

Study Guide for Teachers

The Seventh Principle *Bantaba: The Circle of Celebration*

presented by

Young Audience NJ & Eastern PA
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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Through a high-energy fusion of percussive dance, traditional music, and rousing call-and-response, the three performers of the Seventh Principle demonstrate both traditional African dance and modern African-American dance while teaching about the respective cultures on both sides of the Atlantic. Students will understand how dance and music are infused into elements of everyday life in West African communities, and how the arts play an important role as an expression of cultural identity. *Bantaba: The Circle of Celebration* connects students to the history of African dance and culture and celebrates the unique ability the art form has to bring people together around the world.

LEARNING GOALS

- To present positive images from an African cultural and historical perspective.
- To create multicultural sensitivity and awareness through African-based culture.
- To encourage students to “reclaim their culture,” to love and understand themselves, and to love and understand others.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

In West Africa, dance is thought of differently than it is here in the United States. In West Africa, dance and music are considered part of everyday life, just as religion is. Here, when we think of religion, we usually think of going to a church, temple, mosque, or other places to worship. In African traditional religions, worship took place outside and included lots of music and dancing as a way to contact and honor the gods.

Many of the dances that you will see in this program honor some part of life that the dancers are grateful for. By dancing about these things, they let the gods know that they appreciate what they are given. For instance, there is a dance about fishing. Through their dance, the dancers act out many of the things that you would do if you went fishing.

In Africa, dance is also used as a way to remember and pass down history. Even though many Africans now dress and live in a very similar way to us, they use music and dance to reconnect to and remember their past. When they dance, they often wear costumes like their ancestors would have worn. This is an active way of keeping their history alive instead of simply writing it in books.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

1. Find a map of Africa and have students help you to find West Africa. Point out and name the countries that you find in West Africa.
2. Discuss the fact that the countries in West Africa were formed by colonial rulers and often did not follow tribal lines. This means that established patterns of trade and common paths were disrupted when a country's boundaries were formed. It also sometimes broke up families and established alliances. What would happen if someone took over your town and decided to divide it in half? Talk about the possible problems and conflicts that would emerge if you were not allowed to travel to the new town. What if the only grocery store or gas station was there? What if they could no longer get to the school? How would your students' lives change?
3. Create two lists on the board. Call one "What I know about Africa" and call the other "What I want to know about Africa." Leave space on the board to add to "What I learned about Africa" after the performance.

VOCABULARY WORDS

Ancestors: Persons who are no longer living; believed in African culture to be powerful forces in spirituality and religion.

Bantaba: The circle dance of sharing, friendly competition, and challenge.

Culture: The knowledge, ideas, skills, arts, and customs of a group that are learned to meet the needs of their environment.

Diaspora: All of the countries that contain African people outside the continent of Africa.

Griots: The oral historians and moral educators of the African community.

Ritual: The practice of certain actions or customs on a regular basis.

Pan-African: The title for all peoples of African descent around the world.

Polyrhythm: Several rhythms in different patterns that create a complex whole in dance, music, and visual mediums.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

1. Help students make their own drums using found materials. Then conduct a drum circle, leading students in exploring different rhythms and sounds that their drums can make.
2. Create a dance using common everyday movements that your students are familiar with. You may choose to begin by discussing things that your students are grateful for and then create a dance to show your appreciation for these things. Or you could simply create a dance using the movements from a favorite sport or activity like walking, skating, or riding a bike.
3. Have students write a poem or story in response to one of the dances that they saw. You may want to begin by brainstorming a list of words that come to mind when they think about the dances. Then create a poem or story using these words. Use this opportunity to talk about language and how it can reflect life. What kind of language would best reflect these dances? Think about sounds, rhythms, and the images that the words convey.
4. Have students write a letter to the members of The Seventh Principle. Focus on what parts of the program they liked or didn't like and ask them to use as many details and specific examples as they can. Then have them tell the members of the group about a dance that they might like to create using just as much detail.

RESOURCES

Verma Aardema, *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in Peoples Ears*.

Molefi Asante, *Afrocentricity*.

Muriel Feelings, *Jambo Means Hello*.

Eric Maddern, *The Fire Children*.

A. Smith, *Children of Wax: African Folk Tales*.

ARTIST INFORMATION

The Seventh Principle is a one-of-a-kind contemporary dance company that *The Star Ledger* calls "headed for success...a fresh take on African culture in a modern world." The company's main objective is to heighten awareness of African dance and culture through creative expression of this unique art form.