. However, certain, designated sculptures will be available for the students to touch and examine.

Museum Visit Activities

- Observe the Shona video (approximately 10 minutes).
- Observe the various sculptures. Find one that you like. Observe it closely. What color is it? How big is it? Does it represent people or a type of animal? Read the description. What else is special about this sculpture?
- If the Shona sculptor is present ask him one of your questions (from your pre-visit activities).

Post Visit Activities

- Write a story about your favorite sculpture. Describe it. Why do you like it? What does it represent? Draw a picture of it.
- From your observations what are the main themes sculpted by the Shona artists?
- If you were able to talk to the Shona sculptor tell about your experience.
- If you could visit Zimbabwe what would you like to do or see there?