

From Warrior to Worship: Understanding Polynesian Dance Types

SUMMARY

Dances in Pacific cultures reflect life events ranging from the extraordinary to the mundane. In *Dances of Life* there are warrior dances, birth dances, ancestral dances, dexterity dances, dances created for fun and enjoyment, ritual dances, etc. In this lesson, students will compare and contrast the various dances that they view in the film, reflect on the cultures that those dances represent and create oratory and movements that have meaning for them.

AUDIENCE

Grades 6-8

TIME NEEDED

6-8 hours

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Familiarize themselves with various types of dance shown in the film *Dances of Life* (New Zealand, Palau, Samoa, New Caledonia, and Guam - listed in order of appearance).
- Compare and contrast the various types of dances presented in the film.
- Discuss the role of dance within its cultural context.
- Create poetry and movements that illustrate an event in the student's life.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Dances of Life VHS Tape or DVD

PROCEDURES

1. View film *Dances of Life*

2. Compare and contrast the various types of dances presented:

- What are the similarities in expression, movement, gesture, music making, and messages between these cultures?
- What are the differences?

3. Discuss the cultural meaning of the dances presented:

- What role might these dances play?
- In society?
- In preparation for war?
- In oral histories?
- In celebrations?
- How do you suppose these dances developed?
- What other types of dances not mentioned here might there be?

4. Create a poem/story/chant that illustrates an event in your life:

- Compose a poem, story or chant that illustrates an event that you would like to share with your classmates, family, and or community.
- Create a vocal rhythm for your oratory.
- Develop ways in which your body (facial expressions, hand movements, foot movements, etc.) might reflect your oratory and help illustrate its meaning.

5. Perform and evaluate your composition:

- How would you classify your dance?
- What was the role of your dance? How did your dance develop? What was the process that you went through to create your unique composition?
- How well did you communicate your story through your dance and oratory?
- How did performing an original composition make you feel?

ASSESSMENT

Student performances will be assessed according to the following:

- Quality and depth of research
- Quality of evaluation/research insights
- Quality of performance
- Personal insights
- Creativity
- Effort
- Execution of oratory
- Physical expression

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Students can:

1. Devise an instrument out of ordinary items you might find at home. Create rhythmic patterns using your homemade instrument.

2. Create poi balls. Simple poi balls can be made by putting a tennis ball into the foot of a tube sock, then tying a small knot at the top. Try the movements yourself.

A beautiful example of poi dancing is performed by Ngati Rangiwewehi at the Aotearoa Traditional Maori Performing Arts Festival, held in Rotorua in 1996. Observe the skill, poise, grace and timing of these women. Notice the different types of poi they perform. (This may take a minute or two to download).

www.maori.org.nz/waiata/video/rangiwewehi.mpg

3. Research dances of your own cultural heritage. Learn and perform these dances in groups or individually.

RELEVANT CURRICULUM STANDARDS

From National Dance Standards for the Performing Arts

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards.cfm>

Dance Standards

Standard 1: Identifying and demonstrating movement elements and skills in performing dance.

Standard 2: Understanding choreographic principles, processes, and structures.

Standard 3: Understanding dance as a way to create and communicate meaning.

Standard 4: Applying and demonstrating critical and creative thinking skills in dance.

Standard 5: Demonstrating and understanding dance in various cultures and historical periods.

Standard 6. Clearly identify commonalities and differences between dance and other disciplines with regard to fundamental concepts such as materials, elements, and ways of communicating meaning.

Standard 7: Making connections between dance and other disciplines.

Culture Standards

Standard 8. Compare and contrast how meaning is communicated in choreographic works.

Standard 9. Analyze issues of ethnicity, gender, social/economic class, age and/or physical condition plays a part in relation to dance.