

AILEY TRIO

“Dance comes from the people and should be delivered back to the people.”

~ Alvin Ailey

The *Ailey Trio* is an engaging experience for students. The Trio is made up of three dancers from *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater* and is an exciting part lecture, part class, and part informal performance. The program goals are: to continue *Alvin Ailey's* vision of extending dance into the community; exposing students to the art of modern dance while allowing them to participate actively in the learning experience. The dancers will talk to students about the importance of “focusing”, work ethic, stamina and determination.

Meet the Trio

Guillermo Asca or “Moe” as he is affectionately known, was awarded a scholarship to The Ailey School and has danced with Ailey II (formerly Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble), Ballet Metropolitan de Caracas, Ballet Hispanico, Dance Compass and Foot Prints Dance Project. Mr. Asca joined the Company in 1994.

Clifton Brown began dancing at the age of five, and trained at various schools including Take 5 Dance Academy, Ballet Arizona, New School for the Arts, and The Ailey School where he was a student in the Ailey/Fordham BFA Dance Program. He has also received a number of scholarships and awards including the Martin Luther King Scholarship from the city of Phoenix, AZ and the Arts National Foundation of Advancement award. Mr. Brown joined the Company in 1999.

Khilea Douglass received her dance training from the Dance Theatre of Harlem School, the Baltimore School for the Arts and The Ailey School, where she was a fellowship student. Ms. Douglass danced for the Lula Washington Dance Theatre and was a member of Ailey II. She joined the Company in 2005.

Elements of Dance and Critical Viewing

GENERAL OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

We wish for students to:

- Receive a positive dance performance experience.
- Increase their knowledge of the arts, Alvin Ailey and dancers, to develop skills of perception and communication, and to share the importance of problem solving, stamina, goal setting, and teamwork.
- Collect knowledge before, during, and after the presentation, aided by a teacher who freely adapts our study guide or his or her own use! Please adapt this guide to fit your needs.
- Connect the arts across the curriculum.

TEACHER REMINDERS

- **Teacher Guide.** We hope that teachers will photocopy pages in this guide as needed for all instructors to use with their students.
- **Preparation for Students.** Please remind students that they will be seeing a live performance.

~~~Why Is a Live Theatre Audience Unique?~~~

(Courtesy of The Lied Center, Lawrence Kansas)

Television, rock concerts, and live performing arts events are forms of entertainment that ask for different kinds of responses from audiences.

Television almost begs us to talk back to it, and most of us do. When others are watching with us, we also talk to them about what’s on the screen—and sometimes other things as well. We leave and re-enter the room. We watch and listen and talk and move around all at the same time.

Rock concerts insist that we join in the musical celebration by singing, clapping, shouting, and sometimes dancing. We also talk a lot about what we’re experiencing. We watch, listen, sing, talk, and dance all at the same time.

Theatre, classical music and dance performances, on the other hand, ask for something different. They request emotional and intellectual commitment that can come only from close attention. While we may laugh and applaud at appropriate times, we watch and listen quietly.

There are good reasons why:

- Performing arts events take longer to unfold than 30-minute television programs; to appreciate them fully, it is necessary to be attentive to what the artists say and do.
- Members of the audience who are listening and watching closely are easily distracted by the sounds and movements of other audience members.
- Actors, musicians and dancers are in the same room as the audience and are therefore affected by audience behavior. Film and television performances are fixed on film and, as a result, are not affected by audience activity. Actors must move precisely, must time their lines and reactions carefully, and must make subtle adjustments on the basis of the moment. Musicians and dancers must remember complex musical passages or choreographed steps which require their careful attention. Unexpected activity can destroy their concentration.

Things to *Think* about & Things to *Do*

Before the Ailey Trio Arrives

When reviewing the differences between being an audience member for a film vs. a *live* performance, you should also let the students know what to expect. The dancers will not only be performing—they will talk to the students, encourage their participation, and answer questions.

Sometimes students are uncomfortable when dancers, especially men, appear in leotard and tights. Spend some time discussing what different professionals wear as *uniforms*. Corporate executives, doctors, nurses, policemen, firemen, ranchers, *etc.* each have a particular uniform for their job. Most students will have seen dancers at work—at least on TV or film. Discuss what they will expect the Ailey Trio to be wearing as a uniform. (The Trio will be dressed in rehearsal clothing sweat pants and T-shirts)

To begin breaking down some prejudices or pre-conceived notions against dancers, introduce students to the parallels between dance and other sports. Locate pictures in magazines, in books, and on posters (or cereal boxes!) of athletes in “job positions”—a basketball player bending his knees in preparation for a free throw shot, a baseball player in his batting stance, a football player just after he has kicked the ball, an ice hockey player in a lunge, *etc.* Also find pictures of dancers in equally exciting, controlled movement. Discuss the professions of these individuals, their similarities and differences. Students are introduced to the idea that coordination can—and should—be taken seriously. Encourage students to try creating approximately what they saw taking place in the photographs. The athletic aspect of the pictures reinforces the idea that you can use your mind and body, working together, to express yourself non-verbally. Students interested in choreography could create a dance that incorporates one or more of these moves. Taking the football “place kick” off the playing field, for example, and setting it down in an artistic situation in the classroom.

After the Ailey Trio Departs

Teachers can use the many art forms to relieve the student of the daily pressures of “measuring up” to his/her peers in the graded subjects. This Guide will give some suggestions for movement and visual art activities, as well as one unit of activities that reach across the curriculum.

Take a Movement Break! You do not need any special training, equipment (unless you want to include music) or space to arrange a movement break for your class. Work some of the following activities into the usually sedentary routines of a desk-bound academic program. The most important aspects of a movement program are its potential for strengthening a child’s self-esteem and for equipping him/her

with a securer sense of self. Helping students discover some kind of harmony between their emotions and their physical being should be a key goal in education.

A word about space. When students have been sitting at their desks working in a very controlled situation, and you offer a large, wide-open area, you will more than likely have chaos. Begin small, with a cleared area in the corner of the classroom or simply clear the area around each student’s desk.

Halls and Walls. If you eventually want a space larger than the ordinary classroom, why not try the hallways? How many things can you do in a hallway without disrupting the entire school system? Try crawling up the walls, literally—with your fingers. You can also hold on to the wall to practice balances and gentle kicks, or knee bends. Then find a way to do push-ups against the wall.

Body Bingo. Use “flash cards” or call out directions for touching body parts with other body parts: nose to knee, chin to chest, ear to shoulder, elbow to knee, wrist to ear, chin to wrist, foot to leg, heel to heel, *etc.*

Move “As If”. Create verbal imagery by introducing movements as “Move as if you are...”: wading in syrup, rowing a boat, rolling a huge rock, shoveling snow, walking on hot coals, caught in a spider web, a piece of bacon frying, popcorn popping, a puppet on strings, *etc.*

Halloween Moves. This game is most enjoyed by the “trick-or-treat” kids. Use the following guided imagery: “Stretch like a black cat does when he’s just waking up. Yawn. Stretch again. Oh dear! A ghost has jumped into your hand. He’s making your hand shake, shake, shake! Now he’s got you by your foot—now the other foot—now he’s in both your arms. He lets go—and now he leads you around the room by your nose—now he leads you by the elbow—now the hips—now by the knees—now by your forehead. He pulls the top of your head up and up and up and now he pushes down on your head and you are squashed slowly into the floor.”

Move and Freeze. Encourage students to bring in their favorite music. The directions are simple: move when you hear music; freeze when the music stops. It’s also fun to have students make tapes of many different styles of music, different qualities of sound, different instruments, *etc.*

Create your own movement breaks. If you have had some experience at dancing or acting, borrow freely from what you may remember—use isometrics, yoga, T’ai Chi, and other fitness training class exercises.

Stamina Everywhere. The work of the Ailey Trio requires *stamina*. Stamina is defined as “vigor” and “the capacity for enduring”. The word vigor conjures up images of strength,

power, virility, vitality, energy and good old-fashioned “get-up-and-go”. Synonyms for endurance include persistence, perseverance, durability, lastingness, “stick-to-it-iveness”—words for body strength and for *inner* strength.

Have students recall what the dancers of the Ailey Trio said about their own stamina—both physical and mental. What does it mean to them in dance and in their lives? What does it mean to the students? After students have come to “own” the *concept* of stamina, try some of the following activities so that their bodies and minds can also own the concept.

Mighty Movers. One theory about the word “muscle” is that it comes from a Greek expression meaning, “to enclose,” because layers of muscle enclose the body. There are more than six hundred muscle groups in the human body. The muscles that you can see on the body’s surface are called “landmarks”. You can find pictures that show these landmarks, such as the deltoids, triceps, biceps quadriceps, *etc.* You will also be able to see most of them on the Ailey Trio! Just like other athletes, dancers’ muscles are well defined.

Muscles make up about 40 percent of the weight of a man and about 30 percent of the weight of a woman. The *Blood and Guts* book [see *Resources* on page 4] lists two amazing facts:

- If all the muscles in the body could pull in one direction in one mighty heave, the force would equal 25 tons.
- The average person’s muscles do daily work amounting to loading 24,000 pounds onto a four-foot-high shelf. Think about that over a lifetime.

Move and Remember. [*concentration, sequencing, physical memory*] Have each student make up three different “classroom-sized” movements that can be connected into a *combination*, or movement sequence. For example: both arms start stretched above the head; arms drop even with the shoulders (a “T”) with palms up, then both elbows bend and palms touch shoulders, elbows straighten back to “T” position. Working in partners, each student repeats his/her own combination while watching the other student repeat theirs. The challenge is to be able to concentrate and not “pick up” the partner’s combination. Do this several times with different partners. Next, combine into groups of four students. Have each student learn the other three combinations. Then, as a group, they put together all four combinations into one 12-count combination. (NOTE: Some of the movements may need to be altered slightly in order to connect to the next set of three.) Ask the group to rehearse their combination until they can do it without error. Finally, the group demonstrates their combination to the rest of the class and then they watch while the class tries to repeat their combination. The students in the performing group serve as “judges”. Was any student able to perform the combination with only one viewing?

Contour Drawing. Contour drawing means drawing only the outside edge of a thing—an outline. Students can quickly do a contour drawing of their hand; place one hand, with fingers spread apart, on a paper and draw around it. By questioning, you can help them discover that this drawing doesn’t show whether or not the person is wearing rings (at least not what kind) or where the knuckles, scars, wrinkles and lines come, or whether the hands are clean or dirty. A contour drawing only talks about edges, but it can be very useful. It speaks of shape, size, and sometimes spacing. Rembrandt made telling contour drawings. So do a number of cartoonists and commercial designers.

Have each student gather three to five objects between the size of an eraser and a pair of scissors. They can probably find them in their desks, pockets or book bags; or, several days before you do contour drawing, ask them to bring in some small objects like juice cans, bottle tops, shells, spools, toothbrushes. To reinforce the concept of contour, the students will draw around these objects repeatedly, to create a design or pattern. It is most fun to use wrapping paper or butcher paper so they can draw long lines of shapes moving across the paper in a variety of ways.

This experience provides the opportunity to talk about and arrange shapes to convey a visual idea, just as every artist does. With organization, an artist and a dancer/choreographer attempt to bring different units together to create a satisfying whole. Some of the principles of organization in both visual art and dance are **balance** (symmetrical, asymmetrical, radial), **unity with variety**, **movement**, and **spacing**. Although the principles overlap in actual practice and cannot be separated, it is less confusing for the student if one is emphasized at a time and their relatedness unfolds naturally.

How much space do you fill? Can you fill a lot of space? The space you don’t fill with your body is still space—it is called *negative space*. How little space can you occupy? Can two people occupy the same space? Where is the negative space in their connection? Can we move around the room in our own paths without colliding? How important is the negative space? The answers to these questions about space are of vital importance to anybody who has ever had to fill a stage with “presence,” or for a member of a basketball team working in conjunction with other players in the carefully delineated space of a playing court. The use of space, spatial relationships, and negative space are part of the Ailey Male Trio performance.

To experiment with **spacing** and **unity with variety** in a non-movement way, have students fold a paper in half horizontally, then in half vertically, so when opened it has four equal boxes. Pick one shape and draw around it in the same way in the same spot in each rectangle. Ask them if this repetition would tend to get boring after five or six pages. How could they vary it? Choose another shape of a different

size, and draw it next to or over part of the first shape, in all four boxes. Try a third shape if needed. A pattern occurs, giving a kind of unity with variety. This makes it possible for us to look at two or three different kinds of objects at one time because of the structure and order in which they occur.

Encourage students to notice the effects of *negative space*! They can see negative space in the patterns of their **contour** drawings as well as in their **unity with variety** drawings.

Shoes *Move* Across the Curriculum

Have you ever thought about your old shoes after you buy a new pair? Here is a poem that is dedicated to your old shoes and how they feel:

Sad Shoes

My shoes are lying on the floor.
They are not very new,
And I can't wear them anymore
Because the holes came through.

They had a lovely time today
Scrambling up a tree.
Tomorrow they'll be thrown away,
And cannot play with me.

They won't be here to lace or clean.
I wonder if they know.
I think perhaps they do –
They lean upon each other so.

Dorothy Aldis
Here, There and Everywhere

Students can give new life to old shoes in classroom activities and learning centers. Have students bring in the family's old, worn out shoes. You could also visit Thrift Stores to find some other varieties of shoes to bring in. Tie various activity tags to the shoes and provide shoeboxes for completed materials.

Some ideas for individual activities:

- What do you think the owner does while wearing this shoe? Tape a radio interview with the owner.
- Who do you think wore this shoe? Write or tell a story about a day in his/her life.
- Where has this shoe been? Draw a cartoon story about his/her adventures.
- Examine this shoe and make a list of the various jobs it takes to make a shoe like this.
- How does it feel to be "walked on" all day? Write a poem or a story to tell this shoe's feelings.
- Imagine what would happen if this shoe suddenly changed color. Color or paint a picture.

- Sketch this shoe. Don't forget to look for:
 - (a) the lines in its shape and form.
 - (b) the negative space created with shoe and its environment.
 - (c) the light and dark areas created by the lighting in the room. (You may move the shoe until you like the lighting and the angle.)

Some Ideas for Large group activities:

- What do sayings like "put your best foot forward" and "be careful not to put your foot in your mouth" mean? Can you think of some more sayings?
- Develop a vocabulary and spelling list. Students could also make a shoe dictionary with words like sole, arch, instep, and eyelet.
- Brainstorm with movement! Here's the question: If you were wearing this shoe, how would you move? Hold one shoe so that all the students can see it. Give them time to experiment with several different ways of moving. Then hold up another shoe, and continue brainstorming until students tire of the activity.

Resources

Allison, Linda. *Blood and Guts: A Working Guide to Your Own Insides*, 1976.

Asimov, Isaac. *The Human Body: Its structure and Operation*, 1963, 1992.

Barlin, Anne and Paul. *The Art of Learning Through Movement*, 1971.

ATTENTION TEACHERS & STUDENTS

We would like to read essays and poems, see and listen to video- and audio-tapes, and enjoy artwork and photographs resulting from activity choices you make after seeing *The Ailey Trio*.

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