I notice... 

I wonder... 

Prestige Trumpet 
Mende, Sierra Leone  
Early 20th century  
Elephant ivory  
5 3/4 x 30 1/4 x 3 3/4 in. (14.9 x 78 x 9 cm)  
Gift of Peter and Ann Wengraf  
1994.169.1
For hundreds of years ivory trumpets such as this were used in West Africa to announce the arrival of high-ranking chiefs. The music made by an ivory horn of this size is similar to the trumpeting sound of an elephant. This horn retains the shape of the elephant’s tusk. Within Africa, the elephant has long been respected for its power and wisdom. The ivory from its tusks is also admired for its hardness, color, rarity, and shine.

Ivory has played an important role in Africa’s history. It has been made into luxury items for traditional African use such as this trumpet. It has been traded to Arab merchants who crossed the Sahara Desert. Over the last 200 years, huge amounts of African ivory were exported by colonial powers. As a result, the African elephant is now an endangered species, and the international trade of ivory has been banned.

Why does it look like this?

The Mende carver who made this trumpet playfully carved the hole (used to blow into the trumpet) in the figure’s chest, exactly where the lungs would be. The figure wears a western hat, influenced by European hat styles.

During the 1800s, Great Britain began to trade with the Mende people; at the same time European-style clothing began to appear on traditional Mende art objects such as this.

traditional: In this discussion, the term “traditional” refers to older African ways of life, beliefs, art styles, and religions that were in place before the arrival or great influence of European and Muslim cultures.

colonial powers: During the 1800s, many European countries claimed land in Africa. These European countries or colonial powers were interested in Africa as a source of wealth through the supply of slaves and raw materials. Between 1900 and 1975, African countries won their right to self-government.

Age:
Around 100 years old

Size:
2½ feet long

Function:
To announce the arrival of high-ranking chiefs

Ivory Chief’s Trumpet

West Africa

This Igbo man is showing the way an elephant tusk trumpet is blown. (Southern Nigeria, 1982)
Africa Object Information Sheet

7th Grade

I notice...

I wonder...

Plaque: Girl with Leopard
Kingdom of Benin, Edo, Nigeria
Ca. 1600
Bronze or brass, 17¾ x 7 in. (45.1 x 17.8 cm)
Museum purchase, William H. Noble Bequest Fund 1980.31
In West and Central Africa there were many great kingdoms built, in part, on the wealth that resulted from long-distance trade. Many beautiful pieces of art were made for these royal courts. This plaque was made over 400 years ago to decorate the royal palace in Benin. The plaque is made from bronze, a costly and rare metal often used in royal art. The artists of Benin were experts in bronze casting. In fact, this part of Africa had perfected metalworking long before Europeans arrived on the coast in the 1470s and 1480s.

**Why does it look like this?**

The detailed marks on the royal servant’s body might have been patterns of body paint. The plaque is pierced at the four corners so that it could be attached to a pillar of the royal palace.