

FOR TEACHERS

Classroom Activities

1. **Mirroring:** To explore the concept of working as an ensemble, try a simple “mirroring” exercise. Ask students to find a partner. Designate one person in each pair as the leader and the other as the “mirror reflection.” As the “leader” in each pair moves (limit movement choices to the hands, arms, head and upper back), the “mirror” acts as the leader’s reflection, following the leader exactly. Very slow, smooth movement helps the mirror to stay precisely with the leader. Trade places so that the leader becomes the mirror and vice versa. Slow, sustained accompanying music helps the students focus. If the exercise is done well, it is impossible to see which person is leading. An excellent exercise for developing concentration, mirroring also helps students understand the nonverbal sensitivity dancers need in order to work on stage with other people.

2. **Translating Everyday Movement to Dance:** Much of dance movement onstage comes from everyday movement. This real life movement is often transformed or exaggerated as it becomes dance movement. This transformation produces stylized movement which is recognizable, yet different. Trying this process of stylizing movement will help the students understand how the movements they do every day forms the basis for dance. Have the class pick a category of everyday movements, e.g., ways of saying “hello,” sports movements, getting-ready-in-the-morning movements. Choose a single movement from the category, such as waving “Hello.” Make the arm wave larger than usual so that it becomes an arc taking the whole body out in space. Next, try the arm wave in very slow motion. Finally, try the arm wave while doing a turn with the whole body. The arm wave has just become stylized like much dance movement. Discuss if you can still identify the movement as an arm wave. Also observe if the wave takes on a new or different look from its original form. Select another movement, e.g. a handshake or a football toss. Stylize the movement in the same three ways as above; large, slowly, and turning. Alert students to spotting examples of everyday movements in the dance performance. Follow up with “After the Performance” Activity 4.

3. **Shapes:** An important element of dance is the use of the body as a sculptural shape. Focus students’ perception on this idea by asking each one to bring in three pictures of a single body creating a shape. (Sports pages, news photos, and advertisements are good photo sources.) From the pictures, make a sequence of three or four photos with variety within the sequence. Challenge students to make the shape in the photos with their bodies. Have a group of students make one shape, and then each shape sequentially. How can a group organize itself so everyone moves together? Does the sequence of shapes create a flow of movement, or are the transitions between shapes difficult? Are certain sequences especially satisfying? Why?

4. **Connecting Music to Movement:** Each of the dances of the Ailey repertory seems to have its own movement personality. An integral part of that personality is the music to which the dance is set. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater uses a wide range of music, from Caribbean folk music to contemporary classical music and from Duke Ellington orchestral arrangements to spoken words. Let the class discover how certain music inspires particular movement. Bring in three or four very different types of music, e.g. ethnic music, classical music, popular music with lyrics, or “sound” backgrounds. Ask the students first to express the feeling of the music with crayons, markers or paints. Encourage them to let color, line and texture show the music, rather than representational drawing. Next, ask the students to express the music with movement. Does the music inspire gentle or bold movements? Does it make the body travel in space or move in place? Does the music inspire smooth movements or sharp, angular ones? Discuss movement responses to the music. How are the responses related to the drawings? How do preconceived ideas about the music color responses to it?



LINDA CELESTE SIMS

FOR TEACHERS

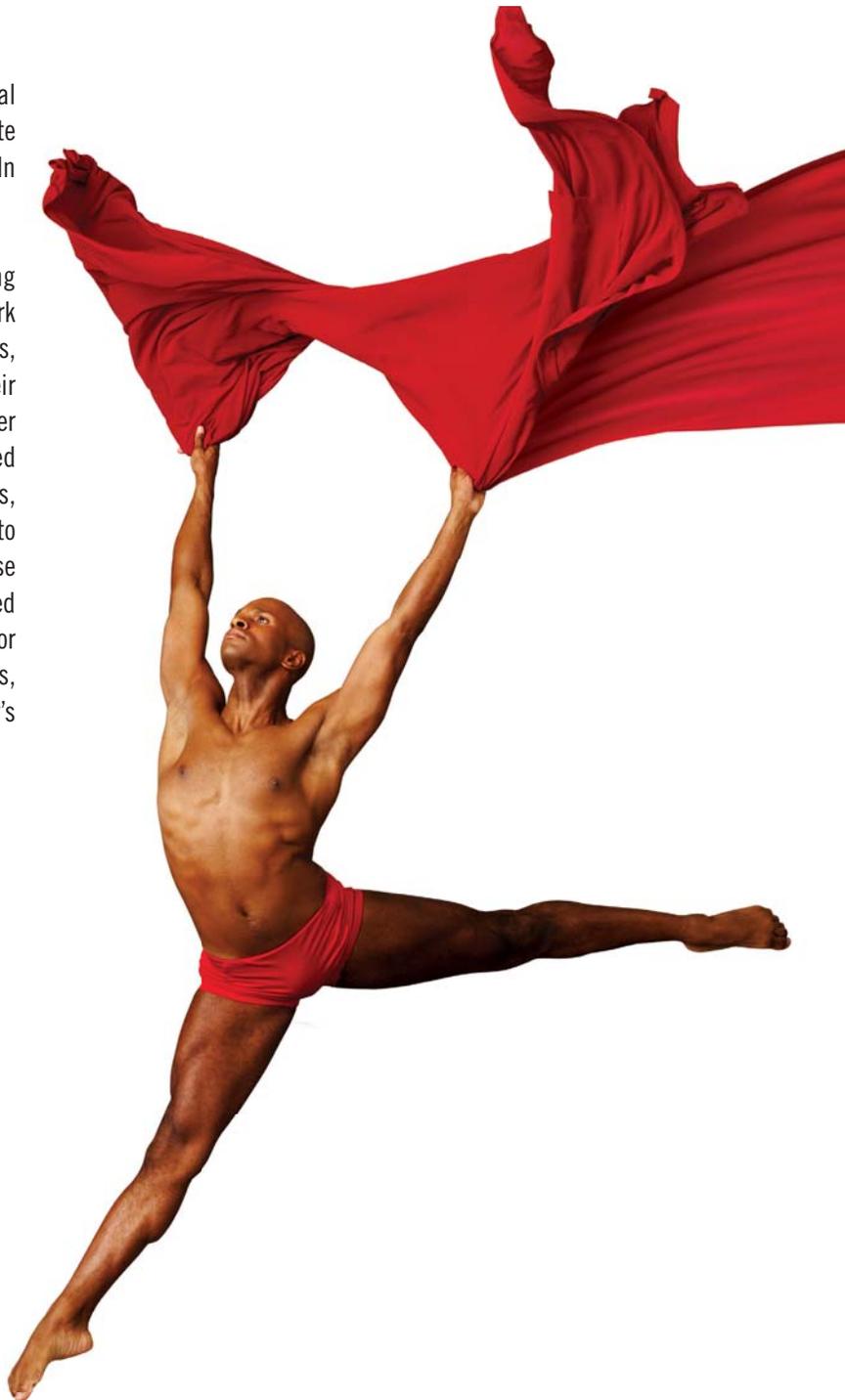
Before the Performance

Discussion

1. Movement is a language as rich and expressive as written or spoken language. Much of this movement language is understood by all humans around the world. Because we understand and use movement language so readily, we are often not conscious of the many ways in which we use it to communicate. Encourage the class to make a list of ways in which we use movement to communicate, e.g. expressing emotions, giving directions, accomplishing tasks, teaching, playing, worshipping, entertaining, or telling a story.

2. Discuss the role dance plays in various cultures through social dances and folk dance. Ask students to describe or demonstrate social dances or folk dances that are traditional in their cultures. In which cultures does dance play an important role? Why?

3. Initiate an age-appropriate discussion about racism and breaking racial barriers to help students appreciate the groundbreaking work accomplished by Alvin Ailey. Like African-Americans in other fields, artists have struggled for opportunities to train and perform in their art forms. Mr. Ailey fortunately encountered a unique teacher, Lester Horton, who helped many dancers past the barriers that existed in the 1940s. Another Horton student of Ailey's era, Janet Collins, became the first African-American classical ballerina. Invited to join the famed Ballet Russes in the 1940s, Collins was asked to use body make-up to appear "white." She refused. Collins later joined the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. The recollections of artists of color provide a strong narrative about racial issues in the United States, past and present. Lead a discussion of these issues using Ailey's life as an example.



FOR TEACHERS

After The Performance

Discussion

1. In discussing a dance performance, it is often more productive to ask the question, “What did you see in the dance?” or “What do you remember most strongly from the dance?” rather than “Did you like the dance?” The first two questions lead to observation or analysis of the performance, while the third question encourages judgmental responses. Although an audience should respond both positively and negatively to a dance, critique should come into play later in the discussion process. Discussion of what aspect of a dance stays mostly strongly in the memory often reveals the choreographic choices at the heart of the work. Have students describe a memorable moment from the dance in various ways—verbally, in writing, by drawing, or through movement. The Ailey performance can inspire a discussion about art and culture, especially for older students. Culture in this context represents the way of life of a group of people, including the customs, values, beliefs, stories, and artistic expressions. The Ailey company is considered a cultural export or cultural ambassador for the United States. How does art transmit culture? Can the students find examples of cultural elements in the dances? How do these cultural elements represent America? Would it be possible for any kind of art to have no cultural reference?

Activities

1. The dancers expressed various feelings and emotions through their movements. Use this idea to explore the possibilities of physical communication. Refer back to using the body as a sculptural shape in “Before the Performance” Activity 1. Ask the students what feelings or emotions were expressed by the dancers? Have students recreate a movement or moment from one of the dances which shows an emotion or feeling. Using that emotion or another you suggest as a theme, ask the students to create an “art museum” filled with dramatic sculptures. Work in pairs with one person as the “artist” and the other as the “clay.” Artists should mold their clay, using the face as well as the whole body, into a frozen statue that expresses the theme emotion. While the clay holds the molded shape, ask each artist to step away from his or her statue. Observe the choices made by the artists. How are the statues similar? What does that reveal about how we physically express emotions? Have students trade places so that the artist becomes the clay and vice versa.

2. The Ailey performance offers opportunities for language arts activities. Have each student make a list of action words (verbs) and descriptive words (adjectives and adverbs) generated by the performance or a particular part of the performance. Emphasize the descriptive aspect of the words, e.g. verbs like bend, bounce, twist, melt, and explode, and adjectives like smooth, trembling, open, linear, and heavy. Create a list of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs

contributed by the class. Discuss whether the list is highly varied or if many of the words are similar. What does this tell about the dances that inspired the words?

3. Ask students to write a review of the performance. First, consider two aspects of critical writing—description and opinion. An important function of a dance critic is the translation of movement images into written language. This translation is made by using descriptive language to paint a picture of what is seen onstage. Students will use this approach. Ask each to focus on the dance or section of a dance he or she remembers most vividly from the performance. Some questions the students could ask themselves might include: What was the form of the dance? Was it a solo, duet, or group dance? Was the dance highly organized and designed, or was it more casual with lots of things happening at once? How did the dance use energy? Was it mostly smooth and lyrical, light and fast, powerful and angular, or quirky and unpredictable? How was music or accompaniment used? What was the intention of the dance? Was it intended to tell a story, mood or emotion, or create patterns in time and space? After the descriptive phase of the review, students can write their responses to the dance. Opinions have a place in critical writing but need to be supported. Have students share their writing with each other and synthesize their work into one or more group reviews. Have them compare their writings to professional dance critics from publications such as *Dance Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Boston Herald*, *The L.A. Times*, and *The Chicago Tribune*.

4. The process of choreography is similar to written language— assembling words (movements) into sentences (phrases). Give the class the opportunity to make sentences in movement. Review the everyday movements listed by your students in “Before the Performance” Activity 4. Have the students demonstrate everyday movements they remember from the performance, e.g. a walk, hug, a nod, or a pointing finger. Have the class choose four movements that will serve as basic material for the students to use. Divide the class into small groups. Each group will work together as a single choreographer and use the four movements to create a movement sequence. All four movements must be used, but they may be placed in any order. One movement may be repeated at the beginning, middle, or end of the pattern. Each group can also choose its spatial formation; a line, circle, clump, wedge, or soloist with chorus are some possibilities. Have each group show its movement sequence to the rest of the class. Ask each group to describe its decision-making process.

Contemporary African-American Choreographers

The Ailey company has been fertile ground for nurturing contemporary African-American choreographers. Some of them have produced their first works for the Company, while others have brought highly-developed styles to the Ailey repertory. The passion, political statements, and dazzling physicality of Bill T. Jones have made him one of the most important contemporary choreographers. Ronald K. Brown melds modern dance vocabulary with elements of African dance in a choreographic voice notable for its deep feeling. Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, with her strong commitment to creating a community of artists working within a neighborhood community, challenges the Ailey dancers to explore social issues and gender roles. Donald Byrd mixes classicism with a love of jazz to produce provocative choreographic statements. These choreographers are providing the next chapter in the rich history of African-American contributions to American dance.



KIRVEN JAMES BOYD

Customs, Cultures, and Social Forces

The African-American influence on American dance has been enormous. Every aspect of dance, including social, Broadway theater, street, and modern dance, shows the impact of African-Americans past and present. This influence has its roots in West African dance and in the role of dance in African society.

Dance, particularly in West African communities, is a natural part of life. Every child attends ritual and recreational events, singing and dancing along with the community. The view of dance as a necessary, respected art is woven into the heritage of African-Americans. Even today, African dance in America educates, entertains, and expresses historical, cultural, and social ideologies.

African-American influences in social dance were felt in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in dances such as the Cake Walk, Charleston, and Lindy Hop. In addition, the development of jazz dance and tap by African-Americans paralleled the rise of jazz music and influenced American musical theater. During this time, racial barriers made it difficult for African-Americans to train or perform in more established dance forms, particularly classical ballet. In modern dance, America's indigenous dance, however, these barriers were not as pronounced. Some modern choreographers, including Ana Sokolow and Lester Horton, employed multiracial casts of dancers. In fact, Horton trained the young African-American dancer Alvin Ailey, who would later become a major figure in American dance.

Ailey moved freely between modern dance and ballet in his choreography, making dances for major ballet companies in addition to those for his own company. He was also one of the first modern dance company directors to acquire a repertory, adding to his own dances the works of dance pioneers Lester Horton, Glen Tetley, Katherine Dunham, Donald McKayle, Pearl Primus, and Talley Beatty, among others. Ailey aspired to teach a mass audience through dance, and his work has greatly broadened the appeal of concert dance, drawing new dance audiences in large numbers. In 2008, a U.S. Congressional resolution designated the Company as "a vital American cultural ambassador to the world," one that celebrates the uniqueness of the African-American cultural experience and the preservation and enrichment of the American modern dance heritage. Today, the Company continues Mr. Ailey's mission by presenting important works of the past and commissioning new ones.

A few dance pioneers:



Lester Horton (1906–1953) was a West Coast choreographer and visionary teacher who served as Alvin Ailey's early teacher and mentor. Horton combined elements of Japanese theater, Native American ritual, and mythology with an earthy, powerful style of movement. His studio was open to dancers of all colors and ethnic backgrounds. His pupils also included the distinguished African American dancers Carmen de Lavallade and James Truitte.



Katherine Dunham (1919–2006) was the first dancer/choreographer to organize a Black concert dance company and seriously explore African-American folklore. A noted anthropologist for her studies in the Caribbean and Haiti, Dunham was also a consummate theatrical artist. She organized her company in the late 1930s, when dance performance opportunities for artists of color were limited. Dunham's company performed throughout the United States and Europe with her highly successful blend of African material, ballet, and modern dance. She choreographed for film and Broadway in the 1940s.



Dr. Pearl Primus (1919–1994), probably the finest American scholar of African dance, trained first as a modern dancer, then in African dance. In 1953, Primus earned her Ph.D. in Anthropology. She devoted her life to studying and performing the dances of Africa and, ironically, was assisted by the governments of Ghana and Liberia to return to Africa to help preserve African culture. A spectacular dancer known for her jumps and percussive high energy, Primus is also remembered for her eloquent choreographic statements on race.

Talley Beatty (1923–1995), a veteran performer with Katherine Dunham's troupe, has had his choreography in the repertory of many companies. Several of his powerful dances, such as *The Roar* and *The Phoebe Snow*, deal with issues of race, while others like *Congo Tango Palace* draw on African rhythm and kinetic high energy. Several Beatty works have been performed by the Company, including *The Stack-Up* and *Toccata*.



Donald McKayle (1930–), a student of Lester Horton, emerged as a gifted choreographer who has worked with modern dance companies, on Broadway, in television, and in theatrical revues. He has also received five Tony nominations for his Broadway choreography. Several of his works show his brilliant theatricality. *Games* is based on urban children's games, *Rainbow Round My Shoulder* depicts a prison chain gang, and *District Storyville* recreates the beginnings of jazz in New Orleans. McKayle's choreography is a staple of the Ailey repertory, and he continues to choreograph for other major companies and productions. He is now a professor for UC Irvine and has been on the faculty of colleges such as Connecticut College, Sarah Lawrence and Bennington College. He has received an Honorary Ph.D. from the College of Arts and in 2009 he received an honorary Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in recognition of his contribution to dance.



The Basic Elements of Dance

Dances have these four basic elements:

body	The dancer's unique and distinctive instrument capable of grand and discrete movement in infinite combinations.
time	A measurable period during which movement or dance occurs. Dance makes the passage of time felt by dividing it into anything from complex, rhythmic patterns to long, unbroken stillness.
space	The whole design and use of the place in which a dance unfolds.
energy	The amount or force of the movement, also sometimes referred to as the color or texture of the movement.

Dance productions sometimes incorporate some of the following theatrical elements:

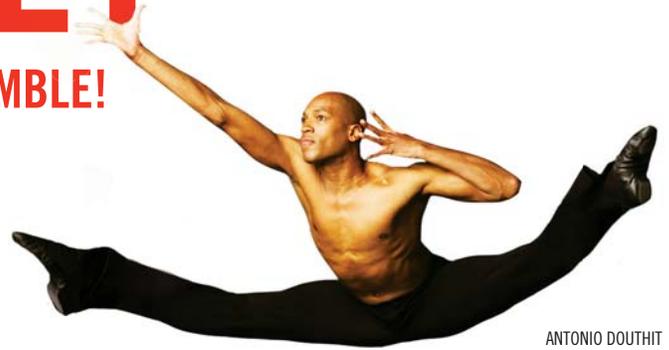
scenery	The environment or setting of a dance, created through the use of, e.g., painted flats, painted backdrops, back curtains, lighting and/or slides on a cyclorama, a white screen-like curtain at the back of the stage.
props	Items used to create a sense of place, or items used by the dancers in the movements of the dance.
score	The musical or sound accompaniment for the dance, which may be created for the dance or may be preexisting music or sound.
stage lights	Electrical equipment used to illuminate the stage or an area of the stage or to suggest a mood or setting.
backstage	The area around and behind the stage where theater technicians work and dancers enter and exit the stage.

Dance Terms

modern dance	A means of expression that is different from classical ballet; uses the body with a wider range of motion, the legs turned parallel or turned in; feet can be flexed and the back rounded; head is not always held erect; there are many different modern dance techniques.
Horton	Created by Lester Horton (1906–1953); a modern dance technique that explores how many different ways the body can move. He named these movements Studies. Some of the studies are for balance, some are to fortify (strengthen) and some are to work on the swinging action of the body. In the Horton technique, the dancer tries to use as much space as possible: turning, bending and jumping sideways, backward and even upside down. The shapes created are clear and linear. The quality of the movement is lyrical, powerful and energetic. The Horton technique portrays a dynamic beauty.
Graham-based modern	Created by Martha Graham (1894–1991); a dance technique that is based on the principle of contraction and release, movement which is similar to the act of breathing, creating a current of energy through the body; the back appears rounded in a contraction and the chest is lifted in a release; movement itself is dramatic and expressive.
ballet	A dance form which started in the royal courts of Europe; the body is held mostly upright and the legs are turned out from the hip; uses five basic positions of the feet; uses French as its language. The movement is meant to look elegant, effortless, and graceful all at once.

AILEY

WORD JUMBLE!



ANTONIO DOUTHIT

BEGINNER

This is what the Ailey dancers do:

C D E A N

A part of your body that can help you move:

E T F E

A part of your body that extends wide:

M A R S

The Ailey dancers dance on this:

G A T E S

ADVANCED

Techniques and classes:

M D N H A U

N I P T O E

A G M A R H

Z A J Z

R E D M O N

P I P O H H

T A B E L L

T R O O N H

AILEY

COLOR IT!



YANNICK LEBRUN

Dancing Deeper

Bibliography and Resources

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Videos, DVDs, and CDs

Available from AileyShop.com:

- Revelations* Audio CD. Entertainment One, 1999.
- Blues Suite* Audio CD. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, 2009.
- An Evening with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater* DVD. Directed by Thomas Grimm, 1986, 108 minutes.
- Beyond The Steps: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater* DVD. Dance Philm, produced and directed by Phil Bertelsen, 2006, 86 minutes.

Available from amazon.com:

- A Tribute To Alvin Ailey* DVD. RM Arts, 1997, 103 minutes.
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Websites

- www.AlvinAiley.org
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/AlvinAileyAmericanDanceTheater
- Ailey II on Facebook: www.facebook.com/AileyII
- Vimeo: www.vimeo.com/channels/ailey