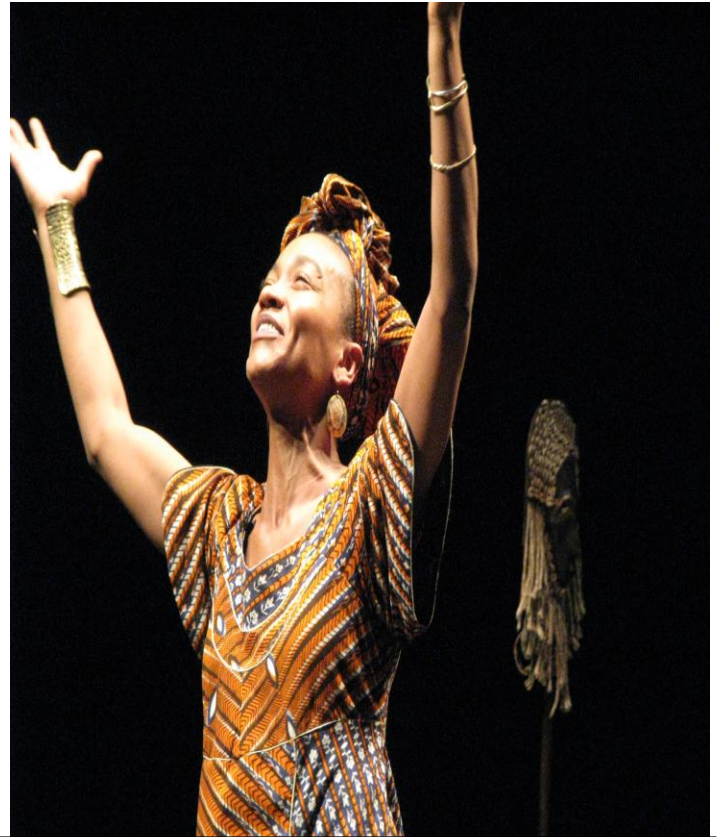


SUNJATA KAMALENYA

Resource Guide For Teachers

EXPERIENTial
theater company
EXPERIENCE CONNECTIONS

For Information, Call
(609) 258-6510



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

One of the greatest legends of West African Mandé tradition is brought to life in *Sunjata Kamalenya* : a brand new, completely interactive, McCarter-created production. Audiences of all ages participate in an “experiential theater” production that chronicles the struggles of a boy destined to be the savior of the Mandé people of West Africa.

Traditional music, costumes, and scenery whisk you away to a village compound where the jelimuso (storyteller) guides you to 13th century Mali.

LEARNING GOALS

Content Area	Visual and Performing Arts
Standard	1.1 The Creative Process: All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles that govern the creation of works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.
Content Area	Visual and Performing Arts
Standard	1.2 History of the Arts and Culture: All students will understand the role, development, and influence of the arts throughout history and across cultures.
Content Area	Visual and Performing Arts
Standard	1.3 Performance: All students will synthesize those skills, media, methods, and technologies appropriate to creating, performing, and/or presenting works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.
Content Area	Visual and Performing Arts
Standard	1.4 Aesthetic Responses & Critique Methodologies: All students will demonstrate and apply an understanding of arts philosophies, judgment, and analysis to works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.
Content Area	Social Studies
Standard	6.2 World History/Global Studies: All students will acquire the knowledge and skills to think analytically and systematically about how past interactions of people, cultures, and the environment affect issues across time and cultures. Such knowledge and skills enable students to make informed decisions as socially and ethically responsible world citizens in the 21 st century.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

The Mali Empire

The ancient Mali Empire spanned several countries in the West Africa area from c. 1230 to c. 1600. Mali, the country, identifies as only a small part of the vast empire, although it is the largest of countries. The empire was significant in the growth of West Africa, allowing the spread of its language, laws and customs. The Niger River played a monumental role in the expansion as it provided access to trade in bulk the abundant crops they were able to produce. Salt and gold mining were prevalent and lucrative businesses in ancient Mali. All goods traveling into, out of, or through Mali were heavily taxed, enabling them to sustain a stable economy and simultaneously rise as an empire. Languages in ancient Mali were as diverse as its inhabitants. The land was divided and organized into kingdoms. A leader was established within each kingdom as long as the people swore its allegiance to the mansa (trans.: ruler) of the Mali Empire.

The Story

Diviners prophesied that the boy Sunjata would grow up to save his people from terrible dangers. In a world of spears and sorcery, he must not only overcome the enemies that seek his country's demise, but also the jealousy and pettiness of those around him. Accompanied by his mother, Sogolon, Sunjata stands up to adversity and becomes the greatest mansa his people have ever had.

The History

The Sunjata epic is based on the real-life 13th century ruler who brought order to the largest empire the continent of Africa ever saw, the Mali Empire. African jeli (storytellers) from Mande' have passed the tradition of this epic through oral tradition for the past seven centuries. Today, the story, and the people whose ancestors it celebrates, are as alive as ever. This production brings the tradition and majesty of this ancient story and storytelling tradition to many Americans for the first time.

The Title

The title *Sunjata Kamalenya* is a combination of the title character Sunjata's name with a Mandinka word, Kamalenya, which means "youth." It is one of the many words the students will learn in Bambara, which is the native language of the Mande' people living in Mali and Northeastern Guinea.

VOCABULARY WORDS

Amina-Amen-“I agree”, a form of affirmation often given by the naamu-sayer and others in attendance of a jeli/jelimuso oral performance.

Bambara-The native language of the Mande' people living in Mali and Northeastern Guinea.

Bara Muso-The favorite wife.

Jeli-A jeli is a storyteller, entertainer, praisesinger, usually jeli sing a good portion of their tales. The French word for jeli is griot.

Jelimuso-A female jeli, the French word jelimuso is griotte.

Kamalenya-The Bambara word for youth.

Mali Empire-This is the empire established by Sunjata when he defeated Sumaworo

Mandé-An adjective used to describe those people, traditions, beliefs of Manden

Mansa-Translates to mean chief/leader/ruler.

Manden or Manding- A noun used to refer to the people, language or society of those who dwell in Western African and ...

Naamu-sayer-The performance supporter of the jeli, who invokes the word “naamu” and all of its various forms and intonations in support of the jeli's story, usually after each sentence in the story is pronounced.

Naamu-“It's true”, “You're right”, “I hear you”, “Yes”, a word of affirmation that is spoken by a naamu-sayer.

Sabu-A woman who is responsible for the success of a man, usually a sister or mother, and usually due to some magical intervention.

Tunya-“I agree”, another form of affirmation, often given by the naamu-sayer and others in attendance of a jeli/jelimuso oral performance.

ARTIST INFORMATION

Christopher Parks/Director, Playwright

Other TYA playwriting credits include *The Adventures of Perseus*, *The Arabian Nights*, *The Tempest*, a *Puppet Play*, *The Odyssey Experience*, *Lucky Girl* (co-writer), *Peter Pan 360*, and editor/writer of additional materials for Jack Gelber's unfinished last play, *Dylan's Line*, all for McCarter Theatre Center. *Sunjata Kamalenya* was first produced as a reading at New Visions/New Voices at The Kennedy Center in May 2010 and had its first workshop production as a part of the McCarter Lab 2010. Prior to his work at the McCarter Theatre, Christopher was co-founder of the New Jersey Renaissance Kingdom, where he served as one of the principal playwrights and directors during the ten years of his involvement. A dedicated Shakespearean Director, Christopher has directed *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest* (NJ Renaissance Kingdom); *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Pericles*, *Macbeth*, and *Winter's Tale* (McCarter Summer Shakespeare); *Henry IV, parts I and II* (Muse of Fire Films), *Macbeth* (Inclination), *Hamlet* (Muse of Fire), and *The Tempest* (Fordham University). Christopher is a graduate of Mason Gross, School of the Arts.

David C. Conrad/Historical Consultant

Dr. Conrad holds a Ph.D. in African History from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is retired as Emeritus Professor of History at the State University of New York, Oswego. From 1986 to 2008 he served as President of the Mande Studies Association, an organization of several hundred scholars from thirty countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and North America. Specializing in oral tradition, indigenous religion and early kingdoms of the Western Sudan, he conducts ongoing research in Guinea and Mali, which he visits at least once a year.

Balla Kouyate/Composer, Balaphone

Balla Kouyaté, from Mali, was given the name of his ancestor, Balla Fasseké Kouyaté, the first Djeli of the Mande Empire and owner of the very first balafon. Balla was raised in the Djeli tradition, learning from his father from the age of six. In 1994, he was a member of the renowned Ensemble Nationale du Mali. Balla has been featured on at least 45 albums, including Yo-Yo Ma's, *Songs of Joy and Peace*, Angélique Kidjo's *Oyo* and Vusi Mahlasela's *Say Africa*. He tours frequently with his own group, World Vision.

Zenzélé Cooper/Jelimuso

Last seen in *The Body Washer* (Rapscaillon Theatre Collective, NYC), Zenzélé Cooper recently completed an international tour with the Blessed Unrest Theater Company in *Doruntine*, the first US-Kosovar theater collaboration. Her other adventures include *Trojan Women* (The Classical Theatre of Harlem, NYC), *The Comedy of Errors* (The American Globe Theatre, NYC) and *The Illusion* (The Berkshire Theatre Festival, MA). Zenzélé was born in Harrisburg, PA and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Rutgers University.

Rahsaan Kerns/Player 2

This is Rahsaan's fifth year touring with McCarter Theatre Center's Education Department, and he is absolutely thrilled! Previously seen in McCarter's *The Odyssey Experience*, Rahsaan continues to hone his skills as an actor and teaching artist as a member of the *Sunjata Kamalenya* company. Rahsaan has studied theater in both Philadelphia and New York, worked in regional theater, and done background work in film/television, including NBC's hit drama "Law and Order."

Nakeisha Daniel/Player 3

Nakeisha is a native of Atlanta, Ga. Regional credits include: Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* (The Nebraska Shakespeare Festival), Amelia in *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Arizona Broadway Theatre), Narrator in *Disney's Aladdin Jr.* (Alliance Theatre Company), and Sarah in *Ragtime* (Charleston Stage Company). Nakeisha recently graduated from the MFA Acting program at Penn State. She received a BFA in Musical Theatre from Shorter College.

Bruce A. Lemon/Player 4

Bruce is thrilled to work with McCarter Theatre Center on his first show out of graduate school. He was most recently seen in *Why They Came*, a finalist in the Strawberry One-Act Festival at The Riant Theatre. Select New York Credits: *Big Tex*, *Orestes 2.0*, *The Blacks* (Dir. Hope Clarke), *Richard III*, *Hecuba*. Select Film Credits: "Gang Tapes" (Lions Gate Films), "Killing The Dog" (Six Part Productions), "The Prospect Heights Affair" (Sepia Studios). MFA in Acting, The New School for Drama, 2010. Born and raised in Watts, Los Angeles, CA.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

UC Berkeley

<http://orias.berkeley.edu/hero/sunjata/>

This site, maintained by the University of California-Berkeley, includes an elongated plot summary, proposed study guide for teachers and students, and background information about the setting of the myth.

World Literature Online

<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/worldlit/content.asp?b=3&c=litlinks&r=Africa&i=sunjata>

This site includes a short summary, as well as links to other sites which provide information about the culture and geography of West Africa.

The Kennedy Center's ArtsEdge Program

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2352/>

This link guides you to a curriculum developed by the Kennedy Center. Topics include the importance of dance, drumming, masks, and music in West African storytelling.

David Conrad, [Sunjata: A West African Epic of the Mande Peoples](#)

http://books.google.com/books?id=SIFSW3GKKZcC&dq=David+Conrad+and+africa&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=iOvqMQpjbE&sig=q8PBNWSfC8Rv9hp197pig_ur344&hl=en&ei=WQA8SpeHMYBtwfuyM35Dw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6

The partial manuscript of David Conrad's book about the epic of Sunjata.

The Malian Empire

<http://www.nmafa.si.edu/exhibits/resources/mali/index.htm>

This site provides information about the Malian Empire, and includes graphics and photos.

The Gambia Guide

<http://www.accessgambia.com/information/>

Though partially a site which promotes tourism, this site also includes sections on the history, culture, crafts, and religious background of Gambia, a nation which was once part of the Malian Empire.