

**TITLE:** *Songye Kifwebe Female Mask*

**ARTIST:** Songye People

**DATE:** n.d.

**SIZE:** 12 1/2" high

**MEDIUM:** Sculpture/Mask— African wood and polychrome paint

**ACQUISITION #:** 2006.45

**ADDITIONAL WORKS BY ARTIST IN COLLECTION?** YES NO\_X\_



## Songye People

The Songye people live in the southeastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (located in the middle of Africa) on the banks of the Lualaba River. Fathers hold a special place in Songye families. Songye people are patriarchal with fathers acting as family leaders, making major decisions. Mothers care for the family, and tend domestic jobs such as harvesting crops. Historically, the Songye and their neighboring relatives, the Luba, have the same ancestral roots sharing the ancestor, Kongolo (a mythical deity traced back to the 16th century). The Songye Bwadiba Kifwebe society receives enormous respect among the people because the society protects the community from disasters like hauntings by ancestral ghosts.

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

These masks were and still are important in Songye religious, social, and magical rituals. Specifically the Kifwebe masks, the most well known of Songye masks, are used to ward off disaster and threats to the tribe. Songye also wear these masks during ceremonies for people who die, during rituals for the new tribe leaders, to properly welcome visitors, and to celebrate a boy's life when he officially becomes a man. Female masks summon spirits of goodwill to impact the future.

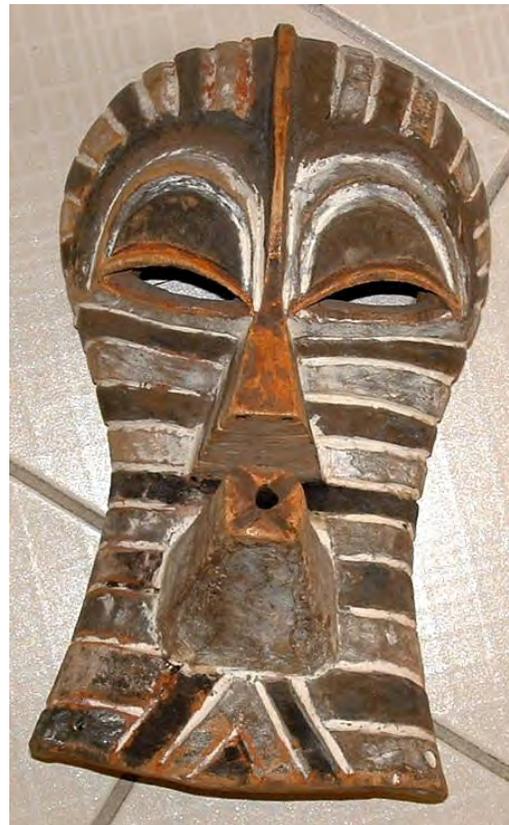
## MEDIA DESCRIPTION

Several distinct features separate the Songye Kifwebe masks from other African masks. Typically the Songye combine abstract shapes, texture, and scar-like lines in these masks. Alternating black and white lines give the mask an other-worldly effect during ritual dances. A crest runs from the top of the skull toward the nose of each mask. The crest represents the spiritual power in the mask and the power it gives the person who wears it. Bigger crests signify more power; smaller crests signify less power. In this patriarchal society a small crest is often used to represent a female during a ritual. The Songye craft these masks from various types of wood found in the forests as well as leather, fabrics, and paint. Mask colors carry meaning: red, blood and power; black, witchcraft; white, peace and light.

## Glossary

**Patriarch** — the male head of a family or tribal line.

**Decipher** — to discover the meaning of.



## What Happens During a Mask Ceremony

During the mask ceremony the mask wearer dances, falling into a deep trance. During this state of mind he/she talks with the ancestors. A wise person or translator sometimes accompanies the wearer of the mask during the ritual. The dancer brings forth messages of wisdom from the ancestors. Often the messages are grunted sounds and the translator will accurately decipher the meanings. Rituals and ceremonies always include song, dance and music, played with traditional African musical instruments. Songye musical instruments include drums, single-note flutes, ocarinas, round shaped wood-wind instruments, gongs, and rattlers.

## RESOURCES

[http://www.randafricanart.com/Songye\\_Kifwebe\\_female\\_MF.html](http://www.randafricanart.com/Songye_Kifwebe_female_MF.html)

[http://www.rebirth.co.za/African\\_mask\\_history\\_and\\_meaning.htm](http://www.rebirth.co.za/African_mask_history_and_meaning.htm)

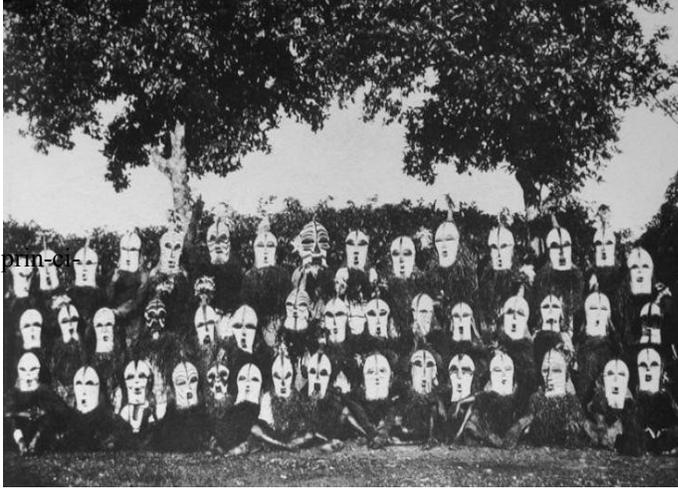
<http://www.zyama.com/songye/pics.htm>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2006/mar/15/art>

Completed Summer 2009, Emmalee Daivd

## Songye Masks and You Activity Lesson Plan: K-5

**Session Activity:** After viewing the Songye Masks, students will learn about the art of design and construction of a mask. Students will also learn about the Songye culture and the way masks play an intricate role in that society. Some guiding questions to help facilitate students understanding include questions such as “What is a mask?” “When and why do Songye people wear masks?” “What story can a mask tell?” This activity will allow students to relate to the process of mask-making while representing Florida cultural issues in their masks (see Activity Procedures below).



Congo 1934

### Objectives:

1. Become aware of the social purpose and significance of cultural artifacts such as masks.
2. Study the characteristics of masks. Note design elements and principles used in making masks.
3. Utilize elements and principles of design in a three dimensional form — particularly the principles of balance and repetition.

### Materials:

various mask handouts, 9" x 12" construction paper, assorted collage papers, scissors, fancy cutting scissors (optional), glue, fish line for hanging (optional), feathers (if desired)

### Activity Procedures:

Start with class discussions about Songye Masks and Songye culture. Show images of Songye Masks and people. Have students describe the mask elements and/or principles. Ask the students to utilize the materials named above but create designs that look something like Songye designs, for instance perhaps utilize the Songye color scheme. Ask students about scary things that we as Floridians would like to prevent—like hurricanes. Ask them to tell ways we try to prevent disasters such as these. Then ask them to design masks, like the Songye, that show our desire to prevent them.

### Sunshine State Standards: K-5

**Standard:** The student understands and applies media, techniques, and processes.

**Benchmark Description:** The student uses two-dimensional, and three-dimensional media, techniques, tools, and processes to depict works of art from personal experiences, observations, or imagination.

### Sunshine State Standards: 6-12

**Standard:** Utilize historical inquiry skills and analytical processes.

**Benchmark Description:** Evaluate the role of history in shaping identity and character.

## Picasso and African Masks Art History Lesson Plan: 6-12

**Session Activity:** Picasso’s painting *Les Femmes d’Alger* (shown right) features women wearing African masks. Show this image after discussion of Songye Masks from the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as discussion of the general characteristics of masks. Have students research the African communities Picasso chose to represent in his selection of masks and the reason he did so. Use the following prompts for discussion and for structuring the content of art historical papers by students.

### Prompts:

1. What is alike and what is different about the Songye and Picasso masks?
2. Do you think Picasso used the masks for the same reasons the Songye People created them? If not, why do you think Picasso used the masks in his painting?
3. Look for the use of masks in other Picasso works. Discuss them.
4. Do you think Picasso was unethical for copying masks or simply creative?



Picasso, *Les Femmes d’Alger*, oil on canvas, 1907.