

Welcome

For high school students studying dance as an elective course or a physical education requirement, dance classes provide an enjoyable outlet for self-expression, a challenging means of staying fit, and an opportunity to explore personal meaning and identity. High school students who are majoring in dance are ready to use their capacity for sustained, detailed work and critical inquiry to advance their skills in all areas of dance learning.

Students at this age gain confidence as dancers, choreographers and dance critics through consistent study and practice. They develop an awareness of the standards and requirements of the university and professional dance arenas and identify personal goals regarding future study and work in dance. Deep-experience training in dance (including creating dance) as well as developing an understanding of dance history, cultural contexts and aesthetic concerns, leads to the emergence of their personal artistic voice. Sustained, sequential dance training builds the following skills and understandings:

- **Physical:** Execution of advanced technical elements of various styles with expressive subtlety.
- **Social/affective:** Initiating, planning and producing projects independently in coordination with others.
- **Cognitive:** Explaining, comparing, implementing, deconstructing and critiquing dance.
- **Aesthetic:** Defining and articulating a personal aesthetic in dance.
- **Metacognitive:** Reflecting upon their strengths and weaknesses in dance and their personal approach to dance study.

Instructional Time

High School Students taking a general dance elective in high school may follow the guidelines for middle school. Students taking a dance option (major) program should have a minimum of one double period of dance daily. A seriously competitive program that seeks to prepare students for the option of continued university study will go further, extending to three or more periods of dance daily, with at least two of those periods block scheduled. Making creative use of zero period and extended day can ease the burden on programming.

Bharatanatyam

Dancing for the Gods

GRADE 9-12

Activity area 1: **Dance Making**

Age Group: 14-18 (US Grades: 9-12)

SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

Task: Identification and Isolation

Ask your students to go to the **Basic Technique** section, where they should choose two gestures from each of the sub-sections (**Head, Eyes & Neck; Hand Gestures; Lower Body**). The students should try to learn the movement demonstrated on the video, including the applications.

Encourage the students to learn the movements (and applications), paying attention to the small details (e.g. eye motions and finger positioning). At the end of this exercise, ask each student to describe in words (3 mins max) his or her experience of performing the movements.

If time permits (or with more advanced students) you can go to **Body Combinations / Pure Movement**. In this section, students can select one of the **Adavu** or **Jati** sequences, learning the movement as before.

Students should use the Movement Analysis video in order to gain a deeper understanding of the movement. As above, at the end of this exercise, ask each student to describe in words (3 mins max) his or her experience of performing the movements.

IMPROVISATION

Task: Combining and shuffling

Ask your students to begin combining the gestures they have chosen (see previous activity, **Skills and Techniques**) into an improvised sequence of movement. Note that gestures and movements can be used simultaneously at this time (e.g. a head gesture and a hand gesture together).

Students should work alone initially. Depending on time available, they can produce up to three sequences of roughly one minute each.

CHOREOGRAPHY

Task: Creating an incident

For this exercise, ask your students to find a partner. The task is to choreograph a short story in pairs.

The first step is for each student to pick a character from his or her local neighborhood – a store owner / a homeless man / the mayor of the town etc.

Each pair should now agree upon a location for the two characters to meet. (A crowded elevator / a park / a cinema hall etc).

The pair should now imagine an incident (the elevator fails / a stray ball strikes one of them on the head in the park / in the cinema, someone falls asleep and starts snoring loudly).

The students now need to 'tell the story' using the improvisational segments that they worked on in previous activities.

The students should be given the freedom to modify the gestures and movements. As they work, discuss with them how they might relate the gestures they've chosen to the story. How can the gestures and movements be manipulated to better portray the characters and incidents of the story?

[Choreography continues on next page]

PERFORMANCE

Task: Creating a short performance

The task now is for each pair to expand the choreographed sequence (from previous activity, **Choreography**) into a short performance.

The performance will have three principal components:

- An entrance
- The main story
- An exit

Space is very important here. How can the students use the available performance space? Which part of the story needs to be in one place while another needs to travel? Is the story showing a larger area or a small location?

If you have access to music CDs, suggest to the students that they can choose a soundscape for the piece. (You should also make clear that silence is a viable option too!) As the students work, discuss with them how their selection of soundscape affects the performance and use of gestures.

The audience is very important element of this exercise. Encourage the students to think about how the audience helps to 'create the space'. Should they sit in a circle around the performance space? Or simply sit in chairs in a traditional 'classroom' arrangement? Should the audience be involved directly (e.g. the pair invites an audience member up on 'stage' with them?)

[Performance continues on next page]

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SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

IMPROVISATION

CHOREOGRAPHY

PERFORMANCE

[continued]

After each pair has presented their sequence, discuss with the group how the improvisational segments developed earlier have now been used to 'tell a story'. Did the students notice a change in shape and rhythm of the gestures and movements? Did the intention seem different this time around? Ask the pair how they found co-ordinating multiple gestures. Was this a simple or challenging exercise?

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After each pair has presented their performance, discuss the choices that were made. Draw attention in particular to three elements:

- **Principal components (entrance / story / exit)**
- **Use of space**
- **Use of audience**

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Activity area 2: **Dance Literacy**

Age Group: 14-18 (US Grades: 9-12)

UNDERSTANDING DANCE

With the course projected on a large screen (or interactive whiteboard) select the **Course Map** icon (small icon on right bottom corner of screen) and choose **See Full Performance / Alarippu** [Note that you need to use the scroll bar to access this heading]

Play through the performance video [4 minutes] and then select and play Expert Commentary [4 minutes]

Reflecting on the exercises from Activity 1 (Dance Making), discuss with the group the choice of gestures that this dancer makes. Observe and analyse how his gestures are composed to form a coherent unit.

APPLYING VOCABULARY

Go to **Basic Technique / Hand Gestures** and choose a gesture (say, **Kapotam** in **Double-hand gestures**). Select Example in Performance. As you watch the performance excerpt with your students, ask them to identify the gesture. Similarly observe the other gestures used.

From this screen, select the **See Full Performance** Tab and use the slider to choose another section of the performance – try to identify a sequence that has a strong narrative element (use the subtitles to identify this excerpt).

Select **Expert Commentary** to hear the analysis of the section you have chosen.

Now ask your students to interpret the same story using the gestures they had chosen in Activity 1 (**Skills and Technique**).

ANALYZING MOVEMENT

Go to **Kartari Adavu** (path: Body Combinations / Pure Movement / Adavu / Kartari Adavu).

Play the video to your students, and ask them to draw out on paper some of the shapes and patterns that the dancer makes during his demonstration. Remind your students that the pattern does not have to look 'pretty' – the important task is to record on paper a sense of how the dancer relates to space. For example, students should be encouraged to use thick and heavy lines where the movement feels more weighty and voluminous, while lighter sharper lines can represent quick angular actions.

After this exercise, click on **Movement Analysis** and show the video to the class. Discuss with each student the contrasts and similarities between their analysis and the video. The video mentions a 'knife thrower' as an appropriate metaphor for the movement. Can the students think of others?

Repeat this exercise with other the other Adavus. If you wish, you can even take this process of analysis a step further by applying it to a Jati (path: Body Combinations / Pure Movement / Jati) – which combines basic phrases (Adavus) into a more complex sequence of movement.

COMPARING DANCE STYLES

For this exercise, make a selection of DVDs showing famous western dance pieces (these can be found at a local library). Suggestions might include a classical performance, such as a traditional production of Swan Lake and a modern / contemporary piece by Martha Graham such as *Lamentation* or *Appalachian Spring*. Choose selections (approx. 3 minutes) from each dance and show them to your students.

Now find some sections of the **Varnam** performance on the DVD (this can be accessed via the Course Map). To begin with choose some of the sections that have a narrative element, such as the first or second line of poem (you can use the slider at the top of the screen to identify and access these sections).

As you show these segments to the class, ask your students to focus on specific aspects in turn – use of feet, eyes, hands, costume, music etc.

Following the videos, discuss with your students the contrasts – and similarities – between the performances. Ask the students to choose one movement that they remembered from each of the video segments they have seen. Give them time and space to try out each of the movements. This will help your students to fully engage – intellectually and physically – with differences in style.

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Activity area 3: **Making Connections**

Age Group: 14-18 (US Grades: 9-12)

HISTORY AND CULTURE

For History:

To prepare for this session, find some top-level information on the history of different dance forms from around the world (ballet / tango / hip-hop etc).

Then go to [Origins of Bharatanatyam](#) (path: Introduction / Origins) and play the video to the class [5 minutes approx.]

After the video, initiate a discussion on the history of dance across the world – and how different styles have influenced each other. In the Origins of Bharatanatyam video, we see how Anna Pavlova influenced the history of Indian dance. What other examples of cross-cultural influence can your group uncover?

For Culture:

Access the [Nataraja](#) page of the program (path: Body Combinations / Emotional Power / Aangika abhinaya / The Nataraja.)

Projecting this page onto the screen, choose some aspects of the statue to explore with your students.

As preparation (homework) for this session, ask your students to research creation myths from other cultures around the world (ancient and modern). Encourage your students to find out if music and dance are connected to these creation myths. In class, the students can present their findings, and you can discuss comparisons to the Nataraja mythology.

CONNECTING WITH OTHER ARTS

Ask your students each to choose a sculpture, painting or photograph that inspires them to tell a story. Ask them to present their selected artwork and describe the story it suggests to them.

Each student should now choose a number of gestures and movements (minimum 3) from [Basic Technique](#). In this phase of the exercise, the students can use their chosen movements as tools to express the story that has been inspired by the work of art.

Remind your students that this is a non-verbal task. They need to try to express the story through movement.

After each presentation, initiate a discussion with the group to analyze the storytelling. Invite each student to discuss the challenges of expressing the story through a limited range of movements from an unfamiliar culture, without the use of spoken text.

USING TECHNOLOGY

Using an LCD projector connected to your PC or Mac (or interactive whiteboard) the games and tasks contained within [Dancing for the Gods](#) can become activities for students both individually and as a group.

In particular, the exercise called [Nritya & Naatya](#) (path: Body Combinations / Emotional Power / Saatvika abhinaya) and the Direct a Drama! section offer engaging tasks to help build characters and dances.

Also see the [Fun & Games](#) section to see how technology can be used as a creative tool.

Go to the Course Map and look for the [Now you Try!](#) webcam icon next to each of the movements in Basic Technique (as well as the [Nataraja](#) page, where the same feature is called Compose your Pose).

In this innovative exercise, students can record themselves following the motions from a demonstration video (note: a high-bandwidth Internet connection is required for the webcam to function).

You can have fun with this feature. Experiment with setting up the webcam in the classroom, in front of a performance space where students can practice the movements 'on camera' and then compare their results against the demonstration video.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Using video excerpts from a number of different dance performances, ask your students to closely observe the dancers' posture and use of breath. Discuss with the class the use of the 'core'. (The core is located roughly a hand's breadth below the navel)

Now open the page called [Some Key Terms](#) (path: Basic Technique / Some Key Terms). This page has a number of sub-sections that examine the importance of posture, breath, levels, verticality etc. These concepts are important to understand both for elegant expression and the avoidance of injury. In particular, draw your students' attention to the sub-sections called Get Vertical! and Breathe!

Now ask your students to divide into pairs. Each member of the pair should perform the Adavu (learned in Activity 1, [Skills and Technique](#)). As they perform, their partner should closely observe and provide feedback on body posture and breathing. In particular, the observing partner should pay attention to potential over-arching or the distribution of weight in the wrong areas of the body.

Remind your students of the importance of observation, playing a critical role in helping fellow dancers to avoid injury.

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Activity area 4: **Community and Cultural Resources**

Age Group: 14-18 (US Grades: 9-12)

ENGAGING WITH INSTITUTIONS

Find out the location of a Hindu temple near to your community. Many temples offer classes and performances in Indian dance and music. Find out the location of an Indian dance studio or a Hindu temple near to your community. Many temples offer classes and performances in Indian dance and music. Ask if your students can observe or even participate in a community class.

Before the field trip, show the video called **Origins of Bharatanatyam** (path: Introduction / Origins). You can also show the sequence called What are you saying? (path: Basic Technique / Some Key Terms / What are you saying?). Both these sequences place Bharatanatyam in a historical and contemporary cultural context, which will be good preparation for a trip to the temple.

A local museum or library may be offering exhibitions of Indian art. They often have visiting artists who give demonstrations, workshops and performances. Seeing a live dancer is one of the best ways to enhance our deeper understanding of the culture and its dance.

USING RESEARCH RESOURCES

Encourage your students to look for books in the school or local public library that go deeper into the background of Indian art. Suggest that they select one particular aspect of the course and find external material related to it. The **Nataraja** section may be a good starting point (path: Body Combinations / Emotional Power / Aangika abhinaya / The Nataraja).

On the Internet there are many sites dedicated to Indian classical dance: www.narthaki.com is a good example as are: www.kadam.org.uk/pulse.php and www.sruti.com. It is always worth looking at arts programming offered by local TV stations. Some more national and international sites offering access to a range of arts programming are the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk) and PBS (www.pbs.org).

Many fine examples of different dance forms and performers are available on the video sharing site YouTube (www.youtube.com)

In addition, your local Indian Association can easily be traced through the Internet or just asking around. These associations will be happy to provide information on touring shows, workshops, exhibitions and any other cultural activities that are due to take place in your area.

There are periodicals and publications to South Asian dance. The UK magazine Pulse is a good example, as is the newspaper India Abroad (www.indiaabroad.com)

SHARING BETWEEN SCHOOLS

Ask your students if they have a friend outside of class who is learning Indian dance. You could invite this person to share a workshop at your school.

Alternatively, if there is an interesting artist in the community, or a touring artist or group is visiting your area, you could initiate a shared workshop with a neighboring school. This can be a powerful interaction for your students as, through the workshop, they get to meet and make friends with other students who have been learning about the arts. What experiences can they share? What can they learn from each other's approach?

You may feel ready to mount a 'partner school' dance drama featuring some elements of Bharatanatyam. You could take one of the Myths & Stories in the **Nataraja** section (path: Body Combinations/Emotional Power / Aangika abhinaya / Nataraja) and assign each of your students a 'buddy' from the partner school. Encourage your students to exchange ideas with their buddies. Together, they can develop the theme and story before coming together for rehearsals in a live setting.

Joint activities of this type provide excellent opportunities for building powerful life-skills such as teamwork and leadership.