

## Dance History Curriculum

Grade Level: Higher Education (Post-Secondary)

### Overview



- **Enduring Understanding:**  
The history of dance is multi-faceted and layered. It is like a river which connects artists and cultures throughout time, teaching lessons that are meaningful to our age.
- **Essential Questions:**  
How has dance impacted people and cultures throughout time?  
How have people and cultures impacted dance throughout time?
- **Topical Enduring Understanding:**  
Dance matters both to individuals and as an expression of a culture.
- **Final Project:** “A Pantheon of Dance Through the Ages” Students will perform a compilation of all of their “Dance-Era Studies” with a corresponding lobby exhibit, which will be open to the community.

## UNITS

**UNIT 1:** Why did people dance?

**Enduring Understanding:** As the very first language among humans dance holds an important role in the development of cultures.

**Key eras:** Prehistoric dance; The Ancient Greeks; Italy and Commedia dell’arte.

**Projects that will feed into the final project:**

Make a dance that mimics the chorus of a Greek play, e.g. Sophocles’ *Antigone*, and is performed.  
Make a dance that mimics commedia dell’arte and is performed.

**Standard to be incorporated into this Unit:**

[DA:Cn11.1.II: Analyze dances from several genre or styles, historical time periods, and/or world dance forms. Discuss how dance movement characteristics, techniques, and artistic criteria relate to the ideas and perspectives of the people from which the dances originate.](#)

**Assessment:**

Start out with an in class quiz that assesses the base line of the class. Based on the Units and semester schedule (midterms etc.) determine appropriate forms and timing for assessment. Be sure to give value to all of the assignments as students need to feel they are not doing “busy work”. Use rubrics for written work and group assessment vehicles for group work. Experiment with engaging students in developing rubrics for certain projects. Use “exit cards” at least once a week to get the pulse of the class and revise as needed.

**Metacognition (or “Reflective and evaluative opportunities that enhance strategic thinking and self-monitoring”):**

Carve out time every class for some writing and reflection in class, even if it is minimal. Give writing prompts that speak to the essential questions being explored and have students hand in their writing, or share it with their peers is there is time.

**Unit 2:** What caused dance to be politicized?

**Enduring Understanding:** Dance has always lived on a two-way street...needing powerful, wealthy sponsors and being needed (and used) by these same leaders.

**Key Players:** Catherine de Medici, Louis XIV, Napoleon, the Russian Czars.

Projects that will feed into the final project:

Make a dance that mimics the Sun King and dance in the royal courts

Make a dance that epitomizes the Romantic Era

Make a dance that epitomizes the Classical Era

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**Unit 3:** What brought dance across the Atlantic?

**Enduring Understanding:** Dance in the United States was still in its infancy at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the century it had become the big kid on the block.

**Key players:** Ruth St. Denis, Diaghilev, George Balanchine, Antony Tudor...

**Projects that will feed into the final showing:**

Make a dance that illustrates the new elements of modern dance (choose Duncan, Fuller or St. Denis)

Make a dance that illustrates Tudor’s “psychological gesture”

Make a dance that illustrates Balanchine and Diaghilev’s new styles in ballet (neo-classical or Russian).

**Standard to be incorporated into this Unit:**

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**Unit 4:** What on earth is “modern dance”?

**Enduring Understanding:** As cultures and governments change so does art.

**Key players:** Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Mark Morris

**Projects that will feed the final project:**

Make a dance that mimics one of Graham’s Greek-themed ballets

Make a dance that uses Cunningham’s use of democratic space and chance

Make a dance that illustrates Taylor’s use of pedestrian movement and classical music

Make a dance that uses Morris’s use of humour and live music

**Standard to be incorporated into this Unit:**

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**Unit 5:** What can dance teach us?

**Enduring Understanding:** If dance can be a lens into an era or culture what does that say about our culture today based on the dance forms we have explored.

**Key players:** Alvin Ailey, Trey McIntire; Twilya Tharp; Mats Ek, William Forsythe, Anna Halprin etc.

**Projects to feed into final project:** Choose a modern choreographer (any genre) and decide as a class what to do to express their style.

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**The NCAS Standards in Dance Resources** include lessons, units, Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs), and curriculum maps as well as guidance documents to help you understand and implement the National Core Arts Standards for Dance. Contributors include members of the dance standards writing and leadership teams and participants in the OPDI courses Implementing the National Core Dance Standards for Dance and Developing Cornerstone Assessments for the New Dance Standards. The contributor's name and bio is provided at the end of each document. Contributors represent all NDEO sectors, teaching in K-12, Higher Education, Private Studio, and Community and Performing Arts organizations. This cross sector representation demonstrates that the standards provide essential content to all constituents.

These standards resources were partially funded by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

**Educator Bio: Hilary Harper-Wilcoxon, MFA, BA** has been an Associate Professor of Dance and Director of the Dance Program, as well as Department Chair for seven years, at Principia College. She is now leaving the classroom to consult on issues regarding teaching quality in higher ed, using Understanding by Design® (UbD) and Peer-Instruction™ as her guides. She received her college's "Teacher of the Year" award in 2014 and has integrated UbD practices into her classroom and into her work on *The Antony Tudor Dance Studies Committee*. Hilary has presented at *Corps de Ballet International* regarding the Dance Studies' objectives, has been a frequent guest artist in Paris at *Academie Americaine de Danse de Paris*, and is working on a book entitled, *What dancers know that you should too*. Her work has extended to the business world through her workshop, *Dance as Metaphor in Leadership Training™*, which has been presented to major corporations around the world. She has collaborated in developing an innovative and highly successful program for learning-differences adults through the use of dance and theatre. She has published on the *Antony Tudor Ballet* website. She received her MFA in Performing Arts from The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and her BA in Political Science from Columbia University.