Lesson Plan: Making an Asante Amulet Bracelet or Necklace

The amulet activity may be used when studying Ghana, trade, and the spread of Islam in West Africa. In preparation for the Royal Class outreach program, amulets should be prepared ahead of time and be worn during the workshop.

Background
Asante amulets contain powerful substances: herbs, spoken words, or texts from the Qur’an, the Muslim holy book. Many Asante people are Muslim, but just as many are Christians or followers of the indigenous Asante beliefs. Yet followers of all three faiths use Qur’anic amulets as a result of the centuries-old influence of Muslim North Africa on the cultures of West Africa. Muslim traders and teachers emigrated to Ghana, gaining power and respect because of their professions. It was not uncommon for a revered Muslim teacher to serve as the king’s advisor.

Traditionally, Asante amulets were made by writing wisdom sayings or verses from the Qur’an on paper. A magic square or diagram was then placed on top of the writing. Magic squares originated 4000 years ago in Egypt, India and China. They began as numbers carved into stone. The squares were believed to have astrological qualities of divination and were introduced to Africa by Arabian mathematicians. The written maxims covered by the power of the magic squares were then enclosed in metal or fabric cases.

Discussion: What is an amulet? (An amulet is an object believed to give protection to the person who wears it.)

MAKING AMULETS WITH MAGIC SQUARES

Supplies: for Magic Squares

Magic Square Diagram (full size grid available for download)
Paper
Colored Pencil
Supplies: for Amulet Case

Cardboard cut into 3 sizes:
- 4” x 3”
- 3” x 2”
- 1” x 1”

Awl for piercing cardboard
Tapestry needle
Aluminum foil
Copper tooling foil or metal flashing
Glue Gun
Black yarn or leather cord for stringing

Preparation:
1. Cut all cardboard to size and pierce largest square with awl in the top corners.
2. Cover each piece with aluminum or copper foil. (They may choose to alternate aluminum and copper.)
3. Re-Pierce holes for stringing with awl or tapestry needle.
4. Cut yarn or leather into 2’ to 3’ length pieces.
In the Classroom:

1. Discuss the history of magic square. Tell students that for this project, all numbers in any direction will add up to 15.

2. Pass out magic square diagram (available as PDF) and allow students to fill in numbers. To get them started, instruct them to place a 2 in the top left square, a 6 in the top right square, and a 3 in the bottom center square. Fill in the empty squares. Students may add words, pictures, or designs that might serve as protective devices.

3. Extra pieces of foil may be added for decoration.

4. Fold the magic square so that it can be held in place between the largest two rectangles. Using a hot glue gun, fix it to the large square and glue the 3” x 2” rectangle on top of it so that the square is hidden behind it.

5. Attach the small square to the top forming a stack of three rectangles of decreasing size.

6. Using the tapestry needle, thread the yarn, gimp, or leather through the amulet case so it may be worn around the neck or wrist. Tie a double knot at the back of the amulet and snip off the ends.