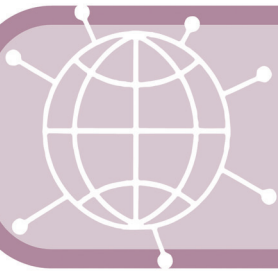


2011 > 2012 Learning Link

Water Is Rising

Monday, October 17, 2011, 9:30am & 11:00am

Recommended Grades: PreK-12



McCallum Theatre Institute
Field Trip Series

A WORLD OF MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE & PERFORMANCE

Learning Links presents
Water Is Rising
Monday, Oct 17, 2011
9:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

"Without better stewardship of our planet, there will be no peace on earth. People are being displaced and cultures will be lost." — Judy Mitoma, performance organizer

Connecting to Curriculum and Students' Lives!

History & Geography: Pacific Islands, Oceania

Arts: dance, music

Students' Lives: Global warming

What is it?

What happens when age-old customs and ways of living butt up against modernity and its fallout? Well, if you're a Pacific Islander, for example, you observe the sea level creeping up your ever shrinking beaches year after year and entertain uneasy thoughts about the future. On the islands of Kiribati, Tokelau, and Tuvalu – where local histories are carried forward on the wings of song and dance rather than in books – folks are very concerned about the rising water line. And some forty of them – dancers and musicians all – are on the move to raise the warning cry and at the same time share the joyous artifacts of their cultures with the world at large. The Water Is Rising – a project three years in the making – offers an artistry at once delicate and forceful, elegant and strong, exuberant and tradition-steeped. Arrayed in finery of great craftsmanship (from shells, fronds, leaves, and flowers), the dancers, Polynesian and Micronesian, move in thrilling synchrony – a metaphor for the interdependence exacted by life on an atoll in the vast sea (and, may we add, on a planet in the still vaster heavens).

By the musicians, we are alternately soothed and roused with lush harmonies composed of multiple parts, and by open hands slapping bass ostinatos on resonant wooden boxes. Text appears, as well, courtesy of the projected images that accompany the live performers. From these texts metaphors emerge, echoing in language the poetic grace we glimpse in swaying bodies, undulating limbs, and expressive hands. It is no great stretch to suggest that these metaphors help awaken us in the audience to connections – even as the Islanders are connected to each other, to their lands and songs, and to the wider world. From the projected images, we lucky ones are also able to carry away with us a sense – perhaps only just roused – of what life must be like where the water is rising.

Who Does It?

First of all, it's instructive to know that everyone in these diminutive nations – absolutely to the smallest child – makes music and dances. It's what they do. Do you want to create? Open your mouth. Pull out that instrument. Are you in the mood to invent? Set your body in motion. Move. In these cultures, every event of the year, great and small, elicits its own performance. This, then, is the talent pool from which the exponents of the performance at hand have been drawn. These forty-some musicians and dancers who spill across the McCallum stage have, in a very real sense, trained all their lives for this moment. The particular moves (each gesture conveying a meaning), the physical control, the attentiveness to group dynamic, the grace, and the feeling – all components are passed from one generation to another by watching and doing. These are, after all, cultures not contained in books but played and danced across the ages.

We want to mention, too, U.C.L.A. Professor Judy Mitoma. For over thirty years she has made it the focus of her industry to explore Pacific Island cultures. Today's performance is very much her brainchild – and she has helped shape its contours at every level. It has been her responsibility to select directors, choreographers, and performers who could most dynamically bring the Pacific Island experience to the world stages. It's a lovely and telling detail that Ms. Mitoma, sensitive to the issues that may arise when culture encounters culture, has taken special pains to set up an experience for the visiting performers in America both exhilarating and educational.

“Ever prescient, Judy [Mitoma] calls Water one of the most important projects of her life.” —UCLA Department of World Cultures Newsletter

What Are Its Contexts?

Interestingly, the name “Tuvalu” translates as “eight traditions,” a reference to the generally held view that each of the eight inhabited islands features its own discrete society. The name only came into use, however, during the ‘seventies when the Tuvaluan people rose to self-determination. As mentioned before, there is no tradition of written literature. When it comes to the visual arts, one must content oneself with decorative mats, skirts, and fans. And only older men are permitted to engage in oratorical performance! So, it is in the area of music that art among the Tuvaluans truly flourishes. Faatale – a kind of action song – predominates. Here's how these work. The singer, sitting, cycles through many verses of a given faatale, each verse picking up speed over the last until a climax is reached, followed by an abrupt silence. Dancers, meanwhile, express the song's meaning through their movements. The exact choreographic choices are left up to the most inspired person present.

Tokelau, once (a rather neglected) part of the British Empire, has identified itself since 1948 as a part of New Zealand. Generally, inhabitants prefer to retain this status, breeding autonomy with outside support. Literary traditions are strictly of the oral kind. Both fiction and history are favored. In the area of visual arts, the genders take strictly divergent paths – women working in fiber, men in wood. When it comes to performance, inhabitants weave together a rich tapestry of poetry, music, and dance.

Here's something interesting. The dances of Kiribati are based on the movement of a particular bird – the frigate bird (fregata minor). The dances abstract out the gait and flight of these denizens of the avian world – for example, outstretched arms and sudden, birdlike moves of the head. The frigate bird looms large in the lives of the I-Kiribati. They are said to guide lost mariners home, and their appearance can be a clue to coming weather patterns. Beyond these valuable services, the feathered friends serve as a potent symbol of peace and harmony.

The music of Kiribati is, to a great extent, based on vocalization – especially chanting. Percussion is provided by bodies oftentimes; however in the standing dance (Te Kaimatoa) or the hip dance (Te Buki) a wooden box provides the percussive beat. In the matter of dance, it remains to be said that I-Kiribati frown on smiling while dancing. In this way they signal that the dance is, rather than mere entertainment, a rigorous form of storytelling as well as a display of the skills and endurance of the dancer.

TUVALU

Land Area: 26 sq km; 9 islands (5 atolls and 4 coral islands)

Highest Elevation: 16 ft (5 m) above sea level

Population: 12,177 (2008 est.); 4th smallest country in the world

Capital: Funafuti

Main Atoll: Fungafale

Language: English and Tuvaluan (a Polynesian dialect); I-Kiribati (Gilbertese)

Currency: Australian Dollar (with Tuvaluan coins circulating on par with Australian coins)

Political System: Tuvalu, which means "eight islands together" was part of the British colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands in 1892. It became an independent constitutional monarchy in 1978.

TOKELAU

Land Area: 12 sq km

Highest Elevation: 10-16 ft (3-5 m) above sea level

Population: 1,466 (2006 census)

Capital: To the extent that Tokelau can be said to have a capital, this rotates between atolls

Religion: Congregational Christian and Roman Catholic

Language: Tokelauan and English; Samoan is also widely used

Currency: New Zealand Dollar

Political System: Tokelau is a non-self-governing territory, administered by New Zealand since 1926.

REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

Land Area: 811 sq km

Highest Elevation: 7-10 ft (2-3 m) above sea level

Population: 100,000

Capital: Bairiki, Tarawa

Religion: Roman Catholic (55%); Kiribati Protestant (41%)

Language: I-Kiribati (Gilbertese) and English

Currency: Australian Dollar

Political System: Independent Republic. Formerly called the Gilbert Islands, Kiribati was first inhabited 3,000 years ago by people from the Caroline Islands region in West Micronesia.

To get ready for the performance, students could research these:

Island nations – Oceania

global warming – climate change

Here's a 60 minute lesson you could teach to help prepare students for this work:

Line of Inquiry How do the artists of Water Is Rising, through music and dance, share their cultures and shine a light on an issue of concern?*

(*A line of inquiry is a question that generates a lesson.)

Ask: What do we know about global warming?

Share some context: The citizens of Tuvalu, Tokelau, and Kiribati are concerned. Their lands are no higher than 16 feet above sea level, and the sea is rising. They have wonderful, rich traditions. Not only don't they want these to disappear – but they want to share them with us. At the same time they want to say: People, look at what global warming is leading us to!

Show an example of a Tuvalu song: (If firewall on campus, download to laptop the night before.)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQPo1OfflJ4>

(This clip shows features of Tuvalu.)

or a Kiribati song:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDBWEKKqqd0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sis9qofIySA>

(This one shows features of Kiribati.)

Have students describe what they hear (and see).

Ask: How do you think music like this could be used as a tool for suggesting change?

Create a list: Things we would like to see changed. (Not everyone needs to agree, of course!)

Table groups: Choose one of the changes from the list. Create song lyrics promoting that change. Either your own tune or a preexisting one. (Old MacDonald, Row row, etc.)

Share these in the whole group. Ask observers about language choices. How might these songs be effective tools for change?

After coming to the theater, students could research these:

coral atolls

Tuvalu

Tokelau

Kiribati

Judy Mitoma and her World Festival of Sacred Music

Here's a 45-60 minute lesson you could teach after students have experienced the work:

Discussion: Have students take a look back at the performance. What stood out, and why? Describe the music, singing and dancing. What were the different numbers – and how were they sequenced? What elements and contextual information were provided through the projected images? Words that stood out? Images? What's a metaphor? Which metaphors do you recall in the performance? What were they communicating? What evidence was there of collaboration? What are some elements which contrasted? What emotions were conveyed – and how? What were some of the larger messages and themes? What surprised you? What do you want to know more about?

Pairs: Come up with a move you saw the performers making. When did they make that move – and what do you think they were trying to convey?

Pairs share with another pair. Observers describe what they see – in adjectives and verbs. All four discuss why these moves stood out.

Return to table groups from prior session. Layer into the singing of your song some of the moves from the performance to lend it a Pacific Island flavor. (Or layer in moves from some other cultural context, if preferred.)

Share these in whole group. Describe. How is the song changed/enhanced?

Individuals: What do you think about the idea of interdependency of all peoples on earth?

“When you see a beautiful dancer, you know his family has loved him/her well.” — Kiribati diplomat

What do YOU think?

How would you answer these questions --- and how could these questions be adapted for student use?

How were the performers ranged throughout the stage space?

What kinds of relationships developed between dancers and musicians?

How would you describe the clothing? How did it appear to be made? What colors predominated? What did this clothing remind you of?

How would you describe the particular ways in which the dancers moved their bodies?

How did they interrelate?

If there were contemporary elements alongside traditional ones, what were they & what tipped you off?

Was humor present in this presentation – if so, how?

What tempos were used?

What words showed up on the screen – and how did these assist in your understanding of the work and its contexts?

What did lighting contribute?

What are some themes of this piece?

How is this performance an effective tool for suggesting change?

Internet

Read about Kiribati:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Kiribati

Read about Tokelau:

<http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Tokelau.html>

Read about Tuvalu:

<http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Tuvalu.html>

The EPA Climate Change site provides comprehensive information on the issue of climate change and global warming in a way that is accessible and meaningful:

<http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/>

Dynamic maps of sea level rise. Does global warming matter to you?

<http://flood.firetree.net/>

Books

How We Know What We Know about Our Changing Climate: Scientists and Kids Explore Global Warming

By Lynne Cherry

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Publisher: Dawn Publications (CA) (March 2010)

ISBN-10: 1584691301

Veteran science writer Cherry and award-winning photographer Braasch team up to make climate change less frightening by showing children how to empower themselves as "citizen scientists."

Winston of Churchill: One Bear's Battle Against Global Warming

By: Jean Davies Okimoto

Reading level: Ages 4-8

Publisher: Sasquatch Books (December 1, 2007)

ISBN-10: 1570615438

A smart, fierce, brave bear, Winston of Churchill has noticed that their icy home is slowly melting away. He explains to the other bears why the ice is melting then, using the stirring words of his famous namesake, rallies the bears to convince humans to save their Arctic home.

CDs

Echoes of Tuvalu

Label: New Vibes Music Inc

ASIN: B000I0QK0G

The Essential Guide To Colombian Music

Release Date: 2008

Label: Tropisounds Corp.

ASIN: B0010N0KVE

"All of this year's Festival artists are committed to the international call to action." — Judy Mitoma on her World Festival of Sacred Music, where *Water Is Rising* played