

Title: Stone Passing Game with Calabash Song

Grade Ranges:

 K-4

 X 5-8

 9-12

Subject Tag:

Art and Music: Music

Synopsis:

Throughout West Africa, young children and adolescents play many games that develop rhythmic and singing abilities. These games involve a wide variety of bodily movements and songs. The game described here is popular in Ghana, though similar games are played in Mali and other West African nations. Presenting this game to students in the United States provides an opportunity for cultivating cross-cultural awareness and a knowledge of African language and cultural activity. Teaching students to sing in an African language may enhance their phonemic awareness of the English language, and it will enlarge their view of linguistic possibilities. Of course, the activity also provides for the development of rhythm and singing abilities. The game presented here is challenging, enjoyable, and provides experiential learning to students and teachers alike.

Keywords:

West African music, Ghana, Ga people and language, rhythm games, singing

Body:

1. Introduction: How do young children and adolescents in the United States develop their musical abilities? Encourage students to brainstorm possible answers to this question that include activities outside of formal music education. Ask students what their earliest musical memories are — to think of how music, singing, and dance were integrated in their childhoods. Ask for descriptions, and even demonstrations of musical and rhythmic games that were/are played (for example: singing and clapping games, sung nursery rhymes, children's songs with hand movements, skipping rope, or tapping out rhythms on the table to accompany song lyrics.)
2. Young people all over the world learn to participate in music through games. Explain that children in many cultures use games to develop their musical abilities, and today the class will learn one such game from the Ga people of Ghana, West Africa. The game is typically played outside and involves singing and passing stones around in a circle. Since you will most likely teach the game inside, newspaper balls can be used instead of stones in order to avoid damage to the floor. Have each student make a tight newspaper ball about the size of an orange. Explain that in Ghana, and other developing countries, children are inventive at creating games with simple found objects, such as sticks and stones, and in fashioning toys from such objects.

3. Once each student has made a tight newspaper ball (their stone), clear an area and have the group sit in the floor in a close circle. Students should sit cross-legged with their knees meeting their neighbor's knees. It is important that no student's legs are in front of them. Students should place their stones on the floor directly in front of themselves. Students should be sure that they can reach their stone and that they can reach over (with their right hand only) and place their stone directly in front of their neighbor to the right. Once everyone has comfortably taken their position, have students leave their stone on the floor in front of themselves so that they all can focus on learning the song. (Note: Lyrics, translation, and a phonetic translation are provided in the accompanying teacher download; music and lyrics are in the accompanying PDF handout.)
4. Rehearse the "Calabash" song in advance of the class, so you can teach the song orally to students. Teach students the song so they can comfortably sing it. Here is an effective way to introduce students to the song:
 - a. Explain that the song involves call and response singing (as does most group singing across West Africa). Sing through the song in its entirety, demonstrating the call and response structure.
 - b. In a broken call and response format, teach the text as rhythmically spoken words, proceeding only one line (or part of a line) at a time. Encourage students to respond with a full voice and in unison – Ghanaians generally sing and speak with a full voice.
 - c. When students can speak through the text confidently, teach the song one line at a time, in a broken call and response format.
5. Once students are comfortable with how the song sounds and how the song goes, pass out the sheets with the printed song lyrics so students have the opportunity to observe how the Ga language is written. You will notice that there are some unfamiliar letters in the written text. The phonetic spelling below the Ga text should make pronunciation relatively clear. Rehearse the song in its proper form.
6. It's now time to integrate stone movement.
 - a. While continuing to rehearse the song in proper call and response form, have students keep time by tapping their stones on the ground directly in front of themselves on the quarter-note pulse.
 - b. Once students are used to this, explain that stones are to be tapped in place during the call portions of the song, and that they are to be passed, in time, to the right (using the right hand) during the response portion of the song. (Note: The pulse of in-place time keeping is twice as fast as the pulse of passing — stones are passed on the half-note pulse.) A hint for practicing passing: When first rehearsing the stone passing, have students reach over to the spot directly in front of their neighbor, with their own stones in hand. Do not place the stones down. They should return their stones to their own spots, i.e. each student holds onto the same stone throughout the practice exercises. Eventually, students will leave their stones for their

neighbors, and return to their own positions for new stones. Recall that stone passing takes place only during the response sections.

- c. You are now ready to play. It is enjoyable to begin at a slow tempo, and slowly increase the tempo over the course of the session. The call sections provide an opportunity for stones to be redistributed should there (inevitably) develop a traffic jam (abundant laughter invariably accompanies this situation). Stop the action and discuss students' difficulties in keeping time with the group. Ask students what words correspond directly with the passing action. And point out the social lessons that can be derived from the activity: the group succeeds only if everyone plays their part in coordination. Students who make errors can be eliminated from the group; this is common practice among Ghanaian children, however it may be inappropriate to do so. Be sure that everyone has had a chance to adequately master the movements and song before anyone is eliminated. Take steps to maintain strong singing throughout the game.
7. A group debriefing session of the activity is highly recommended. Such a debriefing might include examination and discussion of the written Ga text, presentation of additional historic, cultural, and geographic information concerning Ghana, and reflection on the social lessons of the game. It may also be appropriate to discuss how the game is similar to those played in the U.S. or elsewhere.

For information on Ghana, consult the related links listed below or try these written sources on African children's games or music in Ghana:

- Judith Cook Tucker, Abraham Adzenyah, and Dumisani Maraire. *Let Your Voice be Heard! Songs from Ghana and Zimbabwe*. Danbury, CT: World Music Press, 1986.
- Titon, Jeff Todd, ed., *Worlds of Music: An introduction to the Music of the World's People*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1992.

Related Links:

Africa South of the Sahara: Ghana

<http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/ghana.html>

This site provides a plethora of links for historical, cultural and current events information on Ghana.

1upTravel.com

<http://www.1uptravel.com/worldmaps/ghana.html>

This site has several maps of Ghana available for purchase and offers some links for basic information on the country and its population.

BBC News: Country Profiles

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/country_profiles/newsid_1023000/1023355.stm

This site provides a concise country profile for Ghana. Profiles for other African nations can also be accessed through this location.

Features:

- ___ Contains special education tips
- ___ Quick Activity (less than 30 minutes; story starter)
- ___ Requires Internet access for students to complete

Objectives:

Students will learn to sing in the Ga language and to accompany their singing with stone passing movements, learning rhythmic coordination and cultivating intercultural awareness.

Standards

NY: 1. Creating, Performing, and Participating in The Arts: Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts. **4.** Understanding The Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of The Arts: Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

CT: Music 7. Evaluation: Students will evaluate music and music performances. **8.** Connections: Students will make connections between music, other disciplines and daily life. **9.** History And Cultures: Students will understand music in relation to history and culture. **Dance 1.** Elements and Skills: Students will identify and perform movement elements and dance skills. **7.** Connections: Students will make connections between dance, other disciplines and daily life.

NJ: Visual and Performing Arts 1.1: All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater, and visual arts. **1.2:** All students will refine perceptual, intellectual, physical, and technical skills through creating dance, music, theater, and/or visual arts. **1.5:** All students will identify the various historical, social, and cultural influences and traditions which have generated artistic accomplishments throughout the ages and which continue to shape contemporary arts.

Prerequisite Skills:

No specific prerequisites, except the ability to sit cross-legged or kneeling, and a full range of motion in the right arm. Some experience singing may help students to feel more confident singing in a group.

Time Required:

40 – 50 minutes

Technology and Materials Needed:

1. newspaper

Procedures**Assessment Criteria:**

Encourage students to assess their own success during the debriefing session based on their abilities to pick up on the lyrics and the movement, as well as on their willingness to work together.

Review Date:

One year

Review Comments:

Check Web sites.

