

Papermaking at Aba House



This August was a time of experimentation for the papermakers of Nungua, as we created several kinds of paper made with fibers from native plants. Paper was created with leaves from the pandanus plant, pawpaw leaves and stems, and plantain stems. Aba house has several pawpaw trees and a large pandanus plant right in the front yard. The plantain stems were found at the market in Accra, where they are normally considered a waste product left over from the harvest of plantain. Each plant had different characteristics and created unique and beautiful papers. We also experimented with using various amounts of recycled paper with each type of fiber.



Ready to cook the pawpaw stems.



benjamin and famous tend the fire;

cooked pandanus plant

Our results had an interesting amount of variety, but to create each paper we followed the same basic process from start to finish.

We began by harvesting the plant and cutting it into small 1" pieces. With the pandanus we had to be careful to trim off all of the sharp thorns first!

We then cooked the plant over an open fire in the backyard with a solution of water and caustic soda. Because the heat was not a consistent temperature, we often had to be patient and let the solution and plant simmer over the fire's embers overnight.



When the plant was sufficiently cooked and had the proper consistency, we then broke down the plant material into fibers. This was accomplished by pounding it with a large mortar and pestle that is used by Ghanaians for making daily meals like fufu. Everyone took turns with the pounding; it's hard work, but time goes quickly with songs sung to the rhythm of the pounding.



Pawpaw stems, cooked and pounded into fibers.



Plantain stems pounded in mortar.



After the plant is reduced to fibers, water and formation aid are added & the papermaking can begin!

We experimented with using okra formation aid. Formation aid is added to help the fibers disperse evenly and prevent them from sinking in the water during the sheet formation process. It is especially useful with longer, thin plant fibers. The formation aid typically used in papermaking is a synthetic substance that cannot be purchased in Ghana. We wanted to use something more economical, eco-friendly, and easily accessible. The okra worked well and is found at any local produce market.

In order to use the okra, we experimented with boiling it several ways. Here you can see Mariane straining the okra after we cooked it and let it sit. The liquid that remained after straining was used in our papermaking.



Okra before cooking,



Okra formation aid almost ready to use.



Nicholas was a great worker and a fantastic paper maker. He lives right down the road from Aba house.

Evans is Nicholas's older brother, he assembled the books made from our paper and was another one of our wonderful workers - always ready to help with anything that needed to be accomplished.



We had helpers of all ages... from six to sixteen!

Bernard was one of our youngest helpers and he was determined to learn papermaking! He also is a fantastic football player.





A freshly made sheet of pandanas paper. Carefully peeling off a dried paper from a couching cloth.

Jackline couching her paper.



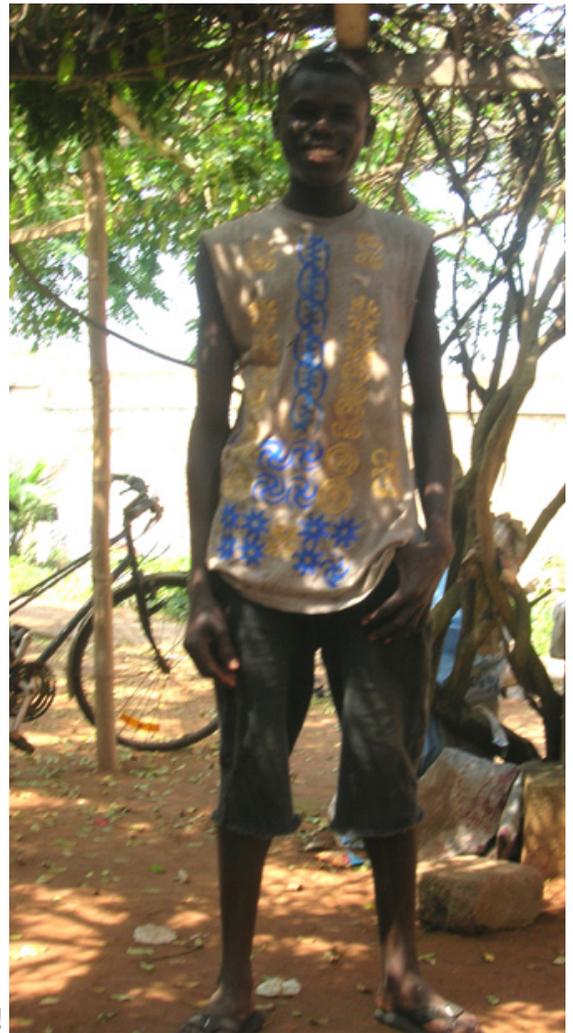
Jackline and Rebekah were two of our hardest working papermakers. They worked with us almost every single morning and afternoon.



Rebekah draining the excess water from the mold.



Elliot and Gideon help out. Weighing down the adinkra stamped papers with rocks so they can dry in the sun.



Evans gets creative with his adinkra stamping!



One afternoon David stopped by, and gave us a demonstration on heating the ink used to make adinkra stamps, as well as using the actual stamps. We decorated our papers with the stamps using both adinkra ink and bright acrylic paints.

David demonstrating adinkra stamping techniques.



The spirit of enthusiasm was what affected me the most at Aba House. People were always willing to help and eager to learn. Songs were sung, chores were done with no complaints, and everyone helped out. Despite the occasional language barrier or miscommunication, things always worked out, and the kids had an incredible amount of patience with my terrible mispronunciations! I loved being able to spend time with such great children. Watching them take care of the little ones, exploring the neighborhood beaches, being shown Evans' garden, attempting to learn games (I still think the "rules" for their favorite card game were completely made up, since half the deck was missing!), a lesson in sea urchin hunting and fine gourmet snacks, adinkra stamping, shopping at the market, and cheering on a football game in the backyard - each and every experience was filled such great spirit. To Aba House and all of wonderful people I met - thank you, and I hope to meet again some day soon.

