Teenage years can be a tumultuous time of change. For boys in Bidjogo communities in Guinea-Bissau, a country on the western coast of Africa, the transition from childhood to early adulthood is called *cabaro* and is symbolized by the wearing of an ox mask called a *dugn’be*.

This carved and painted wooden mask features horns from a cow. Large eyes peer out from the sides of the head, while a wide mouth hangs open to reveal a row of square, white teeth and a small tongue. A white triangle decorates the top of the head between the horns, and white-and-brown ears extend outward. The interior of the mask is hollow and has three woven cords attached on the sides and back, allowing the mask to be secured to the wearer’s head.

*Dugn’be* translates to “the ox raised in the village,” and *dugn’be* masks are worn during ceremonies leading up to the *cabaro*. A ceremony participant wears the mask while performing in community masquerades, or performances often involving dancing and music. Boys taking part in the masquerade mimic the aggressive movements of an ox by parading on their hands and knees to celebrate the wild nature of post-adolescent life. In addition to the mask, they may wear a costume made of raffia, or dried grass. A *dugn’be* may have a cord running through the nostrils on the front of the face, representing that while the ox may be an aggressive creature, its aggression can be controlled or tamed.

**Classroom Activities**

- Invite students to design an animal mask that represents them. Using cardboard, paper, glue, and/or papier mâché, have students create their own animal mask. Students can share their masks in a community masquerade by making sounds or movements that represent the animal they chose.

- *Dugn’be* masks represent an important time of growth in a young person’s life. Have students think about doing something that has made them feel more grown-up—moving from elementary school to middle school, becoming an older sibling, going somewhere on their own, etc. Have students write about how they felt before and after. How did they feel? How have they grown as a result?

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**Ox Mask (Dugn’be)**, Unidentified Bidjogo Artist

Unidentified Bidjogo Artist. *Ox Mask (Dugn’be)*. Between 1960 and 1973. Bissagos Islands, Guinea-Bissau. Wood, pigment, kaolin, cow horns, plant fiber, iron. 9 1/2 x 16 1/2 x 12 in. (24.1 x 41.9 x 30.5 cm). The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Gilbert and Jean Jackson, Potomac, Maryland, BMA 2008.14