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### University of Wisconsin, African Studies Program

Subject Area French 1, Francophone Africa Time Two 45 minute class periods

**Lesson Objectives: Students will identify body parts used in traditional dances in various regions of Benin, West Africa. Students will create their own dance and write a paragraph describing it.**

### **Materials:**

Video *Passeport à l'Afrique Francophone* on traditional Beninese dance, produced by African Studies Program

Cassettes or CDs of traditional African music and drumming  
(Contemporary African music found in the U.S. may be substituted. Look for something by a Beninese artist, like Angelique Kidjo.)

Overhead with commands written out in French

Maps of Benin and Africa, a little imagination and a lot of energy

### **Procedures:**

#### **Introduction**

At some point in the unit, discuss with the students the importance of rhythm to daily life in Africa. In case your school does not own the video concerning traditional Beninese dance, I have paraphrased the information gathered through interviews and observations. For upper level classes, students may read the following information as an introduction to the unit or as an enrichment activity. Lower level students may skim the reading for words they recognize, then speculate as to the relationship those words have with dance, rhythm, etc. As the teacher, you can fill in the gaps based on the reading or video.

#### **Le rythme au Bénin:**

Au Bénin, comme dans la plupart des pays africains, le rythme joue un rôle important dans la vie quotidienne. En se promenant dans les rues, on entend de la musique provenant de chaque maquis et de chaque boutique. Dans la rue même, il y a un certain rythme de vie. Les serveurs au café chantent pendant qu'ils débarassent les tables; les femmes qui portent des

produits dans des paniers sur la tête marchent toutes d'un pas sûr et constant; les jardiniers, les mécaniciens, les couturiers... tous ajoutent au rythme de la vie. En plus, presque tout le monde sait battre au moins quelques rythmes sur le tam-tam et danser quelques danses traditionnelles. D'où vient ce savoir-faire quand il s'agit de la danse?

Dès le ventre, le jeune Africain peut connaître des rythmes et des mouvements de danse. Dans la société traditionnelle, lorsqu'une femme se trouve enceinte, elle va voir l'oracle, ou le Fa. Le Fa lui indique non seulement l'esprit de l'enfant qui va naître, mais aussi une chanson qui lui est particulière. La mère chante alors cette chanson pendant la grossesse pour que son enfant s'y habitue. Cependant, la mère continue ses activités quotidiennes. Chaque fois qu'elle bouge avec le tam-tam ou qu'elle chante en travaillant, le fœtus peut sentir le rythme. Enfin, à la fin de la grossesse, la mère participe dans des cérémonies traditionnelles où elle danse pour faciliter l'accouchement.

Après la naissance, le bébé reste toujours sur le dos de sa mère pendant ses 2 premières années de vie. Sa mère l'attache au dos avec un pagne quand elle va au travail, au marché, dans la cuisine, etc. Partout où elle va, la mère chante avec l'enfant. Celui-ci apprend vite comment répondre aux chants. Plus tard, quand l'enfant apprend à marcher, il ne peut que chanter et danser, suivant le rythme de la vie qui l'entoure.

## Lesson

### Part I (day 1):

**Begin the lesson by asking students: *Qui aime danser? Qui aime chanter? Qui n'aime ni chanter ni danser?* Using a map of Africa, point out Benin (or have a student find it: *Où se trouve le Bénin?*) Explain to students that singing and dancing is important in Benin. It is a form of exercise and entertainment. Even with level 1, this brief introduction can easily be done in French. Make sure students realize that in African dance, everyone participates. Those who are not drumming either dance or sing. No one is left out!**

**The first step is to use TPR to familiarize students with vocabulary (parts of the body). Once students are comfortable with body parts in French, teach a simple rhythm that is easy to learn.**

In true African fashion, the students will now beat the rhythm on their chests, legs and other body parts as you call them out. For example, you may say "*Jouez sur les jambes!*" Students will beat the same rhythm they just learned on their legs. As they get the hang of it, speed up the rhythm.

Now you are ready to introduce dance in the equation. As rhythmically as possible, chant the following commands and have the students repeat the chant and the actions that you provide. Their job is to focus on the words and movements, and stay with the rhythm. Don't be afraid to look a little foolish while dancing... it's all in good fun!

I recommend keeping the chant simple. Especially for beginners, use the same verb several times so the students can focus on the body part that changes. A possible chant may be:

**Chant: Movement:**

*Danse avec la tête! (Repeat) Swing head from side to side*

*Danse avec les mains! Shake hands in front of body*

*Danse avec les bras! Move arms forward away from body*

*Danse avec le ventre (les hanches)! Swing hips*

*Danse avec les jambes! Bend legs or kick them forward*

*Danse avec les pieds! Tap feet forward*

As students begin to feel comfortable with the rhythm and the nature of the dance, you can complicate things by switching the order and adding new verbs. For example:

*Hausse les épaules! Shrug shoulders*

*Secoue les mains! Shake your hands*

*Lève le pied droit! Dance with right foot in the air*

Variations: If you are very rhythmically inclined, you may wish to choose several different rhythms and divide the class into 2 or more drumming groups and a dancing group. The drummers would beat a different rhythm than the singers/dancers. This would be truer to the nature of traditional African music, which rarely has fewer than 3 rhythms working at a time.

## **Part II:**

Once the dance has provided sufficient repetition of body parts, put on your African music. Use the overhead transparency, already prepared with various commands for dance moves printed in French (see list above). Cover all commands. Then reveal one move at a time and see how quickly the students are able to identify the body parts and produce the dance move. (They are not required to repeat out loud for this part of the activity, only to respond with movement). Keep the same movement on the overhead until you have 100% participation from the class for that particular move, then change it. Once you are satisfied, you may allow the students to sit. Follow this with a simple writing activity where students identify body parts.

\*\*If you have the video, you may show the dance clip and pause to ask students what body parts are being used.

## **Part III (Day 2):**

Using the maps of Africa and of Benin as visuals, explain to the students (in French, of course) that there are three types of traditional dance in Benin. In the North, people dance primarily with their legs and feet. In the central region, they use their shoulders and their hips. In the South, people dance mostly with their heads, necks, arms and hands. Once you have explained in French, check for understanding by pointing to a region of the Benin map and asking: "*Est-ce qu'on danse avec la tête dans le Nord / Centre / Sud?*" "*Est-ce qu'on danse avec les pieds dans le Nord / Centre / Sud?*" Vary the questions as comprehension improves by asking: "*Quelles parties du corps est-ce qu'on utilise pour danser dans le Nord / Centre / Sud?*"

\*\* If you have the video, just show the clip and pause to check understanding.

Once you are sure that students understand the basic division of dances in Benin, assign a project according to the level of your students (to be completed within one class period).

## Project: Level 1

Each group shall invent their own authentic dance. They will decide which region of Benin they come from and what the basic steps will be. They should practice the dance enough that they can perform it for the class. If they'd like to invent a particular rhythm to accompany the dance, they may do so. Otherwise they can dance to whatever drumming music you decide to play. You may want to play music while they are developing their dance steps. Depending on the amount of French the students have learned at this point in the class, you may choose to have the group write a short paragraph about the dance as well. For example:

*Nous sommes de Natitingou, au nord du Bénin. Nous aimons danser. Nous dansons avec les pieds et les jambes. Aussi nous dansons un peu avec les bras. Nous ne dansons pas avec les épaules ou avec la tête.*

15-20 minutes should be sufficient for students to invent a dance and write a short paragraph in French. The rest of the class time can be used for demonstrations. Please refer to the attached handout for a more detailed explanation of the project and grading rubric.

### **Assessment**

After each presentation, the class should be asked to identify the main body parts used in the dance and the region that the group is from. Students can be easily graded on participation, enthusiasm, and attention given to other groups. You may also want to issue a separate grade for the written assignment.

### Project: Level 2 or 3

Each group shall invent their own authentic dance. They will need to decide which region of Benin they come from and what the basic steps will be. They should practice the dance enough that they can perform it for the class. If they'd like to invent a particular rhythm to accompany the dance, they may do so. Otherwise they can dance to whatever drumming music you decide to play. 15-20 should be sufficient for students to invent a dance and practice once or twice. The rest of the class time should be used for demonstrations.

Depending on the amount of French the students have learned at this point in the class, you may choose to have the group write a short story about the origin of their dance as well. For French 2, the students should be able to use both *passé composé* and *imparfait* in their story. For example:

*Il était une fois, dans les forêts au nord du Bénin, une équipe de foot. C'était une très mauvaise équipe. Un jour, les joueurs de l'équipe ont décidé de prier aux ancêtres pour gagner le grand match contre les Nigériens. Ils ont prié pendant une semaine. Enfin c'était le jour du grand match. Tous les joueurs du Bénin ont bien joué et l'équipe a gagné. Après le match, les joueurs étaient très contents. Ils savaient que leur victoire était grace aux ancêtres. Donc, ils ont dansé comme dansent tous les footballeurs-- avec les jambes et les pieds-- pour remercier aux ancêtres. Depuis ce jour, les gens du nord du Bénin dansent avec les jambes et les pieds.*

The written assignment can be done as a group or individually. It may be helpful to allow the group to all use the same basic plot, as long as each group member writes the short story for him/herself. You may also expand this activity into a storytelling session in the weeks that follow. The possibilities are endless!

### **Assessment**

After each presentation, the class should be asked to identify the main body parts used in the dance and the region that the group is from. Students can easily be graded on participation, enthusiasm, and attention given to other groups during the presentations. The written portion of the project should be graded separately.

Have students vote on the best dance and the most creative one. Ask the class which body parts were used in each dance.

## Project: Level 4 or 5

Each group shall invent their own authentic dance. They will need to decide which region of Benin they come from and what the basic steps will be. They should practice the dance enough that they can perform it for the class. If they'd like to invent a particular rhythm to accompany the dance, they may do so. Otherwise they can dance to whatever drumming music you decide to play. 15-20 should be sufficient for students to invent a dance and practice once or twice. The rest of the class time should be used for demonstrations.

Depending on the amount of French the students have learned at this point in the class, you may choose to have the group write a short description of their dance. Another option, provided students have some experience with the conditional tense, would be to have students write a short essay responding to the following question: *Si chaque région des Etats-Unis avait une danse différente, comment seraient ces danses régionales? Décrivez les danses de deux régions différentes des Etats-Unis en travaillant le temps conditionnel.*

The written assignment can be done as a group or individually. I would most likely allow the group to all use the same basic idea, as long as each group member wrote the essay for him/herself. You may want to expand this activity into a storytelling session in the weeks that follow. The possibilities are endless!

### **Assessment**

After each presentation, the class should be asked to identify the main body parts used in the dance and the region that the group is from. I would grade students on participation, enthusiasm, and attention given to other groups. The written portion of the project can be graded separately.

Have students vote on the best dance and the most creative one. Ask the class which body parts were used in each dance.

## La Dance Traditionnelle au Benin: Français 1

Based on what you have learned about traditional dance in Benin, your group will create a dance to perform for the class. You will first need to choose a region: *Nord, Centre, Sud*. Then, you will create a simple dance focusing on the parts of the body traditionally used in dances from that region. From your performance, we will try to guess which region you are from.

In addition to the actual dance, you will need to write a few sentences telling where your group is from and describing your dance. For example: *Nous sommes de Natitingou, au \_\_\_\_\_ du Bénin. Nous dansons avec les jambes et \_\_\_\_\_ . Aussi nous dansons un peu avec \_\_\_\_\_ . Nous ne dansons pas avec \_\_\_\_\_ .*

You should also choose one other group and describe their dance. Begin with the group members' names, then tell where they are from and what body parts they use in their dance. You may work on the written portion in your groups if you have time, but **each group member** must turn in **his or her OWN copy** by the beginning of class tomorrow. You will receive an individual grade on this project, based on the following rubric.

	<b>5 points</b>	<b>3 points</b>	<b>1 point</b>
Participation in project	Student contributes to group discussion, remains on task, and participates in dance demonstration with energy.	Student contributes little to group discussion, remains mostly on task, and participates in dance demonstration.	Student does not participated in group discussion, is rarely on task, and makes many mistakes during dance demonstration.
Appropriateness of dance	Dance correctly reflects region of Benin that group is trying to represent. Presentation is entertaining, yet school appropriate.	Dance reflects region of Benin that group is trying to represent. Presentation lacks energy, but meets requirements.	Dance does not adhere to any guideline of traditional dance. Presentation is confusing or not school appropriate.
Paragraph about your group's dance	Includes the region associated with dance and the various body parts used. Spelling is correct and verb endings agree.	Includes the region associated with the dance and the various body parts used. Some spelling and conjugation errors.	Omits either the region or the body parts used. Many spelling and grammar mistakes.
Paragraph about other group's dance	Includes the region associated with dance and the various body parts used. Spelling is correct and verb endings agree.	Includes the region associated with the dance and the various body parts used. Some spelling and conjugation errors.	Omits either the region or the body parts used. Many spelling and grammar mistakes.

**Total points earned: \_\_\_\_\_ / 20 points**

## La Danse Traditionnelle au Bénin: Français 2/3

Based on what you have learned about traditional dance in Benin, your group will create a dance to perform for the class. You will first need to choose a region: *Nord*, *Centre*, *Sud*. Then, you will create a simple dance focusing on the parts of the body traditionally used in dances from that region. From your performance, we will try to guess which region you are from.

In addition to the actual dance, you will need to write a short story in French explaining the origin of your group's dance. For example, if you are from the North of Benin, why do you dance with your legs? Are you imitating an animal? Perhaps you are acting out a scene from daily life? Create a short story using both the *passé composé* and the *imparfait*.

Your group may work together to develop the basic story if you have time, but **each group member** must turn in **his or her OWN copy** of the story explaining the dance's origin.