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Dance Headdress (Chi-Wara), unknown Bamana artist

Arnold Lehman: A modern story based on the traditional legend behind this mask—as told by quilt artist and historian Myrah Brown Green:

Myrah Brown Green: There's a woman who goes into the fields, and her village is suffering from barren land, lack of food. So she goes out into this field, and this spirit wind just surrounds her body. She asks, "Who are you?," and there's a voice that comes out of a bush and says, "If you look over there, there's a hoe. I'll teach you how to use it, and your people will have plenty to eat."

She had to promise two things, though, in order for them to have an abundance of food. The first thing was that the people could not waste, and the second was that they had to always give an offering. And some folks didn't believe, so they didn't give the offering.

It's said that this particular spirit buries itself underground because it's so disappointed with the people. But this woman, who has faith in her people, goes back out into the field, and she begins to cry because that particular spirit's not there. And it's said that the power of her tears is what brings this being back to earth. It comes back in the form of part-antelope and part-human, giving the people another chance.