

the rhythm of things



Dances for Television Series

Introduction

This lesson applies the content and themes presented in the *Dances for Television* videodance *The Rhythm of Things*, to middle school standards (grades 6-8) in the fine arts, language arts, social studies, and life sciences. It is centered around the viewing of *The Rhythm of Things* and includes classroom activities as well as movement activities to be conducted by dance, physical education, or content-area classroom teachers. *The Rhythm of Things* is aligned with the fine arts standards in relation to dance, but could be adapted for use in music, visual art, or theater.

Description

During the course of this lesson students view *The Rhythm of Things*; participate in a discussion about the themes presented in the video; learn the difference between descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative statements when engaging in a dialogue about a work of art; engage in an improvisation activity; and create a movement study based on the themes presented in the improvisation and the video. Students explore the sense of place; how it is used in the video as well as how to manipulate space during their own movement studies. The "Spaces We Live In" lesson is best for students with some improvisation experience. "I Come From" is a great addition if time allows or can serve as an alternative for groups of any skill level.



Objectives

By participating in this lesson, students are able to:

- differentiate among statements of description, interpretation, and evaluation and use them in discussions about dance performance (Fine Arts Standard—FAS: Analyzing and Responding).
- compose a dance to enhance understanding of a concept studied in a discipline outside of the arts (FAS: Connections, Relationships, and Applications).
- recognize and discuss the difference between assessing the quality of a dance and a personal preference for a dance (FAS: Valuing the Arts/Aesthetic Reflection).
- discuss ways that dance is integrated into a community and provides examples (FAS: Historical, Cultural, and Social Contexts).
- create a movement study that has clear intent, explores dance elements and uses choreographic principles (FAS: Creative Expression and Communication).

The Social Studies (Geography & People in Societies) benchmarks that relate to this lesson are:

- define and identify regions using human and physical characteristics.
- explain how the environment influences the way people live in different places and the consequences of modifying the environment.
- explain how contact between different cultures impacts the diffusion of belief systems, art, science, technology, language and forms of government.

The Rhythm of Things can be viewed as a form of “visual text” as part of the language arts curriculum and can be interpreted and analyzed according to the **Literary Text and Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self-Monitoring Strategies** standards in accordance with the following benchmarks:

- Describe and analyze the elements of character development.
- Analyze the importance of setting.

- Demonstrate comprehension by inferring themes, patterns and symbols.
- Explain how figurative language expresses ideas and conveys mood.
- Make meaning through asking and responding to a variety of questions related to text.
- Apply self-monitoring strategies to clarify confusion about text and to monitor comprehension.

Materials Needed

- Music accompaniment for the improvisation and movement studies
- Large space for movement activity
- Pencils and paper for observation
- Chalk board, dry erase board, or large paper to record class discussion
- *Dances for Television* DVD containing *The Rhythm of Things*

Procedure

This lesson can be conducted over two 45-minute periods or one 1.5-hour long period.

1.) Pre-viewing activity/brainstorm (10 minutes)

On a board in front of the class have the students write what they know about descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative statements. Discuss and clarify any discrepancies in understanding and have the students create a chart with three columns for descriptive, interpretive and evaluative statements to take appropriate notes while watching the video.

2.) View *The Rhythm of Things* (approximately 10 minutes)

Students should watch once without taking notes to experience the work. Encourage them to let it wash over them. Then they should watch again and take notes in order to be able to participate in the discussion. They can fill in the chart they created above with appropriate observations.

3.) Discussion (20-25 minutes)

Students begin the discussion by sharing their descriptive, interpretive and evaluative statements that they developed and recorded while

viewing the video. The teacher should help students to recognize and discuss the difference between assessing the quality of a dance and a personal preference for a dance. While interpreting and analyzing the work various themes can be explored including ways that dance is integrated into a community; how the environment influences the way people live and move in different places; consequences of modifying the environment; or defining and identifying the region in the video using human and physical characteristics. What kind of landscape is it? Have they ever seen or been to a place like this? What do they know about wetlands in their communities and so on? The dance experience could accompany a field trip to a local wetland environment and discussion of the role these spaces place in our cities, suburbs and wild spaces.

4.) “The Spaces We Live In” — a movement activity (45 minutes)

- Divide the class into two groups.
- Group one imagines that they are outside in a field and performs movements that inhabit and define that sense of space. Help them by prompting their imaginations with descriptive words. For example: Picture the flowing grasses. How might you hide behind them? Mirror their motion. Can you make the shape of an old gnarled tree? How does the tree move? How far can you see? How do you show us with your motions that you are in a large space or a small space? (3 minutes)
- Group two watches them and writes down as many words as they can to describe the movements, paying special attention to space.
- Group two then imagines that they are on a busy city street and executes the movements that would occur in that space. Prompt their imaginations with descriptive words (3 minutes).
- Group one observes them and writes down as many words as they can to describe the movements, paying special attention to space.
- All students are then asked to move at the same time, still within their original space constraints. (3 minutes).
- Students pair off (one from group 1, one from

2) and pick 4 words from each of the lists they have created and put them in an alternating sequence. (5 minutes)

- Students create a movement sequence using this list, either placing the actions in a different spatial constraint, or using the one originally specified. (15-20 minutes)
- Students perform their sequences for the other students and the others try to guess some of the words that they used to inspire their movement. (5-10 minutes—depending on class size)
- Students can also be encouraged to use descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative statements to discuss the work of their peers.

5. “I Come From” Sequence—alternative movement activity (45 minutes)

This exercise is a Metaphor Form taught by Turning the Wheel Productions, Inc., an intergenerational dance/theatre.

- Hand out several sheets of paper and pencils to each student
- Ask the students to write the following sentence stems on their pieces of paper:
 - I Come From
 - Once I Came From
 - She Comes From
 - He Comes From
 - I Used to Come From
- Encourage them to be brief and creative, to give real life answers or imagined stories or poetic answers. Explain that “I come from Wyoming” is a fine place to start and then illustrate how they can give it more meaning. Is it the wide open prairies or cowboy uncles etc.? (10 minutes)
- Now they can begin improvising with the sentences they created. Encourage them to explore many movement ideas for one word or idea. They do not have to describe the words (as in charades) but just need to have a clear idea in their own minds of their intent. As they explore movements and find something they like for a sentence they can then repeat it a few times in order to remember it and go on to the next. When they have movements for 3-5 sentences

they can review them and explore the order in which they want them to occur (20 minutes).

- Finish by sharing the dances with each other. You may choose to see each one individually or to have the students perform them in small groups together and notice unexpected connections. Clap after each showing and if there is time students can offer descriptive feedback and affirmations to each other (10 minutes).

Assessment

While the students are moving and participating in the discussion, the teacher can conduct a teacher checklist in which they would mark yes or no for whether or not the students participated in the discussion, moved within the appropriate space constraints, stayed on task, created a rich vocabulary list, were attentive audience members, and created thoughtful choreography. The students can turn in their vocabulary lists and the word sequence they used to create their movement study, which could be evaluated as well.