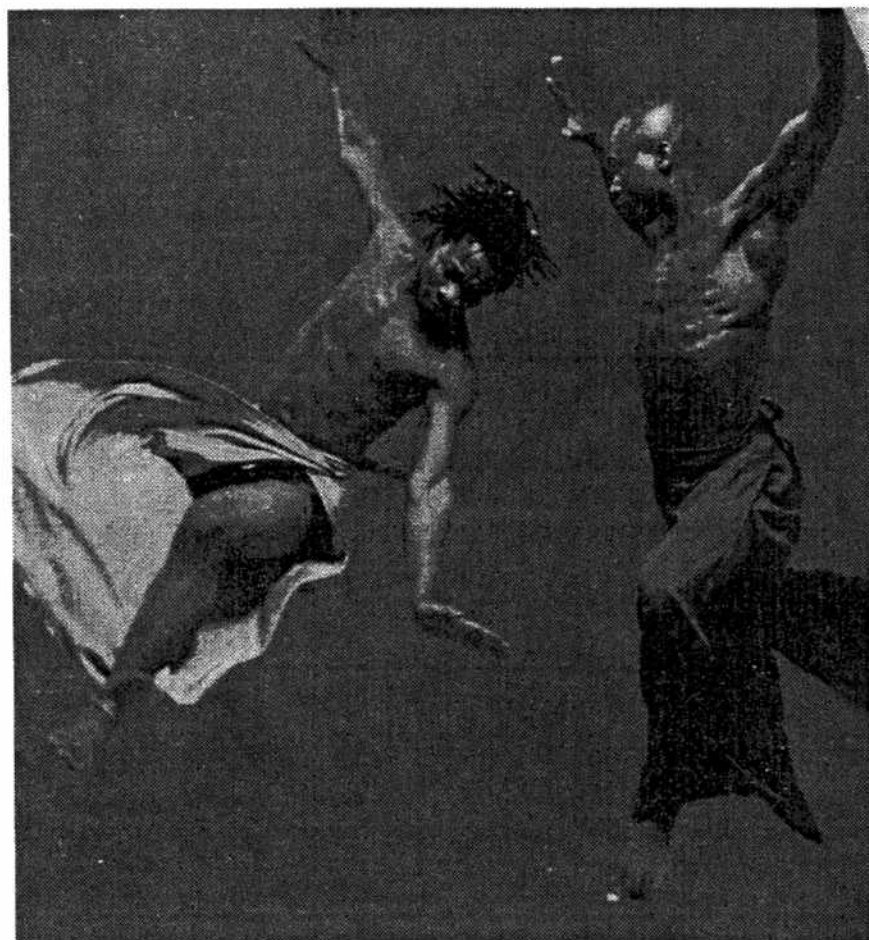


2003 Teachers' Guide

BENIN

Gansango Dance Company



Seattle
International
Children's
Festival

In a performance especially commissioned for younger Festival-goers, Etienne Cakpo and Gansango Dance Company will introduce West African performing arts through storytelling, dance, mask, and song. The performance builds upon localized, traditional summer activities in southern Benin, where children get together to sing and dance for the entertainment of their neighbors.

The Performance



During their annual summer vacation, children in southern Benin observe Kaleta, similar to Halloween in the USA. Children save money and pool their resources to buy or make shakers, bells, drums and masks. They practice dance and music rhythms, and mask themselves as animals. Then they organize outings in their neighborhoods, to entertain their friends and family with music and masked dance.

Etienne Cakpo, lead dancer and choreographer for Gansango Dance Company, is creating a dance-theatre piece inspired by this traditional observance. The performance will begin with percussion music, as a child wakes from a dream of a beautiful Kaleta and decides to organize an event with his friends. The idea of Kaleta will be introduced to the audience through story (by Won-Ldy Paye) and dance. Cakpo then presents a “dance of the protector spirit” and a “Gelede” masked dance to honor the spirit of the Great Mother. Between the two dances will be a song performed by one of Benin’s greatest vocalists, Janvier Denagan Honfo, who will join Gansango especially for these Festival performances.

The performance then showcases Cakpo as a “voudouavonou,” a colorful trickster spirit who entertains children with dance, pranks, and an intriguing costume. He is also featured in a “Dance of the Returned Spirit”: he wears a sparking cape that he skillfully spins around his body and up over his head. Between the two dances Won L'dy Paye will present “The Story of Gansango,” how the bell came to be master percussionist (and how the dance ensemble got its name; see following page). The Kaleta/performance concludes, as it began, with percussion music.



The Company



Etienne Cakpo, a professional dancer and choreographer from Benin, has been building his repertoire of traditional and modern dance for nearly twenty years. In addition to conducting personal research to learn regional dances and musical traditions in his country, he has worked in remote areas of Benin with international ethnomusicologists, musicians, and filmmakers. Etienne has performed with artists from many countries, including Haiti, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Senegal, France, Mali, and USA. He currently lives and works in Seattle.

Won-Ldy Paye (pronounced One Day Pay) belongs to the Dan people, one of sixteen ethnic groups in Liberia, and is from a small village on the outskirts of Tapita, in the country's northeastern region. He is a member of the *Tlo Ker Mehm*, the class of professional storytellers who are also accomplished musicians and keepers of Dan oral heritage. In Liberia he trained in storytelling with his grandmother, and was brought up to recognize, and rely on, masked spirits, appearing in the village as teachers, judges,

messengers, police, dancers, and entertainers. He founded and directed a theater company which became the fourth largest in Liberia. Since moving to USA, he has worked as a storyteller, musician, mask-maker, painter, and drum-maker; he collaborates regularly with Seattle Art Museum. The longtime director of Village Drum & Masquerade, which presents the traditional performing arts of Liberia, Paye now lives for part of the year in Connecticut and performs regularly on the East Coast. Learn more about Won-Ldy at www.worldypaye.com.



Janvier Denagan Honfo is a celebrated, seasoned musician from Benin who now resides in Germany. He has released numerous recordings, and teaches and performs internationally. He composed the music for the film *Nationalite: Blanche* and regularly plays at such European music events as the Jazz in Aachen Festival.

Mohammed Shaibu from Ghana plays guitar, *djembe*, *balafon*, talking drum, and other percussion from West Africa. As a master of the talking drum, Mohammed has inspired many ethnic drummers in the Northwest. As well as leading his own bands, Shakata and Afro Blue, Mohammed has toured and recorded with many of the great Afro-Pop artists, including Fela, I.K. Dairo, and O.J. Ekemode. He is a member of the Seattle-based group Maya Soleil.

2. Learn more about how different cultures define dance and its elements. Lesson included.

Topic 2: Dance & Its Elements

♦ How do different cultures define dance? In some cultures dance itself is not distinguished from music: the same term, for example, “song” or “ngoma,” refers to both music and the rhythmic movements which always accompany it. Even in cultures in which dance is thought of separately from music, it can be difficult to characterize some movements as “dance” and others as just part of moving through life.

♦ In the broadest sense, dance might be defined as “any movement designed to be looked at.” [Roger Copeland, quoted by Gerald Jonas in *Dancing*]. Even a more precisely calibrated definition leaves ample room to embrace many types of movement under the rubric of “dance.” Jonas cites a definition by anthropologist Joann Keali’inohomoku:

“Dance is a transient mode of expression, performed in a given form and style by the human body moving through space. Dance occurs through purposefully selected and controlled rhythmic movements; the resulting phenomenon is recognized as dance both by the performer and the observing members of a given group.”

Jonas applauds the openness of this definition, which can encompass changes in the forms and meanings of traditional dances and also gives dancers themselves, and their audiences, the power to define their movements as dances.

♦ Once, however, we recognize or define certain movements on a certain occasion as “dancing,” there is still the challenge of how to respond. We must, in the words of Margaret H’Doubler [*Dance: a Creative Art Experience*], develop a “visual vocabulary” to “read” a dance—let alone learn to create one ourselves. Seattle-based dancer Anne Green Gilbert, of Creative Dance Center and Dance Educators of Washington, proposes a series of concepts—space, time, force, body, movement, and form—each with associated terms, through which we can analyze and respond to different dances.

✍ **Lesson:** Use the enclosed **Elements of Dance** worksheet (pages 19-20) both before and after the performance. Before the performance, the concepts and terms can be used predictively (i.e., “What kind of form, narrative or abstract, do you think will be used in the Gansango dance performance?” “Will their movements be even or uneven, strong or light?”) After the performance, the same concepts and terms can be used to describe and analyze what you have seen. Thanks to Anne Green Gilbert for permission to reprint material from her book *Creative Dance for All Ages* (1992).

**“Some say
that dance
is the oldest of
all arts.
The maker
of a dance
needs
no tools.
What he has
to say is
expressed by
the strong
bodies
of the dancers,
and the
work of art is a
living,
moving thing.”**

Christine Price

the musicians have started to play. Using drums, big and small, an iron gong, and a pair of basketwork rattles, they weave a complicated network of sound.

A few old women are dancing quietly on their own, with shuffling steps, from side to side. A man standing nearby is suddenly caught up in the insistent rhythm of the music. He flings himself into the air and dances with wild, twisting leaps, flourishing a bunch of green leaves in his hand.

More men and women drift onto the dancing ground. They pass the shrine of the god, which stands at one end like a large green bower, its entrance screened by fresh-cut ferns. Some of the women have shaven heads and white draperies, signs of their deep devotion to the god.

Now the drum-rhythm quickens, and the people begin running around the tree and the musicians. The white-clad women are chanting as they run, and pointing skyward with graceful gestures of their hands. The circle whirls faster, and sweat falls in great drops from the brows of the dancers. On and on they run, driven by the ceaseless rhythm of the drums, until suddenly the circle bursts open. The dancers break free and race away up the road to the village in a long snaking line.

The music slows down. The space around the tree is empty except for the old women dancing gently from side to side. Small children wander about. A young boy joins the drummers and beats a big drum with unerring rhythm, while another, hardly more than a baby, proudly shakes a pair of heavy rattles.

Then there is shouting from the village. The dancers are returning! The musicians spring to life again and strike up a fast beat. The dancers come running at top speed bearing offerings for the god—great heavy bunches of green plantains and earthy roots of yam. They throw down their loads in front of the musicians, and then race around the tree in a dance of triumph and joy.


Women sway and bend, and men leap high, six abreast, spinning around with angular swings of their arms. Fresh dancers plunge into the whirling mass. The white-clad women are chanting again, and someone screams, as though possessed by the spirit of the god. The dancing ground is flooded to the edges with a river of dancers, tossing and heaving to the rhythm of the drums.

At last the rhythm changes and slows to a jog-trotting pace. The spell is broken, and the magic circle falls apart. In a few moments, the dancers have scattered, and no one is left in the dusty space but a few children and the musicians under the tree.

The village will rest in the heat of the day, but later the dancing will begin again. Once more the dancers and musicians will make their act of homage to the god. Through the language of dance, they will pray for another year of good crops and good living in the mud-walled village under the palms. Their prayer is the prayer of farming people the world over.”

4. Learn more about masked dance/masquerade traditions.

Topic 4: Masked Dance

 For an overview of masked dance traditions, see *Dance* in the *Eyewitness Books* series (mentioned in Topic 1), which includes a two-page spread about the variety of masked dance around the world (from Africa, an example from Ivory Coast is shown). Grau says, “A dancer’s face is one of the most expressive parts of the body, yet there are dances all over the world in which performers prefer to use masks to cover their faces. By concealing themselves behind masks, performers can let go of their own identities and devote themselves completely to the movements. Wearing masks challenges dancers to use their bodies in particular ways, so that every part becomes more expressive. In addition, masks can have a symbolic meaning: they may represent spirits or gods, dead ancestors, or the prized skills of a highly respected animal. Wearing a mask allows a performer to take on the special qualities of someone—or something—else.”

senses with a multifaceted combination of painting, sculpture, textiles, music, and dance that is not only a feast to the eyes and ears, but also serves the higher purpose of balancing and maintaining the order of the world and of life. Universal energy draws both on the artful dancing of the masked performers, who to the accompaniment of drumming enact scenes from everyday life, and on the complex masks, themselves a feature of the performance and donned by otherwise inexpressive wearers. The performance appeals to witches, who as members of society are themselves afflicted by tensions, and to their sense of discernment and solidarity. By enacting conflicts, it fulfills the purpose of resolving them, to the benefit of all.”

Volume Two of the lavish *African Ceremonies* by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher (1999) includes a chapter on *Zangbeto* masquerades (*zan* = night; *beto* = person), as traditionally performed during the dry season in Benin (pages 110-117). The masquerades “honor deities and spirits of nature”...they “spiritually renew communities and their land, ensuring prosperity and fertility throughout the region.” This “Coming Out of the Spirits” guards the security of kings, chiefs, and elders, enforcing their authority and, in effect, acting as “ritual policemen”: because villagers don’t want to encounter the masks at night, they stay at home and out of trouble! Beckwith and Fisher say that the presentation of this masquerade is still a “ceremony of intense emotion.” These photographs are sufficiently compelling to warrant a trip to the library or bookstore to secure. **Note:** if you are looking for more information about Benin, in Volume One of this extraordinary publication, there is another chapter and series of photographs, these of a male initiation ceremony. Striking photographs of dance, but the series concludes with photographs of circumcision too graphic for young students.



There is also a chapter on *egúngún* masquerade: several photographs show the masqueraders in motion, conveying a sense of the whirling blur of color the dancers become. Beckwith and Fisher explain that “this spectacle reflects the Yoruba preoccupation with cloth: the more sumptuous and expensive the fabric of a costume, the more powerful and influential the wearer. . . . In ritual performances honoring the ancestors, exquisite fabrics are the major medium for the masker’s transformation into an agent of the spirit, providing an immediate visual expression of spectral and sacred majesty. By enclosing the spirit messenger—the *ara orun* or ‘citizen of heaven’—in a cage of cloth, the unknowable is simultaneously concealed and revealed within the world of the living.” **Note:** some of the text may frighten younger students, with its discussion of masks of children who have died young and masks that chase children, their very touch believed deadly. See also the section on Yoruba masked dance in *Dancing* by Gerald Jonas (1992; accompanies a PBS video series): he has interesting comments on the “huge, enveloping, sacklike, many-layered” *egúngún* masks.

5. Learn more about African percussion traditions, particularly the West African *djembe*, the “talking drum,” and the *shekere* or shaker. Although many of the standard music series for young students (Raintree/Steck Vaughn, Chelsea House, Heinemann, Millbrook) introduce percussion, sources for adults usually provide more compelling information and beautiful photographs.

For a visual introduction to a variety of percussion instruments, use *Rhythm & Beauty: The Art of Percussion* by Rocky Maffit, with photographs by Chris Brown and a foreword by Evelyn Glennie (with CD; 1999; 136 pages). Maffit reminds us that percussion includes more than just drums: “its scope ranges from the grandest concert piano to the most humble of seedpod shakers; within this realm, rhythm and melody are inextricably linked.”

About the *djembe* he says, “In the North African country of Mali, it is carved from a tree trunk into a goblet or vase shape. It is tapered this way to fit between a drummer’s legs, while the body of the instrument is suspended from straps across the drummer’s shoulders. Traditionally, the *djembe* has a goathide or other animal skin drum head that is tuned with ropes. Sometimes small metal plates with steel rattles or shells are inserted into the *djembe*’s tuning ropes. The plates buzz and rattle sympathetically when the drum is struck... Although it has many voices, three deceptively simple strokes identify the sound of *djembe*, each of which may take a year or more to master. The drum’s lightning-like crack electrifies its listeners. Its crisp middle range carries the rhythm, while its deep bass voice seems to ascend from earth itself. It is said that in the right hands, the *djembe* even has the power to heal.” On the following page is a short account of his playing evoking an ecstatic cry of joy from an autistic student who had never before spoken.

About the talking drum he says, “In West Africa, the talking drum is held between the upper arm and left side of the body, while simultaneously squeezing and striking the drum with a curved stick. The pitches shift with every squeeze and release, creating singing rhythms and a gliding, conversational sound. In the hands of a master, the talking drum ‘speaks’ in many ways—mimicking human speech, answering a singer, telling jokes and stories, singing poems of praise, or just playing music. . . Sadly, the drum languages of many societies are being lost as the electronic world of telephones, televisions, radios, and computers takes over the esteemed role of communication once held by the drum.”

To understand how different drums are categorized, see *Musical Instruments: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* by the Diagram Group (Facts on File Publications, 1976), which has useful introductions to membranophones (showing their “family trees” according to the classification system proposed in 1914 by Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs), followed by pages of detailed drawings of how they occur in cultures around the world. The introduction to membranophones categorizes drums by shape into frame, vessel and tubular types, with the tubular category including cylindrical, conical, barrel, waisted, goblet (*djembe*), footed, and long. The introduction also depicts different methods of skin attachment, lacing, tuning, and sounding.

Topic 5: African Percussion

“The dance to drum (and other percussion) is a potent and vitalizing element of African culture. ... drumming and dancing are almost synonymous projections—as ardent, driving rhythms, pungent complexities of form, and consonant, articulate expression.”

Esilokun Kinni-Olusanyin

☞ Watch for the shaker, or *shekere*, in the Gansango Dance Company performance. Klöwer distinguishes the sound made by traditional beading, made from large seeds (“a softer sound”) from that produced by synthetic beads (“more penetrating”). The shape and size of the gourd also affect the kind of sound the musician can produce. Cotton points out various ways of producing sound with this instrument: by scraping, by shaking, by tapping the beaded net against the gourd. If your library is well stocked, seek out the old but still very useful issue of *Faces* magazine called “Drumming It Up” (Sept 1986) for instructions on making a *shekere* with a plastic soda bottle, cotton twine, and plastic or wooden beads.

5. Learn more about West African stories, a tradition represented in Gansango Dance Company's performance by Won-Ldy Paye.

Topic 6: West African Stories



☞ For young students an excellent collection is *Why Leopard Has Spots: Dan Stories from Liberia* by Won-Ldy Paye and Margaret Lippert, illustrated by Ashley Bryan (1998). The introduction has an easy conversational flow that makes it as useful and engaging as other stories in the collection; there are detailed story notes and a glossary. “Why Spider has a Big Butt” is likely to attract by its title alone; another version of the same tale, “How Spider Got a Thin Waist” can be found in Arkhurst's *The Adventures of Spider* (1964). Paye and Lippert have recently published *Head,*

Body, Legs (2002); its surreal humor, enhanced by the colorful illustrations of Julie Paschkis, will appeal to young readers/listeners, who can also take in a lesson about the value of cooperation. On the shelves very soon is *Mrs. Chicken and the Hungry Crocodile*, a single-tale book by the same team of one of the five stories in Paye's first collection.

☞ For older readers, and/or younger listeners, *Why Goats Smell Bad and Other Stories from Benin* is a collection of twenty Fon tales, translated and retold by Raouf Mama (1998; can be ordered from www.shoestringpress.com): it is divided into sections, “Orphans, Twins, and Other Children,” “Cautionary Tales and Spirit Stories,” “Pourquoi Tales and Animal Wisdom,” and “Trickster Tales: Yogbo the Glutton,” with parallels drawn between specific tales and “Cinderella,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and other trickster figures, such as Anansi, Coyote, and Fox. Short explanatory notes follow each tale, to provide more information about Fon folklore and culture, in which “human beings, beasts, plants, and spirits interact on a daily basis.” Mama also notes that, “Graceful, elegant dancing is held in high regard among the Fon, and many of their folktales involve song and dance.”

☞ For a broader range of West African stories, use the now venerable collections by Harold Courlander: *the Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories* (1947: stories collected mostly in Liberia, Togo, and among the Ashanti in

"The word 'vodun' originally meant 'the hidden,' 'god' or 'sacred' in the language of Fon. Despite its fundamentally spiritual context, "voodoo" has been greatly misinterpreted by media



and the Western world, and has inspired terror and fascination among foreigners. Although it has been sensationalized and portrayed as a form of 'witchcraft,' *Vodoun* is essentially a monotheistic religion that shares many elements with other religions. Like members of other belief groups, *Vodouists* believe in harmony, balance and the cultivation of virtue. The practice of *Vodoun* remains a complex and decentralized system of knowledge, cultural practices, and communal support."

"for the divine recognizes itself and is drawn into the eternal movement of the dance."

www.vodoun.com

☞ For teacher background reading, see www.religioustolerance.org/voodoo.htm,

which provides a brief history of the religion, comparison with Catholicism's saints, and useful distinctions from the "evil, imaginative religion" created by and for Hollywood, called voodoo.

☞ With students and a speaker-equipped computer, explore the drum rhythms at www.vodoun.com (site in both English and French). Click on "Drum Rhythms and Dances" to the left, then on "Index of Vodoun Drum Rhythms and Dances" at the top of the next page: each of the many examples which is underlined will play a different rhythm—excellent for "tuning" students' ears. The site also includes an evocative statement about the importance of dance in *vodoun*:

It is in the dance that *Vodoun* touches most closely to the mystical, for every motion that the dancer performs is a magical metaphor for the invisible world, and it is no wonder that spirits arrive most often during the dance. For the divine recognizes itself and is drawn into the eternal movement of the dance."

8. Learn more about Benin, and the Fon culture reflected in Gansango Dance Company's performance.

Note: the historic West African Kingdom of Benin, renowned for its magnificent bronzes, was centered on Benin City, in the Niger Delta, home to the Edo (or Bini) people. It is east of the country now named Benin (so named in 1975, to honor the historic kingdom). As Philip Koslow confirms, in *Centuries of Greatness: The West African Kingdoms 750-1900* (1995), "The modern-day nation of Benin, formerly the French colony of Dahomey, is completely distinct from the vanished realm of the *obas*."

Topic 8: Benin

Why have you heard little of Dahomey, in the increased attention accorded African history over the past two decades? It seems likely that young American students no longer spend much time on Dahomey because of its associations with militarism (the kingdom had a powerful and efficient army, famously featuring amazons) and with the slave trade, of which it was at the center. As Edna Bay admits in her study *Wives of the Leopard* (1998), "Dahomey epitomized everything negative that the Euro-American imagination of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wanted to believe about Africa." Yet, she argues, "Certainly, by the human-rights standards of the late twentieth century, Dahomey is worthy of criticism. On the other hand, Dahomey as a state functioned reasonably well. It guaranteed its citizens basic rights and access to means of livelihood...In short, Dahomey was neither a state that terrorized its citizens, nor a Garden of Eden whose citizens enjoyed an idyllic existence."

The Elements of Dance

Seattle-based dancer Anne Green Gilbert, of Creative Dance Center and Dance Educators of Washington, sets forth **concepts for looking at and analyzing dance, in the chart on the back of this page.** Use them to teach students the visual vocabulary for "reading" a dance. Reproduced with permission from *Creative Dance for All Ages: A Conceptual Approach* (published by NDA/AAHPERD, 1992; call 1-800-321-0789). Consult this resource for further information and exercises related to each of the concepts.

Here are some rudimentary questions to help students start using the concepts:

- ◆ Which direction(s) were the dancers moving? Did they change direction during the dance?
- ◆ Were their movements curvy or straight? Big or small?
- ◆ Was the speed of the dance fast or slow? Did the dancers change speed during the dance?
- ◆ Were the dancers' movements sharp or smooth?
- ◆ Were any parts of the body used in a special way? Were parts of the body isolated from each other as they moved?
- ◆ How did the dancers relate to each other?
- ◆ What verbs would you use to describe the types of movement? (see the list provided)
- ◆ Did the dance tell a story?

Anne Green Gilbert also suggests the following dance activities:

- ◆ Listen to different kinds of music. Draw designs as you listen. Choose colors to match the mood of the music. Think about levels, pathways, sharp or smooth lines depending on speed, volume, or type of music played. Play the music again and dance your design.
- ◆ Practice different kinds of movements, using many body parts and shapes as you move. Have a partner shadow your movements.
- ◆ After seeing the Festival performance, describe the dances using the words from the elements of dance. Try to re-create some of the movements.

**"If we can
think,
feel,
and move,
we can
dance."**

Margaret H'Doubler



SICF and the EALRs

Seattle International Children's Festival performances and curriculum materials support teaching and learning the following Essential Academic Learning Requirements:

- Arts 1.1** Understands arts concepts and vocabulary.
- Arts 1.3** Understands the styles / traditions within the arts from various cultures and times.
- Arts 1.4** Applies audience skills in a variety of arts settings and performances.
- Arts 2.3** Applies a responding process to an arts presentation.
- Arts 3.3** Develops personal aesthetic criteria to communicate artistic choices.
- Arts 4.1** Demonstrates and analyzes the connections among the arts disciplines.
- Arts 4.2** Demonstrates and analyzes the connections between the arts and other content areas.
- Arts 4.3** Understands how the arts impact lifelong choices.
- Arts 4.4** Understands that the arts shape and reflect culture and history.
- Arts 4.5** Demonstrates knowledge of arts careers and the role of arts skills in the world of work.
- Geography 3.3** Examines cultural characteristics, transmission, diffusion, and interaction.