A teacher’s guide for the MODERN DANCE EXPERIENCE

UC DAVIS
MONDAVI CENTER ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS
INTRODUCTION

Dear Educator,

As you make plans for your students to attend an upcoming presentation of the Wells Fargo School Matinee Series at the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts at UC Davis, we invite you to prepare your students by using this curriculum guide to assure that from beginning to end, the experience is an educationally enriching and memorable one.

The material in this guide is for you. We believe that an understanding of some basic vocabulary and background information on the performance art form will help to prepare your students to better understand and enjoy what they are about to see. We also encourage you to discuss important aspects of the artistic experience, including audience etiquette.

We hope that your students find their imagination comes alive as lights shine, curtains open, and applause rings through Mondavi Center. As importantly, we hope that this curriculum guide helps you to bring the arts alive in your classroom.

Thank you for helping us to make a difference in the lives of our children.

Mondavi Center Arts Education Program
Sierra North Arts Project, UC Davis

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THE HEART OF THE ART

• Modern dance developed out of a desire to express individual ideas and emotions instead of performing established dance forms, such as ballet.

• Modern dance continues to evolve from the personal expression of its founders to include many new ideas and movements.

• Modern dance employs manipulation of shape, time, space, and energy to build a foundation for creative exploration and development of movement vocabulary.

• Choreographers often turn to contemporary social themes for choreographic inspiration.

RESOURCES

BOOKS & VIDEOS


The Dance Workshop, Robert Cohan, ISBN 1-85273-051-X


DanceVideo Shop: www.dancevideoshop.com

Dance Horizons Books & Princeton Book Company: www.dancehorizons.com

Biographies and autobiographies of many of the founders and masters of modern dance are readily available.

WEBSITES

Modern Dance History, including biographies on Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Martha Graham, and Doris Humphrey

www.filebox.vt.edu/org/cde/mdrnhist.htm


Mondavi Center curriculum guides are produced in partnership with: ArtSmarts is the title for K–12 educational programs at Mondavi Center.
Modern Dance

I

In the early twentieth century, a new movement in dance arose. This movement was guided by a few pioneering dancers who began to use dance as a form of personal expression. Their movement often stressed emotion and addressed contemporary subjects. This was in contrast to ballet, a dance form with aristocratic European roots, which frequently told stories of princesses, fairies and enchanted forests.

These early pioneers of modern dance each developed their own personal movement vocabulary. There has never been a single specific style of modern dance. Though it often uses the body alignment and movement of ballet, modern dance has developed beyond the vocabulary of ballet.

The most prominent of the first generation of modern dance creators were Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis. In the 1920s, several dancers who studied with St. Denis, (Martha Graham, Doris Humphries and Charles Weidman) broke away and developed their own philosophies of modern dance. Many of these early pioneers were women. Modern dance provided women the opportunity to become directors and choreographers. In the ballet world, these roles had been and continue to be dominated by men. Martha Graham, the most recognized of these women, has had an enormous impact on the field of modern dance. Her notion of contraction and release (a torso based movement of a sharp intake of breath followed by a strong exhalation), her groundbreaking dances based on mythology, and her theatrical personality have made her the best known modern dancer of all time.

Each new generation of modern dance has inspired another. Often the inspiration comes in the form of rebellion against what came before. In the 1950s, Merce Cunningham, a member of Martha Graham’s company, formed his own dance company based on the idea of movement for movement’s sake and the use of chance methods of choreography. Paul Taylor, who danced for both Cunningham and Graham, further shaped modern dance by choreographing dances about real people and the everyday activities of life. The next rebellion came in the 1960s, when dancers such as Trisha Brown rejected the codified and strict technique they felt modern dance had become. Experimental and minimal dance, sometimes called post-modern, developed during this time, as did contact improvisation. These dance makers were also influenced by the societal changes that were taking place in the United States during the 1960s.

However not all choreographers were interested in rejecting the past. One in particular, Twyla Tharp, embraced all that had come before. By combining ballet with modern dance and adding in her own movement ideas, she developed a style that was enthusiastically embraced by audiences.

Just as modern dance gave way to post-modern, ethnic dance gave way to concert dance based on ethnic roots. The work of Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham influenced that of Alvin Ailey and Donald McKayle, among others. These choreographers created dances informed by the African-American experience, but not exclusively about it. Ailey was also influenced by Lester Horton, who formed the first American multi-racial dance company in 1934. Horton worked in Los Angeles, where his work was not as well-known as that of New York based choreographers.

Another choreographer who combines modern technique with other dance forms is Mark Morris. The folk dance, flamenco and ballet he studied as a youth infuse his work with a unique flavor. Popular for its humor and musicality, his work harkens back to the early modern pioneers; it includes form, technique and storytelling.

Today, it is possible to see and study nearly all the forms of modern dance that have developed over the years. As new styles develop, the old remain. The future also looks rich, as new choreographers continue to search for their unique voices and make contributions to the field of modern dance.

“What’s Important to Know?”

“Dance is a song of the body. Either of joy or pain.”—Martha Graham

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Modern Dance
MODERN DANCE STYLES

“Dance is the hidden language of the soul.”
—Martha Graham

Narrative
This style expresses a message or tells a story through movement. It shows the relationships between the performers’ characters.

Chance
A method of choreographic development based on random selection of movement. The dancers learn many combinations of movements but do not know what order they will be performing them in until right before the performance.

Contact improvisation
Usually done as a duet or in a large group, the movement is improvised as each dancer follows the other’s movements and reacts to them. Dancers move in and out of physical contact while rolling, spiraling, supporting and falling.

Improvisation
A process producing spontaneous movements stemming from a specific stimulus, such as sounds or colors, and how they relate to certain feelings or the environment. Improvisation is often a part of the choreographic process.

Post-modern
A form of modern dance which evolved in the 1960s and 70s, and departed from narrative theme. Post-modern experimented with new concepts and forms and is sometimes referred to as experimental or minimalist dance.
### Modern Dance

**Space** - The area occupied by a dancer or dancers, and how dancers move in and around this area. The concept also includes how the choreographer chooses to mold and design the aspects of space. Space can be divided into aspects of direction, size, level, and focus.

**Style** - A structure or form used to create movement.

**Stage directions** - Stage right, stage left (at the performer's right and left, respectively, when viewed from the audience). Downstage (moving towards the audience), upstage (moving away from the audience). These terms come from the Italian Renaissance theater of the late 1400s, when stages were 'raked', or constructed on a downward slant towards the audience. Thus, a performer was literally traveling uphill when moving upstage.

**Tableau** - A static composition that does not move, a “freeze” or living sculpture which creates a frozen moment in time.

**Time** - An element of dance involving rhythm, phrasing, tempo, accent, and duration. Time can be metered, as in music, or based on body rhythms, such as breath and heartbeat.

**Qualities of movement** - Energy (or force) propels movement. While it initiates movement, sometimes energy is also needed to stop action. Energy in dance can be channeled in six different ways, or qualities: sustained (smooth), percussive (sharp), suspended (hover), swinging (arc), vibratory (shaking), collapsing (release).

*Words to Know*

Throughout this curriculum guide, you will see certain words in bold print. Below are the definitions of these words.

**Backdrop** - The images, colors and designs that might be projected on the cyclorama (a drop used to create the illusion of infinite space) at the rear of the stage.

**Choreography** - The creation and composition of dances by arranging or inventing steps, movements, and patterns of movements.

**Choreographic form** - A method that a choreographer uses to determine the structure of a dance. Certain characteristics are common to a well-developed dance: unity, continuity, transition, variety and repetition.

**Floor patterns** - The use of space, including the “road map” of the dance. This includes lines, circles, diagonals, zig-zags, and spirals.

**Gesture** - The movement of a body part or combination of parts, with emphasis on the expressive aspects of the move.

**Master class** - A class offered by a professional dancer and designed to share his or her background, experience, and characteristics of the dance form with students.

**Motif** - A distinctive and recurring gesture used to provide a theme or unifying idea.

**Prop** - An object separate from a dancer’s costume that is part of the action or design in a dance.

### Key Movers in Modern Dance (cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lester Horton (1906-1953)</td>
<td>Horton's technique was based on creating a flat back at the waist by tilting the body horizontally to the side or bending forward. He chose to work in southern California rather than New York. Horton formed the first American multi-racial dance company. Alvin Ailey danced in his company.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Katherine Dunham (1909-)</td>
<td>Dunham was one of the first African-Americans to attend the University of Chicago, where she earned her bachelor, master and doctoral degrees in anthropology. Dunham blended African and Caribbean dance forms to create a technique of her own.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merce Cunningham (1919-)</td>
<td>Cunningham created a style of choreography called “chance”. His dancers learn many combinations of movement but do not know how the music sounds or in what order they will perform until right before the performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Taylor (1930-)</td>
<td>Taylor was a soloist with Martha Graham’s company when he formed his own troupe, the Paul Taylor Dance Company. Taylor studied ballet under Anthony Tudor and also danced for George Balanchine, a prominent choreographer of American ballets.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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*A Mondavi Center Arts Education Master Class*
STANDARDS-BASED CLASSROOM LEARNING EXPERIENCES

PROFICIENT

Names
Use the letters in each student’s name to provide the motivation for movement. Have the students trace the shapes of the letters in their names in the air using different body parts. Keep it simple: start with a finger, then move on to the arms; incorporate the legs, head and, finally, full torso. (1.4 proficient) More: Create movement phrases by having the students break into groups of three or four and teach each other their letter-based movement sequences. Each group performs these movement sequences for the classroom audience.

Recipe
Prior to this learning experience, have students bring in the recipe for their favorite food. (Encourage students to include a variety: i.e. baked goods, entrees, drinks.) Working in small groups, students brainstorm movements that correspond to the action words (chop, blend, whip, grate, simmer, boil) found in their recipe. Students then put the action words together in a movement sequence that follows the order of the recipe. Each group performs their completed dance for their classmates. Have the classroom audience guess the action words and type of recipe. (1.4 proficient)

ADVANCED

Self-portrait
Prior to this learning experience, each student seeks out five individuals to identify three words that describe the student’s personality. Using the 15 words collected, each student creates a short movement sequence interpreting the adjectives that describe them. Choreography should include use of qualities, elements, space and form. Each student performs their movement sequence for his or her classmates, and the classroom audience tries to identify the descriptive words. (1.4 proficient, 2.1 advanced, 5.2 advanced)

Opposites
Prior to this learning experience, create a series of 3x5 cards, each with two words identifying opposites (light/heavy, passive/aggressive, quiet/loud, staccato/legato, summer/winter). Divide the students into partners. Give each partner group one card. Each partner then works individually on a dance sequence which conveys one of the words on the card. After they view each other’s sequence, they put the two together and create a study of duet relationships. Students make choices on how to blend the two movement sequences together. For example: students might perform the sequence side by side, or at opposite ends of the performance space. At some point in the sequence, the partners may relate to each other, combine movement sequences or make a physical connection. (1.4 proficient, 2.1 advanced, 2.6 advanced)

These learning experiences can be done before or after attending a performance, or just as an opportunity to use dance in the classroom.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Artistic Perception: 1.4 Demonstrate clarity of intent while applying kinesthetic principles for all dance elements. (proficient)
Creative Expression: 2.1 Create a diverse body of works of dance, each of which demonstrates originality, unity, clarity of intent, and a dynamic range of movement. (advanced)
Creative Expression: 2.6 Collaborate with peers in the development of choreography in groups. (proficient)
WHAT’S IMPORTANT TO KNOW?

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Questions for students:
• How many of you have ever been to a dance performance?
• What dance performances have you seen?
• How many of you have taken a dance class?
• What kind of dance classes have you taken?
• Can you describe the dance form(s) that you have seen or studied?

Teacher:
Have students share their preconceived notions of modern dance.
Create a list to be reviewed following the performance. Also have
students make predictions about what the types of costumes, music and
backdrop they will see or hear during the performance.

In preparation for a master class:
Have students do research on-line or in the library about the master
teacher. Look for the following information:
• Style of modern dance.
• Background.
• Companies performed with.
• Noted dances performed in or created.

DURING THE PERFORMANCE

Theater Etiquette
There is a specific etiquette for watching a live dance performance.
• Be on time. There is no seating during a dance.
• Use the restroom before the performance. If you have to leave, you may not be allowed back into the hall until intermission.
• Refrain from wearing perfume.
• Leave food and drink at home.
• Leave cameras at home.
• Refrain from talking during the performance.
• Turn off cell phones and pagers.
• Stay seated during the performance.
• Show your appreciation for the performers by applauding at appropriate times.

The bus ride to the theater or the wait in line provides a good time to review
behavior expectations. It is also a good time to remind students of things to
look for.

Things to Have Students Look For
• How do the dancers use space? What floor patterns or levels do you see?
• What is the quality of the movement: soft, flowing, sharp, percussive, incorporated vibrations, swings or collapses?
• What kind of music is used? Is the music live or recorded? Does each dance use music, or sometimes words, sounds, or silence?
• How do the costumes make the dance more interesting or help define a character?
• Do the dancers utilize props or backdrops of any sort? What role do they serve?
• Which style of modern dance is being performed?
• Do you notice any variations in choreographic form? Did you notice a recurring motif?
Classroom Etiquette
There is a specific etiquette for attending a class with a master teacher.
• Be properly dressed.
• Be respectful.
• Refrain from talking to fellow students.
• Stay focused.
• Stay with it, do not give up, and do not leave class early.
• No sitting, unless directed by the teacher.
• Applaud teacher when finished (accompanists as well, if any).

Advice for Students
• Be attentive to cues the master teacher gives to improve your execution of the movement.

• How can you internalize information the teacher is giving you to become a better dancer or enjoy the experience more?

• What did the master teacher tell you about his or her experience that tells you why he or she became a dancer? Why have they chosen this style of modern dance?

Teacher: Listen for things the master teacher says about his or her dance background for discussion following the master class. Watch for teaching strategies utilized by the master teacher.

“I see dance being used as communication between body and soul, to express what is too deep to find for words.”
— Ruth St. Denis
Questions for Students
• What was your favorite part of the performance and why?
• What was your least favorite part of the performance and why?
• Describe the modern dance style you observed.
• What type of music was used, if any?
• What type of costumes were worn? Were they complimentary to the dance or did they distract from it?
• What role did the costumes play in the creation of the movement?
• Was your attention drawn to a specific dancer? Explain why.
• What proper audience etiquette did you observe? Can you give examples?

Teacher: Compare the items on your previous brainstorm list to the actual events that occurred. What differences and similarities are there?

Questions for Students
• What personal history did you learn about the master teacher, i.e. where they studied or their professional experiences?
• Based on your prior knowledge about the master teacher, were your expectations for the class met?
• What tips or information from the teacher affected you personally?
• What modern dance style did the teacher present? Do you see yourself continuing with classes in this particular style? Why or why not?

Teacher: Return to one of the learning experiences you did previously and repeat. Compare how the performance or master class has influenced the students’ decision-making with regard to movement choices.

“...dancing is a spiritual exercise in physical form, and...what is seen is what it is.” —Merce Cunningham

It is often a good idea for students to document their experience following a dance performance or master class.

• Upon returning to the classroom, engage in reflective writing about the performance or master class.
• Using steps from the performance or class, combine them to create a new movement sequence.
• Share personal interpretations of modern dance with classmates.
THE CALIFORNIA STATE VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED BY THIS GUIDE

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION
Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to Dance. Students perceive and respond, using the elements of dance. They demonstrate movement skills, process sensory information, and describe movement, using the vocabulary of dance.

Development of Motor Skills and Technical Expertise
1.1 (Advanced) Demonstrate highly developed physical coordination and control when performing complex locomotor and axial movement phrases from a variety of genres (e.g., refined body articulation, agility, balance, strength).

Development of Dance Vocabulary
1.5 (Proficient) Apply knowledge of dance vocabulary to distinguish how movement looks physically in space, time, and force/energy.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION
Creating, Performing, and Participating in Dance. Students apply choreographic principles, processes, and skills to create and communicate meaning through the improvisation, composition, and performance of dance.

Application of Choreographic Principles and Processes to Creating Dance
2.2 (Advanced) Use dance structures, musical forms, theatrical elements, and technology to create original works.

Communication of Meaning in Dance
2.4 (Proficient) Perform original works that employ personal artistic intent and communicate effectively.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT
Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of Dance. Students analyze the function and development of dance in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting human diversity as it relates to dance and dancers.

Development of Dance
3.2 (Advanced) Analyze the role dancers and choreographers play in the interpretation of dances in various historical and cultural settings.

History and Function of Dance
3.3 (Proficient) Explain how the works of dance by major choreographers communicate universal themes and sociopolitical issues in their historical/cultural context (e.g., seventeenth-century Italy, eighteenth-century France, the women’s suffrage movement, dance in the French courts, Chinese cultural revolution).

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING
Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works of Dance. Students critically assess and derive meaning from works of dance, performance of dancers, and original works according to the elements of dance and aesthetic qualities.

Description, Analysis, and Criticism of Dance
4.1 (Proficient) Describe how the qualities of a theatrical production contribute to the success of a dance performance (e.g., music, lighting, costuming, text, set design).

4.3 (Advanced) Analyze evolving personal preferences about dance styles and choreographic forms to identify change and development in personal choices.

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS
Connecting and Applying What Is Learned in Dance to Learning in Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers. Students apply what they learn in dance to learning across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication, and management of time and resources that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills. They also learn about careers in and related to dance.

Connections and Applications Across Disciplines
5.2 (Advanced) Compare the study and practice of dance techniques to motion, time, and physical principles from scientific disciplines (e.g., muscle and bone identification and usage; awareness of matter, space, time, and energy/force).

Development of Life Skills and Career Competencies
5.3 (Proficient) Explain how dancing presents opportunities and challenges to maintain physical and emotional health and how to apply that information to current training and lifelong habits.
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts

The Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts at UC Davis serves as a resource for the campus and the region, reinforcing the university's status as a comprehensive university of the first order by raising the profile of its arts and humanities programs to that of its top-ranked science programs. Opened in October 2002, Mondavi Center features the state-of-the-art, 1,800-seat Barbara K. and W. Turrentine Jackson Hall, and the 250-seat Studio Theatre for more intimate productions. Mondavi Center is the largest presenter of the performing arts in the Sacramento region, bringing more than 70 of the world's greatest artists and lecturers each season.

In addition to the artists and speakers presented as part of its annual Season of Performing Arts, Mondavi Center also hosts productions by the UC Davis Music and Theatre and Dance departments and other campus academic programs, as well as those of regional arts organizations such as the Sacramento Ballet and the Sacramento Philharmonic Orchestra.

www.MondaviArts.org
530.754.3000

Department of Theatre and Dance

The Department of Theatre and Dance at UC Davis offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in conjunction with an aggressive and artistically adventurous production season. Courses and productions provide students with consistent opportunities to creatively engage with professional directors, designers, and choreographers. The department, in collaboration with the Granada Television network, is host of the Granada Artists-in-Residence program, which brings distinguished theater artists from the United Kingdom to UC Davis. A stellar faculty, state-of-the-art facilities, and talented students make UC Davis a leader in arts education.

theatredance.ucdavis.edu
530.752.0888

Sierra North Arts Project

The Sierra North Arts Project (SNAP) fosters the professional development of kindergarten through post-secondary teachers by employing the model of teachers teaching teachers. SNAP addresses the priorities of The California Arts Project (TCAP) involving direct engagement with the artistic process, direct applications to classroom teaching, and the development of teacher leaders in arts education. The Sierra North Arts Project is one of six California Arts Project regional sites throughout the state, and it serves a twelve-county area extending from the Central Valley to the Lake Tahoe basin. The goals set forth by SNAP cover four key objectives: (1) to deepen and strengthen teachers’ subject matter knowledge; (2) to provide opportunities for teachers to connect with their personal creativity and to develop connections within the arts learning community; (3) to enhance and expand SNAP within the region and create a wide variety of leadership opportunities for SNAP members; and (4) to develop strategies and techniques for translating research experiences into classroom practice.

education.ucdavis.edu/SNAP/
530.752.9683

UC Davis ArtsBridge

In response to educational funding cutbacks and the erosion of formal arts training in the public schools, the University of California and the state of California have joined forces to expand ArtsBridge, an innovative arts outreach program that began at the Irvine campus in 1996. ArtsBridge provides scholarships for undergraduate and graduate arts students to work with K-12 teachers in developing arts activities that supplement the core curriculum. The success of the program prompted lawmakers to include a $1.5 million line item in the 1999 state budget to facilitate the expansion of ArtsBridge to all of the UC campuses. Presently UC Davis students from the departments of Art, Theatre and Dance, Music, and Design are active in classrooms at several area schools, including school districts in Woodland, Winters, and Dixon.

artsbridge.ucdavis.edu
530.754.8477

Mondavi Center Arts Education

Many of the artists appearing during Mondavi Center’s season also participate in a range of educational outreach activities coordinated by the center’s Arts Education Program. These activities include school matinees, master classes, lecture demonstrations, open rehearsals, curriculum development, teacher training, and in-school artist residencies. These outreach activities, which benefit more than 25,000 area school children, college students, educators, and community residents every season, constitute a major commitment to arts education in the region and underscore UC Davis’ commitment to the artists and audiences of the future.

www.MondaviArts.org/education
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