

EDUCATION WORKSHOP

Ranky
Tanky



CHARLESTON
GAILLARD
CENTER

MEET THE ARTIST // Ranky Tanky



Ranky Tanky is an American musical ensemble based in Charleston, South Carolina. It specializes in jazz-influenced arrangements of traditional Gullah music, a culture that originated among descendants of enslaved Africans in the Lowcountry region of the US Southeast. Apart from lead vocalist, Quiana Parler, four of the group's members, Quentin Baxter, Kevin Hamilton, Clay Ross, and Charlton Singleton, previously played together in the Charleston jazz quartet The Gradual Lean in the late 1990s. The name "Ranky Tanky" comes from a Gullah expression roughly translated as "get funky". The overall goal of the group was to create a contemporary interpretation of the Gullah musical vocabulary to share with the world, while remaining true to the pared-down, working-class attitude of the songs. **Check out the videos below!**

["Good Time" Music Video](#)

["Watch that Star" Music Video](#)

[Interview with Charleston Magazine](#)

Musical Style

The Gullah lyrics and melodies that Ranky Tanky uses range from traditional spirituals, to children's rhymes and dance music. Due to its relative geographic isolation, the Sea Islands region preserved more of the West African rhythms, dialects, and musical traditions than the mainland US, which once combined with British colonial influence emerged as the distinct Gullah culture. Ranky Tanky's use of instruments like the electric guitar and trumpet are novel additions to Gullah music, which was historically performed using only a cappella voices and body percussion. Ross credits the 20th century African American folk singer Bessie Jones as laying much of the groundwork for the band, due to her extensive recording and documentation of the songs and rhymes later used in Ranky Tanky.

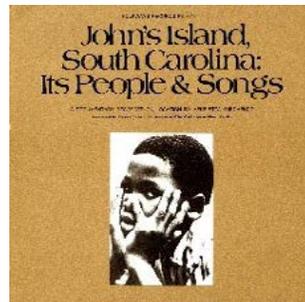
EXPLORE // Classroom Workshops



Paperbag STEAM Challenge

In this lesson, students will learn about the Gullah culture and certain traditions for which they are well known. Afterwards, students, in partners, will engineer a paperbag basket using limited resources to hold the most weight.

[VIEW LESSON PLAN](#) ►



Ranky Tanky and Children's Game Songs

In this lesson, students will explore the Gullah influence on Ranky Tanky through Gullah children's game songs. Students will participate in two children's game songs that were recorded by Henrietta Yurchenco, an American Folklorist.

[VIEW LESSON PLAN](#) ►

CONNECT // Ranky Tanky & Gullah Culture

Gullah Traditions

[Gullah Traditions of the South Carolina Coast](#)

In this activity, students discover the remarkable history and heritage of the Gullah people. The six-minute video features historical photos, interviews, and music.



Jonathan Green

Jonathan Green is an African-American painter best known for his vibrant depictions of Gullah culture, or the descendants of enslaved Africans who settled between northern Florida and North Carolina in the 19th century. Watch his biography made by Charleston Development Academy [here](#).



Sweetgrass Baskets

Sweetgrass baskets are almost identical in style to the shukublay baskets of Sierra Leone, where learning to coil baskets “so tightly they could hold water” was an important rite of passage in West African tribes like the Mende and the Temne. This basket-making tradition came to South Carolina in the 17th century by way of West African slaves who were brought to America to work on plantations.

West Africa resembles South Carolina in both climate and landscape, and rice had long been cultivated there. In slaves, plantation owners gained not only free labor but also a wealth of knowledge and skill.

ENHANCE // Gullah Culture in the Charleston Area



Heritage Days Celebration is a three-day cultural event celebrating Penn School, Penn Center, and the Gullah Geechee history, folk arts, food, music, crafts and West and Central African cultural legacy. Located at Penn Center—formerly the Penn School, one of the first schools for formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants living in the Sea Islands of South Carolina—visitors can experience the unique setting of the 50-acre Penn School National Historic Landmark District.



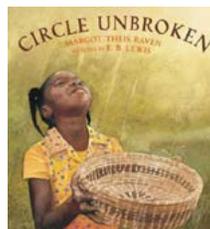
Charleston City Market - With more than 50 resident Gullah artisans, the Charleston City Market is the very epicenter of sweetgrass basketry, one of the nation's oldest and most beautiful handicrafts of African origin. For more than 300 years, people in Charleston have been weaving baskets using locally-harvested bulrush, a strong yet supple marshgrass, that thrives in the sandy soil of the Lowcountry. Originally used as winnowing fans to separate the rice seed from its chaff, sweetgrass baskets are regarded among the nation's most prized cultural souvenirs.



McLeod Plantation - Established in 1851, McLeod Plantation has borne witness to some of the most significant periods of Charleston's—and our nation's— history. Today McLeod Plantation is an important 37-acre Gullah/Geechee heritage site that has been carefully preserved in recognition of its cultural and historical significance. The grounds include a riverside outdoor pavilion, a sweeping oak allée, and the McLeod Oak, which is thought to be more than 600 years old.



The Avery Research Center is housed in the former Avery Normal Institute, established in 1865. Its mission is to collect, preserve, and promote the unique history and culture of the African diaspora, with emphasis on Charleston and the South Carolina Lowcountry. The Center's collection includes manuscripts, photographs, artifacts, personal papers and other documents and memorabilia. Ongoing exhibits and public programs also highlight the African American experience.



Listen & Read

Read *Circle Unbroken* & *My Trip to St. Helena Island* and listen to the audio link below to explore more.

[Chicken Dinner Money Storytelling](#)