Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this teacher’s guide helpful in preparing your students for what they will experience at Le Ballet National du Senegal: Kuuyamba matinee. The guide provides background information on the dance company and the African dance tradition as well as information about Africa and Senegal. Also included in the guide is a review of theater conventions and audience protocol. Le Ballet National du Senegal: Kuuyamba will dazzle students with its rhythms, movements, sounds and color as it reflects the traditions of the Senegalese people.

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Le Ballet National du Senegal

The premier dance company in West Africa, Le Ballet National du Senegal, has won international acclaim for its exuberant, colorful and precise performances representing the nation’s 15 distinct ethnic groups. Founded by poet and national leader Leopold S. Senghor in 1960, the year of Senegal’s independence from France, the company features the nation’s finest young dancers and musicians. In a 1995 story, the New York Times Union asked, “Looking for the origin of the jitterbug, frug, charleston, shimmy and shake, and maybe even the spiritual roots of dance? Look to Senegal.”

The performances of Le Ballet National du Senegal are characterized by high-energy choreography that soars above the stage, performed by 16 dancers with unmatched physical gifts and discipline. Music, the foundation of each performance, is provided by Le Ballet National du Senegal’s 15-member ensemble of drums and traditional instruments, including the kora, the dan,
and the balafon dalinke. Beyond the music and movement, the company is renowned for the infectious joy that fills the stage for every performance. Presently directed by Ousmane Diakhate and Bouly Sonko, Le Ballet National du Senegal is known for its exceptionally beautiful dancers (both women and men), who not only present a dance; they share a culture and its traditions with the audience. The result is emotionally moving, involved, and impressive.
Le Ballet National du Senegal: *Kuuyamba*

In its Mondavi Center debut, Le Ballet National du Senegal presents *Kuuyamba* – which translates to "second sojourn in the sacred forest" – that depicts the traditional initiation from adolescence to adulthood achieved through rhythm, dance and song. The following is a description of the dances that will be performed for the school matinee at Mondavi Center.

*LA YELLA*

The incomparable melody of Toucouleur songs and the imperial grace of young girls and boys dancing to the muffled sounds of the gourds underline this delicate scene.

*Interlude with Kora*

*BARA MBAYE*

*Bara Mbaye* is the opportunity for all the “Ndananes”, men and women, masters of their art, to join together, feasting and talking to the sound of traditional music instruments. Here, the young “Ndananes”, virtuosos of rhythm and dance, meet as rivals of ardor and expertise, under the
magic wand of the “lama”, a small drum that is the joy of Senegalese women.
West African Dance

West African Dance expresses life’s joys, abundances, sorrows, healing, and portrays the traditions and ceremonies of the people. Dance is a language to the African people. Throughout the continent of Africa, people tell their stories and communicate among themselves and to their gods through music and their many tribal dances, which are gracefully and athletically rendered. Often an entire village will participate in a dance, not necessarily on a stage, but interacting with one another. The audience may sing, play and talk with the musicians and dancers and in that way becomes one with the performers. West African dance is a form of high-energy communication for the African people; and for the entire world, West African dance is powerfully entertaining.

Glossary of African Musical Instruments

The Balafon, like a xylophone, has a low wood chassis containing 17-21 rectangular wooden keys of varying length, which resonate when struck with mallets. Two rows of small gourds, secured beneath the wooden keys, act as natural amplifiers.

The Bolon is a kind of harp made of gourd with a bent shaft strung with three strings. It is often played at hunting ceremonies.

The Dan is a traditional stringed instrument.

The Djimbé is a drum with a diameter of 11 to 14 inches. Traditionally carved out of one log, it yields a resonant bass tone when struck in the middle and a high ringing tone when struck on the rim. http://www.geocities.com/jbenhill/jembe.html

The Flute is made of wood or bamboo and has three holes. It is played during in traditional music ensembles during festivals.

The Kora is a lute-like instrument with 21 strings, 11 for the left hand and 10 for the right. http://www.geocities.com/jbenhill/kora.html

The Krin is a hollowed-out log drum, approximately 12 inches in length.
The *Lama* is a small drum.

The *Sangban* is a 10-inch cylinder-shaped wooden drum and produces a mid-bass tone.

The *Tama* is a “talking drum” or a drum whose pitch can be regulated. The player puts the tama under one shoulder and beats it with a curved stick held in the other hand.  
http://www.geocities.com/jbenhill/tam.html

The *Tam tam* is a small-headed drum, usually long and narrow, that is beaten with the hands.

Additional resources:

http://www.africaguide.com/country/senegal/culture.htm

http://www.drums.org/djembefaq/glossary.htm
Africa and Senegal

Africa covers about one-fifth of the world’s land area and consists of about one-eighth of its people. It is a land of striking contrasts and great natural wonders, from the tropical rain forests of western and central Africa to the world’s largest desert, the Sahara, to vast grasslands, and the world’s longest river, the Nile.

Africa is divided into 53 independent countries and protectorates. The African people belong to several population groups and have many cultural backgrounds of rich and varied ancestry.

Tropical Senegal, a country in Africa, is lauded for its beauties both natural and ephemeral. From its sophisticated capital, Dakar, to its fertile southern region of forest and farmland, the Casamance, much of its lands are lush and vital, especially when compared to the expansive deserts that surround it. Senegal's arts are just as lively, with a thriving textile market and an entourage of internationally known musicians.

**Location:** Western Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Guinea-isau and Mauritania

**Area:** Slightly smaller than South Dakota

**Climate:** Tropical; hot, humid; rainy season May to November has strong southeast winds; dry season, December to April dominated by hot, dry wind.

**Terrain:** Low, rolling, plains rising to foothills in southeast.

**Natural resources:** Fish, phosphates, iron ore

**Natural hazards:** Seasonal lowland floods; periodic droughts

**Environmental issues:** Wildlife populations threatened by poaching; deforestation; over grazing; soil erosion; over-fishing.
Population: 10,284,929 (est. July 2001)

Religions: Muslim, 92%; indigenous beliefs, 6%; Christian 2% (mostly Roman Catholic)

Government type: Republic under multiparty democratic rule

Capital: Dakar

Independence: From France, April 4, 1960

Industries: Agriculture and fish processing, phosphate mining, fertilizer production, petroleum refining, construction materials


MAP OF SENEGAL
THINK ABOUT IT!

Dear Students:

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt, you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas, ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

1. How would you describe Le Ballet National du Senegal’s performance to a friend?

2. What feelings did you have while you listened to the music and watched the dancers?

3. How does the dance you saw performed compare to the dances of today? What about the music and rhythms? The instruments?

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4. What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?

5. What kinds of life experiences did you imagine expressed through this dance?

6. Did you learn anything new about the people of West Africa?

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**ATTENDING THE THEATER**

*What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:*

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees now have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist’s work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee;
- Please do not use flash photography.

*What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:*

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed...
so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone’s concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.

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