



DANCE
THEATRE OF
HARLEM



INSIDE BALLET WITH DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM ***STUDY GUIDE***

Inside Ballet with Dance Theatre of Harlem is an informal presentation on the art and science of dance. The educational performance has three components: a brief, front-of-curtain introduction, demonstrations of ballet training and stage lighting followed by excerpts from Dance Theatre of Harlem repertoire. The excerpts show how all of the elements come together to create the magic of performance.

BALLET CLASS

Every ballet dancer from student to professional who is serious about perfecting his or her art begins each day with a ballet class. A typical class is divided into two parts, the barre and the center.



BARRE

During the barre, dancers execute specific movements to warm up and develop dexterity and control of the muscles of the legs and feet as well as coordination with the upper body. A barre is a horizontal rod or pipe that is placed approximately 3.5 feet from the floor and is used for support. Dancers hold onto the barre with one hand while they exercise the opposite leg. In a normal class exercises are done on the right and left sides. In the Lecture Demonstration the

exercises are done only on one side, allowing time for description and explanation of the French terminology used throughout the class.

CENTER

In the center, dancers use the full range of body movement as well as space to execute the movements they have prepared at the barre.



Female dancers work *sur les pointes*, or on the tips of their toes. To accomplish this, female dancers wear special shoes called pointe shoes. In addition to demonstrating frequently used movement vocabulary for the woman, an explanation of the pointe shoe is also covered.



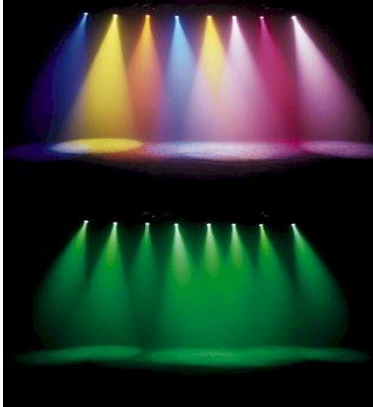
Along with shared movement vocabulary, male dancer technique involves jumping and turning. These steps are a particular part of male center work.



Men and women come together again in **adagio**, or **partnering** class, in which the male dancer the female dancer in turns and lifts.

STAGE CRAFT

In this segment of the Lecture Demonstration a few very basic elements of stage lighting are explained. A brief demonstration reveals some of the equipment used in lighting the stage and illustrates the effects of color and light on a performance.



Here are some of the stage lighting instruments that are commonly used.

Fresnels



A fresnel provides a soft circle of light that is adjustable from spot to flood, or otherwise known as smaller to bigger. The fresnel lens, which was originally used in lighthouses, has a circular ridge pattern built in. It is this ridge pattern that dictates the smooth, soft edge. There is a slot in the front so you can add a piece of Gel to change the color.

Ellipsoidal



An ellipsoidal is one of the most common stage lighting instruments. It has a moveable lens which allows you to adjust the size of the beam of light and shutters to allow you to shape the light with straight edges. There is a slot in the front for gel to change the color and a Gobo slot just behind the shutter in which you can slide a gobo/ pattern holder into. This allows you to shape and texture the light by using a gobo. Gobos are metal or glass stencils that block some light and lets other light through. This is how you can project shapes and images with an ellipsoidal.

REPERTOIRE

Because ballet was first codified in the court of Louis XIV, the terminology is in French. For a ballet company, repertoire is the collection of dances that a ballet company performs in any given season. The final section of the Lecture Demonstration is made up of selections from the Dance Theatre of Harlem repertoire. These excerpts put into practice the movement vocabulary—or steps—of class as building blocks for making dances. Varied in length and style, the excerpts show how music, steps and dynamics come together to create a dance.

EXCERPTS FROM DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM REPERTOIRE

Ballets are created in many different styles, each Lecture/Demonstration presents samples of these styles drawn from the excerpts from the Dance Theatre of Harlem repertoire.



Excerpt 1, “*Harlem’s Finest*” from the ballet *Harlem On My Mind*

Choreography by Darrell Grand Moultrie

Music by Fats Waller

Darrell Grand Moultrie was commissioned to choreograph *Harlem On My Mind* by the University of Wyoming for the Dance Theatre of Harlem in 2017. The dance is in five sections and was created for 10 dancers.



Excerpt 2 *Change* (second solo)

Choreography by Dianne McIntyre, Music by Ely Fountain

This work is inspired by women—Black, Brown and Beige—who have refashioned the neighborhood, the country, the world through their vision, courage, and endurance. Often unsung, inconspicuous, or up-front, these individuals could be called warriors for change.



Excerpt 3 Pas de deux from the ballet *Le Corsaire* (adagio)

Music by Riccardo Drigo and Baron Boris Finhoff-Schnell

The popular bravura showpiece “*Le Corsaire Pas De Deux*” is taken from a 3-act ballet that tells a tale of love’s ultimate triumph despite betrayal and disaster. “*Le Corsaire Pas de Deux*” has become one of the standards of the classical canon. The showpiece, filled with sophistication and challenging technical feats, has had many choreographers and composers. Dance Theatre of Harlem’s version is based on one set by DTH co-founder Karel Shook in the 1970s. Cuban ballerina Caridad Martinez has overseen the current production.



Excerpt 4 “Mother Popcorn” from the ballet *Return*

Choreographed by Robert Garland for Dance Theatre of Harlem’s 30th anniversary in 1999, “Mother Popcorn” is the opening section of a ballet named *Return*. Using the music of Aretha Franklin and James Brown, Robert Garland interweaves the vocabulary and style of classical ballet with contemporary African American social dances.

ABOUT DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM

Dance Theatre of Harlem is a leading dance institution of unparalleled global acclaim that uses the art form of classical ballet to change people’s lives.

Dance Theatre of Harlem was founded in 1969 by the late Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook. Mitchell, the first African American dancer to become a principle dancer with a major U. S. ballet company (New York City Ballet) turned his despair at the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. into hope by establishing a school and later a company to bring new opportunity to the lives of the young people in the Harlem neighborhood in which he grew up. He believed in the power of training in a classical art form to bring discipline and focus to a challenged community. Dance Theatre of Harlem’s unprecedented success is built on creating innovative and bold new forms of artistic expression.

TIMELINE – DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM’S HISTORY

1955-1969

Arthur Mitchell

Selected by George Balanchine in 1955, Arthur Mitchell became the first African American to be a permanent member of a major U.S. ballet company, New York City Ballet. This was the beginning of the many firsts Arthur Mitchell achieved that would change the landscape for dance for years to come. Through roles created on Arthur Mitchell by George Balanchine he was able to fine-tune his craft and became a principal dancer with New York City Ballet for 15 years. Roles created by George Balanchine that Mitchell was known for include the pas de deux in *Agon* and *Puck in “A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream.”*

1969

The Birth of Dance Theatre of Harlem

In 1969, after hearing of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook founded Dance Theatre Harlem. In the 1950s and 60s, Karel Shook was one of the few ballet teachers who allowed African Americans into his New York ballet classes, as a result, he taught most of the leading African American dancers of the time making him one of the most important ballet teachers of the 20th century. A former dancer with New York City Ballet and the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, he taught at The Katherine Dunham School where he first worked with Arthur Mitchell and later started his own school, Studio of Dance Arts, in New York City.

Mitchell and Shook started a school in Harlem to give children there an opportunity to study ballet and be exposed to other areas of the arts. Dance Theatre of Harlem flourished and the nucleus of a professional dance company was born.

1970-1979

A Decade of Triumph

Almost immediately, along with beginning a training school, Arthur Mitchell started an education and outreach program, called “Arts Exposure,” giving lecture demonstrations and smaller performances in public schools, colleges and universities to give the students experience with performing. In 1971, the company that came to be known as Dance Theatre of Harlem made its debut performance at the Guggenheim Museum of Art in New York City. Later that year, George Balanchine invited Arthur Mitchell to co-choreograph *Concerto for Jazz and Orchestra in a collaboration with New York City Ballet and Dance Theater of Harlem.*

By 1979, DTH had toured internationally, had three successful Broadway seasons and received critical acclaim for the public television broadcast, Great Performances- Dance In America.

1980-1989

A World Class, Neo-classical Ballet Company

In the 1980’s, spectacular productions brought rave reviews from performances of such ballets as *Firebird, Creole Giselle, Scheherazade, Bugaku, Agon, Dougla* and *Fall River Legend*. Mitchell’s

vision and hard work had carved a niche for Dance Theatre of Harlem based on the company's strong ballet technique and neoclassical style, enabling it to the company to excel in an eclectic repertoire.

In 1988, Dance Theatre of Harlem was the only American ballet company to perform in Russia, as a part of a cultural exchange initiative sponsored mutually by the United States and the former Soviet Union. Along with an eclectic repertoire that included works by Geoffrey Holder and John Taras. Geoffrey Holder brought ballets to the Dance Theatre of Harlem repertoire that told stories from the Caribbean that utilized ballet technique, pageantry and Afro-Caribbean rhythms. John Taras was also a dancer with New York City Ballet with George Balanchine. John Taras, Geoffrey Holder and Arthur Mitchell collaborated on the Dance Theatre of Harlem version of *Firebird*. In St. Petersburg (Leningrad), Dance Theatre of Harlem performed the work of George Balanchine in the Maryinsky Theater (Kirov Theater) where he made his first performance at 10 years old.

1990-1999

Thirty Years of Dance Theatre of Harlem

During the '90's, Dance Theatre of Harlem continued its mission to be an organization with an artistic, educational and social impact. As in the beginning, DTH continued to challenge widely held stereotypes, while bridging the gaps created by extreme cultural and economic disparity worldwide. In 1992, the company broke historic ground as the first U.S. cultural institution to perform in post-apartheid South Africa. A transcendent artistic success, the tour also gave birth to the Dancing Through Barriers® program in which the education and outreach programs that had always been central to the company's activities was formally institutionalized.

In 1999, celebrating the company's 30th year and Arthur Mitchell's 50th year in the performing arts, Dance Theatre of Harlem and Arthur Mitchell were inducted into the National Dance Museum of Dance and the Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney Hall of Fame in Saratoga Springs, New York.

2000-2009

Dance Theatre of Harlem: Using the Arts to Ignite the Mind

In 2000, Dance Theatre of Harlem embarked on its first tour to China and performed to sold-out houses, giving the country its first performances of *Firebird*, performed with live music and conducted extensive outreach and educational activities in Mandarin.

In September 2001, the Company celebrated its 32th Anniversary at NY City Center, just days after the attacks on September 11th.

In the spring of 2002, DTH returned to the stage of the legendary Apollo Theater for the first time in 25 years and was joined by the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin in a benefit performance.

In the summer of 2003, Dance Theatre of Harlem made its debut at the Lincoln Center Festival with a one-week engagement and premiered the ballet “St. Louis Woman: A Blues Ballet.” In 2004, DTH celebrated its 35th Anniversary with an extensive tour of the United Kingdom and Greece, where they participated in the opening ceremonies of the summer Olympics. In June of 2004, the professional company was put on hiatus. In 2006, in honor of Arthur Mitchell and Dance Theatre of Harlem, the DTH Ensemble, the performing arm of the DTH School performed at “An Evening at The White House”. In an effort to keep DTH’s name in the marketplace while the main company was on hiatus, in 2008 the Ensemble, continued to thrill audiences with performances; lecture demonstrations in schools, colleges, universities; and dance festivals.

In 2009 Dance Theatre of Harlem celebrated its 40th Anniversary with a retrospective multimedia exhibit, “Dance Theatre of Harlem: 40 Years of Firsts” at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center, NYC. At the end of that year, Arthur Mitchell stepped down as Artistic Director of DTH.

2010-Present

- 2010 Arthur Mitchell passes the artistic leadership of DTH to Virginia Johnson, a founding member of Dance Theatre Harlem, a former principal dancer and founding editor of *Pointe Magazine*. Virginia Johnson is a native of Washington, D. C. She started her dance training with Ms. Therrell Smith, in Washington, D.C. and went on to study with Mary Day at the Washington School of Ballet. After graduating from the Washington School of Ballet, she went on to become a University Scholar in the School of the Arts at New York University before joining Dance Theatre of Harlem. Johnson’s career with Dance Theatre of Harlem spanned nearly 30 years. Virginia Johnson is recognized, internationally, as one of the great ballerinas of her generation and is known best for her performances in the ballets *Giselle*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Fall River Legend*. Ms. Johnson has also received honors that include the Young Achiever Award from the National Council of Women, the Dance Magazine Award, a Pen and Brush Achievement Award and the Washington Performing Arts 2008-2009 Pola Nirenska Lifetime Achievement Award.
- 2012 Revival of the Dance Theatre of Harlem professional company with 18 dancers.
- 2014 First tour to Honduras, presented by the U.S. Department of the State.
- 2015 Dance Theatre of Harlem returns to New York City Center for the first time in 14 years.
- 2016 Dance Theatre of Harlem is included in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American Art and Culture.
- 2018 The company tours nationally and internationally
- 2019 Dance Theatre of Harlem begins a two-year celebration of its 50th anniversary

INTRO TO BALLET AS A FORM OF DANCE

People have always danced. In many cultures around the world, dance is a social activity that brings people together to share common ideas or emotions. Dance may also be a part of religious practice to bring rain or a good harvest. Dance can also connect a people to their traditions and convey history. Dance can also be a form of entertainment.

Dance may be improvised or highly structured and one of the most structured forms of dance is ballet, a privileged activity undertaken by highly skilled specialists for the enjoyment of an audience. Ballet is a performing art that began in the 17th-century in the court of Louis XIV in France. In the beginning, the dances told stories about supernatural beings such as gods and fairies and consisted of sequences of steps in elaborate floor patterns. Today ballet has many styles, some of which are included in the LECTURE DEMONSTRATION.

Basic Movements

In ballet, execution of the steps is important and there are certain rules that must be obeyed. For example, movement is done using what is called turnout. Turnout is the outward rotation of the legs from the hips, which means that the knees and the toes point away from the center line of the body. Also, all steps begin and end with one of the five basic positions of the feet. (See drawings below) These positions were developed in the 1700s and have remained the same ever since.

The following movements are used in ballet dances. The movements have French names because of ballet's beginning in the French court. Students can be directed to look for them in the dances performed during the program and other ballet performances.

Plié (plee-AY) - "to bend"

Pliés are used to warm up the muscles of the legs and feet. All jumps in ballet begin and end in a plié. There are two types of pliés: demi and grand (small and large).

Tendu (tahn-DEW) - "to stretch"

This exercise stretches and strengthens the arch underneath the foot and extends the leg fully from the hip. The toe always touches the floor.

Rond de Jambe (rawn duh-JHAHM) - "circle the leg"

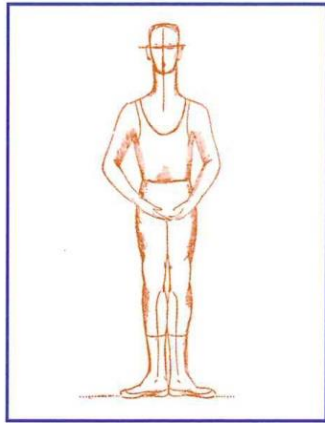
This exercise loosens up hip ligaments and improves turnout. The leg and foot are brushed forward, then circled around to the back and closed to the original position.

Glissade (glee SAAD) - "glide"

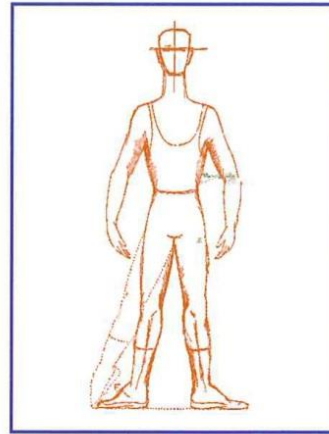
A travelling step that begins and ends in fifth position moving to the front, side or back. Glissades are small jumps (done close to the ground) to link steps in a combination

ACTIVITY 1

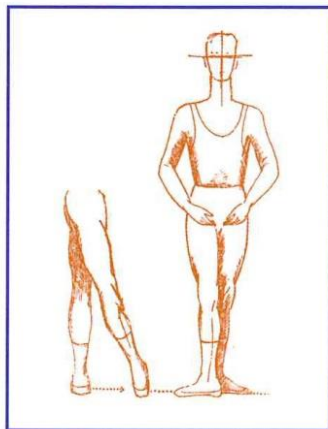
Ask your students to study the positions illustrated here and stand in each one of the positions. How easy or how difficult are they to do?



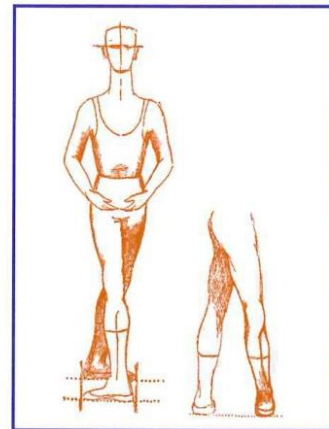
First Position



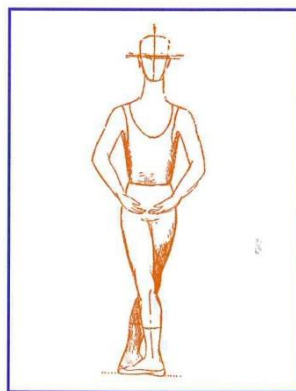
Second Position



Third Position



Fourth Position



Fifth Position

ACTIVITY 2 – Unscramble the words and terms connected to Ballet.

BALLET WORD SCRAMBLE

- 1. RUS ELS NPOITES** _____
- 2. EARBR** _____
- 3. ADGOAI** _____
- 4. PRARTEINGN** _____
- 5. TEPERREIOR** _____
- 6. ROEACRHHPOEGR** _____
- 7. OTUTRUN** _____
- 8. COOPESMR** _____
- 9. DUETN** _____
- 10. DNOR DE JABME** _____

Activity 3 - Improvisation

Robert Garland’s “Return” interweaves the vocabulary and style of classical ballet with contemporary African American social dances. In the last movement of “Return,” an element of improvisation is added to the choreography in what is known as a “Soul Train Line.” “Soul Train” was a syndicated American musical variety show, 1971-2016, that featured music and artists from the African American experience. The show was created by producer and entrepreneur, Don Cornelius. Many homes across America were tuned in every week to see the latest dances.

- Divide the class into two groups.
- Play music of James Brown or contemporary music the students may enjoy.
- Encourage students to respond to the music, express themselves and connect with those around them.
- Group #1 will do their moves and freeze and Group #2 observes the moves and poses. After Group # 2 has had a chance to observe, Group #2 dancers as Group #1 observes.

Group Discussion Questions:

1. Where did ballet come from?
 2. When did ballet start?
 3. What language is used for the terms in ballet?
 4. What are the components of a ballet class?
 5. What do you call the name of the shoes the ladies wear in ballet?
 6. What is the term given a collection of ballets a company does?
 7. Who started Dance Theatre of Harlem?
 8. What was the historical incident that served as a catalyst for the creation of Dance Theatre of Harlem?
 9. Where was the first performance of Dance Theatre of Harlem?
 10. What does a choreographer do?
 11. What is the term used for the person who makes the music for a ballet?
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PHOTO CREDITS:

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