

# SING HOLIDAY

Lassana and Djanka Susso,  
Nick Lewis, Lynise Esprit, Idrissa Camara, River Music Project



## ABOUT THIS SONG

This song was composed collaboratively with singers and musicians from River Music Project and is sung in Mandinka—a language spoken by around 1.3 million people. The Mandinka are a West African ethnic group primarily found in southern Mali, the Gambia and Guinea Bissau. The words are often paradoxical, slightly absurd, seemingly nonsensical and basically suggest that the ways of the world are a mystery that man cannot always explain.

## THEMES/SUBJECTS

Celebration / world / heritage

## CURRICULUM KEY LINKS

Languages, Literacy & Communication  
Humanities  
Expressive Arts

## DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

### Vocal range

An 8th

### Vocal format

Unison/verse, call and response structure

### Musical elements

Call/response, Structure and form

### Musical characteristics

Verse and chorus, repeating melody with call and response element

## Warm-up Exercises

- Ask learners to breathe deeply and hiss or blow out slowly; count how long learners take to blow out. Repeat this exercise, encouraging learners to improve on the previous time.
- Ask learners to stand in a circle and copy your facial expressions, from glum and long to open and bright. Make a big smile and show the cheeks and corners of the mouth lifted. Make big alert eyes and high eyebrows, then back to closed eyes. Ask individuals to be the leader and the rest of the group to follow their facial expressions.
- Demonstrate the characteristic rhythm of the song. Clap the rhythm and ask learners to clap back. Sing the rhythm to the words 'Sing Holiday oh Sing holiday.'



## Suggested key links with other Areas, cross-cutting themes &/or local, national and international contexts

- Mandinka is spoken by more than 1.3 million people and has its own language system. There are versions of the Latin and Arabic scripts for writing Mandinka. The Latin script is official, but the Arabic script is used by more people, and is older. Find out more about it. How is it similar and different to the letters and sounds and phonics you know?
- The word *Dunya* is a word for world that recurs in Hindu and Arabic cultures as well as in Mandinka and has profound connotations and meaning for many cultures throughout the world. In Islam it refers to the temporary and fleeting nature of the life of this world, as opposed to the eternal realm of the afterlife, known as 'akhirah'. Find out more about the different views from different cultures around the world. What might *Dunya* mean to you?
- Bafatá is the hometown of Djanka - the singer and one of the authors of the lyrics. It is known throughout Guinea Bissau for the crocodiles that patrol the river banks. Ask any person from Guinea Bissau and they will know! Find out more about the region. Compare the banks of your local river with the banks of the river Gêba that runs through Bafatá.

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## Teaching and Learning

- 1 Listen to the piece all the way through. Ask the children what they notice about the piece. (Repetitive phrases, call and answer, repetition of 'Sing Holiday' at the end of each line etc.)
- 2 Start by learning the 'Chorus' section: Sing Holiday on the first screen. This comes down a scale in the first line and is repeated in line two. Use the 'I Sing, You Sing' technique to learn this line by line, or play the track on the screen, pause and toggle back to repeat for the children to join in.
- 3 Once comfortable with this, play the song through and join in with this section every time it is repeated. (Screens 1, 3&4, 6&7, 8&9)
- 4 Next, toggle to Screen two and listen to the 'Verse'. This is the 'call and response' aspect. Play again and encourage the children to join in with the 'Sing Holiday' response every time it is sung.
- 5 Learn the words of the verse 'call' aspect by firstly saying the words in rhythm using the 'I say, you say' technique. Watch out for the third line where the rhythm is trickier – it comes in immediately after the 'Sing Holiday' in line two. This may need repeating several times until confident.
- 6 Once the rhythm has been learnt, sing each line using the 'I Sing, You Sing' technique or play each line and toggle back to repeat with the children singing along. Repeat this a few times until confident with the melody.
- 7 Repeat this technique to learn Verse 2 and 3.
- 8 Once completed, sing the song through. You can split the class into 'call' and 'response' groups to highlight this aspect.

## Integral Skills

- The piece has a three chord accompaniment that repeats throughout the piece. Can children identify these three 'bass' notes (B, E, A) on tuned instruments? Can they play these as an accompanying bass line, changing at the right time through the song? To further extend their skills, children could add the chord triad or create an appropriate repeating ostinato to accompany the piece.
- The song's call-and-response nature is distinctive to African music. One voice sings a short melodic phrase, and that phrase is echoed by another voice. Look at the meaning of the words which are available under the lyrics tab. Verse 2 and 3 are basic impromptu introductions to the musicians. Can children write their own call lyrics to fit the verse section and all respond with 'Sing Holiday'.
- African music is highly improvised. A core rhythmic pattern is typically played, with drummers then improvising new patterns over the static original patterns. Ask children to experiment on classroom percussion instruments and improvise their own rhythm. Create a call and response pattern using tuned or untuned percussion in a similar style. Can they play along with the piece keeping to time, rhythm and style?

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## Statements of what matters:

- Exploring the expressive arts is essential to developing artistic skills and knowledge and it enables learners to become curious and creative individual•
- Creating combines skills and knowledge, drawing on the senses, inspiration and imagination•

- A kora typically has 21 strings, which are played by plucking with the fingers. It combines features of the lute and harp. Further investigate this traditional instrument and the way it is played. How does it compare with other countries' traditional instruments?
- The song begins with an instrumental virtuoso introduction called a birimintingo, characterised by fast, virtuosic, improvisatory runs. This is played on the kora, a stringed instrument used extensively in West Africa. Find out more about the birimintingo and the kumbengo and why is it important in Mande music.
- The Mandinka are the descendants of the Mali Empire. Its inhabitants didn't cultivate written language, rather maintaining knowledge orally. They were musicians, and their primary role was to share the knowledge and traditions of the community, including histories, proverbs, and laws. This is a process that carries into the present day. They continue to celebrate their common heritage through story and song. Find out more about this and the important role story-telling through song plays in the Mandinka culture.

## Assessment for Learning:

- Responding and reflecting, both as artist and audience, is a fundamental part of learning in the expressive arts•

## Questioning

### Tool: Think-pair-share

- What kind of atmosphere does this song create? How?
- What is the structure of this song? Explain your answer.
- How does the composer create texture in the piece?

## Feedback

### Tool: How to improve

Give learners temporary comments on areas they need to develop. To improve their accuracy of rhythm, learners may need to revisit clapping in time to the piece in 4 steady beats before attempting more complex rhythms or improvising. Give learners time to act upon these comments during the session, and then comment again to see if they have been successful.

## Self- and peer assessment

### Tool: Learner-to learner dialogue

Ask learners to take it in turns to be the teacher when discussing the performance and to ask questions. You may need to give them some suggestions of possible questions, for example:

- Was this a hard or easy song to learn? Why?
- What do you like/dislike about this song?
- How did you find writing your own lyrics?

This song was a collaborative creation with River Music Project.

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