

SAKAI FLAMENCO

Art Form: Dance and Music

Style: Traditional

Culture: Spanish and Gypsy

MEET THE ARTIST:

Sakai Flamenco is a dynamic ensemble dedicated to performing the music and dance of the gypsies of Southern Spain. Composed of artists from Spain or ones who have lived and danced the traditions of flamenco in Spain, two dancers, a singer and a guitarist keep the living tradition of pure flamenco alive. The word sakai is a gypsy word meaning "eyes." The company's name refers to the eyes, which hold the emotions or feelings of the gypsy people. Artistic Director *Linda Andrade* first got interested in flamenco when her mother took her to Olvera Street in Los Angeles, where she saw a performance of flamenco dancers. Growing up, she explored and studied many different forms of dance, but found herself always returning to flamenco. Her teacher at the University of Washington told her, "The roots are not to be found in a dance studio. They are to be found in the streets with the people." So she went to Seville, where she connected with a small community of gypsies. After she returned, she formed Sakai Flamenco.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

The performance begins with traditional clapping ("palmas"). Through this opening number the audience feels the power and rhythm of flamenco. The guitar joins in followed by singer and dancers. Next, the story of the gypsies unfolds as a brief history of flamenco is given, along with special vocabulary words (see "Activities.") Then the guitarist speaks about his instrument, playing a short solo to highlight the techniques. The poetry of flamenco lyrics and the contrasts are discussed and heard. The audience experiences the hand gestures for men and women and different clapping patterns. Following a presentation on the use of castanets, other props and instruments are introduced, with a demonstration of strong, rhythmic footwork. Student participation is followed by a brief question and answer session.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Flamenco was only defined as an independent dance style at the beginning of the 20th century. There are two main theories of how flamenco got its name. One is that it is a derivation of word "flamingo," a bird that exhibits exquisite postures that display the pride and beauty of flamenco dancers. The other theory is that it comes from the word "Flemish," which depicts a style of art that was prized and loved for its colors and passion. Flamenco was created in Spain, but how did it become flamenco? Spain is a country with its own people and traditions, but for centuries it was conquered and inhabited by many different cultures. The diversity of many cultural influences has been integrated into the people, and out of this blending of cultures, flamenco was born.

It is an accepted theory that gypsies from India wandered through Asia, across the Middle East, Europe and North Africa and that aspects of all these cultures became an integral part of the gypsy culture. If you look at the style of the hand movements you can see Asian gestures. Listening to the music, as well as the lyrics, you hear Arabic and Jewish chants and you can feel the rhythms of Africa. Within Spain, when it was under Moorish rule, there were cultural and religious

differences, but people lived together in relative peace. However, with the coming of the Inquisition and the expulsion of non-Christian people, the gypsies, along with many others, were rounded up and persecuted.

Before the Inquisition, Spain was a cradle of humanity, science and the arts. After the Inquisition, people were forbidden to follow their own beliefs and traditions. This grief, frustration and anguish was expressed in the songs, music and dance of the gypsies. As you listen to the music, you will hear and feel some of these intense emotions. As you view the dance, you will see a spectrum of emotions in the energy and movements.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Prior to the performance, ask students to discuss the benefits of living in an ethnically diverse society where traditions are allowed to influence each other and are often blended or combined to create something new. Ask students to give examples of when this has happened.
- Ask students what most impressed them about the music, the dance and the voice as they watched the performance. Encourage them to give reasons.
- Discuss some of the different emotions that all people have (love, grief, anger, fear, etc.). What were some of the ones expressed by the dancers and musicians? What things about the way they danced, played or sang communicated specific feelings?
- How does Flamenco dance and music compare to other dance and music students have seen or heard?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - HISTORY/SOC. STUDIES:

During the Spanish Inquisition the gypsies, as well as others, were forced to comply with the beliefs and values of the dominant group or experience death, pain and trauma. Think what life would be like if you were forbidden from doing things that you now think of as normal (reading the books you want, listening to any type of music, eating a wide variety of foods, dressing the way you like). Then discuss the benefits and problems of being in a society like ours, where there is personal choice, as well as the freedom to borrow ideas from each other to form something new.

Become aware of the ethnic diversity in your own classroom. Find a special contribution that each culture can give to the group - color combinations, music, dance, dress style, architecture, etc. Experiment with ways that these ideas could be combined. Create a building or design a piece of clothing that combines the ideas of two different cultural influences.

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- 👉 Aesthetic valuing
- * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ▶ Review vocabulary terms related to flamenco and this performance:

gypsy	sakai (eyes)
castanets	braseo (arm movement)
la guitarra (guitar)	flamenco
palmas (hand clapping)	guitar
taconeo (footwork)	rhythm
maneo (hand movement)	el cante (song)
jaleo (cries of encouragement)	emotions
improvisation (making up something on the spot)	
- 🌀 Divide the room in half. One group claps a continuous slow, steady beat. The other half claps off the beat or in-between the beats. Start slowly and get increasingly faster, without losing the rhythm. Begin very softly and gradually build to the louder "palmas."
- ❖ In the performance you observed a clapping, rhythmic conversation between the two dancers. Divide the class into partners and have them carry on a conversation in rhythm (clapping hands/palmas) using different patterns, varying loud and soft and alternating back and forth. Share.
- ❖ In the performance, you observed strong emotions being expressed through dance, music and song. Select a strong emotion you have experienced and write about it in a poem. Begin with a word web, where you write the emotion in the center and all the words that you can think of that relate to the emotion are written around the edges. Use cinquain poetry or other poetry forms.



SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Latcho Dron - Video by Tony Gatif. Available at Festival Records (213-737-3500).

Schreiner, Claus (edited by). *Flamenco*. Amadeus Press. 9999 S.W. Wilshire, Portland, Oregon, 97225.