

Primeros Pasos Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

ACTIVITY PACKET

for

¡VIVA LAS AMERICAS!

Ballet Hispanico's Performance for Young People

Written by Lenore Gale, Ph. D.

On these pages are some suggested activities designed to enhance students' understanding of basic concepts which underlie dance and music and the patterns of cultural evolution. They can be used before and/or after you see a Ballet Hispanico performance.

You may find some useful as preparation. Many teachers also find that the student excitement generated by the dance performance makes the activities particularly effective immediately following the event.

Please feel free to pick and choose those activities which are most relevant to the work you are currently doing in the classroom, and to the age range of your group. Relevant curriculum areas and approximate appropriate grade levels are indicated at the top of the page for each activity.

You may also want to use one or more of these activities as the inspiration for creating your own classroom exercise. If you do, we hope you will let us know what you developed and how you felt about the results.

These materials were made possible, in part, with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and by grants from The GE Fund and the American Dance Touring Initiative, a program underwritten by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and administered by Dance/USA.

Additional support was provided by a gift from Thomas Ostrander.

© Ballet Hispanico 1994

Tina Ramirez, Artistic Director

167 West 89th Street, NY, NY 10024 · 212-362-6710 · Fax 212-362-7809 · www.balleshispanico.org

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

History/Social Studies
Language Arts

ORIGINS, CULTURES AND BOUNDARIES
Grades 3-12

The cultures of Latin America are the result of the mingling of people of many different origins and customs. Though the origins are sometimes evident in a given person's outward appearance, many times they are not.

Themes for discussion:

How do you know what "culture" or ethnic group someone belongs to? What are the outward signs? (clothing, hand gestures, facial expressions, body movements, way of talking, coloring of skin and hair, religious customs, games, rules?) Have you ever been confused or fooled by a person's outward appearance?

Are there separate cultures within your city or town, or even within your neighborhood? Do the separate groups ever mix? How do they change when they mix? Do they borrow from each other's style of speech or clothing or games or slang or... anything else?

How do you feel about your own territory? How would you feel if someone from another territory entered yours? How would you feel crossing into someone else's territory?

Activities:

- 1. Write a story, poem or essay about an encounter between people from two (or more) different backgrounds.**
- 2. Draw a picture that illustrates such an encounter.**
- 3. Draw a map of your city, town or neighborhood indicating where different groups of people live.**

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

History/Social Studies
Language Arts
Art
Music

FAMILY TREE
Grades 4-12

Your students can research the roots of not only their cultures but also their own families. Ask each student to create his or her own family tree:

Interview members of your family (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles) about their pasts. Where were they born? Where were their parents/grandparents born? When did they arrive in this country? What was their work? How many children did they have?

If you have a relative who was raised in another country, ask him or her about customs from that country. Which do they continue to observe in this country? How have they changed? Are there any musical or dance traditions in your family? What special customs have you been brought up with? Do you speak more than one language?

Go to the library and look for materials on the place of your origins. If you have more than one ethnic background, compare the different countries and cultures that your people come from. How are they different? How are they similar?

Have your students create their own visual representations of their family trees. Share them with each other and discuss their similarities and differences, conflicts and harmonies.

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

History/Social Studies
Art
Music
Physical Education

BLENDING FORMS

Language Arts
Grades 6-12

As different cultures moved from Europe and Africa into Latin America, existing dance forms adopted new techniques and styles. Try this cooperative exploration of changing movements to see how new form might evolve.

Form two or more teams. Give each team a time-limit in which they must create a brief movement phrase which they can perform clearly for the other team(s). A phrase is created by linking several movements together, one movement leading easily to the next. All team members should contribute to the phrase.

Each team watches the others' performance carefully, and then must adapt at least one movement or style from another team's movement phrase and incorporate it into their own.

Every movement phrase should be transformed in some way. Observers should be able to identify the change and its origins, while still recognizing the original phrase. Try this exercise using music and movement from the students' own and other cultures.

The following exercise can be done using words instead of movements to create new phrases:

Ask each student to contribute a word to a developing phrase, sentence, or story on the blackboard or on a piece of paper which you will circulate. As each new word is added, the story should continue to make grammatical sense, though it may take some unusual and unexpected twists.

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

Language Arts
Social Studies

MOVEMENT AND EMOTION
Grades K-8

"Body language" reveals emotions in everyday life as well as in a dance performance. Try the following exercises:

Have the group sit in a circle on the floor. Ask them to imagine that they are feeling sad, and then to sit as though they were feeling happy. Alternate the two contrasting emotions and resulting body postures. Observe and discuss physical changes they saw and experienced.

Have a student create one movement, using any or all parts of the body, based on an everyday action or event of his/her choice (walking to school, riding a bus, watering the garden, shoveling snow, brushing your hair, etc.) Now have him/her pick a card with an adverb of feeling written on it (sadly, hopefully, cheerfully, angrily, absent-mindedly, etc.) Ask the rest of the group to guess what emotion is being portrayed by the body language.

Homework Assignment: Ask your students to watch one-half hour of television with the sound off, considering the following questions:

1. **Were you able to see the emotions between characters?**
2. **What kinds of movements tell you when a character is angry, shy, happy, uncomfortable, sad, surprised, etc.?**
3. **Can you create your own dance using some of the movements you observe on "silent TV?"**

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

Physical Education

ISOLATION OF BODY MOVEMENTS

Grades K-12

Often we think of dance as the performance of "steps." But dancers move with every part of their bodies -- sometimes just one part at a time, sometimes many. Some dances involve mostly movement of the feet and legs, and others call for moving the back, hips, shoulders or arms, with or without the legs.

Activities:

Stand with feet fixed in one position and move each of the following parts of your body in turn. What moods or feelings can you convey by these movements, even without taking a step?

Try moving:

**shoulders only
arms and hands only
shoulders, arms and hands
hips and buttocks only
back, hips and shoulders**

Now create a movement for:

legs and feet only

and then:

legs and feet and hips and buttocks

while keeping your upper body as motionless as possible.

How do you feel when you are doing these movements? What body movement(s) feel most natural to you? What movements are hardest to do?

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

Math
Art

DANCE AND DESIGN I
LINES
Grades 4-12

Like the visual arts, dance creates designs in space. We can look at dance similarly to the way we look at a painting, considering such elements as line, shape, color and pattern. Start with the way individuals make lines in space.

Activities with LINES:

1. **"Draw" a line in space with your body by moving across the room, without announcing what line you are going to make. Students who are watching can draw your line with pencil and paper. (You may need to define the "frame" of your space, and make sure everyone understands some of the following terms, before doing the activity.) Try**

**a diagonal
a vertical line
a horizontal line
a curve
a 90° angle
a triangle
etc.**

2. **Standing still, put your body into a position that illustrates the shape of one of these lines in space.
(As in #1, the other students can draw these shapes.)**
3. **Small groups of students could create a short sequence of movements based on one particular body position/line or one particular line moving in space. To make this a game, write or draw line or shape patterns on small cards and have each group pick one that they will use as their basic body position.**

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

Math
Art
Music

DANCE AND DESIGN II
PATTERNS
Grades 6-12

The group of dancers creates patterns as they move. On stage, the effect of these patterns is augmented by the use of color in costuming and by changes in speed or energy.

Activities with PATTERNS:

1. **Form a circle. Ask the student to your right to make a shape in a low level, and the next student to the right to make a high level shape. Continue the high shape-low shape alternation around the circle. Observe the pattern created. Start over with another alternating pattern.**
2. **This activity will demand cooperation and planning within groups. Have a small group form a pattern collectively (circle, star, square, two parallel lines, two perpendicular lines, etc.) In a specified number of clapped counts and/or steps, have the group change to a second formation (and not bump into each other!) For example, two lines pass through each other; two lines become a circle, or vice versa; a circle turns into a pinwheel; two lines or a circle become a series of partners; etc. As in LINES #3, cards that teams pick could turn this into a game.**

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

Math
Music
Physical Education

RHYTHMS I
Grades 4-12

Rhythm is a key ingredient in Hispanic dance. Complex rhythms are generated through footwork, hand-clapping, and full body motions, all of which may follow a percussive musical accompaniment or may create a beat that runs counter to it.

Establishing and following a rhythm:

Establish a beat or pulse which you can clap. You can do this by using a metronome, a piece of music or someone's heart beat.

Clap four or eight regular beats and have your class repeat it back to you. Repeat until everyone's claps are accurate.

Then use your eight beats to create a rhythm, accenting some beats and leaving out others, while keeping the underlying tempo steady. The group must repeat your exact rhythm.

Have students take turns individually clapping a rhythm, with the class repeating it exactly.

Try the same exercise beating hands or feet on the floor as if it were a drum.

You can also use different parts of the body to "clap" the air, again accenting and holding different counts with your movements to create a rhythm. Part of the class can accompany the body accents with hand-claps.

Syncopating a rhythm:

While one small group executes this regular eight-beat (or a four-beat), another group can establish a clapping rhythm in the "off" beats -- between the regular beats.

This syncopated, "jazzy" rhythm will be familiar from much of contemporary popular music, and is prevalent in Hispanic dance and music.

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

Math
Art
Music

RHYTHMS II
Grades 4-12

Basic rhythms become more complex through repetition as a series in time or space, as well as through the establishment of counter-rhythms, or polyrhythms.

Repetition in time and space:

1. **Think of some activity or chore from everyday life and create a simple mime motion or gesture that conveys one movement associated with that activity.**

Now repeat that single gesture several times so that it creates a rhythmic momentum. Once this rhythmic repetition has been established, the rest of the class can "accompany" it by clapping the beat.

2. **Have several people join the first student in a line and perform precisely the same rhythmic movement. Notice how the effect, even the "meaning," becomes more powerful through this "choreographed" rhythm in space.**

Polyrhythms:

1. **As in RHYTHMS I.a., have half the group establish a rhythm based on eight beats (accenting and/or leaving out certain beats) and perform this rhythm for the rest of the group.**

Have the other half of the group establish a different rhythm—i.e., with different accents or omissions—and perform it!

Now have both groups "perform" their own beats together. The basic 8-beat will be the same for both, but their accented rhythms will be different.

2. **For a more advanced exercise in counter-rhythms, have one team establish a slow clapped 1 - 2 beat, with a heavy accent on the "1". Separately, have a second team establish a 1 - 2 - 3 beat in the same tempo, that is, with the heavy "1" beat falling at the same time as in the first group.**

Now have both groups try to clap their rhythms at once, keeping strictly to their own team's beat. This "2 against 3" is a typical African and Latin American rhythm.

These rhythm activities can be explored using "instruments" homemade from bottle caps, cans, rattles, boxes, etc. -- whatever is at hand -- thus creating your own *batuque* as in Brazilian samba!

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

Art
Music

DANCE AND VISUAL ARTS
Grades 3-12

Visual arts activities can be incorporated into responses to dance and music in many ways. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Rhythm:** Listening to taped music or watching a rhythmic movement like one you've established in the **RHYTHMS II** activities, create a line drawing that you think reflects that aural or visual rhythm.
2. **Pattern:** Using any of the pattern ideas that emerge from **PATTERNS**, and using any visual arts medium (pencil, paints, collage, etc.), create a work that uses a pattern. (Patterns are not necessarily symmetrical; asymmetry can also be the basis for a pattern.)
3. **Emotion:** In response to taped music or to any of the dances you've just seen, use color to translate the energy or emotion of the music or dance onto paper.