

2025/26



OVERTURE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

# ONSTAGE STUDENT FIELD TRIP RESOURCE GUIDE



## Step Afrika! Migration

[overture.org/onstage](https://overture.org/onstage)

## ABOUT OVERTURE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Overture Center for the Arts fills a city block in downtown Madison with world-class venues for the performing and visual arts. Made possible by an extraordinary gift from Madison businessman W. Jerome Frautschi, the center presents the highest-quality arts and entertainment programming in a wide variety of disciplines for diverse audiences. Offerings include performances by acclaimed classical, jazz, pop, and folk performers; touring Broadway musicals; quality children's entertainment; and world-class ballet, modern and jazz dance. Overture Center's extensive outreach and educational programs serve thousands of Madison-area residents annually, including youth, older adults, people with limited financial resources and people with disabilities. The center is also home to ten independent resident organizations.

## RESIDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society  
Children's Theater of Madison  
Forward Theater Company  
Kanopy Dance Company  
Li Chiao-Ping Dance Company  
Madison Ballet  
Madison Opera  
Madison Symphony Orchestra  
Wisconsin Academy's James Watrous Gallery  
Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra

Internationally renowned architect Cesar Pelli designed the center to provide the best possible environment for artists and audiences, as well as to complement Madison's urban environment. Performance spaces range from the spectacular 2,250-seat Overture Hall to the casual and intimate Rotunda Stage. The renovated Capitol Theater seats approximately 1,110, and The Playhouse seats 350. In addition, three multi-purpose spaces provide flexible performance, meeting and rehearsal facilities. Overture Center also features several art exhibit spaces. Overture Galleries I, II and III display works by Dane County artists. The Playhouse Gallery features regional artists with an emphasis on collaborations with local organizations. The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters' Watrous Gallery displays works by Wisconsin artists, and the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art offers works by national and international artists.

Dear Teachers,

In this resource guide you will find valuable information that will help you apply your academic goals to your students’ performance experience. We have included suggestions for activities which can help you prepare students to see this performance, ideas for follow-up activities, and additional resources you can access on the web. Along with these activities and resources, we’ve also included the applicable Wisconsin Academic Standards in order to help you align the experience with your curriculum requirements.

This Educator’s Resource Guide for this OnStage presentation of **Step Afrika! Migration** is designed to:

- Extend the scholastic impact of the performance by providing discussion ideas, activities and further reading which promote learning across the curriculum;
- Promote arts literacy by expanding students’ knowledge of music, science, storytelling and theatre;
- Illustrate that the arts are a legacy reflecting the values, custom, beliefs, expressions and reflections of a culture;
- Use the arts to teach about the cultures of other people and to celebrate students’ own heritage through self-reflection;
- Maximize students’ enjoyment and appreciation of the performance.

We hope this performance and the suggestions in this resource guide will provide you and your students opportunities to apply art learning in your curricula, expanding it in new and enriching ways.

Enjoy the Show!

**We Want Your Feedback!**

OnStage performances can be evaluated online! Evaluations are vital to the future and funding of this program. Your feedback educates us about the ways the program is utilized and we often implement your suggestions.

Follow this link: <https://form.jotform.com/252614119409152> and fill out an evaluation. We look forward to hearing from you.



Photo courtesy of Step Afrika!

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**Education Categories**

 Language Arts

 Social Emotional

 Social Studies



Photo courtesy of Step Afrika!

## About Step Afrika! *Migration*

How do you tell the story of millions of people on the move?

If you're Step Afrika!, you do it with percussive dance, stunning athletic movement, and pulsating rhythms.

Plus, you enrich your work with inspiration from the work of other artists. That's what makes Step Afrika!'s ***The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*** so special. The production draws on the colors, themes, and imagery of Jacob Lawrence's iconic 60-panel "The Migration Series."

Lawrence, a major African-American painter, painted this renowned series to highlight the experiences of the more than six million African Americans who left the racial oppression and violence of the rural South in pursuit of opportunity in the industrial North.

Step Afrika! brings these images to life on the stage and puts its own inimitable – and sometimes literal – stamp on the compelling stories that helped shape

The result is one of the company's signature works, a dynamic swirl of sound, light, and shapes moving through space and time to highlight the past, illuminate the present, and engage audiences of all ages.

Blending technique, agility, and non-stop energy, Step Afrika! is the first professional dance company devoted to stepping. Stepping is an art form that uses the body as an instrument. It is a kind of percussive dance that was born on the campuses of HBCUs, Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Stepping employs foot steps, claps, and spoken word to make rhythms – and magic.



# About The Great Migration & Jacob Lawrence



Photo Courtesy of Step Afrika!

The Great Migration is the term used to describe one of the biggest cultural shifts in American history. It took place in two waves, from 1916 to 1940, and from 1941 to 1970.

During these periods, more than six million African Americans left the poverty and racial oppression of the rural South in search of more freedom and greater opportunities in the North and West.

In 1900, it's estimated that nine out of ten black Americans lived in the South, with three out of four living on farms. After The Great Migration, only five out of ten black Americans lived in the South, with only two out of ten living in rural areas. Discuss with your students the different ways these shifts may have affected the world they live in.

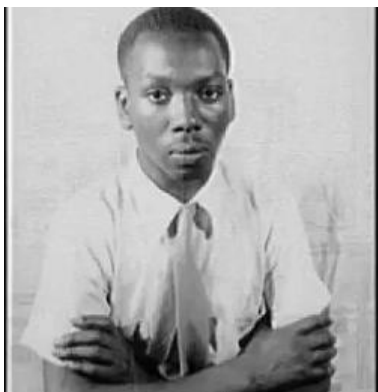


Photo from Wikipedia

**Jacob Armstead Lawrence** was born in 1917 in Atlantic City, New Jersey and moved to Harlem with his family in 1930, when he was 13 years old. This was the era of the Harlem Renaissance and the community was full of artists of color excelling and pushing the boundaries of music, literature, dance, and the visual arts.

Lawrence was mentored by Charles Alston, a painter, sculptor, muralist, illustrator, and teacher. Lawrence had his first solo art exhibition at the Harlem YMCA when he was 21.

Two years later, he received a grant and the commission to create the 60-panel series that would become The Migration Series. This work brought him national attention and led to his lifelong career as an artist and educator.

# About Step Afrika!



Photo courtesy of Step Afrika!

Step Afrika! is about combinations, and not just when it comes to dance steps. Combinations of traditional and contemporary dance forms, as well as cultural influences, figure prominently in their work. The company strives to promote unity and acceptance while living its values of teamwork, discipline, and commitment.

C. Brian Williams, founder of Step Afrika!, learned how to step when he was a student at Howard University, a noted HBCU, and a member of the famous Alpha Phi Alpha, the nation's oldest African-American fraternity. But when Williams was in South Africa and saw a young boy doing the traditional South African gumboot dance, he had a sudden, and perhaps life-changing insight. He was struck by how much it looked like stepping to him. This inspired him to try to find a way people from Africa, the United States, and all over the world could share their dances.

The result was an international dance festival, the exchange with the Soweto Dance Theatre of Johannesburg, and the birth of Step Afrika!

Today, Step Afrika! is an award-winning company based in Washington D.C. It has toured more than 60 countries around the world, from Angola to Croatia to Zambia. Performing in the White House for President Obama and making the chandeliers shake was a highlight for the company, as was the creation of an interactive stepping exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African-American History & Culture. The company also performed at the Presidential Inaugural Celebration for Joe Biden.

Step Afrika! has an extensive educational component, offering in-school performances and workshops, plus a summer camp that combines the company's values of teamwork, commitment, discipline, and academic achievement with excellence in performance and artistic training.

# About Stepping & Gumboot Dancing

Stepping, as it is known today, is often described as a dance form originated by students at HBCUs, specifically the members of the “Divine Nine,” the historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs).

But its roots stretch all the way back to the traditional dances practiced by people in Africa, who were later kidnapped, enslaved, and brought to America. They brought their dances with them, as a way to preserve their culture, their sense of community, their identity, and their ability to express themselves.

Different dance practices became more important than ever after slaveholders passed laws preventing enslaved people from using drums, due to fear of slave rebellions.

Fast forward a few hundred years and, in stepping, the body is used as a musical instrument. It is a form of percussive dance that creates rhythms with hands and feet and sometimes props.

In its early form, as it was popularized by African-American college students in sororities and fraternities, it was a blend of African tribal dance, call and response folk songs, and military march themes. Stepping was a way for students of color to express themselves, foster and feel pride in their community, and provide support for each other in a world that could seem unwelcoming, if not outright hostile.

Today, stepping also includes elements of Motown, hip hop, tap dancing, break dancing, gymnastics, and Afro-Caribbean music, and public recognition is growing daily.



Photo Courtesy of Eduardo Castillo



Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia

Interestingly, stepping has many characteristics with another form of dance that also helped sustain and inspire people of color during difficult times.

Gumboot dancing originated in the oppressive conditions of the gold mines during Apartheid in South Africa, where the owners tried to dress the workers in the cheapest uniforms they could find – no shirt, a bandana to catch the sweat, and gumboots. They tried to keep the miners from communicating with each other, and strictly enforced harsh rules to keep the miners from even talking to each other.

However, the gumboots the bosses selected actually tripped up their schemes.

By making rhythms with their boots, miners were able to communicate with each other even if they didn't speak the same language. They could warn each other of dangers in the mines, support each other, and, very importantly, do so without their bosses knowing what was going on. During the massive protests which brought down Apartheid, gumboot dancing, along with other forms of music and dance, became a vehicle for political protest.



# Resources

The Step Afrika! Company [website](#)

A video with background on [Step Afrika!](#) and their new work in 2020.

A brief video of Step Afrika! in [action](#)

A brief video on part of the [history of stepping](#)

A brief video of [Jacob Lawrence](#) describing his awareness of the Great Migration

A multi-media resource on [Jacob Lawrence and his The Migration Series](#) from The Phillips Collection

An overview of [The Great Migration](#)

The [Library of Congress](#) has amazing resources on The Great Migration

[Background on stepping](#) from Tufts University

Article on [step dancing](#)

Background on [gumbboot dancing](#)

Here's a website devoted to using [body percussion in the classroom](#)

Chapter 3 is a scholarly article on gumbboot dancing and stepping, with [lesson plans and discussion ideas](#)

Summary of [study comparing dancers and athletes](#)



Photo of "Migration," a painting by Jacob Lawrence, from Wikipedia



# Learning Activity - The Message of Music

From Teaching Tolerance

This lesson challenges students to analyze and to reflect on messages presented in songs — and to express their own views about important issues addressed in some songs.

**Grades:** 3 – 5

**Learning Objective:** At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Analyze and write about how a song's lyrics can evoke feelings
- Compare two songs and give examples of metaphors in each song
- Write about the lyrics of songs, critically examining a song's messages and expressing a personal viewpoint about a tolerance-related issue that's important to them

**Materials:**

- Article: "The Other Education." Find it [here](#).
- Song Analysis Handout. Find it [here](#).
- Lyrics of popular songs (and their messages); such as:

"Count on Me" (2011) Bruno Mars (Friends can help each other. Find them [here](#).)

"Mean" (2010) Taylor Swift (Anti-Bullying message: Stand strong even when people are cruel. Find them [here](#).)

"The Climb" (2009) Miley Cyrus (Keep trying, never give up. Find them [here](#).)

"Man in the Mirror" (1988) Michael Jackson (Change in the world begins with you. Find them [here](#).)

"Ebony and Ivory" (1982) Paul McCartney (People can live in harmony. Find them [here](#).)

"Imagine" (1971) John Lennon (The world can be a better, more peaceful place. Find them [here](#).)

## Vocabulary

relevant (rel-uh-vuhnt) (adjective) related or connected to a subject or matter

stereotype (ster-ee-uh-type) (noun) an unfair belief or idea that some people have particular characteristics or are the same

tolerance (tol-er-uh-ns) (noun) a fair, open, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, beliefs, practices, racial or ethnic origins, etc., differ from one's own

lyrics (lir-iks) (noun) the words of a song

metaphor (met-uh-for) (noun) a word or phrase is used to refer to compare something with another thing to show or suggest that they are similar without using the words "like" or "as"



Photo Courtesy of Kwabena

# Learning Activity - The Message of Music (continued)



## Instruction

Photo Courtesy of Step Afrika!

1. Introduce the lesson by playing a song from the above list. Ask: “What makes you enjoy a song? A good sound? Interesting words? When you listen to a song, do you really listen to the words? How often do you think about the meaning of a song?”

2. Pose the following questions to students, and record their answers on an easel pad or whiteboard:

- How many of you like listening to music?
- What are the reasons you listen to music?
- How does music make you feel?
- What might you learn from music?



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3. Ask students to work in pairs. Offer these instructions: “I’d like each one of you to list at least five of your favorite songs. Then check with your partner to see if you listed similar or different choices. Is it okay to have different musical choices than your friends? How might you describe a favorite song to a friend? Would you be open and willing to listen to a new song if a friend recommended it?”

4. Ask students: What do you think makes a good song — catchy music? interesting words? something else?

5. Ask this question: “When you listen to a song, do you really hear its words or are you just hearing the music?” Explain that sometimes the same person who sings a song writes the words (lyrics) and music. Other times, one person composes the music, another writes the words, and a third person may sing

# Learning Activity - The Message of Music (continued)



Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia

the song. Many songwriters want to share a message or point of view with the audience. Ask: “Can you think a song that conveys a songwriter’s message?” Instruct students to refer back to the list they created at the beginning of the lesson for possible examples.

6. Distribute printed lyrics or provide a Web link to the song, “Ebony and Ivory.” Explain that, “Ebony and Ivory” was written in 1982 by Paul McCartney. Tell the class that McCartney wrote songs and was also one of the four musicians in the famous band, The Beatles. Discuss how the ebony and ivory in the song’s title refer to keys on a piano—that black keys are often made of ebony and white keys have been made of ivory. Instruct students: “After you listen to the song or read the lyrics, draw a picture or write about what you think the message of the song is.”

7. Ask students to share their ideas. Tell the class that the song uses something called a metaphor. Next, read this definition: “A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily represents one thing is used to represent something else.” Then ask: “Can you identify any metaphors in the song? What do you think ebony could be a metaphor for? Ivory? The piano keyboard?” [Note: While the song is explicitly about keys on the piano, many commentators have noted that it also is clearly about people getting along, integration and racial harmony.]

8. Ask students: What message might Paul McCartney have wanted to communicate in writing the words to the song? Would that same message be important or relevant today? Why or why not?

9. Distribute song lyrics or provide Web links for the other songs, and give out the Song Analysis handout. Invite children to read the lyrics to a couple of songs. After they have done so, tell them that these songs were written many years apart and ask, “What similar messages do these songs share, even though they were written at different times? What conclusions can you draw about their message? How does this message apply to your school? Your community?”

10. Break the class down into small groups of four or five. Ask each group to brainstorm about other messages that songwriters could sing about that would be relevant to tolerance in your school or community. Say, “Think about tolerance of other groups including those with disabilities, those of different religions, ethnic backgrounds, or viewpoints, or those who come from different neighborhoods.”

11. Next, invite students: “Imagine you are a songwriter and write a song about one of these issues. Pick the issue you’re most interested in. Write a paragraph about the song and the issue you’ve chosen. Include why the issue is important to you, why it is relevant in your school or community, and what message you want your song to share.”

12. Finally, create a title for your song and a CD cover that illustrates what its message will be.

## Add-Ons

- Use the music from one of the songs in this lesson (or another song you like) to write lyrics for your “new” song.
- Interview parents or other community members about the songs that inspire them. Then create a music mix of inspirational songs for your community.



# Learning Activity – Art Expression Through Music

Gale Bournazian-Ybarra

Santa Lucia School, Templeton, Calif.

Teaching Tolerance

**Grade Level:** 6 – 8

Stepping and gumboot dancing have their roots in specific historical and political situations. This learning activity engages students in a similar experience of their own, using different art forms.

**Learning Objectives:** After completing this activity, students will:

- Know that dancers, musicians, and writers explore historical and political topics through their art forms
- Practice sketching their feelings and making collages
- Understand how artistic expression can help people explore historical and political topics

## Materials

- Pieces of recycled cardboard for sketching
- Drawing materials for sketching
- Scissors
- Glue
- Magazines, newspapers, ribbons, foil, yarn, old books, buttons and glue to make collages
- Clear spray for a group collage
- Virginia Hamilton's *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom* (or other relevant text) to read aloud
- Access to "No More Auction Block for Me," sung by Paul Robeson, or a different version if preferred, available [here](#)

## Introduction

History is often taught through books, but art can also unlock the past. Songs, for example, can reveal a lot about historical events by exploring the emotions they evoked in musicians, singers and songwriters. This activity uses music, sketching and collage to study some emotions surrounding the experience of slavery in the United States.

## Communicating, Talking and Listening

1. Begin with a classroom group discussion. First, remind students that all responses are valid and deserve respect. Then ask:

What is music? Is music meant purely for our enjoyment? What messages can music communicate? Are some lyrics meant to protest wrongdoing? What are the various genres of music? What emotions do various songs elicit?

2. Ask students to close their eyes and listen to the song "No More Auction Block for Me," sung by Paul Robeson.

# Learning Activity – Art Expression Through Music (con't)

## Art Expression

3. Let students choose from various sizes of recycled cardboard, and instruct them to sketch whatever they are feeling after listening to the song. You can replay the song as they are sketching. Then tell them they will be turning their sketches into collages; they may want to wait on the details, which can be added later using various recycled objects.

4. Provide magazines, newspapers, ribbons, foil, yarn, old books, buttons and glue for students to use to collage their drawings. As students work, read aloud short stories from Virginia Hamilton's *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom* (or other relevant texts).



Paul Robeson at demonstration

## Coming Together

5. Have students sit in a circle and take turns displaying their creations, identifying which feelings the song elicited in each of them.

6. Close with a group discussion:

- What did you learn from this song?
- What did society gain from this song?

7. Finally, apply a clear spray to each collage, and display them by making one large classroom collage out of the

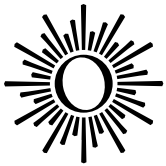
# BE YOUR OWN CRITIC

Now it is your turn to tell us what you thought about the performance that you saw at Overture Center! Use this worksheet to brainstorm some ideas. Make sure to use specific examples from the performance. If you forgot anything, ask your friends and teachers who went to the show with you.

Turn your ideas into a rough draft and then send a final copy to us!

I saw \_\_\_\_\_  
(SHOW TITLE)

Overture Center is...



because...

What would you say this show is about?



Two things that I really loved about the performance were...



Two things that could have been better in the performance were...



I thought the artistic elements (scenery, sound/music, lighting, costumes) were...



because...

I would want to meet the character...



in real life because...

If I could ask the performer(s) a question, I would ask them...



Imagine that you're telling a friend about this show. What would you say?





# Academic Standards

## English Language Arts

### Speaking & Listening

### Comprehension and Collaboration

SL. 4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.

## Theatre Education

### Standard 3 – RESPOND

TP.R.4.i – Analysis – Identify separate elements in a theatrical work.

TP.R.5.i – Reflection – Assess personal participation in a performance

TP.R.6.i – View Performance – Demonstrate developmentally appropriate audience etiquette.

### Standard 4 – CONNECT

TP.Cn.5.i – Cultural Social Context – Explain how theatre relates to self, others, and the world

TP.Cn.8.i – Cross Disciplinary – Identify how theatre connects to literature and social studies

## Dance

Standard DD 3: RESPOND – Students will critically interpret intent and meaning in order to evaluate artistic work. Students will demonstrate developmentally appropriate etiquette skills with guidance in response to a performance, as well as grade appropriate practices of Dance Literacy, Reflection, and Analysis.

Standard DD 4: CONNECT – Students will relate prior knowledge and personal experience with dance to cultural and historical context, including developmentally appropriate Cultural Social Awareness and Cross Disciplinary connections.

## Music

### Standard 3: Respond

MG3.R.5.i: Recognize and define grade- appropriate foundational musical elements.

MG3.R.7.i: Utilize appropriate music terminology in the evaluation /reflection of music performances.

MG3.R.8.i: Demonstrate proper concert/audience etiquette.

### Standard 4: Connect

MG4.Cn.5.i: Compare the historical and cultural aspects of music with other disciplines.

MG4.Cn.6.i: Explain how music relates to self, others, and the world.

MG4.Cn.7.i: Examine and evaluate musical connections, similarities, and differences.

MG4.Cn.8.i: Describe roles of musicians in various music settings and world cultures.

## Social Studies

### Behavioral Studies

SS.BH1.b.4 Describe how culture, ethnicity, race, age, religion, gender, and social class can help form self-image and identity.

# About Live Performance

Theater, unlike movies or television, is a **LIVE** performance. This means that the action unfolds right in front of an audience, and the performance is constantly evolving. The artists respond to the audience's laughter, clapping, gasps and general reactions. Therefore, the audience is a critical part of the theater experience. In fact, without you in the audience, the artists would still be in rehearsal!

Remember, you are sharing this performance space with the artists and other audience members. Your considerate behavior allows everyone to enjoy a positive theater experience.

**Prepare:** Be sure to use the restroom before the show begins!

**Find Your Seat:** When the performance is about to begin, the lights will dim. This is a signal for the artists and the audience to put aside conversations. Settle into your seat and get ready to enjoy the show!

**Look and Listen:** There is so much to hear (dialogue, music, sound effects) and so much to see (costumes, props, set design, lighting) in this performance. Pay close attention to the artists onstage. Unlike videos, you cannot rewind if you miss something.

**Energy and Focus:** Artists use concentration to focus their energy during a performance. The audience gives energy to the artist, who uses that energy to give life to the performance. Help the artists focus that energy. They can feel that you are with them!

Talking to neighbors (even whispering) can easily distract the artists onstage. They approach their audiences with respect, and expect the same from you in return. Help the artists concentrate with your attention.

**Laugh Out Loud:** If something is funny, it's good to laugh. If you like something a lot, applaud. Artists are thrilled when the audience is engaged and responsive. They want you to laugh, cheer, clap and really enjoy your time at the theater.

**Discover New Worlds:** Attending a live performance is a time to sit back and look inward, and question what is being presented to you. Be curious about new worlds, experience new ideas, and discover people and lives previously unknown to you. Your open mind, curiosity, and respect will allow a whole other world to unfold right before your eyes!

**Please, don't feed the audience:** Food is not allowed in the theater. Soda and snacks are noisy and distracting to both the artists and audience.

**Unplug:** Please turn off all cell phones and other electronics before the performance. Photographs and recording devices are prohibited.

