LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO
State Theatre New Jersey welcomes you to the school-day performance of Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

These Keynotes provide information, discussion topics, activities, and resources to use both before and after the performance. The materials are designed to help you integrate the show with learning objectives in many areas of the curriculum. We hope this resource will add to your students’ enjoyment and understanding of the performance and inspire them to continue exploring South Africa’s the rich history and culture.

We look forward to seeing you and your students at the State Theatre!

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LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO

Ladysmith Black Mambazo was founded in 1964 by Joseph Shabalala. The name comes from Ladysmith, Shabalala’s home town; Black, which refers to black oxen, the strongest of all farm animals; and Mambazo, the Zulu word for axe, because the group would always “chop down” any rival group that challenged them in singing contests.

Joseph Shabalala was born into a poor family that lived on a white man’s farm near the town of Ladysmith, in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. The Shabalala household was filled with traditional Zulu songs. After his father died, Joseph left to find factory work in the city of Durban. There, he became involved with local choirs, and then started his own groups.

But he wasn’t satisfied with music they were making. “I felt there was something missing... I tried to teach the music that I felt, but I failed until 1964 when a dream came to me,” he recalls. “I always hear the harmony from that dream and I said ‘This is the harmony that I want and I can teach it to my guys.’” Shabalala recruited members of his family—brothers Headman and Jockey, cousins Albert and Abednego Mazibuko—and other close friends to join into a new group, called Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Joseph taught them the harmonies from his dream, and the group soon became a hit.

In the nearly 60 years since then, the group has recorded over 50 albums and won five Grammy Awards. In 1986, singer-songwriter Paul Simon invited Ladysmith Black Mambazo to collaborate with him on his album, Graceland. He and Joseph Shabalala co-wrote the song “Homeless,” which made the group international celebrities.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo accompanied the late Nelson Mandela, at his request, when he went to Oslo, Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. One year later, they sang at his inauguration as President of South Africa. In 2014, Joseph Shabalala retired after leading his group for more than fifty years. He has passed the torch to the next generation. The current lineup features his sons—Thulani, Sibongiseni, Thamsanqa, and Msizi Shabalala—along with Albert Mazibuko, Abednego Mazibuko, Mfanafuthi Dlamini, Pius Shezi, and Sabelo Mthembu.

“Love yourself, love your ideas, love your voice— especially your voice... Singing and talking, they are two different things. Talking is good, but singing is better than everything.”
—Joseph Shabalala

“It isn’t merely the grace and power of their dancing or the beauty of their singing that rivets the attention, but the sheer joy and love that emanates from their being.”
—Paul Simon
Joseph Shabalala describes Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s special sound. “In Zulu singing there are three major sounds: a high keening ululation [a long, high-pitched, wavering sound]; a grunting, puffing sound that we make when we stomp our feet; and a certain way of singing melody. Before Black Mambazo you didn’t hear these three sounds in the same songs. So it is new to combine them, although it is still done in a traditional style.”

The group’s sound comes from a traditional Zulu style of singing called MBUBE (“lion” in Zulu), as well as a softer version of this style called ISICATHAMIYA (meaning “walk lightly, like a cat”). The music is sung A CAPPELLA, meaning it uses voices, but no musical instruments.

Mbube (pronounced em-BOO-beh) gets its name from the song “Mbube,” written in the Zulu language by South African singer and composer Solomon Linda and recorded by his group The Evening Birds in 1939. The song later spread around the world, recorded by pop and folk singers in languages ranging from Japanese to Finnish. In English, it is known by the titles “Wimoweh” and “The Lion Sleeps Tonight.”

Isicathamiya (pronounced is-cot-a-MEE-ya) singing is a harmonious blending of voices. It features a high-voiced lead singer and a chorus (mostly low voices) singing in four-part harmony. Many isicathamiya songs are in the CALL-AND-RESPONSE form. The lead singer sings a phrase, then the entire group answers—a sort of “musical conversation.”

Call-and-response is used in many types of music—even classical—and is a prominent feature of African American music, such as gospel.
The roots of Isicathamiya are in the mines of South Africa, where many black men had to work to support their families. Far from their homes and loved ones, these migrant workers lived in appalling conditions: in the deep mines, temperatures could exceed 95 degrees, and there was little or no safety gear. They were housed in dismal, overcrowded barracks and paid only a fraction of what the white miners received.

The miners would entertain themselves on their one day off each week by singing songs late into the night. They formed choirs, and developed a style of a cappella singing that combined the traditions of miners from different regions, along with western church music. They started calling themselves Cothoza Mfana (“tiptoe guys”) for the unusual dance steps they developed to keep from alerting the camp security guards: stretching out their legs and kicking them high in the air, all done as softly and quietly as possible.

When the miners returned to their homelands, they took this singing and dance style with them. They formed isicathamiya groups of 10 to 20 men, dressed in matching outfits, performing tight harmonies and perfectly synchronized dance moves. The groups held weekly competitions, which became extremely popular. Isicathamiya competitions are still taking place today, with up to 30 choirs performing. The competitions go from 8:00 Saturday night to 8:00 Sunday morning. Although men still dominate, there are now some groups that include women singers.

Why would a cappella singing be so popular with the black South African miners?

The miners’ barracks at the Robinson Deep gold mine near Johannesburg contained concrete bunks for as many as 40 men in a single room.

An isicathamiya competition.

Music Across Cultures

The music of Ladysmith Black Mambazo is contemporary, but it draws heavily on the traditional rhythms, melodies, and vocal styles of South Africa. When Africans were brought to America as slaves, they developed their own music that had roots in African traditions. American music with African origins includes blues, gospel, work songs, jazz, and more.

Listen with your class to some of these examples of African American music. What similarities and differences can you discover between Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s music and American music that came from similar roots?

Gospel
Harlem Gospel Choir: “O Happy Day”
www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzd0eCuVs7w

Prison camp work song
“Rosie” and “Levee Camp Holler”
www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiv0MY1FY5g

Jazz
Cab Calloway: “Minnie the Moocher”
www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mq4UTj4VnbE

Civil Rights Movement anthem
The Golden Gospel Singers: “Oh Freedom!”
www.youtube.com/watch?v=veiJLhXdwn8
• The official name of the country is the Republic of South Africa.
• South Africa is one-eighth the size of the U.S., almost twice as big as Texas, and 63 times the size of New Jersey.
• The population is about 55 million. The main ethnic groups are black African (80%), colored (multiracial) (9%), white (8%), and Indian/Asian (3%).
• There are 11 official languages, including English. Izulu is the most common, spoken by about 25% of the population.
• The form of government is a parliamentary republic. The people vote for members of Parliament, and then the Parliament elects the President.
• The country has three capital cities, one for each branch of government: Bloemfontein is the judicial capital, Cape Town is the legislative capital, and Pretoria is the administrative capital.
• Because South Africa lies below the equator, its seasons are the reverse of ours (for example, when we have winter, they have summer).
• The largest part of South Africa is a high, flat area called a plateau [pla-TOE]. The edge of the plateau forms the Great Escarpment, steep cliffs that slope down to a coastal plain. The eastern part of the Great Escarpment forms a mountain range called the Drakensberg.
• South Africa’s climate ranges from desert to subtropical. The western part of the country is currently undergoing a severe water shortage; in 2018, Cape Town nearly ran out of water altogether.
• South Africa has one of the world’s great wildlife sanctuaries: Kruger National Park. More than 500 bird species, 114 reptile species, 219 butterfly species, and about 150 different mammals live there, including lions, leopards, elephants, buffalo, and rhinos.
• South Africa is the only country in the world to voluntarily give up its nuclear weapons.
• South Africa’s mining industry is one of the largest in the world. Gold and diamonds are the best-known mineral exports.
• The world’s first successful human heart transplant was performed in Cape Town in 1967 by Dr. Christiaan Barnard.
• In South Africa, motor vehicles drive on the left side of the road—the opposite of the way it’s done in the U.S.
• As of 2016, South Africa had the fourth-highest rate of HIV/AIDS in the world.
The history of South Africa is the story of a long series of migrations, settlements, and displacements by different groups, each of whom brought their languages, cultures, and traditions. Some of the earliest human ancestors lived in the region perhaps as long as three million years ago. Fossil evidence shows the presence of modern humans going back at least 170,000 years.

The San (a nomadic people also known as Bushmen) reached the southernmost point of Africa about 2,000 years ago. Around 200-500 A.D., waves of Bantu peoples from West and Central Africa displaced the descendants of southern Africa’s Stone-Age inhabitants. By the 15th century, they had settled most of the farmable land. The Bantu comprised many different ethnic groups; two of them—the Xhosa and Zulu—were the major groups in the region when the first Europeans arrived.

After the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama opened the Cape of Good Hope spice route in 1498, Southern Africa became a regular stop for Europeans voyaging to and from the East. By the mid-17th century, Dutch traders had established a settlement on the site of present-day Cape Town. The settlers, known as Boers (meaning farmers), would develop their own culture and language, called Afrikaans. They imported large numbers of slaves from Madagascar, India, and Indonesia to work the land. As the Boers pushed north and east, they wiped out entire African tribes through introduced diseases and warfare.

Early in the 19th century, Shaka—also known as Shaka Zulu—emerged as great Zulu king and conqueror. During his reign, (1816-1828), his genius as a military strategist and innovator helped unite more than a hundred chiefdoms into a powerful Zulu kingdom. At the same time, his armies brought war and upheaval to Southern Africa, leading to a huge number of deaths and the forced migration of many tribes.

By the end of the 18th century, Dutch trading power was in decline. The British seized the opportunity to expand their colonies in Southern Africa. British settlers arrived in increasing numbers, splitting the white population into two rival groups, with separate languages and cultures. The British settled mostly in the cities, taking over politics, banking, trade, mining, and manufacturing, while the Boers largely settled on farms. When the British abolished slavery in 1834, about 12,000 discontented Boer farmers moved north and east, where they established their own republics. Continued conflicts between the two groups led to the two Anglo-Boer Wars, won by the British in 1902.

Diamonds were discovered in South Africa in 1866, and gold a short time later. The fight over these valuable resources further intensified the conflicts among the Boers, the British, and the indigenous peoples.

On May 31, 1910, the Union of South Africa was established, governed by Great Britain. Though whites were only about 20% of the population, they had total control, with little or no rights given to the indigenous African peoples. The Union was granted independence from Britain in 1931.
In 1948, the government passed legislation making official the racial segregation that had existed informally from the time of Dutch and British colonial rule. The system came to be known as “apartheid” (an Afrikaans word meaning “separation”). Under apartheid, every person was assigned a racial classification: black, white, colored, or Indian. Nonwhites were evicted from land designated for whites only, and forced into segregated “townships.” All aspects of life were segregated, including education, medical care, houses of worship, beaches, and other public services. The services black people received were vastly inferior to those enjoyed by white people.

The white minority government had an additional strategy for solidifying their power. They created ten small territories—called “homelands” or “Bantustans”—each one designated for a different black ethnic group. From the 1960s through the 1980s, as many as 3.5 million people were forced to leave their homes and move into the homelands. The Black Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 formally declared all black South Africans to be citizens of the homelands, even if they lived in “white South Africa,” and revoked their South African citizenship.

In 1961, white voters passed a referendum making South Africa independent from Great Britain. Apartheid laws remained in effect, despite opposition both within and outside South Africa. Anti-apartheid activists organized strikes, acts of public disobedience, and protest marches, which were violently suppressed by the government. One of the most prominent activists was Nelson Mandela, who served more than 27 years in prison for his role in the movement.

The international community began to exert pressure on the South African government to end apartheid. The United Nations imposed economic and political sanctions, and governments and organizations withdrew their investments in the country. The sanctions worked. In 1990, South Africa's white president, F.W. de Klerk, announced the repeal of the discrimination laws and a lifting of the ban on anti-apartheid groups. He also ordered the release of political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela. After four years of negotiations, a new interim constitution was passed in 1994. It established a democracy that gave men and women of all races the right to vote and to serve in government. That year, free elections resulted in a decisive victory for the African National Congress Party, with Nelson Mandela as president.

Mandela’s presidency saw the successful negotiation of a new constitution; a start on the huge task of restructuring the civil service and attempts to redirect national priorities to address the results of apartheid; and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up to investigate the wrongs of the past and resolve them peacefully.

Even now, South Africa still suffers the consequences of apartheid. It will be a long time before the black majority gains a significant economic benefit from their freedom, as economic inequality remains an overwhelming problem. Despite the scars of the past and the enormous challenges ahead, however, South Africa has made tremendous economic, political, and social progress.

“I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”
—Nelson Mandela
The members of Ladysmith Black Mambazo are proud of their Zulu heritage, which is reflected in their name. Ladysmith, their hometown, is in KwaZulu Natal, the South African province that is home to the country’s largest Zulu population. “Mambazo” is a Zulu word meaning “axe.” Overall, the Zulu are the largest ethnic group in South Africa, numbering 10-12 million people. The word Zulu can mean “heaven” or “weather.”

The Zulu clan was founded early in the 18th century by Zulu kaMalandela. Under the leadership of the brilliant warrior-statesman Shaka (1785-1828) they conquered or allied themselves with a number of other tribes; in 1818, they united them into a powerful Zulu kingdom.

In the 1830s, the Dutch settlers known as Boers arrived in the Zulu Kingdom. Conflicts over land and power led to bloody battles. Eventually the Boers were driven out by the British. The Zulu King Cetshwayo refused to disband his army and submit to British rule, leading to the brutal and bloody Anglo-Zulu War in 1879. The British ultimately won, and the Zulu Kingdom was eventually absorbed into the British colony of Natal.

During apartheid, the white government created the Zulu homeland of KwaZulu. Hundreds of thousands of Zulus had their homes confiscated and were forcibly relocated in KwaZulu. The government declared that the Zulus were now citizens of KwaZulu and not South Africa. In 1994, the year of South Africa’s first free elections, KwaZulu was joined with the province of Natal, to form what is now KwaZulu-Natal.

Today, Zulus are prominent in South Africa’s culture, politics, academics, and economy. Two of the country’s major political parties—the African National Congress and Inkatha Freedom Party—were established by the Zulus. Most Zulus identify as Christians, though many continue to hold onto traditional pre-Christian religious beliefs.

**ZULU LANGUAGE**

Although South Africa has 11 official languages, many people consider Zulu (also known as isiZulu) to be its “national” language, since more South Africans (about 8.5 million) speak Zulu at home than any other language.

Zulu is one of the African languages known for its unusual “click” consonants. You can hear them in this welcome video from KwaZulu Natal.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XAWXMvPV8
ZULU BEAD LANGUAGE

In everyday life, Zulu people generally wear the same styles of clothing as people in the United States and in many other parts of the world. For special occasions, however, they dress in traditional clothing, which is especially known for its colorful beaded decoration. Handmade Zulu beadwork is a craft practiced by the women of the tribe, with older sisters passing down the tradition to their younger sisters. (Men are not involved in making bead jewelry, but they do wear it.)

Beads were originally made from wood, bones and shells. Western traders introduced glass beads. Today all types of beads, including plastic ones, are used to make and adorn everything from necklaces to belts, skirts, and dolls.

The colors and patterns of Zulu beadwork are used to communicate messages about love, courtship, and marital status. From the beads, men can see whether a woman is engaged, married, unmarried, or has children or unmarried sisters. The patterns and colors can also tell what region a woman comes from and what her social standing is.

The basic geometric shape in Zulu beadwork is the triangle. The three corners of the triangle represent the family: mother, father and child. The point of the triangle facing down is the symbol for an unmarried man or boy, while a triangle with the point facing up is the symbol for an unmarried woman or girl. A married man is symbolized by two triangles joined at the point forming an hourglass shape. A married woman is shown by two triangles joined at the base making a diamond shape.

BEAD COLOR MEANINGS

Zulu bead artists use seven colors: black, blue, yellow, green, pink, red and white. Each color has two meanings, one positive, one negative (except white, which is only positive). When a color is used next to white, it takes its positive meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLOR</th>
<th>POSITIVE MEANING</th>
<th>NEGATIVE MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>marriage, rebirth</td>
<td>death, sadness, loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>faithfulness, hope</td>
<td>hostility, dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>wealth, fertility</td>
<td>jealousy, thirst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>contentment</td>
<td>conflict, illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>high status, promise</td>
<td>poverty, laziness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>physical love, strong emotion</td>
<td>anger, heartache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>spiritual love, purity</td>
<td>(none)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beadwork has a long history in South Africa! These shell beads, found at Blombos Cave on the Southern Cape coastline, are estimated to be around 75,000 years old.

TALKING IN BEADS

Use the Zulu color chart or create your own color chart as a class. Choose the bead colors that reflect your dreams, emotions, personality and character. String the beads together to create a decorative and informative necklace. (If you don’t have beads, you can cut out circles from different colors of construction paper or felt, then glue the circles to a piece of cardboard in the desired pattern.)

Sit in a circle with your classmates and try to read what each person is trying to tell you about themselves through the colors and patterns of the necklace.
DO & DISCUSS

APARTHEID AND SEGREGATION

Divide the class into two groups. One group will research the American Civil Rights Movement and create a list of the ways that segregation was used to enforce inequality in the United States. The other group will research the South African Civil Rights Movement and create a list of the ways that apartheid enforced inequality in South Africa. Using your research and the lists you created, compare the policies and effects of apartheid and segregation in voting rights, criminal justice, education, housing, public accommodations, employment, marriage, and transportation.

Then act out a conversation between a South African and an American about the similarities and differences between apartheid and segregation. Your conversation could be between actual historical figures (such as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., P.W. Botha, or George Wallace) or between fictional characters.

GROUP CHOREOGRAPHY

Get together with a group of your classmates and choose a Ladysmith Black Mambazo song (You can purchase songs online or look on YouTube.) You are going to create choreography (dance movements) for the song.

Start by listening to the song a few times to get some ideas for movements that would go well with the music. As you plan your choreography, you can think about whether you want everyone in the group to do the same movements at the same time (unison), or whether each person will move differently (non-unison). If you want, you can use a combination of both unison and non-unison movements. Experiment with different levels and shapes: high and low, circles, lines, and squares. Try different types of movement: sharp, soft, curving, straight, big, little.

Rehearse your choreography with the music until you can do it the same way each time, then perform it for the rest of the class.

GOLD MINERS SHAPE POEM

South Africa is among the world’s top-ten producers of gold. The country’s gold mining industry has long been criticized for the poor working conditions and low pay of the many Black South Africans who excavate the precious metal. Ladysmith Black Mambazo has a song, "Deep Down in the Mines," which they have dedicated to the men who work in the South African gold mines.

Create a shape poem about the mine workers. The poem will have four lines and ten words, arranged in an upside-down triangle shape. (See the example on the right.) All the words will have something to do with working in a mine or how the miners might feel. Starting from the top, the lines will be as follows:

LINE 1: Four adjectives
LINE 2: Three verbs
LINE 3: Two nouns
LINE 4: One more adjective

You can use this pattern to create poetry about other subjects from Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s music, too, or create a poem using a different shape.
DO & DISCUSS

The members of Ladysmith Black Mambazo work as a team to create their unique style of performance. You will see and hear them use several elements, including echoing, call-and-response, and ensemble movement. Here are some activities that will help you become familiar with these elements.

MIRROR

1. Get into pairs. Decide who will be person A and who will be person B.
2. With partners facing each other, person A begins making big, slow movements using only the upper body.
3. At the same time, person B creates a mirror image of person A by imitating their exact movements.
4. Switch roles, letting B be the leader and A the mirror. (You and your partner will continue taking turns leading and following throughout this activity.)
5. As you get better at the exercise, begin to experiment with levels and include your lower body in your movements.
6. Next, add some kind of sound to go along with your movements. Mirror both the movement and the sound.
7. Then try the mirror activity again, this time singing a song or tune in place of the sound.

CALL-AND-RESPONSE

Still working in pairs, experiment with call-and-response—a conversation in sound and movement.

1. Person A begins with a sound and movement. This time, instead of mirroring, B waits for A to finish and then responds with their own melody and movement in response to, (but not the same as) what A did.
2. Switch roles, the same way you did in the previous activity.

ECHO

1. Two pairs get together to make a team of four people. Choose one person to be the leader.
2. The leader makes big, slow movements while humming or singing a tune. Stop after about five seconds.
3. When the leader stops, the three followers echo (repeat) the leader’s movement and sound.
4. The leader immediately creates a new movement and melody, which is echoed by the followers.
5. Repeat this activity, giving each person in the group a chance to lead.

REFLECTION

- Did you enjoy these activities? Why?
- Which part of the activity was the hardest? The easiest?
- Did you prefer leading or following? Why?
- Did your teamwork get better as you went through the activities? Describe how.
- If you wanted to continue exploring these activities, what are some things you could add to make it more interesting and challenging?

LOOK AND LISTEN!

Some of Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s songs are sung in English, and some in Zulu. When you can’t understand the words, you can concentrate on other parts of the performance, such as the dancing, melodies, harmonies, tempo (speed) and the sounds of the words. After the concert, make a list of everything you noticed besides the words, and discuss how they contributed to your enjoyment of the show.
AT THE SHOW

BE A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER.

Going to see a show at the theater is not the same as going to a movie or watching TV. The performers will be right there with you and the rest of the audience, which makes it very exciting! It also means you have a special responsibility to respect the performers and the rest of the audience so that everyone can enjoy the show. Make sure to follow these rules:

• If you have a phone, make sure to turn it off before the show starts. Keep it off until the show is over.

• During the show, give the performers all your attention. Stay in your seat and don’t talk.

• Taking pictures or recording the show is not allowed.

• Don’t eat or drink in the theater. And no chewing gum, please!

BE A GOOD OBSERVER.

During the performance, pay attention to everything that’s going on onstage—not only the words, but the lighting, the way the performers move around on stage, how they’re dressed, and how they interact with the audience. Notice how all of these elements come together to create a unique experience.

Also try to observe how the performers interact with each other. What are some of the ways you see them working together as a team?
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WEBSITES

Ladysmith Black Mambazo official website
www.mambazo.com

Musicians In Their Own Words: Joseph Shabalala (7 minutes)

National Public Radio's "Zulu's Tip-Toe Choir Competition" (6 minutes)

Amazing Zulu Iscathamiya Choirs (2 minutes)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWkIsSKWhWc

South African History Online is a rich resource on the history, culture, and politics of South Africa. Includes lesson plans.
www.sahistory.org.za

Mandela: An Audio History - A five-part radio series documenting the struggle against apartheid through rare sound recordings, including the voice of Nelson Mandela himself. (13-15 minutes per segment)
www.mandelahistory.org

Beadwork from Southern Africa - Information about South African beadwork of different regions, featuring images from the collection of the Iziko Museums of Cape Town.
artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/beadwork-from-southern-africa-south-african-national-gallery/ewKSDPLRFbzfIg?hl=en

BOOKS


Mine Boy, by Peter Abrahams. Heinemann, 1989. This 1946 novel is the story of a young black man, newly arrived in Johannesburg to work in the mines, who learns to fight against the appalling conditions of racial injustice.