

Meet Won-Ldy Paye



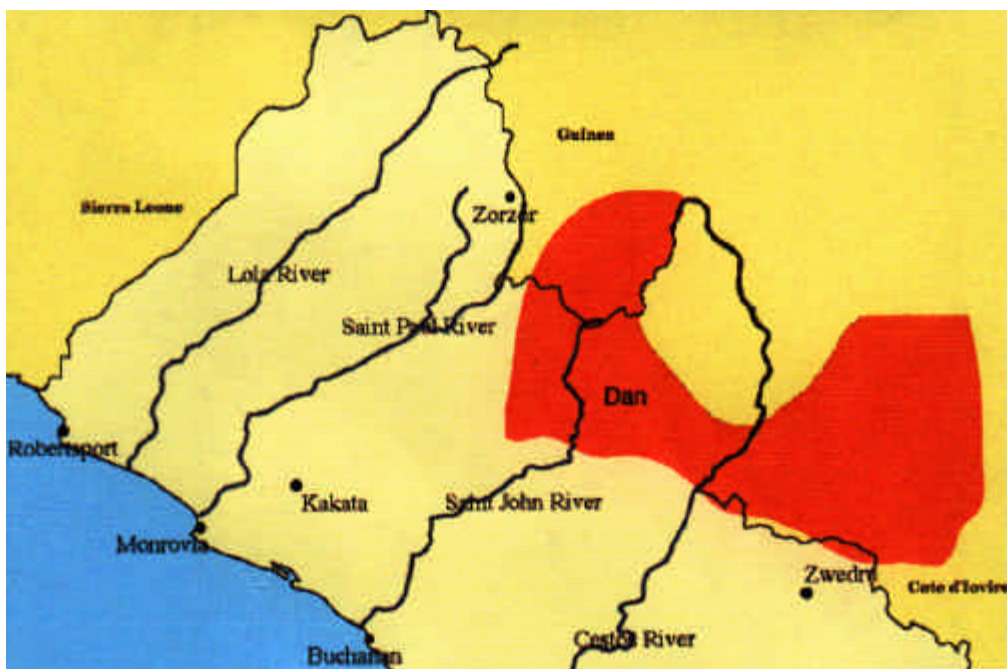
Won-Ldy Paye is a multitalented artist who teaches music, drawing, dance, and storytelling. He is a member of the Tlo Ker Mehn, the class of professional Dan storytellers who are also accomplished musicians and keepers of the Dan oral heritage. He comes from Tapita, in the northeastern region of Liberia, where he was trained by his grandmother to remember and retell the stories of the Dan people. Won-Ldy Paye first came to the U.S. in 1983 as a guest of the U.S. Cultural Foundation to lecture on traditional West African theatre. He has been an artist in residence for the Washington State Arts Commission, the Seattle Arts Commission, the Montana Arts Council, and the Anchorage School District in Alaska. Additionally, he has taught African dance for nine years at the University of Washington's Experimental College. He is founder and director of Village Drum and Masquerade (a traditional music and masks dance troupe from Liberia), leader of Won-Ldy Paye's Ethno-Pop Dance Band, and has hosted The Best Ambiance, an African radio show on KCMU 90.3 FM at the University of Washington. He performs at major festivals from California to Vancouver, B.C. Paye has co-published original Dan stories in *Why Leopard Has Spots: Dan Stories from Liberia* with Fulcrum Publishing, and *Head, Body, Legs: A Story*

from Liberia with Henry Holt and Company Publishing, and has stories published in MacMillan/McGraw-Hill School Division series of textbooks, among many others.

About the Dan in Liberia

Liberia is Africa's oldest republic. The name Liberia means "land of the free." Freed American slaves settled along the coast beginning in the early 1800s. Liberia's Constitution, written in 1847, was modeled after the U.S. Constitution. Liberia is about the same size and shape as Tennessee. The Nimba Mountain Range is composed of mountains that lie along Liberia's northeastern border, in the part of Liberia that bulges out toward Guinea and the Ivory Coast. Long ridges and dome-shaped hills characterize the Nimba Mountains,

which are rich in iron ore, Liberia's most important export. The highest point in Liberia is the Nimba Mountain Range's Guest House Hill at 4,500 feet (1,372 meters).



The Dan are an ethnic group of about 350,000 people living in the forests of the Nimba Mountain Range in northeastern Liberia and western Ivory Coast. They are farmers who grow rice, cassava, and vegetables. In addition to these foods, they eat fish that they catch in streams and rivers. They grow coffee and rubber to sell. The Dan are famous for their artistic accomplishments.

About the Dan in Liberia (continued)

Tapita is one of the largest Dan towns in Liberia. It is located in the foothills of the Nimba Mountain Range and is surrounded by rain forest. Most of the residents of Tapita are farmers who grow rice and cassava. Tapita is located at the crossing of two of the most important roads in Liberia—the road that runs east from Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, to the Ivory Coast, and the road that runs south from Guinea to the coastal port of Buchanan. Tapita is one of the political centers of the Dan community. It is especially busy on Wednesdays, the biggest market day.

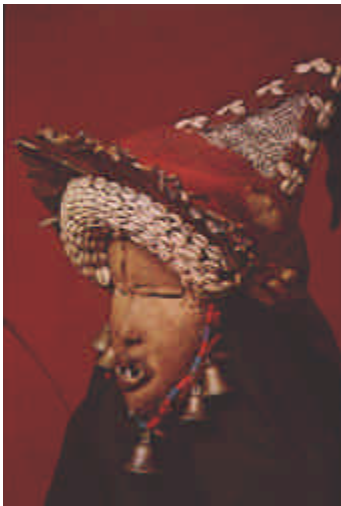
(Adapted from: Paye, Won-Ldy, and Margaret H. Lippert, Why Leopard Has Spots. Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1998.)

What Won-Ldy would like to share with you about his culture

1. Masquerade is a tool for survival; it also reinforces the life lessons of the community. The masks would come to entertain, to help solve a problem, and to unify the community.
2. You learn the skills and lessons of mask/masquerade from your parents during a “household” education, from other teachers during “bush school” (a tribal institution located on the outskirts of a village), and by performing for the public-at-large.
3. There are three categories of masks. Won-Ldy explains the categories this way:
 - “The Female Mask looks like a woman, is pretty, and doesn’t scare kids.”
 - “The Animal Mask has animal characteristics (like a beak, feathers, or fur), looks like an animal and is pretty.”
 - “The Grotesque Mask is ugly, scary, and kids are afraid of it.”

All of the masks are considered spirits. The wearer is disguised by the mask and it changes his identity. The wearer will also change his voice, speaking in a secret language. There are always attendants and/or musicians who come with the mask.

Works of art that Won-Ldy would like you to look at and think about when you visit the exhibition



6. Ga Wree-Wree (mask)
Dan, 1850-1980
wood, teeth, metal, cowry shells, bells, beads,
fiber, netting, and cloth
19 11/16 x 12 1/2 x 11 in. (50 x 31.8 x 28 cm)
Gift of Katherine White and The Boeing Com-
pany

6. Ga Wree Wree (female) Mask

"The Ga Wree Wree Mask is for people in authority, people that belongs to the judicial system, people who make decisions. In the villages, the decision maker comes in costume so that it separates them from all other people. The Ga Wree Wree comes to the village because there are problems within the community that have not been solved for many years." (from audio tour)



7. Ma na Gle (Bird) Mask,
Mano, Dan, Liberia, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire
Late 20th century
Wood, cloth, fur, metal, leather, and cowry shells
27.9 cm (11 in.)
Gift of Mark and Cynthia Putnam,
91.210

7. Ma na gle (Bird) Mask
"Holding flywhisks and waving them gently, the wearer of such a bird mask would be accompanied by an orchestra as he danced and sang in tribute to two birds: the hornbill, a large bird thought to bring the prized palm nut to the Dan, and the parakeet, known for cracking the nuts open." (catalogue, p. 189)

- Can you tell which mask belongs to which category?
- What are some of the details in the mask that show you which category it is?
- What are the similarities between these three masks?



8. Village Drum and Masquerade performance

8. Kran Mask (grotesque)

"The Kran mask is weird, ugly, defunct, not real. Since masks are spirits it should not have any human representation. The carver has to carve a mask that has a monkey-like physical appearance. Huge lips, tubular eye, a flabby cheek. Sometimes there is an attachment on the head with a horn-like projection. This is a warlike mask. He comes in and it is chaos all around. It is a very strong mask."

(excerpted from video interview of Won-Ldy Paye)



9. Krahn Mask in Village Drum and Masquerade performance

Activities you can do back in the classroom

Mask Parade:

Time: Three class period/ three 45-minute sessions

Supplies: Cardboard, colored construction paper, glue, scissors, pencils, and (if desired) yarn, raffia, beads, feathers, fake fur, and shells

Your students can make masks inspired by Dan mask-making methods and use them during dances or acted-out stories they create as well as during a parade of masks.

The following are three traditionally-inspired methods for making three kinds of Dan masks. As you work with your students, discuss the characteristics a Dan mask can have. Students can present their masks individually or as a group, discussing their mask designs and characteristics. Have students imagine the sounds each mask might make or strike poses based on a specific kind of mask. Students can create dramatic stories or poems for their masks. Spend on class period making on one mask-making activity or three making them all.

To make a Female Mask (First class period):

1. Have each student cut out a face-sized V-shaped (or triangle) from cardboard.
2. Have each student select four colors of construction paper for the background, the hair, the eyes and nose, and the band around the eyes (that indicates makeup).
3. These papers can be cut out and glued to the V-shaped cardboard.
4. Students can use found objects like yarn or raffia for hair, and beads or shells for decoration.

To make an Animal Mask (Second class period):

1. Each student can choose an animal to draw on cardboard, making one feature as prominent as possible so the animal is easily recognizable. For example, a bird might have an extraordinarily large beak. Profiles of animals can be used to emphasize the prominent feature.
2. Have each student cut their animal shape out.
3. Students can decorate the different features of their masks using glued-on construction paper.
4. Students can use found materials such as feathers, fake fur, and raffia to embellish their animal masks.

To make a Grotesque Mask (Third class period):

1. Have the students sketch any shape they want on face-sized pieces of cardboard.
2. Students can draw facial features anywhere on the face. Encourage them to be imaginative!
3. Review the characteristics of Dan Grotesque Masks, which are meant to be "ugly and scary."
4. Have each student cut out his or her mask and glue colored construction paper on it to emphasize its distinctive features.
5. Students can add on found materials to enhance the masks' "ugliness and scariness."

Essential Academic Learning Requirements:

Visual Arts 1-2; Communication 1-3.

To learn more

You can read Won-Ldy's two books

Why Leopard Has Spots: Dan Stories from Liberia by Won-Ldy Paye and Margaret H. Lippert. Illustrated by Ashley Bryan. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing. Paperback ISBN 1-55591-991-X

Head, Body, Legs: A Story from Liberia by Won-Ldy Paye and Margaret H. Lippert, New York: Henry Holt and Company. ISBN 0-8050-6570-9 (due out March 2002)