



OVERTURE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

International Festival

2026

RESOURCE GUIDE

<https://www.overture.org/engage/international-festival/>

Greetings,

Happy International Festival 2026! We are so excited to share this virtual International Festival with you and your students!

Here are four important details about the festival:

1. All content is sourced from local performers, vendors and businesses in Dane County.
2. Content is available via an online map with embedded links and will be available through the end of the 2026 school year. You can access the map here: <https://padlet.com/overturecenter/international-festival-gnlraoxuwr9ozxon>
3. At the end of this resource guide, we’ve also put together a festival guide with descriptions of all the performances and their map locations. See pages 12-13
4. We would love for this content to reach as many students as possible, so please share with other educators and youth workers you know. We do ask that everyone registers for the virtual festival so we can evaluate how the materials are being used. Register here: <https://form.jotform.com/OVJotForm/IFschool26>

This Educator’s Resource Guide for International Festival is designed to:

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

We hope you and your students enjoy the festival! If you have any questions please email OnStage@overture.org.

Sincerely,

Alanna Medearis
Director of Education and Community Engagement

Elaine Stanley
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Education Categories

 Arts

 Social Studies

 Social Emotional



About International Festival 2026

Afro-Cuban dance, Flamenco, klezmer music, Taiko drumming, Brazilian drumming, Henna body art, Hmong cuisines...

With more than 20 free performances, visual arts activities and cooking demonstrations, International Festival brings the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the world to you.

It gives you a chance to learn more about what's going on in your own backyard, too, because although they may have ties to distant lands, all the performers, presenters, and cooks you'll see are based right here in Dane County.

International Festival gives people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds a chance to explore, to find new favorites and develop new tastes. Join in and see how the more we celebrate the different ways people make music, sing, dance, cook and express themselves, the closer we get to understanding our essential connection.



The Map



The map gives you an idea of how big, and how small, our world is after all.

Each pin on the map was placed by participants in this year’s International Festival.

Explore the [online version of the map](#) with your students.

Ask students to find the most far-away places pinned on the map, and then remember – each one of those places is represented by people here in our community.

Ask students which places they’re most curious about.

Would they like to know how hot it gets in Africa, or how cold it gets in Northern Europe?

At what age do people start learning how to use chopsticks or play drums?

What kinds of natural materials are used to make clothing and jewelry in South America?

There’s a lot to learn, and a lot to explore, at the International Festival.

The Pin Reference Guide is a handy-dandy tool to help you see what’s available.

Pin Reference Guide

Orange.....	Performances
White.....	Market/Vendors
Red.....	Food & Recipes
Purple.....	Sister Cities
Green.....	Cultural Spotlight
Blue.....	Community Organizations

About Culture

International Festival gives you a chance to experience cultures from all over the world – as practiced by your neighbors. But what exactly do we mean by “culture?”

Countries have cultures, such as “American culture,” and so do groups within those countries, as in “Chinese-American culture.” Even smaller units, such as schools or companies, can have their own cultures, too.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines culture as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” and “the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time.”

With that definition in mind, you might think that cultures are fixed lifestyle models, but the opposite is true. Cultures are not frozen in time but rather evolve, adapt, and change with the people who carry them. One way to describe culture is all the things that make you feel like you’re at home. This can include:

- The food you eat, how it’s made, and what you eat when
- The music you like and how you listen to it
- The clothes you wear every day, how you dress up, and what you dress up for
- The different kinds of dances you do, and when you do them
- The languages you speak at home and other places, if they’re different
- The spiritual beliefs and practices your family follows



Learning about other cultures helps you understand, appreciate and enjoy more of the world. This helps you connect to other people in a richer way.

Learning about other cultures also helps you learn more about yourself. You might discover new foods to enjoy, new music and ways to move, or maybe a new perspective.

This kind of learning also helps you understand more about the culture in which you grew up.

Have you ever been away from home and realized that you notice more things about your home and neighborhood when you return? It’s a similar thing.



Discussion Questions



- How important is music to who you are as a person? What kind of music do you like? Do you like any kinds of music from cultures that are not related to your origins?
- Do any kinds of music bring back special memories to you? What are they?

- What special days does your family celebrate? This could include birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and more?
- What does your family do on these special days?
- What are some of your favorite foods?
- Do you like any kinds of foods from cultures that are not related to your origins?
- Does your family have any special foods or prized recipes they like to make on certain occasions? What are they? How do you get involved with preparing them?
- Does your household have any special ways of remembering and celebrating the places your ancestors came from?



About Dance

You'll be able to see several different kinds of dance in free performances at the International Festival:

- Bolivian
- Chinese Lion
- Egyptian
- Greek/Turkish
- Irish
- Mexican
- Spanish

But although these dances are very different, all dance forms are shaped by the same key characteristics.

Learning about these characteristics can help you talk about and compare different kinds of dance, noting how they are similar, how they are different, and how you connect with the different kinds of dance express these characteristics. They are:

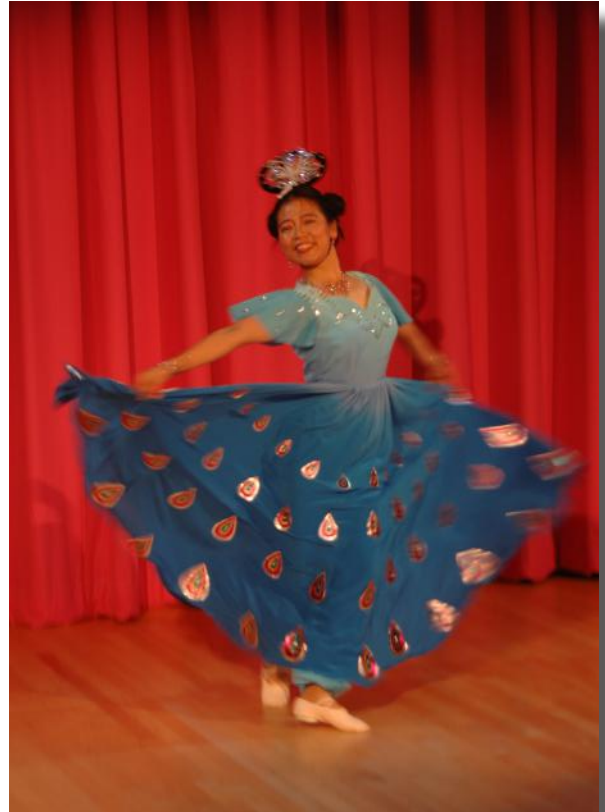
the body – Note how dancers hold their bodies in different kinds of dance. Are they holding their bodies very tightly or very loosely? Do they move both side of their bodies at the same time? Do they make curved or angular shapes with their bodies?

action – Dance is all about different kinds of movement, which can travel through space or take place in one spot. From running and leaping to crawling and rolling, dancers can move through space in many ways. Even when they stand still, dancers can still move their bodies in different ways by twisting, tilting, stretching, and more. Try looking at the distinct ways dancers from different cultures move their bodies. Actions all take place in a certain order, or sequence, which is basically the backbone of the dance.

space – This characteristic concerns the way dancers relate to the environment where they are dancing, and how their environment affects their movements. Are the dancers' movements big or small? How are dancers arranged in the space? Are the dancers close to the ground or leaping through the air?

time – Dancers can move quickly, slowly, in unison, in order, in time with music, or without music. Note how specific dances use time in different ways.

energy – Dancers execute their movements with different qualities, or attitudes. They can seem like they are ready to pound their feet through the floor, or barely touching its surface. They can seem fluid, connected, sharp, tense, and more. Notice the differences in energy between different kinds of dance forms.



Spotlight on TANIA TANDIAS FLAMENCO & SPANISH DANCE

Dance is a way to express one's culture and identity, and a way to celebrate and preserve traditions that have been passed down through generations.

The roots of flamenco dance largely unknown, but we find history in the migration of the Andalusian Roma, or Gitanos, as they are known in Spain, from Rajasthan, India between the 9th and 14th Centuries. They brought various instruments, songs and dances to Spain where they were introduced to the cultures of the Sephardic Jews and the Moors. From the fusion of these cultures came the art form of Flamenco.



There are six elements that make up the foundation of Flamenco: cante (singing), toque (guitar), baile (dancing, or footwork), jaleo (choruses), palmas (hand-clapping) and pitos (finger-snapping). During the golden age of Flamenco, from 1780 to 1845, cante, or singing, was the primary aspect of Flamenco, with dancing and guitar being secondary. The art form began as a family-oriented tradition that was passed down generationally, but the beginning of the twentieth century saw the first public flamenco venues, or tablaos, and the popularity of flamenco flourished.

Tania Tandias is trained in flamenco, Spanish classical, and escuela bolera, and studied with professionals across the United States and Spain. She is now living in Madison where she teaches classes and performs Flamenco and Spanish dance with stage productions, and at festivals and schools. Watch Tania Tandias' Flamenco & Spanish Dance from last year's International Festival:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/M02GkCENhGg?si=m-lB9gZDpYn651uM&t=20403>

Spotlight on Overture Center's Digital Gallery: Democracy

President Abraham Lincoln described democracy in his Gettysburg Address as a form of "...government of the people, by the people, for the people..." An ideal democratic system would listen to and serve all its people equally. Today, democracies around the world are being challenged, but what exactly does it mean to be in a democratic system? And who are "the people"? This exhibit provides an opportunity for artists to explore some of these questions along with their interpretations of the current state of democracy.

Explore the full digital gallery here:

<https://www.overture.org/engage/educator-resources/virtual-content/#democracy>

A Taste of the Festival

Lithuania is a 25,200 square mile country in the Baltic region of Europe, on the eastern edge of the Baltic Sea. It has a cool and moist climate. In the capitol city of Vilnius, which is a sister city of Madison, the average temperature in January is 27.50 F and the average July temperature is 63.0 F.

The Žaibas Lithuanian Dancers was founded in 1991 to promote Lithuanian culture, especially folk dancing. “Žaibas” means “lightening bolt” in Lithuanian, which the group felt described both Wisconsin and the land whose culture they wanted to preserve.

Members range from Lithuanians to people who simply enjoy traditional Lithuanian dancing. The group practices weekly and performs at ethnic and cultural fairs and schools and participates in Madison Vilnius Sister City events.

Lithuanian Grybai are called mushroom cookies because that’s what they look like, but not what they taste like. Instead, this traditional sweet treat is rich with spices such as cardamon, cinnamon, ginger, clove, and nutmeg and topped with a frosting dotted with poppy seeds.



Henna body art is the traditional practice of painting the body with a paste made from dried henna leaves. It is linked to weddings and religious holidays in many cultures. The designs and patterns can be intricate and symbolic.

Known as “mehndi” in Hindi and Urdu, people in India, Pakistan, the Middle East, and Africa have practiced henna body art for thousands of years.

On an around the hands, henna body art usually lasts for one to two weeks, but it can last longer on other parts of the body. Like other forms of culture, it will affect different people differently.



Everyone Has a Culture, Everyone Is Different

From the Peace Corps

Grades: 3-5, 6-8

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to define culture.
- Students will recognize that some differences among people stem from culture and that some stem from personal traits and preferences.

Materials: Worksheet

Instructions:

1. Write the following statements on the board.

No one is exactly like me.

I have many things in common with the members of my family and community.

Every person in the world needs some of the same things I need.

2. Ask students to share ideas that support these statements.
3. Point out that people in various groups often look at people in other groups as “different.”
4. Ask students to describe some of these differences. Why may people in one group behave differently from people in another?
5. Explain that many differences are related to culture—ways of living and beliefs that are handed down from one generation to the next. Working from the list on the board, explain that all people share basic needs (food, shelter, etc.), that each of us learns a set of behaviors and beliefs from the people we grow up with (the kinds of houses we build and foods we eat), and that each individual has unique talents and preferences (I’m good at math; I don’t like chocolate). When we talk about the behaviors and beliefs that a group of people have in common, we are talking about culture.
6. Ask students to complete the worksheet in order to help them identify aspects of their own cultures. Explain that each student should answer each question with one sentence or phrase. Then students should rank each item as to how important they feel it is to their culture.
7. After students have completed the worksheets, ask them to share their answers in small groups. Ask the groups to compare various aspects of their individual cultures.
8. In some schools, students may share many cultural traits. Some students may not identify with a particular ethnic or foreign culture. Ask students if they think there is one American culture. Discuss characteristics of your region (immigration patterns, geographic location, etc.) that might explain the similarities and differences among student responses to the worksheet.



Learning Activity (con't)

Debriefing

1. Use the following questions to focus discussion on the role culture plays in forming our behaviors and beliefs.
2. How does it feel to know you are part of a cultural group that shares many ideas and beliefs?
3. What happened when you compared your worksheets? How many different cultures are represented in the class?
4. What did you learn from this activity?
5. Does culture explain why other people sometimes seem "different"?
6. What are some things that you do that you learned from your culture?
7. Are all of our behaviors related to culture? (Possible answer: Some behaviors are related to individual preferences and personality traits.)
8. What can you do to learn about and understand other cultures?
9. What if you were part of another culture? How might you be different from the way you are now?
10. How can we use what we learned in this lesson to improve our community



Learning Activity Worksheet

[You can download a full page pdf here.](#)

Worksheet #2:

Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone Is Different

Directions: Respond to each question. Use another piece of paper if you need more space.

1. What languages do you speak?

2. What music do you listen to? What dances do you know?

3. What foods do you eat at home?

4. In your family, what is considered polite and what is considered rude? What manners have you been taught? (Think about such things as table manners, behavior toward guests in your home, what to say when answering the telephone, how to say thanks for a meal.)

5. What do you wear on special occasions?

6. How often do you see your extended family (for example, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins)? What role do they play in your life?

7. What holidays and ceremonies are important in your family?

8. Describe something very important to you. It could be a value, such as respect or honesty. It could be a person, such as a parent, brother, sister, or friend. It could be a goal, such as going to college or designing a website. It could be a hobby.

9. Based on what you've written, how would you describe the characteristics of the culture you're a part of?

Festival Guide

Welcome to Overture Center for the Arts' Virtual International Festival for Schools!

Please review the information below to learn more about the artists and cultures that are represented at the festival. All content is sourced from Dane County performers, artisans, community groups and vendors.

A note about war: We recognize and acknowledge the complexities of war and its impact. We trust that as educators you are best equipped to make decisions about this issue as it relates to this festival and your school population. We encourage you to take time to review the festival materials before your students.

Feel free to reach out to OnStage@overture.org with any questions.

Performance Group Name & Description	Self-Identified World Map Location
Atimevu Drum and Dance Ensemble A Madison, WI based group that performs the traditional music and dances of Ghana.	Accra, Ghana
Beni Daiko A Madison, WI based Japanese Taiko drumming group who share and celebrate Japanese culture with Taiko music.	Japan
Black Star Drum Line Created and founded in 2008 by award winning drummer/percussionist, Joey B. Banks, to give kids in the Madison community an opportunity for creative expression through the "Percussive Arts".	Madison, WI
Blue Willow Chinese Dance Joy Chen moved to the United States two decades ago after years of studying traditional Chinese dance. She choreographed many of these works to make them more accessible to Western audiences of all ages.	China
Breckenridge School of Highland Dance Scottish Highland Dancing.	Scotland
Charanga Agozá Cuban Charanga style dance music.	Cuba
Cris & Ann Plata South Texas and Mexican Border music, CONJUNTO and NORTEÑO.	Southern Texas and Mexico
DanzTrad Presenting dances from the state of Puebla and Chiapas.	Mexico Central
Guitar House of Madison Spanish guitar music performed by Gabor Szarvas & friends.	Madrid, Spain
Limanya Drum & Dance Ensemble Under the direction of Mandjou Mara and Maya Kadakia, Limanya performs traditional music and dance from Guinea and Mali, West Africa.	Guinea, West Africa
Lulu Quintet Madison home grown gypsy jazz quintet, with occasional wonderful extras.	France
Mad Craic Irish Dance Adult Irish dancers with experience ranging from beginners to lifelong dancers focus on hard shoe dances, and have performances with ceilis, set dances, and sean nós dancing!	Ireland
Madison Chinese Culture MCCA dedicates itself to finding enjoyable ways for the Madison community to learn more about Chinese Culture.	Beijing, China

Festival Guide (con't)

Performance Group Name & Description	Self-Identified World Map Location
Madison Pipes and Drums Madison Pipes and Drums is a non-profit organization for the purpose of education and entertainment through the promotion of Celtic music and heritage.	Scotland
Magic 98: Celebrating Wisconsin's Historical Women Lanette Hansen shares stories about women who didn't necessarily make the history books, but definitely made history!	Madison, WI
Meenakshi Ganesan & The Kalaanjali Dance Co. The primary focus of Kalaanjali is the offering of training in Bharatanatyam, one of the most prominent forms of Indian Classical Dance.	India (near Tamil Nadu)
Mona Augustin World beat love & social justice songs.	Haiti
Okami Taiko Okami Taiko practices eisa, a dynamic festival dance, originating from Okinawa, Japan. It incorporates taiko drums, dynamic movements and martial arts.	Okinawa, Japan
Raízes do Brasil Capoiera is a martial art that fuses self defense, dance, music and acrobatics.	Brazil
Rebulu Group Classic Cuban Conjunto music.	Latin America
Sadira Middle Eastern Dance Joyful, classical women's dances from the Middle East with a repertoire of traditional and contemporary dances from Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, the Gulf states and Palestine.	Cairo, Egypt
Sergio El Vacilon Cuban son-guajira love songs and old Cuban folk music, performed on guitar and voice.	Havana, Cuba
Son Del Atlantico Columbian fusion Band.	Columbia
Tania Tandias Flamenco & Spanish Dance Company Specializing in classical dance forms from Spain, including flamenco.	Seville, Spain
The Handphibians A community group of musicians and drummers of all levels who practice and perform Brazilian music with traditional percussion instruments.	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Tri Bratovchedki A capella songs in the rhythms, harmonies and languages of Eastern Europe.	Eastern Europe
UW Russian Folk Orchestra Russian/East European music played on authentic instruments.	Russia / Eastern Europe
Yid Vicious A unique blend of traditional and contemporary klezmer music.	Kiev, Ukraine
Žaibas Lithuanian Dancers The group aims to preserve Lithuanian culture, particularly folk dance, within the small Lithuanian community in South Central Wisconsin.	Vilnius, Lithuania
Zhong Yi Kung Fu Association A traditional Chinese martial arts school that teaches kung fu and the Sar Ping style of lion dance to people of all ages.	Heshan, China

Academic Standards

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.

SS.BH2.a.4-5

Compare how people from different cultures solve common problems, such as distribution of food, shelter, and social interactions.

SS.BH2.b.4

Give examples of how peoples from different cultures develop different values and ways of interpreting experiences.





Overture

CENTER FOR THE ARTS



PARTNERS:



American Girl



OnStage is supported in part by: American Girl's Fund for Children, Nelnet and contributions to Overture Center for the Arts.

Overture Center's mission is to support and elevate our community's creative culture, economy and quality of life through the arts.

<https://www.overture.org/engage/international-festival/>

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