



The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



Wednesday, April 10 & Thursday, April 11, 11am

Zellerbach Hall, University of California, Berkeley

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How to use this Engagement Guide

If you have photos or lesson plans to share, please let us know! Use #AlvinAiley@Cal

We invite you to challenge yourself and your students to think with the curiosity and passion of the arts. This engagement guide is organized around 4 key artistic practices (as identified by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards at <http://nccas.wikispaces.com/>)

Investigating: Questioning, exploring and challenging.

Imagining: Opening the door to what's possible, and even to what seems impossible.

Creating: Making artistic choices with a work of art in mind.

Connecting: Reflecting on both process and product and making connections to other aspects of life and study.

You'll be able to link on specific subjects that you or your students may want more information about. The body of the Engagement Guide invites exploration before and after the performance, giving each student tools to make personal and meaningful connections during the show.

We've included a pre-performance engagement activity and a post-performance activity for artistic practice and reflection. By no means should you feel limited by these suggestions! Go, make art, learn more...and share your experiences where you can.

Artistic Literacy: Having the skills and knowledge you need to connect meaningfully with works of art—that's what we mean by artistic literacy. We think that means something different than knowing the names of all the different instruments musicians might play, or being able to reproduce the exact melodies you might hear during a show. To us at Cal Performances, it means you and your students will have a significant glimpse into the artistic process and will have a chance to try to solve the problems the artists aim to solve creatively. It means that the next time you see a performance, you'll be able to use these same insights to connect with a work of art through the artist's process and that this will deepen your experience as an audience member.

The artistically literate student audience comes to understand that every artist draws from a core set of concepts skillfully chosen and applied in performance to create a work of art both unique to the artist, and connected to other works of art.

And along the way, we hope that students of all ages—and their teachers and adult mentors—will be inspired to experiment with artistic decision-making and creativity themselves.

Enjoy the show!

Your ★ STARRING Role in the Theater



As an audience member, you are a STAR, too! You play an important role in the performance community. The artists need YOU in order to give you their best work.

S.T.A.R. Audiences

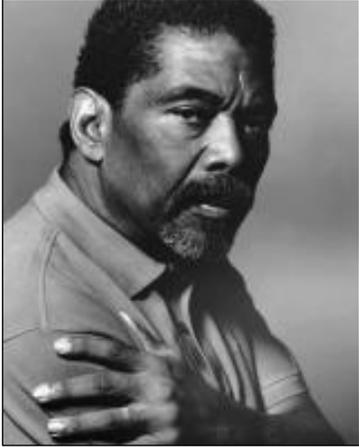
S = Support the artists by being attentive and focusing on the performers.

T = Tune in: listen and watch for understanding, and for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, watch for how the dancers use their bodies to tell the stories and evoke the emotions that are based in the music to which they're dancing.

A = Appreciate the performers by clapping at the right time. For example, when a scene or dance ends, or when the stage lights fade to dark.

R = Respect the performers and other audience members. At a performance, you, the others in the audience and the artists are sharing this experience together and are part of a performance community. Think about ways you can best support the community's performance experience.

We know you will be a STAR today and will help you classmates shine too!



Alvin Ailey and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Born in Rogers, Texas, on January 5, 1931, Alvin Ailey spent his formative years going to Sunday School and participating in The Baptist Young Peoples Union – experiences that inspired some of his most memorable works including *Revelations*. At age 12, he moved to Los Angeles and, on a junior high class field trip to the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, fell in love with concert dance.

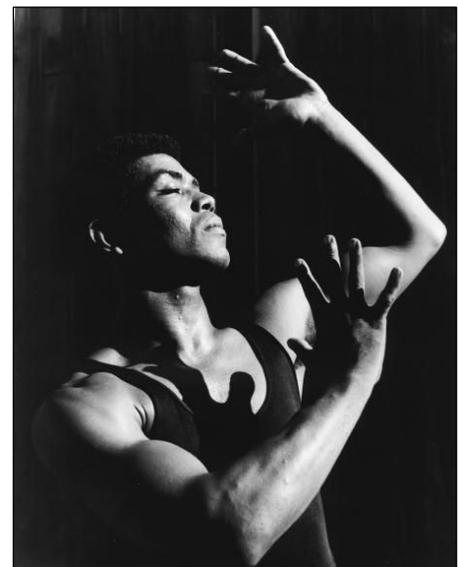
Ailey began his dance training with Lester Horton and studied with pivotal modern dance figures including Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Hanya Holm and Karel Shook. In 1958, Alvin Ailey founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which made its debut at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA in New York. His vision was to create a company dedicated to enriching American modern dance, preserving the uniqueness of black cultural expression, and making works that were resonant and accessible. He famously said, “Dance is for everybody. I believe that the dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people.”

In 1960, Ailey choreographed the now classic *Revelations*, based on the religious heritage of his youth. Although he would create some 79 ballets, he maintained that the company was not a repository for his work exclusively. The company’s varied repertory includes works by dance pioneers as well as emerging, young choreographers.

Founded in 1969, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center today has over 3,500 students from every part of the world. The company’s long-standing commitment to arts education includes free performances, lecture/demonstrations, workshops and master classes offered all over the world. AileyCamp, a unique national program, brings underserved youngsters to a full-scholarship summer day camp that combines dance classes with personal development, creative communications classes and field trips. The **Berkeley/Oakland Ailey Camp at Cal Performances** is now entering its 18th year.

Alvin Ailey died on December 1, 1989. With his death, American dance lost one of its most luminous stars. Anna Kisselgoff of *The New York Times* wrote of Ailey, “you didn’t need to have known Alvin personally to have been touched by his humanity, enthusiasm and exuberance and his courageous stand for multiracial brotherhood.”

Judith Jamison, one of Ailey’s chief dancers, became the Company’s director after Ailey’s death and led the company for 22 years. In July 2011, Robert Battle became the company’s new artistic director. Today, he continues Ailey’s commitment to bring dance back to the people.



Dance Context: *Revelations*

Choreography by Alvin Ailey, 1960
Music: Traditional Spirituals and Gospel

Pilgrims of Sorrow

“I Been ‘Buked”
“Daniel”
“Fix Me Jesus”

Take Me to the Water

“Wade in the Water”
“A Man Went Down to the River”

Move Members Move

“Sinner Man”
“The Day is Past and Gone”
“You May Run On”
“Rock-a-My-Soul”



Excerpt: Autobiography of Alvin Ailey, “*The Inspiration for Revelations*”

Revelations began with the music. As early as I can remember I was enthralled by the music played and sung in the small black churches in every small Texas town my mother and I lived in. No matter where we were during those nomadic years, Sunday was always a churchgoing day. There we would absorb some of the most glorious singing to be heard anywhere in the world.

With profound feeling, with faith, hope, joy and sometimes sadness, the choirs, congregations, deacons, preachers, and ushers would sing black spirituals and gospel songs. They sang and played to music with such fervor that even as a small child I could not only hear it but almost see it. I remember hearing “Wade in the Water” being sung during a baptism and hearing the pastor’s wife sing “I Been ‘Buked, I Been Scorned” one Sunday during testifying time. I tried to put all of that feeling into *Revelations*. My plan was to make *Revelations* the second part of an all-black evening of dance. . . .

I did extensive research, listening to a lot of music, dug even deeper into my early Texas memories, and came up with the piece that I would call *Revelations*. I phoned Hall Johnson, a wonderful man who lived uptown, and said “We want to do this dance two to three months from now from all these spirituals. I would like you to sing.” He had a choir and led me to a lot of music including “I Been ‘Buked, I Been Scorned,” which I didn’t know he had arranged. He decided not to do the concert, and I ended up with a group from the YMCA in Harlem. One way or another, I had to have live music; for me there was no other way.

I divided an hour of these pieces into three sections. First I did it chronologically, leading off with the opening part of *Revelations*, which was the earliest in time. It was about trying to get up out of the ground. The costumes and set would be colored brown, an earth color, for coming out of the earth, for going into the earth. The second part was something that was very close to me – the baptismal, the purification rite. Its colors would be white and pale blue. Then there would be the section surrounding

the gospel church, the holy rollers and all that church happiness. Its colors would be earth tones, yellow, and black.

At the time I was very involved with the work of the sculptor Henry Moore (Lester Horton had admired him too; I guess I picked up my love of Moore from him). I liked the way Moore's figures were abstracted, stretched, strained, and pulled. His work inspired the costumes made of jersey in the first part of *Revelations*. When the body moves, the jersey takes on extraordinary tensions.



...It's pretty clear that there's a love affair between audiences and *Revelations*. The idea of producing spirituals on such a grand scale appealed to everyone. It had beautiful songs sung live by soloists. *Revelations* was long, but people always responded enthusiastically to every song and every movement by the dancers...

Church people share a special fondness for *Revelations*, and many of the most devout church people are black; yet despite the success of *Revelations*, we are still trying to get more blacks into the theater. One of the promises of my company is that its repertoire will include pieces that ordinary people can understand. I still dream that my folks down on the farm in Texas can come to an Ailey concert and know and appreciate what's happening onstage. That's my perception of what dance should be – a popular form, wrenched from the hands of the elite.

Black folks make up roughly 20 percent* of our audience, and the percentage should be greater. Many dance promoters, however, don't advertise in the black press. More than once we've run into black people in the streets of a Midwestern city who ask, "Who are you?" because they know we don't live there. We explain that we're a dance company at the theater down the street. As I say, that scene has been repeated more than once, and it will take very sophisticated marketing to achieve our aim of bringing more black people into the theater.

About 15 or 20 years ago, when we were setting out on a European tour, I said, "I want to stop taking this piece to Europe." I made up my mind to leave *Revelations* home. But after two performances the dancers and audiences were asking "Where's *Revelations*?" and of course we had to relent. It was so popular a piece that it was dangerous to lead off a performance with it. Once we did it first on a program, everybody went home after it was over. Even after all these years, we still feel that our season in New York City Center, where we play for four weeks, hasn't really begun until we do *Revelations*. If we open on a Wednesday and *Revelations* isn't presented until Sunday, the stage somehow hasn't yet been blessed.

As for me, though, I'm more interested in what's next. Sometimes I don't want to hear another word about this 30-year-old dance, and I decided that after our 30th anniversary in 1988, I would put *Revelations* away for a while.

* Alvin Ailey wrote this in 1980; the percentage of African-Americans in the audience is now significantly larger.

Also Performed at SchoolTime:

On Wednesday, April 10:

Flight Time (from *Phases*)

Choreography by Alvin Ailey, 1980
Music: Larry Mizell, performed by Donald Byrd

Flight Time is a section from Alvin Ailey's dynamic, classic jazz dance, *Phases*. *Phases* is a five-part suite that choreographically presents five ways to have a good time. The music in each section is composed by a significant African American jazz musician. You may notice there are parallels between the jazz music and the jazz dance, like syncopated rhythms, off-beat accents and improvisation.

Ailey uses traditional Horton dance technique in this piece – a lengthened spine, sideways movements, deep lunges and dramatic pivots.



On Wednesday, April 10 &
Thursday, April 11:

The Call (excerpt)

Choreography by Ronald K. Brown, 2018
Music: Johann Sebastian Bach, Mary Lou Williams, Asase Yaa Entertainment Group

The Call is choreographer Ronald K. Brown's tribute to Alvin Ailey, whose work inspired

Brown to pursue dance. Created for the company's 60th anniversary celebration, critics have described *The Call* as a conversation between Brown and Ailey. The choreography references Ailey's work and imagery, but also reflects the evolution and inspiration of Ailey's legacy on contemporary movement today.

From *The New York Times* feature story, 11/27/18: ["Ronald K. Brown Choreographs a Love Letter to Alvin Ailey"](#):

"*The Call* is both intimate and spare; for just five dancers, it's set to a surprisingly harmonious mix of Bach, jazz, and Malian music. Despite the contrast in musical idioms, each section flows naturally into the next. It opens with a canon in which one dancer enters after another, each executing the same stately sequence. Both the music and the movement have a formal, almost classical quality. This is a reference to Ailey, Mr. Brown said: 'His sensibility could be very formal. And there was something about that clarity of vision and simplicity that I wanted to evoke here.' The call and response among the dancers eventually leads to an extended duet for a man and a woman... Near the end of *The Call*, the dancers begin to move in sync, slowly gliding backward into a triangular formation. Then, on the final notes, they all raise their arms, at once. And there it is, the opening image from *Revelations*."

Music for the piece includes: *Trio Sonata No. 6 in G Major* by Johann Sebastian Bach performed by Chris Thile, Edgar Meyer, and Yo-Yo Ma; *Blues for Timme* (Live) from the Mary Lou Williams Trio's album "Live at Nice 'Grande Parade Jazz"; and *The Love* from Asase Yaa Entertainment Group's album "Drum Love."

"His dances, earthy and subtly rapturous, tell stories of spirituality by weaving a tapestry of modern dance and West African forms... *The Call* — Mr. Brown's seventh piece for the Ailey company — is something of a conversation between the choreographers, a beauty of a dance." — *The New York Times*

On Thursday, April 11:

Ella (excerpt)

Choreography by Robert Battle, 2008 (2016 premiered as duet for the Ailey company.)

Music: Ella Fitzgerald



Originally created as a solo, this high-energy comical dance was reinvented as a duet by the Ailey company for its December 2016 opening night gala benefit, "An Evening of Ailey and Jazz" — in anticipation of the legendary singer Ella Fitzgerald's centennial in April 2017.

Using a live concert recording of Fitzgerald performing the song "Airmail Special," *Ella* matches the iconic singer's virtuosic scatting with lightning-fast, articulated movement in an irresistible tour-de-force that leaves audiences (and the dancers) breathless.

"*Ella* is a play of contrasts... There's Fitzgerald on the one hand, freely diddle-ee-dopping while maintaining total musical control. And the dancers, reacting explosively with the same virtuosic precision amid a rhythmic storm. Just as Fitzgerald abandoned intelligible lyrics, the dancers abandoned physical limits. They spun, leapt, collapsed, sprang up and slung themselves around like ink in the hand of a mad doodler." — Sarah L. Kaufman, *The Washington Post*

About Modern Dance



Created in America over 100 years ago, modern dance is a younger art form than ballet or folk dance. Ballet began in France in the 1500s and 1600s, and for almost 500 years ballet dancers have performed classical ballet's traditional steps and movements. Ballet choreography emphasizes symmetry and repeating patterns, and dancers hold their bodies straight and try to give the illusion of weightlessness.

Modern dance developed in the 20th century, primarily in the United States and Germany, as a rebellious response to the traditional rigidity of classical ballet. Known for its inventive, independent, avant-garde attitude and "modern" sensibility, modern dance's vocabulary pushed the boundaries set by traditional schools of dance. Expanding the standardized movements of ballet to include everyday actions like walking, running and falling.

Modern dance pioneers like Isadora Duncan (in top photo), Katherine Dunham (in bottom photo) and Rudolf von Laben each sought to inspire audiences to a new awareness of how the body could move and express emotion. Each modern dance company has its own style and unique movement vocabulary corresponding to the artist director's creative talents.

Alvin Ailey developed his unique style of choreography through his knowledge and use of several modern dance techniques including those of Lester Horton, Martha Graham (in middle photo), as well as utilizing African dance, ballet, jazz and the observed "pedestrian" movement of everyday people. He ingeniously combined movements he found most engaging.

About Spirituals

The songs used in *Revelations* are called spirituals. These are folk songs describing personal religious experiences. When Africans were brought to America as slaves, they lost their traditional music as well as their freedom. They added African chants, rhythms and harmonies to the Christian songs they learned and created spirituals. Today, people sing spirituals to raise their spirits, strengthen their faith, and create a sense of community. There are two kinds of spirituals:

- **Sorrow songs** are sung slowly and sadly and tell of the heavy burden of slavery and the belief that better days are coming.
- **Jubilees** are faster, upbeat songs based on Bible stories celebrating victory and joy. Spirituals came to serve many purposes for the slaves:
 - **Work**—Singing spirituals made work less boring and set a rhythm for actions like picking or digging. Slave owners liked the singing because it made the slaves more productive.
 - **Worship**—At night, after the owners were asleep, the slaves would go out into the woods (their invisible church) and worship. Spirituals were a big part of their religious ceremony.
 - **Entertainment**—At the end of a long day, slaves would often sing spirituals for relaxation.
 - **Code Songs**—Communication through spirituals, often helped slaves escape. For example, a hidden message in the song “Deep River” led hearers to a meeting at the river. “Wade in the Water” warned an escaped slave to go into the river so bloodhounds couldn’t follow his scent.



The Fisk Jubilee Singers started out after the Civil War as a group of young college students (most of them still teenagers) singing so-called “slave songs” in order to raise money for their new school, the Fisk Free Colored School in Nashville, Tennessee. They were so popular they ended up touring all over America, including at the White House, and in Europe for more than 7 years. They come home to save their school, later renamed Fisk University, with the money they had made singing and having made the African-American spiritual a well-respected form of music all over the world.

Artistic Concept: Dance and Music Working Together

How do the dancers of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater use their bodies to tell the stories and evoke the emotions that are based in the music they dance to?

Dance doesn't require music. Dancers can move their bodies to tell stories or show emotions without any music at all. But music adds a different aspect to dance. And music with lyrics that tell their own story often inspires dancers—and in turn, gives different meaning to the music itself. It's a reciprocal relationship, that is, it's a relationship of giving and taking back and forth to each art form, so that each one is enriched and influenced by the other. For artists like the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater company, the movement in the dance and the rhythms and words of the music express together a single artistic vision.

It's this relationship between the music and the dance that we want to take a deeper look at while experiencing the performances of *Revelations*, *Flight Time*, *The Call* and *Ella*. The choreographers (Alvin Ailey for *Revelations*, Ronald K. Brown for *The Call*, and Robert Battle for *Ella*) were inspired by the music they chose, because the music had meaning for them.

Alvin Ailey, in particular, knew that the Spirituals he had grown up hearing changed people who heard and sang them, that the music played an important role in history as a way to send messages and motivate people both during the time of slavery and the Civil Rights movement, and that this music continues to change and inspire people. So, as a choreographer, he explored through his own language of dance how the music inspired and changed him and others, and how music can serve as a bridge connecting us with our past.

The most exciting relationship between music and dance happens for us in the audience. As we watch and reflect and see the dance movements and hear the music, we can experience how the "language" of the music and the "language" of the dancers make a whole new language that is *The Call* or *Ella*, or *Revelations*, or a different piece of dance we might watch at some other time. We put together in our hearts and minds the way the two art forms—music and dance—engage with one another and create that reciprocity that makes the live performance so exciting.

We could listen to the music alone, or watch the dance in silence, and they'd both be quite interesting. But when they come together, both art forms are richer and more complicated and offer us, the audience, a new way to experience both the music and the language of dance. Dance and music flow together to make works of art that challenge us to think more deeply about the ideas, emotions and stories that emerge.

Choreography is mentally draining, but there's a pleasure in getting into the studio with the dancers and the music.

(Alvin Ailey)

What to Look for in the Dance

All dances contain the principles of choreography: putting movements together artfully in interesting, thought-provoking or inspiring ways.

Many things are happening at once in *Revelations*, though expression of an idea is paramount. In some cases the choreographer tells a specific story with movement. In other cases, movement implies a story through phrases that evoke an “image” of some familiar aspect of life. Even when a choreographer makes an abstract dance, audience members interpret it to “make sense” in human terms. A human being watching a human being move equals a human experience of some kind. Audience members do not necessarily need to have had first-hand experience with the subject depicted in the dance nor understand it, but the image will resolve itself into something that we recognize as being generated from life.

Revelations is such a dance. It is a suite of dances that tells the story of a community of people through vignettes composed of large and small groups, trios, duets, solos, and various groupings of these dance forms. In *Revelations*, concepts such as oppression, dignity, hope and determination, and emotions like sorry, anger, fear and joy, are embodied and expressed through combining moving human forms in isolation and in relationship to one another.

What follows is a list of specific dance gestures from *Revelations*. While watching the performance, see if you can recognize moments listed on the next page, and discuss the concepts or emotions being depicted. As everyone has a unique frame of reference, a particular moment may say something different to different individuals. The dance is rich with imagery; the list here contains but a few of them. Have your students make note of which scenes particularly stand out to them in order to spark a class discussion following the performance.



Eleven Things to Look for in *Revelations*

1. **The “bird” pose.** Look in “I Been Buked,” “Daniel,” “Fix Me,” “Procession,” “Wade,” “You May Run On,” “Rock-a-My-Soul” for the bird pose performed as a group or individually throughout.
2. **Praying:** Notice the number of different ways *Revelations* depicts praying. Think about how it is portrayed and why and where it is done.
3. **Falling to the floor in grief and despair:** Look in “I Been Buked,” “Daniel,” “Fix Me,” for falling and grief and despair.
4. **Rising into the air in hope:** One woman is so overcome with despair she faints twice, but in the end she ascends toward the sky as if on wings.
5. **Looking for a place to hide:** In one section, several dancers try to hide from consequences of their irresponsible actions.
6. **A man and woman clear away evil spirits:** A man (with a twig and scarf) and a woman lead the Processional to cleanse the way for a couple on their way to be baptized.
7. **Three people walk into a river:** A blue scarf depicts water. Look for wading and splashing movements.
8. **A man crawls on the floor in determination:** He moves with great effort, deliberation, tentativeness, supplication and triumph.
9. **Several women and men carry stools:** Note the greetings and exchanges of people gathering at a church meeting one hot summer evening. Languidness turning to energetic excitement, and then to stately decorum.
10. **The women playfully chastise the men:** Note the piercing looks, wagging and pointing of fingers and fans.
11. **The company is swept away in joy:** A crescendo of bodies, sweeping arms, gathering arms, then spreading arms wide to the heavens as they travel around the stage, ending in tight contraction of the body into a breathtaking release.

10. Resources

Websites

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater website: www.alvinailey.org/

Video of *Revelations*:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrPJ4kt3a64&start_radio=1&list=RDRrPJ4kt3a64&t=446

About African American Spirituals: www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197495/

Books

Alvin Ailey

Andrea Davis Pinkney (Author), Brian Pinkney (Illustrator)

Age Range: 5 - 9 years, Series: Reading Rainbow Books

Publisher: Disney-Hyperion

Ailey Ascending: A Portrait in Motion

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Publisher: Chronicle Books (October 29, 2008)

Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey

Alvin Ailey and A. Peter Bailey

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Alvin Ailey: A Life In Dance

Jennifer Dunning

Publisher: Da Capo Press

Prime Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America

Joseph H. Mazo

Publisher: Princeton Book Publishers

DVDs

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: Chroma, Grace, Takademe, Revelations

An Evening with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: Divining, Revelations, The Stack-up, Cry

Social Media Links

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AlvinAileyAmericanDanceTheater>

Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/alvinailey/>

YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/AileyOrganization/featured>



Engagement Activities

ARTISTIC CONCEPT: MUSIC AND DANCE TOGETHER

Engagement Activity #1 (Pre-performance)

Guiding Questions

- How can the words in a song, or a song's quality or energy inspire dance movements?
- How do movements in a dance change the way we experience music?

Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Music lyrics as an artistic tool: how the words in songs might inspire dance

Overview

Time needed: 15 mins (can be extended with layers of exploration)

Students will explore the connections and reciprocal relationships between music and the dance it inspires.

Supplies and Prep

Writing implements for students.

Video player to show [overview](#) from *Revelations* (2:53 min)



Instructions

Step 1 Tell your students: One of the dances we'll be seeing at the Alvin Ailey Dance Company is a set of dances that, taken altogether, is called *Revelations*. Within *Revelations* are several shorter dances that all add up to one piece. Each section has within it several different types of music.

Step 2 We have a short 3 minute video that shows small segments with the different kinds of music the dancers will be dancing too. Let's watch AND listen and see what we notice. The music will change 7 times as we watch, and you'll notice that the dances change too.

Step 3 Show video. If link above doesn't work, go to <http://www.alvinailey.org/about/company/alvin-aley-american-dance-theater/repertory/revelations#>



Step 4 What did you notice about the different dances and pieces of music? What things changed between pieces (costume colors, number of dancers, slower or faster movement).

Step 5 Where did you see the dancers movements and the music mirror or match each other, and where did they diverge? Where did you see the dancers physically embody an image or emotion that the music only suggested?

Step 6 Did you see stories starting to be shown in these short clips *Revelations*? What do you guess the stories might be about? How do the music, lyrics, movements and staging work together to tell these stories?

If there's time, show the video a second time. What did you notice that was different for you? Were you able to see and hear differently? Why do you think that is?

Step 7 Final note to your class: The dancers use their whole bodies to tell stories and convey emotions. What movements catch your eye? What are the dancers responding to or relating? What is interesting to you about these movements and the music?



ARTISTIC CONCEPT: EXPRESSIVE LYRICS AND DANCE

Engagement Activity #2 (Pre-performance)

Guiding Questions

- How does movement embody ideas in lyrics or poetry?
- How can dancers bring sung or spoken words alive?

Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Dance/movement: the “language” of dance can be informed by the “language” of poetry or lyrics



Overview

Time needed: 20-30 minutes (can be extended with layers of exploration)

Students will receive a brief explanation and demonstration of the process, and then have an opportunity to create a short phrase of movement based on a fragment of written text.

Supplies and Prep

Writing implements for students.

Copies of Maya Angelou’s *On the Pulse of Morning* (segment) for grades 6-12

Copies of Langston Hughes’ *The Blues* or Maya Angelou’s *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me at All* for grades K-5.

Step 1 Using a developmentally appropriate poem which is rich in imagery, pass out a copy to each student. Read the poem out loud first so everyone can hear the words. Ask the students what action words they heard or read (verbs). What are the descriptive words (adverbs or adjectives)? These words are all useful to inspire us to think about movements in our bodies that can make the words alive. Put vocabulary words on the board for shared learning.

Step 2 With a partner, ask students to mark their copy of the poem in order to find words or phrases that might inspire movement or dance. *Descriptive words and phrases* are italicized, **action words and phrases** are in bold, and key words suggesting the quality of movement, underlined. With just these phrases, one can construct a short dance. (See example in Maya Angelou’s poem *On the Pulse of Morning* below.)

Analyze text for action words, and words that suggest:

- Any kind of movement with your head, body, arms, legs.
- The quality of a movement: slow or fast, smooth or jagged, calm or excited.
- Where the movement might shift: from high to low, from stretching to crouching

Step 3 Share which words or phrases were discovered. If desired, ask students to stand next to their desks to demonstrate a gesture or movement that specific words inspire in them. Remind them that they can’t be wrong about this. Whatever they are inspired to do is RIGHT because it’s their inspiration!

Step 4 Working solo or with partners, translate some of the words or phrases marked on the student's copy of the poem into gestures and movements familiar to them. If they have taken dance classes, they might be more physically expressive, but even small, careful movements are valid for expression.

Step 5 If you have time and space, encourage students to create movement phrases that have a beginning, middle and an end that echoes the shape and language of the poem that inspired them. They can present to the whole class, or just to one other pair. Add music if you desire, or read the poem out loud from beginning to end while all the students "dance" together.

Step 6 Discuss the relationship between the poem and the movement. What happened to the words in the poem when you made a movement to go with them? Which did you like best: listening to the poem or dancing to the poem? (Both answers are correct! This is just a piece of information about your personal preference.)

Final note: Tell your students: The words in the songs sung in *Revelations* are sometimes very powerful for the choreographers, and also to people in the audience. You might find that you're one of those people for whom the words are especially meaningful. You might find that you tune in more to the rhythms and flow of the music. Or you might find that first you watch the dance and then notice the music. These things come together differently for every person. If you notice HOW you notice the dance and music connecting, you will have a unique experience of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater that you will remember for a long time!

On the Pulse of Morning

By Maya Angelou

A Rock, A River, A Tree

Hosts to species long since departed,
Marked the mastodon,
The dinosaur, who left dried tokens
Of their sojourn here
On our planet floor,
Any broad alarm of their **hastening doom**
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock **cries out to us**, *clearly*,
Forcefully,
Come, you may stand upon my

Back and *face your distant destiny*,
But **seek no haven** in my shadow,
I will give you no hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than
The angels, have **crouched too long in**
The bruising darkness
Have **lain too long**
Facedown in ignorance,
Your **mouths spilling words**
Armed for slaughter.

The **Rock cries out to us** today,
You may stand upon me,
But do not hide your face.

ARTISTIC CONCEPT: MUSIC MEETS DANCE, DANCE MEETS MUSIC Engagement #3 (Pre or post-performance)

Guiding Questions

- How can we use our bodies through dance to express emotions and ideas?
- How do emotions change the movements in our bodies when we dance?



Artistic Literacy Tool Box

- Movement as an artistic tool: all the parts of our bodies can be used to make dance
- Music as an artistic tool: emotion, story and rhythm
- Choice-making as an artist

Overview

Time needed: 20 minutes (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will explore the possibilities of movement in their bodies and how music changes what they want to do with dance.

Supplies and Prep

Music-playing device.

[Links](#) or recordings to music from *Revelations*:

- #1. *I Been Buked*
- #6. *Wade in the Water*
- #11. *Rock-a-My-Soul*

Writing materials for students (journal, paper, writing implements)

Open space for moving and performing.

Instructions

Step 1 Standing together in a circle, ask your students to center their bodies, drop their arms to their sides, and stand with their feet planted shoulder-width apart. By way of warm up, explore movements of the head and shoulders, the arms and hands, hips and legs, feet and ankles.

Note that movement can come from any part of our bodies.

Step 2: Ask a student volunteer to take one step into the circle and demonstrate a simple movement that everyone will be able to repeat, using one or two parts of their bodies that will finish by stopping and being still. Everyone in the circle repeat the movement and the stillness of the demonstrating student. Go around the circle for everyone to demonstrate a movement or choose a few other students to do a demo.

Coach for simplicity: if the movements are too complicated, ask them to repeat just the first or last part of the movement then come to a stop. If the movements are silly, say that laughing is fine, as long as everyone stays focused on repeating the movement.

Step 3 Move together as a class: before stepping out of the circle and using the entire “playing area,” tell students they will be moving around the whole room in a moment, exploring different kinds of movement like performers do before they create a show. Let them know they are to move safely and making no physical contact with each other when you call out “**Move**” and to stop and hold still when you call out “**Hold.**” Then open up the playing area and coach students to experiment with different kinds of movement by calling out the first prompt: “**Move.**”

Coach for variety: big and small (using their whole bodies, or one tiny part of their body), jerky and fluid, fast and slow, close to the ground and as high as they can reach. At various moments, call out “**Hold!**” and when the students have stopped moving, coach them: “**Hold still but breathe. Don’t move but relax. Wait for the next prompt.**” Then prompt them to move again by calling out “**Move.**” Do this several times with reminders to explore various movements and calling out “**Hold. Breathe, relax, wait.**”

Step 4 Form the class circle again, and ask students to reflect on how they felt when they were moving. Ask students to sit in their circle and tell them you’ll play three different pieces of music from *Revelations* (one of the dances with many parts that they’ll be seeing at the SchoolTime Performance) and you’d like them to listen to the emotions, rhythms and stories in the music.

Step 5 Play the first minute of each of the songs. After listening to a segment from each song, ask students what they heard in the music. What rhythms were present? What emotions did the music suggest? What images or stories did it conjure in their imaginations? Capture words or phrases on chartpad paper or the blackboard to create ideas for a “movement vocabulary.”

Step 6 Play #1 *I Been Buked* (“*buked*” is short for “*rebuked*”). Ask students to move their bodies to the rhythms and words of the music while staying mostly in place. When the music stops, holding where they have stopped, invite students to discuss their experiences. How did their bodies want to move when they heard that music? Did they hear particular words in the music? Which ones?

Step 7 Let students know that you will be playing #1 *I Been Buked* a second time and that this time they can explore dance movement by moving their whole bodies thoughtfully around the room. Encourage them to listen to the music for ideas about how to move their bodies. Play *I Been Buked* again. When finished, discuss: what inspired you to move as you did? What did you notice about the music? How did the music influence your energy? What did you observe of how others moved to the music?

Step 8 Repeat steps 5 and 6 for Song #6 *Wade in the Water* and #3 *Rock-a-My-Soul in the Bosom of Abraham*.

Discuss together what students observed and experienced. What was it like to experience different types of music when they danced? Did other (or stronger) emotions or images come to mind when they were moving to the music?

Step 9 If there's time, ask the students to discuss with a partner the contrast between the different kinds of music, the different emotions or images the music evoked and the different ways their bodies moved.

Share discoveries with the group and/or take notes on chartpad paper or board.

Step 10 Final note to your class: Choreographers are often inspired by music that is important to them. The inspiration can sometimes be in the lyrics (words) of the music, in the emotions of the melody or rhythms, or in the personal and historical significance of the music. All of these are food for inspiration for dancers. When you see *Revelations*, *Flight Time*, *The Call* and *Ella*, see if you notice how the music and the dancers are relating to one another.



See you at Cal Performances' Zellerbach Hall on either Wednesday, April 10 or Thursday, April 11 at 11am for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater SchoolTime show!





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For information on supporting our Artistic Literacy (Education & Community) Programs, contact Sarah Sobey. Phone: 510.643.7053 / Email: ssobey@calperformances.org.



About Cal Performances and the Cal Performances Classroom

The mission of Cal Performances is to produce and present performances of the highest artistic quality, enhanced by programs that explore compelling intersections of education and the performing arts. Cal Performances celebrates over 100 years on the UC Berkeley Campus.

What is a Cal Performances Classroom?

Your classroom, of course!

The arts are an endlessly replenishable resource for a lifelong love affair with thinking, learning and feeling across disciplines and cultures. They connect fluidly with curriculum throughout the school years, and – perhaps with more endurance – they connect us to ideas and reflection on human experience that can't be easily expressed any other way.

Each season at Cal Performance, you will find a menu of compelling performances and classroom opportunities for any age. You can create your Cal Performances classroom through any or all of our artistic literacy programs for grades K-12.

Cal Performances holds artistic literacy on a par with language and numerical literacy. Those who are artistically literate hold the keys to a lifelong engagement with the arts, able to unlock and make personal connections to any work of art, regardless of level of familiarity with the work and the artists.

Artistic literacy skills are developed in the Cal Performances classroom as students and teachers are engaged in the artist's process. These skills are embedded in everything we do, from pre-performance talks to community conversations to teacher workshops and artist visits to the classroom.