



EDUCATORS GUIDE



STORIES AND SONGS WITH SAMUEL JAMES

This guide is geared toward teachers of grades 2 - 8.

Supported by:



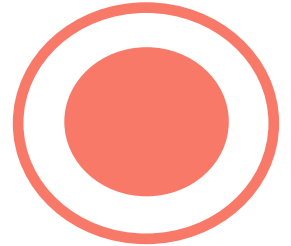
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About This Guide

Use this guide to help your students anticipate, investigate, and reflect upon your live performance experience. This guide is geared primarily toward teachers of grades 2 - 8.

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The great thing about the arts is that they can often evolve to meet their context. That means that many of the activities shared are flexible to a lot of different contexts depending on how you choose to frame them in your class. We know you all are experts on your classroom and students, so we invite you to use these lessons and activities as guideposts and adapt them to fit your classroom management style, range of student ability, and time constraints.

LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Social Studies/History: African American History, American History

Performing Arts: Theater and Storytelling, Music Theory (method), Music History, Music Technique (singing, percussion, guitar)

LEARNING STANDARDS ICON KEY



21ST CENTURY
SKILLS



LANGUAGE ARTS



MUSIC



SOCIAL EMOTIONAL
LEARNING



SOCIAL STUDIES



SPEAKING & LISTENING



THEATER

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

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

Introducing the Performance

It is often helpful to share some context with your students before they attend a live performance. Read below for more information about *Stories and Songs with Samuel James*.

About the Performance

Stories and Songs is a joyous and educational walk through time with musician and storyteller Samuel James. This performance weaves wonderful tales together with the traditional sounds of Black American Folk music. Some of James' stories are historical, like the one about Ona Judge, who escaped enslavement as a young woman and stayed free—even though everyone knew where she was. Some of his stories are fantastical, like the traditional Sukey and Mama Jo about a little girl offered a magical life by a mysterious figure.

Samuel James' traditional sounds of Black American Folk music are inspired by the first recordings of the music made 100 years ago. In *Stories and Songs*, James talks about the origins of American music, the differences in sound and why. Playing different styles of guitar, harmonica and banjo, James performs traditional and original music that not only sets the mood, but might even inspire you to dance! All in all, *Stories and Songs* is a fun and toe-tapping experience that gives a peek through an often overlooked but important historical lens.



Samuel James, photo by Katie Day

About Samuel James

Samuel James is a musician, journalist and storyteller. As a storyteller, James has been featured on *This American Life* and *The Moth Radio Hour*. His other work with The Moth includes Mainstage storyteller, interviewer, Radio Hour host, and contributor to the books *The Moth Presents: All These Wonders* and the NYT Bestselling *How to Tell a Story: The Essential Guide to Memorable Storytelling from The Moth*.

As a musician, James has been touring internationally for more than fifteen years, performing in the Black American Folk Tradition. He has released seven albums, scored film soundtracks and museum exhibits. James' award-winning songwriting has been compared to Leonard Cohen's and his guitar virtuosity to that of Jimi Hendrix.

James' monthly column Racisms can be currently found in The Bollard and his weekly newsletter *Banned Histories of Race in America* can be found on Substack. He's also the creator and host of the podcast 99 Years, exploring the deliberate creation of the whitest state in the nation.

- Watch Samuel James perform music: therealsamueljames.com/music
- Experience Samuel James' storytelling: therealsamueljames.com/storytelling
- Listen to the 99 Years podcast: therealsamueljames.com/99-years-podcast
- Subscribe to Banned Histories of Race in America: samuelj.substack.com/



Samuel James

Being an Audience Member

An audience member is a part of a larger community – an audience – and you all work together to create your theater experience. Audience members play a special and important role in the performance. The performers are very aware of the audience while they perform. Sharing their hard work and joy with you is one of the best parts of being a performer. Each performance calls for different audience responses. Lively bands, musicians and dancers may desire audience members to clap and move to the beat. Other performers require silent focus on the stage and talking from the audience can be distracting. A theater is designed to magnify sound and even the smallest whispers can be heard throughout the auditorium. Samuel James encourages clapping, laughing, and even dancing at the parts of the performance you enjoy.

As you enjoy the show, think about being a part of the performance.

- What are the differences between attending a live performance and going to a movie or watching television?
- What are some different types of live performances? How many can you name?
- What kind of responses might an audience give to different types of performances?
- What are the different cues that a performer will give you so that you know how to respond? For example, might they bow or pause for applause?



The interior of Merrill Auditorium

Essential Questions

What is African American Music and Song?

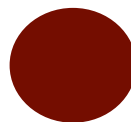
Black people in American are responsible for many deep and influential musical traditions and genres. Samuel James builds on the tradition of Black blues and folk musicians – both nationally and within his own family.

The Blues

The Blues are a genre of music characterized by the use of specific scales--which create a unique sound-- syncopated rhythm under somber melodies, and instruments including the banjo, guitar and harmonica. Like all genres of music, the blues shares a lot of history with and influence on other genres of music. Historians believe that the blues originated in the American South influenced by “field hollers” (a way that enslaved Black people communicated in the plantation fields). This music and song played by Black men and sung by Black women became more widespread and popular in the early 1900s. Some of the first famous blues musicians include Blind Lemon Jefferson, Mississippi John Hurt. During the Great Migration (1914 – 1918) when many African Americans left the south and moved north, the blues moved with them. The blues influenced rock music and remains an important genre of music today.

Here are a few resources that provide historical and cultural information on African American Music:

- “African American Song,” The Library of Congress: [loc.gov/item/ihas.200197451](https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197451)
- “Musical Crossroads: African American Influence on American Music” Smithsonian Music: [music.si.edu/story/musical-crossroads](https://www.music.si.edu/story/musical-crossroads)
- Musical Crossroads: Stories behind the objects of African American Music, National Museum of African American History and Culture: nmaahc.si.edu/about/news/national-museum-african-american-history-and-culture-releases-new-book-black-music-and
- “Roots of African American Music,” Smithsonian Music: [music.si.edu/spotlight/african-american-music/roots-of-african-american-music](https://www.music.si.edu/spotlight/african-american-music/roots-of-african-american-music)
- “Musical Life at HBCUs,” National Museum of African American History and Culture: nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/music-hbcus



What is storytelling?

Storytelling is the art and craft of telling stories orally. It is one of the oldest art forms known to humans and predates written language. The Wabanaki peoples in Maine use storytelling as an important part of how they pass down knowledge about their creation stories as well as how to take care of the land on which they live. In many cultures, storytelling is also a form of entertainment – providing the listeners with the chance to feel a variety of emotions and learn about something new or different. Storytelling offers a powerful way to connect with others and understand other people’s perspectives, as well as our own histories, cultures, and values. As you listen to Samuel James consider how the stories he shares help you understand yourself, your community, and your shared history better. Do you have a history of storytelling in your family?

How do you tell a good story?

There are many techniques for telling a good story. Often storytellers write their stories down first to find the right flow and length. They revise the story many times to make it just right. They use many literary or poetic devices such as simile, metaphor, alliteration or rhyme to help deepen the story’s meaning. Storytelling, however, is a live artform, and it is not just the words themselves that matter when a storyteller like Samuel James performs. It is also the way the performer uses their voice – its pace, pitch, tone and dynamics to help create and deepen the mood and emotions of the story that is being told.

See Song Stories on page 9 for an activity exploring storytelling in music.



Samuel James

PRE-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Here are some ideas for lesson activities that expand on the essential questions, topics, and themes of Samuel James's Performance

ACTIVITY: Guess the Rhythm

This game offers a fun way to introduce rhythm and encourage collaboration.

Materials:

Room for the class to stand in a circle

Procedure:

1. Invite students to sit in a circle on the floor. Join students on the floor and clap in a simple rhythm (a steady beat is easiest to begin with). Invite students to join you in clapping and encourage students to try and clap at the exact same time. Practice clapping in unison until students are comfortable with it.
2. Select a student to be the guesser. The guesser will attempt to guess who is leading the clapping. Ask the guesser to shut their eyes and ears and silently point to a student who will lead the clapping.
3. Invite the leader to begin clapping and the rest of the class to join. When students are clapping in unison, ask the guesser to rejoin the group. Invite them to guess who is the leader.
4. Repeat this activity until everyone who wants to guess has guessed and everyone who wants to lead has led.
5. If your students are great at clapping in unison, consider adding a second leader and challenging students to switch leaders at some point during the clapping without the guesser noticing.

Discussion:

- What strategies did you use when clapping in unison?
- What did you look and listen for when trying to guess who was the leader?
- What could we do next time we play this game to be more effective leaders, clappers and guessers?



ACTIVITY: Song Stories

Use this activity to explore musical stories and story structure with your students and get them up and moving at the same time.



Materials:

- Open space
- An age-appropriate narrative song. We suggest “Old Dan Tucker” recorded by Samuel James on Already Home Recordings (vol 1). Available on Samuel’s website here: therealsamueljames.com/music
- A board or large piece of paper for group brainstorm.



Procedure:

1. Select a song that is age-appropriate for your students and tells a story. Play the song for your students and invite them to listen for the story the song tells. Who are the characters? What happens?
2. After students have listened to the song (you might need to listen a few times), brainstorm the characters and parts of the story—write key characters and moments somewhere students can see them.
3. Divide the class into small groups (2-4 students works best). Ask each group to create a still image with their bodies that represents the story this song tells. You may choose to assign each group a moment or event in the story, or ask students to pick their own.
4. Once students have created and practiced their images, share images with the class. After each image, ask students to describe what they see and guess what event the image depicts.

Discussion:

- What did you see? Describe how the bodies were positioned.
- What events from this story did we share with our images?
- What part of the story does each event represent?
- Why use music to tell a story? What does the music add to this story?

POST-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. What did you see and hear?
2. What instruments did you see and hear?
3. What were some similarities you noticed between the songs? What were some differences?
4. What was your favorite moment or song in the performance? Why?
5. What surprised you about the performance?

ACTIVITY: Rhythm Tapestry

Using simple body percussion like clapping and tapping, this activity encourages a class to work together to create complex rhythms. It is loosely based on the improv game, Machine where students use repetitive movements to build a single moving image.



Materials:

Room for a circle

Procedure:

1. Gather the class in a circle either sitting or standing and explain that you'll be using clapping or tapping to create a rhythm together. Introduce a few ways for students to create their rhythms—clapping their hands, tapping their chests or legs, snapping their fingers, etc. You may also want to brainstorm different rhythm patterns as a class so that students have a series of options and ideas to choose from.
2. Begin the game by clapping a slow, steady rhythm. Invite the student sitting next to you in the circle to add to your rhythm with something new using the same beat. Give that student a moment to settle in their rhythm, then invite the next student to join with a new clapping or tapping rhythm. Continue until all students are participating in the rhythm tapestry.
3. Allow the rhythm to continue for a few moments, then invite students to find a way to end their rhythm.
4. Invite another student in the circle to begin the rhythm and start again—challenge students to create a faster or slower rhythm, or to explore more complex patterns.

Note: If you have a large class, you may need to divide the group in half, with half the class acting as audience members listening and half participating, then switch.

Discussion:

- How would you describe the rhythms we created?
- What did you think about or consider while adding your own beat to our rhythm?
- What was it like creating rhythms together?
- Would you consider the sounds we created music? Why or why not?

ACTIVITY: The Story of My Name

This activity is a great way to introduce storytelling and invite students to tell their own stories. It asks students to share the meaning behind their first, middle, last/surname, or nickname. It's often used as an ice-breaker, but it's also a great way to encourage community at any time.

Materials:

- None

Procedure:

1. Introduce the activity: divide the class into pairs or small groups. Explain that students will be sharing a brief story about their first, middle, last name, or a nickname with their partner. Depending on the context of the class, you may wish to give students the option to invent a story about their name if they prefer (with no requirement to reveal whether the story is the "truth").
2. Together as a class, brainstorm the qualities of a good story. For a more specific discussion, consider one of the stories Samuel James shared in his performance.
3. Give students a few moments to silently brainstorm their story, thinking about the qualities they brainstormed.
4. Invite students to decide who will share their story first and give students between 2 and 5 minutes to share their stories depending on the time you have and your students' comfort level with speaking aloud. Once the time is up, ask pairs to switch so that the second partner shares their story. Continue until all partners have had a chance to share.
5. Return together as a class to reflect on the activity. Depending on the class's comfort level with their stories, you may invite each partner to introduce each other and share a brief description of the story they heard, or something they learned.

Discussion:

- What did you notice about yourself as you participated in this activity?
- What was it like creating your own story and sharing it with someone else?
- What qualities of storytelling helped you tell a more dynamic story?
- Where do our names come from? Do you see any common themes?
- What do names tell us? Are they important? Why or why not?

Learn more about this activity on the Drama Based Instruction Network:
dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/content/story-my-name



ABOUT PORTLAND OVATIONS

Portland Ovation, 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. Ovation 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 Ovation 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.

Land Acknowledgment

Portland Ovation's programs are presented on Wabanaki land, home of the Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Abenaki and Penobscot Nations, their elders past and present, and future generations.

We encourage you to learn more and take action in support of Maine's Indigenous communities through the following organizations

[Abbe Museum](#)

Maine's premier museum dedicated to indigenous history and culture. Their mission is to inspire new learning about the Wabanaki Nations with every visit.

[Maine-Wabanaki Reach](#)

A Native-led non-profit that supports the self-determination of Wabanaki people through education, truth-telling, restorative justice, and restorative practices in Wabanaki and Maine communities.

Created and written by Dr. Liz Schildkret

Designed by Katie Day

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We want to know what *you* thought about the performance. You can write your answers below or draw a picture on the back of this page. Thank you!

PERFORMANCE: STORIES AND SONGS WITH SAMUEL JAMES

SCHOOL NAME: _____ TEACHER NAME: _____ GRADE: _____

YOUR NAME: _____ May we use your name when we share your comments?
Yes__ No__

What did you like about *Stories and Songs with Samuel James*? Why did you like that part?

What was something that you learned during the performance?

What would you like to tell other kids about *Stories and Songs with Samuel James*?

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.)

MAIL RESPONSES TO: Portland Oventions 120 Exchange St Portland, ME 04101
EMAIL SCANNED RESPONSES TO: offstage@portlandovations.org

We want to know what *you* thought about the performance.

Draw a picture of a part of *Stories and Songs with Samuel James* that you liked. Thank you!



YOUR NAME: _____ SCHOOL: _____ TEACHER: _____ GRADE: _____

Please scan and email to offstage@portlandovations.org or mail to Portland Ovations 120 Exchange St Portland, ME 04101

Please take a few moments to fill out this survey after you attend the performance. 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: STORIES AND SONGS WITH SAMUEL JAMES

TEACHER NAME: _____ GRADE(S) OF STUDENTS: _____

SCHOOL NAME: _____ CITY/TOWN: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

1. From your perspective as a teacher, how would you rate *Stories and Songs with Samuel James*?

- 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 was your primary reason for choosing to bring your students to *Stories and Songs with Samuel James*?

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

5. How did this live performance connect to or enhance your curriculum?

6. Did you use the Educators Guide provided by Portland Oventions before or after attending the performance? Yes No

7. Why or why not?

8. What improvements could we make to the Educators Guide to serve you and your classroom better?

9. 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"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication about the day of the performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrival at the venue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Departure from the venue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. 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.)?

11. 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?