

Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey
presents
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
Theater Performance for Schools

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

~ Alvin Ailey

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater made its debut at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA in New York City on March 30, 1958. Alvin Ailey became one of America’s foremost choreographers and dancers, a success built on his vision: to portray the human experience through dance and bring it to as many people as possible. Alvin Ailey sparked interest in dance throughout Kansas City and his works have helped build a community that celebrates the power of Ailey’s dance legacy while communicating the rich history of African-American culture. Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey has united people of all backgrounds who have become connected through our similarities in purpose, to share what we have in common, while we explore together the unique character of our individuality.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, under the direction of Robert Battle, will perform diverse works from the company’s repertory, including Alvin Ailey’s *Revelations*. This fully staged 60-minute dance performance includes lighting, costumes and scenic props.

~~~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.

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 and artists, and to develop skills of perception, reflection, interpretation, and communication.
- Collect knowledge before, during, and after the performance, aided by a teacher who freely adapts our study guide for 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

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 that require their careful attention. Unexpected activity can destroy their concentration.

**WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU COME TO THE
KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS**

Before the performance, an usher will meet you at the entrance to the theater and direct you to your seats. It is a good idea to use the restroom before the performance. If you must go to the restroom during the performance, be sure that you leave and return quietly. An adult (teacher or sponsor) **must** escort the student out of the theater and remain with the student at all times!

Once you are seated, observe the stage. Is the curtain (*Grand Drape*) down? If it is not, what mood do the colors and angles of the set create? How does the lighting affect the set? How does the lighting in the theatre affect the energy of the audience? It is important to soak up the atmosphere around you before the show begins. Soon the lights will dim or go out indicating that curtain time is near. At this time the audience becomes very quiet.

During the performance, the audience listens and watches very carefully. Performers like to hear you laugh when something is funny. Most of all, they love to hear you clap at the end of the performance when they bow. After the final bows (*curtain calls*), the audience always stays seated until the lights in the “house” (where you are sitting) come on. The usher and your teacher will give you directions for leaving the theater. After the performance, take time to discuss the dance performance you have seen. Share your thoughts with your teachers, family and friends! Write and let the dancers, choreographers, and designers know your thoughts about the performance. The Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey staff will be happy to forward your letters to the artists (we cannot guarantee, though, that they will have time to respond).

Before your students arrive at the theater, review the differences between being an audience member for a film vs. a **live** performance, you should also let the students know what to expect.

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 AAADT company members to be wearing as a uniform.

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 her/his knees in preparation for a free throw shot, a baseball player in his batting stance, a soccer 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 men, 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.

Movement Vocabulary. Moving with part or all of the body, everyone can: swing, stretch, bob, vibrate, *etc.* When a person’s body knows how to do these things, the body and mind have a “movement vocabulary”. Students will be able to recognize these movement qualities in the dances they see performed by AAADT.

Use the following movements as preparation for anything from academic tests, to sports, to artistic performance. Warm-ups prepare the body for more vigorous and concentrated activity; they also provide a transition from a previous activity to a new one.

- *Stretching* is the extension of a part or all of the body as far as possible without strain.
- *Swinging* is a loose, relaxed movement that starts with energy, continues with momentum, and ends with energy. The free-flowing ease of the swing corresponds to the breathing cycle of inhalation (energy), exhalation (momentum). Swing all parts of the body: torso, head, legs and arms.
- *Bobbing* is a gentle, easy, up-and-down movement, done with any part of the body in any position. To use the feet properly, land first on the toes, then on the ball of the foot, then the heel and finally, the knees should bend.
- *Striking* is a short, clearly defined movement done with as little tension as possible. The more relaxed you are, the easier this activity is. Striking is a percussive movement that helps use excess energy. Use all parts of the body.
- *Vibrating* is a shaking movement that resembles shivering. It is hard to do, and harder to sustain, but is very effective in ridding the body of strain and tension. Use various parts of the body as well as the total body.
- *Collapsing* may be partial or total, but in all cases, start slowly. In partial collapse, a good image is a balloon with the air being let out. To do a total collapse to the floor, keep the body rounded, and land only on “padded” parts of the body (*avoid falling on knees, elbows and wrists*).

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

Thank you for participating in our arts in education programming. KCFAA reaches over 30,000 students in the Kansas City metropolitan area each year. We would like to read essays and poems, see and listen to audio and videotapes, and enjoy artwork and photographs resulting from activity choices you make after seeing *AAADT*.

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