

## Adinkra Symbols Stamping Activity

*Adinkra (uh-DINK-ruh) symbols are used by the Asante people of southern Ghana in western African to represent memorable expressions or principles. What message will you create?*

### Supplies:

Adinkra symbols (see attached sheets)

Printer and regular printer paper

Scissors

X-acto knife (not necessary, but helpful for more precise cutting)

Tape

Material to make your stamp (a piece of cardboard or a Styrofoam plate)

Acrylic paint

Bottle caps

Glue

Sponges

Disposable plate to put paint on

Something to stamp (shirt, cloth, paper, etc.)





### Instructions:

1. Print symbol sheets and cut desired symbols using scissors. An X-acto knife will help cut out openings inside the symbol or with intricate patterns. Ask an adult for help! *Remember that the different symbols have different meanings. You can create a story or a message by pairing together different symbols.*
2. Tape the symbol to a piece of Styrofoam or cardboard. If using cereal box, tape symbol to the printed side of the box, so that the brown/unprinted side will be your "stamp" side. Cut around symbol to create your stamp.
3. Glue a bottle cap (or similar object) to back of your stamp to serve as the handle. This makes it easier to apply the paint and make the stamping pattern. If the design is not symmetrical, compare with the printed symbol to distinguish the front side of the stamp from the back. Allow glue to dry and cap to adhere to stamp.
4. Apply acrylic paint to stamp.
  - a. If using Styrofoam, pour paint into a dish and dab Styrofoam stamp into paint.
  - b. If using cardboard, pour paint into a dish and dab a sponge into the paint. Then dab the surface of the stamp with the sponge.
5. Once the surface of the stamp is fully covered in paint, carefully apply stamp to shirt, cloth or piece of paper. Be sure to cover your workspace to make sure paint

doesn't bleed through! (If stamping onto a shirt, you might want to put a piece of cardboard in between the two sides of the shirt to prevent paint from bleeding through onto the back of the shirt). Repeat as desired with same or different stamps. *What story did you tell with your stamps?*

## ADINKRA SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS





### SHEET 1

	NAME	TRANSLATION (Approximate)	MEANING
	Ananse Ntontan	Spider's Web	Wisdom, creativity
	Fawohodie	Independence	Independence, freedom, emancipation
	Odo Nnyew Fie Kwan	Love Never Loses its Way Home	Power of love
	Sankofa (Alternate version)	Look to the Past to Understand the Present.	Learn from the past

### SHEET 2

	Denkyem	Crocodile	Adaptability
	Nsoromma	Child of the Heavens	Guardianship
	Nyame Nti	By God's Grace	Faith and trust in God
	Sankofa (Alternate version)	Look to the Past to Understand the Present.	Learn from the past

SHEET 3

	Duafe	Wooden comb	Beauty, hygiene, feminine qualities
	Fihankra	House/compound	Security, safety
	Gye Nyame	Except for God	Supremacy of God
	Nyame Biribi Wo Soro	God is in the Heavens	Hope

Symbols and meanings from [www.adinkra.org](http://www.adinkra.org)

### About Adinkra Symbols

Adinkra symbols are used by the Asante (or Ashanti) people of southern Ghana in western African to represent memorable expressions or principles. Adinkra symbols can be found on fabrics, pottery, woodcuts, and walls and other architectural features. Adinkra cloths were traditionally worn by royalty, particularly at funerals and other significant occasions. The symbols are decorative in appearance but each carries a specific meaning that is often connected to, or translated as, a proverb. There are hundreds of adinkra symbols, which can be combined in many ways to create different messages. Perhaps the best-known symbol of Adinkra is Sankofa, which translates approximately to "return and get it" or "look to the past in order to understand the present." Sankofa is represented by two symbols: a heart-shape with flourishes, or a bird that is looking backwards, like a preening bird.

Ghana and other countries in Western Africa have a deep connection to America through the trade of captive human cargo that lasted for over three centuries. People of western African origins, by birth or by ancestry, were enslaved throughout the Americas and the Caribbean, including people enslaved by members of the Philipse family of Philipsburg Manor. We know of two men, Kofe and Cuffee, both enslaved by the Philipse family, whose names indicate a connection to Ghana. In the Akan language, spoken in Ghana, the name Kofi is given to boys who were born on a Friday. That "Kofe" and "Cuffee," who lived in New York, had this name indicates their connection to Ghana.

People who were captured from their homes and imprisoned in chains for the horrible voyage across the Atlantic Ocean were not allowed to bring meaningful personal possessions with them. But they did bring with them stories, songs, traditions, those aspects of human society that make up what we call culture, and many of these elements have become an important part of American culture broadly. Adinkra symbolizes that important historical and cultural connection to, and identity with, Ghana and western

Africa by enslaved persons Kofe and Cuffee, as well as by people in America today who share western African ancestry. Symbols such as Sankofa provide important lessons and remind us that we must look to the past in order to understand why things are the way they are today.

To learn more about African culture and traditions, please explore [Creating Identity](#), [Retaining Culture](#) on [People Not Property: Stories of Slavery in the Colonial North](#).