

PROGRAM 3: DANCE IN AMERICA

THE INFLUENCE OF NATIVE AMERICAN, AFRICAN AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN DANCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DANCE IN AMERICA



Program Objective

To examine how American dance exemplifies dance as a reflection of culture and how it is the result of the blending of many different cultures.


Program Description

Dance in the United States comes from the amazing mixture of cultures and peoples that make up this nation. As people made their way to this country, they brought with them elements of the cultures they left behind. Dance, being very portable, was consistently one of the ways in which immigrants were able to express their unique identities and sense of community. Over time these dances began to blend, as people found themselves interacting more and more. However, in the case of Native American dance, rather than blending, it developed separately and in some cases was outlawed.

This program is made up of four segments:

- ✦ **Native American Dance**—this segment looks at the role the settlers played in keeping **Native American dance** from having more of an influence on our culture as a whole. It tells the sad story of the Ghost Dance and the banning of Native dances, but also looks at the 20th century revival of Native American dances at **Powwows**.
- ✦ **European Dance**—this segment shows how immigrants during the colonial period brought their dances—such as the **reel**—with them as a way of building a sense of community and connection with home.
- ✦ **African Dance**—this segment explores the connection between African music and dance, the purposes of African dances, and the transformation of **African dance** when slaves were brought to America.
- ✦ **Blending Cultures**—this segment uses tap as an example of how a number of the social dance forms have been created as a result of the fusion of European and African dance. **Tap** grew out of the marriage of Irish step dancing and English clogging and African dance and music.

Before You Watch



What do you already know? America is a melting pot of cultures. Make a list of some of the countries immigrants who settled here came from. Can you think of any dances that come from these countries? [Irish jigs, reels, or Riverdance, or German waltz or polka] Who made up these dances? What music were/are they performed to? Where are they performed? Are they still performed today?

Interview a grandparent or someone from that generation. Ask them what dances they did when they were growing up. What music did they listen to? Who made up the dances? Where were they done? What was going on in the country at that time? How did they dress? What did adults (their parents) think of their dances and music?

Research current popular dances, e.g., hip hop or country western dances. How long have they been done? Who started them or made them popular? [Break dancers, MC Hammer, Michael Jackson, etc.] Are they similar to any dances that were done in the past?

After You Watch

Research Native American dance. What can you find out about its history? Where is it performed now? What groups currently perform it? Do any of these dances look similar to African dance? If so, in what ways? [Use of circles, drums, grounded movement] Do the cultures share anything in common which is reflected in these similarities? [Sense of community, rituals, celebration]

Use the Internet or library to find photographs that demonstrate the similarities between West African dance and U.S. social dances of the 20th century like the Charleston, twist, **jitterbug** or hip hop. Describe these similarities. Listen to music that the dances are done to (e.g., West African drumming, rhythm and blues, jazz or rap). What similarities do you find? Describe these.

Write a poem that reflects the energy and feeling of a particular dance from this country. It could be any of the dances seen in the program—such as the African American slave dance, the Irish reel, the Ghost Dance, etc.—or dances that students have researched.

Move It

Look for a local social dance teacher. Learn an American dance form. Swing dance or square dancing would be good. Take the class to a dance class or invite the instructor to teach at the school.

In both the African and Native American cultures, the dancers and drummers have a very close connection.

- ✦ Try having some students create simple steps with their feet while others use their desks like drums or clap their hands to follow and accompany the dancers' steps.
- ✦ Have the drummers try keeping a steady **beat** or rhythmic pattern while the dancers copy it with their feet.
- ✦ Have the drummers play the syllables of the words "Native American" over and over. At the same time, have the dancers create steps with their feet that play the syllables of the word "African" over and over at the same time. The goal is to demonstrate **polyrhythms**. Set a **tempo** for them and count them in with "One, two, ready, go" in order to have them begin at the same time.

Create your own "American Bandstand." Select a panel of three to four students to judge the music while students dance to it. Ask students to bring in music and dances from any time during this century in the U.S. They will play the music and perform the dances, and judges will select their favorites. Class should choose criteria judges will use to judge the performances.

For more information

Visit the **DanceSense** web site at www.ket.org/dancesense

Key Kentucky Core Content Addressed

(See Kentucky Core Content for Arts & Humanities: Dance in Appendix)

AH-E-2.1.35
AH-E-2.1.36
AH-E-2.2.31
AH-E-2.2.32
AH-E-2.2.33

AH-M-2.2.31
AH-M-2.2.32

AH-H-2.2.31
AH-H-2.2.32
AH-H-2.2.33
AH-H-2.3.31

Key National Standards for Arts Education: Dance Addressed

Content standards addressed in video and teacher's guide:

CS3: Understanding dance as a way to create and communicate meaning

CS4: Applying and demonstrating critical and creative thinking skills in dance

CS5: Demonstrating and understanding dance in various cultures and historical periods

CS7: Making connections between dance and other disciplines

KEY TERMS

(see Glossary for definitions)

African dance
beat
jitterbug
Native American dance

polka
polyrhythms
powwows
reel

tap
tempo

