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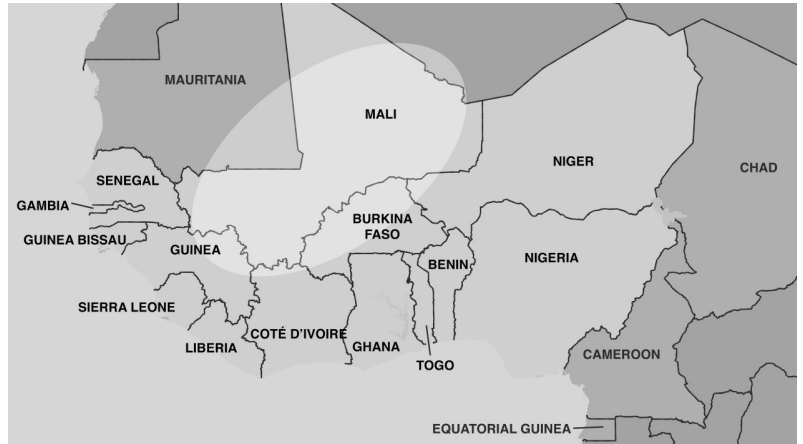
**WEST AFRICA:**

  
**AN OVERVIEW** 



***The West African Region***

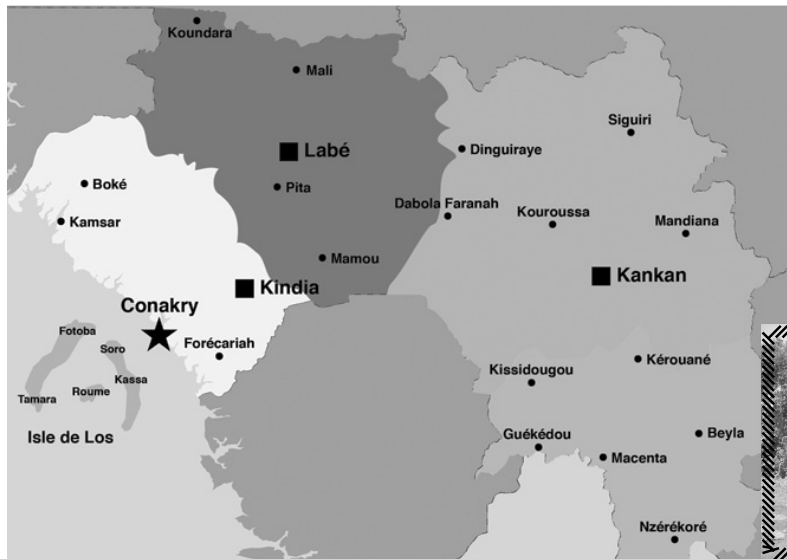
West Africa covers a vast area of the sub-Saharan region of the African Continent often referred to as the “Bulge of Africa.” The colonial boundaries of the 14 contemporary countries cut across ethnic and cultural lines, often dividing single ethnic groups and even past empires into many different sections. West Africa features a widely diverse geographical landscape and a multitude of ethnic groups, each with its own language. Each ethnic group has unique musical instruments, rhythms, songs, dances, and stories that help define and preserve their cultural identity.



*Mali Empire (12th-14th Century)*

***The Mandé Ethnic Groups of the Mali Empire***

The instruments, rhythms, songs and dances of the WRAP program all originate among the Mandé speaking ethnic groups who trace their heritage directly to the former Mali Empire of the 12–14th centuries. The Mali Empire was famous for its scholarship, tremendous wealth and amazing music and dance. Today, Mandé speakers inhabit portions of the present-day countries of Guinea, Mali, Cote d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Senegal. The major Mande ethnic groups responsible for the traditions learned in the WRAP program are the Malinke and Susu, largely located within the country of Guinea.



***Guinea and the Isles de Los***

The Republic of Guinea is a beautiful, vibrant and culturally rich country, with four distinctive geographic regions and home to over 36 different language/ethnic groups. While major cities like Kankan, Labe and the capital city of Conakry boast many modern amenities, most Guineans live in small villages, in much the same way they have for centuries. The WRAP program, in conjunction with the Foré-Foté School of Drum and

Dance, has developed a special relationship with the small Susu fishing village of Roume—the smallest of the three inhabited islands known as the Isles de Los, located just off the coast of Conakry.



***Did You Know?***

*Roume was called Crawford Island until the end of the 19th century, named after the notorious slaver, Crawford, who was executed in an 1850 uprising that liberated the former slaving base. Tales of treasure buried by Crawford and his men are said to be the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson’s famous novel Treasure Island.*



# WEST AFRICAN DANCE BASICS



West African dance is a highly energetic, acrobatic, powerful, yet graceful, art form. While dance subtleties take years of practice to develop, basic movements can be performed rather quickly by students with little or no previous dance experience. The following are some brief guidelines for teaching West African dance.



## Group Formation: Introducing the Steps

- ☐ Arrange students in staggered lines behind you so everyone can see clearly. Periodically rotate students so everyone has a chance to be in front.
- ☐ Teach the steps with your back to the students. It's easier to learn the dance by shadowing than by mirroring.
- ☐ Isolate the foot patterns, then the arms, then combine the feet and arms.
- ☐ Once students are performing the feet and arm movements together, add fine points such as hands, hips, shoulders, head, and eyes.
- ☐ Always start and stop movements with the break to reinforce students' understanding of how to respond to the signal within each step. (The signal can be vocalized when teaching without music.)



Note: In this setting, a slower (practice) tempo is common.

