

Study Guide for Teachers

NIMBUS DANCE WORKS

*Celebrating Culture,
Identity, and Dance!*

Presented by
Young Audience NJ & Eastern PA
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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

By juxtaposing the dance works of acclaimed international choreographers from places such as Turkey, Cuba, and Taiwan, this inspiring program asks audience members to consider how cultural tradition affects identity and self-expression. Students experience how artistic innovation can transcend an individual's background to achieve universal expression.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Students will

- understand that choreographers create dances to express their imaginations, ideas, feelings, and/or a purpose.
- explore the social and cultural heritage of Latin America, Taiwan, and other parts of the world through classical, folk, contemporary, and popular dance
- understand how human gestures and movements can reveal insightful perspectives about world cultures and those who create dances.
- understand how culture influences dance and how dance influences culture.
- be able to recognize cultural similarities and differences between themselves and others.
- Understand that the cultural values, beliefs, and behavioral attitudes of a society are often recognizable in the dances created, performed, and observed within that society.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

The National Dance Education Organization (ndeo.org) states, "Every society embodies movement in a form of dance. Humans move for pleasure, self-expression, communal bonding, and ritual. Dance reflects human nature and imparts the values and beliefs of the society from which the dance emerges....To study the art of dance is to learn the language of bodily movement as it expresses and communicates the essence of humanity."

All cultures provide people with a sense of belonging and share many commonalities, called "cultural universals." Think about common interests, needs, behavioral traits, and patterns shared by people of all cultures in the world. English Anthropologist Edward B Taylor notes, "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [or woman] as a member of society."

Take notice of some of the creative choices made by the choreographers in their dances, such as number of dancers, music, and costumes. You can also notice how each choreographer utilizes the elements of dance: Body, Space, Time, Energy, and Relationship. Choreographers also make timing and energy choices about when and how their movements are to be performed.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

Discussion Questions/Writing Prompts:

- How do artists celebrate their cultures and cultural identities through the arts?
- What is culture? How might culture influence the creation and performance of dance?
- What are some commonalities shared among people of all cultures?
- How is dance important to you, in your family, and within your community?
- Who in your family taught you about your cultural background? What were some important things you learned about your culture and how did you learn them?

Activities:

- Interview a classmate about their cultural background. Write and report back to the class: What is the cultural background of the classmate you interviewed? In what ways is their cultural background important to them and celebrated within their family and community?
- Research 5 facts about Cuba and Taiwan and their cultures.

GLOSSARY

Aesthetics: Values about beauty.

Choreography: The combination of movements that make up a dance composition.

Culture: The arts, laws, morals, knowledge, beliefs, customs, and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement of a society or social group.

Dance Step: An expressive gesture.

Genre: An artistic style.

Improvisation: Spontaneous movement.

Multicultural: Relating to or constituting several cultural or ethnic groups within a society that add to the strength and richness of human diversity.

ARTIST INFORMATION

Nimbus Dance Works focuses on the intersection between high-level dance and innovative ways of involving communities and audiences. In addition to work by Artistic Director Samuel Pott, the company commissions dances by leading international dancemakers, including Pedro Ruiz (Cuba/USA), Huang Yi (Taiwan), Korhan Basaran (Turkey), and Xiao-Xiong Zhang (Australia/Taiwan). The company also leads communities in the creation of dance works that respond to sociopolitical subjects of significance in their community. Through company performances, programs for youth and seniors, partnerships with institutions such as the Jersey City Board of Education and Rutgers University, and collaborations with notable composers and visual artists, Nimbus weaves together artistic excellence and community impact.

Nimbus's programs impact more than 12,000 people each year, including educational programs that serve over 1,000 students annually in the Jersey City public schools.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

Discussion Questions/Writing Prompts:

- Have you ever done a dance from your own heritage? What are the defining features of that dance? When and in what setting is it done? How does the dance style compare to the style of the dances seen during the performance?
- Which choreography did you enjoy most at the performance? What were some memorable moments? What did you think and feel while watching the program? What do you think the choreographers were trying to communicate? What is your personal interpretation? How did the dances seem to be culturally influenced?
- One of the dances you saw, *Danzon*, was choreographed by Cuban choreographer Pedro Ruiz. Where is Cuba located? What is the capital of Cuba? What languages are spoken in Cuba and why? What are some Cuban traditions, values, and beliefs? What are some interesting historical facts about Cuba? How is Cuban culture distinctive from other cultures?

RESOURCES

Books:

Anne Green Gilbert, *Teaching the R's through Movement Experience*.

Eric Jensen, *Arts with the Brain in Mind*

Online:

Afro-Cuban Traditions: www.ife-ile.org/traditions/traditional.htm

Pedro Ruiz: www.thirteen.org/pedro-ruiz

The Five Chinese Elements: pages.ucsd.edu/~dkjordan/chin/WuuShyng.html

About Huang Yi's Shadow of Sound: ny.us.taiwan.culture.tw/information_97_79442.html

Exploring Cultural Dance Forms: us.humankinetics.com/blogs/excerpt/discovering-cultural-dance