Alvin Ailey
American Dance Theater

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We are so excited to welcome you and your students to our National Historic Landmark theatre in downtown Chicago for a memorable performance experience. Before you walk through our doors, we invite you to use this Classroom Companion to prepare for the show.

In the pages that follow, you will find ways to encourage and guide your students to **ENGAGE** with the performance and participate in activities that **CONNECT** the performance to what they’re learning in class. You’ll also find ways to help inspire your students to **CREATE** their own unique art!

We hope that this experience continues after the performance and beyond the walls of the theatre to actively encourage your students to immerse themselves in artistic culture.
**What is Dance?**

**DANCE (n):** To move one’s body rhythmically, usually to music; creative expression of an idea or of oneself through movement sequences; an art form involving body, mind, and spirit.

“...dance in particular is for everybody... I believe that the dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people.”

— Alvin Ailey

Alvin Ailey, the legendary multi-cultural company, commemorates their 60th anniversary this year, and the 50th anniversary of performing at the Auditorium Theatre! Each year, the company brings exciting, fresh choreography for Chicago audiences, and ends each performance with company founder Alvin Ailey’s signature work *Revelations*, an enduring masterpiece that has been an audience favorite since the company’s inception. This Classroom Companion aims to provide you with tools to guide your students in exploring the history of this world-renowned company, as well as ways to connect in order for your students to see how “dance... is for everybody.”

**History of Alvin Ailey**

**American Dance Theater**

**EXPLORING THE COMPANY**

Alvin Ailey had a strong desire to create new and expressive modern dance works based on African American culture and heritage. This stemmed from growing up in Texas, where he was raised by his mom, and attending African American church services. With these ideas in mind, he started Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1958. Ailey’s training and work was inspired by three major modern choreographers and dancers of the time: Lester Horton, Katherine Dunham, and Martha Graham. As word spread about the diversity of choreography and athleticism of Ailey’s dancers, a broad range of people came to enjoy their performances. Today, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is known as “America’s Cultural Ambassador to the World,” and the company travels the globe sharing their uniquely American style and stories.
**REVELATIONS**

One of the Ailey company’s most well-known pieces is *Revelations*, which was choreographed by Ailey himself in 1960 using spirituals, gospel songs, and blues to explore African American cultural heritage. Ailey gathered the ideas for this piece from the “blood memories” of his childhood.

Since its premiere in 1960, the piece has transcended barriers of faith and nationality, and is frequently performed around the globe. It is considered the most widely-seen modern dance work in the world.

**THE STORY BEHIND THE MUSIC**

When looking at a choreographer’s choice of music, you can see that it has a strong impact on the message that is communicated to the audience. For *Revelations*, Ailey chose a variety of spirituals to transport the audience to another place and time.

**SPIRITUAL SONGS**

Folk songs describing personal religious experiences. Spirituals grew from the chants, rhythms, and harmonies of African tribes whose members were enslaved and brought to the American colonies. These slaves combined this traditional musicality with themes from Christianity to create what we now know as spirituals.

**Two kinds of spirituals:**

- **Sorrow songs** — Sung slowly and sadly, these songs tell of the horrific experience of slavery and the belief that better days are coming.

- **Jubilees** — These upbeat, faster songs are based on Bible stories celebrating victory and joy.

**INSIDE LOOK**

One of the popular songs used in *Revelations* is called “Wade in the Water.” It was claimed that this song gave instructions to fugitive slaves on how to avoid capture and make their way to freedom.

*You can learn more about the history of this song, and other “secrets, signs, and symbols” of the Underground Railroad at:*

[pathways.thinkport.org/secrets/music2.cfm](pathways.thinkport.org/secrets/music2.cfm)
Discussion

Here are a few discussion points you can use to encourage your students to connect with what is happening on stage:

**INVESTIGATE**

*Explore what dancers need to be successful.* *Training:* How might a dancer develop flexibility, strength, and control of their body? *Health/Nutrition:* What sorts of food and lifestyle choices do you think a dancer needs to make in order to take care of their body? *Storytelling:* How do a series of movements communicate a larger story? *Critique:* How might you analyze and connect with a dance performance? *Lived Experience:* How do the events we experience shape who we are? *Personality:* How does a person’s unique personality show through movement?

**CAPTURE**

*Pay attention to how you feel throughout the performance.* What do you notice about the physical effort and strength that the dancers use during the performance? What muscles are being used to execute the moves? What do you notice about the sequencing of the movement? Which movements stand out to you and why? Do you prefer it when the dancers move slowly or quickly? When does it seem like the dancers have to exert the most energy?

**CONNECT**

*Explore the elements of the performance — colors, sounds, etc. — that cause you to feel a certain way.* Can you connect any of the songs or movements with something from your life? In what other ways do you connect with what’s happening on stage? Maybe the dancers are using a very aggressive movement and you’re reading a book with a character who is very aggressive. How do characters in books express their emotions vs. the way dancers demonstrate emotion? How does the music or soundscape make you feel? What specific aspects of the music bring you joy or make you feel sorrow?
Curriculum Connection Activities

LANGUAGE ARTS
Dance often pulls inspiration from the literary arts. A lot of ballets come from stories or books. Have your students explore this literature and see why it was susceptible to being turned into a dance. Ask them to come up with a list of books you’ve read in class that contain scenes or sections that could be expressed through dance. Split into groups and have students create a dance based on the text.

SOCIAL STUDIES
As the students will see in Alvin Ailey’s Revelations, movement plays a big part in African American culture. This continued into the Harlem Renaissance, American jazz music, and hip-hop culture. Many cultures have their own dance forms that are influenced by religion and other parts of their heritage. Ask students to examine the following:
- What types of dancing have you seen that connect to a certain heritage?
- In what ways do these dances reflect the associated heritage?
- What dance moves would you create to reflect your unique experience in the world?

MATH
To see math in dance, you have to explore the way that dancers count. They commonly count in sets of eight, but it all depends on the music they are dancing to. It could be a range of other counts. Have students listen to music and try counting along with the beats. Repeat this exercise with a variety of musical pieces, seeing if the students can figure out how many beats are in the music.

SCIENCE
Human bodies moving through space the way they do in dance can be explained by physics! There is plenty of great content that explains the physics of dance on Youtube that you can show your students! Use this TED-Ed video as a jumping-off point for further conversation: youtube.com/watch?v=tS5VgOdqptRg
Connect the dots!

WHICH SHAPES DO YOU SEE?
Use this picture to identify the shapes the dancer is making with their body or in the empty space around their body.

- CIRCLE
- OVAL
- SQUARE
- RECTANGLE
- TRIANGLE

Hint:

Yannick Lebrun, photo by Andrew Eccles.
Find the shapes!

USE this picture to identify the shapes the dancer is making with their body or in the empty space around their body.

CHOOSE one of the shapes you found and describe the qualities of the shape (for example, straight or curved lines, size, etc.).

TIME TO CREATE! Find a partner and choose one of the shapes you found. Work with this partner to create five poses that reminds you of this shape. Consider:

• How do you move from one pose to another?

• In what ways can you make the quality of each shape different (for example, one is small and compact, the next is wide and tall)?

• What emotions do you connect to these poses, and how can you show that to your audience?

DANCE IT OUT!
Do Your Research!

COMPARE AND CONTRAST
Complete the Venn diagram below to compare and contrast Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to another style of dance of your choice.

Name: ____________________ Date: ____________________
How does this connect to Common Core State Standards?

**COMPREHENSION AND COLLABORATION**

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1*
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2*
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

**KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS FOCUS (USING THE PERFORMANCE AS A “TEXT”)**

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1*
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

**INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS**

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7*
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

**P21 PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST LEARNING SKILLS**

*Learning and Innovation Skills: A focus on creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration*
- Think creatively
- Work creatively with others
- Act on creative ideas to make a tangible and useful contribution

*Life and Career Skills*
- Be flexible: Incorporate feedback effectively, dealing positively with praise, setbacks, and criticism. Understand and negotiate diverse views to reach workable solutions.
- Be self-directed learners: All programming challenges students to explore and expand their own learning in the connected areas.
- Interact effectively with others: Both the teamwork and the attendance at the performance teach students to know when it is appropriate to listen and to speak, and to conduct themselves in a professional manner.
How does this connect to Illinois and National Arts Standards?

NATIONAL CORE DANCE ANCHOR STANDARDS ADDRESSED

**Anchor Standard 1:** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.  
*Essential Question:* Where do choreographers get ideas for dances?

**Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.  
*Essential Question:* How is a dance understood?

**Anchor Standard 8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.  
*Essential Question:* How is dance interpreted?

**Anchor Standard 10:** Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.  
*Essential Question:* How does dance deepen our understanding of ourselves, other knowledge, and events around us?
Additional Resources

Alvin Ailey Website

alvinailey.org

Click on the ABOUT tab to find out more about the Ailey company and the history behind its works.

Alvin Ailey Official YouTube Page

youtube.com/user/AileyOrganization

Use this website as a resource for yourself as a teacher first. Look here to get a better idea of the pieces your students will be seeing.

A good video to show your class before going to see the show from this site would be this one that helps introduce your students to what *Revelations* means:

youtube.com/watch?v=J6xgBtH0pul

Information on African American spirituals from the Library of Congress

loc.gov/item/ihas.200197495/

How to discuss dance with your students

lubovitch.org/Educate/Resources/Enjoy_the_Show/enjoy_the_show.html
Theatre Etiquette

Here’s what to expect when you come to the show!

**BE ON TIME!** Be prompt! Walking in late is distracting and takes away from your theatre experience.

**SAY NO TO CELL PHONES!** When in the theatre, it is important to devote your entire attention to the performance. Taking pictures or using social media during a show is distracting to you and to those around you! Remember, you’ve come for the performance, so let yourself get lost in the experience.

**DON’T BE AFRAID TO SHOW YOUR REACTIONS!** One of the unique things about live performance is that the performers are there in the same room with you! They pick up on your energy and it feeds their performance. So if you are enjoying something, don’t be afraid to applaud. If you think something’s funny, it’s okay to laugh. And it’s even okay to dance in your seat a bit, so long as you stay seated and don’t bother the folks sitting next to you!

**STAY CALM AND SIT STILL!** Avoid leaving in the middle of the performance, because this is considered disrespectful. Use the restrooms during an intermission or before the show begins. Of course, if it’s an emergency, let your teacher know.

**KEEP THE AUDITORIUM CLEAN!** The Auditorium Theatre is 129 years old, so we need to make sure that this National Historic Landmark is taken good care of! Food and drink can damage the theatre. Instead of eating during the show, enjoy a pre- or post-performance meal.

**BUT DON’T TALK DURING THE SHOW!** Save your thoughts for post-performance discussions. Because talking during the performance disturbs fellow audience members, having conversations afterwards are highly encouraged. Take note of all of your personal comments and share them with your friends after the show.

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**WHY DO PEOPLE COME TO THE THEATRE?**

- Entertainment
- Engage in social change
- To learn
- For enjoyment

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**WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GAIN FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE AT THE THEATRE?**

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**Auditorium Theatre 2018–19 Season Sponsors**

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