

Date: 9/15/2024

Lesson Plan Creator: Jake Lewis

Grade Level: 4th, 5th, 6th Grade, Junior High, High School

Lesson Title: Merce Cunningham and Chance Dance

Standards:

Standard 4.D.CR.4: Manipulate and expand movement possibilities to create a variety of movement patterns and structures, and discuss the reasons for movement choices and the effectiveness of movement choices.

Standard 4.D.P.1: Establish spatial relationships with other dancers while safely using levels, directions, focus, and pathway designs in near-, mid-, and far-range movement.

Standard 4.D.P.10: Identify, explore, and experiment with a variety of production elements to heighten the artistic intent and audience experience.

Standard 4.D.R.2: Discuss the characteristics that make a dance artistic.

Learning Objectives:

- 1) Students will be able to create a motif using Cunningham's Chance Method.
- 2) Students will be able to state key attributes of Cunningham Technique and Chance Method.
- 3) Students will be able to apply Chance Technique and choreographic devices to your own dance practice and choreography.

Supplies Needed:

Something to play video on. A playlist of random selections of music, paper and pencil to write sequences and directions down, dice, and coins.

Introduction:

Students will learn about the history of Merce Cunningham and his choreographic tool of Chance Dance. Students will work with different methods to create random results that coordinate with different ways of movement to create a phrase, which is then done to random selections of music to see how all of these methods can create endless possibilities.

Warm-up:

Students will learn 4 of the action movements used later in the exercise: travel, jump, turn, balance. Students will start with four 8's to improvise and explore different ways to accomplish the listed movements, it will then lower to two 8's, then one 8 two times.

Part One: History of Merce Cunningham and Chance Dance

Play this video which gives a history of Merce Cunningham along with some of his well-known collaborators along with his methodologies and tools used to create his works.

(dance maker, collaborator and chance taker, to innovator, film producer and teacher)

<https://aeon.co/videos/technology-philosophy-randomness-how-merce-cunningham-pushed-dance-to-its-limits>

Part Two: Chance Dance and How It Works

What is Chance Dance?

Chance is a technique Cunningham used as a choreographic device. Cunningham choreographed dances using a chance technique in order to provide an element of surprise in his pieces. The dancers involved would develop sequences based on chance using a set of boundaries or limitations. In order to develop chance, he would use techniques such as rolling dice, flipping coins, or using instruction manuals to determine which moves would be used, with which body part and in what order/ direction/ dynamic.

Part Three: Application of Chance Dance

TASK ONE

Roll dice 3 times and write down the numbers you roll, in order.

Write the corresponding action next to the number.

ACTION:

1 = TRAVEL - stepping, roll, or run

2 = JUMP - tuck, jump, leap, spring, or bounce

3 = TURN - spin, pivot, or turn

4 = BALANCE - pause, freeze, stop, hold, or suspend

5 = GESTURE - leg, arm, head gesture

6 = ROLL AGAIN

- Make each task a minimum of 3 seconds to make sure their phrases aren't too short.
- If you roll two of the same number consecutively (i.e. 1,1), the two actions must be different.

TASK TWO

Flip a coin to see if you must repeat each move, in order.

Write the corresponding number next to each move.

HEADS = REPEAT MOVEMENT

TAILS = DO NOT REPEAT MOVEMENT

TASK THREE

In the case you must repeat movements, roll a dice to see how many times you must repeat the movement.

TASK FOUR

Roll dice 3 times and write down the numbers you roll, in order.

Write the corresponding action next to the number.

SPACE:

1 = DIRECTION - forwards, backwards, sideways, up, or down

2 = SPEED (very fast, very slow)

3 = LEVELS - low, medium, or high
4 = SIZE - small or large
5 = TOWARD FROM OTHER DANCERS
6 = AWAY SPECIFIC DANCER

TASK FIVE

Put students into groups and have them perform their dance with a random song from the playlist. Have the groups perform several times to different selections of music to see how the music influences their movements and choices within their dances.

SUPPLEMENTAL IDEAS:

- Altering the number of steps chosen for task one to create longer or shorter phrases.
- Adding different or additional tasks to make the movements more complex or play with time, space, shape, and energy (heads/ tails = fast/ slow, dice roll to show relationships with partners 1 = unison (performing the movement at the same time), 2 = canon (moving one after the other), 3 = question and answer (movement compliments/contrasts others in group, 4 = counterpoint (all movers moving individually), 5 = contact (adding touch, support, lean, or lift), 6 = repetition (repeating all or part of one or more motifs)
- You can pull from the bag of adverbs to describe how each individual movement/ repeated movement is done.

REFLECT:

How can randomness and chance make dance more exciting and fun to watch?

How can adding repetition, change of music, different arrangements of people change the way things look?