

PROGRAM 4: THE ELEMENTS OF DANCE

THE “LANGUAGE OF DANCE” - SPACE, TIME AND FORCE



Program Objective

To begin to develop literacy in the language of dance by introducing the three key elements of any dance: space, time, and force.

Program Description

Movement surrounds us, and if we look further, we see that dance is all around us as well. Movement and dance take on countless forms—from the movement of children at play to the practice of yoga to the dance forms of jazz, ballet or tap. Dance styles differ from culture to culture and choreographer to choreographer. As with any art form, however, dance can be broken down into fundamental components. These basic **elements** are **space**, **time** and **force**.

Each program segment will investigate one of the three elements and how it is used in dance.

- Space—This segment explores space in terms of individual body **shapes**, the design of groups of bodies in **space**, **levels**, **directions**, and **pathways**.
- Time—To help students better understand this element, time is defined as both a music and a dance element. Aspects of time including **beat**, **tempo**, **duration**, **rhythm** and **accent** are introduced.
- Force—Force is the use of **energy**. This segment provides examples of ways in which energy is used, e.g., heavy/light, sharp/smooth, tight/relaxed.

Before You Watch

What do we know? Ask students: What are the ingredients that make up dance? Create a list of answers. With each answer, ask: Could you have dance without this ingredient? If yes, cross it off list. Try to get at what must be there. Next, try to put each of these answers under the categories of space, time and force. Allow students to be creative in trying to answer these questions as this can be an interesting way to begin to explore elements of dance. Keep these lists to study after watching the program and discuss them again. These are tricky concepts to get. Wrestling with them can be fun.

Dance in Space: Ask students to find photographs/images of dances that

1. use circles and straight lines
2. use low and high levels in space
3. take up a small amount and large amount of space

Have students discuss what these dances might be about and why they use space in this way.

Research. Find dance books or other resources that illustrate these elements and add them to the class bibliography. You might look for books or videos or web sites on choreography, dance education, children’s dance, elements of dance, improvisation in dance or dance composition. Have students look through these books and report on what they found. Did they read or see something that particularly helped them understand one of these concepts?

Any or all of these activities should prepare students to watch the program. Ask them to watch each program segment closely, writing down words or phrases that come to mind as they observe the examples of each element.

After You Watch

Ask students to read some of the words they wrote down while watching the program. What words or phrases did they note as they watched the examples of space? of time? of force? Can they create their own definitions of these elements, based on what they observed?

Bring in videos of more than one style of dance and observe how the elements of dance are used. Observe and discuss with the class how space is used in terms of shape, **design**, level, pathway, **patterns**, **focus** and direction. Discuss the use of time in terms of beat, tempo, rhythm, and accent; if you need help, consider asking the music teacher to work with you. And discuss force in terms of energy qualities, e.g. soft/sharp, tense/relaxed, heavy/light. Have students discuss or write about the impact these various elements have on their impressions/likes/dislikes of the dance. Imagine the dances using the elements differently. What impact would this have on the dance?

Ask an artist of some kind (other than dancer) to come to the classroom to be interviewed. This could be a music or art teacher in your school. Ask questions about the basic elements of their art form. Discuss how they compare to those in dance. Invite a choreographer to the classroom and ask him/her to talk about how he/she uses the elements of dance in choreography. The two could come at the same time or separately.

Watch a basketball, football, or baseball game. How do the elements of movement/dance apply to these games? Turn the sound off and play a variety of styles of music while watching. Could you imagine these as dances? Imagine there is no ball in play and observe the movement as pure movement. Could this be dance?

Move It

Explore body shape in space. With students seated at desks, ask them to:

1. freeze in a shape.
2. change that shape by moving one arm.
3. change the shape by moving one leg, by moving their upper body, by where they are looking, by a finger, etc.
4. relax.
5. change their level, their direction, their focus.
6. one at a time, to create a pathway in space by getting up and moving to an empty seat. (Note: Be sure there is at least one empty chair in the room.)

Elaborate on any of these ideas.

Key Kentucky Core Content Addressed

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

AH-E-2.1.31
AH-E-2.1.32
AH-E-2.1.34

AH-M-2.1.24
AH-M-2.1.31
AH-M-2.1.33

The "Move It" activities in this and other chapters are designed to help teachers address core content items listed under "Creating" and "Performing."

Key National Standards for Arts Education: Dance Addressed

Content standards addressed in video and teacher's guide:

CS1: Identifying and demonstrating movement elements and skills in performing dance

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

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

CS7: Making connections between dance and other disciplines



KEY TERMS

(see Glossary for definitions)

| | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|
| accent | energy | shape |
| beat | focus | size |
| design | force | space |
| direction | level | tempo |
| duration | pathway | time |
| dynamics | patterns | |
| elements of dance | rhythm | |

PROGRAM 4

| | DANCE ELEMENTS | SPACE | TIME | FORCE |
|--|-----------------------|---|--|--|
| Suggested level for Instruction | Elementary | shape level direction pathways | beat tempo | use of energy while moving |
| | Middle | focus size | accent rhythmic pattern duration | heavy/light sharp/smooth tension/relaxation bound/flowing |

Explore designs in space. Ask students to use paper and pencil and create on paper the design/shape for a group dance.

1. Draw the opening shape to be made in the space by a group of dancers.
2. Draw a second or middle shape.
3. Draw a third or ending shape.
4. Choose the number of dancers to be placed within each of these designs/shapes.
5. Draw pathways that each of the dancers must take in space to get to the middle and ending shapes.
6. In small groups, ask students to analyze each other's designs. Is there one they might like to try out by moving from shape to shape? If so, they will be exploring the craft of choreography.

Explore time.

1. Ask students to stand up and sit down at their desks taking a set amount of time (8 counts, 4 counts, 2 counts, etc.).
2. Change places in the room within a set amount of counts.
3. Vary the number of counts to do either of these.
4. Try combining the two ideas. Stand up, change places, and then sit down. Use a specific amount of counts for each movement or a total amount of counts to complete all three movements.
5. Try this with music.

Explore time and force.

1. Seated at desks, ask students to move their arms very fast and stop when they think a minute is up and freeze. Keep track of the time of the first and last person to stop.
2. Then ask students to do the same thing but with slow moving arms. Check the difference in time of freezes.
3. Ask students to move their arms for five seconds at a time. Use energy in different ways each time. Use these qualities or others: heavy/light, smooth/sharp, tense/loose.

For more information

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

