

Versa-Style Dance Repertory Study Guide



Dear Educators,

Versa-Style is a group of young, passionate, and socially-conscious artists who work endlessly to spread love, positivity, and knowledge through the medium of Hip-Hop dance. As a non-profit organization, Versa-Style serves two purposes; one focus of our organization is to tour as a professional dance company, and the other is to give back to the youth through community outreach. Our goal is to give Hip-Hop more representation in both the professional arts world and in our Los Angeles community as an outlet for underprivileged inner-city youth.

We take pride in being able to teach both students and educators about the positive impact Hip-Hop dance and culture has on the youth while also clearing up some of the negative stigmas associated with Hip-Hop in our society.

I hope the information and activities in these lessons resonate with some of your students. Please take the time to go through each lesson to the best of your ability prior to the show in order to make the performance a more meaningful experience. Each lesson follows both VAPA and California Common Core standards and is a tool to help your students find connections between Hip-Hop dance and subjects they are currently studying.

Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have on this curriculum or Versa-Style Dance Company and our work.

Thank you for all you do for our youth!

Sincerely,

Brandon Juezan

Project Manager and Principal Dancer of Versa-Style Dance Company

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Lesson 1: History of Hip-Hop Culture

Lesson at a Glance

Lesson Objective: Explore the roots and history of Hip-Hop dance to gain a better understanding of the dance style's significance

Duration: 60 mins

Materials: Access to YouTube, butcher paper or printer paper, crayons, Handout 1: Elements of Hip-Hop

Standards:

CCSS, Speaking and Listening, Grade Five: 5. Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

CCSS, Speaking and Listening, Grade Five: 2. Summarize a written text aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS, Speaking and Listening, Grades Three-Five: 4. Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly and at an understandable pace.

VAPA Dance, Grade Two: 3.4 Describe dances seen in celebrations and community events.

VAPA Dance, Grade Five: 5.1 Describe how historical events relate to dance forms.

Concepts/Vocabulary:

Element - an important part of something abstract.

Culture - the customs, arts, social institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people or other social group.

Social Dance - a major category or classification of dance forms or dance styles, where sociability and socializing are the primary focuses of the dancing. In Hip-Hop these dances are referred to as "party dances" and are done together in groups at large social gatherings.

Hip-Hop - an urban youth culture composed of four elements: deejaying, rapping also known as MCing, graffiti and B-boying, which includes hip-hop dance, style and attitude

DJ "disc jockey" - a person who mixes different songs together as they are playing, usually for a live audience.

MC "master of ceremonies" - Master of Ceremonies or Microphone Controller is a rapper who hosts an event or neighborhood party.

Graffiti - writing or drawings that have been scribbled, scratched or painted on a wall or other surface that the public can see.

Breakin (Breakdance) - a style of acrobatic dancing often performed to rap music by teenage males in the streets during the 1970's. It is characterized by intricate footwork, pantomime, spinning headstands, and tumbling.

Guiding Questions:

What defines Hip-Hop culture?

What similarities exist between Hip-Hop dance and social dance?

Lesson Progression

Mini Lesson: Explore the History of Hip-Hop Culture

Hip-Hop is a youth culture that began in the parks, playgrounds, and streets of 1970's New York City. The youth used the elements of Hip-Hop (rapping, deejaying, breaking, graffiti art, fashion, etc.) as a creative and recreational outlet. Hip-Hop culture was learned and shared through observation followed by practice.

Discuss the history of Hip-Hop culture with your students by viewing Handout 1: Elements of Hip-Hop. Review each of the four elements of Hip-Hop by analyzing each photograph and reading the key words about the element.

For supplemental learning, watch two short videos with your students on Hip-Hop culture. The first video introduces important historical figures and discusses the four elements of Hip-Hop culture. The second video shows the progression of breaking steps starting in the 1980's. While watching the videos, encourage students to listen for information on the four elements and call out when they hear a key word from Handout 1.

Four Elements of Hip-Hop Culture

1. DJing: Music
 - Key Words: turntables, vinyl, scratching, mixing, music breaks, backspinning
2. MCing (Master of Ceremonies): Spoken Word
 - Key Words: host of event, microphone, keeping up the energy, rapping, rhyming
3. Breaking: Dance
 - Key Words: break beats, rocking, power moves, freezes, party dances
4. Graffiti Artists: Visual Art
 - Key Words: visual art, murals, walls, fonts, spraypaint

Videos

History of Hip-Hop culture summed up in 10 minutes: <https://youtu.be/yVTTph1nZPw>

- 0:00-4:59 Historical figures and history
- 5:00-5:59 Key words on DJ's
- 6:00-7:55 Key words on MC's or "Rappers"
- 7:56-9:25 Creation of the word "Hip-Hop" and importance of live performances

The Hip-Hop Dance Experience-History of Dance: https://youtu.be/_BKXn6vb6gA

NOTE: This video is appropriate for young audiences. We have reviewed and feel it is appropriate for Grades 3-5.

After watching the video, ask students to share what they learned with a partner, using the following prompts.

Describe the four elements of Hip-Hop in your own words.

Where and when did Hip-Hop begin?

What was the original purpose of an MC, and what are MCs called today?

How did DJs play music? What kind of equipment did they use?

ACTIVITY: Recreate the Four Elements of Hip Hop

Hip-Hop culture originated in the Bronx neighborhood of New York City during the 1970’s. Many practiced Hip-Hop culture together as a community within neighborhood block parties. The DJ, MC, break dancers, and graffiti artists all worked together to create a positive atmosphere for their community members. Lead students through an interactive activity to recreate the Hip-Hop neighborhood block party in the class.

Task: Embody the four elements of Hip-Hop culture to create a classroom block party.

First, decide a theme for the neighborhood “classroom” block party. This could be a class motto or name that will be used throughout the school year.

Second, divide the class into four groups. Assign the groups one of the elements of Hip-Hop: DJ, MC, breakers, and graffiti artists. Within the four groups, ask students to discuss the items they need in order to successfully perform their assigned Hip-Hop element. (Example: A DJ needs a turntable, headset, records, table, etc.)

Third, ask each group to practice their element. Give each group a specific task to complete within 20 minutes.

- DJ: Ask the group to create a playlist for the “classroom” block party and draw the equipment that the DJ would bring (Turntables, records, headphones, etc).
- MC: Write a rap together that relates to the theme of the party.
- Breakers: Choreograph a short Hip-Hop dance that uses some of the steps seen in the *The Hip-Hop Dance Experience—History of Dance* video.
- Graffiti Artists: Create a visual art piece on butcher paper or sheets of printer paper taped together that represents the party theme. This piece will be the backdrop for the party.

Assessment Criteria:

- Students work together in a group.
- The four elements of Hip-Hop are distinct from each other.
- Students understand the roles of each element of Hip-Hop.

Come back together as a class and have each group present to the class what they developed for their element. After each group shares, ask students to perform their element together in order to create a “classroom” block party.

Discuss the “classroom” block party experience together.

Was your group able to embody the Hip-Hop element?

Were you able to see the difference between the roles of the DJ, MC, breakers, and graffiti artists?

Did you feel the classroom transform to a community party?

Purpose:

To understand the different aspects of the DJ, MC, breakers, and graffiti artists and how they work together to create a positive atmosphere in a community party.

Student Reflection:

Which is your favorite element of Hip-Hop? Why?

Where have you seen Hip-Hop culture in your everyday life?

Handout 1

Elements of Hip-Hop

DJ

DJs aka “Disc Jockeys” provide the music at Hip-Hop events. The instruments they use are called “turntables” and DJs would mix and “scratch” songs on vinyl records to create music breaks that partygoers would dance to. A DJ could smoothly mix one song into another without a pause to change the record. A DJ could also play the same song on both vinyl records and playback specific parts of the record on “loop” if that particular part of the song was a crowd favorite.



MC

An “emcee” is traditionally known as a “Master of Ceremonies” and eventually developed into what we know today as “rappers”. MCing began with DJs grabbing a mic and making announcements or hyping up a crowd during a party. In time, someone separate from the DJ would be hired for parties and social events with the sole purpose of keeping the energy up in the room. The MC would make musical “calls” to the crowd and would feed off their “response”. This “call and response” is essential to Hip-Hop culture and helped develop systems of rhyming words.



Breaking

Breaking, which is incorrectly called “Breakdancing,” is a dance style that involves rocking the body in rhythm with the music as well as acrobatic stunts, freezes, spins, and floor footwork. Breaking is the original style of Hip-Hop dance. Dancers referred to as “breakers” would wait specifically for DJs to play certain drum breaks in songs on loop before they took over the dance floor.



Graffiti Art

Graffiti art is the visual art form within Hip-Hop culture. This art style is characterized by stylistic “scribbled” letters or characters that are painted on walls and other public surfaces. Graffiti artists would help create the atmosphere for Hip-Hop events by painting the environment around the neighborhood and the specific spaces social gatherings would be held.



Lesson 2: Hip-Hop Dance Movement

Lesson at a Glance

Lesson Objective: Learn, practice and differentiate four foundational street dance steps and understand the value of eye-contact when dancing and performing.

Duration: 1 hr 15 mins

Materials: Paper and Pencils, open space to dance in classroom or outside, speakers, access to YouTube or Spotify

Standards:

CCSS, Speaking and Listening, Grade Three: 1.b Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (b) Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.

CCSS, Speaking and Listening, Grades Three-Five: 4. Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly and at an understandable pace.

VAPA Dance, Grade Three: 1.2 Demonstrate the ability to start, change, and stop movement.

VAPA Dance, Grade Three: 2.6 Compare and contrast the role of the performer with that of a member of the audience.

VAPA Dance, Grade Five: 1.2 Name and use a wide variety of movements (e.g., isolations/whole body).

VAPA Dance, Grade Five: 5.4 Demonstrate social skills that enable students to become leaders/teachers and followers/learners.

Concepts/Vocabulary:

Vocabulary (in dance) - the words used in a language. In the "language" of dance, the "words" are specific steps or movements attached to a particular dance style

Party Grooves - style of social dance that is foundational to Hip-Hop dance. Movements include bouncing, rocking, waving, rolling, and skating

Popping - style of street dance based on the technique of quickly tightening and relaxing muscles to cause a jerk in the dancer's body, referred to as a pop or a hit

Locking - style of funk dance in which the dancer freezes from a fast movement and "locks" in a certain position. They hold that position for a short while and then continue in the same speed as before

Social Dance (aka Party Dances) - social dance is a large category composed of many dance styles. In a social dance, people are focused on connecting with others by dancing in a large group. In Hip-Hop, these dances are called "party dances"

Freestyle - the act of making up dance steps as you go or improvising. These steps are not planned in advance

Cypher - one of the original definitions of the word "cipher" is that it's another name for the figure zero. In Hip-Hop culture, the spelling was changed to "cypher" and was used to describe any type of energy that is passed in a circular or cyclical motion. For Hip-Hop dancers specifically, a dance circle is called a "cypher" because it is a circular shape and the energy travels within the circle

Guiding Questions:

What makes a dance a social dance?

What is the difference between each style of Hip-Hop?

Lesson Progression

Mini-Lesson: Rhythm and Timing

Task: Perform basic movement-based routines utilizing all parts of the body.

Breaking down rhythm and timing of movement in sync with music is the key to executing dance movements properly. Dance movements are performed in sets of 8 counts. Complete the following exercises with your class to practice rhythm and timing:

1. Choose one of the following 3 songs and play it for the class:
 - “They Don’t Want Music” by Black Eyed Peas: <https://youtu.be/pyoSJzCKhIQ>
 - “Lights, Camera, Action Instrumental” by Mr. Cheeks: <https://youtu.be/o5T6LZdr4uo>
 - “Lost Ones” by Lauryn Hill: <https://youtu.be/NdNFFC0p7N4>
2. Have students nod their heads in time with the music, following along with percussive elements of the song (bass and snares). This is how you find a song’s tempo.
3. After finding the tempo of the song, have students count from 1-8 within the same tempo. Every time students nod their heads, they should add a count.

Mini-Lesson: Movement Basics

Stretching is essential for warming up the body before dancing “full-out” or fully. Dedicate 10 minutes to stretching with your class in sets of 2-4 eight counts. Ask students to stand and move in the space behind or to the side of their desks. Lead students through the warm-up by following the instructions below:

- Shake your head “no” and nod your head “yes”.
- Slowly roll your shoulders back, then forward, both together and one at a time in succession.
- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and reach down to your right foot. Switch to the left.
- Stay standing with your feet shoulder width apart and stretch your arms up to the sky as far as possible. Slowly roll your body down and reach for the floor.
- Stay standing with your feet shoulder width and extend your arms out to the side and wrap your arms around your body as if you are “hugging” yourself.
- Place your hands on your hips and slowly rotate your hips around in a circle from right, to front, to left, to back, and then in reverse.
- Lift one leg behind you while balancing on the other (this is a basic stretch done in sports) and then switch legs.

Assessment Criteria:

- Ability to interpret rhythm and tempo in music.
- Understanding of the 8 count system.
- Accurate execution of movements.

Purpose: To introduce body control and enhance the students’ listening skills.

ACTIVITY: Hip-Hop Dance Movement

Step 1: Foundational Steps of Hip-Hop

Introduce your students to four foundational steps of Hip-Hop dance. Not every street dance style is “Hip-Hop”, therefore, it is important for students to gain a clear understanding of the differences between each step. Each step can be practiced by using natural everyday movements.

Demonstrate and practice each step together as a class. As an option, follow along with Versa-Style Dance Company dancer, Brandon Juezan. The video is accessible online on The Broad Stage’s website in the *Box of Hope* Student Matinee page www.thebroadstage.org/boxofhopematinee.

After demonstrating each style, students should practice the movement for 4 eight counts to one of the previous songs. Feel free to adjust the amount of time you dedicate to each style depending on how quickly your students catch on to the movement.

Party Grooves

Hip-Hop dance foundation consists of the following party grooves: bouncing, rocking, waving, rolling, and skating. This lesson will focus on the bounce, which is the most basic and universally used groove.

History of Party Grooves

Partygoers at Hip-Hop events who were not able to “break” or preferred to dance to other parts of a song outside of drum breaks began to develop their own dances. These dances were meant to be done socially in groups and eventually were given names like “party dances” or “party grooves”. Famous party dances from the 80s up to the 90s include the “running man”, the “cabbage patch”, and the “roger rabbit”.

• Beginner Level: Shoulder Bounce

1. Raise your shoulders up to your ears and drop them in a bouncing motion.
 - Describe this motion as a gesture for “I don’t know”.
2. Repeat this movement in succession at the tempo of the music.

• Proficient Level: Body Bounce

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and bend your knees on the count 1, and stand back up on 2. When done quickly, it should feel as if the body is rebounding or “bouncing” off the floor.
2. The bounce should be practiced at the tempo of the music played.

• Advanced Level: Two-Step Body Bounce

1. Incorporate the bounce into a basic two-step. Step out to the right with your right foot, and bring your feet together using your left foot. To travel the opposite direction, step out to the left with your left foot, and bring the feet together with the right foot. Step out on count 1, and step together on count 2.
2. The bounce is incorporated by bending the knees when you step out and straightening the knees when your feet come together.

Popping

Popping is a street dance and one of the original funk styles that came from Fresno, California during the mid to late 1970’s. The most basic and recognized popping move is the chest pop.

History of Popping

Popping involves flexing different muscle groups in sync with music. The style began in the mid to late 1970’s in Fresno, California during the “Funk Era”. A man named Sam “Boogaloo Sam” Solomon created this dance after attempting to do another popular social dance at the time called “The Jerk”. While Sam tried to do The Jerk, he began to mutter the word “Pop” under his breath and would push his chest out in a sharp motion every time. From there, he began to create other “popping” movements with different parts of the body, and combined movements into specific steps. Eventually, he created the group “The Electric Boogaloes” who turned popping into a world renowned dance style.

• Chest Pop

1. Inhale and exhale deeply, and watch how your chest naturally rises and falls.
2. In order to perform a chest pop, extend your chest out then immediately release, as if taking a quick breath. This movement should be done in only 1 count.
3. When done properly, it should look as if your heart “pop” out of your chests (hence the name).

Take it Further!

Popping and Locking were both developed by mistakes. When has making a mistake led you to discover something new?

Locking

Locking is a style of funk dance that was developed in the early 1970's. The "Lock" is the foundational movement in locking, and consists of quickly "locking the body" in place by stopping movement.

History of Locking

Locking involves sharp movements and "locking" the body into different positions within the rhythm of a song. The style was developed in the early 1970s in Los Angeles, California during the "Funk Era". A painter named Don "Campbellock" Campbell was attempting to do a popular social dance at the time called the "Funky Chicken". Being that Don was not a dancer, he kept getting stuck in a certain position every time he tried to do the Funky Chicken, a mistake which created the base movement for the Locking style. Eventually, friends of Don learned how to Lock and the group "The Lockers" was created. They appeared on the popular TV show Soul Train and turned Locking into an international phenomenon.

• Beginner Level: Point and Lock

1. Use your right or left arms to point in various directions. Extend your arms completely as you point.
2. Freeze once you have fully extended your arms and make sure you stop all movement for two counts.
3. Repeat this movement for an 8 count (4 points should be completed per 8 count).

• Advanced Level: Blast/Muscle Man Lock Sequence

1. The "Blast" is also known as the "Muscle Man". Lift your arms up above shoulder level and create 90 degree angles as if you are "showing off your muscles." Emphasize that you want students to make this look big and strong. This movement should be performed on the count 1.
2. Drop your arms straight down to your sides quickly. This is the transition between the "Blast" and the "lock". This movement is performed on the "and" count (ie. 1 "and" 2).
3. The final step is the "lock" itself. Imagine you have chicken wings that are flapping by using the elbow. After every "flap" you must pause and "lock" into place with your elbows out, slightly hunched over, and then release.
4. When performed together, the "Blast and Lock" sequence should follow the counts "1 & 2, 3 & 4, 5 & 6, 7& 8."

Breaking

Breaking originated in New York City during the late 1970's, and is still practiced in Hip-Hop culture today. The Rock or The "New York Rock" and Toprock are two foundational steps of breaking.

History of Breaking

Hip-Hop was born in the Bronx, New York in the late 1970s and reached its peak in the 1980s. The original Hip-Hop dance style called "Breaking" was developed after dancers would wait for DJs to loop specific drum breaks in a record and then would proceed to dance strictly to those breaks.

• The Rock or The "New York Rock"

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart with a slight bend in the knee.
2. Slowly bend forward and back from the waist, keeping your feet planted. Be sure to extend forward past your body's center, and back past your body's center.
3. This rocking motion should not be exaggerated and should be kept at a comfortable or more "natural" level. The rest of your upper body should be relaxed as you bend back and forth from the hip.
4. To the tempo of the music, perform the rock for a total of 4 eight counts, with 1 eight count of rest in between.

• Toprock

"Toprocks" are a variety of different steps done in an upright position utilizing both the rock movement and moving the legs and feet different directions. The most popular Toprock called the "Salsa Rock" is used in other dance styles as well and is referred to as the "Kick Ball Change". This movement consists of arm motions moving in sync with leg motions.

1. Stand with your legs shoulder width apart with a slight bend in the knee.
2. Kick your right foot out in front of you. At the same time, shoot both of your arms out in front of you creating an "X". By this time you should be balancing on your left leg. This should be done on the "1" count.
3. Cross the right leg in front of your left leg (it should now be touching the ground). At the same time, bring your arms into your chest creating a straight line where your knuckles face each other near your sternum. This should be done on the "And" count.
4. Step out to your left, bringing the left leg out from behind the right leg, and be sure that your stepping out on your toes, not flat footed. At the same time, shoot your arms out straight to both sides creating a long horizontal line between your chest and both arms. This is the "2" count.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 now kicking out the left leg (or whichever leg is opposite from the one you started with). The easiest way to remember the order of movements is to repeat the phrase "Kick, Cross, Out" which coincides with the counts "1 And 2".
6. Practice this motion for 2 eight counts total, with one eight count break in between. Repeat as needed if time allows.

Step 2: Dance Vocabulary Practice

If space permits, ask students to get into a large circle. In Hip-Hop dance this circle is called a Cypher. Turn on one of the suggested songs, and practice the four steps of Hip-Hop dance together. Call out the steps bounce, chest pop, point and pose at random. If your class practiced the advanced level movements, you may also call out two-step, blast and lock, toprock or freestyle. Freestyle consists of any type of movement the students would like to do aka “their own dance”. While students are practicing the different steps, encourage them to make eye contact with each other.

Step 3: The Role of Eye-Contact in Hip-Hop and Social Dance

Eye contact is the basis of all social dances. A dance is not considered “social” if you are not establishing a visual connection with another person. Even if multiple people are dancing in the same space, doing the same move, the dance will not be truly social if the dancers are staring at the floor, ceiling or some other object in the distance. Eye contact establishes trust and a mutual understanding between individuals, not only in dance but in life in general. Effective non-verbal communication involves the ability to share ideas through physical gestures, which can only be interpreted visually. In professional dance companies like Versa-Style, eye contact not only helps share ideas with audience members but also creates synergy between dancers on stage by developing a sense of trust, understanding and unity. Eye contact helps multiple performers keep on the same page in terms of energy, emotion and movement.

Task: The students will dance with and without the use of eye-contact.

Complete the following exercise with your class:

1. Create a large open space that will work as a dance floor. This can be done by moving all desks to the perimeter of the room.
2. Divide your class into two groups, Group A and Group B.
3. Ask Group A to perform the dance steps from the Dance Vocabulary Game on the “dance floor” for 1-2 minutes. You can remind them what steps to use, but they should feel free to dance them in any order they would like. Ask them to focus on themselves while dancing and generally avoid eye-contact.
4. Ask Group B to observe Group A’s performance.
5. After the performance, ask Group A and Group B to switch places; Group A observes while Group B performs for 1-2 minutes without eye-contact.
6. After Group B has finished performing, discuss the following with your students:
How did it feel to dance without eye-contact?
As an audience member, how did the dancers look while they avoided eye-contact?
Example: Did they feel/look connected, lonely, comfortable or uncomfortable?
7. After the discussion, ask Group A to perform again for 1-2 minutes. This time, ask them to perform while making eye-contact with at least 1-3 other “dancers” in their group.
8. Ask Group B to observe Group A’s performance.
9. After the performance, ask Group A and Group B to switch places; Group A observes while Group B performs for 1-2 minutes with eye-contact.
10. After Group B has finished performing, discuss the following with your students:
How did it feel to dance with eye-contact?
As an audience member, how did the dancers look while they used eye-contact?
Example: Did they feel/look connected, lonely, comfortable or uncomfortable?
What did you enjoy more, performing with or without eye-contact? Why?
What did you enjoy more, observing dancers with or without eye-contact? Why?

Assessment Criteria:

- Students perform the dance steps correctly and creatively.
- Students follow the teacher’s directions for their performance.
- Students make connections with their peers through eye-contact.
- Students think critically about their observations and express their preferences clearly.

Purpose: Students learn how non-verbal connections with fellow dancers can change the feeling and quality of a performance.

Student Reflection:

How did moving in different ways make you feel? Were there any movements that felt different or new? Describe what you saw your fellow students do when the commands “pose” and/or “freestyle” were given. What kind of poses or movements did you see? You learned that eye-contact is important in social dance. What other ways could you connect with people in a social dance?

Sample Integration Lesson: Choreography and Syllables at a Glance

Lesson Objective: Choreograph an original movement phrase using Hip-Hop foundational steps and connecting them to syllables in a word.

Duration: 40 mins

Materials: Paper, pencils

Standards:

CCSS, Language, Grade Three: 2f. Use spelling patterns and generalizations (e.g., word families, position-based spellings, syllable patterns, ending rules, meaningful word parts) in writing words.

CCSS, Language, Grades Three-Five: 3. Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

CCSS, Writing, Grade Three: 4. With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

VAPA Dance, Grade Four: 1.5 Describe a specific movement, using appropriate dance vocabulary.

VAPA Dance, Grade Four: 2.1 Create, develop, and memorize set movement patterns and sequences.

Concepts/Vocabulary:

Choreography - the art of composing a dance piece (ballet, Hip-Hop) and planning and arranging the movements, steps, and patterns of dancers

Choreographer - a person who creates dance compositions and pieces

Syllable - Vowel sounds, with or without surrounding consonants that form a word. Words can have one or more syllables

Guiding Questions:

Where can you find inspiration for choreography?

How do words and syllables play a role in choreographing a movement phrase?

Lesson Progression

ACTIVITY: Choreography to Syllables

Analyze a dance piece and describe underlying themes/ideas communicated in the piece

Task: Choreograph a short movement phrase by assigning Hip-Hop dance steps to syllables in a word.

Choreography is the art of composing a dance piece and planning and arranging the movements, steps, and patterns of dancers. When choreographing, the choreographer can gain inspiration for the dance piece from anything. Sometimes, they choreograph a step on purpose to a syllable or word in the piece of music. Explore the world of choreography with your students in the following activity.

Students will choreograph a short movement phrase based on the number of syllables in a word within a sentence. Every Hip-Hop dance step from Lesson 2 follows one of these rhythmic patterns: “1”, “1,2”, or “1 And 2”. Students will choose a dance move that matches best with the syllables in a word, and will create the sequence in the same order as the sentence. For this activity, one syllable equals one count.

Ex. “My name is Emily”

1. “My”, “Name”, and “is” are all one syllable each. Moves like the chest pop or the bounce which is only one count would be a perfect match. Three chest pops in a row would sync with the first three words in this sentence. Similarly, a student could break down the movement in a “Kickball Change” into single counts in order to fulfill this criteria (this is a more advanced concept).
2. The name “Emily” has three syllables (E-mah-LEE). Moves like the “Blast and Lock” or the “Kickball Change” would fit with the word/name because each movement has three counts (the “And” count should be considered a third count for this activity). In this case, the dance move with the count “1 and 2” syncs with the three syllables in Emily.

Go through these steps in order with your class.

Step 1: Ask students to write a simple, descriptive sentence using words with 1-3 syllables each. The simpler the sentence, the easier it will be to create movement off of each word.

Step 2: Have students review the syllables in each word and write the number above each word.

Step 3: Choreograph a set of Hip-Hop dance steps in the same order of the syllables in the sentence.

Ex. If a student’s sentence follows the syllable pattern “1,1,1,3” then they should choose movements that fit the counts “1, 1, 1, 1 And 2”.

Step 4: When choreographing, have students verbally recite the word connected to the move. Naturally, students will verbally break the word down into syllables in order to match their movement.

Ex. Chest pop once as you say “My,” chest pop once as you say “name”, chest pop once as you say “is”, blast and lock as you say “Emily”.

Step 5: Ask students to partner up and share their choreography with another student. Emphasize the need for them to make eye contact with the other student while performing their choreography as well as verbally saying their sentence. If time permits, have students change partners.

Assessment Criteria:

- Choreography phrase incorporates foundational Hip-Hop steps (party grooves, popping, locking, breaking).
- Hip-Hop steps are performed in the same amount of time as the syllable.
- Students perform the Hip-Hop steps while breaking down the syllables in a word.

Purpose: To gain a better understanding in the choreographic process and making the connections between syllables and counts in music.

Student Reflection:

What inspired your descriptive sentence and movement phrase?

Did matching the counts to the syllables help you remember the choreography?

What foundational Hip-Hop steps did you see your classmates use?

Meet Versa-Style Dance Company Member, Brandon Juezan



1. How and when did you start dancing? How long have you been a member of Versa-Style Dance Company?

I first started dancing seriously when I was a freshman in high school which was spring of 2009. I met Jackie Lopez that same spring and joined Versa-Style Next Generation in Fall of 2009. I was then moved up to the professional touring company Versa-Style in 2014.

2. What inspires you to dance?

My first inspiration in dance was the group The Jabbawockeez. However, I ended up finding my own path in dance in terms of movement (meaning I did not grow up to dance like The Jabbawockeez), and really today what inspires me to keep dancing is the community as a whole. Seeing others who I consider my friends grow and excel in their respective dance styles pushes me to want to grow in my dance as well.

3. What is your favorite element of Hip-Hop?

That's hard to say for me. I'm not a breaker, so I can't technically say my favorite element is breaking even though I'm a dancer, but I'm also not a DJ, although I love Hip-Hop music. If it were possible to generalize DJing as "music" and breaking as "dance" then I would say music is my favorite element, and then the dance. However, I'm not sure if it works that way.

4. What is your best quality as a dancer? What do you try to improve on when you dance?

When it comes to dance I'm a hard worker. I constantly take on challenges and push myself until I overcome those challenges, whether it be complicated choreography or learning a completely new style. When I dance, I'm always trying to find new and improved ways to move to music. This could be creating new moves or trying to make moves I know look and feel better.

5. Have you ever made a mistake while performing? How did you fix that mistake?

I have made multiple mistakes while performing. The key is to not show the audience you made a mistake. Even if I'm off on choreography or fall out of a trick, I still continue to perform and make facial expressions as if nothing happened at all.

6. What advice do you have for beginning Hip-Hop dancers?

Be patient. Many dance movements will feel uncomfortable for a long time, but practice really makes perfect. Something I learned when it comes to learning new dances that stuck with me forever is the saying "If it feels wrong, you're probably doing it right."

7. What are your goals as a dancer?

I want to be able to exchange with people internationally. I'd love to continue to travel to other countries and share my dance with others while allowing them to share with me.

8. What is it like to work with the choreographers and other dancers in Versa-Style Dance Company?

Versa-Style Dance Company is a family. Although we work as a professional entity, we treat each other like brothers and sisters.

Glossary

Breakin (Breakdance) - a style of acrobatic dancing originating in the mid 1970's, often performed to rap music usually by teenage males in the streets, and characterized by intricate footwork, pantomime, spinning headstands and tumbling.

Choreography - the sequence of steps and movements in dance or figure skating, especially in a ballet or other staged dance.

Choreographer - a person who creates dance compositions and pieces

Culture - the customs, arts, social institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people or other social group

Cypher - one of the original definitions of the word "cipher" is that it's another name for the figure zero. In Hip-Hop culture, the spelling was changed to "cypher" and was used to describe any type of energy that is passed in a circular or cyclical motion. For Hip-Hop dancers specifically, we call a dance circle a "cypher" because it is a circular shape and the energy travels within the circle

DJ "disc jockey" - Spelled "Djay". A person who mixes different sources of pre-existing recorded music as it is playing, usually for a live audience

Element - an important part of something abstract

Foundation - an underlying basis or principle for something

Freestyle - Movement improvisation. These movements are not pre-meditated or choreographed

Gesture - a movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, to express an idea or meaning.

Graffiti - writing or drawings that have been scribbled, scratched or painted illicitly on a wall or other surface, often within public view

Locking - style of funk dance in which the dancer freezes from a fast movement and "locks" in a certain position. They hold that position for a short while and then continue in the same speed as before

MC "master of ceremonies" - Master of Ceremonies or Microphone Controller is a rapper who hosts an event or neighborhood party

Party Grooves - style of social dance that is foundational to Hip-Hop dancing. Movements include bouncing, rocking, waving, rolling, and skating

Popping - style of street dance based on the technique of quickly tightening and relaxing muscles to cause a jerk in the dancer's body, referred to as a pop or a hit

Social dance (aka Party dances) - social dance is a large category composed of many dance styles. In a social dance, people are focused on connecting with others by dancing in a large group. In Hip-Hop, these dances are called "party dances"

Staging - an instance or method of presenting a play or other dramatic performance (in dance, this is known as "blocking" and has to do with formations and directional focus)

Theme - the subject of a talk, a piece of writing, a person's thoughts or an exhibition; a topic

Vocabulary (in dance) - the words used in a particular language. In the "language" of dance, these words are specific non-verbal movements attached to a particular dance style