



**NJACKO BACKO
PRESENTS...**

AFRICAN VOYAGE

**Study Guide for
School Visits**



INTRODUCTION

In this interactive performance, students will learn the important role that music, dance, and storytelling play in everyday life in Cameroon, Central Africa. Students will enhance their understanding of community in Central Africa, will experience traditional dance and drumming, and will listen to a traditional story.

This program demonstrates to the students the true way that traditional music is played in Cameroon; percussion is not just drums, it includes a variety of instruments. The students will learn that this traditional music is made up of different parts that have to be played together. Each person has to learn how to respect the other parts and find their own place in the music - because that is what makes the music clean and sweet.

INTRODUCTION



Format: This is a performance-based workshop in English or French.

Grade Levels: Kindergarten-12

Resources: This workshop requires an enclosed space suitable for a lively performance.

There is no audience size limit (aside from having a space large enough for all attendees), however one teacher per 20-25 students is recommended (depending on grade level).

INTRODUCTION



Who is Njacko Backo?

Njacko Backo is a musician and storyteller. Born in 1958 in the hillside village of Bazou, Cameroon, he studied music with his village elders for many years. At seventeen, he left his family and his known life to explore the world beyond his village. For the next five years, he traveled through ten African countries, learning music and working. Finally, he arrived in Amsterdam, where he began to record the sounds he had absorbed from his traveling time in Africa. Njacko arrived in Montreal in 1989 and began his ongoing collaborations with varied Canadian and African-Canadian artists. He formed the band Njacko Backo and Kalimba Kalimba in Montreal, and moved it with him to Toronto in 1998.

To-date, Njacko has released a total of 10 full length albums and has received awards for his song writing. More recently, Njacko has a new band called Njacko Backo and Kalimbas At Work. He is one of the rare kalimba players in North America. He makes his own instruments, including the kalimba, a kind of African harp called the zaa koua and a variety of drums and small percussion instruments which he plays in performance and teaching situations.

INTRODUCTION



Njacko first developed the African Voyages program in 1990 and began touring schools with Club 2/3 in Quebec until he moved to Toronto in 1998. Njacko continued working with children in Toronto and beyond through Mariposa in the Schools, Inner City Angels, and independently.

For Njacko, the point of his work with children is to bring authentic, interactive African music into Canada's classrooms. Through singing, dancing and drumming, the children engage in healthy and celebratory activities that foster a community spirit in their schools and classes. In sharing some of his own childhood experiences, he gives the participants a sense of what it was like growing up in Cameroonian culture, one profoundly different from their Canadian one. As Njacko himself says, "I love my work. I have been playing music and making instruments since I was three years old. It is what I am and it is not separate from life. It is life and I believe that the children can feel it and respond to this very well."

INTRODUCTION



Why use this Guide?

This study guide was created with one central mandate: to increase the value of Njacko's workshop for classes.

Through the use of this guide, students may be prepared for the experience of the workshop in such a way that their appreciation and understanding of it will increase immensely. They will see the performance as an experience that enhances and enriches their studies and that helps illustrate curriculum concepts in a vibrant and multifaceted way.

How to Use this Guide:

The goal of this guide is to be inspirational rather than prescriptive. While the suggested activities were designed to be adaptable to a wide range of age levels, teachers know their own students best and are encouraged to use the guide as a tool kit rather than as a how-to guide. Teachers may wish to emphasize and elaborate on certain activities or discussion points (there are deliberately a number of discussion questions for each theme) depending on their subject focus.

CURRICULUM LINKS

African Voyage is intended to educate students in a holistic manner and may address numerous other subject areas beyond the ones outlined here.

CENTRAL CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS (curriculum expectations listed in chart in Appendix A)

English/Language Arts

French

Music

Social Studies

Math

Study Guide Learning Goals for Students:

I can understand how music, as well as storytelling, affects the perspectives of individuals.

I can describe the way that music and language unite communities.

I can explain how aspects of culture “travel” through migration.

I can recognize how math concepts like patterns and counting are also used in music and dance.

GLOSSARY



Country of Origin: the country from which a person originally comes.

Culture: a particular group or society, considered in relation to its beliefs, way of life etc.

Kalimba: a common name for African thumb piano which was made popular by the company Latin Percussion. The kalimba is an instrument that is played all over the continent of Africa, and has hundreds of names depending on where you are, and the language spoken.

Migration: the act of moving from one place to another, especially in order to find work or a place to live.

Djembe: a goblet-shaped hand drum that originates in West Africa

Toumouk: a hand drum that originates in Central Africa, which has also developed into the congas.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

PRE-PERFORMANCE UNIT

Discussion Questions:

Where is Cameroon?

What do we know about Africa?

What languages are spoken in Africa?

What questions do you have about Africa?

How do music and stories bring communities together?

Music and stories in your own family?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



Warm-up: Introduction to Kalimba and Ngoni

Objective: This activity will familiarize students with Njacko's music and will invite them to explore their reactions to it.

Materials: Space to move around the room.

Directions:

Tell students to walk around the room slowly (in a circle if best for the given age group).

Play "Marchons Pour L'Amour." Link: <https://youtu.be/xIS0pxUkVe4>

Invite students to change their walking in response to the music, expressing how it makes them feel without talking.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Debriefing Questions:

- What kinds of feelings did you have while listening to the music?
- What kind of instrument do you think you were listening to?
- Which language was the song performed in?
- Did you recognize any patterns in the music?
- What different parts are there that contribute to one whole piece of music?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Exercise #1: Community Culture

Introductory Questions:

What does community mean?

What are examples of communities?

In what ways is our school a community?

In what ways is our class a community?

As a class community, what do we share?

What types of music are popular in our community?

What communities might we belong to that are not shared by everyone in the class?

Optional Resource: Graphic Organizer to aid in an expanded discussion on shared communities (Appendix B)



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



Activity: Community Circle Dance

Objective: This activity will help students to appreciate the value of shared rituals and the impact of these on group unity.

Materials: Space to move and for the class to form a circle

Directions:

Have students sit in a circle.

Ask students to take turns saying a number in sequence until reaching eight. Students will count one at a time the numbers 1-8 until 8 is reached. They will then start back at 1.

Tell the students that you will be replacing the numbers with movements, one by one.

As the numbers are counted off, stop the counting randomly and, as a class, decide to replace a given number with a decided action (a clap, a jump, a funny dance etc.).

Continue this process until all numbers are replaced with actions and the group has choreographed its own “dance.”

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



Debriefing Questions:

How did we use teamwork when coming up with this dance?

Would we want to share this dance with others?

How might knowing this special dance make us feel more united as a group?

Would it matter what language people spoke if we were trying to teach them this routine?

How does music and dance unite groups of people differently than language?

In what ways do certain songs and dances “belong” to certain groups of people?

Is there value in sharing these with people who might not be familiar with a group’s culture and community history?

How did counting help us to build this dance?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Exercise #2: Family Stories

Introductory Questions:

Where are your grandparents from?

What kinds of stories did your family tell you when you were younger?

Did the stories you heard relate to your family's country of origin?

What other factors might influence your parents' choice of stories?

What are some common themes in stories we are told as children?

How do the messages we receive in stories from our parents different than those we might receive through music and other "secondary" influences.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Activity: Swapping Stories

Objective: This activity will help students to reflect on the storytelling process and to consider the value of first-person narration.

Materials: Space to move and for the class to form two lines

Directions:

Ask students to form two lines facing one another.

Ask each student to think of something funny that happened to them when they were younger.

Ask each student to relay the story to the person across the aisle.

Ask the lines to shift such that each student faces someone new.

Tell the students that they can now choose to tell their own story or the story that they were just told.

Tell partners to guess if they are hearing a story from their partner's life or from someone else's life.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



Debriefing Questions:

What helped you to guess whose story you were hearing?

When you were telling someone else's story, do you think you told it differently than you told your own story?

What might influence the way we tell our own stories vs. the way we tell the stories of others?

Is it more interesting to hear a story that happened to the person telling the story? Does it matter?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

POST-PERFORMANCE UNIT

Discussion Questions:

How was Njacko's music influenced by where he grew up?

What was the most memorable thing for you about Njacko's performance?

How did you feel to be part of the performance (singing, dancing, playing music)?

How might the migration/travel of African musicians influence Canadian music culture?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



Exercise #1: Kalimba Revisited

Objective: This activity will invite students to explore their changed responses to Kalimba music since their experience with Njacko's performance.

Materials: Space to move around the room.

Directions:

Tell students to walk around the room slowly (in a circle if best for the given age group).

Play "Marchons Pour L'Amour" once again.

Invite students to change their walking in response to the music, expressing how it makes them feel without talking.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



Debriefing Questions:

How has your reaction to the music changed since your African Voyage with Njacko Backo?

How would you explain this kind of music to a friend from a different school?

What do you think people in Njacko's village might be thinking about while listening to this music? Why might their reactions be different than yours?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Exercise #2: Continuing your African Voyage

Objective: Students will independently research similar Canadian and global musicians and to share their learning. This will enable them to gain a broader appreciation of African music culture and its influence on global culture.

Suggested Artists to Research:

Canadian - Donne Roberts, Achilla Orru, Madagascar Slim

International - Manu Dibango, Salif Keita, Youssou N'Dour, Famoudou Konate

Materials: Needed materials will depend on age range and chosen pedagogy. These may include internet-enabled devices, pre-chosen musical tracks, note-taking resources



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



Directions:

Primary Students:

Have students work in groups, each group listening to a different selected track by one of the artists listed below.

Ask them to discuss how the music makes them feel and what it reminds them of.

Ask groups to share their learning with one another.

Have students to prepare a short dance to the track (optional).

Older Students: Students Grades 4-12 can engage on online research. Depending on the group's independent research skills, teachers may wish to provide printed biographies such as the encyclopedia article on Youssou N'Dour: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Youssou-NDour>.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



Guiding Research Questions for Older Students:

What kind of music does this person create?

Where were they born?

How does their cultural background influence the style of music they create?

In what ways is their background similar to Njacko's? How is it different?

In what ways is their music similar to Njacko's? How is it different?

How has this musician maintained a connection to their family's cultural roots?

EXTENSION: Have groups prepare posters about or inspired by the artists/songs studied. These can be shared with the broader school community.

APPENDIX A

	Elementary Level	Secondary Level
Language Arts/English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use active listening strategies in a variety of situations. • Demonstrate an understanding of the information in oral texts by retelling the information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and explain interpretations of oral texts. • Use active listening strategies in a variety of situations.
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an understanding of a variety of musical genres and their socio cultural contexts. • Apply the critical analysis process to communicate feelings, ideas, and understandings in response to a variety of musical experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an understanding of the social and cultural influences and effects and functions of music.
Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast the perspectives of different groups on challenges and opportunities presented by the natural environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare the influence of primary agents of socialization and secondary agents of socialization. (HSP3U) • Describe ways in which culture, tradition, and language influence social trends. (HSB4U) • Describe the globalization of culture. (CGW4U)
Math	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make connections among mathematical concepts and procedures, and relate mathematical ideas to situations or phenomena drawn from other contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make connections among mathematical concepts and procedures, and relate mathematical ideas to situations or phenomena drawn from other contexts.

APPENDIX B

Shared Aspects of our Community

	Class	School
Things in our environment:		
Things we do every day together:		
Rules we all follow:		
Songs we all know:		