

ENRICHMENT GUIDE



STEP KIDS

Sponsored by
 **Children's
Wisconsin**
Kids deserve the best.

 **FIRST
STAGE**
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH THEATER

PROUD CORNERSTONE MEMBER
 **UPF**
UNITED PERFORMING ARTS FUND

DEAR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS,

A group of seemingly unconnected high school students find common ground in the most unlikely of places - the audition for their school's competitive step dance team. As the students become unified through the power of rhythm and dance, experience the joy of finding your crew in this energetic performance.

Enclosed in this enrichment guide is a range of materials and activities intended to help you discover connections within the play through the curricula. It is our hope that you will use the experience of attending the theater and seeing STEP KIDS with your students as a teaching tool. Use this guide to best serve your children — pick and choose, or adapt, any of these suggestions for discussions or activities. We encourage you to take advantage of the enclosed student worksheets — please feel free to photocopy the sheets for your students, or the entire guide for the benefit of other teachers.

Enjoy the show!



Julia Magnasco
Education Director
(414) 267-2971
Julia@firststage.org

PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS



1. Step is a percussive, high energy style of dance that uses the rhythm of stomps, steps, and claps to create a complex musical sound. Step is often compared to tap, clog dancing, and Irish dancing. What similarities can you infer that Step has to these styles? What might be different?

2. The reason Yessica does step is because her father used to do step, too, and she wants him to watch her perform. What things do you do that your family and friends also do or used to do?

3. Step Kids tells the story of a group of high schoolers auditioning to join the elite step team All Stars, but they all have their own reasons and goals for joining the team. What is a big goal that you have? What are some things you can do to get closer to achieving your goal?

PRAISE POEM

ACTIVITY

We all have a unique story to tell. Art in all forms is storytelling. It can be a deeply personal way to share about ones' history and their experiences. The young people in Step kids use dancing and movement as a way to express themselves. Yessica has deeply personal reasons for why it is important to her. It communicates her history and praises the person that she is. In the following activity, students will create Praise Poems, honoring their history and the person that they are today.

The history of praise poetry can be traced back to many cultures, however we will be exploring the West African tradition of oral poetry. In this tradition, young people in the tribe are able to articulate and understand who they are, who their ancestors are, why they are loved and what special gifts they bring to the world. This type of poetry contains similes and metaphors and challenges the writer to make connections between their internal selves and the external world. During performance of praise poems, you may hear this oral poetry sung or chanted and possibly accompanied by musical instruments. You may want to consider these performance options after creating your poems!

PERFORMING POETRY

1. Poetry is filled with words and phrases that elicit feelings and images. The mood, tone and meaning of a poem are presented in its written form, as well as through its oral delivery. This interactive method allows us to fully embody the poem; it is collaborative and empowering.
2. Before writing individual poems, students will have the opportunity to perform an already written Praise Poem, and explore how the delivery of a poem—both vocally and physically—enhance understanding of the text.
3. Share the following poem with students. Together as a group, read the following praise poem:

PRAISE POEM

ACTIVITY

NEW WINGS

I am a *daughter of the dust*.
I am a true *sister of the yam*.
I come from a long line of serious brown women
that don't take no mess or apologize for living.
I am birth from the morning earth
deep, rich and free.
My middle name Gale
describes how I move in this world
sometimes gracefully other times stormy.
Glenis, welsh for valley.
I have dwelt there far too long.
I am a raven
I am a crow.
I am a nappy bat.
I am a mosquito.
Call me anything black
that has wings
and
flies.

Poem by Glenis Redmond

1. As a class, come up with at least one specific physical gesture and vocalization for each line – choose words and phrases that elicit images and feelings and consider how movement and voice can add to the articulation of mood, tone and even theme.
2. Next, split the class into smaller groups, and give each group a stanza to develop into a piece of performance poetry, with voice and movement.
3. When ready, each group will share their performance poetry piece with the class, in sequential order.

PRAISE POEM

ACTIVITY

WRITE YOUR POEMS

Before beginning, it may be important to note that these poems will take time and consideration as they follow the structure of a West African inspired praise poem.

1. There are seven guideposts to follow in creating. It may be helpful to identify these as a class in the previous poem.
 1. Heritage (literal and metaphoric)
 2. Height (literal and metaphoric)
 3. Color (personality and skin tone)
 4. Animal (compare yourself to an animal)
 5. Nature (compare yourself to the natural world)
 6. How you walk in the world
 7. Profession or desired profession, pastime, or hobby.
2. Next, brainstorm ideas to get the creativity flowing. You may want to create a box like the one below on the board for inspiration.

Animals/Mystical Creatures	Nature	Jewels	Places/Landmarks	Professions
Dog	Clouds	Ruby	Palmetto Tree	Dancer
Poodle	Stars	Sapphire	Red Clay	Writer
German Shepard	Rain	Peridot	Cotton	Poet
Rottweiler	Sun	Crystal	Heat	Stager
Pitbull	Mountains	Diamond	History	Dramatist
Fairy	Creeks	Onyx	Grits	Counselor
Phoenix	Stones	Opal	Sweet Tea	Mother
Elf	Ocean	Lapis Lazuli	Magnolia	Grandmother
Zeus	Moon	Turquoise	Crepe Myrtle	Literary Citizen

Graphic from <https://www.hmhco.com/blog/how-to-write-a-praise-poem>

3. After brainstorming, give students time for creation. Working in pairs may be helpful for some students.
4. Consider presenting poems in a performance utilizing the physical gestures and vocalizations used in the previous activity. Bring some musical instruments and get ready for a celebration of everybody's story!

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS



1. The character of Voice of God is a constant, all-seeing and all-knowing force that passes her judgements on those auditioning. Though our characters are always at risk of her critiquing their moves, we never see her. Who could this Voice of God character be? What do they represent? What purpose does the Voice of God serve in the story and for the audience.
2. Yessica's goal is to join the All Stars with a wish that her dad can see her step. By the end of the play, though, she chooses not to join the All Stars and form a whole new team instead. Why does she change her plan? What compels us to work towards our goals? When have you had to alter your path or change your goals?
3. At the end of the play, everyone auditioning walks out of the audition to show solidarity with Yessica. What unites them to form a new team is the sense of community they find in that act. Why do we join communities and why is belonging to a community so important? What draws us towards and pushes us away from certain communities?

WHO SAID IT?

1. "Worthy.
You are worthy.
You deserve to win.
Just showing up's enough!"
2. "That 'ography was waaaay off the map."
3. "I'm a perfectly intelligent, logical human being. Just like step. It's logical."
4. "I'm doing my best and I don't know what you want from me."
5. "You've all done really great under a lot of pressure. You should be proud. But we still have a little ways to go—"
6. "Daddy says 'What you begin, you see it to the end.'"