Teacher Resource

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ORIGINS

Sofa is one of the oldest rhythms played in West Africa from the Mande people. Sofa means guardian on the horse in Mande languages. People who dance the Sofa were usually a part of the Mali empire’s military.

Sofas make their first appearance in oral and written records during the formation of the Mali Empire. Sofas were recruited from "jonow" (slaves) captured in battle or bought from afar. They could be depended on in most instances for obedience since their livelihood depended entirely on their master. The institution of slavery in the Mali Empire heavily rewarded loyalty and jonow could rise to civil or military positions of prominence. Jonow became part of their master's clan and were often freed after a certain number of years. The jonow are not the same as Africans who were taken by Europeans in the transatlantic slave trade.
Jonow were expected to accompany their master's into battle and handle his horse and weapons. Initially forbidden from engaging in direct warfare, sofa eventually made up the majority of Mali's infantry army. As infantry, they were armed with bows and arrows by the state or, more accurately, royal clans devoted to the state.

In the forest and swampy areas of the Mali Empire, cavalry was minimized or altogether abandoned making sofas the exclusive instrument of war. Sofas were equipped with two quivers. Sofas utilized deadly poisons and fired in arcs to give the arrows strength. Sofas also used flaming arrows, especially against fortifications that were often little more than thatch or wooden palisades.

Some sofas fought as cavalry, at least after being freed, such as Mansa Sakura who started out his military career as a jonow of the Keita clan. He was freed by Sundiata Keita, became a cavalry commander of some renown and eventually usurped the throne of Mali.

**MOVEMENT**

The traditional movement of Sofa represents military defense from colonizers or other enemies. The movements are powerful and epic, telling a story of ancient Africa’s past. The movement of this dance represents strength fortitude and power.

**RESOURCES**

- When Sundiata Keita Built the Mali Empire - Ancient History Illustrated Grade 4 Children's Ancient History Paperback – May 15, 2017 by Baby Professor
- Sundiata: Lion King of Mali Jan 22, 1999 by David Wisniewski
ORIGINS

Djansa (Dansa, Yansa, Diansa) is originally coming from the Kassouke-people from Southern Mali (Kayes-region). In Kayes, Sunu and Dansa were played together. Girls would dance the Sunu as a competition to find the best dancer. Men would dance the Djansa for competitions as well. For the young men, it was also used at times when they had a disagreement or a rivalry with another man in order to settle the conflict. Currently, in places like Bamako in Mali this dance can be seen at weddings and formal affairs that involve celebrations.

Kayes is a city in western Mali on the Sénégal River, with a population of 127,368 at the 2009 census. Kayes is the capital of the administrative region of the same name. The name "Kayes" comes from the Soninké word "karré", which describes a low humid place that floods in rainy season.

MOVEMENT

Djansa movements can be both sharp and fluid. It required great technique and voice. The music of the KAssonka Dound Doun plays an important part in interpreting the movement flow and style.
INSTRUMENTS
Khasonka (also: Khassonké, Xasonka) is the name of an ethnic group historically associated with the Khaso cultural/geographic region in western Mali. In present-day Mali the administrative center of this region is the city of Kayes. Khasonka drum ensembles feature a variety of instruments, yet the most important, emblematic one is the dundunba or dundungo, a double-headed cylindrical drum with goatskin membranes. The player strikes the drum with a curved stick and has a bell fixed to his other hand, hitting the bell with an iron nut or ring slipped on his thumb.

In Mali in earlier days, only two bass-drums were used. A third pattern was added (here kenkeni-pattern) and it's logical that different kenkeni-patterns on different occasions were improvised.

RESOURCES
The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa Paperback – October 15, 1995 by Patricia McKissack (Author), Fredrick McKissack (Author)
ORIGINS
(Kou Kou or Cou Cou) is a traditional dance that, in the old time, was performed by women returning from fishing. The dance was accompanied on the women's fishing gear. ... Kuku evolved from a dance performed by the women to a communal recreational dance which could be performed by men and women of all ages.

MOVEMENT
Many of the KuKu dances depict fishing or working. One way in which fishing is done in West Africa is with giant hand-woven nets. These nets take a lot of skill to manage and to use. Fishing becomes a major resource in West Africa as a means of trade and livelihood.

RESOURCES
Fishing Stories For Africa: Stories from the first ten years of The Fishing & Hunting Journal Kindle Edition by Edward Truter (Author), Martin Rudman (Author), Craig Smith (Illustrator)

Afrobeat/Hip-Hop
ORIGIN

Afrobeat is a music genre which involves the combination of elements of West African musical styles such as fuji music and highlife with American funk, jazz influences, and hip-hop, with a focus on chanted vocals, complex intersecting rhythms, and percussion.

MOVEMENT

Much of the movements of Afrobeat derive from traditional African dance styles, hip hop and other international dance styles of the African Diaspora. Afrobeat dance celebrates the diversity of African musicality with a very spiritual element.

PIioneer IN THE GENRE

Fela Anikulapo Kuti was born October 15, 1938, and passed on August 2, 1997. He was also professionally known as Fela Kuti, or simply Fela. He was a Nigerian multi-instrumentalist, musician, composer, and pioneer of the Afrobeats music genre. He was also an avid human rights activist that integrated profound political messages inside of his music. At the height of his popularity, he was referred to as one of Africa's most "challenging and charismatic music performers.

RESOURCES

Afrobeat: Fela and the Imagined Continent
Aug 2002 by Sola Olorunyomi
The Djembe (pronounced JEM – Beh) has its origins with the "Numu", a social class of professional blacksmiths from the Mandinka (Maninke) people of western Afrika in around 1300 AD. They were the first to carve this wooden instrument. The term “djembe” originates from the Bambara saying “Anke djé, anke bé” which translates to “everyone gathers together in peace." The call of the djembe starts events and is used to let our young people know that libations are about to begin amongst other things.

**ORIGINS**

A villager’s wife was pounding grain in her mortar one day when she pounded through the bottom. Her husband happened to be in the vicinity with a goatskin, which they stretched over the hole in the mortar to make the very first djembe. Another story says that the Djembe came through a genie known as a Djinn. The Djinn gifted a special tree to a Mandinka blacksmith and taught him how to carve it into a djembe.

**USAGE**

In a typical ensemble, two djembes and a dun dun player accompany the Jeli (oral historian). Women sing and clap hands while moving in and out of the circle, showing off their skill as dancers. The djembe master or soloist leads the pace of the dance, increasing the tempo when dancers enter the circle. A single song is played for most occasions, usually lasting a few hours.

**PURPOSE**

The djembe is primarily the instrument of dance used at marriages, baptisms, funerals, circumcisions, a rite of passage ceremonies and rituals. The djembe is also played during the plowing, sowing, harvest, courtship rituals and even to settle disputes among the men of the village.

The djembe is considered a sacred instrument. Its properties around vibration and healing make it a healing instrument which is used when people need medical attention. Therefore, the djembe fola (the person who plays the djembe) has a very large responsibility in the village and in society.