

Discover West African Rhythm Through Drumming and Dance with Sogbety Diomande Artist from the Ivory Coast

STUDY GUIDE

Artist Narrative

Sogbety Diomande, native of the Ivory Coast in West Africa, is a professional drummer and dancer and has been performing since he was a child. He has been a member of Ballet National de Cote d'Ivoire, Kotchegna Dance Company, and has been featured with many troupes in NYC and around the US. Sogbety started his own troupe in 2005. His troupe performs at festivals and in colleges throughout the U.S. He spends most of his time working as a solo artist doing drum workshops, assemblies and lectures in schools, universities, community centers, and juvenile correctional facilities. Sogbety is happy to share his culture with school groups all over Ohio so that students can get a glimpse of life in a different land.

- Program goals:** To raise awareness of the need to respect and honor human diversity. It is hoped that the knowledge gained by the participants will lead to the desire to learn more about African cultures.
- Program objectives:** To actively engage students in drumming and dance activities of the West African culture.

A Brief List of Activity Options:

The activities available depend on the type of format chosen (residency, workshop, or performance) and length of time. A program with Sogbety may include:

Culture

- ❖ An introduction to village life in West Africa in comparison to city life
- ❖ Singing a song and learning greetings in various languages spoken in West Africa
- ❖ Discussing different West African rhythm instruments important to the culture

Drumming

- ❖ Discussing reasons drums are used in West Africa
- ❖ Explaining how to hold the drum and learning the three sounds of the djembe (bass, tone, slap).
- ❖ Playing simple rhythms through call and response
- ❖ Learning the accompaniment to traditional West African songs

Dance

- ❖ Learning the meanings and importance of dance in West African culture
- ❖ Learning the steps for traditional West African dances

Performance

- ❖ Students presenting a culminating performance of drumming and dances learned throughout the experience
- ❖ Watching Sogbety perform a masked dance called Bolohi (the panther dance, pronounced Bolo-HEE)

Suggested Books For Elementary Aged Students

Max Found Two Sticks by Brian Pinkney

Faraway Drums by Virginia Kroll

Talking Drums-A Selection of poems from Africa south of the Sahara by Veronique Tadjo

Tanka Tanka Skunk! By Steve Webb

Jungle Jamboree by Kimberly Knutson

Patakin: World Tales of Drums & Drummers by Nina Jaffe

Tales Alive! Ten Multicultural Folktales with Activities by Susan Milord

The Leopard's Drum: An Asante Tale from West Africa by Jessica Souhami

The Royal Drum: An Ashanti Tale by Mary Dixon Lake

Zimani's Drum by Melinaa Lilly

Jungle Drums by Graeme Base

Jungle Drum by Deanna Wundrow

Off to the Sweet Shores of Africa and other Talking Drum Rhymes by Unobagha

Jamari's Drum by Eboni Bynum and Roland Jackson

African Drumming

Drumming is a powerful art, a means of communication and healing, a way to bring harmony to a community. Drumming, songs, and dances are a part of the African ethnic expression, traditions, rituals, and way of life. It is important to understand where a rhythm comes from geographically and what it means to that culture. It is important to learn the origins of anything we do, particularly with anything African rooted, so we don't forget. There was a time, not long ago, that people of African descent were not permitted to drum and dance.

In African dance all movements mean something; they tell a story. Drumming and dancing is part of the culture. There are dances for birth, rites of passage, healing, planting, harvest, fishing, to give support to field workers, religious occasions, cycles of the year, marriage, death, and celebration. In Africa the drummer and the dancer are one. You don't have the dance without the musicians. A drummer 'talks' to a dancer with his drum. He can tell a dancer to start moving, change to another movement, and stop, all by a signal on the drum.

In any African dance, there is a specific rhythm that goes with each dance. Every part of Africa has its own style of drumming and dance. Instruments, clothing, and movements are all different.

Drumming requires listening, differentiation of sounds, coordination of hands, eyes, and our innate genetic need for rhythmic pattern and vibration. Persons with learning and hearing disabilities and ADD, even autistic and Alzheimer people respond positively to drumming. Drumming goes beyond the verbal, reading, and articulation skills that are beyond the ability of many of these people. Drumming is therapy. Drumming builds community. It encourages group participation and working together. Everyone who participates is important and necessary to make this program work.

I N S T R U M E N T S

In West Africa, drumming and dancing go hand in hand. In fact, drumming is meant for dancing and not for listening. As a result, dances require live drummers, who respond to the movements of the dancers. The following are instruments that provide the dancing beat:

DJEMBE (Pronounced JEM-bay) Also spelled "*djembé*" or "*djimbe*," depending on variations in African/French/English transcription

- Goblet-shaped hand drum covered with skin of goat or antelope
- Originated in Wassoulou region in southern Mali (located north of the Cote d'Ivoire), where women play an especially important role in traditional music making
- Has very wide sound spectrum, but is especially known for its high pitches
- Open-mouth shape of barrel is purported to have originated from the traditional grain grinder
- Known as "soloist drum"
- Can optionally be played with vibrating rings attached:

Kesingkesing - vibrating sound enhancer tied to the rim of the *djembe* in the form of two to three metal plates surrounded by small rings adorning the outer edge

DOUNDOUN (Pronounced doon-doon), Also known as *dunun*, *djundjun*, *junjun*, *diun diun* (in Sénégal), and *dondoumba*

- Name is modified according to differences in dialects in various regions
- Literally means "lower drums"
- Double-sized cylindrical barrel covered with a thick cow skin
- Ranges from highest in pitch and smallest in size to lowest in pitch and largest in size:

Kenkeni - smallest in size and highest in tone

-functions as time keeper

Sangban - mid-sized with medium tone, also called *songba* or *sangbé*

Dununba - largest in size and lowest in tone

-can be fabricated from large 55-gallon oil barrel but ours is made of wood

-played standing on one face

-struck with wooden club

-functions as bass drum

BALAFON (Pronounced BALA-phone), Also known as *bala*

-A West African predecessor of the xylophone made with strips of wood increasing in length that are tied together with thread. Attached to the bottom of the wooden keys are hollow gourds of different sizes that act as resonators, which give the instrument a greater tonal range

- ❖ Contemporary ensembles can consist of three to six *doundouns*, in addition to three to ten *djembes*.

Usually, more *djembes* are employed than *doundouns*.

Cultural and Social Context

LA CÔTE D'IVOIRE (IVORY COAST)

Slightly larger than New Mexico, Cote d'Ivoire is a tropical West African nation with a population of over 16 million people representing over 60 ethnic groups. Little knowledge exists about this coastal country prior to the arrival of European explorers in the 1460s. What is known, however, is that Cote d'Ivoire was the hub of major African trade routes during the Middle Ages. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, major ethnic groups migrated to Cote d'Ivoire from surrounding areas: Liberia (southwest of the Cote d'Ivoire), Burkina Faso and Mali (north), Ghana (east), and Guinea (northwest). Compared to its eastern neighbor, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire did not suffer very much from the slave trade, as its harbor was not as hospitable as others along the coast. The French first came into contact with Cote d'Ivoire in 1637 when missionaries landed on its eastern border with Ghana. Exposure was limited, though, due to unfavorable conditions at the shoreline and apprehension of the natives. It wasn't until 1840 that France took a further interest in the territory and persuaded local chiefs to grant French commercial traders a monopoly along the coast. Fifty-three years later, in 1893, the Cote d'Ivoire officially became a French colony.

The main mission of the French was to produce exported goods, including coffee, cocoa and palm oil crops. Of all colonies in Western and Central Africa, Cote d'Ivoire was unique in that it was the only country in West Africa that was inhabited by large numbers of settlers. In other colonies, the French and British largely functioned as bureaucrats. Due to the increased involvement of foreign settlers in Cote d'Ivoire, one-third of the country's cocoa, coffee, and banana plantations were controlled by the French. This, in turn, led to the proliferation of the despised forced-labor system, which became the spine of the economy.

Following sixty-seven years of colonization, the Cote d'Ivoire was by far the most affluent West African nation, with a booming agricultural industry that contributed to over 40% of the region's exports. It was during this time of prosperity that the nation won its independence in 1960 through the machinations of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, a successful cocoa farmer and local chief who also had a background in medicine. After becoming the Cote d'Ivoire's first president, Houphouët-Boigny, unlike other leaders of former colonies, maintained close ties to France. Ironically, the French population mushroomed from 10,000 to 50,000 post-independence. The majority of the expatriate community consisted of educators and advisors who engineered an agricultural growth strategy that was often referred to as the "Ivorian miracle". Houphouët-Boigny granted farmers favorable prices to further stimulate production. As a result, in 1979, Cote d'Ivoire became one of the world's leading coffee and cocoa producers, as well as Africa's leading pineapple and palm oil exporter. For two decades, the economy maintained the highest growth rate of Africa's non-oil exporting countries at over 10% annually.

After enjoying a period of prosperity, good times came to an end in 1999 and 2000, when falling cocoa prices and political turmoil sparked an economic downturn, which led to rising debt. On Christmas Day 1999, the first military coup in the history of Cote d'Ivoire overthrew the government led by President Henri Konan Bédié, Houphouët-Boigny's hand-picked successor after his death in 1993. Presidential and legislative elections held in October and December 2000 were neither peaceful nor democratic. Violence erupted due to the exclusion of Muslim opposition leader Alassane Ouattara. In October 2000, ten months of military rule came to an end when Laurent Gbagbo replaced junta leader Robert Guéi as president. Three months later, in January 2001, another coup was attempted, which led to the jailing of certain opposition members and blaming of bordering nations for causing instability. A brief civil war in 2002 divided Cote d'Ivoire into the rebel-held north and government-controlled south, crimping the lucrative cocoa industry and slowing economic exchanges around the country. The war displaced a large part of the population from their home territory. Many people have become refugees or moved to Abidjan which interrupted their livelihoods.

Economics and politics aside, Cote d'Ivoire possesses a rich culture with distinct differences among ethnic groups. Three major groups include the Baoulé, the Yakouba, and the Senufo, who are all famous for their wooden carvings. Baoulé masks are realistic, as they are often used in commemorative ceremonies to represent individuals who could be identified through facial marks or hairstyles. The most prevalent Yokouba mask is one of a slightly abstract human face, while another common carving is a large spoon that rests on human-like legs, which is used for serving rice. Masks of a very stylized nature come from the Senufo tradition, the best-known being the "fire spitter" helmet mask that combines features of an antelope, wart hog, and hyena.

Approximately 34% of the population is Christian of the Protestant denomination, although two of the world's largest Catholic cathedrals are located in the Cote d'Ivoire. Slightly over a quarter of Ivoirians are Muslim and live mostly in the north. Many others practice native religions involving ancestral worship in which deceased relatives are believed to remain in constant contact with the world of the living through rituals. Magic is also quite prevalent, as spells keep evil spirits at bay. Medicine men or priests distribute charms, tell fortunes, and advise people on how to avert danger. The Senufo culture has particularly kept its traditions alive. Children are secretly initiated into their society after being taught the history and moral principles of the Senufo people.

Ivorian food is eaten with the hands. A popular place to eat is the *maquis*, a typically economical open-air restaurant that lays out chairs and tables in the sand. Often served at the *maquis* are braised chicken and fish topped with onions and tomatoes. An accompanying side dish is the popular *attiéké*, which is similar to couscous, but made from grated cassava. Of the street-vended foods, one that stands out is *aloco* - a ripe banana in palm oil, flavored with chili and steamed onions. As a nice accent, a meal can be enjoyed with the local palm wine, *bangui*.

Glossary

A cappella Vocal music that is performed without any instrumental accompaniment.

Arrangement An adaptation and orchestration of a musical composition to a different medium than what it was originally intended for.

Balafon A West African predecessor of the xylophone made with strips of wood increasing in length that are tied together with thread. Attached to the bottom of the wooden keys are hollow gourds of different sizes that act as resonators.

Bass 1.) A musical instrument that produces tones in a low register (e.g. - electric bass, double bass, and tuba).

2.) A particular *djembe* hit marked by striking the drum in the center with the whole hand laid flat, making the lowest-pitched sound on the *djembe*.

Beat A steady succession of rhythmic units.

Call and response Exchange between the lead singer's improvisations and a group's recurring response.

Chorus The section of a song that a group of singers or musicians repeats at certain intervals.

Djembe Goblet-shaped hand drum covered with skin of goat or antelope

Doundoun Double-sized cow- or goat-skinned cylindrical barrel

Improvisation The unplanned and spontaneous creation of music during a performance.

Lyrics The words in a song.

Percussion The sound produced by beating or striking a musical instrument, such as a drum.

Pitch The quality of a sound that is correlated its frequency. A high pitch is associated with a higher frequency, while a low pitch is linked to a lower frequency.

Polyrhythm The simultaneous overlaying of distinct rhythmic patterns that interact to form a more complex rhythmic pattern.

Pulse A single stroke of sound. Rattles and jingles add strong pulses to music.

Rhythm The regular pattern of sounds at a particular speed or tempo.

Slap The highest-pitched sound on the *djembe*, attained by striking the drumhead with slightly separated fingers. The focus of the blow is concentrated on the fingertips.

Solo A composition or passage performed by one voice or instrument, with or without accompaniment.

Syncopation The act of stressing unaccented beats.

Tempo The speed at which music is played.

Tone 1) A note.

2) A particular *djembe* hit marked by striking the drum with all four fingers together, along with the creves of the hand hitting the edge of the rim.

(KOTCHEGNA- Center for Traditional Music and Dance □ □2002 10)

Program Evaluation

What did you like best about the program?

What did you learn about the importance of drumming in African culture?

What did you learn about the importance of dance in African culture?

What did you find interesting about Sogbety's life in Africa?

Would you take this program again or recommend it to your friends? Why or why not?

What new questions do you have about West African culture, drumming or dance?

