Adinkra Symbols - Adinkra Meanings

The Adinkra symbols come from West Africa, specifically a region that is modern-day Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire. The symbols belonged to the Asante (or Ashanti) peoples, who would print them on cloth, as well as pottery and metalwork. The Asante people resisted British colonial rule when it arrived in West Africa. It may be for this reason that much cultural tradition and symbolism survives to this day. The word ‘adinkra’ means ‘farewell’ or ‘goodbye’ in the Twi language, spoken by the Asante people. For this reason, Adinkra cloth was worn often on special occasions, particularly funerals.

The Adinkra symbols are closely tied to the history, beliefs and traditions of the Asante people. Each symbol represents a small number of simple concepts, meaning that Adinkra cloth would traditionally be printed using bespoke patterns, telling a story about the wearer that could be read by those knowledgeable enough to understand the underlying symbolism. The Adinkra symbols, and their meanings, have survived to the present day. Clothes displaying Adinkra symbols are now mass-produced in bright colors, using modern techniques and are very popular both in Africa and the wider world. This is not to say that the traditional weaving and printing methods have died out. It is still possible to find Adinkra cloth that has been made by hand, printed using natural inks and traditional techniques. Today, the University of Ghana uses Adinkra iconography in its official logo and crest. Many other modern institutions in West Africa borrow these symbols for use in branding, due to their prevalence, history and associated meanings.
Sepow

The Sepow symbol depicts a knife, specifically that of an executioner. It represents authority and justice. It consists of a pointed triangle above a circle.
Okuafo Pa

The Okuafo Pa symbol represents diligence, hard work, and entrepreneurship. All of these are characteristics of a successful farmer. The symbol depicts farming tools.
Eban translates to mean ‘fence’, though in the case of this symbol, it represents more the safety and security provided by the home. The home is where the family is, and therefore the symbol also represents love and the security provided by the family.
Owuo Atwedee translates as ‘the ladder of death.’ It forms part of the proverb which says that, in essence, everyone will one day climb to death later. The symbol depicts a literal ladder, but represents the mortality of man. It may be invoked to humble the proudful or console the grieving.
Adinkrahene translates to mean 'Adinkra King', and this symbol purports to be the inspiration for all others. It consists of three concentric circles, one within the other. The symbol represents charisma, leadership and greatness. In a more abstract sense, it is the idea of an idea.
The Nteasee symbol represents cooperation and understanding. It urges the people to be more considerate and compassionate towards one another. Peace and harmony will reign when people overlook their differences and work together.
Mmere Dane translates as ‘time changes.’ It represents the temporariness of any particular state of affairs and the transient nature of luck or fortune. The symbol reflects the transitory nature of all things, and implores that one be humble at all times.
Mako

**Mako**, which translates as ‘pepper’, forms part of the proverb, ‘all peppers do not ripen at the same time.’ It represents inequality and uneven development, serving as a reminder that one should help the less fortunate, as one’s own fortunes may one day change.
Dame Dame

*Dame-Dame* translates as 'chequered'. The symbol represents intelligence, ingenuity and strategy.
Epa

The Epa symbol depicts a set of handcuffs, introduced to West Africa as a result of colonialism and the slave trade. Those within African communities wishing to preserve and enforce the rule of law, however, also adopted them. Therefore, the symbol represents slavery, captivity, but also, conversely, justice and a rejection of slavery.
Mpuannum translates as ‘five tufts,’ and it refers to the hairstyle traditionally worn by the Asante priestess. The symbol implies a particular kind of religious joy. It also represents loyalty, faith and duty.
Bese Saka is the symbol of the cola nut. This represents affluence, power, abundance, trade and commerce. Cola nuts were a prized cash crop in West Africa and so they are closely associated with economic success.
The UAC Nkanea symbol represents technological advancement. It is a symbol that makes a record of advances in Asante and Ghanaian society.
Gye Nyame

*Gye Nyame* translates as, ‘except God.’ It suggests that, ultimately, one must answer to God and no-one else. The symbol also represents the omnipotence of God. This symbol remains prevalent in modern-day Ghana.
Woforo Dua Pa A

*Woforo Dua Pa A* translates as one half of the proverb, ‘When you climb a good tree, you are given a push.’ It means that when you offer support to good causes, you will receive support in return. It represents encouragement, support and cooperation.
**Osram ne Nsoromma**

*Osram ne Nsoromma* translates to ‘the moon and the star’. It depicts a half moon as if it is a bowl that might catch the star above. The symbol represents faithfulness, fidelity, love and harmony.
Mframadan

The Mframadan symbol depicts a well-ventilated, or wind-resistant house. Mframadan consists of a square containing straight diagonal and horizontal lines. It represents fortitude and the ability to confront and manage change.
The Funtumfunafu Denkyemfunafu symbol depicts two conjoined crocodiles, sharing a stomach. They are said to argue constantly, yet share food together. It represents a common destiny, sharing, unity and diversity.
Nea Onnim represents knowledge and learning. It comes from a proverb that means, ‘he who does not know can know from learning’.
Menso Wo Kenten

Menso Wo Kenten means 'I am not carrying your basket.' The symbol represents industriousness, self-reliance and self-determination. It takes the form of three star shapes, each inside the other.
Aban

The Aban symbol depicts a castle, or fortress. It represents strength, safety and authority.
The Nkonsonkonson symbol depicts two links in a chain. Nkonsonkonson represents unity, community, and the strength that comes from each.
Nsaa is a type of woven fabric. The symbol is representative of a proverb which means, ‘He who does not know authentic Nsaa will buy fakes.’ It symbolizes excellence, quality workmanship and authenticity.
The **Mpatapo** symbol depicts a knot with no beginning or end. Mpatapo represents peace, particularly after conflict, as well as forgiveness and reconciliation.
Hwehwemudua

The Hwehwemudua symbol depicts a measuring stick or instrument. It represents high quality and excellence in one’s endeavors.
Akoko Nan

The **Akoko Nan** depicts the leg of a chicken, or hen. The name of the symbol comes from the African proverb, ‘The leg of a hen steps on the child chick but it doesn’t kill the chick.’ It represents the nurturing, but also disciplining, of children.
Kuronti ne Akwamu

The Kuronti ne Akwamu symbol represents the sharing of ideas, taking council and democracy.
Akoben

The Akoben symbol depicts a war horn. It represents vigilance and wariness.
Nyame Dua

The Nyame Dua symbol depicts a cross-section of a palm tree, or the top of a tree stump. It represents God’s presence and protection. Nyame Dua is also the name of the place outside a dwelling or in a village where sacred rituals take place.
Abe Dua

The Abe Dua symbol depicts a palm tree. The palm tree represents resourcefulness, wealth, and self-sufficiency. This is due to the sheer number of practical uses one can find for products made from the palm tree's wood, oil and fruit.
Akoma Ntoaso

The Akoma Ntoaso symbol represents agreement and understanding.
Dwannini Mmen

The Dwannini Mmen depicts the horns of a ram. It represents humility and strength, as well as the idea that even the strongest must also be humble.
Adwo

The Adwo symbol represents peace, tranquility, and quiet.
Nyame Nwu na Mawu

Nyame Nwu na Mawu translates to ‘God won't die for me to die.’ The symbol, in the shape of a cross, represents the presence of God and the immorality of the soul. They don’t die because, after death, the soul returns to God. God doesn’t die and, therefore, neither does the soul.
The Duafe symbol depicts a wooden comb. It is a symbol of femininity, as well as love and care. It also represents good hygiene and being well groomed.
The Tamfo Bebre symbol represents jealousy, evil, or ill will. It translates to mean either, ‘the enemy will suffer’ or ‘the enemy will stew in his own juice.’ The symbol is sometimes said to depict a bowl that will not submerge in water, due to increased pressure resulting in an increase in resistance. For this reason, the symbol may also represent futility.
The Nsoromma is a symbol of guardianship. It represents love, bonding and faithfulness, particularly in marriage. ‘Nsoromma’ translates literally to mean ‘star.’ The symbol serves as a constant reminder that God watches over all people.
Akoma

The Akoma represents patience and tolerance. It is similar to the classic heart ideograph. For this reason, it can also be said to represent understanding, agreement and unity.
**Nkyinkyim**

*Nkyinkyim* translates to mean ‘twisted,’ and relates to the proverb that says ‘life’s journey is twisted.’ The symbol itself twists and turns to reflect this wisdom. Life requires versatility and resilience, and these qualities are represented by this symbol.
The Denkyem symbol depicts a crocodile and signifies the proverb, ‘the crocodile lives in the water, yet breathes the air’. The crocodile’s cleverness and ability to adapt are seen as desirable qualities.
Odo Nyera Fie Kwan

The Odo Nyera Fie Kwan symbol represents the proverb, ‘those led by love will never lose their way,’ sometimes written as ‘love never loses its way home’. This symbol is usually engraved on wedding bands and other events related to the union of two people. The Akan people consider it a powerful mantra to represent a union.
BOA ME NA ME MMOA WO

BOA ME NA ME MMOA WO is a symbol of cooperation and interdependence. Literally it means: “Help me and let me help you”. Also represents the need to transform the world by creating a space to promote interdependence and collaboration amongst a group of people towards the greater good.
Sankofa

Sankofa Adinkra symbol depicts a mythical bird with its feet firmly planted forward with its head turned backwards. The word Sankofa comes from the Akan people of Ghana. It is an Akan term that literally means, “to go back and get it.” The Sankofa symbolizes the Akan people’s quest for knowledge among the Akan with the implication that the quest is based on critical examination, and intelligent and patient investigation.