

# Discovery Theater & African Art!

## African Visions Gallery

### Directions

- Come out of the lecture hall and face the circular railing. Go to your **right** around the railing and out through the short corridor. Before reaching the elevators, go **left**, then **left** again up the stairs.
- At the top of the stairs, go **left** a few steps and enter the large, blue-carpeted space.
- Go between the pillars at the **right** to enter the African Vision gallery.
- Head **right** into the room with orange walls. To your **right**, find the large wooden sculpture in front of the glass and grass screen.

**Note to Teachers.** In African art, figures are frequently shown in the nude. These figures represent ideals of human and aesthetic beauty, just as they do in classical Greek art and that of other cultures around the world. It is also very hot in many African countries, so people who live out of doors wear very little.

### Discussion

Family is important everywhere! When things are important, people all over the world show that fact through their stories, their songs, and their art.

- **Who** is depicted in this sculpture? (*A mother and baby.*) What are they doing? (*The mother is sitting on a stool, holding the baby.*) What is the sculpture made of? (*It is carved from wood.*)
- In the country of Mali, this figure was used during special **ceremonies** to help women have strong, healthy babies. Is there something about it that makes it seem **powerful**? (*Size; strong shapes.*)
- Do you ever see pictures of mothers and babies in your **everyday life**? Where? (*Storybooks, commercials, magazines, baby food labels, etc.*) How are they like this figure? What **messages** do they have for people?
- **Look** at the mother's hands and the baby's hands and feet. How do you think the baby feels? (*Safe? Protected?*) Why do you think so? How do you think the mother feels? Why?



*This program was made possible by a grant from The Smithsonian Women's Committee.*

## Directions

To the **right** of this tall sculpture is a shorter showcase with two figures inside. Look at the one holding a pole-like object.

## Discussion

- **Who** is depicted in this sculpture? (*A woman.*) What is she wearing? (*Beaded jewelry.*) What is she doing? (*She is pounding cassava, a starchy white root that people eat in Africa.*) What roots do we eat? How about potatoes, and sweet potatoes? Cassava roots are like those. The roots are put in the container and pounded again and again with the heavy pole.
- Pounding cassava is hard work. **Look** at the woman's **hands and shoulders**. What do you notice about them? (*Large, strong.*)
- This woman is probably the younger wife of a chief, who is responsible for preparing his meals. It's an important job, because if the cassava is not prepared properly, it is **poisonous!** The chief must **trust** his wife to do her job correctly. Do you think she looks trustworthy and dependable? Why? (*Strong shoulders, arms, hands. Sturdy feet, legs slightly apart, standing firmly. Can't knock this woman over!*)
- Do you know of food that could make you sick if it isn't cooked correctly? (*Meat, for instance, if not thoroughly cooked.*) Who makes the meals in your house? **Is that an important job?**
- What have **you** learned to cook?

