

This One Takes the Cake

Museum Connection: Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: In this lesson students will learn about the history and practice of the cakewalk. Students will apply what they have learned to choreograph their own cakewalk and perform it for the class.

Course(s): Dance I or II, introductory or beginner level, or social/ballroom dance class

Time Frame: Two class periods (of 80 minutes each)

Correlation to State Standards:

Dance Outcome I: Perceiving and Responding – Aesthetic Education

The student will demonstrate the ability to use perceptual skills through performing and responding in dance.

Expectation B

The student will translate and convey the meaning of dance and explain the ways in which a person’s experiences and environment impact that meaning.

Indicators of Learning

- The student will describe the aspects of a dance that convey its meaning.
- The student will discuss the ways in which interpretation of dance may vary according to experience and environment.

Dance Outcome III: Creative Expression and Production

The student will demonstrate the ability to create dance by improvising, organizing dance ideas, and performing.

Expectation A

The student will apply skills and knowledge from the language of dance to improvisation.

Indicators of Learning

- The student will improvise dance phrases using a variety of stimuli, including ideas, feelings, and emotions.
- The student will improvise variations to dance phrases by selecting and manipulating the elements of movement: time, space and energy.

- The student will improvise movement patterns/dance phrases individually and in groups.

Expectation B

The student will apply fundamentals of composition to design and perform dance ideas and themes.

Indicators of Learning

- The student will apply aesthetic principles, such as unity, variety, and contrast to dance composition.

Dance Outcome IV: Aesthetics and Criticism

The student will demonstrate the ability to identify, analyze, and apply criteria for making aesthetic judgments in dance.

Expectation A

The student will critically analyze and evaluate dance performance based on aesthetic criteria.

Indicators of Learning

- The student will apply aesthetic criteria when participating in the assessment of peer performance.

Objective(s):

The student will observe the cakewalk through media and demonstration in order to analyze its structure.

The student will choreograph a cakewalk duet in order to personalize his or her experience with an historical dance.

The student will perform and evaluate his or her duet for the class in order to utilize creative and critical thinking skills.

The students will complete a peer evaluation in order to incorporate and apply aesthetics.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

(Word or Concept)	(Definition)
Percussive	describes movements that are explosive or sharp. They are accented with jabs of energy, and have an obvious start and stop.
Aristocratic	characteristic of an noble or elite class; having the manners, values, or qualities associated with the aristocracy, noble, arrogant.

Vaudeville	era from the early 1880's to the early 1930's, "Variety" shows which included, dance, dramatics, acrobatics, and other forms of entertainment.
Minstrel Shows	theatrical entertainment originated and developed in the U.S. in the first half of the 19th century, and consisted of songs, dances, and comic repartee typically performed by white actors who wore black facial make-up. The minstrel show probably evolved from two types of entertainment popular in America before 1830; the impersonation of blacks given by white actors between acts of plays or during circuses, and the performances of black musicians who sang, with banjo accompaniment, in city streets.
Buck and Wing	fast and flashy dance usually done in wooden-soled shoes and combining Irish clogging styles, high kicks, and complex African rhythms and steps such as the shuffle and slide...
Strut	to walk with a proud gait; to walk with a pompous and affected air.

Materials:

For the Teacher:

Historical Background

For the Student:

Student Resource Sheet 1: Taking the Cake - Reading and Questions

Student Resource Sheet 2: Now It's Your Turn! - Scoring Tool and Reflection Questions

Student Resource Sheet 3: Cakewalk Reflection Questions

Resources:

Publications:

Emery, Lynne Fauley. *Black Dance: From 1619 to Today*. New Jersey: Princeton Book Company, 1988.

Shrader, Constance. *A Sense of Dance*. Illinois: Human Kinetics, 1998.

Minton, Sandra Cerny. *Choreography: A Basic Approach Using Improvisation*. Illinois: Human Kinetics, 1997.

Web Sites:

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/freetodance/behind/behind_slaveships.html

www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sDnVieSn_k

http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&q=cakewalk+dance&rlz=1R2ADFA_enUS369&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=t2NZTPXFFYOWsgPBjtTtCg&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=6&ved=0CD0QsAQwBQ

Oquita.com

The Cakewalk/Chalkwalk Line Dance

Dance Black America. DVD. New York: Pennebaker Associates, Inc., 1984. 87 minutes.

Historical Background:

Consider life on the plantation. Here we have workers, brought over from countless tribes in Africa. Each tribe had its own language and its own ritual dances, performed for specific occasions. Movements were percussive and athletic, with intricate rhythms and changing tempos. We also have the plantation owners, who relished European-based classical music, with a flowing, steady melody. Social dance to them was a sophisticated and aristocratic art practiced with the utmost decorum and much less physicality.

The cakewalk (originally named “The Chalkline Walk”) developed around harvest time on plantations. For their own entertainment, slaves danced in their finest clothes, two by two, along a straight path balancing buckets or glasses of water on their heads. The couple with the best performance was awarded a cake, often as simple as a corn cake. You still hear people use the phrase “That one really takes the cake” when referring to the clear winner of a competition.

The cakewalk continued to evolve, first becoming a form of entertainment for the slave holders and eventually as a favorite act at vaudeville shows. The more boisterous and outrageous it was, the more the audience loved it. “This kind of challenge dance included high kicks, fancy struts and antics (many of which were mocking the unwitting slave owners). The competition inspired by these performances gave rise to steps that remain in the tap curriculum, such as the buck-and-wing.” The cakewalk eventually was included in minstrel shows with white performers donning black face.

Lesson Development:

Motivation:

1. Place a cake in the room where students will see it upon entering. It can be either the real thing or a picture or toy item.
2. Ask the students why there might be a cake in the classroom.
3. Ask them if they have ever heard of a saying that includes the word “cake.”

4. Discuss the origin of the saying as the focus of the lesson.
5. If available, show the students the cakewalk from video footage.
Dance Black America. DVD. New York: Pennebaker Associates, Inc., 1984. 87 minutes.
View vintage film clips of the cakewalk from the 1900's on YouTube
6. Handout a copy of **Student Resource Sheet 1: The Cakewalk: History and Practice**.
7. When students have finished reading (independently or in a group), have them answer the questions provided independently.
8. After students have finished, review and discuss answers to these questions with the class.
9. After the teacher has demonstrated some of the typical movements and qualities of steps used in the cakewalk, distribute **Student Resource Sheet 2: The Cakewalk Directions and Scoring Tool**.
10. Demonstrate a cakewalk strut and ask students to explore the movement of strutting. Discuss the position of the head, back, arms and what distinguishes the strut from a pedestrian walk. Explain the purpose of this assignment and assign each student a partner to work with (teacher may decide to let the students choose their own partners).

Assessment:

Pairs will take between 15 and 30 minutes to choreograph their “cakewalk” with attention to the scoring tool and directions. When they have finished, they will evaluate themselves in the “Self” column of the scoring tool, answer the follow-up questions below, and hand it in to the teacher.

Closure:

- Students will perform their cakewalk for the class one pair at a time. Have students give constructive criticism on their own work, as well as that of their peers. Which aspects of the choreography assignment came most easily? Which aspects were challenging?
- Students will complete **Resource Sheet 3: Cakewalk Reflection Questions** as a reflection of their experience.
- Demonstrate ways in which techniques used in the cakewalk may be incorporated in dances done today such as those done in ballroom dance competition shows (*So You Think You Can Dance, Dancing with the Stars, etc.*). The cakewalk and those

dances done today in competition shows make use of similar techniques such as grand entrance, partnering, flourishes, high kicks, and fancy footwork.

Thoughtful Application(s):

- These pieces of student choreography may be performed two by two for other dance classes or a small audience.
- These pieces may be performed for a Social Studies class that is studying life on the plantations.

Lesson Extension(s):

- This lesson may be used as a competition, similar to the way that the cakewalk was originally performed. Teacher may supply a cake/cupcake for the winner.
- Students may use peer feedback as well as teacher feedback to revise their choreography and present it again.
- These pieces of student choreography may be joined together, along with transitions, to form one large piece of choreography to be performed.
- Videotaping the performance will provide students with an opportunity to reflect on and respond to their work.

Lesson Extension (s):

- The Museum offers several school programs that connect to the curriculum lessons.
 - *Journey in History Theater* provides living history and theatrical performances which highlight African Americans in the museum's gallery.
 - Take the theme tour, *Heritage* and experience the rich, cultural heritage of Maryland's African American community. Learn how African Americans established and influence Maryland's historic communities, social organizations, work traditions and artistic customs.
 - Contact group reservations for schedule updates.
- Visit The Strength of the Mind Gallery to explore theatrical entertainment by Marylanders and forms of dance created by African Americans.
- View vintage film clips of the cakewalk from the 1900's on YouTube. Compare this dance form to contemporary dance moves such as hand dancing.

Student Resource Sheet 1

Taking the Cake!

Reading and Questions

Consider life on the plantation. Here we have workers, brought over from countless tribes in Africa. Each tribe had its own language, and its own ritual dances, performed for specific occasions. Movements were percussive and athletic, with intricate rhythms and changing tempo. We also have the plantation-owners, who relished European-based classical music, with a flowing, steady melody. Social dance, to them, was a sophisticated and aristocratic art, practiced with the utmost decorum, and much less physicality.

The cakewalk (originally named “The Chalkline Walk”) developed around harvest time on plantations. For their own entertainment, slaves danced in their finest clothes, two by two, along a straight path balancing buckets or glasses of water on their heads. The couple with the best performance was awarded a cake, often as simple as a corn cake. You still hear people use the phrase “That one really takes the cake”, when referring to the clear winner of a competition.

The cakewalk continued to evolve, first becoming a form of entertainment for the slave holders and eventually as a favorite act at vaudeville shows. The more boisterous and outrageous it was, the more the audience loved it. “This kind of challenge dance included high kicks, fancy struts and antics (many of which were mocking the unwitting slave owners). The competition inspired by these performances gave rise to steps that remain in the tap curriculum, such as the buck-and-wing.” The cakewalk eventually also became included in minstrel shows, with white performers donning black face.

1. What was the cakewalk? Describe how it was performed, and how it originated.
2. What commonly used phrase originated from the practice of the cakewalk?
3. What was the cakewalk originally called?
4. Describe some of the typical movements and qualities of the cakewalk.

Student Resource Sheet 2

Now it's your turn! Scoring Tool and Reflection Questions

With your partner, create your own cakewalk. Follow the guidelines covered in the scoring tool below. When you are finished choreographing, answer Student Resource Sheet 3: The Cakewalk Reflection Questions (using the back of this sheet), then evaluate your work in the "Self Evaluation" Column, and hand your rubric to the teacher to use during your performance.

Cakewalk Scoring Tool

Possible Movement	Points	Self Evaluation	Teacher Evaluation
Creation of Original Movement, traveling in a straight pathway	5 points		
At least two level changes	5 points		
At least one full turn	5 points		
At least one direction change (forward to side, side to back, etc.)	5 points		
Ability to balance object on head for the entirety of the choreography	5 points		
Ability to remain attentive and respectful as an audience member	5 points		
Response to reflection questions	10 points		

Student Resource Sheet 3

Cakewalk Reflection Questions

1. What was the biggest challenge of creating your Cakewalk? Which part did you enjoy most? Explain.
2. Compare and contrast your choreography with a Cakewalk that could have been



<http://tinyurl.com/kv12ubl>



Oquita.com

The Cakewalk/Chalkline Walk Dance