Chapter 10

Maturing Classics: 1945–1959

# Overview

After World War II, two major ballet companies developed. New York was the dance mecca of the United States. The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo continued to tour until the early 1950s, and ballet was being made in major cities such as Chicago and San Francisco. These developments of American ballet were preparing audiences for the next stage of American ballet development.

From World War II to the 1960s, American modern dance rapidly developed as an accepted dance, art, and educational form. The dancers created companies that performed their works and drew new audiences to dance. Their dances began as expressions of contemporary thought and wandered through Americana and historical eras. Their dance statements were personal, yet they offered audiences a new expression of movement and symbolic meanings most often grounded in stories or themes that were readily discernable. The four pioneers and the second generation that followed solidified and were responsible for the rapid maturation of the art form.

# Activities and Assignments

The activities and assignments are in two parts: ballet and modern dance.

## Ballet

### Activity 1. A Tale of Two Companies

In this activity, the entire class researches each of the two major ballet companies that emerged and matured after World War II. Use books or websites as resources. Using a graphic organizer such as a flow chart, depict a sequence of events, actions, and decisions that influenced each company. Include pictures of important ballets and choreographers, and locate videos of ballets associated with each of these companies. This assignment can extend to creating an infographic or media presentation.

Select one or more of the following to show your group’s research:

* After each company has been researched, the class uses a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the following:
* Artistic direction
* Dancers
* Company structure
* Types of works
* Style
* Aesthetics
* Philosophy
* A spokesperson representing each company will summarize the salient features of the company and its contribution to American ballet.
* During this period, ideas and definitions of neoclassicism, modern ballet, classical ballet, and American ballet developed. Define and characterize each of these terms, cite sources, and give two or more examples of each of these ballets; place them in a chart. The chart may be a flow chart to show the continued development and the connections, or it may be a concept map to show relationships to one another.
* In small groups, focus on the work of George Balanchine, Jerome Robbins, Antony Tudor, and other ballet choreographers. Explain how each choreographer captured the American spirit. Provide pictorial, video, and written sources to support statements.
* Using the information in Report of a Live or Recorded Performance as a guide, compare two works by a choreographer associated with each company. Or, you could compare and contrast two ballet companies on artistic vision and direction, choreographic repertoire, choreographers, and the works they contributed to the repertoire.

**Extension or Alternative: American Ballet Family Tree**

Divide the class into two groups to begin to develop the American ballet family tree. One group concentrates on the dancers associated with New York City Ballet; the other group concentrates on dancers from Ballet Theatre.

## Modern Dance

### Activity 1. First Generation

Your class will work in two groups. One group researches Martha Graham; the other group researches Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. Each group creates a chronology of the choreographers’ works, showing important events, works, and contributions beginning with the previous era (1930–1944). The chronology can be captured as a media presentation (infographic, PowerPoint presentation, or other format). A spokesperson explains the chronology to the class.

Using the chronology, the class develops a Venn or media diagram that compares and contrasts the following categories for two of the dancers:

* Biography
* Career as a dancer
* Technique
* Choreographic style
* Philosophical basis for their work
* Themes in their work
* How they worked with their dancers and companies
* Contributions to American modern dance

### Activity 2. Second Generation

Begin to develop a modern dance family tree. Start with the four pioneers. Research the second generation of modern dancers. With whom did they study? What direction did their choreography take? What contributions did they make to American modern dance? Collect the information for each modern dancer.

### Activity 3. Comparing First- and Second-Generation Choreographers

View a video of the significant work from a first-generation choreographer. Using information in Report of a Live or Recorded Performance as a guide, analyze the choreographer’s work. Then view a videorecorded performance of a significant work of a second-generation choreographer. Using the report form, analyze the choreographer’s works. Compare and contrast the work of a second-generation choreographer with a significant work of his or her mentor. Collect the information for each modern dancer.

### Activity 4. Reconstruct

Reconstruct a significant work from a video performance of either a first- or second-generation choreographer, such as José Limón, Anna Sokolow, or other choreographers prominent in this period. If the work is not performed by the original dancer or choreographer, then note that another performer has attempted to capture his or her technique, style, and aesthetics.

Create a video of your reconstruction of the dance work, then write a two- to three-page analysis of your performance. Outline the problems you had to solve. Evaluate your performance.

**Extensions**

If you have studied Graham technique, demonstrate the warm-up and some of the techniques.

Read *The Art of Making Dances* by Doris Humphrey, or read Doris Humphrey’s or Martha Graham’s biography. Write a book report on one of the works. To what extent do you think the dance artist still influences dance today?

# Web Links

How to cha-cha  
[www.ballroomdancers.com/Dances/dance\_overview.asp?Dance=CHA](http://www.ballroomdancers.com/Dances/dance_overview.asp?Dance=CHA)

1950s fashion, cars, and music  
[www.retrowaste.com/1950s](http://www.retrowaste.com/1950s)

Literature and culture of the 1950s  
[www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/home.html](http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/home.html)

*West Side Story*<http://broadwaymusicalhome.com/shows/westside.htm>

American Ballet Theatre library of ballets  
<https://www.abt.org/explore/learn/repertory-archive/ballets/>

New Dance Group  
<http://new.danceheritage.org/html/newdance.html>

National Museum of Dance  
[www.dancemuseum.org](http://www.dancemuseum.org)

Dance Heritage Coalition  
<http://new.danceheritage.org/html/index.html>

# Review Questions

1. What was society like during this time?
2. Who were the dancers and other contributors to ballet and modern dance during this period?
3. What were the dances, music, and other arts that supported dance during this period?
4. What were the significant dances, ballets, modern dance works, and dance literature of the period?

# Vocabulary

## Ballet

Ballet Society

Ballets: USA

D’Amboise, Jacques

Danilova, Alexandra

*Fancy Free*

Kaye, Nora

neoclassical ballet

New York City Ballet

Robbins, Jerome

Tallchief, Maria

## Modern Dance

Connecticut College

*Beloved, Th*e

*Black Lak*e

*Clytemnestr*a

*Desert*s

*Diversion of Angel*s

Hawkins, Erick

*Here and Now With Watchers*

Horton, Lester

Limón, José

*Lords of Persia*

Martha Graham Dance Company

*Moor’s Pavane, The*

*Night Journey*

Primus, Pearl

*Rooms*

*Salome*

*Seraphic Dialogue*

Sokolow, Anna

*There Is a Time*