

Unit: From Cave men to Greek Gods
Grade Level: College/Post-Secondary Students
Duration: 2 Weeks/6 Classes



In this Unit we will explore Anchor Standards 10 and 11.

[Connecting. Anchor Standard 10 synthesizes and relates knowledge and personal experience to make art.](#)

[Anchor Standard 11 relates artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.](#)

Note: I will use the three learning styles (auditory, visual and kinesthetic) in the delivery of this unit while being aware of the nine multiple intelligences outlined by Gardner.

Overview: This Dance History class for college freshmen and sophomores is a survey of western dance. As such it covers an enormous range of periods (from prehistoric cave paintings of dancers to modern day choreographers), styles of western dance, and famous dancers and choreographers. The need for clarity and focus is essential, as is the need for a broad, working definition of the terms dance, classical, art, society and creativity. Without these working definitions it is easy to descend into chaos.

Major Focus: What students will know and be able to do at the end of this unit.

KNOW: I want them to be able to know where dance came from in western civilization to some degree. I want them to know how to connect dance from long ago to dance of today. I want them to make a personal connection (through physicalizing and writing/discussing this topic) with dance done thousands of years ago.

DO: I want them to be able to work together as a team to synthesize new information (Greek chorus) and create a representative piece of theatre/dance. I want them to be able to critique their peers and find a sense of shared experience and community in doing so, also a way to improve and feel appreciated.

Essential Question: What makes “dance” “dance”?

Concepts: civilization, worship/religion, dance for the gods, dance for self, dance for others, origins of language and artistic expression.

Supporting questions:

- Why would dance be important to prehistoric man?
- How do you envision this sort of dance?
- What are some ways dance today and dance in 35,000 BC might relate to each other?
- Why are the Greeks considered “classical”?
- What in their society relates to ours?
- What is your personal definition of “Art”.
- What is your personal definition of “dance”?

Prior Knowledge: Assess prior knowledge during the first class and in the homework assigned. e.g. an open discussion of “What is dance and art” with answers listed on the board or mirror. A homework assignment that asks them to Google those terms (along with classical) and write a short essay on how they would define those terms now. Take a “Flash test” of what they know and can share re. dance history. The questions typically revolve around simple question (naming three dancers they know) but also has questions re. the period to be covered e.g. “What time period is considered classical Greece?”

New Knowledge: Discuss over the two weeks concepts embedded in ancient dance forms (prehistoric cave painting from India for instance); the idea that dance evolved as a form of communication (the earliest of all as far as we can tell!) and that the Greeks moved the art form along during the era of 500-400 BC with the Greek Chorus and their focus on gesture and combining the arts (theatre, music and dance). They will watch a Greek Tragedy (usually Antigone) and evaluate the societal forces taking place in Sophocles’s day and relate them to the abuse of power, violence towards women and others, and women’s status in society in both small group discussions and through reporting back to the whole group.

Culminating Project: Students will present a Greek Chorus in two to three groups (depending on class size) and use the spoken word (their own creation) and the gestures we have reviewed in class that have meaning behind them in a theatrical setting. They will write a supporting document as a group outlining how they arrived at their “Theme” for their piece and how they decided on the design and choice of gestures for their presentation.

Assessment: I often use Liz Lerman’s guidelines when having student’s assess the work of their peers. I find it makes it less personal. Of course they need to be comfortable with the tools she gives so we would review this beforehand and then use this final project presentation as a first try at giving constructive feedback, and taking it constructively! I also would have them fill out a form I use that rates the student participation that takes place outside of class in preparation for the piece. It lists many of the expectations of the unit:

- Was on time and engaged in the needs of the group
- Brought helpful ideas to the sessions and listened well to others
- Was respectful of other ideas and supported other team members
- Followed through with tasks assigned to him/her
- Was creative
- Related work back to anchor standards and helped group make the connections
- Related work to other areas of study and disciplines

These all have a grading standard of -- agree, sort of, not really and disagree. As for the written component I have a specific rubric that deals with research requirements, writing styles (MLA) and content expectations. I would also say that this is the weakest part of my teaching. I would love to be able to say, “Just do a great job on this.”

But I know that is unrealistic as well as unfair. I could use some help in this area. The readings were not as specific as I would have liked on assessment verbage so I will keep searching for good, simple wording that is accessible to first year students.

Critical Resources:

Video of Greek drama; Liz Lerman article on feedback in the arts; group work; readings from textbook on prehistoric dance and dance in ancient Greece; google of terms; space to perform Greek chorus; costumes and masks for said showing.



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 constitutes.

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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.