teacher resource guide

schooltime performance series

ayiti: stories and songs from haiti

arts education

njpac

discover. create. grow.
Get ready for a rousing and energetic performance that celebrates Haiti in all of its multifaceted wonder and beauty. The show, “AYITI, Stories and Songs from Haiti,” features Haitian-American performer and Miami native Inez Barlatier and her family band, which will take audience members on a fun, celebratory and eye-opening trip through Haitian (Ayisyen) culture and art. There will be singing, drumming, colorful traditional costumes, dances, games, visual art and folk tales. Performers will sing and chant phrases in Haitian Creole as they explore the importance of community, gratitude, honor, respect, kindness and finding happiness within oneself.

Her father, Jan Sebon, a master Ayisyen percussionist, and other talented artists will be part of the performance. “I never saw a show celebrating Ayiti as a child. Even in Miami, many children don’t know these stories. I want to change that and share Ayisyen culture with children,” Inez said.

Inez Balatier is a multidisciplinary artist. She is a gifted singer-songwriter, folkloric dancer, actress, percussionist and teacher who has long been steeped in performance, music and the arts. She joined her father’s band Jan Sebon & Kazak International when she was 12 years old. For six years, she also led her own band, Kozaoz. During her career, she has been featured on CBS 4 News Miami, NPR, WRAL, WDNA, PBS, Complex TV, Island TV, Turks and Caicos, The Miami New Times, The Miami Herald and The Ringling Museum. Inez is a teaching artist with Guitars Over Guns, a Miami-based non-profit group that gives musical opportunities to children from vulnerable communities. She has also worked with Miami Girls Rock Camp, Miami Theater Center and The Motivational Edge. She has performed in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Cuba, and of course, her beloved Haiti. She was part of a Haitian-Cameroonian fusion theatrical piece called “Sharing Grandmothers” with director Carlos Caballero of FundArte and Afro-Pop artist Lornoar. The Knight Foundation awarded a grant to this project. She has also received a Knight Arts Champion grant recommended by Miami Light Project. For “AYITI, Stories and Songs from Haiti,” she produced this show with a LEAP grant from Miami Theater Center.

How did you get your start in performance and music? I grew up with music. My father is a musician. When I was just 12 years old, he gave me a guitar. I started writing music. And also, in the same year, I joined his band and I was a backup singer and percussionist. And then when I started writing my own music, we would perform my music with the band, and after a while I started my own band. I had a band for six years. And I am now solo. I have performed with many musicians and now I perform children’s music. So, I started off with my father being born into music.

Who has influenced you on your journey as an artist and why? What really inspires me are people, especially women. And the idea that we have to leave or better the community behind us, that has really inspired me. When I write a song down, I ask myself, is this beneficial to a human being or to the community? Is it harsh? Does it hurt someone’s feelings? Would it make them feel any bad energy?

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How is the show structured and what elements of Haitian culture and music, what important artists should you look up and why? There is so much to look at and listen to, but they should first look at Haitian artist, Martha Jean-Claude, who is almost the Celia Cruz of Haitian music. She’s a classic singer.

What do you hope audience members get from this performance? I hope they get a new education of what Ayiti is about because in this country we get stories about the country from other people and they don’t hear it from people who are from Ayiti. When I present this show to others, I want people to get a sense of connection that Ayiyen history is world history, and it’s part of your history too.

For people who are just learning about Haitian culture and music, what important artists should you look up and why? There is so much to look at and listen to, but they should first look at Haitian artist, Martha Jean-Claude, who is almost the Celia Cruz of Haitian music. She’s a classic singer.

For young people who are interested in music and performance, what kind of advice would you give to them? I would say have fun and sing every day, play every day. Listen to other artists and try to learn their songs. Get on stage and get embarrassed. Do it over again. Because you only get better over time. And there will be always someone who will listen to you. There will always be an audience for you. And don’t compare yourself to anybody else. Just develop your own sound and keep going on your journey. But keep doing it.

“ When I write a song down, I ask myself, is this beneficial to a human being or to the community?” —Inez Balatier
Prepare for the performance
If you have...10 minutes
Introduce the country of “Ayiti” (Haiti) to your class by sharing a map and explaining that it is another country with its own culture. Tell students they will be hearing songs and stories from “Ayiti” and watch Ayiti Promo Video (password: Inez).

Learn that Haiti is a country with its own culture and watch the promo video for Ayiti: Stories & Songs from Haiti. Make predictions about what you may hear and see during the performance.

If you have...15 minutes
Above and discuss what a respectful virtual audience member looks, sounds, and feels like and review “call and response” with the students (e.g. “One, two, three, eyes on me. One, two, eyes on you.”)

Create, or review, class standards for being a virtual audience.

Experience the performance
If you have...10 minutes
Lead students in a discussion about the performance including the themes of the show and “Ayiti” (community, honor, respect and kindness). Ask students what they remember. Remind students of the magical creatures and colors of Haiti that Inez described.

Have students complete Activity Sheet #1.

Discuss: What themes do you remember? What words or instruments did you hear and see? What did you notice about the performance?

If you have...20 minutes
Do the above and create a list of themes, words and instruments students observed that can be referenced later.

What colors did they see? What did they hear? Perhaps repeat and practice the Creole chants and “call and responses” from the show such as “Ayibobo!” or “Onè!” — Respè!

Have students complete Activity Sheet #2.

Focus
If you have...10 minutes
Have students share their completed magical creature creations and take note of the words or phrases used to describe them. Lead a discussion on what makes each of us special and how it adds to your class community and culture, just like honor and respect add to Haiti’s culture.

Recall the music and instruments used in the performance. Practice repeating rhythms using your body and desks as “drums.” Learn music and theater vocabulary such as “Tanbou drum” and “costumes.”

Have students share their completed magical creature creations and take note of the words or phrases used to describe them.

Be an active audience member. Notice the instruments and French Creole words in the stories and songs that Inez and her band share. Notice the use of any costumes or colors and be prepared to talk about the performance!

If you have...25 minutes
Tell students they will be hearing songs and stories from “Ayiti” and watch Ayiti Promo Video (password: Inez).

Learn that Haiti is a country with its own culture and watch the promo video for Ayiti: Stories & Songs from Haiti.

Recall some of the creatures Inez introduced from Haiti, such as the talking whale and mermaids.

If you have...10 minutes
Introduce the country of “Ayiti” (Haiti) to your class by sharing a map and explaining that it is another country with its own culture.

Recall the music and instruments used in the performance. Practice repeating rhythms using your body and desks as “drums.” Learn music and theater vocabulary such as “Tanbou drum” and “costumes.”

Activity Sheet #1
Using them as inspiration. Create your own magical creature, using Activity Sheet #1.

Activity Sheet #2
Create, or review, class standards for being a virtual audience.

Rehearse
If you have...20 minutes
Older students can be broken into groups and each create their own rhythm/drum pattern and then add them together.

Remember your word or phrase that you drew or wrote on Activity Sheet #1. Rehearse your class rhythm using your body and desks as “drums.” Learn the “class rhythm” you and your teacher create.

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Share your magical creature creation!

New... what makes you special? How does that add to your class community? Complete Activity Sheet #2.

Make magic
If you have...20 minutes
Invite guests to your class performance and gallery inspired by Ayiti.

Share your class’ magical creature in a gallery or slideshow. Have students perform their rhythm integrating what makes them a special part of the community. If there is time, you can have the guests ask the students questions about their creatures or about their word or phrase.

Get ready to work together with your classmates to perform your original performance piece! Be prepared to answer any questions about your word or creature.

Teacher Focus
Student Activity
NJ Student Learning Standards

English Language Arts
NJSLA.L.1
NJ Social Studies
6.1.2.GeoSV, 6.1.2.CivicsPD
National Core Arts
NJ Arts
1.3A.RE7, 1.3A.RE8, 1.4.RE7
21st Century Readiness
9.4.2.CI1

English Language Arts
NJSLA.L.1, NJSLA.L.2
NJ Social Studies
6.1.2.GeoCM, 6.1.2.CivicsPD,
National Core Arts
NJ Arts
1.3A.CN1, 1.4.CN1
NJ World Languages
71.6, PRF.2

Social Studies
6.1.2.GeoCM, 6.1.2.CivicsPD,
National Core Arts
NJ Arts
1.3A.RE8, 1.4.RE8

Social Studies
6.1.2.GeoSV, 6.1.2.CivicsPD
National Core Arts
NJ Arts
1.3A.CN1

21st Century Readiness
9.4.2.CI1

21st Century Readiness
9.4.2.CI

21st Career Readiness
9.4.2.CI

NJSLSA.SL1

21st Career Readiness
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Haiti’s Landscape, Culture and History Geography

Haiti is situated in the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Ocean. Hispaniola itself is situated in the Grand Antilles, a large archipelago that includes Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. Hispaniola is also considered to be part of the West Indies. Hispaniola is divided into two countries, Haiti on the left and Dominican Republic on the right.

The name Haiti is directly derived from the Taino word for Hispaniola and translates loosely to “land of high mountains.” Indeed, Haiti has many mountains and is considered the most mountainous part of the Caribbean. Despite the country’s relatively small size, Haiti is incredibly diverse in landscape. Haiti’s mountains have a variety of ecosystems depending on the altitude level: lush rainforests, pine forests, leafy deciduous woods and specialized trees adapted to high-altitude living. Haiti’s geography is also characterized by river valleys and coastal plains. The coast has lagoons, mangrove forests and white sandy beaches. Because of its natural beauty, Haiti has also been nicknamed “The Pearl of the Antilles.”

One of Haiti’s most famous cultural imports is Vodou, a mixture of West African, Taino and Catholic traditions. According to Encyclopedia Britannica “The word Vodou means ‘spirit’ or ‘deity’ in the Fon language of the African kingdom of Dahomey (now Benin in West Africa).”

In Vodou tradition, the world is filled with spirits such as ancestors. Spirit possession happens in rituals where people dance, sing or perform miraculous feats. Playing the drums is an important part of these ceremonies. Vodou plays a crucial part in Haitian history. Dutty Boukman, a Vodou priest, and Cécile Fatiman, a mambo (Vodou priestess), initiated a religious ceremony which would later become the Haitian revolution in 1791.
Food
Haitian cuisine is a hearty blend of African, Taino and European influences—reflecting the many people who have settled or occupied the island of Hispaniola. On the surface, it has some resemblance to other Caribbean cuisines but it has its own unique flavors and twists.

A legacy of Taino culture is the word and concept of barbecue. Its origin can be traced to the Spanish word barbacoa and to Haiti’s precolonial history. Food historians surmise that barbacoa comes from the Taino word barabucu, which means sacred pit, or a style of slow cooking using a raised wooden platform or grill.

France introduced cheeses, pastries and various European-style desserts that are commonly found in the richest homes of Port-au-Prince.

The arrival of enslaved Africans exerted heavy influence on the cuisine via the use of okra, tara root, ackee (a type of fruit originally from West Africa), pigeon peas and the use of spices—most famously Scotch bonnet peppers.

Popular dishes in Haiti include griot, which is pork shoulder marinated in citrus juices and spices and then braised and deep fried until crispy. It’s usually served with red rice and beans, pikliz (Haitian condiment of braised and deep fried until crispy. It’s usually served with red rice and beans, pikliz (Haitian condiment of pickled vegetables and scotch bonnet peppers), and twice-fried plantain called banan peze. Another delicious dish is Haitian patties which are flaky, buttery hand pies that can be filled with seasoned beef, chicken or fish.

Celebrations, Music and Dance
A wide range of styles of music and dance are popular in Haiti. Meringue music is considered emblematic of Haitian culture and is mostly characterized by the use of African drums, piano, string instruments, horns, joyful singing and a distinctive syncopated rhythm with roots in West Africa. From meringue comes kompa music, a modernized version that includes electronic instruments. It has also taken on influences such as rap, soul and funk.

The dance style for this music is a romantic, sensual duet with lots of hip movements.

Like other Catholic countries in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti celebrates their own version of carnival (or kanaval in Haitian Creole), which are festivals that take place before Lent. Mardi Gras or Fat Tuesday is also part of the carnival celebrations. Port-au-Prince holds the biggest carnival in the country called Haitian Defile Kanaval.

The city marks it with raucous parades that feature dance troupes, music, bands, floats, people in costumes and masks, and fun dance parties.

Another unique aspect of Haiti is rara, which refers both to a festival or musical genre depending on context. Rara festivals and processions happen all over the country and typically occur during Lent and Easter week. In rara festivals and parades, people sing in Haitian Creole, twirl batons in colorful costumes and often incorporate Voudou elements in their performances. The soundtrack for these festivals is rara music, characterized by the use of trumpets called vaccine, drums and other instruments.

Musical Instruments
Drums are featured prominently in homegrown Haitian music. An important drum central to Haitian music is the tanbou, which is considered the national musical instrument. It’s a barrel drum made of a hardwood vessel and covered with an animal skin. It typically has a rope that is tied around the vessel in order to make sure the animal skin is taut. The sides of the vessel taper.

Another Haitian instrument is the banza, which is the country’s version of the banjo. It is made from a hollowed out gourd which has a piece of animal skin stretched over the opening. A stick is attached to the gourd along with strings.

The vaccine or vakson are simple trumpets typically made from bamboo or metal with a mouthpiece at one end. To keep a rhythm going, players beat the side of the vaccine with a stick so the instrument also provides percussive sounds. They are a prominent feature of rara music and festivals.

Though it is Cuban in origin, the marimbula is an instrument often used in Haitian music. It consists of a hollow box with metal tines attached to the face. People pluck the metal tines, which causes sound to resonate inside the hollow box, and people also beat the surface of the box in order to make a percussive sound.

A Brief History of Haiti
According to archaeological records, people have been living on the island of Hispaniola since 5,000 BCE. The indigenous group at the start of European colonization was called the Taino.

Conquistador Christopher Columbus landed what was then Hispaniola (now Haiti) on December 6, 1492 and promptly claimed the island for the Kingdom of Castile in present-day Spain. This event would herald a long period of European colonization first by Spain and then France. The Taino would undergo a brutal genocide of their population and culture. Some researchers estimate that there were less than 500 Taino people living on Hispaniola by 1548. The pre-Columbian population has been estimated to be anywhere from ten thousand to more than a million.

France started ruling the left side of the island in 1697 and named its part of the island Saint-Domingue. French colonizers started sugar and coffee plantations and brought large groups of enslaved Africans to work the fields. The imports of coffee and sugar made the colony the crown jewel of France’s overseas empire and the wealthiest in the Caribbean, but at a great price. Saint-Domingue was considered one of the most brutal slave colonies in the New World, with many slaves dying from various diseases and malnutrition.

Many slaves escaped into the mountains of Hispaniola and formed their own communities called the Maroons. In the northern part of the island, many slaves kept their African traditions and melded their beliefs with Catholicism to create Vodou.

On August 14, 1791, at a site called Bois Caiman (Cayman Woods), a Vodou religious ceremony doubled as a meeting for a slave rebellion. This day is considered by many to be the official start of the Haitian Revolution.

From this rebellion, Toussaint Louverture, a general and former slave, emerged as the leading figure of the revolution and controlled all of Hispaniola by 1801. Because of his victories and consolidation of power, he is considered the Father of Haiti who led the only successful slave revolt in modern history. On January 1, 1804, Saint-Domingue declared its independence and assumed a new meaningful name, Haiti.

The years following independence have been challenging for Haitians: a succession of different leaders, factional fighting, and even occupation by the United States from 1915 to 1934. Despite many upheavals, both manmade and natural, Haiti remains a rich and vibrant place.

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Haiti’s people are resilient, including the Haitians living abroad who send remittances to citizens who stayed behind to rebuild, particularly after the devastating earthquake in 2010. Haiti’s motto, also found on the country’s flag, exemplifies the Haitian spirit in the face of adversity: “L’Union Fait La Force,” which means, “unity is strength” or “together we are strong.”
Ayiti: Stories and Songs from Haiti

Ayiti: The name is derived from the Taino word for Hispaniola and means variously “flower of high land” or “mountainous land” or “land of high mountains.” Ayisyen means Haitian in the Caribbean. It is made up of three major archipelagos, the Grand Antilles, Lesser Antilles and the Lucayan Archipelago. This term came about to differentiate it from the East Indies – the territories and islands east of India.

Maroons
Enslaved Africans in the New World who escaped bondage and sought refuge in the wilderness. They either formed their own communities or joined surviving Taino.

Colonialism/Imperialism
Colonialism means the act of controlling wholly or partly a piece of territory or country. This control entails exploitation of the natural and economic resources of the territory or country. It’s used interchangeably with imperialism, which also denotes controlling a territory or country via the use of military power.

Archipelago
A group of islands or a stretch of water with many islands.

Indigenous
Native or naturally occurring in a certain place or region.

Pre-Columbian
Time period in the Western Hemisphere before the advent of Western explorers (especially the Spanish and Portuguese) who arrived in the late 16th century.

Conquistador
The explorers that left Spain and Portugal and sailed to the New World to find gold, spices, trade routes to Asia and territory.

Taino
The indigenous people of Hispaniola and the rest of the Caribbean who first encountered Christopher Columbus. Due to interactions with early Spanish explorers and settlers, the Taino were nearly annihilated due to enslavement and disease. The heritage of the Taino continues to live on as many people of Caribbean origin, especially the Caribs, are of Taino descent.

West Indies
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In-School Residencies: Residencies: NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school—online—to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible virtual residencies are designed to meet your needs, and you’ll have a dedicated program manager to help you every step of the way. It’s the perfect program to keep your students creating, connecting and expressing themselves through the magic of the arts.

Professional Development: Calling all educators! Expand your teaching skills, deepen your curriculum and give yourself a creative boost in NJPAC’s forward-thinking professional development workshops. Our virtual PD programs are for teachers all the way from pre-K to high school, and include hip hop, dance, storytelling, theater, music and more. Not only will you learn something… you’ll also have fun and be inspired.

Study the arts at NJPAC:

Saturday Programs: NJPAC’s Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level—from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in hip hop, jazz, devised theater and symphonic band.

Summer Programs: Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please email our education sales team at artseducation@njpac.org.
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