

African Rhythms and Spirituals

Joseph Dixon/JD Art

Grades: K-5

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

This performance is inspired by two of the oldest forms of communication, the drum and the human voice. It explores the origin and history of African percussions and Spirituals from Americans of African descent. Students learn the roles of traditional African drums such as the popular Djembe, Ashiko, and Dun Dun drums, as well the Tumbadora drum from Congolese. The drums coded messages were used for communication, celebrations, healing rituals and rites of passage ceremonies. In this country, the drums coded messages led to slave revolts and escape attempts before they were banned or outlawed. The coded messages in the Spirituals that were sung, served as guides or roadmaps for those escaping enslavement by way of the Underground Railroad. Participants are entertained with songs like “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”, “Wade in the Water”, “Gospel Train” and “Follow the Drinking Gourd”. The history of the Underground Railroad and each song’s meanings and the terms used are explained. Since rivers, locomotives and the Big Dipper all played a significant role in the Underground Railroad, the audience will learn the history of the locomotive, explore the Big Dipper and the North Star, and create rhythms that represent the life cycle of a river.

	Art	Social Studies	Music	ELA & Reading	The students will:
K	K.3,	K.7, K.15	K.3	K.1, K.10, K.11	* Demonstrate appropriate concert etiquette during live performances.
1	K.3	1.7 1.15	1.3	1.1	*Understand the role of African drumming in history.
2	K.3	2.15, 2.16	2.3	2.1	*Learn various songs
3	K.3	3.5 3.13	3.3	3.1	
4	K.3	4.10 4.17	4.3	4.1	
5	K.3	4.10 5.18	5.3	5.1	

Academic Vocabulary:

Tradition	the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way.
Spirituals	a religious song of a kind associated with black Christians of the southern US, and thought to derive from the combination of European hymns and African musical elements by black slaves.
River	Any natural stream of water that flows in a channel with defined banks.

Big Dipper	a constellation in the Northern Sky. The Little Dipper has traditionally been important for navigation, particularly by mariners, because of Polaris being the North Star.
North Star (Polaris)	the brightest star in the constellation of Ursa Minor. The North Star (Polaris), the current northern pole star and the tip of the handle of the Little Dipper
Underground Railroad	a network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States during the early to mid-19th century, and used by African-American slaves to escape into free states and Canada with the aid of abolitionists and allies who were sympathetic to their cause.
Follow The Drinking Gourd	first published in 1928. The Drinking Gourd song was supposedly used by an Underground Railroad operative to encode escape instructions and a map. These directions then enabled fleeing slaves to make their way north from Mobile, Alabama to the Ohio River and freedom.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:

Before the Performance:

- Using the vocabulary list, students should study the Big Dipper and Little Dipper.
- They should also study the Underground Railroad and the folksong “Follow the Drinking Gourd”.
- Students can view various versions of spirituals used during the Underground Railroad like “Wade In The Water” and “Follow The Drinking Gourd” on YouTube.
- Students should also be introduced to rivers and other bodies of water.

After the performance:

- Several art projects can be conducted following the performance. Students can make maps of the routes of the Underground Railroad.
- They can also create drawings or collages that represent the Big Dipper and Little Dipper, along with The North Star (Polaris).
- Using musical instruments in class, students can play and sing along with “Follow The Drinking Gourd”.

Language Arts:

How do listening and speaking help us learn from one another?

Social Studies:

How does culture shape the way people live together?

How does the physical environment affect how people live?

Art:

How do artists communicate ideas about people and culture?

Music:

How does music help people express ideas and connect with others?

Resources:

Related Websites

<http://www.followthedrinkinggourd.org/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pw6N_eTZP2U

<http://www.dustbunny.com/afk/constellations/bigdipper/>

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/underground-railroad>

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/collections/teaching-content/underground-railroad/>

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Joseph Dixon - With over twenty-five years' experience, Joseph has conducted over a thousand workshops, residencies and performances in the Houston, Dallas, Beaumont and San Antonio areas through the collaborative partnerships with schools and organizations, including Young Audiences of Houston. He designs and teaches art activities that utilize TEKS to support effective classroom learning. Award-winning and multi-talented, Mr. Dixon has presented lectures, workshops, classes, exhibitions, and performances both locally and nationally and has had several of his writings and illustrations published.