

The Nego Gato Music and Dance Ensemble

“From Africa to Brazil”

Study Guide for Grades K-12

1

1. The Nego Gato Music and Dance Ensemble.

Mestre Nego Gato is the Founder of Nego Gato Music and Dance, as well as its Artistic Director. The Ensemble is a troupe which shares the beauty and rich culture of Bahia, Brazil with audiences throughout the world. Nego Gato is a master folklorist, choreographer, composer and martial artist, who grew up learning and performing the art forms that you will see today. As a child he was raised in the very poorest neighborhoods of Salvador, Bahia Brazil.

Brazil is the largest country in Latin America and is home to almost 185 million people! All Brazilians speak Portuguese; they are the only population in Latin America that speaks this beautiful language.

The house in which Nego Gato grew up was among more than a hundred clustered together and built over a huge swamp. Sadly, none of these houses had running water. Small bridges made of thin planks formed the sidewalks. Here, Nego Gato learned how to step carefully and keep his balance, the fundamental elements of a dancer and musician.

Nego Gato came to the United States in 1985, and has trained and continues to train the musicians and dancers you will see today. Some of the artists are Americans that Nego Gato is training in this county. This is another example of how Latin America is continuing to influence the United States and shows us how diverse and rich our country can become when we learn from our neighbors!

The Ensemble performs throughout the United States, having performed in such venues as The Kennedy Center and The Lincoln Center and has recently completed a tour of Japan! The Ensemble is renowned for its work in arts education and has won a number of awards including, most recently, The PA Health Department’s Violence Free Challenge Award. This award was for our collaboration with Miller African Centered Academy, in Pittsburgh, entitled The Ginga Project. The Ginga Project has as one of its goals the prevention of violence through the arts and today is in its eighth year.

We are sure you and your community will enjoy the upcoming performance and we thank you for your interest in The Nego Gato Music and Dance Ensemble!



Mestre Nego Gato

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Study Guide for Grades K-12

2

2. Some facts about Brazil!

2a. History:

In 1822, after three centuries under the rule of Portugal, Brazil became an independent nation. By far the largest and most populous country in South America, Brazil is renowned for its beauty, seen in its people, landscapes and the music and dance you will see today!

2b. Location:

Eastern South America, bordering the Atlantic Ocean

2c. Size:

A little smaller than the U.S.

Total: 8,511,965 sq km

Land: 8,456,510 sq km

Water: 55,455 sq km

2d. Who are Brazil's Neighbors?

Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, French Guiana, Guyana, Venezuela, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, and Uruguay

2e. What's the Climate?

Mostly tropical, but temperate in south.

2f. Population:

There are 184,101,109 people in Brazil, about two-thirds of the U.S. population



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Study Guide for Grades K-12

3. “From Africa to Brazil”

The stories, dances and music that make each culture unique can travel with people across oceans to other parts of the world. When thousands of Africans were forcibly taken to Brazil and other parts of South America during enslavement, the musical instruments they played, foods they ate, and traditions they celebrated became part of daily life in Brazil. The challenges that faced early Afro-Brazilians also influenced their culture, as seen in the beautiful dance and martial art known as Capoeira. Using representative songs and instruments, Nego Gato Music and Dance presents a range of African-Brazilian dances with accompanying music. Your students will meet the natural forces behind the rivers and the ocean, and watch (and dance with) Capoeiristas, people who play the game of Capoeira.

Portuguese colonists came to Brazil in the 1500s, starting plantations, mineral mines and made items to be shipped back to Europe. Africans came to Brazil by force, enslaved by the Portuguese to work on the plantations. They received no money, rights or other freedoms in return for their labor. With no weapons or other means of defense, some African-Brazilians maintained their strength with their traditional music and dance and a martial art they developed in Brazil from their African heritage, called **Capoeira**. They made its movements look slow and graceful, like a dance, but in the right moment it is said that they used this art as a way to escape enslavement. Once the plantation owners discovered the threatening physical power behind Capoeira, they forbade it. In fact, Capoeira remained illegal even after the Brazilian government abolished slavery in 1888.



Xango-The Deity of Lightning

During enslavement, the dance was secretly practiced in the **quilombos** (hidden free-territories) in the hills of Brazil. There, it grew and flourished among Brazil's African population, still disguised as a ritual dance.

The modern day father of this traditional form of Capoeira was a man named Mestre Pastinha. In the 1920s, another famous Mestre, named Mestre Bimba, modified this traditional form with more upright movements and called it **Capoeira Regional** because it was created in the region where Mestre Nego Gato was born, Bahia. We will show both forms today. In Capoeira, as your students will see, two opponents/dancers match their movements to the rhythms of the **berimbau**, which speeds up and slows down as the game is played. If the

The Nego Gato Music and Dance Ensemble

“From Africa to Brazil”

Study Guide for Grades K-12

4

students are lucky they may get the chance to come up on stage and give Capoeira a try!

4. Before the Program

4a. VOCABULARY

Learn some terms that will be used in this production:

Word	Meaning
<u>African-Brazilian</u>	People who were born in Brazil yet whose ancestors were from Africa, much like in the U.S. there are African-Americans.
<u>Axe!! (pronounced Ashay)</u>	Positive energy.
<u>Bahia, Brazil</u>	Mestre Nego Gato is from this region of Brazil. It was the major port of entry for enslaved African people into Brazil.
<u>Berimbau</u>	A one-stringed instrument, with a gourd as a resonator. Unless you've already set eyes on it, we bet you've never seen anything like it!
<u>Capoeira</u>	African-Brazilian martial art/dance.
<u>Capoeirista</u>	A person who practices the art of Capoeira.
<u>Ginga</u>	The side-to-side step that is the basic movement of Capoeira.
<u>Orixas-(Or-eee-shas)</u>	Forces of Nature – they are given praise as the different aspects of the Creator and were brought by the enslaved Africans to Brazil as a part of their religious culture.
<u>Martial Art</u>	“Martial” describes anything pertaining to war or battle. So a “martial art” is a perfected series of skills dealing with war or battle.
<u>Nego Gato</u>	Means “black cat” and is the name of the leader of the ensemble.
<u>Samba</u>	The national rhythm of Brazil.

The Nego Gato Music and Dance Ensemble

“From Africa to Brazil”

Study Guide for Grades K-12

4b. PRE-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION

Locate the following on a map: Brazil, Africa and Portugal. Notice how far apart each place is from the other two. Are any of these places even on the same continent? Which continents are represented? Do you know any words in a foreign language? Why could it be important to learn a foreign language?

Think of a cultural practice that lives on, even though the culture has migrated to another place (for example, the music of the European gypsies, or Irish step-dancing in America). What changes and what stays the same?

What traits do you recognize in both martial arts fighting and choreographed dance? Think of different types of martial arts: karate, fencing, sumo wrestling, etc. What kind of music would you suggest to accompany it and make the sparring look more like dancing? Do any kinds of dance look like fighting? What about break-dancing? Flamenco? Modern dance?

Why is knowing history important? What is slavery? Is slavery a part of our history?

5. WHAT DOES THE PROGRAM INCLUDE?

The program begins with a brief introduction of the group, its Artistic Director Mestre Nego Gato and the origins of the music and dance that the audience is about to see. The production then opens with dances of the *Orixas* (*Or-ee-shas*). The Orixas represent the various forces of nature and are seen as different aspects of the Creator. These include in order of appearance: 1) Ogum (Ogoom)/The warrior/iron, 2) Oxum (O-shoom)/Beauty/river, 3) Omulu (O-moe-lou)/The protector from sickness, 4) Iemanjá (Yay-mon-jah)/Mother of all the Orixas/ocean. This Orixá is preceded by a story that engages the audience while helping them to gain a different understanding of the ocean and river came to be related.



The program then moves to an introduction of all of the percussive instruments used in the performance and gives the audience an opportunity to interact with the performers and possibly even play an instrument!

The final section of our show is the martial dances of Maculele and Capoeira. One of the central reasons that

Iemanjá- The Mother of all the Orixá

The Nego Gato Music and Dance Ensemble

“From Africa to Brazil”

Study Guide for Grades K-12

6

Africans were brought enslaved to Brazil was to harvest the sugar cane. Maculele is a stick fighting dance developed by African-Brazilians to celebrate the harvesting of the sugar cane because it meant the end of that very difficult work (some even say they were practicing a fight to escape from enslavement). Capoeira is the African-Brazilian art form that is dance, music, marital art, sport and philosophy all rolled into one. It is a beautiful form that involves handstands, acrobatics, dance, fast kicks and music and is always a crowd favorite. This section gives a few choice audience members the opportunity to come on stage and give Capoeira a try for themselves!

The performance closes with everyone dancing to the music of samba in the aisles and on stage while leaving a little time for Q&A to close out the show.

6. AFTER THE PROGRAM

6a. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS¹:

What aspects of the costumes that each Orixá wore supported the way they were described in the stories/descriptions?

Sometimes, when a group is oppressed, they must develop plans in secret to gain their basic freedoms. Can you think of an event in American history where this happened? What did the descendants of Africans here in the U.S. have to do to gain greater freedoms?

Many folk dances get passed on from the older generations to the younger generations. Can you think of a special dance you learned from a teacher or an older member of your family?

What dances do you do with your friends that you would like to pass down to future generations?

Why do you think so many of the costumes that represented spirits or forces of nature covered the dancers' faces?

Why are so many of the vocabulary words of this African/Brazilian art form in Portuguese?

¹ We would like to thank Pittsburgh's Gateway to the Arts for allowing the use of the pre & post performance discussion questions used in their study guide for the “Africa to Brazil” performance.

The Nego Gato Music and Dance Ensemble

“From Africa to Brazil”

Study Guide for Grades K-12

7

6b. Program Objectives

Students will identify the music, dance and language of Brazil and draw specific connections between Afro-Brazilian music and dance and traditional Africa. Students will be able to articulate the contributions Africa made to Brazil and in turn the contributions Brazil is making to the world.

The National Content Standards for Music state that 1) “listening to, analyzing, and evaluating music are important building blocks of musical learning. Further, to participate fully in a diverse, global society, students must understand their own historical and cultural heritage and those of others within their communities and beyond.... Music is a basic expression of human culture.” In addition: 2) Understanding music in relation to history and culture: Students demonstrate audience behavior appropriate for the context and style of music performed.

7. National Curriculum Connections & Standards for grades K-12

Dance: Content Standard 5. **Music:** Content Standard 1

AXE!!!



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