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 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

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

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 at www.kqed.org/spark
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 that 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.

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 though 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.

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 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.
SECTION III – RESOURCES

TEXTS


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


TEXTS (continued)

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.


MEDIA

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


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


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.


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.


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.


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
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](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education).