

Movement Motif and Musical Structure: A Choreography Lesson Plan

Lesson Overview

Duration: 90-120 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Focus: Creating movement motifs using theme and variation within musical structures

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Generate original movement material using structured improvisation techniques
- Identify and create movement motifs from longer movement phrases
- Apply musical structure (A-B-A or A-A-B format) to choreography
- Use theme and variation techniques to develop motifs
- Perform and analyze short choreographic works

Materials Needed

- Mad Libs movement worksheet (provided below)
- Sound system/speakers
- Two selected songs with clear A-B-A or A-A-B structure
- Suggested tracks:
 - "You Are My Sunshine" by Christina Perri (A-B-A format)
 - "We'll Meet Again" by Vera Lynn (A-A-B format)
- Notebooks/paper for students

Lesson Structure

Phase 1: Movement Generation Through Mad Libs (25-30 minutes)

Setup (5 minutes)

- Distribute Mad Libs movement worksheet
- Explain that students will create movement vocabulary through guided prompts

Group Fill-Out (10 minutes)

- Complete the Mad Libs worksheet together as a large group
- Encourage creative, varied responses
- Write responses on board/large paper for all to see

Movement Creation (10-15 minutes)

- For each item on the completed worksheet, create small movement "nuggets" or phrases
- Work through the list systematically
- Each movement should be 2-8 counts long – encourage brevity... if every nugget is long you will have issues with memory and length
- If stuck, focus on the literal 'execution' of task rather than the 'dancing' way it should be performed. We discovered in class that the task-based nature of this lent itself to unique and powerful movement vocabulary – we didn't need to worry about the dance.

Phase 2: Solo Practice and Sharing (20-25 minutes)

Individual Practice (10 minutes)

- Students practice their sequential order to create one continuous movement sequence
- Encourage personal interpretation and refinement
- Teacher circulates to provide individual feedback

Sharing and Discussion (10-15 minutes)

- Students perform movement phrases for each other
- Discuss different interpretations, experiences, approaches, successes, difficulties

Phase 3: Motif Development (20-25 minutes)

Introduction to Motif (5 minutes)

- Define motif: A short movement phrase that serves as a recurring theme
- Explain how motifs can be developed through variation

Motif Identification (10 minutes)

- Students examine their complete Mad Libs phrase
- Identify sections, movements, small chunks that could serve as strong motifs
- Consider: What movements are most memorable? Most interesting? Most repeatable?

Motif Refinement (10 minutes)

- Edit and refine the Mad Libs phrase to create a shorter A motif
- Focus on clarity, repeatability, and expressive potential
- Motif can be any length at this stage

Phase 4: Musical Structure Analysis (15-20 minutes)

Musical Form Discussion (10 minutes)

- Introduce A-B-A and A-A-B musical structures
- Explain how theme and variation creates meaning for audiences
- Play both selected songs, having students identify the structure

Song Analysis Activity (10 minutes)

- Listen to "You Are My Sunshine" - identify A-B-A structure
- Listen to "We'll Meet Again" - identify A-A-B structure
- Discuss how lyrics and melody create the distinctions

Phase 5: Motif A Development (15-20 minutes)

Structure Requirements (5 minutes)

- Explain that motif A must be exactly 32 counts (4 sets of 8)
- Demonstrate counting in sets of 8

Motif Creation (10-15 minutes)

- Students refine their chosen motif to fit exactly 32 counts
- Practice until memorized
- Test with both pieces of music
- Students select which song feels most appropriate for their movement

Phase 6: Motif B Creation (20-25 minutes)

Contrasting Elements Discussion (5 minutes)

- Brainstorm ways to create contrast:
 - Opposite qualities (sharp vs. smooth, high vs. low)

- Missing elements from motif A
- Different dynamics, facings, or spatial patterns

Motif B Development (15-20 minutes)

- Create motif B using material from original Mad Libs phrase
- Must be exactly 32 counts (4 sets of 8)
- Should contrast with motif A while maintaining connection
- Practice until memorized

Phase 7: Full Structure Assembly (15-20 minutes)

Structure Practice (10 minutes)

- Practice motifs A and B separately to music
- Combine according to chosen song structure (A-B-A or A-A-B)

Variation Exploration (10 minutes)

- Experiment with additional variations:
 - Facing different directions
 - Quality changes (effort, energy)
 - Spatial modifications
 - Timing variations

Phase 8: Performance and Reflection (15-20 minutes)

Final Practice (5 minutes)

- Students run through complete choreography
- Final adjustments and refinements

Performances (10 minutes)

- Students perform for each other
- Encourage supportive observation and discussion

Discussion and Reflection (5-10 minutes)

- Reflect on the creative process

- Discuss successes and challenges
- Analyze what made certain motifs effective
- Consider how musical structure supported the choreography

Teacher Notes

- Encourage risk-taking and creative exploration
- Emphasize process over perfection
- Model vulnerability in your own movement choices
- Be prepared to demonstrate concepts physically
- Allow flexibility in timing based on student needs and engagement levels
- Consider recording sessions for students to review their work later