

Dances of Sāmoa

by Toleafoa Avauli Peter Setefano

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Overview

This article describes three well-known dance forms from Sāmoa. The article is accompanied by colourful, high-energy photos of students from a Porirua primary school performing the slap dance and the sāsā.

The article features some of the history of the dances and it also provides opportunities for an in-depth exploration of the relationship between the heroes of the dances and the stories that each dance tells.

Customary Samoan values are shown through the students' commitment to their culture group and their enthusiasm and pride in their performance.

The article complements the story "Uncle Tino" in this issue of the *School Journal*. The three dances featured in that story are described in this article.

Texts related by theme "Uncle Tino" SJ L2 Oct 2012 | "A Silent World" SJ 2.2.02 | "Mele's Money Dance" SJ 1.1.10

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students' prior knowledge

figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification

some words or phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and/or written explanations

Dances of Sāmoa
by Toleafoa Avauli Peter Setefano
(with photographs of students from Holy Family School, Porirua)

In Sāmoa, dance plays a big part in the culture of the people. It helps to show who they are and adds richness to their lives. Three of the most beloved dance forms of Sāmoa are:

- ★ the fa'ataupati, or slap dance
- ★ the sāsā, or posture dance
- ★ the siva afi, or fire dance.

The Fa'ataupati (Slap Dance)

This dance is usually performed by young men. Sāmoa is a country that has many mosquitoes. The fa'ataupati is based on the action of swatting mosquitoes on the body. You need to have a good sense of rhythm for the fa'ataupati.

The dancers carry out the movements together and in time to the rhythm. Often they follow a leader. They use their bodies as percussion by slapping their thighs (vae), chest (fafafata), and shoulders (tau'au) and by clapping (pati). Mostly the tempo of the dance is fast.

other visual language features that support the ideas and information, for example, text boxes or maps

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

Possible curriculum contexts

CURRICULUM (Social Sciences)

Level 2 – Social Studies: Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

Possible reading purposes

- To find out more about three of the dance forms of Samoan people
- To compare different Samoan dances and their purposes
- To evaluate how the author organised and presented information.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

Possible writing purposes

- To describe and explain a dance or another art form that you know or that is special to you
- To create a table to compare different types of dances and their purposes, across cultures
- To report on a cultural event
- To describe the history of a particular form of dance that you know about.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- A number of phrases and words from gagana Sāmoa, followed by an English translation
- Possible unfamiliar words, including “mosquitoes”, “swatting”, “percussion”, “tempo”, “musical backing”, “energetic”, “wringing”, “fibre”, “generations”, “neighbouring”, “popularity”, “protective”.

Possible supporting strategies

Familiarise yourself with words in gagana Sāmoa (the language of Sāmoa) and how to pronounce them. Depending on the knowledge of your students, you may need to provide support for accurate pronunciation and meaning. You could use an online resource such as <http://pasifika.tki.org.nz> or staff, students, parents, or other community members.

Each gagana Sāmoa word is accompanied by an English translation, and you may need to explain this to the students or model how to read them. It may benefit some students to revisit these sentences, as the bracketed translations could interrupt reading fluency.

Preview any words that you think will be unfamiliar to your students. Prepare a vocabulary list of key words. For each word, include a simple definition in English and/or a picture and a simple example sentence. Give pairs of students all the words and the example sentences and have them match the words to the correct definitions.

The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction, pages 39–46, has some useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge of Pasifika culture and traditional dances
- Knowledge of cultural performances
- Knowledge of gagana Sāmoa
- Knowledge of fa’asāmoa (the culture of Sāmoa).

Possible supporting strategies

Refer to the teacher support materials for “Uncle Tino” to find out more information about Samoan customary values. Students, staff, parents, or others in your community may have valuable knowledge to share and to support your students. The Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs can also provide useful guidance and contacts.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Gagana Sāmoa terms for the dances
- The report structure
- Variations in verb forms, for example, on page 24, which includes present, present perfect passive, and “would + verb” for past habits
- Adverbs of frequency and time: “usually”, “often”, “originally”
- Many passive verb forms, for example, “is performed”, “is based on”, “was performed”
- Abstract ideas/figurative language: “grown in popularity”, “dance plays a big part”
- Use of an adjective as a verb: “to perfect”
- Use of a noun changed to an adjective: “neighbouring”.

Possible supporting strategies

Preview the text, beginning with the title and names of the dances. Support the students to notice that the text is organised around these three dances.

Explain how the tense changes on the last page. Tell them that the verb form “has been performed” suggests that something happened in the past and still happens now and that the form “would + verb” can be used to refer to habits in the past (not to things that only happened one time).

The abstract ideas or figurative language may need direct explanation. As with other examples of figurative language, the meaning is carried in the whole phrase rather than in individual words. Students may know of other similar expressions in English, or in their own language, which have a figurative rather than literal meaning.

For students who find this text challenging, you could conduct a jigsaw reading and have students use a graphic organiser. After reading page 18 together, divide the students into three groups. Assign one of the dances to each group. Have each group read about their dance and work together to fill in the relevant section of the graphic organiser. Then have students work with a partner to share their information and fill in another section of the graphic organiser. Swap the pairs around so that they repeat this process to fill in the third section. Finally reread the text as a whole group and agree on a shared version of the organiser.

Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences (Level 2 – Social Studies: Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.)

English (Level 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

Text excerpts from “Dances of Sāmoa”

Students (what they might do)

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

The Fa’ataupati (Slap Dance)

This dance is usually performed by young men. Sāmoa is a country that has many mosquitoes. The fa’ataupati is based on the action of swatting mosquitoes on the body. You need to have a good sense of rhythm for the fa’ataupati.

The dancers carry out the movements together and in time to the rhythm. Often they follow a leader. They use their bodies as percussion by slapping their thighs (vae), chest (fatafata), and shoulders (tau’au) and by clapping (pati). Mostly the tempo of the dance is fast.

*The students use the heading to **predict** what the paragraph will be about. They **locate information** to confirm their prediction. They use the context of the sentence containing “percussion” to work out its meaning, and they **make connections** to their knowledge of text structure and punctuation to work out that the words in brackets are translations.*

*They **think critically** about the sentence “Often they follow a leader” to **infer** that dance must be very fast and that leadership is important for ensuring that everyone stays in time.*

The sāsā is a very energetic dance for men, women, boys, and girls. Although dancers usually perform the sāsā sitting down, they use their whole body in the dance. Their movements show everyday activities in Sāmoa, such as greeting friends and going swimming. The dancers’ hand and leg actions must be exact. Often the sāsā is performed in time to the beating of pātē (wooden slit drums), tins, or fala.

*The students **locate information** about how the dance is performed and compare this with fa’ataupati. They use the sentences “The dancers’ hand and leg actions ...” and “Often the sāsā is performed in time to the beating ...” to **infer** that the dance is quite difficult. They **ask and answer questions** about the statement that the movements show everyday events to **infer** that Samoan people use dance to communicate and tell stories.*

The siva afi, which features a dancer with a flaming torch, has been performed in Sāmoa for many generations. Traditionally, the pule nu’u (village mayor) would invite a neighbouring village to a poula (social evening). Different groups from each village would perform. The last to perform would be the taupou (village princess).

*The students **locate** the modal verbs “would” in the sentences, and with prompting, conclude that “would” is used to express habits and routines in the past. They **evaluate information** in the paragraph to **infer** that traditionally, and in present times, dance has an important role in connecting people and communities across Sāmoa.*

PROMPT the students.

- What does the heading suggest that the paragraph is about?
- What will you look for as you read this paragraph?
- How will you know if your prediction is correct?

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students’ understanding of the translations.

- Why are some words in brackets?
- How do you read them?
- How do they help you?

ASK QUESTIONS

- Why do you think they follow a leader?
- What would happen without the leader?
- What clues tell you that a leader is probably needed?

ASK QUESTIONS

- What are the differences between the sāsā and the fa’ataupati?
- How hard or easy do you think it would be to perform? Why? What information in the text supported your answer?

MODEL how to ask questions of the text.

- Asking questions as we read is a good way of thinking critically about the information. So my question is: Why do they show everyday activities in their movements? The answer is not in the text, so I need to make an inference. Based on what I have read, and on what I know about the cultural values of the people of Sāmoa, I think that dance is used to tell stories and to show people they are welcome.

PROMPT the students.

- What do you notice about the use of “would” in this paragraph?
- How and when is it used?
- Turn to your partner and tell them what you think it means.

ASK QUESTIONS

- What traditional practice was carried out in the past?
- How do we know that it has been happening for a long time?
- What does this tell you about the importance of this dance?
- What other information can you find in this paragraph about Samoan values that are expressed through performance?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve used your prior knowledge to make that inference. See if you can find information in the surrounding sentences to support it.
- It was great that you used the context to work out that word. You are nearly right. Have another look at the ending. Notice that it ends in “ic”. What word do you think it is?

METACOGNITION

- I saw you reread the sentence. How did that help you to read that section with more understanding?
- What clues helped you to work out what values are expressed through dance?
- What would you like to ask the author of this text? Why?

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.)

Text excerpts from “Dances of Sāmoa”

In Sāmoa, dance plays a big part in the culture of the people. It helps to show who they are and adds richness to their lives.

- the fa’ataupati, or slap dance
- the sāsā, or posture dance
- the siva afi, or fire dance.

These movements depict making ‘ava.

1. Amata ona palu le ‘ava (Starting to mix the ‘ava)



Examples of text characteristics

INTRODUCING THE TOPIC

An engaging opening paragraph allows the reader to connect with the text. The use of “you” to speak directly to the reader is another way for the writer to connect with the audience.

USE OF ANOTHER LANGUAGE

Other languages are often used in English texts, especially when the topic relates to another country. Using another language can give writing authenticity and is also important for valuing specific cultural concepts, ideas, events, or items.

LABELLED DIAGRAMS

Visual features such as a labelled photo or diagram can help readers understand a complex explanation. The labels show the steps, and the text explains what they are, how they work, or why they are important.

METACOGNITION

- Share your writing with your partner and talk about two places where you made changes and explain why you made them.
- Tell your partner what was hard about writing your report. What do you need to work on for your next piece of writing?
- How did you work out what you needed to show using a diagram or photos?

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students form their writing intentions.

- What is your topic? Why are you writing about this?
- Who is your audience and how are you going to make them want to read your article?
- What kind of text structure will best suit your purpose and your audience?
- What knowledge can you assume your audience will already have about the topic?

EXPLAIN to the students that using another language in their writing can add authenticity. For some students, it may be extremely valuable to use their own language to explain particular events or feelings, especially when they are writing about a cultural activity.

PROMPT the students to think about the sort of support they need to provide the reader.

- How will your reader know what you have written?
- Would a glossary be the best support, or would a translation provided in brackets be the best support?
- Can you explain the meaning within the sentence?

MODEL the use of the labelled photos to support understanding.

- I can use the photos and the text to help me understand the dance movements. The labels describe what is shown in the photos and give me an understanding of what the movement is describing.
- You may need to help students decide which features are best described in words and which need an illustration. Use examples from other *School Journal* articles to model different ways of using diagrams.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I can see how you’ve used the criteria to check your use of cohesive devices in these two paragraphs. Use the criteria to check your third paragraph and see if you need another linking word.
- You’ve added “would” to this sentence here. It really makes me think that the dancers probably had red marks on their chests after the dance.



Writing standard: by the end of year 4



The Literacy Learning Progressions