

PROGRAM 6: MAKING DANCE

HOW DANCES ARE CREATED, WHAT CHOREOGRAPHERS ARE TRYING TO COMMUNICATE AND HOW IMPROVISATION IS USED IN DANCE



Program Objective

To develop a basic understanding of how choreographers work— looking at some of the dance forms they work with and how they incorporate the elements of dance and fundamental dance movements into their process—and to understand the role improvisation plays in creating and performing dance.

Program Description

This program is divided into five segments—all exploring how dances are created.

- ✦ **Choreography** — **Choreography** is what holds dance together; it provides a **form** or **structure** within which the movement ideas are shaped. It is like the **composition** of a song, which holds together all of the ingredients of melody, harmony and rhythm. To choreograph is the “art” of making dances, and the **choreographer** uses her/his craft to create dances. A choreographer draws on his/her knowledge of dance, adding ideas, emotion and meaning to create a work of art. Several choreographers talk about what inspires them and how they depend upon their **imagination** and observation skills.
- ✦ **Making a Dance**—A dance is made up of parts. Think about how, in writing, language becomes a novel—sounds become letters, letters become words, become sentences, paragraphs, chapters, completed books. Similarly, in making a dance, impulses become movements which become **phrases** and are developed and completed as a dance.
- ✦ **Space – Time – Force**—The **craft** of choreography (and improvisation) involves working with the three elements of dance—space, time, and force—as well as basic locomotor and non-locomotor movements, and using form to shape these ingredients into a dance.
- ✦ **Improvisation**—Movement improvisation is used as a tool in the process of creating a dance. Some choreographers create dances that allow the dancers to **improvise** as a part of the performance. Dancers and choreographers talk about creating on the spur of the moment—or improvising—and how they work within a structure. The structure gives the dancers a form and rules to work with, but within that framework they are able to explore.
- ✦ **Completing the Dance**—A dance has a beginning, middle and end. This is one of the many forms used in structuring dances and creating choreography.

Before You Watch

What do we know? Ask the class if any of them have ever choreographed. Maybe they have been on a cheerleading squad and created cheers or choreographed dances with friends for a talent show. How do they think choreographers work? Where do the ideas for a dance come from? How would they compare choreographing a dance to composing music or writing a book? Where would they begin if they were going to choreograph a dance?

What do we know about improvisation? Ask the class what their definition of improvisation is. Where do they see improvisation around them? in nature? in their individual lives? in school? in sports or other activities? in the social



PROGRAM 6

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-2.1.33
AH-E-2.1.36

AH-M-2.1.24
AH-M-2.1.31
AH-M-2.1.35

AH-H-2.1.25
AH-H-2.1.36

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

CS2: Understanding choreographic principles, processes and structures

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



dances they do? What are the structures within which this improvising takes place? E.g., school or class schedule, rules of the game in sports, seasons, etc. Is all of life a structured improvisation?

Invite a choreographer to come to the classroom or find a video that includes an interview with a choreographer. Perhaps there is a local choreographer who has choreographed a musical in your town or a choreographer from a local dance studio. Find out how they work. What inspires them? How do they begin their process? Do they improvise? Do the dancers contribute ideas? Do they collaborate with other artists? Etc. Have students prepare their interview questions in advance and record the interview, if possible.

After You Watch

Have the class find some books or other resources on choreography and improvisation. Try to find at least two of these books and look for similarities and differences in the approach they take toward creating dances and improvising. Add these resources to the class bibliography.

Try a written improvisation that uses form. Create a form within which the students write. For example, give them a set amount of time to write one paragraph that includes three sentences and is about a particular subject. Or, have each student begin a sentence with the exact same word and end with same word. Read the variations. Or, going around the room, improvise the telling of a story. Each student, in turn, picks up the story where the one before left off.

Discuss **contrast** and **transition** as it relates to dance. What are contrasting dance forms/styles? [Hip hop and ballet] What would be an example of contrasting movements or a contrasting use of one of the elements of dance? [Balletic arms floating up versus a break dancer's arms] How are transitions made in movement? [Think about how a ballet dancer makes a transition from leaping in the air to moving along the floor. Or how a break dancer makes a transition from spinning on his head to being on his feet.] Find examples of movements that are used to make a transition from one place to another or one activity to another. What movement is used to make a transition from sitting to walking? Or standing at home plate and hitting a baseball?

There are many examples of contrast and transition in the **DanceSense**. Go back and watch Program 1. In it you will see examples of African dance, waltz, modern dance, and ballet. Describe the contrast between the use of arms in each of these dance forms. Describe the contrast in their upper bodies (torso). Which are most similar/different? How do dancers make a transition from one step to another in African dance and in ballet? How do these transitions contrast? Choreographers use contrast and transition in many ways to create dances.

KEY TERMS

(see Glossary for definitions)

AB
ABA
call and response
choreographer
choreography
collaborate

composition
contrast
craft
form
imagination
improvise

narrative
phrase
structure
transition



Move It

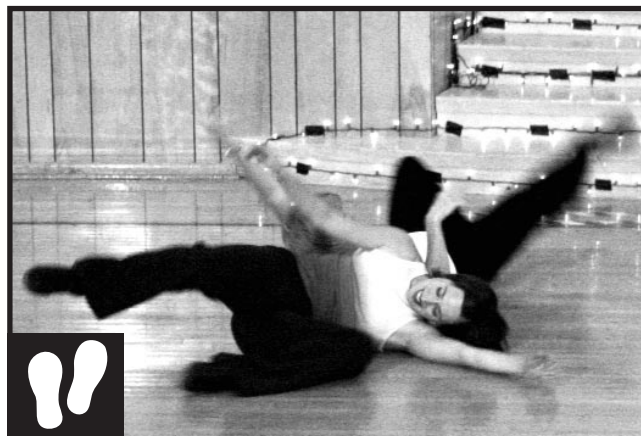
While seated at their desks, have students create a movement. Name that movement “A.” Then create another movement; name it “B.” Put these two movements together and you have a dance with a simple AB form. Now put them in ABA form by repeating the “A” at the end. Extensions: Try a number of movement variations. Rather than the “A” being a single movement, make it an entire movement (or dance) phrase, e.g. “Stand up slowly, reach the arms up, then down, turn in a circle, sit back down.” Or while seated, “Roll your head in a circle, circle your shoulders, raise and lower one arm and then the other.” Create other forms using additional movement material — AABA, ABAC, AAB, etc.

Have all of the students watch the clock for the duration of one minute. In five second increments have them improvise the movement of one body part at a time, e.g., move head for 5 seconds, then move hand, then arm, leg, shoulder, finger, etc. Using this time structure, have them choreograph 5, 10, or 15 second movement phrases, using one body part at a time.

Choose a student to write something on the board using a specific quality of force, e.g., smooth, sharp, tense, light, etc. Try having the whole class write their names with their hand in space using these same qualities. Use different body parts to write their names through space or try other words. For example, use your elbow to write a word in space through the whole length of the room. Play a guessing game and see if the class can guess what word the student is writing. Now watch without looking for the word and just notice the movement itself. How would students describe it?

For more information

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



More About Making Dances

There is no *one* way to create a dance. This program looks at several aspects of choreography. For example, we see how choreographers use the elements of dance and locomotor and non-locomotor movements in creating dance. In addition, choreographers also use principles of contrast and transition and work with a number of forms. Some basic dance forms include: **AB**, **ABA**, **call and response**, and **narrative** or a simple beginning, middle and end. Choreographers also **collaborate** with other artists, like composers or costume designers, in creating their finished product.

