

Primeros Pasos  
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

**A Report on the *Guajira* Dance Project  
conducted by  
Ballet Hispanico and P.S. 166  
through the Empire State Partnership  
1999/2000**

The *Guajira* Dance Project employed a Company work, *Guajira*, as a springboard for the creation of an integrated dance curriculum by Ballet Hispanico for the Empire State Partnership program at P.S. 166 in 1999/2000. Choreographed by Company principal dancer Pedro Ruiz and based on his childhood experiences working on the plantations in Cuba, *Guajira* weaves threads of classical ballet, modern and folk dance styles into a rich tapestry of movement.

Classes for the project were conducted in nine classrooms: one bilingual 2/3, three 3<sup>rd</sup>, four 4<sup>th</sup> and one bilingual 4/5 class. Classes met 24 times (once per week), beginning in November and continuing through May.

The dance classes taught a combination of Cuban and Spanish folkloric dance styles, creative movement vocabulary, and motifs and movements from Mr. Ruiz's work. Additionally, students had an opportunity to meet Mr. Ruiz, view and analyze excerpts of *Guajira*, learn about the history and cultural background of Cuba, and create a parallel student work inspired by aspects of the Mr. Ruiz's choreography.

Teaching Artists worked closely with the classroom teachers to create connections to the language arts and social studies curricula. Staff development workshops supplemented the dance unit and provided more in-depth instruction for classroom teachers and paraprofessionals.

Classes were divided into two choreographic groupings: agricultural work inspired dances and Cuban folkloric dances. The agricultural dances combined creative movement vocabulary inspired by work actions with motifs and movements from *Guajira*. The Cuban folkloric dances were based on a Guateque which describes "a Campesino party where a mix of different social dances and singing occurs." (Ruiz) The Guateque dances combined folkloric dance steps with creative movement and steps from *Guajira*.

The *Guajira* Dance Unit culminated in a final performance of the students' work in June 2000. All participating classes presented their group dances in the gym in a special performance open to the school community.

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**Student Creativity**

Dance themes were identified for each class, combining creative movement (originated by the students to illustrate planting actions, growing seeds and harvesting) with more formal dance forms, such as Zapateo (traditional Spanish heelwork patterns); El Papalote (a traditional kite dance, where women wear a kite shape on dress and men form the string pulling the kite); and the Gavilan ("Guajiros are always alert for hawks, because they eat the chickens. The Gavilan movement is African inspired.")

The following dances were created by the students and their Teaching Artists.

***I Am A Farmer***

(preparing the earth and planting actions such as hoeing, digging and the Guajiro "planting step")

***Salsa Seeds***

(seeds and growing section, which refers to opening section of Mr. Ruiz's choreography. Some folkloric steps included in choreography.)

***Yuca and Sugar Cane Dance***

(harvesting section: gathering, collecting, cutting and pulling)

***Farming Under the Sun***

(harvesting section: pulling, cutting and hanging tobacco to dry. Some phrases from Mr. Ruiz's choreography included.)

***Water Dance***

(West African-inspired dance movements, washing actions and motifs from Mr. Ruiz's choreography)

***I Am A Bird***

(inspired by the Gavilan dance, includes bird actions such as extending arms, stretching, floating, rising and sinking)

***Guantanamera***

(traditional Spanish fan dance using Cuban music)

***Kite Dance***

(Papalote kite dance and couples dancing)

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### **BACKGROUND: A History of Cuba**

(Sources: Haverstock, Nathan, A. Cuba in Pictures, Lerner Publications, 1997.  
Stanley, David, Cuba: The Travel Survival Kit, Lonely Planet Publications, 1997.)

Cuba is located ninety miles south of Key West, and lies at the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico between Florida and Central America. It is the largest island in the West Indies. Cuba's geography is diverse. Most of Cuba is low, rolling country with hilly parts. The highest point of Cuba is Pico Turquino; its altitude is 6,560 feet. There are few island lakes, and the only navigable river is the Rio Cauto. Cuba has a tropical climate and a flora and fauna that are generally found in that climate.

Christopher Columbus discovered Cuba in October 27, 1492. Two Arawak Indian groups – the Ciboneys and the Taino – lived on the island at the time of their discovery by the Spanish. Their livelihood was farming and they grew vegetables, yams, cotton and manioc. Their diet was further enriched with fish, turtles, iguanas, snakes and birds. The Arawak were skilled at making pottery, baskets and cotton cloth, and their religion revolved around spirits, whose figures the Indians also fashioned of wood, stone or clay. They introduced the Spanish to tobacco, canoes, and hammocks, which are all of Arawak origin.

The Arawak Indians were forced into slavery, and within 30 years only 5,000 of the original 100,000 remained alive. The rest had died – victims of cruel exploitation and of diseases introduced by the Europeans.

Beginning in 1517, the Spaniards started to import blacks from Africa as laborers. Unlike slavery in North America, Cuba's African slaves were kept together in tribal groups and were thus able to retain elements of their African cultures. The two most important groups of Africans introduced in Cuba were the Yoruba from Nigeria and the Bantu from Congo and Guinea. Sugar cane arrived by 1512 but it wasn't until 1800 that it became the main export.

Cuba remained under Spanish rule for the next four centuries, except for a brief period of British occupation in the eighteenth century. Cuba's independence came about when the United States won the Spanish American war in 1898 and granted Cuba independence in 1902 after four years of U.S. occupation. The Platt Amendment, grafted into the Cuban constitution of 1902, guaranteed the right of U.S. to intervene in Cuban affairs to protect U.S. interests on the island. The U.S. intervention endowed Cuba with a series of weak, corrupt, dependent governments.

In August, 1933 an army sergeant named Fulgencio Batista seized power in a noncommissioned officer's coup and he would oversee and manipulate the Cuban political landscape for the next 26 years. In 1940 a new constitution was established.

On July 26, 1953, a group of rebels led by Fidel Castro attacked the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Although the assault failed, it would mean the beginning of a constant confrontation between the guerrillas and the government during the following six years, which ended in a revolution. On January 1, 1959, Batista left Cuba and Fidel Castro took over Cuba's government. Fidel Castro continues to rule Cuba today.

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### **BACKGROUND: Spanish Dance**

(Source: Matteo, *The Language of Spanish Dance*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.)

Spanish dance can be subdivided into four styles:

- Folkloric (folk or regional dance)
- Escuela bolera* (eighteen-century classic dance)
- Andalusian
- Flamenco

Folkloric dance encompasses the complete Iberian panorama of fifty-three provinces with an endless array of colorful regional costumes and hundreds of folk dance forms. Many of these dances, stemming from Greek, Phoenician, Celtic and Moorish origins, employ complex steps, patterns, and use props such as wooden shoes, water pitchers, flower arches, maypoles, stilts, swords and kerchiefs.

*Escuela bolera* (Bolero school) possesses the refinement of eighteen-century academic dancing. Elegance was and still remains the hallmark of this distinguished balletic form of dance, which is performed in soft slippers (*zapatillas*). Based on the principles of classical ballet, *Escuela bolera* features technically brilliant jumped, beaten, and flying steps, coupled with adornments in the use of the arms and castanets (wooden clappers).

Andalusian (*baile andaluz*) is the style most people associate with Spanish dancing. The uplifted chest of the male and the arched back and fluid, sensuous arm movements of the female, all performed to the sound of castanets, characterize these dances.

Flamenco, in contrast to the above dance styles, has a highly charged level of dynamics, with its ambiance of merriment (*jaleo*), singing (*cante*), and rhythmic hand clapping (*palmas*) that often involves the audience. It is closely associated with the Gypsies, and features bravura, improvisational performances by the *cuadro* (group) of guitarist, singer and dancer. It is essentially a solo dance with strong Eastern and Moorish influences (sinuous arms and hands movement). Flamenco is the most popular form of Spanish dance and has been described as a "way of life of those who sing and dance their sorrows and joy."

From north to south, the four principle styles of dance can also be identified by the indigenous music that accompanies each form. The sounds range from bagpipes (*gaitas*), metallic triangles (*triangulos*), jingling tambourines (*panderetas*), flutes (*flaviols*) and castanets to the familiar rhythmic hand clapping (*palmas*) and flamenco guitar, which was introduced to Spain by the Arabic culture.

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Lesson Plan: From Guajira to *Guajira*  
Prepared by Jose Francisco Martinez

**OBJECTIVES**

Students will:

- recognize the interrelationship of Spanish and Cuban dance styles and culture
- analyze Spanish dance styles on video
- learn Spanish dance styles
- listen and dance to Flamenco music and Cuban popular music
- recognize the relationship between Cuban popular culture and Pedro Ruiz's dance piece, *Guajira*

**MATERIALS/MUSIC**

Map of Cuba

Pictures of Arawak Indians and Black slaves working in the sugar cane

Pictures of Folklorico, Escuela bolera, Andalusian and Flamenco dance

Flamenco music: Spanish Guajira (Flamenco's Guajira steps)

Cuban music: Putumayo's Cuba.

Guajira's dance music: Guajira Amorosa (Pedro Ruiz's Guajira steps)

Relaxation music: After Glow.

Video tapes: Cuba's National Folk Assemble; *Guajira*, Ballet Hispanico Company performing  
Castanets, Spanish dance shoes and fans

**MOVEMENT WARM UP**

**TALK: (REFER TO HANDOUTS)**

- Historical introduction of Cuba
- Characteristics of Spanish dance

**WATCH**

- Cuba's National Folk Assemble Video

**DO**

- Walk throughout the space following the Flamenco's Guajira rhythmic pattern to feel the character and the attitude of pride and dignity of Spanish dance.

**DEVELOPMENT/ELABORATION**

- Flamenco Guajira's steps stamping, and then the clapping separately
- Stamping and clapping at the same time on the spot
- Stamping and clapping at the same time while traveling throughout the space
- Zapateo steps: From side to side with bend and stretch
- Stamping with both legs arms behind. Kick and cross the ankles in front with both legs.
- Put the three steps together.
- Pick up a partner to practice the steps with.

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**SHARING**

Movement Analysis Questions for students:

- What part of the body is used most?
- Does the movement repeat or change?
- Is the movement straight, angular, or curved?
- Is the movement mostly in the upper body or lower body?
- Which elements do the dances have in common?
- What about differences?
- Do the dancers appear to be weighted in the ground or rather weightless, rising as high as possible?
- In general, what feelings do the dancers' movement create?  
(Joyful, solemn, anguished, longing, playful?)
- What instruments do you hear?
- Is there singing? In which language?
- If you close your eyes and listen for a moment, what mood does the music create in you?
- What words occur to you to describe the music?

Create a vocabulary chart out of the answers.

**VIDEO VIEWING**

- View the Guajira amorosa section of Pedro Ruiz's Guajira.
- Note the influence of Cuban popular culture in both music and dance in Pedro's piece.

**RELAXATION**

- Relax on the floor facing up.

**NYS Dance Learning Standard focused on in this lesson plan:**

Standard #4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts.

Students will know dances from many cultures and times and recognize their relationship to various cultural, social and historic contexts. Students will recognize that dance is performed in many different cultural settings and serves many functions in diverse societies.

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