

Cooking Up Rhythm from Scratch

The Magic of African Rhythm Performance Guide



This performance guide will prepare you for **The Magic of African Rhythm's (TMOAR)** amazing recipe for **Rhythm**. The main ingredients are **Malian and Guinean Drumming, West African Dances, "Call and Response" Songs, Adinkra Stamps, and African Folktales**. When in balanced proportions, this magical blend of Africa's cultural art forms is called **Ngoma**. The ingredients are quite easy to come by. Just like your Grandma's favorite recipes, there's always something special added. With Rhythm, that magic ingredient is you.

Look For These Adinkra Stamps



Look For These Adinkra Stamps

Listen!

Tune into these concepts during performances



Listen for these Adinkra Stamps

Try!

Listen for these Adinkra Stamps

Before and after performance activities

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- ❖ **Teachers Note:** Performance Guide goals are drawn from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study Music and Dance curriculums for K- 8th Grades. Particular attention has been given to the 7th Grade Social Studies Objectives. *Hands and Feet Speak* school performances engage the inquiries of all grade levels.

Who Drums?

African women are the original drummers, even before the existence of actual drums. African women, just like today, would sing and clap throughout their workday to encourage and entertain themselves while working. Their huge **mortars** with long sticks for grinding grain called **pestles**, pounded out many of Africa's first rhythms. Because the women also wanted to dance, they went to the village blacksmiths and asked that instruments be made to accompany their dancing. Blacksmiths used their fire and tools to make drums, becoming the first drummers' **guild**.

Family of Drums

Dundunba, Cousins, & Other Relations

The **Dundunba Family** is a group of three cylindrical drums **Dundun**, **Sangban**, **Kenkeni**, they are open at both ends and covered with cow skin. When played horizontally they are mounted with a metal bell. Which drum has the deepest pitch? Why?

Djembe is a goblet-shaped drum open at both ends, one of which is covered with a goatskin. It functions as a solo and accompaniment instrument.

Bala is made with a bamboo frame holding 27 wooden keys and several small gourds laying underneath that amplify its melodic sound when played with mallets. What instrument does it remind you of?

Kora has twenty-one nylon strings that run down a long wooden staff and up over a large hollow goatskin covered gourd. In the present day, why might fishing line be used for the strings instead of traditional animal gut?

Shakere is a small hollowed out gourd covered by a "skirt" of dried seeds that rattle against the body of the gourd when shaken.



Notice the differences between hand and stick drums. How many different ways do the sticks strike the drum? What changes about the sound?



Playing Apart and Being Together

Dundun, Sangban, and Kenkeni are the foundation drums of the rhythm. Each drum has its own **pitch** and its own language or individual rhythm. However these different rhythms fit together to make one rhythm; African music is **polyrhythmic**. Although the musicians play apart from each other, they all play an important part of the rhythmic whole.



The djembe has 3 main notes: **tone**, **slap**, **bass**. Try making slap and tone notes with your hands. On one hand, spread your fingers apart and tap your thigh a few times. On the other hand close your fingers and tap the other thigh. What do you notice about the sounds? Practice until you can distinguish slaps and tones. Make your own rhythm with different slap and tone patterns.

What is African Dance?

There is a rhythm played for every occasion in African life: to ensure an abundant harvest, to ward off danger, to celebrate **rites of passage**, birth, death, and marriage ceremonies. African dancers use their bodies to express a message or feeling. The dancer isolates one body part from another. Head, shoulders, arms, chest, hips, and legs all move at once but in different ways and at different speeds. African dance like African music is also polyrhythmic.



DRUM AND DANCE ARE ONE

In Africa, dancers drum and drummers dance. In fact while dancing and drumming, they playfully copy, complement, and compete with one another. The djembe as a solo instrument has the most freedom to **mark** or accent the dancers' movements with the musical notes played. At the same time, each of the dancer's body parts accents a different part in the foundation of the rhythm. Back and forth dancer and drummer communicate with one another. It is through the drum's rhythm that all the dancer's body parts connect.

Who is African Dance For?

African Dance is for everyone! There are dances for elder women (**Mane**), young girls (**Mendiani**), warriors (**Dundunba**), farmers (**Kassa**), and hunters (**Sofa**) just to name a few from Guinea. Each generation has their own rhythms and accompanying dances. As times have changed, women now dance **Dundunba**, a fiercely competitive "strong man's dance". However, you are still not likely to see the **Elders** dancing the same steps as the youth. Because each rhythm serves a function and a reason, everyone dances regardless of age or ability.



Gather together to form one large circle. Lifts arms with palms facing outwards toward the person on either side of you. Push your palms outwards tapping hands with your neighbor (giving a gentle high five). Tap hands to a pattern: 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4.

Take turns creating new patterns.

Once the rhythm is set one person enters the circle moving their head, arms, and legs to the rhythms created by the tapping hands.

Variations to try

1-2-3-hold, 1-2-3-hold...

1-hold-3 hold, 1-hold-3 hold...

1-hold- 23-, 1-hold- 23...

Everyone Plays a Role ⁴

- There are many different **ethnic groups** in Africa. In the country of Guinea, West Africa there is both the **Susu** and the **Malinke** ethnicities. People are further divided into groups by their occupation. These guilds in Africa include farmers, warriors, jelis, blacksmiths, and many others.

Once Upon A Time...

As the story goes, two brothers traveled on a journey. After a while, one brother decided to continue toward the ocean while the other brother headed up into the mountains. In Guinea the coastal people are called Susu, and the people in the

Time Time

Who are the griots in your family?

Do you know any

Diabates

?

Diabate

The Malinke

have long recorded histories and are divided into clans based on family last names.

Malinke are known djembe players as well as jeli families.

Jeli means "blood" in the Malinke language of the **Mandinka** or **Manding** people. The common name for jeli is **griot**. In traditional culture, each royal family had their own jeli who was responsible for the entire history of that family. The **Kouyates** and the **Diabates** are well-known jeli families from the Malian Empire.

Kouyate



Mamadou Diabate is a Grammy nominated kora player and jeli from Mali, West Africa living in Durham, NC.

Glossary

Who is TMOAR?

The Magic of African Rhythm (TMOAR) began as a family of artists- Mama and Baba Shabu, and their children- Maafu, Mabinti, and twins Teli and Taji. Mama and Baba have lived, worked, and traveled all over Africa since 1968. The children were born in a different country on the continent of Africa (Tanzania, Guinea, and Liberia) and they grew up speaking Swahili, Wolof, Jula, Kpelle, French and English. The Shabu family has performed with notables such as blues musician **Eric Bib** and South Africa's late **Miriam Makeba**. This easy-going family believes that there's rhythm in everything and everyone. They invite you to join the family of rhythm.

Adinkra- Akan symbols from Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire representing values, beliefs, and history

Blacksmith- maker of tools, weapons, jewelry, and utensils

Elders- wise and respected persons of advanced age

Guild- societies of designated persons possessing expert skills passed down within each family

Improvisation- making something new out of something else or out of nothing; freestyle

Jeli- musicians preserving ancient stories and traditions through song; griot

Mortar and Pestle- a vessel and tool use to grind and crush materials

Ngoma- the power of all the traditional African cultural arts

Rites of passage- a ritual or event that marks new and significant change in one's life

Pitch- the range of high and low sounds

Polyrhythmic- two or more rhythms played at the same time, combining to make one

Rhythm- patterns of sound and silence, movement and stillness; harmony of all life's forces

You're Part of the Rhythm Circle

In the village, African dancing and drumming happen in a ring. The individual in the center is **improvising**- "doing their own thing". The rest of the community forms a circle of support around the soloist.

Today You, as audience members are the supporting community

During the performance it is important that you listen with your whole body- ears, eyes, hands, feet, and heart. Feel free to clap, sing, and dance in your seat. Always, listen, and be ready to "do Your own thing" in the ring.

Resources

Internet:

<http://www.lesballetsafricains.com/>

Books:

Mamady Keita -Life of the Djembe: Traditional Music of the Malinke by Uschi Billmeier

African Dance by Dr. Kariamou Welsh-Asante

DVD:

Memoire du Manding

CD:

Rhythm Of Africa