

# STUDENT ACTIVITY

## SANKOFA: Resistance Through Art







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## **SANKOFA: Resistance Through Art**

**SANKOFA** is a word derived from the Akan tribe in Ghana. It symbolically depicts a bird turned backward retrieving an egg from its back. It teaches us that we must go back to our roots in order to effectively progress in the future.

The word sankofa is derived from the words:

**SAN** (return),

**KO** (go),

**FA** (look, seek and take).

### **Discussion:**

Discuss the meaning of sankofa, its importance and how it relates to the individual and culture of people.

Present a basket of plastic eggs. Inside of the egg, students will find African proverbs or local expressions and idioms they may be familiar with to discuss the significance, lessons and cultural connections found in these expressions. Contents of each egg will vary.

Allow students to discuss lessons, traditions and experiences learned from elders or important people in the family. This may include family reunions, cooking, holidays and other traditions.

Be sure to focus on why these traditions are important and how they preserve culture.

### **Movie reference:**

As Nunu shared stories with life lessons and beliefs, storytelling continues to be one of the most important ways that traditions and belief systems are passed down.



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### FOR DISCUSSION

What does this sign mean?



and this one?



and this one?



Intangible IDEAS, BELIEFS, and HOPES can be represented by using these hand signs. We have learned to see specific ideas and qualities in these SYMBOLS, and the Akan people of Ghana, Africa, also created a visual shorthand to communicate deep truths. They created ADINKRA SYMBOLS.

In Ghana, Africa adinkra symbols might have appeared in pottery, furniture, architecture and, originally, in fabrics worn by royals during important ceremonies. You might not even realize that the *Black Panther* film featured some of these symbols in tribal attire.



### DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

**In the film SANKOFA, this special adinkra symbol appears at the top of an elder’s staff and around the neck of our story’s hero. Sankofa means “return and get it.”**

This idea is expressed as a mythic bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth. This reminds us that in order to understand our present and ensure our future, we must know our past.

The sankofa symbol is a meaning of courage and resilience from the stories of our ancestors. To the Akan, it is this wisdom in learning from the past which ensures a strong future.





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**MATERIALS:** WATER, AIR DRY CLAY, NEEDLE TOOL or A PLASTIC KNIFE, A BRUSH AND A CARDBOARD CUT-OUT OF THE SANKOFA BIRD.

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**Using clay – one of the most ancient mediums – we can create a 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional sankofa.** With water and earth, we can use the SLAB METHOD to create a medallion where we carve the bird into wet clay, or we can use the PINCH METHOD to make a 3-dimensional bird facing back toward the past. Either method will give us a charm that reminds us that the wisdom in our past empowers and emboldens us.

**STEP 1** Create the charm by creating a circular slab. Once we have used water to smooth the surface, we will press the cardboard sankofa into the clay.

**STEP 2** Using the needle tool or the point of the plastic knife, we will trace the outline of the sankofa bird onto the slab. Once you lift up the cardboard cut-out, use the brush to make sure your lines are clean.

**STEP 3** The last touch is making a tiny piece of clay into the egg by turning it between two fingers. Place it at the bird's beak and you have a sankofa!

This charm reminds us we must remember to "return and get it!"



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**The Ron Clark Academy (RCA)** is a highly-acclaimed, nonprofit middle school located in Southeast Atlanta known for creating a loving, dynamic learning environment that promotes academic excellence and fosters leadership.