

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Solo Acts
Subject: Derique
Discipline: Theatre

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Derique performing in contemporary minstrel costume in his one-man show "Solo Acts."
Still image from SPARK story, 2003.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Solo Acts

SUBJECT

Derique

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Theatre

Social Studies

OBJECTIVE

To introduce educators to Hambone and other forms of historical African American performance traditions through the solo artist Derique

STORY SYNOPSIS

Derique takes his show from stage to street and back again as a one-man evangelist for the art of “Hambone,” a traditional form of body percussion originated by African American slaves in the Old South. His work explores the evolution of this traditional art form from the days of slavery through today.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Individual student writings and research

Individual and group geographic study and mapping

Individual student verbal presentations

Group process and feedback (critique)

Individual student self-reflection and critique

Engagement with and demonstration of basic movements of Hambone

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To introduce students to the art form of Hambone and its history

To introduce students to minstrelsy and Blackface

To provide a jumping off point for the investigation of contemporary issues of race in American commercial culture

To introduce students to the concept of solo performance

To introduce students to the basic concepts of silent performance, vaudeville, and pantomime

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story “Derique” on VHS and DVD and related equipment

Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card, and color printer

MATERIALS NEEDED

Paper & pencils

Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers

Detailed world maps

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic - control of one's own body, control in handling objects

Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems

Logical-Mathematical - ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically

Musical - the ability to read, understand, and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms



More information on [Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark) at www.kqed.org/spark.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

No matter for whom or where he is performing, Derique is a solo act. He relies on his body to create entertaining, humorous, and engaging programs make audiences laugh, while also introducing important African American art forms in contexts that provoke consideration of their origins and traditions in history and contemporary performance. A multi-talented circus artist, Derique began his career at age 15 performing clowning, juggling, doing gymnastics, riding unicycles, dancing, and performing "Hambone"--a traditional form of body percussion originated by African American slaves in the Old South. The Spark story "Derique's Hambone" follows the performer as he takes his show from stage to street and back again as a one-man evangelist for the art of Hambone. His work explores the evolution of this traditional art form from the days of slavery through today.

In 1981, working as a main attraction with Circus A La Mode, Derique suddenly "ran away" to join the Pickle Family Circus and Make*A*Circus in San Francisco. Since then he has performed his unique blend of physical comedy and Hambone body music around the world, including tours of Asia, Europe, the America's, and South Africa. He has performed with countless entertainers including Bobby McFerrin, Lou Rawls, and the late great Sammy Davis Jr. He was host of the Emmy-Award winning children's TV show "Short Stories and Tall Tales" for KQED, and was featured on the Disney Channel. Currently, Derique is the Circus Arts Program Director at Oakland's Children's Fairyland and teaches circus arts at Bay Area schools, including at the Prescott Clowns School in West Oakland. He also teaches in special education programs.

Hambone is an improvisational form of body music created by slapping the thighs and chest with the hands, as well as clapping the hands, and stamping the feet. Derique's latest show tells the story of how

Hambone came to be, pushing his art form further as a vehicle for recounting and examining history. When Africans were brought to the Caribbean and Americas to be enslaved, they brought their dance and music with them, using drums as a form of communication between slaves as it had been in Africa. It has been told that following an alleged murder of a white man by a slave during his attempted escape, slaves were banned from playing the drums. Faced with reprimand and punishment for using their native drums, slaves invented new ways to create rhythms, using tambourines and animal bones, and by "patting Juba"--meaning using the body as a percussive instrument.

Derique has enhanced traditional Hambone with modern technology, creating the HamTech bodysuit. The bodysuit is fitted with touch sensors that send signals through a Midi interface to a sampler that stores an array of percussive sounds, permitting Derique to vastly expand the range of sounds he can produce through his art. Derique's Hambone mobilizes an artform that is centuries old, but does so through contemporary multimedia technologies that help to link historical events to the present day.



Derique performing Hambone on his custom-made "Hamtech" percussion bodywear.
Still Image from SPARK story, February 2003.

THE BIG PICTURE

Through the entertainment world, Hambone became an art form included in minstrel performances by musicians, actors, and other performers who offered what were then referred to as “black American” melodies, jokes, and impersonations, usually wearing “blackface.” Minstrelsy became very popular in the United States in the early 1800s, particularly in Northeastern communities of immigrants and laborers. It also appealed to the middle and upper classes, endowing it with a unifying popularity in white communities as a publicly sanctioned form of discrimination against Africans and African Americans.

Early minstrelsy featured white performers who wore “blackface” – black makeup – in order to look like slaves. Black makeup was applied to the face, with areas of red or white color usually used to exaggerate large lips and large eyes. The tradition of blackface began with vaudevillian performers who used burned cork to darken their faces to appear like slaves. They would then stage skits that represented slaves as buffoon-like or lazy to the delight of white audiences. Blackface minstrels played instruments, danced, engaged in vaudevillian antics designed to make audiences laugh basically by ‘playing the fool.’

African American entertainers also entered the tradition later in the 1800s, wearing blackface and performing the same stereotyped characters played by the white minstrels. Burt Williams, one of the most famous entertainers who starred in many silent films can be seen playing these racially stereotyped roles, such as a useless gambler and a chicken-man (half man/half chicken). Films from this genre, as well as the printed materials produced at the time illustrate the country’s attitude towards African Americans.

Although minstrel performance began to lose its appeal in the 1900s, the same racist attitudes were extolled in the immensely popular television and radio program “Amos and Andy,” in which two white men in blackface pretended to be uneducated Southern African Americans.

First aired in 1951, Amos ‘n’ Andy featured two white actors performing in blackface, Alvin Childress as Amos (left), and Spencer Williams as Andy. The show ran for 2 years on CBS, and on local stations for many years until, after receiving ample criticism from the NAACP and the government of Kenya about its portrayal of African Americans, the show finally lost popularity and was pulled from US TV markets in 1963.



Students of Derique's at Prescott Elementary School show off their agile Hambone skills. Still image from SPARK story, February 2003.

SECTION III – RESOURCES

TEXTS

Among the Merry Men of Minstrelsy". Walter Thompson. San Francisco Chronicle. November 12, 1916.

A Pictorial History of Vaudeville. Bernard Sobel. New York, Citadel Press, 1961

Bert Williams: Son of Laughter. Mabel Rowland, ed. New York, The English Crafters, 1923.

Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the Afro-American in the Performing Arts. Langston Hughes & Milton Meltzer. New York, Da Capo Press, 1990.

Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls. Allen Woll. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1989.

Ely, Melvin Patrick. The Adventures of Amos and Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomena. University of Virginia Press, 2001.

High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film. Sharon Willis. Duke University Press, 1985.

How To Be A Complete Clown. Toby Sanders. New York, Stein and Day, 1978.

In Person: The Great Entertainers. Martin Gottfried. New York, Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1984.

Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, Brooks McNamara, eds. Wesleyan Press.

Once Upon a Stage: The Merry World of Vaudeville. Charles and Louise Samuels. New York, Dodd, Mead, 1974.

TEXTS (continued)

Wages of Whiteness (The): Race and the Making of the American Working Class. David Roediger. New York: Verso, 1991.

WEB SITES

American Slave Narratives – Web site hosted by the Corcoran Department of History at the University of Virginia, including interview transcripts of a few of the 2,300 slaves interviewed by reporters during the Works Progress Administration of FDR - xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/wpahome.html.

Rhapsodies in Black – Web site dedicated to the history and preservation of the Harlem Renaissance in New York, produced by the Institute of International Visual Arts - <http://www.iniva.org/harlem/home.html>.

MEDIA

A Natural Born Gambler. Biograph Company, 1916. - 15-minute silent-film starring Bert Williams as a hopeless gambler. Available at some specialty video rental locations, public libraries, and film archives.

Bamboozled. Spike Lee, Director. New Line Productions, 2000. - This film satirizes network television's pitfalls and prejudices, while offering a humorous look at how race, ratings, and the pursuit of power lead to a television writer's stunning rise and tragic downfall.

Arts for Learning – An interactive arts education Web site developed by Young Audiences, Inc., including Quick Time© movies of Derique performing for students. – <http://www.arts4learning.org>

BAY AREA RESOURCES

Center for African and African-American Art and Culture – The CAAAC promotes and supports art and culture through several organizations, including The African-American Historical & Cultural Society - San Francisco – <http://www.aaacc.org> - 415/928.8546.

African-American Historical and Cultural Society Museum displays African-American artwork and historical artifacts from America and Africa, including photos and a great display of musical instruments in San Francisco - 415/292.6172. <http://fortmason.org/visualarts/index.shtml>

KQED Black Heritage Month – Annual celebrations, including events, television and radio programs - <http://www.kqed.org/topics/history/heritage/black/>

The African-American Drama Company of California – SF –National, traveling Black theater company - 415/333.2232. <http://www.african-american-drama-company.org/pages/1/index.htm>

The African-American Shakespeare Company – SF – The only African-American theater company in the country specializing in classical Shakespeare works - San Francisco -415/333.1918. <http://www.african-americanshakes.org>

Cultural Odyssey – SF – Cultural Odyssey produces contemporary theater and music performances using the experiences of the community - 415/346.5509. <http://www.culturalodyssey.org/v2/index2.html>

Afro-Solo – Organization providing a forum for African American artists to give voice to the unique experience of being Black in the United States – San Francisco – <http://www.afrosolo.org/> - 415/771.2376.

Lorraine Hansberry Theatre – SF – An African American theater company presenting original works and those of African-American playwrights - <http://www.lorrainehansberrytheatre.com> - 415/474.8800.

San Francisco Jazz Festival – Live performances by famous African-American jazz musicians. Concerts and events scheduled throughout the year - through 13 June 2003 – <http://www.sfjazz.org>.

Wajumbe Cultural Institution - Organization producing the annual “Celebration of Black Music and Dance Experience” – San Francisco - <http://www.cominguptaller.org/profile/pr200multi.htm> - 415/563.3519.

African-American Community Entrustment and Service Agency is an organization that focuses on critical issues affecting African Americans and provides cultural programs and activities, meeting space, emergency food and clothing, information, and referrals - San Francisco - Entrustment - 415/772-4415, and Service Agency – 415/292.3157.

Black Chamber of Commerce in San Francisco – Promoting civic, commercial, and financial interests – San Francisco - 415/291.8818.

The Black Chamber Silicon Valley – A Black-focused Chamber of Commerce located in San Jose serving the larger Silicon Valley area - <http://www.blackchamber.com> – 408/ 294-6583.

Bay Area Black United Fund offers grants and assistance to non-profit agencies servicing African-American and minority communities - <http://www.babuf.org/> – Oakland – 510/563.7270.

Ella Baker Center for Human Rights provides free legal representation to victims of discrimination or racism and legal assistance to individuals and community organizations - San Francisco - <http://www.ellabakercenter.org> - 415/951.4844.

BAY AREA RESOURCES (continued)

Saint John Coltrane African Orthodox Church – SF –
Services and outreach programs - 415/673.3572.

United Negro College Fund – The UNCF raises
money for scholarships, books, and educational
enrichment – San Francisco – <http://www.uncf.org/> -
415/956.1018.

Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame - Non-profit
organization dedicated to “influencing Black images
portrayed in film and television through education,
the nurturing of current independent filmmakers,
and the preservation of contributions by African
American artists both before and behind the camera.”
– Oakland, CA - <http://www.blackfilmmakershall.org>
– 510/465.0804.

SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Accompanist

One who plays along with a primary performer, following and accentuating what s/he does with music, usually from a position on stage that is not central to the action, sometimes even in the wings or the orchestra pit.

Collective Memory

An image or feeling we have that does not come from something that happened to us specifically in our lifetime, but that may have happened to our ancestors, which we have read or heard about and incorporated into our consciousness.

Cue

A verbal, visual, or musical signal in a performance that indicates that something such as an entrance or a light change is about to happen

Hambone

A form of body percussion in which the performer “plays” his/her own body by rhythmically tapping and slapping the chest, thighs, hands, and, arms

Improvise

To make up on the spot, without previous practice

Invoke

To call up, in a ceremonial way

Minstrelsy

Referring to the minstrel shows, a form of popular entertainment that originated in the mid 19th century and flourished for eighty years, in which white actors in Blackface performed dances, songs and skits associated with or making fun of black culture

Post-Modern

Of or relating to any of several movements (in art, architecture, or literature) in which artist sought to be react intentionally against the philosophy and practices of modern movements. This attitude is typically marked by revival of traditional elements and techniques used in effort to critique, comment on, or refer to the original intention

Soundtrack

A musical accompaniment to a performance (not live)

Technical Rehearsal

A rehearsal dedicated to finessing the visual and aural aspects of a performance; technical rehearsals usually take place in the last few days before a show opens and are used to set light, sound, and music cues, and occur in the actual theater space, rather than a rehearsal hall

Vaudeville

A form of popular theater from 1870s -1930s that incorporated circus arts, burlesque, variety shows, minstrel shows, comedy, and music in a revue format. Each performance was made up of 12-15 different acts, each of which was approximately 8-10 minutes long. There used to be over 400 vaudeville theaters across the United States, although the form and the theatres died when television was invented

SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Exploring the African Diaspora

Use Derique’s introduction to slavery as a point of departure to explore the slave trade in the US. Download a world map from the Internet and project the map onto one wall of the classroom. Identify the African Diaspora on the map - the countries and locations where Africans were forcibly enslaved and exported to other countries.

Extend this exploration by challenging students to research a particular African country and to follow the peoples of that country as they were enslaved and sold to the U.S. Encourage students to choose different countries to research and to organize their research in response to the following questions:

What traditions and customs did the people of that country bring with them?
Are any of them still practiced?
If so, have the traditions, props, or meanings changed, and how?

Suggest that students look for stories that illustrate their account, and invite them to read out extracts if they are comfortable doing so. Ensure that students have time to share and discuss their research.

Talking about Slavery through Art

Research various art forms that arose from enslaved peoples’ attempts to speak about their plight, alleviate their unhappiness, and improve their conditions. Some examples: capoeira from Brazil; the cakewalk, Hambone, and the spiritual from the slave experience in the United States.

Discuss with students how the creation of art helps to free the soul and provide escape routes from enslavement (e.g. sending messages through drums or song lyrics).

Use Derique’s performance about slaves and Hambone as a jumping off point to explore African American traditions and customs developed by or

adapted by enslaved Africans. Challenge students to locate other traditions or customs that were similarly adapted by enslaved peoples. Consider songs, visual imagery, sewing, recipes, cooking techniques and styles, and stories passed down through an oral tradition.

Ask students to bring in examples of spirituals or other music that speaks of slavery or arose from subjugation. As a group listen to the music and talk about how it makes them feel and what it is saying.

RELATED STANDARDS SOCIAL STUDIES

Grade 1

A Child’s Place in Time and Space

- 1.4 Recognize similarities and differences of earlier generations in such areas as work (inside and outside the home), dress, manners, stories, games, and festivals, drawing from biographies, oral histories, and folklore.

Grade 5

United States History & Geography: Making a New Nation

- 5.4 Students understand the political, religious, social, and economic institutions that evolved in the colonial era.
- 5.5 Students understand the course and consequences of the American Revolution.
- 6.0 Describe the introduction of slavery into America, the responses of slave families to their condition, the ongoing struggle between proponents and opponents of slavery, and the gradual institutionalization of slavery in the South.
- 7.0 Understand how the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence changed the way people viewed slavery.

Grade 10

World History, Culture, & Geography: The Modern World 10.3

- 4: Trace the evolution of work and labor, including the demise of the slave trade and the effects of immigration, mining and manufacturing, division of labor, and the union movement.

Hambone and the Technology of 21st Century

Play the SPARK story focusing on the segment in which Derique describes in detail the technology of his Hambone Hamtech body percussion suit; a body suit designed to amplify the sounds of Hambone through sensors and amplification. His body becomes an instrument.

- How does this technology work?
- What other examples of such technology have students encountered?
- What does it mean for Derique to blend two very different techniques together in his performance – Hambone and 21st century audio technology?

Compare the sound produced by his body percussion suit with the sound of Hambone in other parts of the story. Does technology enhance or detract from the impact of the music? Does the sound change the link with the past or the way the music is understood and symbolizes history?

The addition of E.W. Wainwright as accompanist introduced a collaborative aspect to Derique’s work and performance as a solo artist. It also changed the nature of the performance. What did Derique feel was missing when he performed using pre-recorded music or drumming? How much of a live performance is spontaneous, and how much is constant (never changes)? What are the differences between using pre-recorded music and live performers playing music? Does it change the performance?

SPARKLERS:

*Write down a list of ideas to learn in way Derique learned Hambone – using methods of investigation, including observing and communicating with people on the street, working independently, inventing his Hambone Hamtech, listening to his stepfather’s advice, following his passion and interests, etc.

* Write stories about an event or activity in which you were involved. Once the story is written, ask students to tell the story using only physical body movements. Invite each to tell their story to the class by performing it and then challenge the group to guess the story/idea.

* Finally invite students to think about the comments made by Halifu Osumare from the Alice Arts Center in Oakland. She talks about a possible negative side to recreating Hambone. What does she mean? Does it denigrate the people living in the present when we bring up aspects of our shared history that were humiliating and cruel? For example, in Shakespeare’s “The Merchant of Venice,” Jews are portrayed as miserly and evil. Should we never perform this play?

RELATED STANDARDS THEATRE

Grade 2 AESTHETIC VALUING

- 4.1 Critique an actor's performance as to the use of voice, gesture, facial expression, and movement to create character.
- 4.2 Respond to a live performance with appropriate audience behavior.
- 4.3 Students critique and derive meaning from works of theatre, film/video, electronic media, and theatrical artists on the basis of aesthetic qualities.
- 4.3 Identify the message or moral of a work of theatre.

Grade 4 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

- 1.4 Identify a character's objectives and motivations to explain that character's behavior.

Grade 5 HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXT

- 3.2 Interpret how theatre and storytelling forms (past and present) of various cultural groups may reflect their beliefs and traditions.

Grades 9-12 (Proficient & Advanced) AESTHETIC VALUING

- 4.1 Report on how a specific actor used drama to convey meaning in performances.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at

<http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/>