

LESSON 8: STRANGE FRUIT

Grade-Level Outcomes

Primary Outcomes

Movement concepts, principles & knowledge: Identifies and discusses the historical and cultural role of games, sports and dance in society. (S2.H1.L2)

Self-expression & enjoyment: Identifies the uniqueness of creative dance as a means of self-expression. (S5.H3.L2)

Embedded Outcome

Rules & etiquette: Examines moral and ethical conduct in specific competitive situations (e.g., intentional fouls, performance-enhancing substances, gambling, current events in sport). (S4.H2.H2)

Lesson Objectives

The learner will:

- recognize the written word as an effective accompaniment.
- appreciate the fact that dance can come from many different ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
- discuss the role of dance in expressing cultural or historical ideas.

Equipment and Materials

- Place for students to watch a film and write down thoughts about it
- Paper and pencil, Chromebooks, or laptops if all students have them
- The poem “Strange Fruit” to read: www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/fruitholiday.htm
- The photograph that inspired the poem “Strange Fruit”: <http://rarehistoricalphotos.com/lynching-thomas-shipp-abram-smith-indiana-1930>.
- Video clip of Pearl Primus’ dance “Strange Fruit”

Introduction

Today, we will change gears and more deeply explore accompaniment. You have moved to a lot of different music of all styles in our choreography module, but much of today’s class will focus on a disturbing topic in our history and how dance was used to convey the emotions around that topic. You will see how a chain of events moved across the country and produced an amazing and moving piece of choreography.

Instructional Task: Discussion of the Poem “Strange Fruit”

■ PRACTICE TASK

Introduce the students to Abel Meeropol and his background. Read his poem “Strange Fruit.”

Have students listen to the poem and write down their interpretation. You may have to read it twice.

Ask some students to share their ideas. Discuss what the students wrote.

Next, let the students know that the photograph they are about to see is real and may be disturbing. Show the photograph of the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith. Ask students to describe what they see (e.g., the men hanging, the people assembled).

Guiding questions for students:

- What do you think the onlookers are thinking or saying?
- What are they communicating with their body language?
- What emotions do you think they are experiencing?

Tell the story behind the photograph of Thomas and Abram. Explain that Abel saw this photograph, as did most of the country and beyond. He was so disgusted and saddened that he wrote the poem “Strange Fruit.”

Student Choices/Differentiation

- Students share their own ideas and reactions.
- Students may discuss their ideas in pairs or small groups.

What to Look For

- Students are engaged and listening.
- How are they reacting to the poem and the photograph?

Instructional Task: Discussion of the Dance “Strange Fruit”

■ PRACTICE TASK

Introduce the students to the fascinating and multi-talented Pearl Primus. Tell them a little about his or her background. Then show students his or her dance “Strange Fruit.”

In groups of four or five, students discuss how the piece of choreography moved them.

EMBEDDED OUTCOME: S4.H2.1.2. Discuss how the dance conveyed the moral and ethical conflict represented by the poem.

Guiding questions for students:

- Was the choreography effective in expressing the idea of the poem?
- Did it help you understand the poem better?
- What choreographic tools did you notice?

Extension

Bring students together and discuss as a class.

Student Choices/Differentiation

- All students are bringing their own thoughts to the group.
- Students choose their groups.
- Students can volunteer to share the ideas of the group with the rest of the class.

What to Look For

- Everyone is being heard.
- Students can identify two or more choreographic tools.

Formal and Informal Assessments

- Reflections from peer assessment last class
- Exit slip: Did you find the dance or the poem more powerful and why?

Closure

- The accompaniment you chose can really help you convey a thought or concept.
- Next class, you will move to the accompaniment of the written word again.
- Before our next class, find a short piece of poetry that speaks to you, one that you want to share and possibly dance to. It should be able to be read in less than a minute, and it must be school-appropriate.
- Be sure to turn in your peer assessment reflections from last class and continue to work on your papers.

Reflection

- This is a somber lesson. Was I sensitive to my students and their feelings?
- Was everyone involved in the discussion?
- Review exit slips to gauge how students are feeling about the assignment.

Homework

- For next class, bring a short poem that can be read in less than a minute and lends itself to movement.
- Finish your choreography papers, due next class.

Resources

American National Biography: www.anb.org

Dance Heritage Coalition: www.danceheritage.org

Rare Historical Photos: <http://rarehistoricalphotos.com/lynching-thomas-shipp-abram-smith-indiana-1930>

Strange Fruit Poem: www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/fruitholiday.htm