

SUNJATA KAMALENYA

Sunjata Kamalenya (translated: Sunjata for Youth), is a new completely-interactive production created by the McCarter Theatre. 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. Audiences have a unique experience that celebrates the spirit of determination and the love of family in the face of seemingly-impossible odds.

"If you're in the room, you're in the show!"

For more than seven centuries, the hero Sunjata has been hailed and exalted by the revered West African praise-singers known as jeli. The McCarter Theater has teamed up with artists from America and Africa to bring the spirit and majesty of this time-honored epic to children and families. Most audiences that experience *Sunjata Kamalenya* here in America will be hearing the story for the first time. It is our ongoing commitment to faithfully bring the events of the Manden people's Tariku (chronicle) to children with the same excitement engendered in the music, dance and performance celebrated every day in countries such as Mali, Guinea, Senegal, and The Ivory Coast.

The artists at McCarter Theatre who brought you the "experiential theater" style when they created *The Odyssey Experience*, have further developed what is possible in terms of audience immersion for this upcoming tour. When we arrive, students will likely expect to see a play that day. But instead, they will quickly discover that they are going to be in a play, as they, without any prior knowledge or rehearsal, sing, dance and act alongside professional performers who have been trained to create a unique performance that everyone will always remember.

"And the people of Fara Koro said, 'Walahi, Balahi, Talahi!,' which is a Mande' expression of great joy!"
Sunjata Kamalenya, Scene 4

Great for grades K-2, 3-6, and 7-8!

There are two versions of Sunjata Kamalenya. The first is about 65 minutes, and has been created for students in grades 3-8, as well as family audiences. The second is a bit shorter, and lasts around 35 minutes. Both tell the story of a mother and her son's struggles to grow up and overcome challenges he experiences because of jealousy, bullying and ignorance. But the longer version also goes on to see the hero fight in a war to overcome a villainous enemy who seeks to oppress his country and all of the people west of the Niger River, which involves some content that is less accessible for children in grades K-2.