

Ideas for dance with third and fourth classes

In this article, we present suggestions for three one-hour dance lessons for third and fourth classes. Our aim is to enable teachers to provide opportunities for children to engage meaningfully with the strand units of the dance strand of the physical education curriculum:

- ◆ Exploration, creation and performance of dance.
- ◆ Understanding and appreciation of dance.

The lessons are based on a dance framework which outlines the structure of a dance to be performed at the end of the lesson sequence. The dance framework denotes the kind of movement that children do in each section of the dance as well as the order of the sections (Smith-Autard 2002). It thus provides a framework for lesson planning and a scaffold around which children can create their own movements (Rolfe and Harlow 1997).

Resources

Video clips of 'Cat Dance' from *L'enfant et les Sortilèges* and 'Dance of the Texan Kangaroo Rat' from *Still Life at the Penguin Café* (both available online and on DVD); selection of music e.g. Cada Cabece and Um Mondo's *Timbalada*, Dario G's *Sunchyme*, Vivaldi's *Spring*, Nina Simone's *Feeling Good*, Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*.

Animals – dance framework

Section 1

- ◆ Pairs of animals lie 'asleep' on the floor. Each pair, simultaneously, performs a 'waking up' phrase, concluding in a still position/shape which is held until everyone is still.

Section 2 (improvised section for 7 counts of 8)

- ◆ A follows B through the space for a count of 8.
- ◆ A and B perform a phrase of movement 'on the spot' for a count of 8 (e.g. twitching head to one side, stretching out one hand, listening for danger, looking for prey etc.).
- ◆ B follows A for a count of 8.

This section is performed twice. The first time, one half of the group starts 8 counts ahead of the second half so that the second half is travelling while the first half is performing on the spot. When the first half has finished, they repeat their 'on the spot' phrase. The second time, the sequence is performed by the whole group together.

Section 3

- ◆ The fiercest pair of animals (e.g. lions) runs to the middle of the room, holds its fiercest pose and roars. The other animals scurry away.
- ◆ The fiercest animals look around, before calmly leaving the space.
- ◆ The rest of the animals rush back in to the centre, forming a huddle.

Teaching framework

Encourage clarity and control of body shape.

Focus attention on pathways, levels, movement quality and actions.

Encourage smooth transitions between phrases.

Encourage focus on movement quality (e.g. smooth, jerky, sharp, gentle, twisting, twitching) and on movement of various body parts.

Practice for clarity and smooth transitions.

Lesson 1

Warm-up

- 1 Imagine you are a giraffe. Stretch up as high as you can, on your tippy toes, and relax back down (x4). Go from the final stretch into a walk around the space on your tippy toes.
- 2 Hang your head. Feel the weight of your head bring you down, slowly dropping your spine. Soften your knees. When you get to the point where it is still comfortable, feel the weight of your arms and swing them gently from side to side. Imagine you are a monkey. Let this gentle swinging action enter your upper body. Imagine how a monkey would walk. How could the swinging action lead into a walk? Take a short walk in the space. Then stop, and come back up to standing, slowly unfurling your spine.
- 3 Bring your shoulders up to your ears. Feel the rest of your body tense. Walk like a penguin. Relax. Walk again and relax.
- 4 Get on your hands and knees and slowly drop your belly, curve your back and lift your head; then raise your belly, arch your back and drop your head (yoga cat stretch). Enjoy this movement. How else might a cat move? Move like a cat through the space. Use different levels.

Exploring and creating (based on section 2 of the dance framework)

The children name other animals and describe how they move e.g. prowl, stretch gallop, charge, stalk, slither, creep, leap, scurry, swing, climb, hop, crawl etc.

The class is divided into pairs (A and B). Each pair chooses an animal, considers where it lives (jungle/forest/city) and comes up with words to describe its movements.

The children then explore how their animal moves in space. Is it fast or slow? How else might it move? If it scurries, might it also hop? If it gallops, might it also kick?

Next, A follows B around the space. B considers the animal's surroundings and the pathways it takes (straight/curved/zig-zag). The roles are then reversed. Next, A follows B again. This time B considers the different levels (high/middle/low) the animal might explore. The roles are then reversed once more.

Each pair sets the movement of its animal e.g. scurrying along a zig-zag pathway, exploring low and high levels and pouncing to the ground. The movement should last for a count of 8. This movement is practised with A following B.

The children explore how their animal might move various body parts. How would it move its

head/shoulder/legs etc.? Jerkily/sharply/smoothly/gently/stiffly/loosely? Each pair then sets movements on the spot (4 counts) e.g. twitch head to the right, scrunch up right shoulder, stretch out left hand etc. For a further 4 counts, the children listen for danger, look for prey etc. Each pair then sets an 8 count 'on the spot' phrase.

Next, each pair creates another 8 count travelling phrase. This time B follows A.

Performing (based on sections 2 and 3 of the framework)

The class is divided in half. The first half starts eight counts ahead of the second half so that the second half is travelling while the first half performs on the spot. When the first half is finished it repeats its 'on the spot' phrase. The whole class then performs the 'travelling, on-the-spot, travelling' phrase together.

The fiercest pair of animals (e.g. lions, if there are lions) run to the middle of the group, hold their fiercest pose and roar. The rest of the animals scurry away.

Cool down

Rushing around like busy animals; getting slower and slower. Getting smaller and smaller until the body is curled up on the floor. Slowly waking and stretching and rising to standing.

Lesson 2

Resources: Video clips of 'Cat Dance' from *L'enfant et les Sortilèges* and 'Dance of the Texan Kangaroo Rat' from *Still Life at the Penguin Café*.

Warm up

- 1 The children sit in a circle; they yawn and stretch their arms up and over their heads. A yawn and (big) stretch are passed around the circle and back in the opposite direction.
- 2 Still sitting in the circle, children make opening and closing movements, curling and arching movements (yoga cat stretch) and rolling and sliding movements.
- 3 The opening and closing and curling and arching movements are taken up to standing and around the space.
- 4 Travelling through the space, the children open and close and curl and arch and fall and roll and slide and rise.
- 5 In pairs, children practise the travelling phrases devised in the previous lesson.

Exploring

Children sit back to back with their partners. Keeping

their backs in contact, they massage each other. A then becomes the leader and moves her/his back in various ways: from side to side; leaning forward; circling her/his shoulders etc. How does B respond? B then leads the movement.

Pushing into each other's backs to come up to standing; experimenting with various ways of coming up to standing, keeping contact with each other at all times.

Coming up to standing keeping contact with each other's sides/shoulders; using different body parts e.g. A's side maintains contact with B's back etc.

Appreciating

The children view the 'Cat Dance' twice. They then view the first few minutes of 'The Dance of the Texan Kangaroo Rat' twice.

After each first viewing, the children are asked: what did you notice?

Before the second viewing the children are directed to attend to the 'waking' movements of the animals/dancers, the various shapes the dancers make and how they move through space. They are also directed to notice the points at which the dancers make contact with each other in 'Cat Dance'.

Interesting movements, pathways, levels etc. might also be discussed.

Exploring and creating (based on section 1 of the dance framework)

Pairs of animals, in physical contact with their partners, 'sleep' on the floor. Referring to the dances viewed and the earlier movement exploration, each pair creates a dance phrase in which they wake up and come to standing. Is your animal slow and lazy or is it immediately alert? Does your animal make smooth or sharp movements?

Performing and appreciating

Each half of the class performs its waking up dances for the other half. What did you notice? What animals did you see? How did you recognise the giraffe? Was it the movement/the shape? What shapes/pathways/levels did you see?

Cool down

The opening and closing, curving and arching, sliding and rolling movements of the warm-up phase are repeated in reverse order (starting from standing and ending on the floor).

Lesson 3

Resources: Various types of music

Warm up

The teacher calls and the children respond.

- 1 Run – using all the space.
- 2 Freeze – in a shape that your animal from last lesson might make.
- 3 Dodge – weave in and out through one another, using all the space.
- 4 Wide – stretch into a wide position.
- 5 Centre – rush to centre and huddle.
- 6 Walk – using all the space.
- 7 Crouch – down.
- 8 Stick – to a partner.
- 9 Look – at a point in the room.
- 10 Up – stretch up high.

Performing and appreciating

Pairs practise the waking up phrase (section 1 of dance framework). Then they practise the travelling phrase (section 2 of dance framework). After this, the fiercest animal roars and the others scurry away (section 3 of dance framework).

A new ending for the dance is created: the fiercest animal, looks around, and calmly leaves

the space. The rest of the animals rush back, forming a huddle in the centre (section 3 of dance framework). Focus on movement quality and smooth transitions.

The children practise the whole dance (as per dance framework) a few times before performing it to a variety of musical accompaniments: live-ly/energetic/slow/various genres (popular/jazz/classical).

Half of the class then performs for the other half. How did the music make a difference? Which music did you prefer? Why? Which music do you think worked best for the dance? Why? What did you notice when you were watching?

Cool down

Children move around the space to musical accompaniment. The animals have come to the end of their day. They are very tired. They yawn and stretch before finding a spot in which to melt into sleep.

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References

Dance works on video

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Books

Rolfe, L. and Harlow, M. (1997) *Let's Look at Dance*. London: Fulton.
Smith-Autard, J. (2002) 2nd ed. *The Art of Dance in Education*. London: A&C Black.