Sub-Saharan African exhibit at the MFA

You may work in teams of 2 or 3, or individually. Make sure all names are on the submitted report. In providing examples, note the label material for the piece you are proposing or take a digital picture and incorporate it into your report - otherwise I won't know what you're talking about.

1. What kinds of objects are on display? Figure sculpture? Masks? Utilitarian objects like bowls or chairs? Paintings? Textiles? Do a quick count. What might you conclude from this?

2. How many materials are represented by the works on display in the African collection? (If there is more than one material used, focus on the main material) and what is the one most used? What might you conclude from this?

3A. Context: How does the MFA provide contextual information for these objects. Choose one of the other galleries (not the ones immediately adjacent) – Is there more or less information provided in the African gallery? Why do you think this is so?

3B. What do you think is the difference between ‘mask’ and ‘masquerade’? How does the Museum of Fine Arts address the difference in the exhibition of traditional African art? Give at least one example.

TECHNIQUES
4. Subtractive Technique - when you take away material to create form. Find an example of something created in this way.

5. Additive Technique - when you add material to create basic form. Can you find an example of something created in this way.

6. Accumulative technique - when materials are added to a basic form to create an emotional effect, materials that are different from the primary material used. Can you find an example of a work with materials added to create a frightening effect? With materials added to create an effect of wealth and beauty?

FORM.
7. Geometry is said to be a way of approaching form in African traditional sculpture. What do you think this means? Point out a work that is a particularly good example of this.

8. African artists typically use symbolic proportion in their figure sculpture. What do you think this means? Find an example on display.

9. African artists typically use symmetry in their work. When we say something is
symmetrical, what do we mean. Stand so that your body is arranged symmetrically. So it is not symmetrical. Find an example of a symmetrical work in the exhibit. Can you find an example that is not symmetrical?

10. African art typically displays frontality. What do you think this means? Find an example in the collection.

11. African art typically displays “closed form.” Make your body into a ‘closed’ form. Make it into an ‘open’ form. Find examples of ‘closed’ figure forms in the exhibit. Are there any open figures that seem ‘open’ in form.

SUBJECT MATTER
12. How many works are there in the display. How many represent humans? How many represent animals? Can you conclude anything from this (assuming this is a random selection of objects).

FACES

14. Using faces and bodies as signifiers, how old are the individuals represented? Are they children? Are they adults? Are they elderly?

15. What postures are found in the sculptures? How many standing? How many sitting? How many kneeling? Any other?

16. What gestures are employed by the figures? What are they doing with hands and arms?

17. What is the primary axis of the sculptures on display? How many are vertical? How many seem oriented on a horizontal axis?

18. How does the African sculptor respect the material with which s/he works? What do you think this means? Give an example and explain.