

THE VANAVER CARAVAN

Dance & Music For All People.

EarthBeat: A Journey

Middle & High School Teachers' Study Guide

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Dear Teachers,

In our 45+ years of offering in-school performances, we have found that the students are more appreciative of the experience if they have a previous understanding of the stirring music, interesting costumes, and energetic songs and dances they are about to see. Even just a small amount of information offered to them before the performance will be reinforced by the complete sensory experience of the production.

The intent of our assemblies and workshops is to expose young people to different cultures and to the tremendous varieties of dance and music worldwide. Since the beginning of time, dance has been an integral part of the lives of human beings. Even in prehistoric times, movement and sound communicated the needs and moods, grief and joy, of peoples everywhere.

When teachers and students return to the classroom, the students are often bursting with questions about what they just saw. With this guide, we hope to provide you, the teachers, with answers, as well as an assortment of folk dance and music information to add to the soup of impressions. In this guide, there are discussion questions and activities that will augment and strengthen The Vanaver Caravan experience for the students.

Less than 10% of our population are regular patrons of theater and performance art. The best way to support an ongoing interest is to foster for young people positive experiences in the arts. Please use this guide as just that, a guide for you to best help the students gain the most from this experience.

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About the Production

Vanaver Caravan dancers and musicians present a dynamic dance and music program which features material about the rich cultural heritage of the United States and the rest of the world. It also encourages students to learn more about their own family backgrounds. The theme of this program is “rhythms of the earth” and pieces are performed in a traditional style with live musical accompaniment. School shows are fully narrated, guiding students through each dance and country in a fun and involved journey. Audience participation in the sharing of folk songs, music and dance is a part of the colorful festival.

Folk dances and music from among the following cultures will be explored:

England
Ireland
Philippines
U.S.A.
China
Middle East
Brazil
South Africa
West Africa
Spain
Canada
Israel
India

The majority of the dances are “percussive dances” in which the dancers create sounds and rhythms to accompany and enhance the music. Sometimes the dancers even create the music on their own.

The Performers

The Vanaver Caravan is a brightly costumed group of energetic and spirited dancers and musicians who perform with a pastiche of folk dances from all parts of the world. With choreographer Livia Vanaver and composer/musician Bill Vanaver, The Vanaver Caravan weaves a tapestry of dance heritage with skill and precision. At home, in the concert hall, at outdoor festivals, conferences and in the classroom, the Company has captivated audiences throughout the world with its celebrations of American and International dance and music. Bill and Livia Vanaver have traveled extensively and gathered dances from each country they have visited. Several performers with the Company bring the cultures of their own country to the stage.

What is Dance? Why Dance?

What is Dance?

So, really what IS dance?

Do you think I was born yesterday? Of course I know what dance is.

So what is it?

A couple executing complicated steps on a ballroom floor? Or the same couple moving on the lighted tiles of a disco? A break dancer on a street corner? A group of people holding hands in a circle doing fast steps in unison? A ballerina in a frilly white dress making pirouettes across a stage? What about the little kick wiggle and jump a football player makes after a touchdown?

All of these movements are dance. Webster's dictionary defines dance as, "to move the body, especially the feet, in rhythm, ordinarily to music."

Led by the beating of our hearts, rhythm is an integral part of human physiology and has been a component of human life since the beginning of time. Cultures have developed instruments of every description to expand on our natural rhythms. Dancing has evolved to match the moods and styles of the instruments and music. Movement is a natural body rhythm that allows expression of feeling.

What is Percussive Dance?

EarthBeat is a collection of percussive dances from around the world.

Percussive dance is dance that uses parts of the body or even other objects to create rhythms. These rhythms create music to which the dancers dance or add to the music of the musicians. Some characteristics of the percussive dances in **EarthBeat** are the sticks in Indian Stick dance, the rhythms from the special shoes worn in flamenco, clogging, and French Canadian dance, and the sounds generated from the hitting of the palm against the chest and thigh in "Juba."

History of Dance

Everyone shared the first dances; young, old, male, female, leader and follower, all played a role in the dance. Ancient societies expressed their relationship with their gods, their daily work, their community and their history through dance, music and storytelling. Some ancient groups were hunters and plant gatherers, some were nomads, wandering about from one place to another, while others lived in one place planting crops and harvesting them. Their lives were affected by the cycle of the seasons, and many of their dances reflected their close relationship with nature.

Later on, in more complex societies, dance became specialized for the upper classes. In the palaces and capitals of Europe, schools were established to train professional dancers for elaborate royal entertainment. In these settings, only a few people actually danced while

others watched. This caused a separation between dancers and audience that continues today in most “non-social” dancing.

Costumes

The costumes that the Company members wear for the performance are traditional costumes from the cultures of the dances, either daily wear or specific to the dance itself. Sometimes the components of the costume help the dancer do the dance better by becoming a tool or instrument for the dance. This happens when the dance dances with ribbons in the Chinese Ribbon Dance or with the ankle bells worn in the Indian Stick dance.

Shoes

Shoes are a very important part of percussive dance. Look at the dancer’s feet. How are the shoes they are wearing helping the dance? Sometimes dances developed around the everyday footwear of the culture. In England people wore hard- soled clogs to work in the mills. They knew that their shoes made noises when walking across the floor. Eventually they created steps that became emphasized and made use of those sounds and put it to music. This became English clogging which is a grandparent of Appalachian clogging. The Company dancers wear modern tap shoes with metal taps put under the ball and heel of the foot to help give the sound of traditional shoes. The flamenco dancer wears shoes that have no taps, but tiny little nails pounded into the tip of the toe and the heel of the shoe. This also helps the percussion of the footwork be heard in a performance setting. What dances are done barefoot? Why would some cultures dance barefoot and others with shoes?

The Dances

South African Gum Boot Dance

This dance comes from the gold and diamond miners in South Africa who wore rubber boots to protect their feet from the sharp stones in the mines and the water running from high – powered hoses. During apartheid, the native South African people were not able to play drums, so they created dances and rhythms on their boots to elevate their spirits and also to communicate in code.

Appalachian Clogging

Appalachian clogging has its grandparents in Irish and English step dancing, African rhythms and Native American Cherokee “flat footing.” These four ethnic groups lived together in the mountains of Appalachia and observed each other’s cultures and dances. As tradition would have it, beginning around 200 years ago, they borrowed steps and styles from each other and thus this dance form was born in the southeastern U.S.A.

Chinese Ribbon Dance

The ribbon dance is traditional all over China for many festivals and occasions. Silk is an abundant fabric in China. Often people incorporate their natural resources and every day movements in the cultural dances. One version of this dance was inspired by a dream that an emperor had 1000 years ago. He dreamt that a princess was kept in a tower by an evil warlord because she refused to marry him. She found solace in her friend the moon and one night the moon sent moonbeams down and rescued her. Festival dances use red ribbons as the color symbolizing happiness and wealth. White ribbons are used in Flight to the Moon where the color traditionally symbolizes death. This dance was taught to us by Margaret Yuen and Jeanne Chin.

Flamenco

The rich ethno-cultural history of Andalusia (Southern Spain) has birthed a form of music unique to the region and the people: flamenco. Some will argue that flamenco is the music of the Spanish gypsies (Gitanos Beticos), other will credit it more broadly to the region. Flamenco has its roots in Moorish, Jewish, Eastern European and even Indian cultures. Southern Spain’s position at the end of the Silk Road made it a melting pot of many different cultures where flamenco was born.

Tap/Modern Percussive Dance

This dance is a perfect example of how dances are created and are born through the influence of many different styles. Percussive dance forms from a variety of cultures have shaped this style. Some include: Irish Step Dancing, American Tap, as well as Flamenco.

Hangman’s Reel

This dance is done to the complicated and challenging French Canadian fiddle tune. Some traditional French Canadian dances were done sitting down. The opening step that the dancers do while sitting down in the chairs is a traditional basic step in Quebequois step

dancing. Even the fiddlers do it to keep the beat while playing. Some fiddlers even stand up and dance while playing the music on their fiddles. Can you imagine doing the entire dance while playing the music for yourself on the fiddle?

Salip

This is a ritual dance done by the women of the Kalinga tribe of the Philippine Islands. It is traditionally done as a celebration of a happy event, such as a good harvest, a peace pact with another tribe, or a first-born baby. Many of the steps imitate the flight of birds.

Indian Stick Dance (Dhandia)

In India this dance is done in the Gujarati region during Navrati, the celebration of the triumph of good over evil. Great groups of people get together to dance the stick dance. They wear beautiful costumes and take pride in having the most beautifully decorated sticks to dance with.

Juba

This African-American hand game was learned from Bessie Jones, a wonderful singer and storehouse of folklore from her home region, the Georgia Sea Islands. These Islands, populated mostly by blacks, have been relatively isolated from the mainland since before the Civil War. Due to this fact, many African words and expressions have been preserved in their local African derived dialect, Gullah. The Juba chant is actually in a code so that the slaves could express their complaints without their owners' knowing. One of these words, "juba" refers to the food scraps and garbage that white slave owners would feed their slaves. The yellow cat is the slave owner. Because the slave owner took away the slaves' drums, the slaves used their bodies as percussive instruments to keep their music alive.

The percussive quality of hands and body is used for dance and music in Africa and Europe as well as in other areas. Most North American children are familiar with any number of versions of Hambone, Juba's well-known cousin (see page 10 for words and explanation of hands).

Erev Shel Shoshanim "Evening of the Roses"

Israeli Dance is a relatively new form of folk dance since Israel only became a country in 1948. It is influenced by the many areas from which the Jews emigrated and the people who already lived there. Some of these styles are Eastern European and Russian folk dance, Arabic line dances (debkas) with a strong upright style, and Yemenite dance with beautiful hand movements. Israeli choreographers create dances for everyone to dance together at celebrations and festival as well as social events. Hadassah Badoch, a Yemenite dancer from Inbal Dance Company, choreographed Erev Shel Shoshanim. It employs the beautiful hand movements that are almost East Indian in nature, with hyper extended hands and flowery fingers to express the movement of pulling rosebuds out of the air and making flatbread (pita) in the marketplace. This dance is followed by a spirited hora, the national dance of Israel. Dancing the lively grapevine step, the dancers seem to fly up in the air while maintaining a circle. They celebrate joy and life with their arms and upper body and kick their legs behind them in the Russian style.

Irish Jig

This is a soft shoe Irish Jig. The lace up shoes that the dancer is wearing are called Gillies. Notice the beautiful embroidery on the dark green costume. The pictures and patterns of the embroidery come from the Book of Kells, one of the oldest books in the world. It can still be seen today in Dublin, Ireland. Notice how the dancer holds her arms close to her sides. This is a characteristic of Irish dance. How is this different from the other dances? Why do you think she does that? The drum that is played is called a bohran. It is a traditional drum from Ireland.

Sasa

In Western Samoa people enjoy this dance, in which many of the hand movements represent the work of daily life, especially the activities involved in getting ready for a festival. Can you pick out what the dancers' movements are portraying? Are they painting, cooking, or catching fish?

Makulele (Brazil)

Makulele is a dance from Angola, Brazil. It was originally danced with machetes. It is both a dance and an exercise to train in and practice Brazilian martial art. Makulele was developed as a form of self-defense disguised as a dance, to use against slave owners and bounty hunters. People who escaped from the slave ships would hide. They developed Makulele using sugar cane that they cut down to be the same length as the machetes. The slave owners would see them "dancing", not noticing the machetes. Makulele has its roots in West African rhythms and dance as well as dances and rhythms indigenous to Brazil. The version that The Vanaver Caravan teaches, was learned from master capoeirista/dancer/teacher: Nego Gato.

Pre-Performance Preparation

Discuss, prompt the students:

Why do people dance? What is dance? What is folk dance? Do you dance?

Wiggle a finger in the air or do a little dance. Ask: is this dancing?

Tell them what dancing is and then ask if dancing is movement. Can we make a dance out of something we do everyday? How?

Make some of our daily activities into dances. Can we dance other things? How about colors, sounds or feeling? Try it.

Provide music or just let students explore the movement.

How does music change dancing?

How might climate or geography affect dancing?

Heritage

What is heritage?

Tell the students about their heritage. Ask them about their heritage.

Tell them that they are about to attend a performance of songs and dances from around the world. Maybe they will see a dance from a country that their family is from.

Journey through Song and Dance

Show the students a map of the world. Point out some of the countries from which they will be seeing dances and hearing songs.

Have you ever traveled to any other country?

What kind of dancing do you think people do in _____?

How are these countries different?

Do you think that the dances of some of the countries will be similar/ different to other countries? How? Why?

Tell the students that dances travel. How do you think they travel?

JUBA

Juba this and juba that and juba killed a yellow cat
 You sift the meal and give me the husk
 You bake the bread and give me the crust
 You cook the meat and give me the skin
 And that's the way my Mama's trouble began
 Juba, juba, get over double trouble juba.

Hold left hand in the air above the right knee, palm down. With the palm of your right hand, tap your right knee (top of thigh); lift your right hand so that the back of the right hand taps the palm of the left hand which you are holding stationary. Bring the right hand down again to tap the right knee (a down, up, down or "floor, ceiling, floor" motion).

As you switch hands, your left hand will hit your left knee, while simultaneously bridging your right hand into position above the left knee. Complete the three beats on your left side by lifting the left hand so that it makes contact with the palm of the right hand, then tapping the knee again. (Floor, ceiling, floor again). Continue alternating side to side.

NOTE: Each hand only strikes its own knee, never the other knee and the back of the hand that is lifted always strikes the palm of the hand that is held stationary over the knee. It is important that there be no pause in the 1, 2, 3 pattern. The words to the Juba are in a 4-beat pattern, so a syncopation is created with the 3-beat hand motions against the 4-beat word pattern.

Ju-ba this and ju-ba killed the yel-low cat
 You sift – the meal - - - and give me the husk - - -
 You bake – the bread - - - and give me the crust - - -
 You cook - - - the meat - - - and give me the skin - - - and
 That's the way my Ma – ma's - - trou – ble be-gin - - -
 Ju – ba, - - - - ju – ba - - - -
 Get o- ver dou – ble trou – ble, ju- ba - - - -

Indian Poem

This hand dance of India is basically a universal with illustrated in the beautiful form of Bharata Natyam (temple dancing), using hands in a mime dance way. In India, as in many other countries, hands can tell stories, with symbolic gestures. Livia Vanaver learned this dance during a whole earth study course in her training at New York University from a master Indian dance teacher. Illustrations follow on the next page.

Post – Performance Discussion and Activity

Recap

Can we remember one fact about each of the dances we saw?

Do you have anymore questions?

What kinds of shoes did the dancers wear?

Hand Games

Ask the children if they know any hand games like Juba

Have them share the game and rhyme with the class.

Do you (teacher) know any hand games from when you were a kid? What about skipping songs for jumping rope?

Body Percussion Band

Begin one rhythm using your body, clapping slapping one hand on chest, thigh etc.

Have class repeat the rhythm, when the class is comfortable with the beat designate a small section to continue that rhythm.

Begin another rhythm with another body percussion, have another section continue that rhythm.

Observe, listen and reflect on the way the rhythms overlap and intersect each other. Is it hard to carry one beat while your neighbor is making another one? What do you like about his? Could you make an entire dance this way?

Young Folklorists

Have the students spend time leering more about the culture of their favorite dance. The students choose three interesting facts to report back to the class. Use the included worksheet to encourage students to learn more about their heritage.

Drawing Movement

After the performance reflect with the students as to what they saw.

Have the students draw quick sketches of the dances they remember.

Heritage and Folklore

What is folklore? _____

Do you know your national origin? _____

Mother's side ? _____

Father's side ? _____

How many generations can you trace in your family?

How are aspects of your culture similar or different to other cultures?

Why is it important for you to know your own heritage?

How can you find out about your own heritage and explore your background?

Bring in three of the following: recipes, stories, lullabies, songs, dances, music instruments, costumes, games toys or sayings that may have been in your family for at least five years.

Can you think of any other aspects of culture that could be added to the list above?

Ask an elder family member about an element of folklore or your heritage that you could pass on to the next generation.

Discography **(Some of our favorites)**

Village Music of Bulgaria Nonesuch H- 72034

The Chieftains (Irish Instrumental) – Claddagh Records, Ltd.

The Second Annual Farewell Reunion – Mike Seeger: American Traditional, Mercury SRM – 1- 685

Quebequois Phillipe Bruneau – Philo 2003

Barachois (Traditional French Canadian Music)

Quagmire (Irish and French Canadian)

Man's Early Musical Instruments: Folkways (Ethnic Library)

Songs of the Earth: Theodore Bikel and the Pennywhistlers – Elektra – EKA – 7326

Balkan Rhythm Band: Flying Fish – 314

Landfall II: Bill and Livia Vanaver: Philo – 1013

Afro-Percussion: Babatundi Olatunji – Columbia – CS 8434

Folk Music in American Series – Dance Music – Vols 3, 4, & 5; Vol. 14 – Solo & Display
Music: Library of Congress

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