



Rishile Gumboot Dancers of Soweto.

## South African Gumboot Dance

*A jump, a slap, a jingle, a scream - The soaring rhythm of the gumboot theme.*

*A kick, a whistle, a fast command - It aint no good if it got no sound!*

The gumboot dance developed from traditional African roots, to become a part of urban South African working-class culture. The practice began with rural laborers who came to work at the gold mines of Witwatersrand in South Africa. They brought with them strong traditions of **rhythm, song, and dance**. Facing oppression and hardship at the mines, including punishment if they talked to each other while working, they were forced to adapt and **create new forms of communication and entertainment**. The fact that many ethnic groups and languages existed side by side also contributed to developing their associations through the **shared language of rhythm and music**.

Faced with this repressive regime, workers adapted traditional dances and rhythms to the only instruments available - their **boots and bodies**. It was not unusual for these performers' songs, sung in the workers' native languages, to openly mock their bosses and criticize wages and conditions, while the bosses listened on, blissfully ignorant of the content.

Gumboot dance is now a popular art form performed worldwide to entertain and pass on elements of South African history to new generations and other cultures. Gumboot dancing recently featured in the City of Toronto as a part of the large international productions, *African Footprint* and *Umoja*. Like many **folkloric art forms**, it is adapted to the modern contexts in which it is performed and also provides the basis for Stepping (a dance style associated with Hip Hop culture) as seen in the recent film *Stomp the Yard*.



Prepared by HOZA!

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# Starting Points for Discussion

Movement	Gumboot Dance	Contemporary Culture
Who dances?	Where did it originate?	What do we mean by contemporary culture?
When do we dance?	Who did it?	What style/s of dance would you characterize as contemporary dance?
Why do we dance?	When?	How has the South African Gumboot Dance influenced (or been influenced) by contemporary dance culture?
What is dance?	Why?	South Africa Today What do you know? What are the biggest challenges? Who faces these challenges? What is being done? How can we help? Do you think art or dance expression can play a role?
What are some elements of dance choreography	Why and how is it still practiced? Is it still a relevant dance form?	Please think of two questions of your own, that you would like answered during our time together.  1)
What dances forms do you know?	How do you feel when you Gumboot Dance?	2)

