

DANCE

An Introduction

Dance provides numerous functions in a society. People experience dance in different ways and for many different reasons. Most people are aware of dance as a performing art on stage, screen and media, but dancing can also be a social activity, a form of physical fitness, or a prime means of expressing cultural heritage and identity. Historically, dance was often performed in rituals, worship, social celebrations, and as a means of entertainment and self-expression. Today, dance is still a part of traditional events but also as an element of new innovative performing experiences.

Dance is the most ephemeral of all the arts although improvements in video technology have affected the way we presently record and observe dance. Uniquely, dance is also accessible to many people because one only needs a body to create art through movement. Although dancing is the most common way people interact with the art of dance, other dance experiences include choreographing, viewing, and analyzing dance.

The goal of dance education is to inform and enable students to appreciate and participate in various aspects of dancing: creating/choreographing, performing, and responding to dance. Students learn the craft of choreography, giving them an opportunity to become creative artists, as they practice using a variety of choreographic tools and devices. A wide range of dance styles and techniques are studied, from traditional folk dances to highly evolved classical ballet or modern techniques, from ethnic and cultural dances like those found in India or Africa to numerous contemporary urban dances. Learning how to understand and interpret dance performance can open the door to a lifetime involvement with dancing. When students are given opportunities to watch dance performances, live or on video, this helps them define what makes dance movement interesting, meaningful, or artistic to them.

In the best circumstances, very young children have early opportunities to experience dance through simple rhythmic movements, such as being rocked, or rhythmic moving games like playing “patty cake” or skipping games like “Ring Around the Rosie.” Parents or guardians and preschool teachers should also encourage children to engage in expressive movements. Encouraging children to express themselves by dancing freely to music, leading “freeze dance” games with stopping and starting cues, and inspiring children to create imaginative shapes with their bodies.

During the elementary and middle school years, dance can be integrated into physical education and music classes; however, it is best to have dance taught as a separate discipline by teachers who are experts in the field of dance and creative movement. Dance can also be an integral component of academic learning in more multifaceted curriculums. At the high school level, students should be offered a series of elective dance courses that involve performing, creating, and responding to many types of dance performances.

The Artistic Processes in Dance

CREATE

Connecticut dance standards call for students to learn about the craft of choreography. To begin, students learn a variety of choreographic skills and processes. Through exploration and experimentation, they learn how to create and conceptualize their own choreographic ideas. By using a wide variety of sources for artistic inspiration and varying circumstances, students learn where choreographers get their ideas.

Students also investigate how to organize and develop artistic ideas. They learn to compose dances by using a range of choreographic devices and structures, and using improvisation, experimentation, collaboration and revision to discover new choreographic methods. Learning to express emotions and ideas through movement is investigated, culminating in the development of an artistic statement that communicates personal, cultural, and artistic points of view.

Finally, students learn to refine choreography to completion by improving their ability to analyze, evaluate, revise, and refine. By applying suggestions or feedback from others and self-reflection, students learn to look at composition in new ways. Students practice articulating ideas and artistic intent verbally and by means of various notation methods, to include the use of pictorial symbols and dance vocabulary. Media technologies are employed artistically, and to depict and record dance movements and document choreographic compositions.

PERFORM

Throughout history, people have danced for social, cultural, and theatrical reasons. Connecticut standards endorse the cultivation of student dancing for all purposes by expanding their ability to express, embody, and present themselves in dance performance.

Investigating how the body relates to space, time, music, and energy supports dance expression. Students explore their relationship to space by making static and dynamic shapes, understanding travel pathways, using inward and outward focus, and discovering how to use levels and facings. A dancer's use of time and music are essential tools of expression; therefore, by developing musical awareness and teaching basic music concepts, students learn to recognize, physicalize, and interpret various rhythms, tempi, and eventually complex phrasing. Students then discover the power of expression through the use of energy and dynamics. They learn to recognize various qualities of movement and develop vocabulary to describe movement characteristics. By distinguishing among movement qualities, students discover how to direct their own energy and select various dynamics for performance.

Students embody dance by developing and refining artistic techniques and preparing their minds and bodies for performance. First, students learn how to move in various simple or complex formations while maintaining personal space (examples: lines, circles, diagonals). Learning and refining dance technique expands the students' movement options and strengthens their bodies. They learn a variety of fundamental dance skills to include: functional alignment, core support, balance, weight shifting, and body patterning. They also discover strategies to achieve performance accuracy by creating personal goals and solving movement problems. Utilizing healthful practices (optimal eating habits, improving strength and flexibility, applying injury prevention methods, and increasing stamina) further prepares their bodies for performance. Middle and high school students learn basic anatomy and investigate the effects of nutrition and proprioceptive feedback on the dancing body to further refine embodiment.

Performing is usually the highlight of every student's dance education, and helping students utilize additional production elements teaches them how to enhance artistry. They discover the impact of props, lighting, costumes, scenery, and media projections on a performance. Also, presenting dance in traditional and alternative performance venues further challenges students to think about the overall effect of a dance performance, and supports experimental performing experiences.

RESPOND

Discovering and articulating the meaning of an artistic work is key to appreciating, understanding, and responding to dance performances. Students learn to analyze, interpret and critique dances to refine their skills of observation.

To comprehend the meaning of a dance, students practice finding and describing movements observed. By analyzing dance works of different genres and styles, students look for recurring movement patterns, qualities, and characteristics. Then by noticing the differences or similarities of various dance genres and cultural movement practices, students are challenged to discover what makes each dance unique. Giving them opportunities to explain how dance communicates aesthetic and cultural values also strengthens their ability to perceive and analyze artistic work.

Dance is interpreted by considering artistic intent, meaning, and artistic expression as communicated through the use of the body, elements of dance, technique, structure, and context. To develop a discerning eye, students observe dance performance and share impressions, ideas, and context cues from movements observed. Further reinforcing their dance vocabulary, students practice verbalizing their interpretations of dance movements and theorizing possible meaning.

Developing criteria for evaluating dance across many genres, styles, and cultures helps students define what makes dance movement interesting, meaningful, or artistic. Students learn to identify characteristics of various dance genres and cultural dances, while considering societal and personal values, to define their own personal artistic preferences.

CONNECTING

Dance connects us to a society or culture in many universal and personal ways that deepen our understanding of our world and ourselves. Synthesizing personal knowledge and experiences with an understanding of dance movements, reinforces how students perceive the feelings and ideas evoked in a dance work and its impact on them.

To discover the big ideas in a dance work, students compare how other art forms (example: literature, visual arts) express an idea or feeling. Students also learn the context and historical developments of various dance genres or styles through research, lecture-demonstration, creating a dance study, or working on a capstone project. Integrating personal experiences with knowledge and context helps students connect with dance.

Dance is all around us. Students deepen their connection to dance and its value to a society by noticing dance in their homes, communities, and in the media. Then by observing other cultural or historic dances performed in their natural environment or time, students discover how other cultures and societies experience dance. Students discuss how dances from a variety of cultures, societies, historical periods, or communities reveal the ideas and perspectives of the people. Exercises that promote written and verbal communication skills are emphasized to improve dance literacy and a deeper connection to dance.