



FALL 2025

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TOUR CURRICULUM

Echoes of the Past

September 4, 2025 - January 3, 2026

Echoes of the Past is a landmark exhibition at the Albany Museum of Art that brings into focus the extraordinary richness and diversity of Sub-Saharan African art. This large-scale survey represents the museum's most ambitious exploration of African art in nearly fifty years. With artworks drawn from the AMA's own permanent collection—many of which have remained behind the scenes for decades due to the specific care and display needs of such pieces—*Echoes of the Past* also includes exceptional loans from regional partners such as the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University, the Savannah African Art Museum, the North Carolina Museum of Art, and Spelman College Museum of Fine Art.

This exhibition is both a celebration and a reckoning. It celebrates the deep legacy of African art within the museum's collection and its historic role in the museum's founding mission, while also coming to terms with the problematic ways African art has been historically displayed and discussed in Western institutions. It intentionally revisits this complex past—examining how works from the African continent have often been miscategorized as “primitive,” viewed through an exoticizing lens, or treated as ethnographic artifacts rather than fine art. This exhibition offers a corrective to those outdated narratives by honoring the artistic mastery, cultural significance, and enduring spiritual meaning of these works.

Visitors will encounter a wide range of materials and forms—from hand-carved ritual figures and ceremonial masks to intricate textile appliqués that narrate royal histories. Among the highlights are the Fon Artists' Appliqué Tapestries from the Kingdom of Dahomey, which visually encode cultural memory, lineage, and leadership through the symbolic use of animals and objects, and the Ibeji Figures, twin sculptures from Yoruba culture that serve not only as artistic expressions but also as spiritual vessels representing familial love, grief, and continuity.

What makes *Echoes of the Past* especially compelling for students is the opportunity to see how art is connected to community, ritual, and belief. These are not static objects but were once (and in some cases still are) active participants in ceremonies and daily life.

Students will learn how African communities transmit values, preserve history, and embody identity through art, and they'll reflect on how those same practices exist in their own cultures and lives. In addition to exploring the art itself, the exhibition pulls back the curtain on what happens behind the scenes in a museum. It highlights how collections care, scholarship, documentation, and curatorial interpretation evolve over time. Students will understand that museums are not static—they're living institutions that must grow, question their histories, and embrace more ethical and inclusive practices.

Echoes of the Past is not only an exploration of African art but a reflection on how we learn, interpret, and tell stories through art. It challenges students to think critically about questions such as: Who gets to decide what counts as “art”? How can we appreciate traditions that are different from our own? And how can museums play a role in honoring cultural heritage while also promoting inclusivity, reflection, and change?

Through this exhibition, students will be immersed in art that is rich with meaning, history, and relevance. They'll come away with a deeper appreciation for the artistic traditions of Sub-Saharan Africa, a broadened understanding of global cultural heritage, and a new way of seeing how the past continues to echo through the present.



Why This Exhibition Matters for Students:

Bringing students to *Echoes of the Past* offers far more than a visual arts experience. This interdisciplinary opportunity helps students:

- **Expand cultural awareness** by exploring artistic traditions from across the African continent.
- **Engage with global history** through the lens of art, identity, trade, colonialism, and cultural preservation.
- **Challenge bias/stereotype** by investigating how African art has been marginalized in historical scholarship.
- **Explore ethical stewardship** and museum practices related to the display, conservation, and interpretation of non-Western art.
- **Reflect on universal themes** like remembrance, family, spirituality, symbolism, storytelling, and community.

This exhibition provides touchpoints for cross-disciplinary learning in **history, world religions, anthropology, literature, social studies**, and **visual art**.

Key Learning Points:

- **Regional & Cultural Identity:**
Each work represents a distinct community, spiritual tradition, and artistic practice. This highlights the vast cultural and linguistic diversity within the African continent.
- **Historical Context and Shifting Scholarship:**
Many works in the AMA collection were acquired in a time when terms like “primitive” were used to describe African art. Today, those labels are seen as harmful and reductive, and the exhibition acknowledges and addresses this critical shift in interpretation.
- **Museum Ethics & Care:**
Many objects in the collection have not been publicly displayed due to the need for specific conservation equipment. The exhibition brings attention to the challenges museums face in protecting and preserving fragile cultural objects.
- **Narrative Art & Community Learning:**
 - *Fon Appliqué Tapestries* from the Kingdom of Dahomey use animal and symbolic imagery to share royal histories and victories.
 - *Yoruba Ibeji Figures* embody spiritual care and remembrance for deceased twins, showing how sculpture serves as a living part of family and ritual life.
- **Reclamation & Representation in the Art World:**
Despite influencing artists like Picasso and Kandinsky, African art was long excluded from the Western fine art canon. *Echoes of the Past* repositions these works as equal participants in global artistic heritage.

Field Trip Schedule:

I. Arrival & Welcome (10–15 minutes)

- Brief orientation in the lobby.
- Review museum behavior and expectations.

II. Gallery Tour (30–40 minutes)

Students will explore key works with an AMA gallery guide or their teacher using age-appropriate prompts. Tour focuses include and are not limited to:

- Locating African countries in the Atlas.
- Storytelling and symbolism in the Fon appliqué tapestries
- Ritual and remembrance in the Yoruba Ibeji sculptures
- How art reflects everyday and spiritual life
- Materials and techniques used in traditional African art (wood, textiles, metal, beads)

Interactive Questions:

- What animal symbols do you see? What might they mean?
- How do the artists show love, memory, or community through their work?
- What do you think makes something “fine art”? Who decides?

III. Hands-On Studio Art Workshop (30 minutes)

Students create a symbolic art object that reflects something important to their own identity or community.

Sample Projects:

- **Appliqué Narrative Banner** (grades 3–12): Using felt, yarn, and fabric, students create a banner or wall hanging that tells a personal or family story through images and symbols.
- **Remembrance Sculptures** (grades K–5): Using clay or paper mâché, students make a figure or object that honors a memory or person from their life.
- **Pattern & Print Collage** (grades 3–8): Inspired by textile and wood designs, students build collages using traditional African pattern motifs.

IV. Reflection

- Students share their artwork with peers
- Discussion of their favorite object in the exhibition

Pre-Visit Classroom Lesson Options:

Lesson 1: What is African Art?

- Discuss common misconceptions students may have (e.g., that Africa is a country, not a continent of many nations and traditions).
 - Introduce key terms: ritual, oral tradition, symbolism, colonialism, artisan vs. artist.
 - Locate featured regions (Nigeria, Benin, Yoruba Kingdoms) on a map.
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Post-Visit Activities:

Reflect & Respond:

- Write a journal entry or poem inspired by a piece from the exhibition.
- Draw a visual timeline of the exhibition, noting artworks, themes, and your personal reactions.

Research & Present:

- Students research an African artist or community featured in the exhibition.
- Students create a small group presentation or art piece to share with the class.

Cross-Curricular Connections:

- **Social Studies:** Link artworks to historical events such as colonialism or independence movements.
 - **Literature:** Pair with African or African- American folktales or poetry (e.g., *Anansi the Spider*, *Africa* by David Diop)
 - **Science/STEAM:** Explore materials used in African art (e.g., metallurgy, plant dyes, textile weaving) and how they reflect the environment and natural resources.
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Standards Connections:

This experience supports:

- Visual Arts GA Standards of Excellence (VAK–VAM)
- Social Studies Standards: Geography, Culture, and World History
- ELA Standards: Informational Text, Speaking & Listening, and Creative Writing
- SEL (Social Emotional Learning): Empathy, Identity, Reflection
- For specific grade/class standards to be met, please reach out to annie.vanoteghem@albanymuseum.com.