

# Bamidele Dancers & Drummers

## *Wongai! Rhythms of West Africa, Brazil & the Caribbean Educational Guide, Grades PreK-12*



### About the Performance

Discover celebratory West African dances and their adaptations in Brazilian and Caribbean cultures, set to the rhythms of African drumming in an interactive performance that is guaranteed to bring all ages to their feet. This program features authentic costumes and instruments and can be adapted to include narration on African art, culture, and history.



### About the Artists

Founded in 1983 by Bamidele Osumarea (1947-1995), the Bamidele (BAH-mi-dee-lay) Dancers & Drummers are now led by Marilyn M. Sylla and Sekou Sylla, dancer, acrobat and drummer from Les Ballet Africains, the National Dance Company of the Republic of New Guinea, West Africa.

The ensemble has studied and performed in West Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean, and Europe. Marilyn and Sekou were faculty for many years at Smith College (home campus) in addition to Mt. Holyoke College, Amherst College, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and Greenfield Community College.

### Program Learning Goals

1. To explore the music, dance, and culture of West Africa, the Caribbean, and Brazil.
2. To broaden students' understanding of African culture.
3. To demonstrate how African culture has influenced the cultures of the Caribbean and Brazil.

### Essential Questions

1. What can learning about other cultures teach us?
2. How is West African music and dance similar to music and dance that you are familiar with? How is it different?
3. Why is it important to learn from ancient cultures and traditions?

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### Vocabulary

- **Wongai:** means “let’s go!” in the Sou Sou language, of the Sou Sou people of Guinea and Sierra Leone, West Africa
- **Percussion instruments:** musical instruments sounded by striking, shaking or scraping
- **Acculturation:** the process by which one culture adopts the traits of another culture
- **Diaspora:** a community of people who share a culture and traditional homeland but live in a different place either by choice or by force

### Key Facts and Cultural Context for Students

#### Where?

The dances, music, and instruments featured in this program originate in **Africa**. This culture has heavily influenced music and dance in the Americas, and students will learn about its adaptations in the **Caribbean** and **Brazil**.



Africa



The Caribbean



Brazil

### West African Percussion Instruments



**Djembe**  
(GEM-bay)



**Dundun Drums**  
(DOON-doon)



**Shekere**  
(SHAY-keh-ray)

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### Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

1. What do you know about Africa? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
2. What percussion instruments do you know? How are they played?
3. What kinds of dance are you familiar with? Where are those dances popular?
4. What do you think different cultures can communicate through music and dance?

### Pre-Performance Activities

#### LEARNING GOALS:

- To study the continent of Africa through a comparison of its basic characteristics to those of North America
- To explore the diversity of Africa in terms of music, language, culture and geography

#### MATERIALS:

- Maps of the world and Africa
- Books and/or vetted websites about Africa and African culture

#### ACTIVITY 1: Land of Africa

##### DIRECTIONS:

1. Have the class name the seven continents. Ask students to define "continent." Guide them to think about the vastness of North America and name the countries that comprise it. Discuss the differences in the countries of North America (cultures, land, climate, etc.)
2. Discuss Africa. Locate the continent on a map or globe. Where is Africa in relation to North America? Is it bigger than North America? How many countries are in Africa?
3. Divide the class into groups. Assign each group a topic to brainstorm, such as the populations of Africa and North America, the languages spoken on both continents, etc.
4. Create a chart on the board or on a large piece of paper to compare the two continents. Discuss the differences between the two continents.
5. Have students draw or color maps of Africa from stencils or freehand. Ask students to draw something on their map that is symbolic of Africa.

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## *Wongai! Rhythms of West Africa, Brazil & the Caribbean Educational Guide, Grades PreK-12*



### Pre-Performance Activities, continued

#### ACTIVITY 2: Diversity of Africa

##### DIRECTIONS:

1. Discuss Africa. What countries comprise Africa? Do students have general or specific knowledge about Africa? Emphasize that Africa is a diverse continent with many different countries and cultures.
2. Divide the class into groups. Assign each group a country from different regions of Africa, such as North Africa, South Africa, East Africa, West Africa and Central Africa.
3. Have each team answer the following questions and develop additional questions to ask one another.
  - What is the typical music of the country?
  - What is the primary spoken language?
  - What does the traditional dress look like?
  - What shapes, colors, and patterns are popular in crafts?
  - What is the style of architecture?
  - What movements do the dances emphasize?
  - What are the climactic and geographic characteristics?
4. Have each group present the answers to these questions non-verbally (i.e., through drawing, maps, crafts, dance and music, etc.). Have the other students guess which country each team is describing.

### Pre-Performance Activity Extensions

1. Listen to traditional African music, Afro-pop, and music influenced by African culture.
2. Explore the African visual arts with special attention to the use of patterns and ideas.
3. Look in newspapers, magazines, and vetted websites for information on African current events and share findings with the class



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### Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. What instruments did Bamidele Dancers & Drummers use in their performance? How were they played?
2. What was your favorite dance from the performance? What did the movements symbolize and why is it significant to the culture?
3. How do the dances and music from the performance compare to the dances and music you listen to?

### Post-Performance Activities

#### ACTIVITY 1: Making African Instruments

##### LEARNING GOALS:

- To create percussion instruments
- To create layers of sound using percussion instruments

##### MATERIALS:

Coffee cans, soup cans, beans, rubber bands, fabric, soda bottles and caps, paper towel rolls, paper clips, wooden sticks (for tapping), water

##### TIP FOR THE TEACHER:

Collect materials in the weeks preceding this lesson

##### DIRECTIONS:

1. Discuss percussion instruments and instruments of African influence, including those that the Bamidele Dancers & Drummers used in their performance.
2. Ask students to think of everyday materials that they could use to create instruments. Collect the materials. Discuss how students might vary the sounds of the instruments (amount of beans, different sizes of cans, etc.).
3. Have each student make a percussion instrument from everyday materials. Encourage students to experiment with different sounds before making their final instruments.
4. Give students time to practice playing their instruments by themselves and with partners.
5. Have students play different rhythms with their instruments and create layers of sound by playing them with each other.

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**Bamidele Dancers & Drummers**  
***Wongai! Rhythms of West Africa, Brazil & the***  
***Caribbean Educational Guide, Grades PreK-12***



**Post-Performance Activities, continued**

**ACTIVITY 2: Understanding Cultures**

**LEARNING GOAL:**

To understand the concept of “culture” and encourage students to explore their own cultures.

**MATERIALS:**

Magazines, photos, objects that students bring in from home

**TIP FOR THE TEACHER:**

This activity involves making a collage. If making a collage is not feasible, have students share what they have learned about their cultural roots with the class.

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Discuss the word “culture”. What does it mean? Using a bubble chart, ask students to share any words or comments that relate to the concept of culture.
2. Discuss the Bamidele Dancers & Drummers performance. Using the bubble chart as a reference, talk about the various aspects of culture presented in the program.
3. Ask students about their own heritage and culture. Have them share some of their family customs.
4. Have students interview their family members about their cultural roots. Encourage them think about the culture that they have created for themselves, such as the music they listen to, the food they like to eat, etc.
5. Have students create collages that represent their culture using photos, objects, drawings, etc. Have them share their culture collages.

**Post-Performance Activity Extensions**

1. Have students draw imaginary musical instruments. Ask them to explain what they are made of, how to play them, and what sound they make.
2. Listen to African music. Ask students to identify the instruments they hear.
3. Ask students to read and report on various African cultures. How did European colonization influence them?
4. Discuss acculturation. How does this happen in music? How has it happened in the United States with food, language, clothes, etc.?

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### Further Resources

- [Bamidele Dancers & Drummers Website](#)
- [The Kennedy Center's Digital African Arts Collection](#)
- Balandier, George and Jacques Maquet: *Dictionary of Black African Civilization*, L.Amiel, 1974
- Bebey, Francis: *African Music, A People's Art*, Lawrence Hill Books, 1999
- Courlander, Harold: *A Treasury of African-American Folklore*, Da Capo Press, 2002
- Shearer, Wendy: *African and Caribbean Folktales, Myths and Legends*, Scholastic Classics, 2021

### Curricular Connections

#### History and Social Science

##### PreK

- Topic 2: Geography: maps and places (HSS.Pre-K.T2)
- Topic 3: History: personal experiences and memories (HSS.Pre-K.T2)

##### K

- Topic 2: Geography: connections among places (HSS.K.T2)
- Topic 3: History: shared traditions (HSS.K.T3)

##### Grade 1

- Topic 2: Geography: places to explore (HSS.1.T2)
- Topic 3: History: unity and diversity in the United States (HSS.1.T3)

##### Grade 2

- Topic 2: Geography and its effects on people (HSS.2.T2)
- Topic 3: History: migrations and cultures (HSS.2.T3)
- Topic 4: Civics in the context of geography: countries and governments (HSS.2.T4)

##### Grade 3

- Topic 5: The Puritans, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Native Peoples, and Africans (HSS.3.T6)

##### Grade 6

- Topic 1: Studying complex societies, past and present (HSS.6.T1)
- Topic 4a: Physical and political geography of Sub-Saharan Africa (HSS.6.T4a)
- Topic 4b: Selected Sub-Saharan African states and societies (HSS.6.T4b)
- Topic 5a: Physical and political geography and indigenous populations of Central America and the Caribbean Islands (HSS.6.T5a)
- Topic 5b: Physical and political geography of South America (HSS.6.T5b)

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### Curricular Connections, continued

#### History and Social Science, continued

##### Grades 9-12

- World History 1 Topic 1: Dynamic interactions among regions of the world (HSS.WH1.T1)
- World History 1 Topic 3: Interactions of kingdoms and empires c. 1000-1500 (HSS.WH1.T3)
- World History 1 Topic 5: Global exploration, conquest, colonization, c. 1492-1800 (HSS.WH1.T5)
- World History 2 Topic 3: The global effects of 19th century imperialism (HSS.WHII.T3)

#### English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

##### Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

#### Arts Standards: Dance, Music, and Theatre

##### Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (D.R.07, M.R.07, T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (D.R.08, M.R.08, T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (D.R.09, M.R.09, T.R.09)

##### Connecting

- 10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (D.Co.10, M.Co.10, T.Co.10)
- 11. Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (D.Co.11, M.Co.11, T.Co.11)

