

CULTURE & HISTORY

The vast continent of Africa, the second largest continent on earth, spans 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles) from north to south and 7,400 kilometers (4,600 miles) from east to west. It encompasses the world's largest desert, the Sahara; longest river, the Nile; and highest free-standing mountain, Mt. Kilimanjaro. Its geography and climate range from dry deserts in the north to the savannah plains and lush rainforests of its central and southern regions. It is home to an enormous variety of wild animals, including elephants, giraffes, lions, apes, and crocodiles. The people of Africa are equally diverse; over 2,000 languages are spoken there. Africa's beautiful and rhythmically complex music reflects the rich diversity of its landscape, languages, cultures, and people. The Arab slave trade in the 7th and 15th centuries and the Atlantic slave trade beginning in the 16th century forced many Africans into slavery and brought African cultural traditions to foreign lands, such as present-day Spain, Turkey, Brazil, the Caribbean, and the United States. The French, English, Belgians, Portuguese, and Dutch who colonized parts of Africa beginning in the late 18th century also left their mark on its music, language, and culture. The struggles of the African people for independence have been hard won, and contemporary struggles against disease, poverty, and conflict pose challenges for many African countries today. Through their music, the people of Africa express their identity, celebrate their traditions, tell their history and convey their hopes for the future.

The diaspora of Africans due to slavery and emigration influenced music throughout the world. Music styles in the Americas, such as gospel, blues, rock and roll, rhythm and blues, funk, salsa, bomba and hip hop all have roots in African musical traditions. These musical forms share characteristics such as complex rhythms, an emphasis on improvisation, call and response patterns, multiple melodic lines (polyrhythm), and communal participation. Listen for these features as you take a musical journey with African Playground.



ACTIVITIES



#1) Musical Proverbs

Hendry (Track # 7) is based on traditional proverbs from Madagascar, a large island in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa. The singer, Tarika Sammy, sings in Malagasy, the language of Madagascar. Most of the original people of Madagascar migrated there from Indonesia and Southeast Asia almost 2,000 years ago. Their music is very unique, with rhythms, melodies and musical instruments found nowhere else in the world. One such instrument is the *valiha*, a harp made of a bamboo tube and 28 strings. Listen for this instrument in the song.

You Will Need:

- CD player
- *Hendry* (Track # 7)
- *Hendry* song lyrics
- Africa Map
- Room to move
- Optional extension: paper and oil pastels or colored markers

Activity:

- 1) Play *Hendry* and ask students to describe their impressions of song.
- 2) Explain that the song is based on traditional Malagasy proverbs -- each line of the song is a different proverb. Discuss what a proverb is (a short, traditional statement that expresses a commonly accepted truth or value) Then ask students to think of proverbs they have heard and to describe how they were used. Explain that proverbs use metaphors to express an idea. Make a list of different proverbs and discuss their meaning.
- 3) Distribute the lyrics to *Hendry* and read each line together. Ask students to think about an idea these proverbs have in common, i.e. that people can be stronger working together rather than alone. Do they agree with this idea? Can they think of proverbs or situations from their own experience that support this idea or express the opposite idea (i.e., "Two heads are better than one")?

- 4) Tell students that throughout the African continent, much of the traditional and popular music invites participation from the listeners. This communal spirit is central to much African music and other aspects of African society. Listen to *Hendry* again. Do they hear a solo voice or many voices? These voices are working together to create beautiful music!
- 5) Have students work together in small groups to write a verse to the song with lines written as proverbs that support the value of working together.
- 6) Extension idea: Have students research proverbs from other countries that express a similar or opposite idea and display the proverbs along with their country of origin. One good site for proverb research is www.theotherpages.org/quote-05a.html.



#2) Call and Response

Hoya Hoya, a traditional children's song from Ethiopia, is usually sung by groups of children during the Buhe celebrations held around the New Year. Children go from house to house singing the song while pounding walking sticks to the beat. They take turns singing praises in rhyme to the inhabitants of each house they visit to earn gifts of bread or coins. This song, with its lead voice and group response, is a good example of the "call and response" pattern found in much of the music of Sub-Saharan Africa.

You Will Need:

- CD player
- *Hoya Hoya* (Track #4)
- *Hoya Hoya* song lyrics
- Africa map
- Room to dance

Activity:

- 1) Locate the country of Ethiopia on the map of Africa. Explain to students that Ethiopia is known as "the cradle of humanity" because so many fossils and bones of early humans have been found there. It was home to great civilizations that go back thousands of years.
- 2) Play *Hoya Hoya* and ask students to describe the voices they hear. Do they hear solo voices and group voices? Adult voices and children's voices? What is the relationship between the voices? Do they hear the solo voice singing a line and the group voices responding? This pattern, called "call and response," is a central feature of the music of Sub-Saharan Africa. It is used in work settings to coordinate movements and in secular and religious songs to invite community participation. You can also hear this pattern in music created by people of African descent throughout the world, such as the blues in the United States and *bomba* in Puerto Rico.
- 3) Explain that this song is sung by groups of children who go from house to house during the celebration of Buhe. Ask children if they have participated in celebrations where people travel house to house singing songs and/or asking for treats, such as Halloween "trick or treating" or Christmas caroling. Ask how they celebrate the New Year in their cultures and compare and contrast those to Buhe.
- 4) Distribute the lyrics to *Hoya Hoya*, and divide the class into two groups. Have one group sing the "call" part and the other the "response". Then reverse parts, so that each group can experience both roles.
- 5) Have students stand and walk in rhythm to the music while one group sings the lead part and the other the response. Then ask them to walk in rhythm while imitating the sound of a stick hitting the ground by clapping on the downbeat to punctuate their movements and singing. Ask students to observe how successfully they coordinate their movements. Ask if the music and call and response singing helps them move together.



#3) Paper Boats

The Republic of Cape Verde, an archipelago of islands located off the west coast of Africa, was uninhabited when Portuguese sailors arrived there in 1462. The Portuguese brought enslaved Africans to Cape Verde to do hard labor and became involved in the slave trade that sent many Africans to the Americas. People from Africa, Asia,

and the Middle East also settled on the islands. The music, culture and language of Cape Verde are a mixture of influences from the regions of the world where Cape Verdeans originated.

You Will Need:

- CD player
- *Barco di Papel* (Track # 12)
- *Barco di Papel* lyrics
- Africa map
- Mixed color paper, rectangle shape (several sheets for each child)
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Colored markers
- Optional project: string and wooden dowels

Activity:

- 1) Show students the map of Africa and locate the Cape Verde islands off the west coast. Ask students to think about the kinds of occupations you might find in an island nation surrounded by the sea. Tell them that many Cape Verdeans make their living from the sea as fishermen, and that boats and the sea are very important to their lives and their culture.
- 2) Play *Barco di Papel* (track #12) and ask students to describe the mood of the song. Is it happy or sad or something in between? Ask them to describe the rhythm and tempo of the song. Is it fast or slow? How does it make them want to move?
- 3) Distribute the lyrics to *Barco di Papel*. Explain that *Barco di Papel* means Paper Boat. The words invite us to make a paper boat and sail it together around the world, even up to the moon and stars, to create a happy future full of hope and tenderness. Ask students what kind of world they wish for. What message would they like to take around the world and up to the stars? What can be done to help bring about such a world?
- 4) Have students construct a folded paper boat (instructions are available for download from www.putumayokids.com) and decorate it with drawn or cut- paper images and symbols. Then have them write a message or wish for the world on a small piece of paper and tuck it into the boat. Play *Barco di Papel* while students are working.
- 5) Make a mural or bulletin board display with the theme of traveling over water or to the stars – you can be as simple or ornate as you wish – include images such as a map, waves, fish, planets, stars, etc. and attach the boats. Optional project: Create a mobile by tying together wooden dowels and suspending the images and boats from strings.



CLOSING QUESTIONS

- What have we learned about the countries on the African continent by listening and dancing to their music?
- What are some characteristics these African songs share with each other?
- What connections do you see between the ideas expressed in the proverbs in *Hendry* and the songs you listened to?
- How is the African music you listened to similar and different from other music you have heard?

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