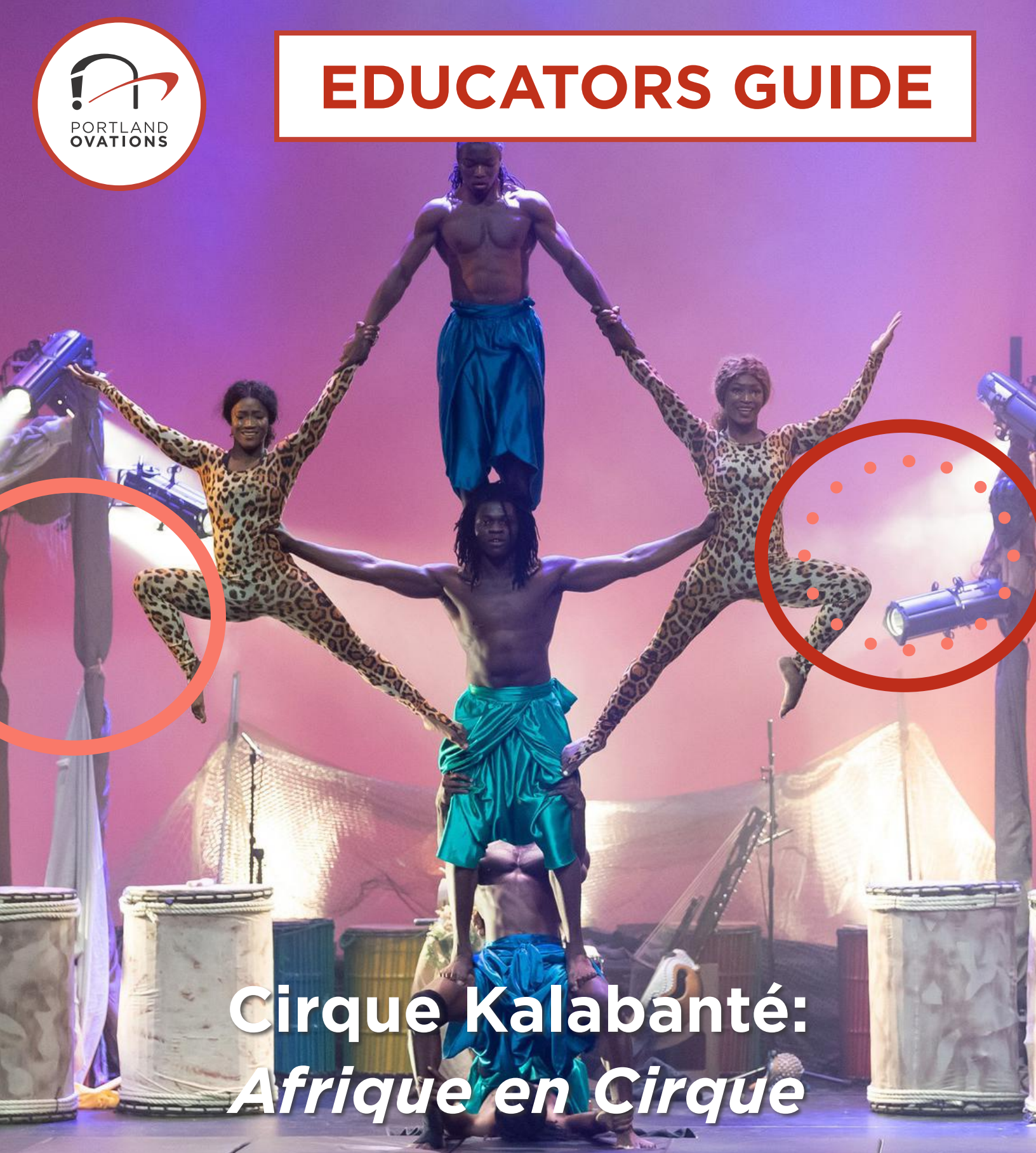




EDUCATORS GUIDE



Cirque Kalabanté: *Afrique en Cirque*

This guide is geared toward teachers of grades 3 - 8.

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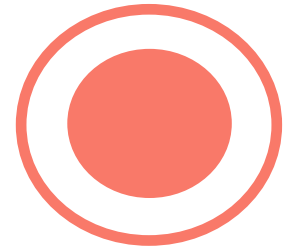
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About This Guide

Use this guide to help your students anticipate, investigate, and reflect upon your live performance experience. This guide is geared toward teachers of grades 3 - 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: West African history and culture
Performing Arts: circus arts, West African music and dance

LEARNING STANDARDS ICON KEY



21ST CENTURY
SKILLS



MUSIC



PHYSICAL EDUCATION



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
LEARNING



SOCIAL STUDIES

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 on the performance you're coming to see.

About the Performance

Gravity-defying acrobatics. Astonishing human pyramids. Live Afro-jazz, percussion and kora. Welcome to the universe of Cirque Kalabanté. Created by Guinean artist Yamoussa Bangoura, an alum of Cirque Éloize and Cirque Baobab who has also performed with Cirque du Soleil, Afrique en Cirque shares the beauty, youth and artistry of African culture inspired by daily life in Guinea. The theater vibrates with the energy, strength, agility and joy of young African performers through the merging of circus arts with West African dance and music. Prepare for an unforgettable journey.



About the Company

Cirque Kalabanté was created in 2007 by Yamoussa Bangoura, a multidisciplinary artist of Guinean origin who has always dreamed of founding a circus school and having his own multidisciplinary company in African arts. Now a resident of Montreal, Canada, Yamoussa Bangoura transmits and shares his values, passion, and expertise as Artistic Director of Cirque Kalabanté and as an educator of the various artistic disciplines in circus arts, African dance and traditional music of West Africa.



French teachers, watch an interview with Yamoussa Bangoura recorded in French a few days before Afrique en Cirque was first presented in February 2017!

What To Expect

The Performance

- The performance is 50 minutes long.
- Cirque Kalabanté performs in traditional West African dress and in acrobatic costumes influenced by West African prints.
- The performance includes acrobatics like human pyramids, tumbling, and flips, as well as dance and live music. A short teaser video is available on our website here: <https://portlandovations.org/event/afrique-en-cirque-stp/>
- The performance includes some audience participation, including call and response and clapping.

The Sound

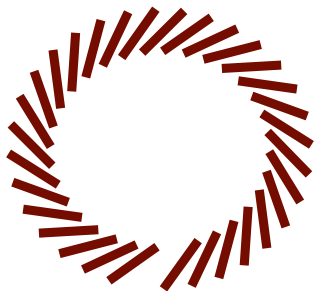
- The performance is accompanied by live music, including live drumming, Kora, singing, and a jazz band.
- Parts of the performance will be loud (especially drumming), and other parts will be much softer (Kora). See page 9 for more information about the instruments you'll see and hear.
- All sound will be amplified with speakers.

The Lights

- Cirque Kalabanté's performance includes theatrical lighting to highlight the acrobats. The lights will be bright and colorful at times, and dark and moody at others.
- A follow spot is used during the performance.

Resources

- Plan your visit to Merrill Auditorium: <https://portlandovations.org/about/accessibility-merrill-auditorium/>
- Learn more about accessibility at Portland Oventions: <https://portlandovations.org/about/accessibility/>



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. Cirque Kalabanté encourages clapping at parts of the show you enjoy and may even invite you to participate from your seat at certain moments during the performance.

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?

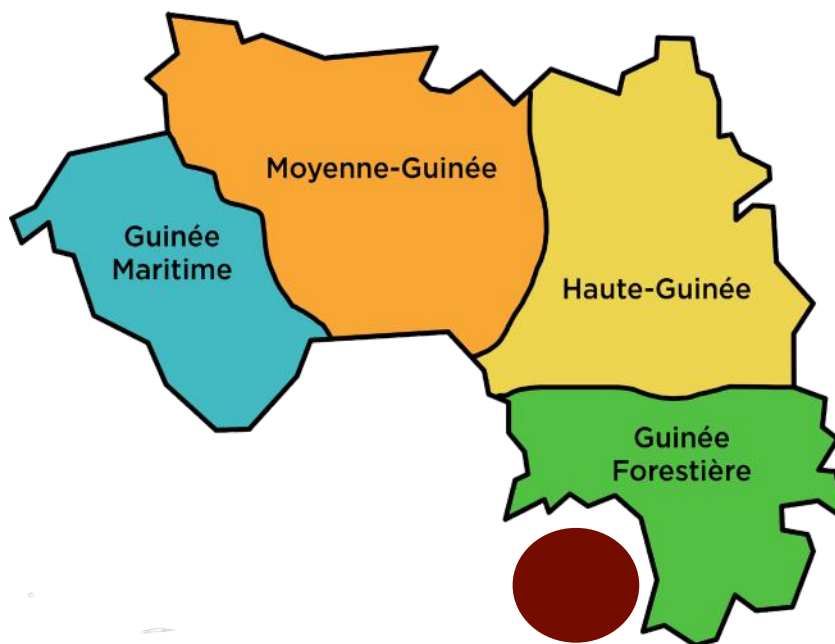
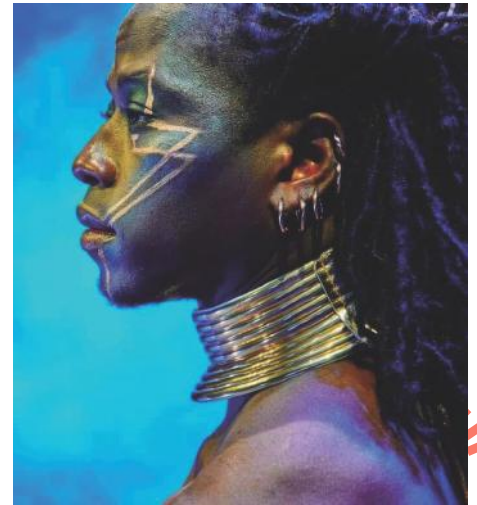


The interior of Merrill Auditorium

Essential Questions

Where is Cirque Kalabanté's founder, Yamoussa Bangoura, from?

Although Cirque Kalabanté is based in Montreal, Canada, the founder and Artistic Director, Yamoussa Bangoura, grew up in the Republic of Guinea. Guinea is a coastal country in West Africa, divided into 4 regions: the coastal region of Maritime Guinea, the mountainous region of Middle Guinea, the savannah of Upper Guinea and the woods of Forest Guinea (note that these names are Cirque Kalabanté's own translations into English). The main languages spoken in Guinea are Malinké, Soussou and Peul. Because of colonialization, French is also spoken. The capital, Conakry, is located in Maritime Guinea where the main language is Soussou. The land Guinea sits on, along with much of West Africa was the site of several prosperous empires, most notably the Mali Empire (c 1226 to 1670), founded by Sundiata Keita. At its peak, Mali was the largest empire in West Africa, and many of its languages, culture, and customs endure today. Mali was also wealthiest empire in West Africa, and one of its rulers, Mansa Musa (the 9th Mansa, or ruler of the Mali Empire), is considered one of the wealthiest people in history. Guinea was one of several sites in West Africa where Europeans kidnapped Africans into slavery. The region was colonized by the French in the 19th century. In 1958, Guineans voted overwhelmingly for independence from France and proclaimed Guinea a sovereign, independent republic.



What West African Dance traditions inspired *Afrique en Cirque*?

West African dance traditions and styles reach back thousands of years and are as diverse as the region. As with many cultures, in West Africa dance is a means of storytelling and expression, a language that speaks of community, spirituality, and human experience. Many dances serve social purposes as rituals, celebrations, rites of passage, and gatherings of the community. While dance styles and purposes are extremely varied, all share a strong connection between movement and music. Many dances are tied closely to specific rhythms and repetition plays a key role, both in rhythm and in movement. Below are two examples of specific West African dances that influenced Yamoussa Bangoura in creating *Afrique en Cirque*.

Yankadi

A dance and drum rhythm from Susu people of the Maritime region of Guinea, the Yankadi is a social dance for men and women to meet each other. Yamoussa Bangoura's parents met dancing the Yankadi. In the dance, men and women line up on opposite sides of the space. The rhythm begins slowly as the two groups dance toward each other, then goes much faster and couples break up to dance in pairs.



Konkoba

The Konkoba dance and rhythm from the Susu and Malinke people celebrates farmers and their important work. The Konkoba displays the virtuosity of both the dancers and the musicians. In the Konkoba, drummers and musicians play and upbeat rhythm while dance leaders take the center of the space, often surrounded by other dancers. The leader performs a series of athletic movements celebrating farmers' good work.

What instruments will we see and hear on stage?

Along with daring feats of acrobatics and energetic dancing, Afrique en Cirque features live music. Here are two instruments you'll see and hear performers play on stage:

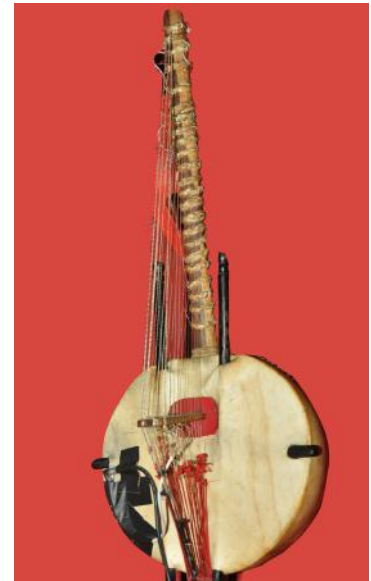
Djembe

The Djembe (pronounced JEM-bay) is one of the most versatile and widespread percussion instruments on the planet. It has its roots in West Africa where it was first created by the Mandinka people. The Djembe features a distinctive “goblet” shape, with a long, narrow base that widens into a bowl at the top. The body of the drum is traditionally carved and hollowed out of a single tree trunk. Goat skin is stretched over the top and secured by vertical ropes lining the length of the drum. These ropes allow the skin's tension to be loosened or tightened to tune the drum and achieve specific sounds. By striking the drum in various places using different methods, musicians achieve lots of different sounds.



Kora

The Kora is an instrument that looks and sounds like cross between a harp, a lute, and a guitar. It has its origins in the Mali Empire. Constructed from a type of gourd called a calabash, the Kora typically has 21 strings, played with just the thumb and forefinger of both hands. Typically, Kora musicians use their thumbs to play base notes and their forefingers to play the melody. Koras are complex instruments, difficult to tune and play, and mastering them is a skill passed down through families.



PRE-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Here are some ideas for lesson activities that expand on the essential questions, topics, and themes of Cirque Kalabanté's performance.

ACTIVITY: Three Ball Toss

In this activity, students toss multiple balls or beanbags across the circle in a particular pattern. The exercise requires students to work together, observe closely, and physically connect their body and mind. This strategy is a great way to build community in the classroom and gives students an idea of the attention and focus required to perform Cirque Kalabanté's impressive feats.



Materials:

Open space with room for a circle
Up to 3 small balls or beanbags

Procedure:

1. Begin by practicing a few simple frozen images, or tableaux. Depending on age and skill, students may either stand in a circle and toss balls or sit in a circle and roll them. Decide if your students will be tossing or rolling and gather everyone in a circle.
2. Explain the goal of the activity: to successfully pass the ball to each person in the group.
3. To pass the ball, make eye contact with someone across the circle, say their name and toss/roll the ball to the person gently. Ask students to pay attention to who they toss/roll their ball to, and who tosses/rolls to them. Continue passing the ball until everyone has had it once.
4. Ask everyone to point to the person they tossed/rolled the ball to. Ask students to repeat the activity, tossing/rolling the ball in the same pattern. Pause afterwards to reflect: how successful were you?
5. Once students successfully repeat their pattern, add a second ball and either repeat the same pattern (with two balls traveling one after the other), or establish a new pattern.
6. When students are comfortable with two balls, add a third.

Reflection

- On a scale of 1 - 10, how successful were we at this activity?
- What skills did you have to use to successfully complete each pattern?
- How many of these skills do you think an acrobat may need to use to perform safely? Where do you think we'll see these skills in Cirque Kalabanté's performance?

Read more about Three Ball Toss here:

<https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/teaching-strategies/three-ball-toss>

ACTIVITY: Rhythm Tapestry

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



Materials:

Open space with 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.

Reflection

- 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?

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.

POST-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. What moments of the performance are sticking with you? What moments did you find most exciting? Why?
2. Where did you notice elements of West African music and dance in the performance?
3. Where did you notice elements of western circus arts in the performance?
4. What was it like watching a performance with both western circus arts and West African dance and music?

ACTIVITY: Stop and Go and Jump

This physical and mental warm-up involves deep listening and body awareness. It begins with simple action prompts that students respond to as they move through an open space, then becomes increasingly more complex as the facilitator switches the actions that go with each prompt. Like Three Ball Toss, this activity is a good metaphor for the physical and mental stamina required of the performers in Cirque Kalabanté.



Materials:

Open space with room for the class to move freely

Procedure:

1. Define the playing area and invite students to walk around the space. Ask students to actively avoid walking in a circle—instead, invite them to cover as much of the floor as possible, finding interesting pathways and walking slowly and carefully, aware of where their bodies are in space.
2. Introduce the first prompt pair: Stop and Go. When students hear “stop” they stop moving. When they hear “go” they move again. Practice these prompts a few times.
3. Add the second prompt pair: Jump and Name. When students hear “jump” they jump lightly. When students hear “name” they say their name. Practice this prompt pair along side Stop and Go.
4. Add the third prompt pair (optional): Arms and Knees. When students hear “arms” they raise their arms in the air. When students hear “knees” they place their hands on their knees. Practice all 3 prompt pairs together!
5. When students are comfortable with the actions, switch the meaning of each prompt pair. Stop becomes Go, Jump becomes Name, and Arms become Knees (ie: when students hear “stop” they go, and vice versa). You can either introduce switches one at a time, or all together.

Reflection

- On a scale of 1 – 10, how successful were we at this activity?
- What skills did you have to use to successfully complete each pattern?
- How many of these skills do you think an acrobat may need to use to perform safely? Where did you see these skills in Cirque Kalabanté’s performance?

Read more about Stop and Go and Jump here:

<https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/teaching-strategies/stop-and-go-and-jump>

POST-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY: Mapping Geographies

Cirque Kalabanté's performance is a celebration of the place Yamoussa Bangoura calls home. Explore definitions of home in your classroom with this activity, which invites students to map and perform their literal and figurative understanding of home on an imagined map on the floor.



Materials:

Open space for students to move freely.

Procedure:

1. Define the outer boundaries of the playing space, and establish the parameters of your map: identify the center of the space, this is where your school/classroom sits. Identify North, South, East, and West.
2. Introduce the strategy by explaining that you'll give students a series of prompts. Students respond by moving to the place on the map that best represents their answer at this moment in time. After each prompt, invite students to name where they are currently standing either aloud or to someone standing near them.
3. Prompt 1: If our classroom is located at the center of an imagined map, please stand on the location – or one location – where you currently live.
4. Prompt 2: If our classroom is located at the center of the map, please stand where you were born.
5. Prompt 3: If our classroom is located at the center of the map, please stand at one of the physical spaces that you call home, recognizing that there may be more than one. This could be a place where you have spent a lot of time, or a physical space that you feel is "home" although you may not have been there in a long time, or have never been there.
6. Ask each student to create a gesture that represents the place they call "home", thinking about all the places they stood. The gesture can be abstract or concrete.
7. Perform the gestures either simultaneously or in sequence to create a dance that represents "home" – both as a feeling and as a physical space. (Note: there is an extended version of this step in the link below if you have more time.)
8. Once students have performed their gestures, invite them to "popcorn" out one word that sticks with them—those words might be an emotion, an idea or an action that they saw represented or that they felt.

Reflection

- What did you notice about yourself in this activity? What did you notice about the group?
- How did our map shift and change as we moved between imaginary map locations?
- What is home? What shapes our understanding of home?

Read more about Mapping Geographies here:

<https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/teaching-strategies/mapping-geographies-home>

ABOUT PORTLAND OVATIONS

Portland Oventions, 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.

Land Acknowledgment

Portland Oventions’ 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: Cirque Kalabante: *Afrique en Cirque*

SCHOOL NAME: _____ **TEACHER NAME:** _____ **GRADE:** _____

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

What did you like about *360 Afrique en Cirque*? Why did you like that part?

What was something that you learned during the performance?

What would you like to tell other kids about *Afrique en Cirque*?

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 *Afrique en Cirque* 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: Cirque Kalabante: *Afrique en Cirque* – October 17, 2024

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

SCHOOL NAME: _____ CITY/TOWN: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

1. From your perspective as a teacher, how would you rate *Afrique en Cirque*?

- 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 *Afrique en Cirque*?

- 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?

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