



City Lore CASA Program
Residency Unit Plan

RESIDENCY: Storytelling Arts of West Africa: Dance & Creative Movement

CONTACTS:

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OVERVIEW:

In this residency students learn about the importance of folktale and folk dance traditions in West African communities in the Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Mali. They are introduced to trickster stories and a central character in West African trickster tales, the spider Ananse. They also learn about the community settings and events where stories are told and dances and music are performed as part of daily life and of special events in the community. They explore the relationship of African drumming and dance, how they can be used to tell stories, and how they tell stories differently from words and images. Students learn three traditional dances as well as explore and improvise movements to convey the characters and actions in the stories they are telling. They also explore the relationship between folktales, music, song, drama and culture. The residency culminates with a performance, titled "Ananse and the Drum" where students will tell Ananse stories through drumming, dance, song, and drama. Our goal is to cultivate appreciation of another culture, encourage tolerance, and teach dance in a context of world awareness.

INQUIRY QUESTION:

How can we tell stories through dance and music? How do dance and music tell stories differently from words and images?

ARTS LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will learn/understand:

- How dance can be used to tell a story,

- Roles that dance plays and the community settings where dances are performed in West African communities
- How African dance communicates to an audience
- How dance and drum work together
- Basic choreography (a map of movements)

Students will be able to:

- Perform three traditional West African Dances
- Respond drum rhythms as a communication tool for dance
- Use non – verbal expression through traditional dance and creative movement to tell a story
- Respond to and recognize basic choreography. (ie: map of movements in a sequence with a beginning, middle, and end)
- Work as an ensemble to learn and create traditional and original dance movements that express ancient stories and their own story.
- Learn to dance in the West African style and recognize drum patterns while responding in a movement sequence.

NYC DOE BLUEPRINT FOR DANCE:

Dance Making

- Students will dance on beats, accents, tempo and to simple rhythms
- Students will replicate and recall basic steps and sequences in the dances they learn
- Students will improvise movements to convey characters and story narrative

Dance Literacy

- Students will understand dance as a means of personal and cultural expression
- Students apply dance vocabulary in responding to and reflecting on their own and others' dance movements
- Students will understand how dance can express feelings, ideas, stories, and characters.

Making Connections

- Students will understand the social and cultural contexts in which the dances they learn are performed
- Students will understand that people dance differently in different cultures, although they may have commonalities as well
- Students will understand that dance has different functions in different

Working with Community & Cultural Resources

- TA will share how he learned dance both in informal community settings and as part of a professional company
- Students will share their dance experiences with their parents and ask their parents/caretakers about the dances that they know

Explore Careers & Lifelong Learning

- TA will share his career path to becoming a dancer and the roles dance has played in his life as a performer and as a teacher
- TA will discuss the skills that dance teaches apart from dance that students can use in their future work and careers

KEY CONCEPTS & VOCABULARY:

Vocabulary

- Djembe Drums- The main West African drum instrument
- Break – A drum signal used to start, stop, and change dance movements
- Sequence – Learning movement order and building skill through repetition
- Tempo (Rapide / Lent)- How the drum rhythms determine how fast or slow we move
- Bantaba – the circle of sharing which allows everyone to participate and show their knowledge
- Dobale – a collective gesture of respect used widely in African societies and the African diaspora. Used at the end of an African dance class, rehearsal, or social gathering to show respect to the drummers, dancers, teachers, elders, or other esteemed guests.
- West African Dance names: Lamban, Cuckoo, and Here Come the Sun
- How these dances are used in West African communities

KEY CONCEPTS:

- Traditional dances are shaped by and express geography, culture, values, and roles in society
- The West African Griot tradition of storytellers and keepers of group's oral traditions and history.
- Cultural traditions are transmitted to other places and times through the movement of people from one place to another.
- Cultural traditions, like storytelling, music, and dance evolve over time

MATERIAL RESOURCES:

School provides:

- A clean, clear space for dance and movement
- Chairs for drummer and teacher assistant
- Classroom teacher to assist with instruction and class management

Teaching artist provides:

- A djembe drum for dance instruction and demonstration.

City Lore provides:

- Age appropriate children's book versions of Ananse stories from West Africa
- Fabric, tee shirts, animal masks & headdresses, and art supplies and stage set materials for final show

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

Each residency session will include: 1) a warm-up activity to prepare our bodies and minds for listening, learning, dancing, and working together as a group; 2) a review of the previous lesson; 3) a demonstration by the TA of a new skill, technique, dance step or movement, or story; 4) time for students to practice the new material; and 5) a discussion

for students to reflect on what they learned, make connections to their own cultures and the dances they know or have seen and ask questions.

SESSION #1: Introduction

- INTRODUCTION: TA introduces himself and presents an overview of the residency goals and expectations. TA also introduces the drums as an essential part of West African cultures and discusses its role and purpose in West African dance as a form of communication through a "call and response" and interaction between dancer and drum.
- WARM-UP: Students introduce themselves with a name game that introduces the concept of gesture.
- DEMONSTRATION: What is dance? What are some of the characteristics of West African dances? TA demonstrates a traditional dance from the country where he was born, the Ivory Coast. He describes how dances were performed as part of most community celebrations and gatherings and how dance and music were integral to community life in the village where he grew up.
- ACROSS THE FLOOR: Students learn and perform African dance steps that travel through space (locomotion). They practice combinations of basic steps from the West African dances from Mali, The Ivory coast, Guinea that they will be learning in the residency.
- DISCUSSION/REFLECTION: What did you notice about the ways we moved our bodies and responded to the drumming through dance? How are these dances similar to or different from dances you have seen or performed? On what occasions do you dance with your family or friends?

[Remaining sessions will follow a similar format]

SESSION #2: Telling Stories through Dance

- TA introduces the trickster folktale tradition in West Africa with the central character Ananse the Spider. He describes the important role of the storyteller in West African cultures as keepers of traditional stories and community history. He tells/reads a story that features Ananse.
- Students learn and perform a dance and creative movement sequence that tells the story and portrays characters in the Ananse story.
- Discuss how dance tells a story differently from words and pictures

SESSIONS #3, 4, 5 & 6: Lamban

- Students learn and practice the movements and basic steps of the West African dance, Lamban
- Students learn that the dance tells the story of a great war between King Sundiata and King Mansamusa
- TA connects the dance to West African "Griot" tradition and discusses how dance records special events and perpetuates knowledge of community history, as a form of record keeping.
- TA Introduces activities and strategies to encourage memory and retention while introducing new steps

SESSIONS #7 &8: Bantaba

- Introduce the "bantaba" - the circle dance where each student can experience dance as storytelling from a traditional African perspective. The circle is where dance, music, and songs are shared with the community and each other for enjoyment and communication
- Continue working in the Bantaba circle format, for practice, fun, and reinforcement of lessons and skills learned in the first five sessions.

SESSIONS # 9, 10, 11: Cuckoo

- Students learn and practice the steps to the West African traditional dance, Cuckoo, often performed at weddings and birthdays.
- Continue work on practice drills and cleaning up movements to teach technique and the underlying purpose that dance serves

SESSIONS #12, 13, 14: Here Come the Sun

- Learn and practice steps and movements for Here Come the Sun
- Continue work on practice drills and technique
- Discussions of how dances tell a story and the stories that we want to tell in our final performance

SESSIONS #15, 16 & 17: Ananse and the Drum

- Ms. Suerte reviews the dramatic story that will open the performance of the "Ananse stories from West Africa" performance.
- We discuss the common themes and characters in this story to the Ananse stories we will perform through dance.
- Students are assigned roles and improvise creative movements that portray their animal character.
- Ms. Suerte rehearses the narration with students between sessions.

SESSION #18: Putting It All Together: Choreography

- Review dances for clarity of movements
- Students share ideas about how to weave the stories, dances, and drumming together for the final performance
- Discussion of role of choreographer in creating a map of the movement sequences.
- Ask if dance performance has a beginning, middle, and end and how we can tell the story in a clear and engaging way
- Students learn a song to enhance their performance

SESSION #19, 20, 21: Rehearsals

- Meet in the auditorium for rehearsals. We work on individual scenes and do several run-throughs of the complete performance. Students will learn and practice how to enter the stage, exits and entrances, and their role in the ensemble.
- Students receive costume and percussion instrument for the show

- Discuss and practice skills and behaviors for working as an ensemble and performing for a live audience
- Feedback from TAs and school staff and peer reflections on how we're conveying our characters and telling our stories.

SESSIONS #22 & 23: The Performance

- The final performances will help students to understand the process of performing on stage from start to finish as a final event, while reflecting on their individual progress throughout the residency.
- Students will wear costumes, face paint and other props and percussion instruments to perform for the school and for families and friends. They will perform with their teaching artists, Yahaya Kamate and Harold Akyeampong and.

SESSION #24: Reflections on Our Work

- Students reflect on their residency experiences and what they learned with both teaching artists, Yahaya Kamate and Harold Akyeampong.