

# Gotta Hand It to Our Artists!

by Debi West

Our “eARTh ... It’s got ART” year-long curriculum series now takes us to the beautiful continent of Africa! I so enjoy “taking” students here because of my 20-day visit to South Africa several years ago. I traveled from Johannesburg, to Durban, to Capetown and Knysna. I met with local artisans, met art teachers and spoke with Zulu tribemembers, as well as the Ndebele, to discuss their culture and art with them. By the time I returned, I had written an entire curriculum based on the many artworks I had purchased.

My students enjoy stories about my South African adventures, so I was thrilled when my yearlong curriculum brought me to the continent of Africa, allowing me to incorporate some of the amazing art I picked up there into my students’ learning.

The lessons I wrote included Egyptian Headdresses and Cartouches for kindergarten, Moroccan Bean Masks for first-graders, Ndebele-Inspired Clay Bowls for the second grade, Zulu-Inspired Batiked Shields and Masks for third-graders, a fourth-grade lesson on Ndebele-Inspired Hand Print Self-Portraits (presented here), and Kalahari Safari Collaborative Painting and Collages for fifth grade.

We discussed the art of the Ndebele, looking closely at their colored patterns through an array of authentic artifacts from this amazing tribe. My students were inspired by this art and thoroughly enjoyed “traveling” the beautiful country of South Africa.

We then moved into a discussion about self-portraits and students were asked to think deeply about the definition of “self-portrait.” Does it have to be

an image of the face? Could it consist of words and symbols that represent the artist? Students began to realize that a self-portrait can indeed be a plethora of images to visually describe a person. We then discussed the importance of a handprint, thinking about how each hand tells a story of “who we are.” Students then traced their hands with pencils onto their papers.

They then used permanent marker to go over their hand outlines and drew line designs inside the hand. They referred to a “line-family” sheet (available at [www.artsandactivities.com](http://www.artsandactivities.com)) to be sure they incorporated straight lines, angled lines and curved lines.

On the following day, students began the coloring process, filling in the newly formed shapes with varying colored markers, making sure to not put two colors together, and paying close attention to each individual shape created.

When this was complete, they embellished their art

with oil-pastel blending techniques using a cool or warm color palette. They went around the colored hand and the border of the

paper and blended the colors inward to create a “glow.” To incorporate language arts, students wrote stories lightly in pencil about who they were as individuals around the hand, paying attention to specific character traits, giving the art personal meaning.

Finally, the students glued a feather onto their art to complete the process. This was a successful lesson in that, again, everyone was successful while remaining unique and individual in nature! I gotta “hand” it to my fourth-graders ... their art is incredible! ■

*Currently an art teacher at North Gwinnet High School, Debi West wrote her “eARTh: it’s got ART” curriculum while at Level Creek Elementary (both in Suwanee, Ga.). She’s also a past-president of the GAEA and owns the Crystal Collage Children’s Art Studio.*



## AFRICA

grade level: fourth

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Fourth-grade students will ...

- learn about the art of the South African people, specifically the Ndebele tribe, their colored patterns and symbolic art.
- learn about color selection, line families and blending techniques, giving their art personal meaning.
- experiment with storytelling by using symbols and language arts to add to their final pieces.
- learn the vocabulary words: self-portrait, symbols, color, shape, composition, line families, storytelling, blending and repetition.

## MATERIALS

- 8.5" x 11" white drawing paper
- Pencils
- Permanent markers
- Color markers
- Oil pastels
- Feathers
- Glue
- Ndebele art prints and artifacts

## RHYTHM-ONG

Ndebele Hand Art,  
Colors and lines straight from the heart.  
African symbols with meanings so rare,  
Personal images, through our art we share!

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## AFRICA

The following lesson plans are available at [www.artsandactivities.com](http://www.artsandactivities.com)

**Kindergarten:** Egyptian Headdresses and Cartouches

**Grade 1:** Moroccan Bean Masks

**Grade 2:** Ndebele-Inspired Clay Bowls

**Grade 3:** Zulu-Inspired Batiked Shields and Masks

**Grade 4:** Ndebele-Inspired Hand Print Self-Portraits

**Grade 5:** Kalahari Safari Collaborative Painting and Collages



Go to [artsandactivities.com](http://artsandactivities.com) for the link to the additional African lesson plans and Debi West’s “line-family” reference sheet.