

Standard 1

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

Grade-Level Outcomes

- Balances in an inverted position* with stillness and supportive base (S1.E7.2b)
- Combines balances and transfers into a three-part sequence (S1.E11.2)

Lesson Objectives

The learner will:

- Balance in an inverted position on teacher-selected bases of support
- Create and perform inverted balances
- Recognize the concept of alignment in gymnastics balances
- Create and perform a three-part sequence

Safety Concern

*Inverted balances must be presented with differentiated instruction and developmentally appropriate tasks for individual students. Children immediately think of headstands and handstands as the inverted balances; your role is critical in presenting safe, inverted balances for nongymnasts.

Materials and Equipment

Small individual mats, one per student or sufficient large mats for all students to be working simultaneously; carpet square for outdoors

Organization and Management

Established protocol for moving mats, placement on floor, listening position

Introduction

Today, we introduce a new word and a new skill in our work on balance in gymnastics. We are going to explore balancing in inverted positions. Inverted is a big word for “upside down.” But when we balance in inverted positions, we do not have to do headstands and handstands. If your head is lower than other parts of the body, you are in an inverted balance for gymnastics.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: BALANCES AND BASES

Review balances on various bases of support, safety, and criteria for balances. Allow several minutes for students to practice balancing on various bases of support while you review stability and safety protocol.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: INVERTED BALANCES

As I observed your balances, I noticed that some of them were inverted—your head was lower than other body parts. Show me an inverted, upside-down balance. (Remind students to use a wider base of support for stability.)

- Students balance on shoulders, head, and upper arms with legs extended upward. Introduce the concept of alignment—body parts positioned vertically over the base of support, such as the legs extended upward over the hips.
- Students balance on head, two hands, and one foot, with the other leg extended upward. Introduce the concept of extension—free body parts fully stretched, such as leg extended and toes pointed.

- Students do inverted balances with free body part extensions:
 - Head, one foot, one hand
 - Head and two knees
 - Head, two hands, one knee
- Have students choose their favorite inverted balance. Emphasize that the criteria for a successful balance is stillness for three seconds, not the difficulty of the balance.

Safety Concerns

- When students use the head as a base of support, they must always accompany it with another body part as the base. Students must never attempt to balance on the head alone.
- If children begin to experiment with frog stands, tripods, and headstands as inverted balances, you should teach them the proper mechanics for assuming and maintaining those positions.
- When the head is involved as a base of support, weight must be distributed equally among all the body parts that are bases.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: ALIGNMENT, EXTENSIONS, AND MUSCULAR TENSION

Earlier in our lesson today, I introduced a new word for our work in balance; the word was *alignment*. Alignment of body parts vertically creates a stable balance.

Have students balance on the shoulders, head, and upper arms and extend the legs upward. (Extending the legs upward over the hips creates alignment and a stable balance.)

Gymnasts have a special trick. When they finish their routines on the mats or on an apparatus, they quickly stand with arms extended upward. We call this the “ta-da” in gymnastics routines, from the cartoon strip Calvin and Hobbs. (Demonstrate as you explain that this position creates proper alignment.) The extended arms are aligned over the shoulders, the shoulders are aligned over the hips, and the hips are aligned over the feet. This alignment creates balance and stability.

- Link alignment to routines with speed, aerials, and rapid exits from pieces of apparatus.
- Link alignment to a perfect score in gymnastics and subtraction from the score for moving the feet. (Demonstrate with a video clip from a gymnastics competition.)
- When students are ready for headstands, alignment will be a major factor in success of the balance.
- Reinforce the concept of extensions in balances:
 - Balance and counterbalance for stability
 - Full extension from trunk through extremities, that is, stretch of leg, pointing of toes, stretch of arm and fingers
- Reinforce the concept of muscular tension:
 - Tightening of the muscles for stillness in balances
 - Tightening of abdominal muscles for stability in inverted balances
 - Tightening of muscles in extended body parts for stillness and form
- Review students’ favorite balances on various bases of support, various body shapes, and various levels. Provide cues for alignment, extensions, counterbalance, and muscular tension.
- Students demonstrate three favorite balances, counting aloud the number of seconds they remain still. Offer praise for alignment and extensions.

Note: Muscular tension, alignment of body parts over the base of support, and extensions for counterbalance are critical for the development of good gymnastics balances. They are emerging skills for first and second graders.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: THREE-PART SEQUENCE

Thus far in our study of balance, you have created balances with various bases of support, balances with shapes, balances at different levels, and some inverted balances. With each of those categories of balances, you chose a favorite. For the culmination of our work today, we will create a gymnastics sequence. A sequence has three parts: a beginning shape, balances or actions in the middle, and an ending shape.

- Beginning shape in standing position
- Balance: student's creative work, choice of balance to demonstrate shape, level, or inversion
- Ending shape: ta-da

Magic Number Three

- Stillness for three seconds
- Three parts in sequence
- Three balances (student's choice of shapes, levels, different bases of support), one of which must be inverted
- Allow several minutes for students to practice balances and choose shapes, levels, or various bases of support for their balances.
 - Class decision on beginning position or shape, review of ending shape, ta-da
 - Individual decision on three balances
- Have the students explore the order of the balances to create smooth transitions between them.
- Allow several minutes for students to practice their sequence from beginning shape to ta-da.
- Group performance with your signal for changing each part of the sequence and each balance.

Assessment

- Informally observe inverted balances.
- Sequences can be recorded on paper or video and assessed informally by a peer. Then you can assess them with established criteria for summative assessment.

Closure

- What was the focus of our lesson today?
- What does the word *inverted* mean?
- If your base of support is narrow and you are having difficulty holding the balance stationary, what can you do to the base to add stability?
- What is alignment in gymnastics? Why is it important?
- Why is extension of free body parts (arms and legs) important?

Reflection

- Can the children balance in an inverted position?
- Are they beginning to balance on narrower bases of support?
- Are they holding the body parts firm with muscles tight?
- Do they have a beginning understanding of extensions and alignment?