

Second Line Arts Collective

Lesson 5: West African Chant

Lesson Overview

This lesson introduces students to the practice of call-and-response, a key element of West African music that influenced New Orleans' musical traditions. Through vocal and rhythmic activities, students will explore the communal and expressive nature of this style.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will:

1. Understand the concept of call-and-response in West African music.
2. Participate in vocal and rhythmic call-and-response activities.
3. Recognize the influence of West African traditions on New Orleans music.

Materials Needed

- Percussion instruments or homemade drums.
- Optional: Audio recordings or examples of West African chants.

Lesson Steps

Introduction to Call-and-Response (5 minutes)

- Begin by asking students:
 - Have you ever played a game or sung a song where one person says something and others repeat or respond?
- Explain that call-and-response is a musical conversation:
 - One person “calls” by singing or playing a phrase.
 - Others “respond” by echoing or adding their own phrase.
- Share how call-and-response was used in West Africa for communication, storytelling, and music.

Demonstrate a Chant (5-7 minutes)

- Teach a simple West African chant using call-and-response:
 - Leader: “Funga Alafia!”
 - Response: “Ashe Ashe!”
 - Repeat several times until students feel comfortable.
- Add a rhythmic layer by clapping (1, 2, 3, 4) or drumming along with the chant.

Group Call-and-Response Activity (10 minutes)

- Divide students into two groups: callers and responders.
 - Callers begin singing “Fanga Alafia” and responders say “Ashe Ashe.” Then switch the roles of the two groups.
 - Next, Callers sing or play a rhythm, and responders echo or reply.
- Encourage creativity by letting students create their own calls for others to respond to
- Rotate roles so everyone gets a chance to lead and respond.

Cultural Connection (5 minutes)

- Discuss how call-and-response helped enslaved Africans express themselves and share their stories. For example: “Enslaved people used call-and-response, both in work songs and spirituals, to coordinate labor, communicate across fields, and express their struggles and resilience.”
- Explain how this tradition became a key part of New Orleans music, influencing jazz, gospel, and more. For example: In gospel, call and response is a core element of worship, particularly in singing with a leader and a chorus, while in jazz, it's a structural element, shaping improvisation and collective expression of a band.

Extension Activities

- Movement Integration: Add body movements or dance steps to the call-and-response activity. For example, try clapping with or instead of the vocal call.

- Instrument Exploration: Experiment with different sounds using drums, shakers, or other percussion instruments.
- Creative Writing: Have students write their own call-and-response lyrics about something they enjoy.

Reflection Questions

- How does call-and-response feel like a conversation?
- What did you enjoy most about leading or responding in the chant?
- Can you think of other songs or games that use call-and-response? (For example: Marco Polo)

Teacher/Parent Tips

- Keep the chants simple and repetitive to help younger students feel confident.
- Encourage shy students to participate by starting with group responses.
- Use positive reinforcement to make students feel proud of their creativity.