

# Cirque Zuma Zuma

## Student Matinees



Study Guide

## Welcome!

Today's scholars and researchers say creativity is the top skill our kids will need when they enter the work force of the future. We couldn't agree more, and we salute YOU for valuing the educational and inspirational power of live performance. By using this study guide and the **Suggested Pre-Matinee Activities** you are taking an even greater step toward implementing the arts as a vital and inspiring educational tool.

Enjoy the show!

### Standards:

Seeing a Cirque Zuma Zuma performance and reflecting upon the experience afterward addresses the following standards:

- Critique
- Aesthetic Judgment
- Point of View
- Audience Response

Seeing this particular performance and doing any of the activities in this study guide or having a companion workshop also addresses:

- **Healthy Choices** *Students make informed, healthy choices that positively affect the health, safety, and well-being of themselves and others.*
- **Teamwork** *Students perform effectively on teams that set and achieve goals, conduct investigations, solve problems, and create solutions (e.g., by using consensus-building and cooperation to work toward group decisions).*
- **Cultural Expression** *Students demonstrate understanding of the cultural expressions that are characteristic of particular groups.*



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# The Company: Cirque Zuma Zuma

The tradition of dance and acrobatics in Africa goes back over 2,500 years. The members of African Acrobats International Academy uphold this centuries' old tradition through their training, artistry, and touring performances. AAI was originally founded in East Africa as a private school with a goal of providing entertainment to the tourist hotels in Africa. Cirque Zuma Zuma was established about a decade later, in late 2005, as a touring arm of the company with a mission of teaching the world about African cultures. African Acrobats International now has training schools in Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Kenya. In addition to training performers, AAI is working to collect and publish numerous African opera scripts and historical texts as well as issuing DVDs and videos for education and promotion of the traditional arts of Africa. The performers of African Acrobats International have toured the world, presenting more than 150 performances annually.

## What is "Cirque"?

The term refers to a style of performance that incorporates circus arts from all over the world such as clowning, acrobatics, mime, trapeze, contortionism, stunts, and more and then adds a layer of theatricality not usually seen in a standard circus performance. "Adding theatricality" means the use of costumes, sound, lighting, and perhaps even some plot or storyline. The performances are entertaining and inventive. The various art forms are blended together to create one seamless, energetic, and dramatic experience for the audience.

### Further Exploration...

<http://www.zumazuma.com/>

*Check out the Zuma Zuma website for more information on their performances and the variety of acts and art forms—see photos and check out video clips from their shows.*

**After watching the video, discuss what you saw with students. Here are some questions to get the discussion started:**

- What skills do you think these acrobats need to have and develop in order to perfect these feats?
- How long do you think these acrobats have to train and practice?
- How important do you think are teamwork skills in order to be a good acrobat?
- What kinds of props do the acrobats use in the acts?
- What are the similarities and differences between the acts you saw in these videos and acrobatic acts you have seen other places? (Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Mechanics, Golden Dragon Acrobats or other circus acts for example?)
- What did you notice about the music in these performances? What did you notice about the costumes? The lights? How do these elements add to the overall experience of the performance?



# The Production

The performance of Cirque Zuma Zuma blends traditional African dance, song, and music, with feats of acrobatics, contortionism, mime work, clowning, magic and more. The performance includes lively music, colorful costumes, and dramatic lighting.

Here are some of the acts the troupe commonly performs. *Each performance is a little bit different—the company may substitute other acts not listed here in place of some of these acts but this list will give you an idea of what you might expect to see at the matinee.*

**Flag Dance**—Flags of different parts of Africa waving in synchronization combined with tumbling stunts.

**Celebration of Acrobatic Skills**—An exhibition of some of the most popular acrobatic moves.

**Diablo Spinning**—This special spinning-wheel called a diablo is based on an ancient Ethiopian child's toy. The act is accompanied by traditional African melodies as acrobats throw, coil, and toss the diablos to one another with dexterity and finesse.

**Dexterous Feet**—Look for some incredibly fancy and skillful footwork by the performers.

**Hoops and Barrels**—Two female performers dance and move through hoops and barrels with amazing agility.

**Chair Balance**—Demonstrating balance, daring, and unbelievable focus, acrobats will perform atop stacks of chairs. Don't try this at home!

**Zulu and Gumboot Dance**—The Zulu reed dance is part of a traditional ceremony performed in the regions populated by the Zulus, for their kings. The Gumboot dance comes out of the mining culture of the region. Learn more about these traditional dances in the "Further Exploration" box on this page.

**Acrobatic Clown Show**—Traditionally, African acrobatics performances include a clown who combines humor and acrobatic techniques in his act.

**Candlesticks**—An elegant female performer balances candlesticks on the soles of her feet, her forehead, hands, and even on her mouth while moving through space in a graceful dance.

## Further Exploration...

The **Zulu Reed Dance** is an important part of traditional Zulu festivities which take place in September each year at the start of spring (remember South Africa is in the Southern hemisphere). Young girls dressed in traditional Zulu attire come to sing, dance, and celebrate at the eNyokeni Palace in Nongoma, Zululand. The festivities take place over several days and represent the rite of passage of young girls into womanhood. The Reed Dance has also become an opportunity to teach girls about their culture and for Zulu women to teach the girls about respect for their bodies. Today this age-old ceremony has also taken on some contemporary social issues affecting the Zulu people including HIV/AIDS and teen pregnancy.

A highlight of the event is the reed-giving ceremony in which young women dressed in intricately beaded and colorful outfits collect a cut reed to present to the king. The reed is an important symbol in Zulu tradition as it is believed that their original ancestor emerged from a reed bed. Reeds are used to build traditional Zulu huts, mats, and baskets so the laying of reeds at the king's feet is a symbol of respect for Zulu culture.

The **Gumboot dance** began with rural laborers working in the gold mines of South Africa. In the mines they faced harsh oppression and abuse including punishment for even talking to one another while working. Mine executives feared an uprising and so they worked hard to keep the workers separate and divided. Miners were also forbidden to practice their traditions or wear traditional attire. As a result of this oppression as well as the fact that many ethnic groups with many different languages were working side by side in the mines, the miners began to create new forms of communication. Because mine floors often flooded due to poor drainage and mine bosses refused to spend the money to properly fix the problem, the miners were issued rubber boots to wear. These gumboots along with jeans or overalls, bandannas, and hard hats became the miners' uniform. Workers began to adapt traditional dances and rhythms using the only instruments they had in the mines, their boots and their bodies. By slapping their gumboots, stamping their feet, and rattling their ankle chains (many workers were actually chained to their work stations) they developed a kind of communication with one another. The form developed over time into a popular social activity with songs dealing with life, love, family, and the problems and oppression of the mining work.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0Q51WVrR40>

*Check out this video of a group performing traditional gumboot dances. Notice the combination of quick footwork and the percussive use of the boots and bodies of the dancers.*



## Activity—African Nations Studies

The performers in Zuma Zuma come from a number of different African nations including South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia. What do you know about these countries? What can you find out about this part of the world? Do a quick nation study with your class. Have students start with the information provided here about two of these nations (Kenya and Ethiopia). Read through the brief introductions to these two countries as a class. **Ask students: What information was already familiar to you? What surprised you? What questions do you have about these two countries?**

Next have students (individually or in small groups) choose one of the countries listed above to research and create presentations. Students should use their school library catalog, pathfinders, and databases to locate at least two print resources and at least one online source. Presentations should include basic information such as: the country's official name, population, capital city, official language, images of the country's wildlife, natural features, and man-made features, and a brief history of the country. Students should also try to answer the following questions through their presentations:

- What is the landscape or what are the prominent geographical features of the country? What wildlife might you see there?
- What are some of the country's most well-known art forms?
- What are some of the country's most loved pastimes?
- Who are some of the nation's most famous figures (political figures, artists, national heroes, etc.)?
- What is the country's economy based on? Agriculture? Tourism? Trade? Explain.

**Kenya** is located along the eastern coast of the continent of Africa and straddles the equator. Covering almost a quarter of a million square miles the geography of Kenya is rich and varied. The northeastern region which borders Somalia and Ethiopia is arid with some stretches of desert. The central Rift Valley enjoys many fish-rich freshwater lakes. The fertile western highlands and the lower slopes of the ice-capped Mount Kenya in the central highlands provide opportunities for agriculture. The coast line along the Indian Ocean boasts a large coral reef and beautiful beaches. Kenya shares Lake Victoria (the world's second largest freshwater lake) with bordering countries Tanzania and Uganda. The country is famous for its diverse wildlife as well and is a popular destination for tourists who want to observe the wild animals living in the nation's vast reserves and national parks. The region is historically home to several groups including the Gikuyu who formed farming communities in the southern part of the country, the Luo people who lived and farmed around Lake Victoria, and the Maasai who were a nomadic people, herding cattle. In the late 1800s, the British East India Company moved into the region with its eye on the natural resources and farmland. The exploitation of Africans in this region continued throughout the first half of the 20th century. Kenya finally gained independence in 1963.



Source: "Kenya." *New Encyclopedia of Africa*. Ed. John Middleton and Joseph C. Miller. 2nd ed. Vol. 3. Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008. 96-108. *World History In Context*. Web. 1 Apr. 2013

**Ethiopia** is located in the region of northeastern region of Africa known as "the Horn of Africa". The country is almost as large as the states of Texas and California put together and its landscape is made up mostly of a highland region which is surrounded by lowland deserts. This geography served to isolate Ethiopia throughout history both from its neighbors in Africa and from Europeans. This isolation played a part in Ethiopia being only one of two African nations which were never formally colonized by Europeans. The topography of Ethiopia may come as a surprise to those not familiar with the region. The Abyssinian highlands run down the center of Ethiopia and Ethiopia's central plateau rises to between 6,000 and almost 10,000 feet. Twenty-five mountains in the north and central part of the country have peaks rising to over 13,000 feet with the tallest, Ras Dashen rising to 14,538 feet! Anthropologists believe that the region is most likely one of the places where humans originated due to the fact that some of the very oldest human fossils have been found in Ethiopia.



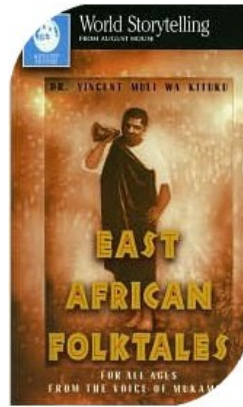
Source: Pretes, Michael. "Ethiopia." *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*. Ed. Thomas Benjamin. Vol. 1. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 454-456. *World History In Context*. Web. 1 Apr. 2013.

## Further Exploration...African Folk Tales

One way to learn more about a culture is to read folk tales from that particular place. Folk tales can tell us a lot about what a culture holds to be important, what characteristics or qualities are seen as the most valuable or most honorable, as well as what the culture finds funny or entertaining. Because acrobatics grew out of folk customs, reading a selection of folktales can also give students a broader context from which to understand the cultures of the performers. Here are some suggested titles—your school librarian may have other ideas on where to find more folk tales.

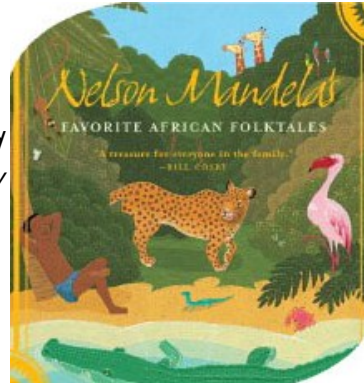
**Kituku, Vincent Muli Wa. *East African Folktales: from the voice of Mukamba.* August House, Inc : Little Rock, 1997**

*As a child in his native Kenya, Dr. Vincent Muli wa Kituku learned many stories from his mother. She told him stories as she cooked, as she washed, and as she harvested corn. Now, Dr. Kituku presents eighteen of those folktales in both English and Kikamba, the language of Kituku's East African culture. Comments following each story develop the story's themes and moral direction. The stories, together with the author's comments, provide an excellent foundation for discussion with children in any environment.*



**Mandela, Nelson. *Nelson Mandela's Favorite Folktales.* W.W. Norton & Company : New York, 2002**

*Mandela, a Nobel Laureate for Peace, has selected these thirty-two tales with the specific hope that Africa's oldest stories, as well as a few new ones, be perpetuated by future generations and be appreciated by children throughout the world. What is particularly exciting about this book is that many of the stories, in their oral form, are almost as old as Africa itself. Most of them were, in fact, first told in various African tongues around evening fires in centuries past--these folktales are a testament to the craft of storytelling and the power of myth. Accompanied by dozens of enchanting, specially commissioned color paintings, Nelson Mandela's Favorite African Folktales--presents a fountain of precious knowledge that will be treasured by children, as well as adults, for years to come.*



<http://www.mandelasfavoritefolktales.com/> - Listen to the stories here!

**Mhlophe, Gcina. *African Tales.* Barefoot Books : Cambridge, MA. c2009**

*Eight tales from Africa, beautifully illustrated with hand-sewn embroidered artwork decorated with African beads on a silk base. The tales are from Ghana, Senegal, Lesotho, Namibia, Malawi, Sudan, Swaziland and Ethiopia. Each tale is prefaced by a short introduction to the country.*

**Washington, Donna. *A Pride of African Tales.* Harper Collins : New York, NY. c2004**

*This treasure trove of lavishly illustrated stories comes from different regions in Africa. For her research, Donna Washington consulted as many written and oral sources as she could find. And award-winning artist James Ransome's stunning water-color paintings illuminate the diversity of the African people, clothing, architecture, landscape, and wildlife. Readers will discover that despite the variety, these stories about human foibles hold universal truths for everyone, everywhere.*

### Discuss:

After reading a selection of stories (preferably from a few different African traditions) discuss the stories, the characters, the morals/themes, with your class:

- Describe the characters that you can remember from the stories.
- Describe the events you can remember in the different stories.
- What stood out to you about the characters' personalities, ideas, goals, or qualities?
- Did any of the stories remind you of other folk tales with which you were already familiar? Which ones and how so?
- What stood out to you about the ways that the stories were told? Did you notice any particular rhythms in the stories? Did you notice any descriptive styles?
- What seemed to be the major themes in the stories that you read?
- What (if any) morals or ideals did you notice being expressed or taught through these stories?
- Were there funny moments in the stories? What were they?
- Were there any touching or profound moments in the stories? What were they?

## Suggested Pre-Matinee Activities

**Why do these activities?** Giving students the opportunity to actively explore a few of the decisions made by the creative team producing the show helps them become more attentive audience members. They will approach the performance with keen curiosity, watching the artists' choices and often comparing those choices to their own. For this reason, it's best to do these activities **before** the show. If it's impossible to do these exercises beforehand, doing them **after** the show can still help the students deepen their insights into how the show came together and further analyze the company's choices.

### Balancing Part I

Ask your students to stand up and then ask them where their centers of gravity are. Next challenge them to stand on one foot and ask if their centers of gravity have changed. Challenge them further by asking them to move their arms in different ways as they stand on one foot.

*Ask students: What changes did you notice in your center of gravity when you stood on one foot? How did your balance change when you moved your arms? Did you have to work different muscles to keep from falling over?*



### Balancing Part II

First ask students to stand on a pillow in a safe, open, soft area. Ask them to balance on one foot, and then to experiment with their balance by holding different objects as they stand on one foot.

*Ask students: How does each of these objects affect your sense of balance? How does standing on the pillow, rather than the floor, change things?*

### Balancing Duets Part I

Have the students divide into pairs. In each pair, ask one student to hold a large book in his/her hands. Ask the other student to gently try to disturb the first student's balance. Now have the first student hold the book in different way (e.g. balance the book on his/her head, shoulder, foot, etc.) and have the second student again try to gently disturb the first student's balance. Once the first student has tried a few different positions, have the students switch roles.

*Ask students: Which positions made it easier to keep your balance and the balance of the book? Why?*





## Balance Duets Part II

Ask two volunteers, one smaller, and one bigger, to hold each other's wrists and to put one foot together and pull against one another, trying to share balance. If they need help, encourage the smaller person to be lower and further out in space, using both the head and hand out to the side. The larger person must stay taller or higher.

Now divide the students into pairs and ask them all to try the exercise. After they have had some time to practice, they can begin to play with forming interesting balanced shapes.

*Ask students: How did you have to shift your center of gravity in order to keep both yourself and your partner balanced?*



## Balance Duets Part III

Divide the class into pairs and suggest that each pair moves from one shape to another, shifting their balance points as they create different shapes with their bodies. Play some soft music to help their concentration as they create different shapes balancing in space. Challenge them to use different parts of their bodies to create the weight and counterweight of each balanced shape.

*Ask students: What adjustments did you need to make in order to continuously shift balance points? How did you and your partner communicate and work together to keep from falling? Were you each taking on the same amount of weight in each shape or did one person support more weight than their partner in some poses?*

## Moving Through Space

In groups of three or more, ask students to create a balanced structure with their bodies using the least number of contact points on the floor. Each player should be connected with the whole structure. Have each group try the above balance exercises in their groups of three or more. See if one student can balance two of his/her classmates? Challenge the structures to move across the room without losing balance.

*Ask students: What new challenges arise when you begin to put the balanced shapes into motion? What adjustments did you need to make as you moved across the room? Did the balance points shift from static pose to moving pose?*



# Etiquette For Live Performance

*Because of the vital importance the audience plays in live performances, we suggest that you discuss the guidelines below with your students before bringing them to see the show.*

Unlike television or movies, live events depend very much upon the contribution of the audience. Some performers feel that the quality of the audience is 90% of what determines the quality of the show! The more the audience gives to the performer, the more the performer can give back to the audience. The performer hears the audience laughing, senses its sympathy, and delights in the enthusiasm of its applause. A good live performance is nothing less than an intense communication between audience and performer. Furthermore, each audience member affects those sitting near him or her, in addition to the performers onstage.

**Give your energy and attention to the performers.** Laugh when you think something the performer is doing is funny. Clap after a song or section you particularly enjoyed. Your response really matters to the performers. If you are bored, think to yourself about what would make the show more interesting for you and remain quiet, so as not to distract the performers or the people around you.

**At the end of the show, clap to show respect for the performers' time and energy.** If you were disappointed in the show, clap softly; loud expressions of disapproval are not appropriate. If you think the show was fabulous, give the performers a standing ovation!

**Unlike in movie theaters, eating, drinking, and chewing gum are not okay.** These activities create noises and smells that distract other audience members and soil the very elegant environments in which live performance occurs.

**Talk only before and after the performance.** By all means, talk to your friends while you are waiting for the show to begin. And talk after, compare your favorite parts. But when the lights go down in the house and up on the stage, it's time to stop talking and start watching. Check out the lighting, props and costumes, watch for the choices that went into everything you see onstage. Talking during the show will cause you and the people sitting near you to miss these moments that you can't witness again. There are no pause buttons, rewind options or volume controls in live performance. What you miss cannot be recaptured!

## Enjoy the Show!

## Wireless Etiquette

Cell phones, blackberries, mp3 players and other devices with lit screens and ringtones have made it necessary for all of us as audience members to **broaden our definition of live performance etiquette.** Using a cell phone or ipod during a performance is like tickling a porcupine...it just shouldn't be done! Even a quick check of the time on a lit screen is incredibly distracting to others in the audience, and disrespectful to the performers onstage.

**Please be sure to turn all devices COMPLETELY OFF before entering the theater and THANKS!**



# Parent Hand-out



**Dear Parents,**

Today our class traveled to see a performance of the *Zuma Zuma*. Use this worksheet to jump-start a conversation with your child about the performance not only will you get to learn about what your child experienced, but it will also help him or her to process and reflect upon the onstage material.

**What type of art form did you see onstage?** (Dance? Music? Acrobatics? Was there more than one art form?)

**What was the performance about?** (Was there a theme/style?)

**What did you learn from the performance?** (Did it spark any new thoughts you hadn't had before?)

**Can you remember something about the performance that you particularly liked or disliked? If so, what was it and why did it stand out to you?**

**Did you have a favorite moment in the performance? Tell me about it.**