

ARTS OF PERFORMANCE



learning objectives

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- identify words and expressions that are distinctively Bermudian;
- define gombey and describe the tradition's roots;
- understand gombey dancing as a narrative form of storytelling;
- describe a gombey costume and the materials used to make one;
- reflect on what it means to be a gombey crowd member;
- define a calypsonian member; and
- describe how songs are created.

CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS

In this chapter, in addition to social studies curriculum links, there are readings, discussion questions, and activities that fit well with language arts, visual and fine arts, music, drama, dance, design and technology, and family studies.

In this chapter, students will delight in discovering the cleverness and roots of Bermuda's vernacular language. They will unmask the gombey and discover where this rich dance and musical tradition comes from, what the dances mean, and how the costumes are created, as well begin to understand the symbolism that permeates the whole tradition. They will also examine where musicians get their inspiration for writing songs. This chapter is designed to work with the *Bermuda Connections* music CD, Ron Lightbourne's essay "Gombey, Bands, and Troubadours," Vejay Steede's article on Bermudian reggae (in the Introduction chapter), and the CD song notes (in the Resources chapter) that cover a broader spectrum of Bermuda's musical traditions. Four lesson plans related to the CD are on the website.

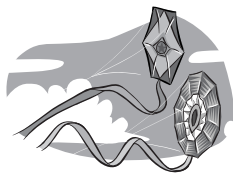


Bermuda regiment band at Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2001. Courtesy Smithsonian Institution.

Bermudian Ways of Talking, Singing, and Dancing

Performing arts are not just what you'll find in a concert hall or on a stage or what you learn in a formal class. They also include the impromptu music made by a group of musicians enjoying each other's company on a Sunday afternoon in the park, the stories your grandfather told around the dinner table and now your father tells, a conversation with a neighbour standing in the yard, and gombeys dancing through the streets. They include songs, dances, stories, and ways of speaking that as a youngster you learned by watching or imitating others.

Bermudians comment on society through their stories, choice of language, dances, and songs. A calypso song may make a jibe at family relations or the newest pastime of youngsters, or it might simply declare how wonderful Bermuda is. Although reggae has its roots in Jamaica, Bermudian musicians write lyrics that use Bermudian slang and make references to local neighbourhoods, with some even incorporating Christian messages. The gombeys dance and drum a history lesson that is Bermudian. Think about the way someone in your family tells a story, the types of music you listen to, the dances you enjoy, as well as performances you have seen in churches, at fairs, and at community and family gatherings. How did you learn the stories you tell and the songs you sing? What rituals are related to community-based musical and dance performances? How do they reflect the lifestyle and values of Bermudians?



Verbal Arts

The arts of performance include language. Bermudians use standard English, but also have a **vernacular** (local) language and switch back and forth between them more easily than a sailor changes tack. English, Caribbean, Portuguese, and American words, speaking rhythms, and **cadences** mingle together to create the sound of Bermudians talking. Think about the different ways you speak and when you might use formal English or flavour your speech with Bermudian slang. Ruth Thomas, of Southampton, founder of Mosaic, a spoken-word performance group, wrote about Bermudian language in the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival programme. She describes the roots and richness of Bermudian English:

The English language that Bermuda's first settlers brought with them has evolved into two main forms—a standard English and a local vernacular. Many Bermudians switch back and forth between them at will, depending on the situation. For example, standard English is used in professional settings and in writing, while vernacular Bermudian English is spoken on more casual occasions. Some people who always use the vernacular orally write in perfect standard English.

As much as any other aspect of culture, Bermudian speech reflects the islanders' connections with neighbours around the Atlantic. Early settlers to Bermuda came from various places in England and brought their various local accents and vocabularies with them. Bermudian speech also echoes influences from the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean.

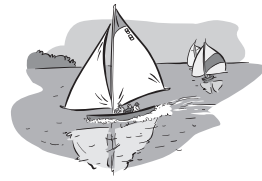
Portuguese speakers immigrated to Bermuda in the mid-1800s, first from Madeira then from the Azores. Most came without knowledge of English. Eventually, they added a different accent, rhythm, cadence, and even vocabulary to the English spoken on the islands. Some young Bermudians try to emulate the English of the Rastafarian community in Jamaica, reggae dub poets, or American rap artists.

In spite of evolutionary change in Bermudian English and the effects of frequent contact with other English-speaking countries, some elements from the past still linger. An example is the way Bermudian English sometimes interchanges the sounds /v/ and /w/; for example, "Vere is Villiam's violin?" for "Where is William's violin?"

Nicknames are another distinctive Bermudian language tradition. A person's nickname often derives from something associated with them. For example, a taxi driver who always picked up his clients at bus stops and charged them their bus fare was called "Bus Stop." For more on nicknames, see the "Being Bermudian" chapter.



Ruth E. Thomas, M.B.E., J.P. Courtesy Ruth Thomas.



Bermudian Expressions

Onion: Bermudian: Bermuda was once known for growing and exporting onions.

Bye: 1) a male child. 2) generic form of address: "We BYES wrote this book about us BYES and them BYES and we sold it to you BYES."

Rest it down: To rest something down means to put it down. Rest the book on the table.

Back-back: To back-back is to reverse when driving a car. "Back-back 'til I say, ho" is what someone says to guide a driver who is reversing into a parking space.

Cut cross: To interrupt someone with whom a conversation is being held. "Excuse me, I don't mean to cut cross you, but . . ."

Poor man's roses: Periwinkle (flower).

Dip up your dinner: Serve yourself or help yourself.

Fly dirt: Freckles.

Going home to watch my story: Expression used by someone racing home at the end of the work day to see a daily soap opera on television.

Putting on airs: Reference to someone who is acting in an uppity manner.

To rinse out: To launder a few items of clothing by hand as opposed to doing the weekly laundry.

The sky is making up: Dark clouds are forming.

A blow: Reference to bad weather. This could be strong winds or a hurricane or a gale. "The sky is making up. A blow might be coming."

Chopsing: Talking.

Webber: Peeping Tom (voyeur).



Cover: Bed clothes. This could be a sheet or blanket or bedspread.

Tea: Any drinkable hot liquid e.g., coffee, cocoa.

Drink: Any drinkable cold liquid e.g. soda, lemonade, juice.

First mind: Initial idea. "I should have followed my first mind" means "I should have done what I thought of first."

Full crazy, full, or fulish (foolish): Reference to someone whose thinking is skewed. "He thinks Bermuda has the best fish in the world. He's full crazy."

Onliest: Only. "This is my onliest hat" means "I have only one hat."

It tastes well: It is delicious.

Fine rain: Scarce; a reference to someone you do not see frequently. "I haven't seen you for a long time. You are like fine rain."

Dressed to kill: Smartly attired.

Laid out: Reference to preparation of clothes. "Have you laid out your uniform for school tomorrow?"

Coolish: Reference to cool weather. "It was hot this morning, but now its getting coolish." Or, "In November the nights are coolish."

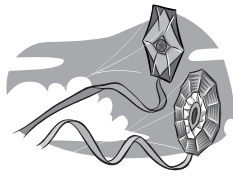
Dampish: Reference to damp or extremely humid weather. "Rain must be coming; it feels dampish."

Part toeded: Parrot toed. "That boy walks with his toes pointing in. He's part toeded."

Voose: Throw something at. "He voosed the ball at the catcher."

He had a good innings: Said of someone who lived a good, long life (term comes from cricket game).

Pokey: Someone who listens to gossip or spreads it is pokey.



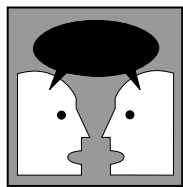
You Know an Onion by the Way He Talks

When you travel, often you can recognise someone else from your home by the way they dress, act, or speak. Mr Robert Horton tells a story about how Bermudians can tell a fellow Bermudian by the way he talks. He emphasises that the vernacular language of Bermudians crosses classes and races.

My mother was on a cruise in the Baltic Sea, and they were approaching one of the ports. She was on the deck with a Bermudian couple they travelled with. She heard a voice from the deck, and she knew, and turned to her friend and said, "There's another Bermudian on board!" They looked in the direction of where the voice must have come from, and there were dozens and dozens of white people, no black Bermudians. They certainly didn't recognise anyone. And they went over and said, "Someone here is from Bermuda," and this couple said, "Yes! We're from Bermuda!" It was a white Bermudian couple, upper middle class, you know, but my mother recognised [them as Bermudian] immediately in that setting. She heard the voice; she heard the expression. We do it no matter where we are, black or white.



Mrs Dorothea Horton on Sun Viking cruise in Baltic Sea. Courtesy Dorothea Horton.



Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever travelled away from Bermuda and heard someone that you just knew had to be Bermudian? If yes, what tipped you off?
2. How would you describe the way Bermudians speak? Give examples.
3. What has influenced the development of a Bermudian vernacular language?
4. Are there expressions schoolchildren use that others do not? What are they?
5. Like "Villiam" for "William," what are some other examples where the spoken accent changes the word from how it is actually written?
6. In addition to the expressions listed in the box, what other Bermudian terms can you think of?



Hey Bye!

1. Make a list of as many Bermudian terms as you can. Write their definitions next to them. Now use these to create a fun paragraph all in Bermudian slang. Be sure that it tells a story.
2. In small groups, read the paragraphs out loud and see if everyone understands them.



Not the Um-Um Players performing *Bermuda Word Chant* at the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. In back, left to right, Chris Broadhurst, Tim Taylor, Peter Smith, Fred Barritt. In front: Bruce Barritt. Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.

Having Fun with Words

Bermudian ways of speaking and ways of behaving are the inspiration for the Bermuda comedy troupe Not the Um-Um Players. They perform satires on Bermudian ways of life, and two members of the troupe published a book of conversational Bermudian entitled *Bermewjan Vurds*. Their piece, “Bermuda Word Chant,” plays off particular Bermudian expressions.

Activities

Bermudian Words

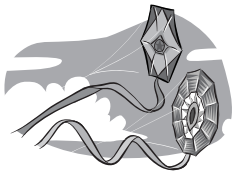
1. Add to the list of Bermudian words and phrases you started in class by asking your parents, friends, and people you come into contact with to add words and definitions to your list.
2. Look at *Bermewjan Vurds: A Dictionary of Conversational Bermudian* by Peter A. Smith and Fred M. Barritt. Are all the words on your list in the book? Have you heard all the expressions included in the book?
3. Create a comic strip in which all the characters use a lot of Bermudian terms in their speech.

Links

- Listen to Bermudian Word Chant on the *Bermuda Connections* CD.

“enh-enh, um-um,
chingas, aungh”

“micin’, bye-no-bye,
zappnin’, we’re hard”



Bermuda Word Chant

We speak English in Bermuda with a special inflection

We also have some very special expressions

enh-enh, um-um, chingas, aungh

When young kids get together and someone misbehaves

the others shake their hands and everybody says, enh-enh

um-um, chingas, aungh

When asking a question or pausing in a chat Bermudians fill the blanks with um-um like that

enh-enh, um-um, chingas, aungh

For a happy discovery, for a positive event

For a flash of inspiration, chingas is said

enh-enh, um-um, chingas, aungh

Your wife asks you something that she asks you every day

No sense using lots of words, aungh is all you say

micin', bye-no-bye, zappnin', we're hard

If we catch you daydreaming, if you make outrageous claims

or if you're staring into space, you micin' is the phrase

micin', bye-no-bye, zappnin', we're hard

A bye is a guy, could be young or old

Let him say something strange, bye-no-bye he'll be told

micin', bye-no-bye, zappnin', we're hard

We greet you with good morning, but other times of day

We aren't nearly so formal, zappnin' is what we say

micin', bye-no-bye, zappnin', we're hard

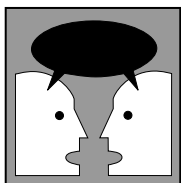
We like it, we're happy, we just played the winning card

We're the best, we're the champions, shot bye, we're hard

micin', bye-no-bye, zappnin', we're hard

Musical Connections

Music and dance are part of celebrations and part of relaxation and enjoyment of life. Bermudians have taken music traditions from around the Atlantic and made them our own. Bermuda's rich musical traditions include those by family and community-based musicians and dancers, such as the family-based masked gombey crowds (troupes), community marching bands, a bagpipe band that plays calypso, and a one-man band. Sacred musical traditions include an **a cappella** sacred-song quartet. Reggae, calypso, and traditional jazz are also part of the soundscape of Bermuda. We engage in musical performance at home, in churches, at bars, clubs and dancehalls, and on island sightseeing boats.



Discussion Questions

1. Does your family share music, dance, or storytelling together? If so, when and where?
2. What types of music, dance, or stories are practised in your family? How do you learn these traditions?



Place's Gombey at the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. Courtesy Smithsonian Institution.

He Took Off Following the Gombey!

The masked and vividly costumed gombey troupes, called crowds, have come to symbolise Bermuda. Their frenzy of drumming, energetic dancing, and glittery costumes attract all who encounter them. Traditionally, folks follow the crowd of gombey dancers when they come dancing down a street. You may end up miles away from home, spent from the high energy of being caught in their beat.

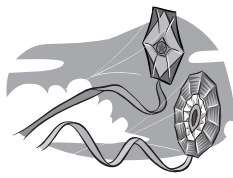
Gombey means rhythm, specifically drum rhythm, in an African Bantu language. Gombey dancer André “Woolly” Place, of Devonshire, explains how the drum and dancers are closely tied:

The drum expresses moods and tempers: happy, sad, and mad. The gombey is the rhythm of the drums. The dancers act out the spirit of the drum music.

No one is positive how the gombey tradition started in Bermuda. The tradition has roots in Africa and was brought to the Caribbean by enslaved populations. Dances and masquerades were developed. The tradition was adopted by, and became popular among the **bondpeople** in Bermuda. Some of the first gombey-type dancers in Bermuda were seen in St David's in the 1800s. They danced only after sunset using an improvised drum and did not put on special costumes. Originally they only danced on Boxing Day and New Year's Day, the two holidays bondpeople were not forced to work. The fancy costumes worn by gombey dancers today probably come from traditions brought to Bermuda in the 1920s by gombey or “Indian” dancers from the Leeward Islands. In Bermuda today, costumed and masked gombey dancers help usher in the spirit at all types of celebrations.



Warrior, Place's New Generation Gombey.
Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



Stories and High Steps

Some think the gombey dances served as a vehicle for bondpeople to express their feelings regarding their situation. The dances provided a way for them to dramatise and comment on their experiences.

Through the dances, they were able to mock the white-imposed system of slavery without their masters realising what was going on. Perhaps this mockery is the reason the dancers' identities are totally obscured by their costumes.

Allan Warner, of St David's, a third generation gombey dancer with the Warner Gombeyes, explains the different dances and how they are actually a narrative enactment:

We basically danced out our stories. We were telling stories, just like how we used to sit around a campfire in Africa and tell the stories about how we went out today and we hunted the lion and what we did to get the lion. We act out all those things.

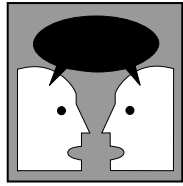
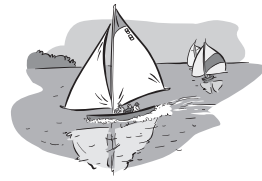
The biblical dance routines that we use were basically used to camouflage the other routines that we were using before the slave master came out or someone else that worked in the house that we felt would go back and tell the slave master what we were doing. So when somebody warned them that this person was coming, they would quickly change the structure, and they would start to dance either Samson and Delilah, or David and Goliath, and they would put these routines forward.

Louise Jackson, former dancer and founder of the Jackson School of Dance, researched the dance traditions of Bermuda's gombeyes. She states that while their beat is unique, their movements and steps definitely link the tradition to Africa and other gombey dance traditions of the Caribbean.

*[The dance is] very acrobatic, with high jumps and leaps and spins and splits and turns, which is African. That's totally African. Then you have the running step, which is the beginning of it. Once the group assembles and they start the masquerade or the centre part—which is when they start to tell the story—that's when you start to see the battle between the dancers. There are always two dancers who battle with each other using the dance steps, and that **choreography** is very combative and usually involves again, a lot of acrobatics: leaps, splits and jumps. They jump over each other and land in a split. They do a lot of turns. Then you have the group coming together dancing separately, everybody doing almost a solo. . . . When they finish the pattern dancing, people are throwing money. . . . Once they finish and they've picked up all the money, they have to let the people know we have to go on to the next neighbourhood, thank you, and goodbye. Their way of saying thank you and goodbye is a very stylised, formal bit of choreography in which they line up, do very high kicks toward the crowd in a line, [and] they bow. . . . Then they dance back, re-form, and go in a line to the next [location]. They usually do it in a square, two sides front and back, and that's very structured. Then once they finish that, they go off.*



A young member of Warner Gombeyes dresses for a performance. Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever seen gombeys dance? When and where? For what occasion were they dancing?
2. What kinds of steps were the gombeys dancing?

3. If you've seen gombeys dancing, could you read the story in the dance performance?

4. Why do you think gombey dancers hide their identity?



Analysing the Dance Patterns

1. Watch a gombey dance and note down the choreography. Be specific as to the order of the steps and the patterns being danced.

2. What is the story they are telling in their dance?

3. Now create your own dance based on the pattern you observed the gombeys' dance steps. Figure out what story your dance will enact.

Whistles and Drums

Each member of the gombey crowd plays a specific role. The captain is the leader, and he directs the rest of the troupe by using a whistle, occasional words, and pointing. He may use his whip to direct the crowd standing around or following the gombeys. He doesn't hit anyone with the whip, but instead uses it to warn viewers to move out of the way. He does this, for instance, when one of the warriors throws up a hatchet so the assembled watchers doesn't get hurt. Irwin Trott, of Warwick, is a member of the Warwick Gombeys. He explains the use of the whistle:

The whistle is primarily for the captain or the leader of the dance troupe. He uses his whistle to give commands. As you can tell with all that loud music, it would be quite difficult to give verbal commands to a troupe that maybe stretched 20 feet long. So it might be difficult to try and shout. So what they do, they use various short blows of the whistle, long blows of the whistle, meaning various commands. It may mean getting in a straight line; it may mean the starting of a group routine; it may mean ending of a group routine. It may mean calling out one individual dancer to perform his talents or calling out several to showcase in front of audience. So it has various meanings for it. But it is usually primarily for giving commands.



Captain, Places New Generation Gombeys. Courtesy Smithsonian Institution.



Musicians, Place's New Generation Gombeys at the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. From left to right: Dion Ball, Andre Parsons, Shaun Place. Courtesy Smithsonian Institution.

The dancers follow the lead of the musicians, who take their cues from the Captain. Mr Trott says, “The key point is having the drummers or the musicians keeping focus, or concentrating, on each dance step and body movement of the dancer, because he has to play with his step to complete the story which is being told.” Shawn Place, of Warwick, a member of Place’s New Generation Gombeys, further explains the close relationship between the dancers and the drummers, “Most of the time you will find that drummers have been dancers. They say the best drummers are former dancers.”

A gombey crowd usually includes one drummer playing a base drum and two playing snare drums. Both types of drums are played with sticks and not hands like in the Caribbean gombey groups. The base drum, called the “mother” or “lead” drum, provides the rhythm that the other musicians follow. The drums are struck both on their heads and on their rims to give distinctive sounds and beats. The troupe also includes fife, triangle, and bottle players. The snare drum, fife, and whistle were probably adopted from the British military band and mummer traditions.

CD Link

- Listen to music of Warner’s and Place’s Gombeys on the *Bermuda Conections* CD.



Alan Warner of the Warner Gombeys. Courtesy Smithsonian Institution.



TRAPPER

GOMBEY MUSICIANS

- 1 base drummer
- 2 snare drummers
- 1 bottle player
- 1 triangle player
- 1 fife player



WARRIOR

GOMBEY DANCERS

(based on information from: *The Bermuda Gombey: Bermuda's Unique Dance Heritage* by Louise A Jackson, 1987)

CAPTAIN: leader, teacher, organiser of the crowd (carries a whip, uses a whistle to give commands)

"WILD INDIAN": goes in front of the gombey dancers seeking houses where the gombey dancers can perform (carries a bow and arrow)

TRAPPER: tries to capture the Wild Indian (carries a rope)

CHIEFS: follow the Trapper (carry large tomahawks and shields)

WARRIORS OR CHOPPERS: follow Chiefs (carry small hatchets)



"WILD INDIAN"

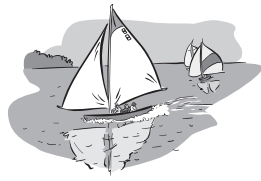
CHIEF

Photographs by Stephen D. Raynor.

Activities

The Spirit of the Gombey

1. How can a drum express moods? Using your hand against your desk, drum out a beat that expresses different moods. For example, try to express happy, sad, angry, in love, worried, and excited.
2. Working with a couple of other students, create a dance to illustrate a mood that a drum plays.
3. Start by performing your drum rhythm for your classmates and see if they can guess what mood it embodies. Don't tell them yet if they guessed correctly. Then perform your dance and see if they guess the same mood as they did for the drum beat. Afterwards tell them which mood the drumbeat and dance illustrate. Discuss why your classmates thought your drum beat and dance did or did not illustrate that mood.
4. Now that you are warmed up, create a dance and drum beat that tell a story. Perform this for your classmates and see how much of the story they understand.
5. Invite a gombey dancer and drummer to your classroom and ask them to teach you some of the traditional steps and rhythms used by the musicians.



Gombey Influences and Costumes

Bermuda's gombey costumes and rhythms combine references to North America, Africa, and the Caribbean. The tall headpiece and complex dance steps have origins in the West Indies. The drums, painted mesh mask, and velvet cloth reflect West African influence. The long hair, bow and arrow, and hatchet (also referred to as a tomahawk) derive from traditions of American Indians (which is why many older Bermudians refer to gombeys as "Indians"). Some say the feathers used in the head piece also reflect the influence of American Indians; others say Africans because peacock feathers are a symbol of pride and honour in West Africa. The use of a bass drum, snare drums, fife, and triangle reflect a British military influence. The combined result of these influences is what makes Bermuda's gombeys distinctly different from other gombey troupes in the Caribbean and West Africa.

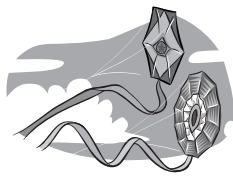
The costumes consist of a white sweatshirt; white gloves; colourful pants and skirt (apron) decorated with coloured fringe; a black velvet cape decorated with embroidery, ribbons, mirrors, and sequins; a head scarf wrapped around the neck; a sash around the waist; a painted mesh mask; and a tall headpiece decorated with glitter and sequins and topped with feathers (most often peacock). Gombeys wear sneaker boots, called "bow wow," making it easier for them to do the acrobatic leaps, jumps, and knee bends that are part of the dance steps. Popular today are high-top sneakers. Each of the gombey roles also carry their specific props, such as the whip and whistle of the captain and the bow and arrow of the Wild Indian.

The women in the gombey families are the ones who usually make the elaborate costumes, although the men often are the ones to make the headpieces and masks. Some men, such as Allan Warner, sew the costumes as well. Janice Warner Tucker, of Pembroke, part of the Warner Gombey family, began sewing gombey costumes when she was 13 years old. She tells how she learned:

I started out doing gombey costumes by watching the old costume makers, like Momma Hewey, Aunt Elsie Smith, Country James, and all those people around the Curving Avenue, Happy Valley, and Middletown, and my mother Audrey Warner Wade. I really loved the work I used to see my mother doing, and I always used to ask mom to let me help her out. So for a while she didn't, but then one night she was kind of tired, so I said, "Mom let me put some beads on for you." She said, "Okay, but do it right." She had to watch me. When she saw my work, she was quite pleased. Then I noticed after a while, mom would leave me with the work when she was taking a break. And it went on like that. After a while, I was doing more work than momma was doing, so it goes, whereas my father was dancing gombeys. [For] his last [troupe] Daddy needed nine gombey suits to be made. So momma decided, since I was so good, "You do the nine gombey suits for your father." And at that time there were no sewing machines. Everything was all handwork, and I got them all ready.

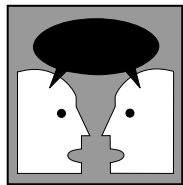


Janice Tucker sewing a gombey costume, 2000.
Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



The costumes are beautiful and colourful. The designs and pictures on them are created of embroidery thread, sequins, beads, mirrors, glitter, yarn fringe, and feathers. Traditionally the capes are made of black velvet, which some say represents the animal skins used to make capes in Africa before the time of slavery. The rich black velvet sets off the bright embroidery-thread colours and glittery objects. Originally the costumes were all hand stitched and took quite a long time to make. Today, sewing machines have cut down on the amount of hours of labour, but still a costume can take 30 or more hours to make, depending on how elaborate the design is. Mrs Tucker explains how she comes up with her designs:

I've never made two suits the same. If I have a gombey suit to make, I will sleep on it, and the design automatically comes to me. The next day, when I take up that work, I just go. And as I'm working, everything just keeps coming to me. The designs just keep coming, and I just design everything that comes in my head on that costume. . . . Some of my ideas come from years-back history, and then some of my ideas come from nature of Bermuda. Like the costume I just finished making for [the cruise ship] Crown Dynasty: I put a tropical design on it, and that was things that represent the island If a dancer has a design in his mind that he would like for me to put on his costume, then I would do that. I would put whatever they would like me to put on there. Sometimes, they may see a lion they want on there, or maybe a gombey.



Discussion Questions

1. How did Mrs Tucker start sewing gombey costumes?
2. Where does Mrs Tucker get her ideas for designs she puts on the costumes she makes?
3. What types of designs have you seen on gombey costumes?
4. Give one word that you would use to describe a gombey costume.

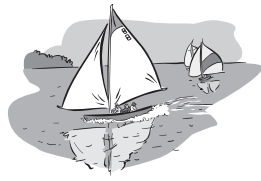
Activities

Gombey Costumes

1. Draw a design that you would want embroidered on your cape if you were a gombey dancer. Be prepared to explain the meaning of your design and why you would want it on your cape.
2. Try your hand at making a gombey cape and embroidering your design on it. Be creative and add sequins, glitter, ribbons, or anything else to make it beautiful.
3. Draw your own design for a gombey mask and then create it using wire, mesh, and paint.
4. Interview people who make gombey costumes about how they do it, how long it takes, where they get their ideas for the designs, and why they enjoy creating these costumes.
5. Put up a display of your gombey masks and capes. Invite members of a gombey crowd to come view them and tell you what they think about your creations. Would they want to wear them? Why or why not?

Video Link

- Watch Janice Tucker embroider a gombey cape and listen to her talk about the tradition on the *Bermuda Connections* video.



Being a Gombey

Originally gombey crowds were made up of men and boys from the same family. The gombey dances and rhythms were passed on from father to son. Today gombey troupes have expanded to include non-family members and sometimes women. Alan Warner describes a traditional gombey crowd as being “a group of men working together to learn about their past traditions and willing to teach these things to other young males in their entirety.” A gombey crowd can have up to 30 members, including dancers, young children in training, and musicians.



Andre “Woolly” Place, Place’s New Generation Gombeys. Courtesy Andre Place.

André “Woolly” Place dances with Place’s New Generation Gombeys. He explains how one learns to be a gombey:

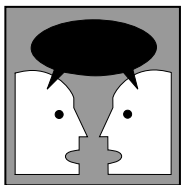
If a person wants to be a gombey, first you have to be fit enough to go up and down and run, and then to coordinate with the rhythm of the drum. First I’ll teach you the basic steps—the beginning, middle, and end—the single masquerade steps. You piece together the steps and learn the spirit of it. These are passed on from generation to generation. My grandfather taught me the steps by playing the melody on his flute.

Mr Place goes on to say what being a gombey means to him:

Being a gombey warrior gives me self-confidence. It helps me with my problems in life, with my stresses. [Being a part of a gombey crowd] teaches discipline, respect, and self-confidence. [Members of the crowd] can enjoy it because they are respected and loved for what they do.

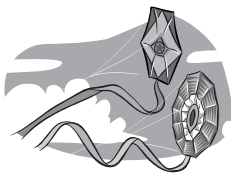
Allan Warner shares a similar view. He talks about the importance of maintaining the spirit of the gombeys. The costumes and dance steps may change over time, but the spirit must remain the same. He explains:

Well, there’s one thing that I tried to keep the same and that is the spirit of it. I try to keep the spirit of it alive. Because I feel that the spirit is what is most important—more important than the headdress, more important than the costume, more important than the drummers. The spirit of the gombey—that is the core of one’s soul. Acknowledging that claim is the pride that you achieve, working towards elevating that.



Discussion Questions

1. What is important if you want to be a gombey?
2. Do gombey dancers feel good about themselves? If so, why?
3. What do you do that makes you feel good about yourself and gives you self-confidence and pride in who you are?



Activities

Being a Gombey

1. Interview members of different gombey crowds and ask them questions about why they chose to be gombeys, how they learned, what their role is in the crowd, etc. Ask a dancer who made his costume why it has the designs it does. Ask both dancers and musicians what being a part of a gombey crowd makes them feel.
2. Watch a gombey performance and write a description of its action, sound, and emotion. Describe the dancers, musicians, and the audience. Describe the location and feel of the entire performance.
3. Based on your written narrative, paint a picture of a gombey performance. How will you show the emotion and feeling of the performance in your painting?

Activities

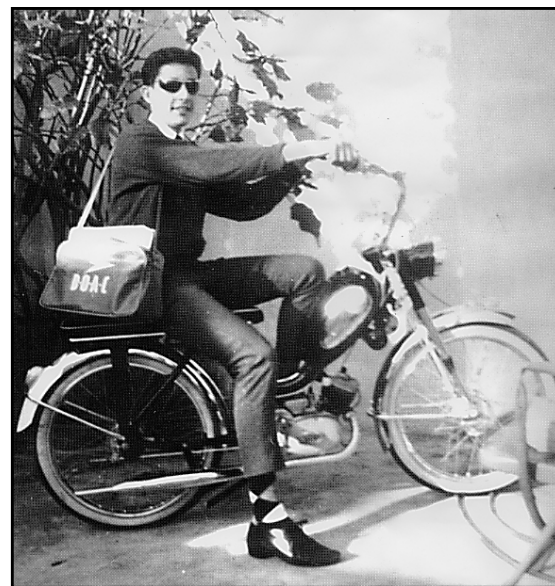
CD and Video Links

1. Listen to the Warner's and Place's Gombey selections on the CD. Can you pick out the instruments being played? Can you tell if there is a lead musician that the others follow? If so, which? What is the rhythm of each piece? Try clapping it out yourself. How would you describe the group's musical sound?
2. Watch the gombey performance on the video. Notice the dance steps and see if you can tell what story the gombeys are enacting. Notice the relationship between the captain and the dancers and the dancers and the musicians.

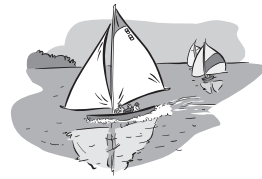
Diddlybop and the Gooseneck Handlebars

Talented Bermudian musicians found a venue entertaining tourists on small cruise (sightseeing) boats that run along the harbour/Great Sound area or down the North Shore close to land. Vacationers like danceable, happy music and love swaying to the island rhythms of calypso. Calypso was a popular, upbeat rhythm that came to Bermuda from the West Indies. As always, Bermudian musicians took what they liked and gave it a Bermudian flavour. Stan Seymour (Lord Necktie), of Southampton, played on the island sightseeing boats and in hotels with such great Bermudian musicians as Hubert Smith. He explains the origins of his popular calypso song, *The Diddlybops and the Gooseneck Handlebars*:

The Diddlybops and the Gooseneck Handlebars—*that's the kids that rode the bikes with the handlebars way up high and the seat down low. Well, it was a rainy day and I would usually be working on the cruise boat, but I was home and had my tape recorder, and I thought I'd just fool*



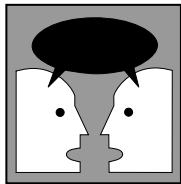
Warren Dyer rides to school on his black and chrome Cyrus with gooseneck handlebars (1964). The gooseneck handlebars were made wider by putting them in a vice and applying heat from a blow torch thereby making them easy to bend. Courtesy Shirley Pearman.



around and see if I could compose anything. That morning there was something in the newspaper about the diddlybops, the kids who were riding the bikes with the gooseneck handlebars, so I thought I would just kid around and see what would happen. I probably had one verse. It wasn't complete. I didn't think there was anything particular about it. So the tape sat in the corner for a few months.

Then one day I tried it on the cruise boat—I worked for the sightseeing cruises, the Rum Swizzle Cruise, and I thought I would try this song. I got to the beep-beep part and I noticed the reaction was very good. So the next day I tried it again, I tried it a few times, and then eventually I tried it in the floorshow 'cause I was working with Hubert Smith and the Coral Islanders at that time. So that's when I realised that, hey, this song, I kind of liked [it].

Somebody wanted to hear this song on the radio—because I had recorded it—and somebody requested Everest DeCosta, a local disk jockey to play it. He said that he couldn't play it because it was a rock 'n' roll programme, but he thought he'd do me a favour and just this once he would play it. So he played it. It could have been a match in the gas tank, boom-boom, you know. After he played it, the phone rang off the hook. Everyone was calling and saying, "Play that song again. I like it." It took off from there. Up until today, this song still seems to have magic. Some people when they see me, they call me "Diddlybop."



Discussion Questions

1. What inspired Mr Seymour to write his popular song?
2. Have you ever tried to write a song? What is involved?
3. Why did Mr Seymour try his song out so many times before he began to really like it?



Calypso Songwriting

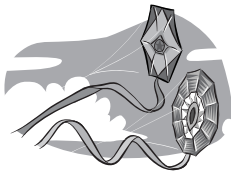
1. Listen to several calypso songs and write down their lyrics. See if you can figure out what is the structure of the song. What pattern do the lyrics follow? (You might want to listen to Stan Seymour's CD *One Man Band*.)
2. Pick something that is popular in Bermuda today and write song lyrics in a calypso style that tells a story about it. If you need inspiration for your subject, read through the newspaper. Match your lyrics to the melody of another calypso song or compose your own melody.
3. Invite Stan Seymour or another calypsonian to your classroom to help you write lyrics to your song.
4. Hold a calypso songwriting contest and invite Stan Seymour or another calypsonian to be the judge. Invite some musicians to perform the winning songs.

CD Link

- Listen to Stan Seymour perform *DiddlyBops* on the *Bermuda Connections* CD.



Stan Seymour ("Lord Necktie") performs for tourists.
Courtesy Department of Communication and Information.



The Diddlybops

by Stan Seymour

Here on the island there's a traffic rule,
no matter what you drivin' you got to keep
your cool,
but the Diddlybops like to break way
makin' speed records on de highway.

Chorus

The Diddlybops an' de gooseneck
handlebars, beep-beep,
zig-zag through de motor cars,
come roun' de corner four in a row,
up on de sidewalk I had to go.

A friend of mine name Johnnie Brown,
drivin' horse and carriage aroun' town.
Diddlybops drive him out of his mind,
dey' wouldn't stop to de stop sign.

Chorus

Diddlybops an' de gooseneck handlebars,
he must come from de planet Mars,
de seat so low, de handles so high,
like a man reachin' to de sky.

Chorus

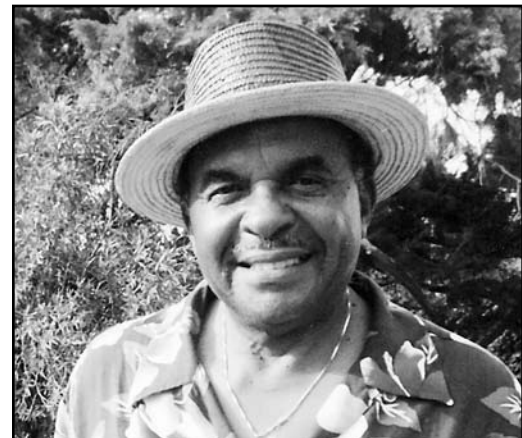
Riding my scooter the other day,
making twenty miles on the highway.
Something like a rocket shot past me
It was a Diddlybop on a spree.

Chorus

A Calypsonian

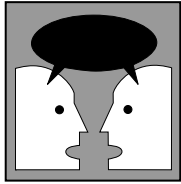
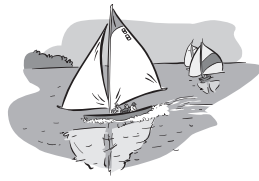
Mr Seymour considers himself more than a calypso singer. He thinks of himself as a calypsonian. He defines a calypsonian as someone that writes calypso lyrics, composes their melody, and sings calypso songs, whereas, a calypso singer only sings other people's calypso songs. Mr Seymour tells how he got into music and became a calypsonian:

I think it [music] was most likely in my genes. 'Cause I do the one-man band and my grandfather was a one-man band. So I think I sort of liked music from very young. I remember going to the grocery store one time, and there were two guys in there drinking and playing the guitar and singing "Marianne" [a classic calypso song]. I really liked it. I mean I was fascinated by this guitar sound. And then it was my desire to get a guitar. I worked as a carpenter in the early stages of my life. One of the carpenters was a calypso singer. He was from the West Indies and he liked to sing. I listened to him and listened to him and tried to copy his style of singing. So eventually I developed into a calypso singer, and, being a writer, a composer, I'm a calypsonian.



Calypsonian Stan Seymour ("Lord Necktie").

Photograph by Lisa Falk.



Discussion Questions

1. How did Mr Seymour become a calypsonian?
2. Do you play an instrument? How did you learn?
3. What is a one-man band?
4. Do you think there are any similarities to the way teenagers ride motor bikes today and the way the song describes teenager riding habits years ago? Why?

CD Link

- Listen to the *Bermuda's Musical Connections* CD and read the "Gombeys, Bands, and Troubadours" essay by Ron Lightbourne and Vejay Steede's article about reggae in the Introduction chapter to learn more about gombeys; community, military and dance bands; Bermudian calypso and reggae; and songwriting.

Chapter Link

- See the Resources chapter for *Bermuda's Musical Connections* CD song notes by Ron Lightbourne and Vejay Steede.

Website Links

Music Lesson Plans:

- March Music in Bermuda (covers military, march, and calypso music)
- The Gospel According to Bermuda (covers vocal sacred music)
- Bermuda's Swingin' Jazz (covers jazz music)
- *Chat Pon De Mic: Reggae Music in Bermuda* (covers reggae music lyrics and rhythm)

Video Link

- Watch the gombey performance and the interview with Janice Tucker on the *Exploring Bermuda Connections* video.

Now It Is Your Turn

Look around Bermuda! Check out the stories and performance traditions of regiment bands, military and brigade music and marches, church music, big bands, jazz, soca and reggae music, family gatherings, weddings, and . . .

LINKS

ARTS OF PERFORMANCE

Links to Social Studies Curriculum Goals and Subgoals

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- identify words and expressions that are distinctively Bermudian
(SS Goal 1, subgoals 1.1, 1.2, 1.4; SS Goal 2, subgoal 2.1; SS Goal 4, subgoals 4.1, 4.2, 4.3; SS Goal 5, subgoals 5.1, 5.3);
- define gombey and describe the tradition's roots
(SS Goal 1, subgoals 1.1, 1.2, 1.4; SS Goal 2, subgoals 2.1, 2.1; SS Goal 3, subgoals 3.1, 3.4; SS Goal 4, subgoals 4.1, 4.2, 4.3; SS Goal 5, subgoals 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.5);
- understand gombey dancing as a narrative form of storytelling
(SS Goal 1, subgoals 1.1, 1.2, 1.4; SS Goal 2, subgoal 2.1; SS Goal 3, subgoal 3.1; SS Goal 4, subgoals 4.1, 4.2; SS Goal 5, subgoals 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.5);
- describe a gombey costume and the materials used to make one
(SS Goal 1, subgoals 1.1, 1.2, 1.4; SS Goal 2, subgoals 2.1, 2.2; SS Goal 4, subgoals 4.1, 4.2; SS Goal 5, subgoals 5.1, 5.2, 5.3);
- reflect on what it means to be a gombey crowd member
(SS Goal 1, subgoals 1.1, 1.2; SS Goal 4, subgoals 4.1, 4.2; SS Goal 5, subgoals 5.1, 5.2, 5.3);
- define a calypsonian
(SS Goal 1, subgoals 1.1, 1.2; Goal 4, subgoals 4.1, 4.2); and
- describe how songs are created
(SS Goal 1, subgoals 1.1, 1.2; SS Goal 3, subgoal 3.4; Goal 4, subgoals 4.1, 4.2).



