TheTree of Life: A National Symbol
Lesson plan written by Leslie Roberts

Overview
National symbols unite people in patriotism and teach the world of a nation's cultural values and beliefs. Students will be able to explore the cultural and historical significance of Senegal's National symbol, the baobab tree, while comparing it to the United States national symbols with which they may be more familiar. Students will learn a poem about the baobab tree, create rhythmic word chains, and perform a Rondo Form on classroom instruments.

Grade Level 3rd-5th grade

Intended Content Area: General Music

STEM & Language Arts Connections: Literacy connection with poetry and song lyrics as well as breaking words into syllables to match rhythmic patterns

Essential Questions
- How and why is music central to culture and community?
- Why do we listen to other cultures' music?
- How does music communicate a point of view?
- How can we use beat and rhythm to help tell a story?

Standard Alignment with NC Standards
MU:Cr1.1.5a Improvise rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic ideas, and explain connection to specific purpose and context (such as social, cultural, and historical).

MU:Cn11.0.3a Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

MU:Re7.2.4a Demonstrate and explain how responses to music are informed by the structure, the use of the elements of music, and context (such as social and cultural).

Materials:
- Google Slides
- Classroom Instruments (Orff)
- Scarves, ribbons, other movement props, etc. (optional)
- Senegal-Mauritanie from the album Kora Revolution by Kaouding Cissko (optional)
- Chrome Music Lab Demo

Duration: 3, 50-minute lessons
Procedures

<u>Day 1</u>
- Teacher leads class discussion on the Senegalese national symbol of the baobab tree found in the Google Slides Presentation (Slides 1-13)
  - <u>Discussion topics:</u>
    - Name national symbols that represent the U.S. and why they are important
    - Discuss how other countries have their own national symbols that are important to the people who live there
    - Compare the national coat of arms of Senegal and the United States and discuss the symbolism in both
    - Why is the baobab tree culturally important?
    - Brief discussion on the dangers facing the baobab tree and what can be done to protect them

<u>Day 2</u>
- Teacher reviews the google slides presentation from previous lesson with students (Slides 1-13)
- Recap the importance of the baobab tree as a national symbol for Senegal
- Teacher leads class in a rhythmic activity using Keetman's rhythmic building bricks (Slides 14-15)
- Teacher gives examples with a list of words and rhythms.
  - Example words:
    - shelter (ta ta)
    - Water source (ti-ti ta)
    - Shade (ta shh)
    - Food (ta shh)
    - Monkey bread (ti-ti ta)
- Students match the words with the appropriate rhythms
- Students brainstorm to create and share their own list of words and find the rhythms that match them
- Create rhythmic word chains as a class (choose words about the importance of the baobab tree or nicknames for the baobab tree).
- Practice speech piece/poem (Slide 16)

    **Note, this is a poem that I created for the use of this activity and is not a native poem to west Africa.

I am the mighty baobab tree. I stand so tall and proud.
My roots are firmly planted, branches reaching for the clouds.
I may appear upside down, be assured that isn't so.
I am the ancient "tree of life," a tree you all should know.

- Students read poem independently
- Students recite poem out loud together over a steady beat (teacher may use a drum or students may patch the beat on their body)
- Teacher may decide to have students add a body percussion sound to the rhyming words which may later be transferred to an unpitched percussion instrument of choice
- Create ostinati patterns to accompany the poem (Slides 17-19)

  Suggested ostinato patterns:
  - "Tree of life"

  - "Rooted in tradition, open to the world"
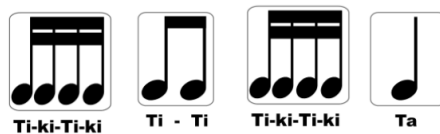
    - Try using the suggested ostinato patterns or class can create their own
    - Try layering ostinato patterns with unpitched percussion (explore what happens when you rearrange the order)

- Add a simple crossover bordun on xylophones to keep the steady beat (this can be done by the teacher or students) - low C, G, high C,' back to G
- Add unpitched percussion instruments for the rhyming words and ostinati patterns to accompany the poem (allow students to help choose which instruments to use)
  **For teachers that do not have pitched Orff classroom instruments, you may use this Chrome Music Lab demo to accompany the poem (note- the yellow squares represent the sounds on the rhyming words):
  https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Song-Maker/song/5092909364019200
- Consider practicing the words of the poem with students improvising the melody on a C pentatonic scale. (Can they incorporate text painting with the melodic direction of the "roots" going down and the "branches" going up?)

- Students may take turns improvising a melody over the accompaniment or the class may agree to create a melody together for the poem

Day 3
- Teacher reviews the google slides presentation from previous lessons with students
- Students rehearse the poem with the ostinati accompaniment and C pentatonic melody
- Teacher splits class into small groups (label the groups with a letter so that they know which part of the rondo they will be responsible for)
- Each group will create their own word chains (words can be repeated to create an 8 beat phrase) - these phrases will be performed 4x's and will be transferred to classroom instruments
- Students may choose to perform with or without saying the words out loud while playing on instruments
- The teacher should provide students ample opportunities to practice or change their patterns as needed.
- Students will perform their word chains in a rondo form (the poem is section "A" and the group collaborations as "B", "C", "D", "E", etc.)

Extensions:

Movement Activity
- Divide class into small groups
- Each group will create and perform their own interpretive dance to represent the baobab tree
- Student groups may choose to become a baobab tree, or represent the tree and its importance in some other way.
- Student groups will need time to practice at least 16 bars of movement
- The teacher may find an appropriate instrumental accompaniment to be played softly in the background of the performance. Suggested musical selection: Senegal-Mauritanie from the album Kora Revolution by Kaouding Cissko which can be found on spotify.

National Anthem Analysis- A deeper look at National Symbols
Teacher may opt to have students listen to and analyze the translated lyrics of the Senegalese national anthem and lead a discussion on the symbolism found in it
- Refer to the video taken in Dakar, Senegal of the youth children's choir singing
- An instrumental version of the Senegalese national anthem can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMyj4Nkw7sk

- Have a class discussion about the words and meaning in the song
- Compare it to the Star-Spangled Banner
- How might your view of your country change when comparing its national symbols to that of another country?