

CONTEXT Since piloting our Culture, Community, and the Classroom (CCC) series in 2018, we have engaged traditional artists from diverse communities and connected them with public school teachers and museum educators in learning residencies. CCC uses a three-phase series model, starting with a 12-hour professional development workshop that includes artists, culture bearers, and regional educators learning together. The second phase pairs artists and teachers working together in a classroom. The final phase brings everyone who participated together to reflect on what was learned and to strengthen peer networks and connections.

This lesson plan was shared with us by a teacher who participated in the CCC program. It can be adapted for use with a local artist in another region. Or, Contact Us to learn how to invite the named artist in this lesson to your learning space.

WHAT WE LOVE Step dance is a dynamic, vital tradition that is widespread among African American fraternities and sororities. Many high schools have step teams. White students may be unfamiliar with step dance, so learning about it—how to do basic steps—enriches all students.

TITLE Step Dance

AUTHOR and TEACHER Amanda Shoemaker

ARTIST COLLABORATOR Akilah Briggs-Melvin

SUBJECT AND GRADE LEVEL 5th-grade General Music

LENGTH Two 40-minute class periods

HANDOUTS Artist Statement

MATERIALS/RESOURCES Screen, Audio Capabilities, Computer, Paper, Pencils

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VOCABULARY

Visit 1: Steady Beat--the heartbeat of the music; the pulse, rhythm patterns created by musical sounds. step dance history

Visit 2: Step Moves: Chip Clap, Bass Clap, Chest, Snap, Thighs, Feet, Flip Flap, Dividers, Voice

Resources for Background and Context:

<https://www.stepafrika.org/arts-education/stepping>

<https://www.essence.com/culture/what-to-know-history-stepping>

PURPOSE/CONNECTION

Before our artist's first visit, the students had participated in many steady beat and rhythm activities, including playing instruments, watching videos of body percussion and step dancers, and performing body percussion movements. I told them that a guest teacher would be coming to teach them about step dancing, which requires making rhythms with your body and moving to the steady beat. We came up with a list of questions to ask our guest, her co-teacher, and the two performers.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN—Visit 1

Engagement Our artist introduced herself (Ms. Akilah), her co-teacher (Ms. Amnerys), and student performers (Nini and Sarye). She had the 5th-grade students introduce themselves by telling her their names. She read her Artist Statement and asked the students a few questions about what she read. (i.e., Where did step dancing come from?)

Model/Demonstration: Akilah talked about the origins of step and who performs it today. She showed videos about its origins, as well as groups performing. Next, her students performed a few step routines for us.

Interview: Students had an opportunity to interview the guests and to get to know them better. We had talked about interviewing our guests during the class prior to their visit and we made a list of questions.

Share/Closure: During the music class after the artist visit, we had a discussion about what the students learned. We talked about how to write a thank-you note and to try and specifically write about something the students had learned from the visit.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN—Visit 2

Engagement: Ms. Akilah started with a review of the history of step dancing. She divided students into groups of 3-4. Each group designated a note taker. She taught the students the following step moves: Chip Clap, Bass Clap, Chest, Snap, Thighs, Feet, Flip Flap, Dividers,

Voice. As she taught, she had note takers write down the names of the moves and their definitions. She modeled each move and the students tried them with her.

Independent Exploration: Students practiced and applied the new learning independently, as individuals or with a partner or small group. (Teacher assigns before or after the interview, to practice and reinforce the interview process.) Students worked with their groups to create their own short step routine. Students were instructed to use at least three moves on their list. Students were also encouraged to write down their ideas to keep track of their routine. Ms. Akilah walked around to help students as needed.

Share/Closure/Assessment: Selected students shared explanations or demonstrations of their understanding and application of a teaching point. Students reflected/reviewed what they learned and asked questions. At the end of class students had time to perform their routines for Ms. Akilah. Before she left the students presented her with their thank-you notes.

GENERAL MUSIC STANDARDS

Create

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Perform

Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Respond

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work

Connect

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding