

FOCUS➤

BALANCE

Subfocus➤

Muscular Tension, Alignment, Extensions, Stretching, Curling, and Twisting Actions

Grade 3

Standard 1

The physically literate individual demonstrates competency in a variety of motor skills and movement patterns.

Grade-Level Outcomes

- Balances on different bases of support, demonstrating muscular tension and extensions of free body parts (S1.E7.3)
- Employs the concept of alignment in gymnastics and dance (S2.E4.3a)

Lesson Objectives

The learner will:

- Demonstrate muscular tension when balanced on different bases of support
- Extend free body parts for balance and counterbalance
- Align body parts over the base of support for stability
- Transition from balance to balance with purposeful, selected movements

Safety Concerns

- Students must not disturb or touch others as they work. This safety protocol is important for gymnastics work at all times. (Standard 4)
- Safe use, transport, and storage of mats.

Materials and Equipment

Individual mats, one per student, or sufficient large mats for all students to work simultaneously or take turns with one other person (Sequence work can easily facilitate working on and off the mats; the person without a mat can observe for constructive feedback to the person on the mat.)

Introduction

Thus far in our study of balance in gymnastics, you have learned to balance on various bases of support; in wide, narrow, curled, and twisted shapes; and at different levels. We even ventured into inverted balances. As third graders, some of you have been challenging yourself each day with narrower bases of support and inverted balances; others have been practicing balances that you are more comfortable with. Our lesson today is not on creating new balances, but on refining the balances we have, refining them to a "perfect 10" in gymnastics. We will do that by focusing on three concepts you learned as first and second graders: muscular tension, alignment, and extensions.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: MUSCULAR TENSION

Challenge students to practice the following:

- Narrow bases of support, inverted balances, or previous balances that need a little more practice. Remind them to hold each perfectly still for three seconds.
 - As you walk and observe the students' practice, focus on muscular tension by saying, "I may touch you as I walk past to see whether you have the muscular tension needed for good balance in gymnastics. If the muscular tension is really there, I could lift you or hold you upside down and your gymnastics shape would still be there."

- Demonstrate the best, most difficult balance on bases of support. Remind students that muscular tension will be the key to three seconds of stillness.
 - The best, most difficult balance to illustrate wide, narrow, curled, and twisted shapes. Tightening of the muscles should be visible.
 - The best, most difficult to illustrate low, middle, and high levels. Remind students that a gymnastics balance is a balance that requires muscular tension.
 - The best, most challenging inverted balance for which three-second stillness is possible.

Muscular Tension Sequence

The four balances just completed by students will be a sequence of bases, shapes, levels, and inversion (one balance for each), emphasizing muscular tension and clearly illustrating bases, shapes, levels, and inversion. After several minutes of practice, have the class do a group performance with your signal for changing each balance.

Just for fun, have students add a beginning shape at high level and an ending ta-da.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: EXTENSIONS

- Challenge students to extend free body parts away from the base of support.
- Balance on base of spine. Legs and arms extended forward in narrow shape, in wide shape, and in combination of narrow and wide.
- Balance on knees and elbows, narrowing base of support to one knee and one elbow (muscular tension). Extension of free leg and arm for counterbalance.

(Counterbalance: Extension beyond the base in one direction requires an extension in the opposite direction.)

- Explore extensions beyond the base in one direction, resulting in a loss of balance.
- Balance on head, two hands, and one foot with free leg extended upward.
- Balance on two hands and one knee with free leg extended upward.
- Balance on one hand and one knee. Explore the extensions needed for counterbalance.
- From all the balances created thus far, have students select their favorite, the one they can hold perfectly still for three seconds. Challenge students to extend free body parts away from the base of support, creating the need for counterbalance extensions.

Extensions Sequence

From all the balances that illustrate extensions, have students select a favorite. Ask them to explore all the possibilities for extensions from that base of support, emphasizing the smoothness of the action as body parts extend from the base and return near the base. The extension actions will create a sequence of movement. Ask these questions:

- How many body parts are free to extend from the base?
- How many different directions? How many levels?

After the extension sequences are complete, have students show the sequence to a partner for suggestions for improvement as well as praise for extensions well done. Working together, partners choose a beginning and ending for the sequence; the sequence begins and returns to that position.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: ALIGNMENT

Last year we introduced the word ta-da as the ending of gymnastics sequences. Partner A, tell your neighbor what ta-da means in our gymnastics work. Partner B, show your neighbor what ta-da looks like at the end of the gymnastic sequence.

Review with the class: Ta-da is the alignment of body parts over the base of support. Alignment provides stability and stillness in balances. Alignment gives gymnasts a perfect landing in a competitive routine.

- Students balance on shoulders with legs extended upward, with legs bent tucked close to the body, and with legs extended and twisted. Align legs over hips for balance.

The secret to an inverted balance is the alignment of body parts over the base: toes over knees and knees over hips to form a straight line.

- Practice of inverted balances created by the student, emphasizing alignment of body parts and muscular tension for stability
- Balance on head and hands as in a frog stand (knees resting on elbows)
- Tighten abdominal muscles to raise knees and align hips over shoulders

Note: In the early stages of working on inverted balances, teach the skills of returning to the feet or tucking the head and doing a forward or a safety roll out of the balance. Students can use this safety measure any time they lose balance or feel unsafe.

Safety Concern

Differentiated instruction and individual student readiness are critical for inverted balances and all gymnastics work, especially for grade 3 and above.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: TRANSITIONS

Each student has a large repertoire of balances to illustrate bases of support, body shapes, levels, and inversion. Allow several minutes for students to practice their favorites, using selections from each of the categories.

All the gymnastics work you have done thus far has had me giving the signal to change from one balance to the next. As third graders, you will now do the work on transitions for sequences. You will be in charge of the balances and the transitions between them.

- Have students repeat their favorite balances, being aware of the transitions between the balances as planned, purposeful movement.
- Review stretching, curling, and twisting actions for transition movements.
- Have students experiment with the order of balances to achieve smooth transitions between them.
- Have each student select three favorite balances and place them in the order that allows the smoothest transition from the first to the second to the third.
- Have each student show his or her balances to a partner, emphasizing the switch from the “still photography” of balances to “action recordings” of balances and transitions. The partner observing now provides suggestions for improvement on stillness in balances (muscular tension, alignment, extension) and the smoothness of movements between balances.

Assessment

Informal observation of stillness in balances; muscular tension, alignment, and extensions; smooth transitions

Closure

- Today, we refined balances with muscular tension, alignment, and extensions. Pretend that a new student has arrived in third grade. What would you tell your new classmate about muscular tension in gymnastics? Why is it important?
- Why are extensions important in gymnastics? What is counterbalance?
- How does alignment of body parts help us with inverted balances?

- Think for a moment of your favorite category of balance: shapes, levels, inverted, bases of support. Tell your neighbor why the one you chose is your favorite.
- The new concept today was transitions. What do transitions add to a gymnastics sequence?

Reflection

- Do the students have functional understanding (cognitive and performance) of muscular tension, extensions, and alignment?
- Do they work safely in the gymnastics environment as difficulty is increased and the need for personal responsibility becomes greater?
- Is reteaching needed in some areas? Do some students need individual help to feel secure in gymnastics and to advance?