

Kandinsky Inspired Choreographies

Overview

This unit is designed for Upper Elementary students (grades 4-6) at the Montessori Community School. The class meets once a week for Music, Dance, and Drama. The program is based on a method called, Orff- Schulwerk, characterized by the following: a unity of music, movement and speech; participation by students at all ability levels; elements of composition and improvisation; and an emphasis on process as well as elemental music and dance.

The Montessori students usually work in what is termed a “three hour work cycle.” This cycle usually contains the freedom of movement, contextual learning, and elements of choice for students. The Music, Dance, and Drama time is no different. Students come to class for 2 ½ hours in the afternoon. The time usually begins with a group “key lesson” followed by work choice time. The key lesson is a time that is teacher led, but based on a model of inquiry learning and process teaching. The work choice time is facilitated by a “prepared environment,” where the children explore elements of the room on their own or with peers if they choose. At this time, the teacher is available as a guide or if needed for questions. The room is filled with movement props, dramatic inspirations, and instruments from the Orff ensemble (xylophones, percussion instruments, and recorders). These choices are meant to facilitate creative expression at many different ability levels and encourage peer collaboration, composition, and choreography.

Often the Music, Dance, and Drama time is inspired and connected with the Visual Art program at school. In this case, our art teacher went to New York to view a Kandinsky collection at the Guggenheim. Her research inspired this joint unit that began with an art lesson and then led to choreographies inspired by the artist’s work. We are planning to fully implement this unit in the winter, a time of intense creativity and exploration for students. This is also a time when they are not weighed down by pressures of a large performance at school.

Goals and Rationale

One of the main goals of the Upper Elementary curriculum for Music, Dance, and Drama is to learn how to create and shape a choreography. They have worked on “elements” of a dance in Lower Elementary, and have learned many set dances, yet have not worked fully to create a form, and more importantly shape that form into a work that reflects more depth and artistry. There are three steps to creating a choreography: finding an inspiration, understanding and labeling movement terminology, and finally shaping these ideas into a form. They are not only participating as movers and creators, but as evaluators and critics for their work and the work of others. They are also developing an eye and a way to connect very deeply the content of one art form with another. This takes a certain comfort level with the elements of dance: time, space, and weight or force. It also takes the ability to work with the collective, and collaborate to create a brainstorming, outline, rough draft, and final product to be presented. Most importantly, the student has to find their “voice,” which in this case exists in the body through movement. For the final product, some students may choose to participate as composers/accompanists, yet each will have had a chance to participate in the creation of the dance.

On a micro-level, there are two Kandinsky paintings that the students will analyze and use for inspiration. The first is *Thirty*, an oil on canvas painting from 1937. This painting features black and white shapes and will be the springboard for the dance concept of positive and negative space. The second work is *Succession*, an oil on canvas painting from 1935. This painting features many colorful shapes and lines supposedly seen horizontally. Students will explore the individual shapes as well as the whole piece and use this analysis to examine single and multi-focus, a concept in dance. It is a goal that their ending choreographies will feature either the element of positive and negative space, or the element

of single and multi-focus.

Kandinsky Choreography Unit: Objectives

During and by the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. Participate in a key lesson with whole body listening. (S)
2. Recognize their “self space” and manage it in many different formations. (K) (S)
3. Recognize the “general space” and how to move from the “self space” to “general” and back. (K) (S)
4. Transition from different activities with ease. Make suggestions for their own flow of movement and spaces for working in small groups. (S) (R)
5. Perform and label a variety of locomotor and nonlocomotor movements. (K) (S)
6. Label movements as gestures, elevation, stillness or rotations. (K) (R)
7. Construct choreographies and be able to shape them and those of others. (S) (R) (D)
8. Construct a choreography containing either positive/negative space or single/multi-focus. (K) (S) (R)
9. Participate positively and safely in contact improvisation activities. (S) (D)
10. Participate in different movement adjustments dealing with time and space (sizes, levels, directions of movements, and pathways). (K) (R) (S)
11. Accompany or follow the movement they observe using an instrument from the Orff ensemble. (S)
12. Define positive and negative space as it relates to art and dance. (K) (R)
13. Define single and multi-focus as it relates to art and dance. (K) (R)
14. Gather information about Kandinsky and understand some of his journeys and processes as an artist. (K) (R)
15. Evaluate the dances of other groups and make valuable suggestions about their work. (R) (D)
16. Design their own work of art that features either positive/negative space, or single/multi-focus.

(K) (R) (P)

K=Knowledge

R=Reasoning

S=Skill

P=Product

D=Disposition

Lesson #1

1. **Purpose:** to introduce students to the work of Kandinsky, his history, style, shapes/lines and techniques. Students will use this lesson as an exploration of the visual components of this unit.
2. **Rationale:** in the performing and visual arts, a “hook” is otherwise known as “preliminary play.” This time of exploration is crucial for exploring techniques, getting inspired, and developing a spiritual and/or emotional connection with the material. In the case of this multidisciplinary unit, this lesson is for students to “play” with the visual art concepts and materials.
3. **Objectives:** Students will be able to:
 - A. Analyze in a group discussion different shapes, colors, lines and use of space in a selection of Kandinsky’s work.
 - B. Explore some of the history of Kandinsky and observe some of his processes and inspirations for creating art. (using art cards of other artists like: Monet, Klee, Miro)
 - C. Explore the definitions of positive/negative space in art and single/multi-focus in a visual art piece.
 - D. Create some of their own work “inspired” by Kandinsky’s work. Parameters: large work using chalk and dark card stock.
4. **Activities:**

Key Lesson:

- A. Look at Monet’s *Haystacks at Giverny*. What do you see? Describe artistic elements like: color, line, shape, use of space. What did Kandinsky see?
- B. How can the man responsible for painting these cards have said this statement about the Monet? What were some of his inspirations? How did he change and why? Discuss: spiritual component to art, relationship to music, travels, and education.
- C. Look at cards of Kandinsky, Miro, Klee. What do you see? Explore the terminology positive/negative space and single/multi-focus. Look at two works: *Thirty* and *Succession*.
- D. Record student brainstorm on white board. Answering questions of: what do you see?

Work Choice:

- A. Get inspired by Kandinsky! Use large dark card stock and colorful chalk to create your own work. Here are some journal questions you can ask yourself and others:
 - 1) Do you associate certain meanings with different shapes, lines, or color in your work?
 - 2) What are your favorite subjects to paint or draw? Does it matter if the viewer does not recognize the subject of the painting?
 - 3) Have any of you had a similar experience to Kandinsky, and accidentally seen abstraction

because they did not recognize the subject of a painting? Has any artwork you were making ever been improved by an accident?

**questions from the Tate Gallery art education supplement

5. **Materials:**

- A. Art cards: Monet, Kandinsky, Miro, Klee.
- B. Large prints of *Thirty* and *Succession*.
- C. Oversized card stock and chalk, enough for entire class exploration.
- D. Journal Questions.

6. **Assessment:**

- A. Journals/B. Portfolio artwork of early inspiration from Kandinsky.

Lesson #2

1. **Purpose:** to review our knowledge of positive/negative space as it relates to Kandinsky's *Thirty*. To introduce students to the exploration of positive/negative space in dance and movement.
2. **Rationale:** This lesson is to create a "preliminary play" experience in movement and dance. Students will analyze the basic components of positive/negative space and apply those to their initial experience with their bodies. The vehicle for this exploration is a human obstacle course.
3. **Objectives:** Students will be able to:
 - A. Explore what it feels like to represent the positive space with their bodies.
 - B. Explore what it feels like to represent the negative space with their bodies.
 - C. Define more clearly positive/negative space in art and in movement.
 - D. Make suggestions about how to "deepen" the dance piece. What is working? What is not working?
4. **Activities:**

Key Lesson:

- A. Create a human obstacle course. Some movers are static and are the course, while others are moving through the course.
- B. Come together and look at *Thirty* by Kandinsky. Discuss what they remember about positive and negative space as it applies to visual art.
- C. Review a video from u-tube that shows an artist reviewing this concept.
http://www.ehow.com/video_4953696_creating-abstract-art-positive-negative.html
- D. Discuss what positive and negative space looks like in the "obstacle course."
- E. Repeat the obstacle course making student suggested changes. What is working? What is not working?
- F. Add instruments.

Work Choice:

- A. Begin to explore creating choreographies based on positive and negative space. Students may also explore creating a music accompaniment to their work.
 - 1) Use the Tips for Making a Choreography sheet as a guide.
 - 2) Use Kandinsky's work or your own exploration of Kandinsky as inspiration.
 - 3) As you label your movement words, can you categorize them as one of the following: locomotor movements, nonlocomotor movements, stillness, rotation, elevation.
- B. At the end of class give yourself and your group a rating according to the "collaborative" work rubric.

5. **Materials:**
 - A. Hula hoop, wooden dowels, ribbon, fabric.
 - B. Large prints of *Thirty*.
 - C. Computer and access to wi-fi for the definition viewing.
 - D. Variety of instrument choices.
 - E. Rubric for collaborative group work; Tips for Making a Choreography sheet; journal page for labeling movement words.
 - F. Survey of Kandinsky Music and Movement work.
6. **Assessment:**
 - A. Journal page for labeling movement words
 - B. Rubric for collaborative group work. (self-rating, group score)//C. Survey

Lesson #3

1. **Purpose:** to review our knowledge of single focus and multi-focus as it relates to Kandinsky's *Succession*. To introduce students to the exploration of single focus/multi-focus in dance and movement.
2. **Rationale:** This lesson is to create another "preliminary play" experience in movement and dance. Students will analyze the basic components of single focus and multi-focus and apply those to their initial experience with their bodies. The vehicles for this exploration are several movement exercises: follow the leader; body parts lead; eyes closed and move.
3. **Objectives:** Students will be able to:
 - A. Explore what it feels like to move through space with a single focus.
 - E. Explore what it feels like to move through space with a multi-focus.
 - F. Define more clearly single and multi-focus in art and dance. As a viewer and as a performer/artist.
 - G. Make suggestions about how to "deepen" the dance piece. What is working? What is not working?
4. **Activities:**

Key Lesson:

- A. Students will participate in the following movement exercises:
 - 1) Follow the leader. Where is your focus as a performer? Audience?
 - 2) Let your body part lead your motion (use some of the movement words from your lists last week). Where is your focus as a performer? Audience?
 - 3) Close your eyes and let your focus be within. What is this like for performer? Audience?
- B. Come together and look at *Succession* by Kandinsky. Discuss what they remember about single focus/multi-focus as it relates to visual art.
- C. Discuss which exercise was most effective to performer? To audience? For single focus? For multi-focus.
- D. Begin to play with a choreographic form. What is working?
- E. Add instruments.

Work Choice:

- A. Begin to explore creating choreographies based on single focus and multi-focus. Students may also explore creating a music accompaniment to their work.

- B. Use the Tips for Making a Choreography sheet as a guide.
 - C. Use Kandinsky's work or your own exploration of Kandinsky as inspiration.
 - D. As you label your movement words, can you categorize them as one of the following:
locomotor movements, nonlocomotor movements, stillness, rotation, elevation.
 - E. At the end of class give yourself and your group a rating according to the "collaborative" work rubric as well as a review sheet of the unit.
5. **Materials:**
- A. Large prints of *Succession*.
 - B. Variety of instrument choices.
 - C. Rubric for collaborative group work; Tips for Making a Choreography sheet; journal page for labeling movement words.
 - D. Review of Kandinsky Unit.
6. **Assessment:** A. Journal page for labeling mvt. Words; B. Rubric for group work; C. Test review

Lesson #4

1. **Purpose:** to begin to shape the final dance in groups, choosing the theme (either positive/negative space or single focus/multi-focus). To evaluate their knowledge on various content themes, as Stiggins suggests, a test before a performance skill.
2. **Rationale:** This lesson is to preliminarily evaluate the students on their content knowledge and then give them a framework for creating a final performance piece. This is the lesson where they really start making important decisions about their choreographies and functioning at a deep level of artistry and choice for final performance.
3. **Objectives:** Students will be able to:
 - A. Complete an evaluation based on content knowledge of the unit.
 - B. Make a decision about their groupings and the theme of their pieces (positive/negative space or single focus/multi-focus).
 - C. Work on #3 of the Tips for Making a Choreography. Rehearse/perform/practice.
 - D. Have a performance at the end of class that they are ready to present next class.
 - E. Complete their second art piece. How does their piece look different than their first work? (students can have time to complete this step in music or art studio if they need it).
4. **Activities:**

Key Lesson:

- A. Students will complete the Evaluation testing content knowledge of the unit.
- B. Students will discuss the rubric for the final choreography and art piece. Focus on the top portion as goals for the performance and product.

Work Choice:

- A. Students will work in their groups using the Choreography Rubric as a model for the final performance. They will also refer to the Tips for Making a Choreography sheet. Students can also use the flip camera to preview their performance and give themselves comments.
 - B. Students will find time to complete another Kandinsky inspired art piece. They can use their first piece as inspiration, as well as their early journal entry. Same medium.
5. **Materials:**
- A. Evaluation of Unit.

- B. Variety of props and instruments to help facilitate choreographies.
 - C. Rubrics for Choreography and final Art Piece.
 - D. Flip Camera
6. **Assessment:**
- A. Evaluation of Unit.

Lesson #5

1. **Purpose:** To view the final performances and art pieces as a group.
2. **Rationale:** This lesson should bring a sense of closure and accomplishment to the group. They should feel like enough time was given to truly experience the artistic process, and also to know that sometimes the amount of time needed can vary in a real life experience, or in Kandinsky's case, can represent an entire lifetime. They should also have some ways of measuring their work that is encouraging, not mysterious, and deepens their artistic eyes when working with a piece.
3. **Objectives:** Students will be able to:
 - A. Show their finished performance/choreography.
 - B. Make decisions about their own work and the work of others according to the Choreography Rubric.
 - C. Show their finished art piece in the gallery, displayed with their first work.
 - D. Have valuable feedback for each group in regards to their choreographies.
 - E. Have valuable feedback for each person in regards to their art work.
 - *These comments should really focus on: What did I enjoy? What is going well?
(participants are hopefully not discouraged when sharing something very intimate and personal)

4. **Activities:**

Key Lesson:

- A. Groups will share final performances.
 - B. Groups will receive positive feedback from the audience. (they will also be videotaped and have the opportunity to view these)
 - C. Students will journey to the gallery to see a presentation of their first explorations and their final work.
 - D. Students will have the opportunity to receive comments about their work.
5. **Materials:**
- A. Choreography Rubrics
 - B. Art Rubrics
 - C. Flip Camera

6. **Assessment:**
- A. Choreography Rubric (self and teacher)
 - B. Art Rubric (self and teacher)
 - C. Video of Choreography

**It is my goal to have one more session with the students. Each student would come in for a final interview of the unit. During this conference, we would discuss the point's sheet, look at the compilation of work, and examine the final interview question. This would be the final assessment procedure with the students.

**Another follow-up activity that would be of interest is to view a video of the Richmond Ballet's most recent interview and performance of a choreography based on the art work of Modrian.

Some Ideas for Differentiation

Currently in the Upper Elementary class there exists two types of student that may require some extra assistance with the above unit.

- 1) There are two students in a class of 28 with asperger's syndrome. Both students might be challenged by the "Collaboration Rubric" requirements. Some options for them might be to create a choreography by themselves, and then ask friends to perform it. Another option might be for them to "audit" a group experience and turn in a written plan for their own dance. Both students when feeling social pressure find great comfort in the ability to "observe" and almost wander. Both are old enough that we could talk together about options and make a decision that feels best to them.
- 2) There is one student who has learning disabilities and struggles immensely with the written word. The classroom teacher has instructed all specialists to supplement any written work with either one-on-one assistance, or an aural/oral option for assessment. I would recommend that he have an older child in the class (he is in 4th grade and would be able to work with a 6th grader) be his "buddy" and help him read some of the handouts.

If this looks like an obstacle, then I could create handouts that contained choices in picture form, or language and font that was more appropriate for younger readers.

I would be more than willing and have the time to administer his "evaluation or test" by reading it to him and having him give answers verbally. He could also answer his rubrics in more of an "interview" format.

Standards of Learning

*The current standards of learning for dance are only listed in Virginia beginning at grades 6. Since this lesson includes 6th graders, I have put those standards for that level below.

DANCE: (from April 2006)

DM.2 The student will demonstrate correct alignment while performing basic locomotor sequences, including walking, running, hopping, jumping, leaping, galloping, skipping, and sliding.

DM.3 The student will develop dance technique skills and movement vocabulary through replication.

DM.4 The student will perform short movement sequences that employ specific space, shape, time, rhythm, energy, and effort requirements.

DM.7 The student will create and perform short choreographic studies that manipulate the elements of space, shape, time, rhythm, energy, and effort.

DM.8 The student will collaboratively create and perform short choreographic studies that use simple compositional forms, including unison, theme and variation, and canon.

DM.9 The student will rehearse choreographed dances and execute those dances in performance.

DM.17 The student will describe in oral and written form personal work and the work of others in choreography and performance, using appropriate dance arts vocabulary and terminology.

ART: (from April 2006)

4.1 The student will research and generate ideas for creating works of art, using discussion.

- 4.3 The student will create a work of art that uses themes, ideas, and art forms from the past.
- 4.8 The student will identify positive and negative space in works of art.
- 4.10 The student will create abstract works of art.
- 4.16 The student will investigate artists and their work, using research tools and procedures.
- 4.18 The student will analyze works of art based on visual properties.
- 5.7 The student will collaborate with others to produce a work of art that characterizes a historical time period.
- 6.17 The student will demonstrate inquiry skills and appropriate art vocabulary for
1. describing works of art;
 2. responding to works of art;
 3. interpreting works of art; and
 4. evaluating works of art.

MUSIC: (from April 2006)

- 4.4, 5.4 The student will respond to music with movement.
1. Perform choreographed and non-choreographed movements.
- 4.7 The student will create music through a variety of experiences.
1. Improvise simple melodic and rhythmic accompaniments.
- 4.14, 5.12 The student will exhibit respect for the contributions of self and others in a music setting.
3. Participate in music activities that involve sharing, taking turns, and other ways of demonstrating good citizenship.

Textbooks

Green Gilbert, Ann. (1992) Creative Dance for All Ages. The American alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, Reston, VA.

Joyce, Mary. (1980) Dance Technique for Children. Mayfield Publishers, California.

To my knowledge (and I train movement teachers in the summers), there is no textbook for students, ages 9-12, specifically for dance. That said, the above two books, are very standard practice for movement teachers working with that age group. These texts contain a myriad of activities for dance and choreographies at those ages. I especially used the Green Gilbert book in planning this unit and draw specifically on her ideas for positive and negative space and single and multi-focus. This unit based on the works of Kandinsky, however, is an original idea inspired by the visual art teacher and her trip to New

York.

Enrichment Materials: for Student Viewing

- 1) Art Cards from various museums, including: Monet (Haystacks), Kandinsky, Klee, and Miro.
- 2) Partnership with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts gives our school access to their lending library.
This video might be a wonderful supplement to the unit (perhaps at the beginning or end of the unit).
Wassily Kandinsky [videorecording] : invisible shapes
Cuvelier, Marcel.
2002
- 3) The following is a video clip of choreographer Jessica Lang discussing her process to create a work for the Richmond Ballet based on the works of Piet Modrian. This would be an exciting clip to show after the students have performed their choreographies and evaluated their process.
http://www.richmondballet.com/performancestickets/studio1_2010.aspx
- 4) This is the site that features the clip from an artist describing positive and negative space:
http://www.ehow.com/video_4953696_creating-abstract-art-positive-negative.html

Annotated Bibliography