

# Nefertiti Burton

## Arts Programming Overview + Teaching Artist(s) Bio

### Teaching Artist Bio

Nefertiti Burton is Professor Emerita in the Department of Theatre at the University of Louisville. Her teaching, directing, writing, and storytelling focus on the experiences of people of the African Diaspora. She has taught performance workshops in Senegal, Brazil, and South Africa and has performed and directed in regional theatre and off-Broadway as well as in international venues including Adelaide, Australia; Beijing China; and Grahamstown, South Africa. Burton has led study abroad tours with students, faculty and staff to South Africa, China, and Cuba.

Burton holds an MFA in Directing from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a Research Certificate from the Community Fellows Program of Massachusetts Institute of Technology where she studied Media/Arts and Film Production. During Burton's more than 20 years at the University of Louisville she has served as co-director of the African American Theatre Program and Associate Dean for International, Diversity, and Engagement Programs. Five of Burton's children's plays inspired by Yoruba traditional beliefs have been produced in schools and theatre companies in various parts of the U.S. She has consulted for numerous arts agencies including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the New England Foundation for the Arts, the North Carolina Arts Council and the Kentucky Center for the Arts. Burton's academic and creative contributions have been acknowledged with the University of Louisville's Presidential Exemplary Multicultural Teaching Award, a Fulbright International Educator's Award, an American Scene Award from the Association of Film, Radio, and Television Artists (AFTRA), an Audelco Award, and a Distinguished Director award from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. In 2023 she was given the University of Louisville's highest honor for faculty: the Trustees' Award. Her service to the community includes instruction in Tai Chi for adults and self-defense lessons designed for pre-teens and teenagers, especially female identifying youngsters.

### Programming

On a yearly basis, I have produced two theatrical productions per year that toured to approximately 40 JCPS school classrooms annually during the school day. Audiences - school children in grades 3 through 6.

I teach a formal university-level tai chi class every other year for college-age and adult students and staff. Approximately 20 students per year.

I teach self-defense workshops for youth (primarily female identifying) two to four times per year. Typically 15-20 students in each workshop.

## **Artistic Content of Programming**

My Children's Theatre productions focus on West African culture and storytelling. They are based on ancient Yoruba tales and poems from Nigeria, Brazil, and the southern United States. Outcomes are measured by an evaluation questionnaire that classroom teachers fill out after the production.

My tai chi classes focus on authentic yang style postures and forms. Once participants are proficient in the movement they are required to use the postures they've learned to create a movement set that expresses their own personal aesthetic and level of comfort. I use a Likert scale for pre- and posttests that allow participants to self-assess balance, breath, focus, relaxation, tranquility (stillness), comfort following the leader, and comfort leading the group.

## **Educational Content of Programming**

Children's Theatre production educational goals are determined based on JCPS Standards for Visual and Performing Arts at grade level. The evaluation form that is distributed to teachers who have invited performances of my plays in their classroom was designed by a JCPS Humanities specialist to specifically address expectations for middle and elementary students in arts disciplines.

## **Process for hiring, training, and evaluating my performance/effectiveness.**

I continue to evolve as an artist and teacher by studying with experts in various parts of the U.S. and around the globe. For instance, I spent a month in China studying with a Tai Chi master in 2014. In 2017 I studied with a Tai Chi master in Boston, Massachusetts. From 2018 to 2021 I studied with a Tai Chi master in Washington DC. As a theatre artist I continue to write and direct plays in Louisville and Washington, DC. I attend theatre festivals and conferences where my work is presented and judged by experts in the field.

## **How are participants of all backgrounds and abilities included in programming?**

Working with groups and organizations that have diversity as a foundational principle in their mission and who are dedicated to using all possible methods of getting word out to communities is critical. Also clearly communicating the nature of the work and my commitment to accommodating physical, mental, and emotional challenges. I encourage feedback and make sure that participants know they can give feedback to me directly or use anonymous methods that I make available (e.g. Slido.com). I carefully consider feedback and whenever possible, incorporate suggestions/criticisms from participants in order to improve inclusion, accessibility, and communication in my programming.

## **How do I engage teachers and community center staff before, during, and after programming?**

I like to meet/communicate with staff and teachers in advance to make sure they have a good understanding of the program I aim to offer and to learn their expectations, concerns, and answer any questions I can. During, I encourage them to participate if they would like, or to observe if they prefer.

Afterwards they are asked to fill out an evaluation form that includes suggestion for improvement.

## **How do I engage participants in the creative and learning process?**

My Children's theatre productions are designed to be interactive, with opportunities for the audience to engage with the actors during the play. For example, they are asked to participate in call and response, create environmental sounds, and answer questions posed by the characters during the play. The plays are followed by a session with the audience that includes instruction in dance/song, discussion of cultural objects and food, invitations from audience members to ask questions or share their own knowledge of the culture that is highlighted within the story. As mentioned above, in my tai chi workshop series, participants create a short movement sequence based on what they have learned in the course. Then they teach it to their classmates, so that everyone becomes a creator.