



KANKOURAN DANCE COMPANY
Presents

“VISIT AFRICA”

KanKouran West African Dance Company was established as an instructional institution designed to preserve the traditional cultural arts of the Senegambia Region. The “Visit to Africa” program dazzles audiences with its exciting and electrifying dances and rhythms that reflect various cultural traditions that relate to the history and culture of West Africa.

The objectives of, “*Visit Africa*,” include the following:

- Increase students’ understanding of African cultural traditions
- Explore ways of stimulating students’ non-verbal means of communication
- Give students an introduction to the history, language and techniques of African dance
- Expose students to traditional African musical instruments

PROGRAM CONTENT

Drum Call

The drum call begins all ceremonies. The drums speak the opening prayer and request blessings for the dance ceremony to begin. The purpose of the drum call is to contain the spirits that would normally be invoked through the dances. The drum call is also called “Bak.” Each ethnic group has its own “Bak,” and within each ethnic group every family has its own special rhythms that are passed down from generation to generation.

Akonkon

Akonkon (“A-kon-kon”) is a dance from the Diola (“Jola”) people of Senegal. They are farmers in the South of Senegal, in the Casamance Region. Since it is rainy all year, this enables the Diola to successfully harvest rice, as it is one of those crops that require lots of water. Akonkon is designed to show the strength of the rice farmers, who spend many long hours cropping in the rice fields. Men and women work together enthusiastically in hope of a successful harvest. There are two very important movements that you will see that characterize this dance: the men chopping the rice stalks, and the women gathering and separating the rice. The drums accompany the workers in the field.

Questions for Discussion

During this portion of the program, the “tour guide” explains the cultural significance of the costumes that the performers are wearing. There is also an explanation of the traditional musical instruments that are being used, in addition to some historical information about Senegal and its various ethnic groups. The students are then instructed to ask any questions that they may have pertaining to the performance, the instruments, the costumes, or Africa, in general. This is always a very special part of the program.

Demonstration of Other Instruments Used in Africa

This part of the program highlights other instruments frequently used throughout West Africa.

Audience Participation

This is the students’ favorite part of the program. Here, students are asked to come to the stage and participate in a dance routine while the drummers accompany their movements.

Mandiani (Finale)

Mandiani (“man-john-ee”) is a very lively dance from the Bamboura (“Bom-boo-ra”) people of Mali. It is performed when young girls and boys reach the age of 18. The celebration always





occurs during the month of July. In this area, birthdays are not calculated by months, only years. Thus, everyone turning 18 during a particular year will celebrate their birthday in July. The entire village participates in the celebration.

Once the children reach 18, they are required to take-on their future adult responsibilities. The young women are expected to take over the family household duties from their mothers. They do this so that one day they will know how to run their own household. The young men are required to take over their father's responsibilities, in addition to learning the "family business." This may be drumming, making jewelry, designing leather goods, farming, etc. In this way, young people are taught responsibility, discipline, and the means by which to successfully cultivate their own family.

The movements of Mandiani are acrobatic, showing the strength and resilience of young people. The village enjoys the celebration as they proudly look upon their young people entering adulthood.

Closing Remarks

PROGRAM SUPPORT OF DCPS LEARNING STANDARDS

Because of the different school systems encompassed in the program areas that we service, and because local and state standards overwhelmingly correspond to national standards, the following national curriculum standards are addressed through KanKouran's program:

Dance:

- Understanding Dance as a Way to Create and Communicate Meaning (NA-D.3)
- Demonstrating and Understanding Dance in Various Cultures and Historical Periods (NA-D.5)

Music:

- Understanding Relationships Between Music, the Other Arts, and Disciplines Outside the Arts (NA-M.8)

English/Language Arts:

- Multicultural Understanding: Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles. (NL-ENG.K-12.9)
- Applying Non-English Perspectives: Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum. (NL-ENG.K-12.10)

Social Sciences/Geography:

- Places and Regions (NSS-G.2)

OVERVIEW OF SENEGAL

KanKouran's dances are from Senegal, West Africa. It is one of the most accessible West African countries, located on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, with a thriving import and export-trading center. It is a flat, sandy country between Guinea, to the South; Mali, to the East; and Mauritania, to the North. Prince George's County is officially related to the Senegalese region of Ziguinchor, through the "Sister Countries Program." The official language of Senegal is French, but Wolof is the most widely spoken native language. Eighty percent of Senegal's population is Muslim. Others are Christians or followers of "traditional" beliefs.

KANKOURAN WEST AFRICAN DANCE COMPANY

KanKouran West African Dance Company was founded in 1983 by two nationals of Senegal, West Africa, to introduce elements of authentic African cultural arts to American artists and audiences. In addition, KanKouran was designed to promote intercultural and educational



experiences. The program objective is to increase the audience's understanding and appreciation of African culture via the presentation of traditional African dance and music.

KanKouran takes its name from the Mandingo people of Senegal. In Mandingo culture, KanKouran is a guide who teaches young boys and girls the meaning of manhood and womanhood. True to the name, KanKouran works extensively with young people through its junior and children's performing groups, children's community dance and music classes, and its programs in schools.

SELECTED VOCABULARY

- **Casamance** - a forest region in Southern Senegal.
- **Akonkon** - a dance celebrating the rice harvest.
- **Calabash** - a type of pumpkin whose dried shell is often used as a bowl or shaped into utensils.
- **Chake** - beaded necklaces worn by women.
- **Chies** - long pants with loose fitting material between the legs, to facilitate movement. These pants are worn by men.
- **Dex** - Mandingo word for river.
- **Diola** - farming people of the Casamance Region.
- **Djembe** - a very popular large kettle type drum made from a tree trunk, with a goat skin stretched across the top opening.
- **Gage** - Mandingo word for ocean or sea.
- **DounDoun** - large barrel type drum that serves as the bass drum in an ensemble. The instrument has cow skin stretched across both openings.
- **Lapa** - an authentic African material worn by women as a long skirt.
- **Maniyer**- a blouse worn by women for work or special occasions.
- **Ngamba** - a short loin cloth worn by men working in the fields.

Greetings

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| • Na nga def | "How are you?" |
| • Ma ngi ferek | "I am fine" |
| • Jerejef | "Thank you" |
| • Nyo ko bok | "You're Welcome" |
| • Ba Beneen | "Good Bye" |



