



This was the best fine arts residency I have experienced for students in 29 years of teaching. The best thing was how hands on it was. The students were captivated by the instruments and the dances, which they were able to experience first- hand!

Teacher at Sidney Public School



African
Culture Connection

1823 South 155th Avenue
Omaha, Nebraska 68144
(402) 238-8259

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

African Culture Connection (ACC) is an Omaha-based nonprofit 501(c)3 organization founded in 2006 to provide African culture and art experiences to educators, children and the general public in Nebraska and Iowa.

The organization offers residency programs and performances led by professional artists, including master dancers, drummers and story tellers from the United States and abroad. Their presentations are engaging and dynamic, imparting an appreciation and respect for African culture. ACC's artistic activities are designed to supplement traditional approaches to learning and encourage others to learn about the positive contributions diverse cultures make to society.

Today, ACC's activities - workshops, in-school residencies, school assemblies, after-school programs, public performances and ongoing classes - impact the lives of nearly 10,000 people annually.

ACC is the only organization of its kind in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, South Dakota, and North Dakota

Mission

To provide African culture and art experiences to educators, children and the general public in Nebraska and Iowa

Target Audience

Annually up to 3,000 youth ranging from age 7 through 18 from all socioeconomic backgrounds, including low-income households in inner-city neighborhoods, in the Greater Omaha and Council Bluffs areas.



THE PROBLEM

The African Culture Connection (ACC) was established to address two important issues in the Greater Omaha and Council Bluffs areas:

- **The need to build overall community awareness of and respect for African culture and other diverse cultures.** Community leaders and experts in cultural competence recognize that a lack of personal familiarity and contact with other cultures too often feeds the fear that is at the root of stereotyping, prejudice, and racism. Exposing others to the beauty and meaning of another culture's art forms dynamically provides others with the direct personal contact necessary to build openness and awareness.
- **The need to provide opportunities for support and positive development for high-risk, primarily African-American children and youth of low-income households living in the North Omaha and the nearby Council Bluffs areas.** A recent study conducted by the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) in conjunction with the *Omaha World-Herald* found that African-American children and youth in Omaha are among the poorest African-American communities in the country. Extreme and concentrated poverty often leads to very serious developmental risks for these low-income youth in Omaha. Oftentimes, their parents are overwhelmed by a struggle for economic survival, which leads to a lack of involvement with the education of their children. Their children often lack parental guidance, role models, encouragement for success, and general adult support from the community. They also lack access to arts education, after-school programs, or consistent adult guidance to provide them with the skills they need to succeed in school and in life.

A strong body of research shows that participation in arts education and after-school programs contribute to positive development for youth of all socioeconomic backgrounds.

James S. Catterall of UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies states: "longitudinal data of 25,000 students demonstrates that involvement in the arts is linked to higher academic performance, increased standardized test scores, more community service and lower dropout rates."

According to research from Harvard's Program in Afterschool Education and Research, "studies suggest that attendance at after-school programs is associated with better grades, peer relations, emotional adjustment and conflict resolution skills."

THE SOLUTION: African Culture Connection

ACC addresses a lack of cultural awareness and a lack of art education opportunities for low-income youth by providing culturally diverse, art-based residency programs and performances in the Greater Omaha community. ACC's programs are geared toward elementary school through high school-aged students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and are delivered throughout the year in workshops, in-school residencies, school assemblies, after-school programs, public performances and ongoing classes.

ACC's programs incorporate the following artistic disciplines:

African Dance

Dance is a primal form of communication. Singing and dancing can bind communities together. Traditional dances are performed for significant events and rites of passage from birth to death.

African Drumming

African music is complex and polyrhythmic. During residencies students receive hands-on experience while learning about African music.

African Crafts

African art has inspired artists around the world. Art is part of everyday life in Africa. During residencies students create their own African crafts including masks, stamped cloth, jewelry, anklets, headbands, shakers, or drums, and learn about the significance of these objects in African culture.

African Story

The Story is a traditional art form of all indigenous people. West African cultures have elevated the art of Story to the highest form.



The students learned a great deal about the variety and culture of Africa. The active nature of your program and that they could touch, try things, and ask questions at anytime was exceptional. Thanks - your program and work with students is outstanding.

Mrs. Raiter, Bee School



BENEFITS OF ACC

Besides offering knowledge of specific art forms, ACC's programs benefit youth and adults in the Greater Omaha and Council Bluffs areas by providing:

An Understanding of Diversity

Programs promote understanding of artistic, cultural and social differences while overcoming stereotypes of African people

Character Development

Programs encourage self-respect, respect for others, cooperation, and behavior that leads to a healthy learning environment

Interdisciplinary Connections

Programs introduce instruments, rhythms, songs, stories, dances, costumes, and artifacts that lead to discussions and exploration into history, geography, and social studies

Health and Physical Fitness

Programs offer opportunities for students to perform dance routines for balance, hand-eye coordination, aerobics, agility, flexibility, healthy release of energy, and overall physical development

Family and Community Participation

Programs encourage students, parents, schools, and community organizations to work collectively to impart values that improve their community

Therapeutic Engagement

Recent research reviews indicate that drumming accelerates physical healing, boosts the immune system and produces feelings of well-being, a release of emotional trauma, and reintegration of self.



I enjoyed the authenticity of everything, including the drums, costumes and rhythms. Most children don't have the opportunity to hear authentic African music.

Wake Robin Elementary School



PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Since ACC was established in 2006, the organization's residency programs have expanded from impacting about 100 students per year to impacting nearly 3,000 youth annually. The organization provides programs and performances at six schools in the Omaha Public Schools and Council Bluffs Community Schools Districts and has collaborated with several nonprofit organizations including Girls, Inc. and the Council Bluffs Boys and Girls Club.

To achieve its plans for the future, ACC's annual budget will increase from \$200,000 to \$500,000.

This increase would enable ACC to:

- Continue its residency programs at Omaha schools and Girls Inc.
- Expand its educational programs to additional Omaha and Council Bluffs area schools, hospitals and nonprofit organizations that cannot afford educational art programs
- Increase its exposure and collaborative activities
- Expand its administrative staff conservatively to support this program growth and impact the lives of even more educators, children and adults
- Provide core funding for operations and the Executive Director position, which is now offered as an in-kind contribution



HOW YOU CAN HELP

ACC is seeking financial support from individuals, corporations and foundations that are interested in providing African culture and art experiences to all people in the Greater Omaha and Council Bluffs areas.

Donations may include gifts of:

- Cash
- In-Kind Services or Materials
- Securities
- Bequests
- Retirement Fund Assets
- Life Insurance

For more information about giving to ACC, please contact Executive Director Charles Ahovissi at

402.238-8259 (phone)
charles@africancultureconnection.org
(email)

Thank you for considering a contribution to an organization that will enhance academic achievement, artistic skills and cultural understanding for everyone in our community.



The ACC's program provides hands-on learning experiences about another culture. This is a wonderful program and supports the curriculum when the students study Africa. Charles is a great teacher!

Sheila R.S. McCauley,
Beveridge Magnet School





Annual Gala performances tell a traditional African folk story, showcase traditional drumming, and rich music, encouraging appreciation for All People.

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