

Activity

Step, Slap, Echo

Use this activity to get students moving, listening and creating together while exploring the rich, rhythmic tradition of gumboot dancing.

Materials Needed: one short video of gumboot dance, shoes, open space for movement



1. Gather your students in a circle and introduce them to gumboot by offering: “In South Africa, miners weren’t allowed to talk while they worked, so they used rhythms—stomps, claps and slaps on their boots—to communicate. Over time, this turned into a powerful dance form.” Play a short gumboot dance video and ask students to pay close attention to the sounds and movements, asking them: *What do you notice? What patterns repeat? How do the dancers use their whole bodies to make music?*
2. Ask students to close their eyes and listen while you (the teacher only) create a simple rhythm by clapping or stomping. Without moving, students can tap the beat on their legs or clap along. Invite them to try stomping their feet, clapping their hands or slapping their thighs along with the beat, focusing on how each movement creates a different sound.
3. Now it’s time for call and response! Create a short gumboot rhythm for your students using a combination of stomps, claps and slaps. Keep it simple at first—maybe a stomp, stomp, clap, slap on the leg. Have the whole group echo it back. Then, mix it up. Make it faster or slower, louder or softer, or add an unexpected pause. Once they’re comfortable, invite volunteers to take turns leading, making their own short patterns for the group to repeat.
4. Now, it’s time for a group challenge! Invite one volunteer to start with a short rhythm and movement sequence. Ask the next student to repeat it exactly but make one small change—maybe an extra stomp, a different clap or a tap on the thigh. Let the sequence travel around the circle, with each person adding their own twist. Encourage students to pay close attention so they can build on what came before them, creating a rhythm that feels like a conversation.
5. Split students into small groups and challenge them to take their favorite moves from the large group circle and turn them into a short gumboot-inspired routine. Encourage them to think like choreographers: *How can you use repetition to make your movements more exciting? Can you face different directions or use your facial expressions to tell a story or share an emotion you want your audience to feel?* Remind them that gumboot dance is about expression and energy, so confidence is key!
6. Have each group share their gumboot routine with the class. Encourage the audience to watch not just for the steps but for the rhythm and collaboration.



Teacher Tip

When facilitating this activity, you might want to use the video below to offer the origins of gumboot dance.

- [Learn About the South African Tradition of Gumboot Dance with Lucky Lartey](#)

Reflection Questions:

How did your dance change as each person added their own spin?

What other styles of dance or music use call and response?

If you turned this gumboot routine into a full performance, what story or message would it tell?