Adinkra Symbols and their meaning

These are some examples of Adinkra Symbols and their meaning.

Sankofa

symbol of importance of learning from the past

A very popular symbol, especially in the Afrikan Diapora. It shows a bird turning around to catch its lost egg. It is a sign of the return, which says that it is never too late to turn around and start on a new path once one has recognized one’s mistake
Gye Nyame

A second meaning derives from the following Ashanti proverb: "Look at your past and you will recognize your future" or to “Go back and fetch ones essence”

Gye Nyame “except for God”

symbol of the supremacy of God

This unique and beautiful symbol is ubiquitous in Ghana. It is by far the most popular for use in decoration, a reflection on the deeply religious character of the Ghanaian people.

This is one of the signs for “Nyame” which admonishes people not to fear anything except God. It is the highest of the Adinkra symbols and describes the all-encompassing God and his omnipotence.
Duafe

symbol of beauty and cleanliness; symbols of desirable feminine qualities

The meaning of this symbol is characterized slightly differently in “The Adinkra Dictionary” and “The Values of Adinkra Symbols”; the former emphasizes more abstract qualities of feminine goodness, love and care, while the latter has a more literal interpretation, looking one’s best and good hygiene. In any case, the duafe was a prized possession of the Akan woman, used to comb and plait her hair. The Sylized comb refers to the feminine virtues of consideration, caution, circumspection, and tenderness. In the Afrikan Diapora, this symbol is better known or recognized as the “Afro Pic”.
Aya

symbol of endurance and resourcefulness

The fern is a hardy plant that can grow in difficult places. “An individual who wears this symbol suggests that he has endured many adversities and outlasted much difficulty.” (Willis, The Adinkra Dictionary)

Dauntlessness and courage are symbolized by this sign. It indicates the will to persist even when adverse circumstances make it difficult. Towards the top, the obtrusive influences get smaller. This means that when one continues on the chosen path without wavering, the difficulties will diminish as well.
Adinkrahene

Adinkrahene—"Chief of the adinkra symbols"

symbol of greatness, charisma and leadership

This symbol is said to have played an inspiring role in the designing of other symbols. It signifies the importance of playing a leadership role.
Wawa aba

Magnanimity, steadfastness, and conscientiousness are described in this form.

Wawa aba-“seed of the wawa tree”

symbol of hardiness, toughness and perseverance

The seed of the wawa tree is extremely hard. In Akan culture, it is a symbol of someone who is strong and tough. It inspires the individual to persevere through hardship.
Sesa wo suban

Sesa wo suban-“Change or transform your character”

symbol of life transformation
Osram ne nsoromma

This symbol combines two separate adinkra symbols, the “Morning Star” which can mean a new start to the day, placed inside the wheel, representing rotation or independent movement.

Osram ne nsoromma-“The Moon and the Star”

symbol of love, faithfulness, harmony
Nyame dua

This symbol reflects the harmony that exists in the bonding between a man and a woman. Proverb: “Kyekye pe aware.” (The North Star has a deep love for marriage. She is always in the sky waiting for the return of the moon, her husband.) The moon and the stars stand for gentle characteristics such as loyalty, mercy, and trust.

Nyame dua-“tree of god” – altar

symbol of God’s presence and protection

The Nyame Dua is a sacred spot where rituals are performed. Erected in front of the house or compound, it is crafted from a tree that has been cut where three or more branches come together. This stake holds an earthenware vessel filled with water and herbs or other symbolic materials for purification and blessing rituals.
Mate masie

symbol of wisdom, knowledge and prudence

The implied meaning of the phrase “mate masie” is “I understand”. Understanding means wisdom and knowledge, but it also represents the prudence of taking into consideration what another person has said.
symbol of unity and human relations
A reminder to contribute to the community, that in unity lies strength.
This is the sign of mutual responsibility in which, however, neither party has to surrender his or her individuality. It also represents cooperation.
Okodee mmowere

symbol of strength, bravery, power

The eagle is the mightiest bird in the sky, and its strength is concentrated in its talons. The Oyoko clan, one of the nine Akan clans, uses this symbol as their clan emblem.

symbol of knowledge, life-long education and continued quest for knowledge
Mpatopo

Mpatopo—“knot of pacification/reconciliation”

symbol of reconciliation, peacemaking and pacification

Mpatapo represents the bond or knot that binds parties in a dispute to a peaceful, harmonious reconciliation. It is a symbol of peacemaking after strife.

Mmusuyidee
Mmusuyidee—“that which removes bad luck”

symbol of good fortune and sanctity

This symbol is suppose to convey purity and luck by invoking the presence of God
Ananse ntontan

symbol of wisdom, creativity and the complexities of life

Ananse, the spider, is a well-known character in African folktales.
Denkym

symbol of adaptability

The crocodile lives in the water, yet breathes the air, demonstrating an ability to adapt to circumstances.
Dwennimmen

symbol of humility together with strength

The ram will fight fiercely against an adversary, but it also submits humbly to slaughter, emphasizing that even the strong need to be humble. The readiness to learn and to develop wisdom are signaled with this sign.
Bi nka bi

Bi nka bi-"No one should bite the other"

symbol of peace and harmony

This symbol cautions against provocation and strife. The image is based on two fish biting each other tails.

The virtues of justice and honest are united in this motif.
Akoma ntoso

Akoma ntoso-“Linked Hearts”

symbol of understanding and agreement

This symbolizes the immortality of the soul represented as a closed unity.
Kete pa

symbol of a good marriage

From the expression that a woman who has a good marriage is said to sleep on a good bed.
Kwatakye atiko

Kwatakye atiko—“hair style of an Asante war captain”

symbol of bravery and valor

“This symbols is said to be a special hair style of Kwatakye, a war captain of old Asante. The symbol has come to represent bravery and fearlessness. It is also given as an earned title to any brave son of an Akan community.”
Hwe mu dua

Hwe mu dua—“measuring stick”

symbol of examination and quality control

This symbol stresses the need to strive for the best quality, whether in production of goods or in human endeavors. All Good produced in Ghana carry this sign as a quality seal. It stands for perfection and the associated abhorrence’s of imperfection.
Funtunfunefu

Funtunfunefu-“Siamese crocodiles”

symbol of democracy and unity

The Siamese crocodiles share one stomach, yet they fight over food. This popular symbol is a reminder that infighting and tribalism is harmful to all who engage in it.
War Hor

symbol of vigilance and wariness

Akoben is a horn used to sound a battle cry.
Akofen

symbol of courage, valor, and heroism

The crossed swords were a popular motif in the heraldic shields of many former Akan states. In addition to recognizing courage and valor, the swords can represent legitimate state authority.
Nyame Nti

Nyame Nti—“By God’s grace”

symbol of faith and trust in God

similar to Gye Nyame

According to The Adinkra Dictionary by W. Bruce Willis: “This stalk is depicted as the staff of life in many cultures. It symbolizes to the Akan that food is a basis of life and that they could not survive if not for the food that God has placed here on Earth for their nourishment.”
Nkyinkyim

Nkyinkyim—“twisting”

symbol of initiative, dynamism and versatility