

Danceable Thoughts

Lesson 1

Dancer as Athlete and Artist

Dance Combination

None required for beginner level
See Combo 1 for Intermediate Lesson or Extension

Supplemental materials

Video Clip of dance excerpt
Video Clip of athlete highlights (optional)
Follow-up activity requires paper or posterboard, scissors, glue sticks, markers

Prep

Write on board two distinct columns -- leave room in the middle –
Athlete Artist

Discussion

There are many different types of athletes – brainstorm a list of sports – include individual types and team types

Ask students to visualize a top performing athlete in any sport and then write down in the column under the word “Athlete” -- three or four ADJECTIVES that describe that athlete. Make a point that they should describe the total “person” not just the physical appearance. Give them no more than 2 minutes.

Ask the students to volunteer their words – teacher should make certain that the words are ADJECTIVES and if necessary take the time to coach the student to get their thought into ADJECTIVE form. Teacher should also group words of similar meaning. Teacher writes list on board - students should add words to their lists.

Repeat process with “Artist” Use this opportunity to define “performing arts” and “visual arts” Allow students to have duplicate words from athlete list on artist list.

Use the “artist” list as valid descriptors of athletes ... repeat the process with athlete list. Allow for exceptions to the rule...pointing out that both are very broad categories of activities.

Bridge the columns with the word “dancer” and add arrows pointing to both columns. Discuss the physical requirements of dance. Move to the artist column – introduce the word, **aesthetics**. Describe the artist’s choice to communicate an idea and to create/generate an emotional response.

Under the bridge add the word “**technique**” and simply define it as the proper execution of skills – then further define “proper” as the safest and most effective way to execute an action. Emphasize that this is another commonality of the two categories. Give an example of attempting to perform an athletic action without correct technique and the consequences -- failure to achieve the desired result and potential for injuries. Emphasize how important correct technique is to dancers – especially beginners who sometimes have unrealistic goals related to their skill level. Use the example of wanting to be able to “do the splits” and how much time and patience it takes for most people to achieve that goal.

Video Presentation Activity

Choose a video clip of any type of dance form. Find something that includes leaping, turning, and displays of control and strength. (I used the very last few minutes of Alvin Ailey's "Night Creatures." It begins with dancers crossing the stage individually, using leaps and turns. The dancers gather and then break into partners and execute a short "jitterbug" that includes the partners lifting and turning.)

Before showing the video ask them to "focus" on the action in two ways – view the movements as physical achievements and secondly, view the movements as means of communicating an idea.

After showing the video, ask leading questions:

What movements stood out? (typical answer "leaps") Why? (typical answer "so high" etc.)

How well did the dancers perform the moves? What kinds of special skills did they display?

Respond to their answers by emphasizing the physical aspects of the performance.

(second set of questions focus on the artistic aspects of the work)

Without really seeing the entire work, what do think was the setting/storyline for this work?

What kind of emotions did the dancers display?

How could you tell?

Respond to their answers by focusing on the dancers' ways of communicating (facial expression, energy level, types of movements, reactions to other dancers on stage)

Describe or if available -- show sports video clip -- (I chose a section of a basketball highlight film that showed the last few seconds of a game that ended with "buzzer beater" shot and the resulting emotions of the players on both teams)

Use similar questions as before. When discussing the emotional aspects of the clip --- explain that what is displayed is mostly "**body language**" and "reaction" –

Ask students to differentiate between the emotional displays of the players and those of the dancers.

Emphasize that dancers must plan and mentally create their settings/storylines so that they can "act" or "recreate" emotions. Point out that many athletes who seem very "emotional" and "enthusiastic" are often hired to act in commercials. Some of them are not nearly as dynamic when they attempt to purposefully communicate an idea.

Outside of Class Assignment

Students should locate and bring to class a total of ten pictures – five of artists IN ACTION and five of athletes IN ACTION.. Possible sources of these pictures, magazines, newspapers, Internet, clip art, greeting cards, wrapping paper, advertisements, cartoons. Not acceptable a "school picture" a still - life shot of someone...the pictures must convey ACTION.

Follow-up (requires paper or posterboard, scissors, glue sticks, markers)

Before starting the follow up activity – check the students' pictures to make sure they are "action-oriented."

Have them identify some of the activities portrayed (running, dancing, swinging, sliding, leaping.) Let them 'call out' the words. Conclude by emphasizing these are ACTION VERBS.

Students will create movement "collages" with their pictures, adding the descriptive words.

Variations – Use large sections of butcher paper for the students to create a class collage or allow the students to create individual collages on half sections of posterboard. Using the class approach early in the school year can be a good "get to know each other" activity. As a teacher it allowed me to quickly

identify the “cliques” so that I could encourage those students to branch out. If done individually these collages can be used for a future choreography lesson. (See Individually Choreography project – Transitional movement)

Movement Activity

Instruct students that they must use only one movement -- the arms moving from the at rest position at their sides to above their heads and then back down to their sides. Limit the movement further – unbent arms in a path “around the outside”

If you must demonstrate -- do so only once and with “no emotion”

Ask students to use only this motion to convey the ideas which you will state:

Getting up in the morning (don’t let them bend their elbows)

Pride in a personal accomplishment

Anger

Ask leading questions –

What are the differences? (posture, facial expressions, speed, energy)

Let them repeat the process this time purposefully, exaggerating the differences, adding posture changes and body movement (bending, foot stomping, heads turning).

Response Discussion –

The way dancers use the energy in their bodies is a primary way of communicating ideas to an audience. (see also Qualities of Movement) This must be done in a very purposeful manner. The same dance step can be used in many ways to convey an idea to an audience – this is what makes it ART not merely a physical action. We first learn the steps and the proper technique for executing them – Dancers then add the artistic dimension to movement – refining it for a specific purpose.

Intermediate Lesson or Extension

Construct an entire movement phrase to be utilized in the same manner (or see Combo 1). After teaching the “plain” phrase divide students into three groups and give each group one of three themes to portray. This activity is best done without music. This could easily be expanded into a choreography project – define certain variables that the students can manipulate – levels, tempo, timing.

Individual Choreography Project Emphasizing Transitional movements

See Lesson one to create a movement collage or use the introduction that follows.

Introduction

Ask the students to construct a list of ten action phrases. Steer them towards words that create a mental picture such as “sliding into home base” or “lovingly petting a cat” or “intensely playing a violin.”

Allow students to divide into partners. Use this activity to check the validity of their choices. Partner one will pantomime the phrase and partner two will confirm that it does portray action. Repeat the process to check the second partner’s list. This activity will take about 7- 10 minutes. There will be a lot of giggling.

Ask each student to underline the ACTION VERBS in their phrases.

Movement Activity

Allow them to choose 8 movements from their list or from their collage and instruct the students to link them together in a sequence. This may be challenging at first. Give them only about 5-7 minutes to get the sequence in order and “memorized.” Start by giving each movement four counts to be “performed.” Phrases will be something like the following: 4 counts of running, 4 counts of painting, 4 counts of sliding, 4 counts of batting, 4 counts of pretending to play an instrument. As teacher counts have all students simultaneously perform their “phrases.”

Stop and ask leading questions?

Are parts of this awkward? Why? (sequencing, level changes, special skills required)

Instruct students - based on special skills required - to edit down to 6 movements but they may not resequence yet. Give them about 3 minutes and then re-perform.

Define “**transition**” as a movement that helps connect other movements so that there aren’t such obvious ‘starts and stops.” Explain that the best transitions are the most natural ones. Let your body give you clues.

Instruct students to discover or create transitions to make movements “flow better.” The students may use more than four counts for each movement idea. Give them about 5-7 minutes and then re-perform or give this to them as an overnight assignment to be performed the next day.

Audience Activity

Prompt students to identify which transitions worked successfully. Emphasize that the ones that the audience won’t easily recognize are the best.

Performer Response

Prompt the performer to discuss (verbally or in writing) what made certain transitions difficult (level changes, direction changes, speed or tempo changes)

Advanced lesson

Have students refine/abstract their phrases into more formalized/stylized movement. Give them overnight to prepare. During performance time ask them to show the “unrefined” phrase and then their new creation.

Dance Combo 1

Beginning position: Facing back, standing with right foot crossed behind left , arms low V

total counts	specific movements
1-8	1-4 arms circle upward, 5-6 lunge out to right, arms behind head, 7-8 return to start position
1-8	1-2 releve pull right arm up in fist to shoulder level, 3-4 unwind to face front, 5-6 plie and extend arm with jazz hand downward, head follows, 7-8 look up
1-8	1-4 lunge out to left, return to parallel first, left arm only extends, 5-8 repeat right
1-8	chasse ball change, right then left arms second position and then in
1-8	1-4 right pivot arms shoot up and circle down to sides, 5-8 repeat to end facing front
1-8	1-4 right foot leads jazz square, arms open to V down, rt, lft, rt to chest rt, lft. 5-6 hinge facing right, 7-8 return to parallel second facing front
1-8	1-4 jazz pas de bouree right and left, arms v down, 5-8 simple pirouette prep – tendu to second, plie fourth, turn finish second parallel, arms v up
1-8	1-4 hinge left arms cross body, return to parallel second, 5-8 right foot crosses behind arms circle up and finish behind head