

Culture Preservation and Education In the Gambia, West Africa



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Baatu Askan Wi (The Voice of the Tribes),
Banjul
The Gambia Cotton Tree Heritage Theater,
Gambia Chapter, Serrekunda, The Gambia

Project Goals

- To preserve indigenous culture through the performance of traditional dances
- To sensitize the public on human rights issues using the performing arts
- To use aspects of the culture to educate the community

Personal Goals

- To learn about and be integrated into the West African community
- To experience, first-hand, the role of dance and music in the community
- To be accepted as a member of the dance troupe



Activities

- Learned traditional dances and songs
- Interviewed artists in the community
- Performed with the troupe at public events
- Collaborated with administrators of cultural groups to establish goals and plans for the groups
- Served as an ambassador of the cultural groups to various members of the community

Key Dilemmas and Questions

- Do traditional values hinder advancement?
- Can all of the tribes be accommodated through performance to promote equality?
- What are the implications of sharing culture by teaching African music and dance to Caucasians?
- What responsibilities do I have now that I have learned traditional African music and dance?
- In a context of diverse cultures, can theater be used to disseminate information without minimizing tradition? What languages should be used? Whose values should be promoted?

Important Learnings

- Music and dance are integral aspects of West African culture, and can be used to attract large audiences as well as to provide new insights.
- The arts can reduce some of the barriers that result from poverty.
- Arts allow for integration of traditions with new ideas.
- To communicate using dance, passion is more important than technique.

- Stereotypes of Americans are plentiful throughout the world; the arts provide a means for eliminating some of these.

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