



Education Department

Title: Juju bags (Medicine Bags)

Level: Any

HISTORY/ART (1 lesson)

OVERVIEW

Students will learn about African juju bags and create their own African-inspired juju bag.

History Standard 1.4 Students compare and contrast everyday life in different times and places around the world and recognize that some aspects of people, places, and things change over time while others stay the same.

OBJECTIVES (SWBAT)

1. Discover and discuss the uses of juju bags in the past and present. Consider their spiritual, protective and healing uses.
2. Design and create a juju bag.
3. Select meaningful ingredients to fill and embellish their personal juju bags.

MATERIALS

- String or raffia
- 6x6 square of cloth (eg. burlap or muslin)
- Scissors
- Shells, beads, leaves, minerals, stones, feathers, sequins etc. (for embellishment or filling)
- Herbs and/or medicinal plants (i.e. chamomile, lavender, sage, eucalyptus, dandelion)
- Permanent markers to write text or symbols
- Background information on juju bags
- Small personal items

PROCEDURE

1. Place cloth square flat on a table. One side of the cloth will be the outside so any symbols written on it will be visible, the other will be the inside when it becomes a pouch.
2. If students have done the West African naming lesson (see Akan naming lesson), they can write their West African name on the outside of the cloth with a permanent marker.
3. Select items to fill juju bag (small personal items, herbs, shells, etc).
4. Place items in the center of the cloth, making sure the name is on the opposite side.
5. Pull up sides to the center and gather together so that the cloth looks like a pouch.
6. Tie a piece of string or raffia around the center of the pouch, making a tight knot.
7. Make sure all items are secured in the pouch.
8. Decorate the string or raffia with beads, ribbons, small pieces of cloth, more string and/or shells.
9. Attach a longer string to the pouch to wear as a necklace or attach to a belt loop or a backpack.

*We recommend making an example beforehand for your reference. See New Orleans mojo/ gris gris bag on page 3 for an image of what the bag may look like when completed.

Juju Bags: Spiritual Objects of African Origins

Whether it is known as a *mojo* or *gris gris bag* in New Orleans, a *juju bag* in parts of West Africa, and a *pakèt kongo* in Haiti, nearly all cultures have a version of a medicine bag. It is often a small, portable pouch of carefully chosen roots, herbs, plants, minerals, and/or animal parts.

There are many different kinds of medicine bags because healers use their own unique knowledge and materials to combine the most powerful natural and man-made resources available. Some call the people who use the power of medicine bags leaf doctors, witch doctors, shamans, conjure men/women, hoodoo or voodoo men or women, root healers or herbalists.

Medicine bags can be used to ward off evil, absorb negative energy, remove curses, attract good luck and heal the sick. To ensure effectiveness, they are usually worn close to the body or hung over passageways (such as doors).

Paket Kongo (Haiti)



* Mojo /gris gris bag (New Orleans)

