

Program Name: African Dance

Artist: Vanessa and Rodney Gibbs

Special Requirements:

A large, open space;
wood floor preferred.

Special Points of Interest:

In African culture, the Griot is the village historian who teaches everyone about their past. It is said that when a Griot dies, a library has burned to the ground.

Workshop Description

African societies express themselves through movement and imagery in the art of dance. Teaching artist Vanessa Gibbs, a principal dancer for *The Traditional Music Society*, teaches students the basic concepts and techniques of West African dance from Mali and Senegal.

Students will learn dances that honor kings and queens, celebrate weddings, and begin harvests. They will also learn how African dance is connected to Africa's rich musical traditions.

African societies rely on dance to retell the stories of their elders, the legends of their leaders,

and the customs of their cultures. In Senegal, the Malinke people dance *Lamba*, the dance of the *Griot* (historian). In Mali, Mandingo girls dance *Lengin* upon reaching their teenage years.

Handed down through countless centuries, these dances reinforce African values and customs through body movement, music, and imagination.



Educational Objectives & Standards

Students will:

- Understand the importance of music and dance to West African society.
- Recognize the value of cooperation in music and dance.

Behavioral:

- Knows how a culture's art works and artifacts reflect its values and beliefs.

Dance:

- Identifies movement elements and skills in performing dance.



Artist Bio: Vanessa and Rodney Gibbs

Since 1987, Vanessa Gibbs has taught West African dance. Working with Bird Fleming, she helped found The Traditional Music Society. In 2000, Vanessa traveled to West Africa to continue her studies in West African cultures.

In addition to teaching dance for Kansas City Young Audiences, Vanessa has taught camps for Alvin Ailey and City in Motion Dance Theater.

In 1987, Rodney Gibbs began studying West African drums with Bird Fleming. He soon joined The Traditional Music Society where he plays West African drums and other percussion instruments in local schools, churches, and theaters.

Rodney has taught through KCYA since 1996.

Vocabulary

Bamaaya: a children's dance for the celebration and recognition of harvest in Ghana.

Call and response: The drum riffs that cue the support drummers, singers, or dancers to change their respective rhythms, songs, or dance steps

Doun-Doun-ba: A warrior's dance

Griot: A storyteller in western Africa who perpetuates the oral tradition and history of a village or family

Mali: A country of western Africa. The site of several powerful states, including the Mali and the Songhai

Senegal: A country of western Africa on the Atlantic Ocean. The coast was settled by Wolof and other West Atlantic peoples, while the interior formed part of the medieval empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai.

List of Resources:

Books:

[Songhay \(Heritage Library of African Peoples. West Africa\)](#)
by Tunde Adeleke
Rosen Publishing Group; 1st ed edition (September 1, 1996)
ISBN: 0823919862

[Drums Speak the Story of Kofi, a Boy of West Africa](#)
by Marc Bernheim Harcourt;
[1st American ed.] edition
(June 1, 1972) ASIN:
0152242333

[Dances of Africa](#)
by Michel Huet Harry N
Abrams; (March 30, 1996)
ISBN: 0810932288

[Africa Dances](#)
by Geoffrey Gorer Eland;
(March 1, 2004)
ISBN: 0907871186

Contact KCYA for more information about this and other programs

816.531.4022
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Post-PWorkshop Activities

1. . What role did music and dance play in West African society? Is this similar to or different from the ways we use music and dance in this country?
2. Ask students to imagine their lives without music or dance. What would be different? How would it be different?
3. Create a dance to celebrate a special event in the life of your family: birthday, holiday, or special meal.
4. Compare and contrast African dance to ballet. What do the two forms of dance say about the culture, traditions, and beliefs of Western European and African societies?