

# EDUCATORS GUIDE

## *Five Days with Step Afrika!*



Supported by:



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Use this guide to help your students anticipate, investigate, and reflect upon your live performance experience. This guide is geared toward teachers of grades K - 12.

*Five Days with Step Afrika!* includes 5 videos that range from 10 - 20 minutes. You can watch them in the order presented or in any order you prefer. This guide provides some resources to introduce the videos and then some lesson ideas to extend students' learning based on the content of the performances.

### IN THIS GUIDE

- 3** Introducing the Performance
- 4-6** Reflection Questions
- 7-9** Essential Questions
- 10-12** Lesson Plan: Choreograph a Step Routine
- 13** About Portland Ovations
- 14** Student Response Form
- 15-16** Teacher Response Form

**Educators**, we invite you to share with us what you did in your classroom around this guide or the production. You can email [scoleman@portlandovations.org](mailto:scoleman@portlandovations.org) or reach us via [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

We want to hear and see what great learning is happening in your classrooms.

## INTRODUCING THE PERFORMANCE

Before you watch the videos, it is helpful to introduce the dance company and the art form.

Step Afrika! is the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping. Stepping is a polyrhythmic and percussive form of dance where the body is both the dancer and the music. Step Afrika! was started in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, is based in Washington D.C. and has toured all across the United States and the world. Their choreography blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities; traditional African dances; and an array of contemporary dance and art forms. Their performances are much more than dance shows; they integrate songs, storytelling, humor and audience participation.

*Five Days with Step Afrika!* Its part history lesson, part class and part performance.

Here are some questions to think about as you watch and listen to the story.

- What types of movement did you see? How would you describe stepping?
- What moments of the performance stick with you? What moments did you enjoy? Why?

We don't get to watch performance these days because of the pandemic but I hope you are all able to sit back and enjoy this experience as if you were in a theater.

### **Watching Tip!**

Stepping is an interactive experience! When you watch stepping live the audience is an important part of the experience. They participate in the call and response and holler their praise and admiration for the complicated dance moves the dancers are showing off. The audience might clap along when invited and move their bodies in rhythm. Invite your students to do this throughout the different recorded performances. The dancers will encourage everyone to participate as well!

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

These questions can be used during and after each video to reflect on the content and engage students in discussion. Please feel free to modify the questions to be developmentally appropriate for your age range.

### Day 1: What is Stepping?

1. How did you feel when watching the dancers step?  
How would you describe their movements?
2. The dancers are filmed around Washington, D.C. – do you recognize any of the locations? Use [this map](#) on the performance page to learn more about these locations.
3. What is stepping?
  - Stepping is a highly energetic, polyrhythmic and percussive dance form created by African American college students
  - Dancer is both the dancer and the music
  - Poly = many, Rhythmic = A strong, repeated pattern of sound
  - Percussive = to strike forcibly
1. What are some other types of percussive dancing? (Flamenco, Irish Step Dancing, Tap Dance) Have you seen or done these types of dance before?
2. What are the Divine Nine? How are they connected to the history of stepping? (Check out page 7-9)



## Day 2: The Performance, Part 1

1. What did you enjoy about the performance? How did you feel when you were watching the performance?
2. How did the dancers use call and response in their performance?
3. Do you know anyone who has been a part of a fraternity or sorority? Why did they join that association? What are other associations or groups in your area that build community between people for the good of the community?
4. How were the fraternity and sorority style routines different?
5. What were the three rules of voting?
  1. Clap, yell, stomp your feet (if you want the team to win)
  2. Be silent (if you don't want the team to win)
  3. No booing, thumbs down, or anything negative.



## Day 3: The Performance, Part 2

1. What are gumboots? Where were they worn? Look at a map of Africa and find the different countries that the video mentions - Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland (now known as Eswatini), Lesotho, South Africa.
2. What did you enjoy about the performance? How did you feel when you were watching the performance?
3. How was the South African Gumboot dance different than the other dances you have watched thus far?
4. Are you excited to learn how to step? Do you think it will be easy or hard?



## Day 4: Stepping with Step Afrika!

1. What are the basic movements that you learned? Name and share them.
2. How did it feel to learn the basics? What parts were easier or more challenging for you?
3. Check out the Choreograph a Step Routine lesson plan to build off the basic movements taught. (pg. 10)



## Day 5: Meet the Artists of Step Afrika!

1. What parts of being a dancer did the dancers talk about loving? What did they say was challenging? Would you be interested in being a performing artist that travels around the country and world? Why or why not?
2. Nicolas shared that Step Afrika! has three core values - teamwork, commitment and discipline. Why might these be important core values of being a dancer in a dance company? How might these core values apply to you and the way you live your life?
3. Would you like Step Afrika! to come to Maine? (We hope so because we can't wait to bring them to Maine when it is safe to gather again!)



## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

### WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF STEPPING?

The stepping of Step Afrika! was created by the college students in African American fraternities and sororities at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. It is distinct for its use of clapping, body slapping, footsteps, chants and singing. However, it has its roots in a lot of different parts of Black history and culture. Step Afrika! recently premiered a new work that honors and celebrates an important moment in stepping history – the Stono Rebellion.



Photo by Drago Videmsek

“On September 9, 1739, the largest insurrection of enslaved Africans in North America began in South Carolina on the banks of the Stono River. Twenty Africans marched south toward a promised freedom in Spanish Florida, waving flags, beating drums, and shouting ‘Liberty.’ This extraordinary act of rebellion in colonial America predates the famed Boston Tea Party of 1773, the first significant act of defiance to British rule over American colonists. Although the Stono Rebellion was suppressed, this little-known event in American history forever changed African American life and culture. When Africans lost the right to use their drums through The Negro Act of 1740, they began to use their bodies as percussive instruments in response. This act of survival and activism earned them the name of “Drumfolk,” coined by famed folklorist Bessie Jones. Their percussive movement gave rise to some of the country’s most distinctive art forms, including the ring shout, tap, hambone, and stepping.”

In the early 1900s, the Black students in African-American fraternities and sororities took on this percussive and vocal form of dance and over many years made it their own. Each fraternity and sorority has a distinctive style of chant and movement. It was, and is used as a part of the celebrations of being a member of the fraternities and sororities as well as a way to show pride. Stepping is an important part of African American culture in the United States, and internationally.

## WHAT ARE HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (HBCUS)?

Historically Black Colleges and Universities, often referred to as HBCUs, are higher education institutions that were founded before 1964 with the purpose of providing education to African Americans. These institutions were essential because it was not possible for Black youth to receive a college education due to segregation and Jim Crow laws.

Today there are over 100 HBCUs in the United States. Below is a list of some of the most well known schools along with a few of their famous graduates.

### Hampton University (Hampton, VA)

Some notable alumni include Alberta Williams King (mother to MLK Jr.), mathematician and aerospace engineer Mary Jackson, educator Booker T. Washington (who founded Tuskegee University), comedian Wanda Sykes, president of MSNBC Rashida Jones, former Surgeon General of the United States Sylvia Trent-Adams.



### Howard University (Washington, D.C.)

Some notable alumni include Vice President Kamala Harris, actor Chadwick Boseman, Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison, writer Zora Neale Hurston, Ben Ali (founder of Ben's Chili Bowl), and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.



### Morehouse College (Atlanta, GA)

Some notable alumni include scholar Eddie Glaude, filmmaker Spike Lee, Senator Raphael Warnock, activist Julian Bond, Martin Luther King, Jr., marine biologist Samuel M. Nabrit.



### Spelman College (Atlanta, GA)

Some notable alumni include politician Stacey Abrams, writer Pearl Cleage, Marian Wright Edelman (founder of the Children's Defense Fund), Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker, musician and activist Bernice Johnson Reagon.



## WHO ARE THE DIVINE NINE?

Nine historically African American Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities make up the National Pan-Hellenic Council and they are often referred to as The Divine Nine. Fraternities and sororities are social and service associations on college and university campuses around the world. People join these institutions for a sense of community, as a way to give back, and for academic, leadership and career opportunities. African American fraternities and sororities were founded because Black students were banned from pledging white fraternities and sororities. Thus, in the early 1900s through the 1960s Black students created their own. Today, fraternities and sororities remain a part of the social life of many college and universities.



Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority



Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity



Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity



Delta Sigma Theta Sorority



Omega Psi Phi Fraternity



Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity



Zeta Phi Beta Sorority



Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority



Iota Phi Theta Fraternity

## Lesson Plan: Choreograph a Step Routine

Use this lesson plan to guide your students in creating their own polyrhythmic routine. Feel free to modify this for your age range.

**Objective:** Individually or in small groups of up to 4, students will create their own step routine. They will share the routine with others and discuss its composition using key vocabulary words.

1. Watch Day 4: Stepping with Step Afrika!
2. Review the basic steps taught
  - Bass Clap: Clap with your hands in a “C” shape
  - Tone Clap: Clap with hands offset
  - Match Clap: Clap with hands lined up
  - Chip Clap: Hit the bottom part of your hand with the top part of your other hand
  - Step: Stop your foot on the ground
3. Explain to students that they will now choreograph their own polyrhythmic step routine using the basic steps.
4. Teach some of the techniques that choreographers use to put movements together in unique and interesting ways.
 

Methods for putting movements together

  - Accent (make a part of the beat sound stronger than other parts)
  - Repetition (either a rhythm phrase or one beat)
  - Tempo (slow down/speed)
  - Variety (keep the same beat but use a different movement)
  - Change direction (with your whole body or just one part of your body)
  - Spacing (where the dancers stand in relationship to each other)
5. Give each student a handout (pg. 12) with the movements and techniques to have as a reference while they choreograph.
6. Give students time to create and practice their routine. Depending on your group you might ask them to create something that is 16 beats long or 30 seconds. Make sure they write down the order of their movements so that they can remember it at a later time. They might also film each other doing the sequence.
7. Share the routines. Depending on the amount of time that students have had to create the routine it might be best if it doesn't feel like a formal sharing.
  - If students are working individually they might share it with a few other students. Have one student film it and share it with the teacher. If students are working in smaller groups they could share out with the entire class.

- Remind students that they are sharing a routine-in-progress.
- Have each student/group share two times in a row.

8. After each sharing have the audience talk about what they noticed and enjoyed about the sharing using the vocabulary words.

- Discussion vocabulary should include: rhythm, beat, accent, tempo, repetition, variety, direction

#### **Rubric/Assessment Ideas**

- Choreography included repetition, tempo changes, direction changes, call and response, combinations of the 5 basic movements, and a clear beginning and end to the routine.
- Performer showed energy, enthusiasm and focus throughout the performance
- As an audience member, student engaged in conversation using the vocabulary.

## CHOREOGRAPHING A STEP ROUTINE

### The Basic Movements

#### BASS CLAP

Clap with your hands in a “C” shape

#### TONE CLAP

Clap with hands offset

#### MATCH CLAP

Clap with hands lined up

#### CHIP CLAP

Hit the bottom part of your hand with the top part of your other hand

#### STEP

Stomp your foot on the ground

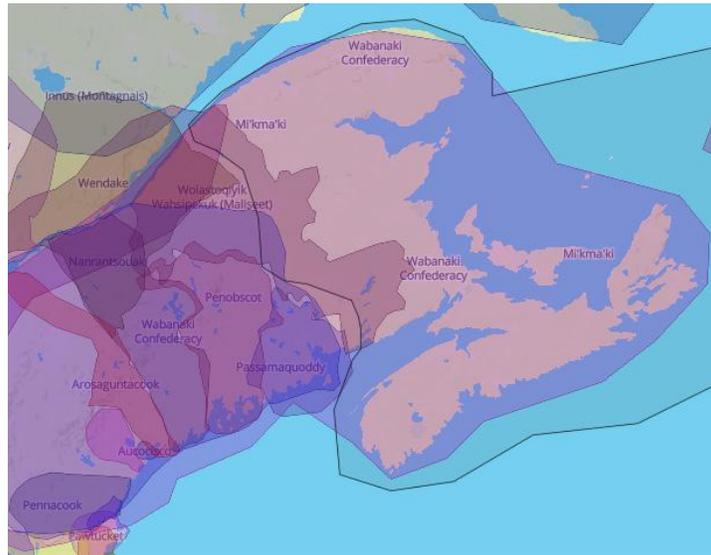
### Techniques for Putting it Together

Create rhythm using the basic movements. Then make them more interesting using the following techniques.

- Accent (make a part of the beat sound stronger than other parts)
- Repetition (either a rhythm phrase or one beat)
- Tempo (slow down/speed)
- Variety (keep the same beat but use a different movement)
- Change direction (with your whole body or just one part of your body)
- Spacing (where the dancers stand in relationship to each other)

## PORTLAND OVATIONS

Founded in 1931, produces dynamic performing arts events including classical music, jazz, opera, dance, theater, and Broadway. We believe that cultural enrichment should be high quality and accessible to all. Oventions collaborates with other nonprofit organizations, education systems, and the business sector to promote lifelong learning while celebrating the power and virtuosity of the performing arts. We bring the exhilaration of the performing arts into our communities with free events as part of Oventions Offstage, connecting artists and audiences. Join us at unexpected “art happenings,” classroom workshops, masterclasses, community discussions, and pre-performance lectures to explore together the relevance and connection of the performing arts to our lives.



*Native-Land.ca*

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Portland Oventions acknowledges that the places where we gather, dance, and sing is ancestral Wabanaki land. We will to pay respect to the Abenaki, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot - and their elders past, present and future.

We can't wait to gather with you all again soon!



Created by Sarah Coleman  
Designed by Katie Day  
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We want to know what *you* thought about the performance.

**PERFORMANCE:** *FIVE DAYS WITH STEP AFRIKA!*

**SCHOOL NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **TEACHER NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GRADE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ May we use your name if we share your comments as promotion? Yes\_\_ No\_\_

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What did you enjoy about *Five Days with Step Afrika!?* Why?

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What was something that you learned, discovered or felt through watching *Five Days with Step Afrika!?*

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Would you recommend *Five Days with Step Afrika!?* to others? Why or why not?

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What types of performance would you like Portland Oventions to offer in the future? (Feel free to share what type of art you are interested in (theater, dance, music), what cultures you might like to see, what topics the art might connect with, or specific artists.)

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**MAIL RESPONSES TO:** Portland Oventions 400 Congress Street #17573 Portland, ME 04112-8573

**EMAIL SCANNED RESPONSES TO:** [offstage@portlandovations.org](mailto:offstage@portlandovations.org)

Please take a few moments to fill out this survey following your viewing of *Samuel James Tells the Story of Tiny Bill McGraw*. You can also [fill it out online here](#). Your response provides valuable insight on the impact, accessibility, and relevancy of the School-Time Performance Series and will allow us to improve and strengthen the program. Thank you.

**PERFORMANCE:** *Samuel James Tells the Story of Tiny Bill McGraw*

**TEACHER NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GRADE(S) OF STUDENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SCHOOL NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **CITY/TOWN:** \_\_\_\_\_

**EMAIL ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**1. When and how did you share this performance with your students? (e.g. We watched it together in the classroom or students watched it at home on ....)**

**2. From your perspective as a teacher, how would you rate *Samuel James Tells the Story of Tiny Bill McGraw*?**

- Excellent     Very Good     Good     Fair     Poor

**3. What made this a valuable experience for your students? (If it wasn't, what can we do better?)**

**4. What made this a valuable experience for your students? (If it wasn't, why not, what can we do better?)**

- I wanted my students to experience the performing arts.  
 The performance topic fit with my curriculum goals.  
 The flexibility of the performance fit our schedule.  
 The ticket price was affordable.  
 Other (please specify):

**5. How did these videos connect to or enhance your curriculum?**

**6. Did you use the Educators Guide or other virtual resources provided by Portland Ovation before or after watching the videos?**

- Yes     No

**7. Why or why not?**

**8. What improvements could we make to the educational resources to serve you and your classroom better?**

**8. How would you rate the following components of attending the School-Time Performance?**

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Reserving & paying for tickets	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Communication about how to access the virtual performance and resources	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Watching the virtual performance	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Utilizing the virtual resources	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**9. What types of performances would you like to bring your students to in the future? (Feel free to share art forms, topics/themes, specific artists, etc.)?**

**10. A number of generous individuals and organizations make it possible for Portland Ovation to offer these School-Time Performance tickets at extremely discounted rates. Is there anything you'd like them to know in terms of your experiences or its impact on your students?**

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