

GET UP AND GO

A sport? A passion? A way of life? Capoeira is not easy to define, but this beautiful and energetic combination of martial arts, music and dance is growing fast. Capoeira schools have opened all over the world and more and more people are doing capoeira. So why has this Brazilian art form become so popular?

Capoeira is a 'game' where two players move around inside a circle. Players kick to attack each other and stretch or fall on the ground to try to escape, but the most important move is the 'ginga' which means to swing. Players swing backwards and forwards to the rhythm of the music and, because they are constantly moving, it is harder for opponents to attack. Capoeira is such an intense form of exercise that players must warm up before they start training, so that they are flexible enough to do the moves.

The music and instruments make capoeira different to other physical activities, and without them capoeira wouldn't be so unusual. The main instrument, the "berimbau", is a strange-looking object consisting of a curved piece of wood and one string. The musicians sing songs in Portuguese and the lyrics tell stories about life. Some of the songs have been passed from generation to generation, but new songs are being created all the time.

If you really want to understand capoeira, it's important to know about its history. Over 400 years ago, African slaves were taken to Brazil to work on sugar and tobacco plantations. They took their music, culture and beliefs with them, and capoeira was one of the things that helped them keep their African identity. They also wanted to be strong and fit so that they could get away from their masters. They played music to hide the fact that they were training and, as a result, slave masters thought the slaves were dancing for fun, not getting fit in order to run away. So what is capoeira? Perhaps the best way to understand it is to try it yourself.

Activity 3: Find the words in text that mean ...

1. explain the meaning of something (para 1):
2. two or more different things together (para 1):
3. move smoothly backwards and forwards (para 2):
4. people who belong to someone else and have to work for them (para 4):
5. things you believe are true (para 4):