EDUCATION WORKSHOP

RANKY TANKY

1st-12th Grades
Ranky Tanky (a Gullah phrase for “get funky”) are five lifelong friends (Quiana Parler, Quentin Baxter, Kevin Hamilton, Clay Ross, and Charlton Singleton) from Charleston, South Carolina, who have established themselves as passionate global ambassadors for their local culture and community, helping to faithfully preserve the traditions originated by African Americans in the coastal South during slavery that are kept alive through the present day.

Fresh from a 2023 GRAMMY Award for Best Regional Roots Music Album, Ranky Tanky are celebrating their second GRAMMY win in a four-year span. Celebrating the music of their West African-rooted Gullah community, Ranky Tanky were honored in 2023 for their first-ever live album ‘Live at the 2022 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival’ which was captured during their debut at the iconic festival last year. Ranky Tanky previously took home Best Regional Roots Music Album in 2020 for their studio album ‘Good Time,’ marking the first-ever GRAMMY Award win for an album of Gullah music. The five-piece have now won Best Regional Roots Album for two consecutive releases and become the most awarded group in the history of the category.

“Live performance is at the heart of what we do as Ranky Tanky and to be recognized for our inaugural set on the historic New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival stage is a high honor,” the band said during their acceptance speech. “Once again, it is an honor to be able to stand on the shoulders of our Gullah Ancestry and continue to bring this music and message to the world!”

The 2023 GRAMMY win is just the latest accolade in a long line of ‘firsts’ that Ranky Tanky has achieved for the music of the Gullah community. The five-piece also reached #1 on each of the Billboard, Amazon and iTunes jazz charts, brought their songs and stories to national television on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, The TODAY Show and PBS Newshour – and even performed during President Joe Biden’s 2020 inauguration festivities.

**Check out the videos below!**

“Watch That Star”       “Knee Bone”
“You Better Mind”
The Gullah Geechee people are descendants of Africans who were enslaved on rice, indigo, and Sea Island cotton plantations along the Atlantic coast of the Southeastern United States. Their culture has preserved a significant influence of Africanisms as a result of their historical geographic isolation on the coastal sea islands.²

Want to explore more about Gullah Geechee culture? Click here.

Gullah Geechee also refers to the unique creole language spoken as “a simplified form of communication among people who spoke many different languages including European slave traders, slave owners and diverse, African ethnic groups. The vocabulary and grammatical roots come from African and European languages. It is the only distinctly, African creole language in the United States and it has influenced traditional Southern vocabulary and speech patterns.”¹

Gullah Geechee language and culture have been so influential to the S.C. Lowcountry that many of their words have melded into the vocabularies of most South Carolinians. American linguist Lorenzo Turner documented that several words in the standard English language, such as tote, yam and gumbo, have been adopted from Gullah Geechee words of African derivation.²

Want to learn how to speak Gullah Geechee? Click here.

---


CONNECT // Gullah Geechee Music

“Deeply rooted in music traditions brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans, their [Gullah] music evolved out of the conditions of slavery that characterized their lives. The influence and evolution of musical forms that arose out of Gullah music can be heard in many musical genres such as spirituals and gospel music, ragtime, rhythm and blues, soul, hip hop and jazz.”3 Much of Gullah music is centered around percussive beats that musicians create by using traditional African instruments and their own bodies, a unique technique known as “hamboning.”4

Did you know that the banjo was originally from West Africa?

Click here to listen to Ranky Tanky’s version of the classic Gullah Geechee song “Sink Em Low.” Now, click here to listen to beloved Gullah performers Bessie Jones and the Georgia Sea Island Singers sing their own rendition of “Sink Em Low.” Compare and contrast what you notice between the two versions.

---

5Figure 2 “Broken Sekere,” Awe Olufunso, July 31, 2021, https://aweolufunso.blogspot.com/2021/07/broken-sekere-beautiful-story-about.html
6Figure 3 “Thoman-TK17-R Kalimba” Thoman Music, accessed December 27, 2023, https://www.thomannmusic.com/thomann_tk17_r_kalimba.htm
EXPLORE // Classroom Workshops

**Gullah Roses**  
**All Ages**
Students will design and create tissue paper roses inspired by several Gullah Geechee spiritual traditions. Students will also write and attach affirmative statements to their artwork, mirroring the protective intentions of many Gullah practices.  
[Click here for the lesson plan](#)

**Paper Bag STEAM Challenge**  
**Grades 2nd-6th**
In this workshop, students will learn about the Gullah culture and certain traditions for which they are well known. Afterwards, students will work as partners to engineer a paper bag basket using limited resources to hold the most weight.  
[Click here for the lesson plan](#)

**Beanbag Jazz**  
**Grades 1st-5th**
In this workshop, students will learn an interactive and percussive sequence by using beanbags to play along with one of jazz music's most recognizable pieces. Exploring the unique time signatures of jazz music, students will be challenged to understand musicality, rhythm, and tempo, while finding accent beats.  
[Click here for the lesson plan](#)
Okra Stew: A Gullah Geechee Family Celebration
By Natalie Daise

Papa has something special planned for tonight's family dinner – and Bobo can't wait! Excited to learn how to make okra stew like his ancestors, Bobo helps Papa pick veggies from the garden, catch shrimp from the creek, rain down rice in the pot, simmer the stew, and even make a tasty side of cornbread. When the stew begins to bubble and pop, Bobo and his family gather around for a mouthwatering feast.

Joy Takes Root
By Gwendolyn Wallace

It's Joy's first summer in her grandmother's South Carolina garden – a rite of passage. In the midst of okra, spinach, and strawberries, Grammy teaches Joy that plants are friends with many uses. Herbs, for example, can be turned into medicine.

There in Grammy's abundant backyard, Joy learns to listen for the heartbeat of the earth and connect it to her own as she takes deep breaths and puts her intentions into the soil. By the story's end, she learns to grow seeds in her own garden, honoring all that her grandmother taught her.

Nesting Dolls
By Vanessa Brantley-Newton

Anyiaka is in awe of her gorgeous Gullah Geechee family – she wants to be beautiful like her older sister, Sorie, a great listener like her mom, and a talented artist like her grandma. But on today's visit to her grandparents' house, Anyiaka sticks out from the rest of the family like a sore thumb. She can't seem to do anything right, and a trip to Grandma's art studio confirms just how different she is from the rest of the family.

But Grandma's artwork – a special set of nesting dolls – also shows that what's on the outside doesn't always tell the whole story. While they may be distinct, together, her family's beauty and inner strength have deep roots that have been growing within each of them for generations.

Click here to learn more about other Gullah Geechee stories.
EXPLORING // Gullah Geechee in the Lowcountry

Originating from the displacement of enslaved West Africans into the Lowcountry of South Carolina and Georgia, Gullah Geechee traditions remain unique to the area historically and today, contributing to the language, cuisine and much more. Though it is unclear where we get the terms “Gullah” or “Geechee,” scholars believe that Gullah might be a shortened form of "Angola," the West African state “from which most of South Carolina’s slaves came”, and “Geechee” likely is derived from the Ogeechee River in Georgia’s Lowcountry where many the enslaved people lived.

As enslaved African women and their many generations of descendants prepared meals on the Lowcountry coast, the South's cuisine became creolized. “Melding old world knowledge with new, enslaved women reinvented or created new dishes, resulting in one-pot cooking styles of soups and stews. These worked especially well on plantations where preparing and eating food in a communal setting was commonplace. Dishes such as shrimp gumbo, she-crab soup, and shrimp and grits are still on Charleston restaurant menus as evidence of early Gullah women's inventive Lowcountry cuisine.”

Gullah Geechee people also used the passed-down skill of African basketry and sewing patterns to create sweetgrass baskets, named for the grass material they are made from. “While beautiful, the baskets were utilitarian with Lowcountry women,” and were used to assist with jobs such as storing dry goods, harvesting, and even carrying water. Today, Gullah Geechee sweetgrass baskets are recognized as art pieces and are sold on roadsides and in markets across the Lowcountry.

---

Following the transatlantic slave trade, enslaved Africans began to merge cultures with one another and their newfound residency in the Americas, forming several ethnic subdivisions like the Gullah Geechee peoples.

The **Fulani American** ethnic subdivision was derived from the Fulbe people who were from West and Central Africa, and enslaved in the Northern states of New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia. Keeping their African traditions alive, Fulani Americans are devout Sunni Muslims. A largely pastoral and originally nomadic culture, Fulani Americans are extremely connected to the land, with much of their diet and tools being derived from the natural resources available to them. Even their musical instruments were originally crafted from the Earth, such as the millet stalk flute and calabash gourd.

The **Igbo American** ethnic subdivision is made up of enslaved people from Igboland (Southeastern Nigeria) who were enslaved primarily in Virginia’s lower Tidewater region. By the height of American slavery in the 18th century, they made up 30% of the enslaved Black population, and even introduced the Igbo word “okra” into the English language. Though suppressed, Igbo Americans continued their cultural traditions, specifically in the realms of music and entertainment. To this day, Igbo Americans are known for their lively cultural Jonkonnu festivals, similar to Mardi Gras. Similarly to how the music genres of jazz and ragtime came as a result of the blending of many African American cultures, Igbo instruments such as the eboe drum and opi flute had a huge influence on Afro-influenced music in the United States.

The **Yoruba American** ethnic subdivision is comprised of people from Nigeria and Benin who were enslaved in South Carolina and Louisiana. Carrying their religious beliefs rooted in spirit and ancestral worship, to America, they played a key role in the development of Louisiana’s voodoo culture. Many Yoruba Americans have tribal facial marks, a cultural identifier they utilized to help reunite with other Yorubans when displaced during slavery. “Today, most African Americans share ancestry with the Yoruba people.”

---


Figure 6 Making African Connections, accessed December 27, 2023, [https://makingafricanconnections.org/s/archive/item/4097](https://makingafricanconnections.org/s/archive/item/4097).

Figure 7 “Be a part of the colourful and exuberant junkanoo festival!”, Berger Paints, December 15, 2016, [https://www.bergerpaints.com/imaginecolours/this-day-that-colour/be-a-part-of-the-colourful-exuberant-junkanoo-festival](https://www.bergerpaints.com/imaginecolours/this-day-that-colour/be-a-part-of-the-colourful-exuberant-junkanoo-festival).

Figure 8 “African Ife Head,” Wikimedia Commons, updated July 23, 2023, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Africa_Ife_Head_1_Kimbell.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Africa_Ife_Head_1_Kimbell.jpg).
EXPLORE // Ethnic Subdivisions Across the Country

READ

**Kaaro Tomi - Good Morning Tomi**  
By Ablmbola Anifowoshe  
Follow Tomi as he wishes everyone a Good Morning in this Yoruba/English bilingual picture book. With a simple story and beautiful illustrations, this is the perfect book to share with your child to introduce a different language and the concept of saying good morning. Follow along with either the Yoruba or English story.  
Yoruba is one of the largest spoken languages in Sub-Saharan Africa, spoken in countries like Nigeria, Togo and Sierra Leone. Outside of Africa, Yoruba is also spoken in Brazil, Cuba, and other countries.

**Savvy Yazzy's African Adventure: The Fulani Culture**  
By Boubacar Cherif Balde  
*Savvy Yazzy's African Adventure: The Fulani Culture* is about a girl named Yazzy who travels all the way from America to visit the tribe of Fulani in Guinea, West Africa. Yazzy is a very smart girl who wants to learn about other places and cultures. In the Fulani tribe, she finds a friend, Bouba, who teaches her Guinean culture. Take this journey with Yazzy and Bouba and you will enjoy their adventures and learn about African culture too.
**READ**

*Introduction to Igbo Mythology for Kids: A Fun Collection of Heroes, Creatures, Gods, and Goddesses in West African Tradition*

**By Chinelo Anyadiegwu**

The first definitive collection of Igbo legends and traditions for kids, this book explores the mythological origins of the Igbo people, the ancient Nri Kingdom, and Igbo cosmology before delving into the Alusi, or the core Igbo deities. Following this introduction to the pantheon of gods and goddesses, a collection of the most popular Igbo myths, folktales, and legends will immerse kids in exciting stories of tricksters, shapeshifters, and heroes, including:

- The Wrestler Whose Back Never Touched the Ground
- Ojiugo, the Rare Gem
- The Tortoise and the Birds, or The Origin Story of Sea Turtles
- Ngwele Aghuli, Why the Crocodile Lives Alone
- How Death Came to Be
- *And more!*

The perfect book for kids who are fascinated by Greek mythology or love the Rick Riordan series, *Introduction to Igbo Mythology for Kids* offers a fun look into the stories, history, and figures that characterize Igbo culture.

*J is for Jollof: An African Alphabet*

**By Dr. Gloria Fátúsin**

Explore your ABCs the West African Way, full of fun and flavour! 26 West African foods named from A-Z, from Akara to Zobo Vivid, authentic illustrations and descriptions featuring favorites such as fufu, jollof rice and palm nut (banga) soup. Share the gift of heritage and culture with your little one through the love and power of food. Every book bought will contribute towards buying books for children in Africa.

*J is for Jollof* is the perfect gift for children of all ages to discover West African cuisine and culture. JOLLOF is a tasty tomato-based rice dish, a family favorite, and a symbol of unity across the West African region.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


https://gullahgeechecorridor.org/thegullahgeechee/.


“Hidden Voices: Enslaved Women in the Lowcountry and U.S. South,” LDHI, Accessed February 26, 2024,
https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/hidden-voices/enslaved-womens-cultural-lives/lowcountry-gullah-geechee-cult


https://jazzaspensnowmass.org/history-of-gullah-music/.


Olufunso, Awe. "Broken Sekere." July 31, 2021,

https://www.peoplegroups.org/explore/GroupDetails.aspx?peid=47192#:~:text=Overview%3A%20The%20Fulani%20of%20United,primary%20language%20is%20Adamawa%20Fulfulde.

https://www.rankytanky.com/about.


EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS

The Gaillard Center would like to thank the following educational partners in their ongoing support of our Education & Community program. This program is also supported, in part, by a grant from a private foundation.

Gaillard Center Partners

Institutional Support

City of North Charleston Cultural Arts Program

Donaldson Charitable Trust
Hilton C. Smith Jr. | Chairman

John and Susan Bennett Memorial Arts Fund of the Coastal Community Foundation of SC

The Mark Elliott Motley Foundation
EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS

Institutional Support Continued

Lowcountry Quarterly Arts Grant Program
Peter Glenville Foundation
Publix Super Markets
Samuel Freeman Charitable Trust

South Carolina Commission on the Arts
South Carolina Arts Commission
South Carolina Humanities
South Carolina Ports
South State Bank

Community Partners

Jazz Day for Kids with the Charleston Jazz Orchestra & Charlton Singleton