



**Inspire Change Through Dance:  
How Dance and Music Tell a Story to Impact the World**

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(South Charlotte Middle Schools)

This curriculum unit is recommended for:  
(8th Grade Dance and/or English Language Arts Students)

**Keywords:** (Dance, Rhetoric, Story Telling, Ethos, Pathos, Logos, Pathway, Time, Weight, Space, Flow, Movement Qualities, Choreography, Choreographic Devices, Dance Phrase)

**Teaching Standards:** See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

**Synopsis:** (This unit focuses on the integration of rhetoric into the dance curriculum. Movement fosters retention of new material and is a perfect medium for kinesthetic learning. Students will learn about the foundations of rhetoric and use that knowledge to create a dance that has meaning. They will participate in various activities that expand their knowledge of both dance and rhetoric. As a culminating activity in this unit, students will create a dance solo using given criteria.)

*I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to (70) students in (8th Grade Dance).*

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# **Inspire Change Through Dance: How Dance and Music Tell a Story to Impact the World**

*By Kathleen Butler*

## **Introduction**

As I begin to explain my curriculum unit it will be important to understand my “why.” “Why” is an ideal that Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools has been cultivating the past few years that encourages teachers to explore why they teach. Teaching dance is fun, energetic, creative, and gets me up and moving. But, my “why” is more than that. I teach dance because dance has had a positive impact on my life. I teach dance because I believe it has a positive impact on the lives of my students. Many students who are unable to be successful in other “core” classes are able to be successful in my classroom. Many students with behavior challenges in other classes are engaged and motivated in my classroom. For many students, dance class is a place where they feel like they can be themselves.

The research sites many benefits of dance. Dance is most well known for being a form of exercise and a creative outlet. But there are many other not so well known benefits to dance - particularly dance in public schools. Did you know that there is a positive correlation between taking dance and high test scores?<sup>1</sup> A study of 25,000 middle and high school students found that those who had higher arts involvement had better grades.<sup>2</sup>

Another big benefit is that dance promotes many of the personal qualities that employers want in their workforce: collaboration, adaptability, perseverance.<sup>3</sup> In a world focused on technology, students are missing the opportunities to communicate and collaborate in the classroom. Dance allows for (and really requires) strong communication and collaboration as students work together to choreograph, and perform dance phrases.

Dance can improve brain health and also increases the “feel good” hormone serotonin. It can also develop new neural connections in the regions of executive function, long term memory and spatial recognition.<sup>4</sup> A study by the New England Journal of Medicine in 2003 investigated the effects of 11 different types of physical activity on the brain. They found that dance was the only activity that lowered participants risk of dementia.<sup>5</sup> While my students are not currently at risk of dementia, think of the effect dance must have on the brain to cause this disease without a cure to slow down. Dance in schools also aid’s socio- emotional wellbeing by reducing stress, gives tools for collaboration and conflict resolution and increases confidence and self esteem.

Dance, like many art forms is accessible to all students regardless of ability. No previous knowledge of dance or technique is required to be successful in my classroom. The arts themselves are very inclusive environments for all students. Special needs students, english

language learners, students who have danced since they were three and students who have never danced a day in their life can all be successful in my classroom.

Movement fosters retention of new material which makes it a great place for interdisciplinary integration. The arts automatically allow for differentiation and student expression. Studies show that students who are involved in school arts classes retain information better, learn how to collaborate with others, think creatively and respond effectively.<sup>6</sup> This makes my dance classroom is the perfect place to explore and integrate rhetoric. Rhetoric is a tool that I need to share with my students to help them generate choreography that communicates meaning. This unit is intended for 8th grade students in my A and B day classes. The overall goal of this unit is for students to be able to craft a dance solo that communicates meaning utilizing rhetoric.

## **Rationale**

My 8th grade dance students have always completed a solo dance project. I have done this project with topics like social issues, personal experience and poems. In the past I have really struggled with getting students to understand how to create a dance with meaning that does not utilize pantomime (acting things out). Specifically in this project I get a lot of push back from students because they do not understand how they can create a dance that has a deeper meaning. They want something easy. They want to know what the answer is. However, when you are creating a dance by yourself, there really is no right answer. This means the students have to take a risk, which in middle school is very scary. As long as they can explain and rationalize their choices and why, they are correct. Completing the Time Travel: Using Music to Explore Past, Present, and Future Messages Seminar has allowed me some insight on how to use rhetoric to help my students foster a deeper understanding. Exploring rhetoric with my students will help them get to the next level in creating dances that have meaning. This knowledge will also help them analyze and decipher the meaning of dances created by others.

## **Content Research**

I have broken the content research section into three parts: Dance Concepts, Rhetoric Components and Dance Rhetoric Research.

### Dance Concepts

*Dance Vocabulary* - elements that students should be familiar with and add into their dance phrases to add more dimensions. This is vocabulary and concepts that students should know before creating a dance phrase. Vocabulary words are in **bold**.

- **Time** is when the dancer is moving. Time can refer to the tempo or speed of a movement or phrase. Tempo can be slow or fast. Time can also be characterized by measure, how many beats in a measure, or overall time of a piece.

- **Rhythm** is also related to time as it is the pattern of beats.
- **Space** is where the dancer is moving. Space concepts can include positive and negative space, directions, pathways, levels and dimension.
  - **Positive Space** is defined as the space you occupy while the **negative space** is the space around you.
  - **Directions** include sideways, forward, backward, circular, diagonal, arc, up and down.
  - **Pathways** are the route you take to get from one place to another doing various movements.
  - **Levels** include low, middle and high.
  - **Dimension** is talking about the size of a movement so how large to how small a movement is or becomes.
- **Weight** can vary from heavy to light.
- **Flow** of movements can be bound or free, direct or indirect.
- All movements are either locomotor or non locomotor. **Locomotor** means to move from place to place while **non locomotor** is a movement that stays in one place.
- Body Shapes and Movement Designs are either **symmetrical** (the same on both sides) or **asymmetrical** (one side is different in design than the other side).
- **Choreographic Principles** include **repetition**, actions, **space**, relationships
- **Performance Qualities**: students will perform with clarity of movement, focus, energy and concentration.
- Audience Etiquette: quiet during performances, watching and evaluating, clap at the end.<sup>7</sup>

### Rhetoric Components

What is rhetoric? The definition for rhetoric from a quick google search says: “the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.” However, this refers only to writing and speaking. From the Time Travel CTI Seminar I know that rhetoric is more than just writing and speaking. How you dress is rhetoric. Body language is rhetoric. The song choice a video producer adds to a video is rhetoric. A painting can be rhetoric. So after some more searching I found a description I like better. San Diego State University explains rhetoric as “referring to the study and uses of written, spoken and visual language. It investigates how language is used to organize and maintain social groups, construct meanings and identities, coordinate behavior, mediate power, produce change, and create knowledge. Rhetoricians often assume that language is constitutive (we shape and are shaped by language), dialogic (it exists in the shared territory between self and other), closely connected to thought (mental activity as "inner speech") and integrated with social, cultural and economic practices.” I like this explanation better because it focuses on language and includes written, spoken and visual language. Visual language can encompass dance, art, performances, fashion, home decor, architecture and so much more.

As we explore rhetoric, it will be important for my students to understand ethos, pathos and logos.

Ethos - the trustworthiness of a person, group or institution

Pathos - evoking an emotional response

Logos - appeal to the logical



## Dance Rhetoric Research

Henrietta Bannerman explains that dance movement alone is not possible to analyze, argue or contextualize. Dance requires other components in addition to movement to be able to tell a story. Costumes, song choice, title, background knowledge of the choreographer, setting/ staging choices, lighting and text are all things that help to tell the story. For example, if we moved the performance of the Nutcracker from the theater and put it in a high school gym it would look completely different. If there were no costumes to denote who was who and everyone wore black pants and a black shirt. If there was no music, and only dancing. If the people who were in attendance were not told what the show was. If there were no programs denoting the title, musical artist, choreographer and storyline. Would the audience still be able to recognize this work as the nutcracker? Even if the dancers performed the same routine and utilized performance qualities such as facial expressions and the chemistry between the characters were apparent, most if not all audience members would not be able to identify this work as the nutcracker. It is all the components working together that give a the performance meaning.

Dance sequences out of context can still convey meaning. For example if a dancer completes a traveling jump sequence quickly with long lines and beautiful leaps this suggests feelings of flight, happiness or joy. In contrast if a dancer falls to the floor and pulls themselves into a ball this conveys a feeling of sadness, despair or disappointment. The order of the dance moves and phrases is also important. If the two examples happened one right after the other this might convey that the dancer was hopeful, but then the hope came crashing down. If the order was reversed perhaps the dancer was in a challenging situation but then rose above it and became successful. While dance sequences themselves convey meaning, without context there is not a strong association as to the “real story” or choreographer’s intent. Henrietta Bannerman states that “In the case of choreography delivering programmatic meaning or relating a plot, the syntactic ordering of the movement material must be bolstered by mime and/ or gestural action as well as being viewed in relation to whatever framing devices are involved such as narrative context, music, costume, scenography, lighting and staging properties.”<sup>8</sup>

Dance can be considered rhetoric because it elicits a response from the viewer.

Michelle LaVinge makes a case that Alvin Ailey’s *Revelations* is a work of rhetorical art. “The rhetorical (as well as aesthetic) strength of *Revelations* comes from how the movements and spirituals work together in bringing forth a community that shares the joy and pain of living as well as faith in human endurance... They stretch their arms high above their heads to embody the prayerful words sung in the music. They jump high with the upbeat and playful tempo of the music. They move together with precision, which amplifies the communal aspect of the dance...It’s story can be understood as a critical response to the shortage of African American voices during the violent struggle for civil rights.”<sup>9</sup> Upon watching Alvin Ailey’s *Revelations* again after reading this claim, I can agree with LaVinge. Ailey’s choreographic and staging choices of this piece elicit a strong response from viewers. The steps, music, lighting, and costumes all work together to convey a message. Alvin Ailey’s website, [alvinailey.org](http://alvinailey.org), explains that *Revelations* is a tribute to “African-American cultural heritage ‘sometimes sorrowful, sometimes jubilant, but always hopeful.’”<sup>10</sup> Even though I do not share a background in African-American culture or heritage, viewing *Revelations* still elicits a response. I can connect to the

piece because I can feel the sense of struggle and relate it to points in my life when I have struggled. I can connect to the sense of joy by relating to happy moments in my life. And I can connect to the sense of hope that I feel, is the works overall message. Hope in humankind, hope in the future of our world. It can also be noted that the Alvin Ailey dance company has a strong ethos. Many people identify with the choreographer which adds to their ethos and trustworthiness. Alvin Ailey has built a company that is very popular due to its ability to reach the viewer through rhetoric.

### Student Demographics

Day	Total Number of Students	ELL students	Gender	Students with special needs	Students with previous dance experience
A	33	1 - portugese 2 - spanish	17 - Male 16 - Female	1 - IEP 2 - 504	24
B	29	0	14 - Male 15 - Female	1 - IEP 2 - 504	14

### Unit Goals

- Students will create and perform their own choreography based on a personal experience, social issue, poem or topic.
- Students will analyze the rhetoric of their song choice, costume, and choreography
- Students will analyze solo's created by other students to decipher their meaning
- Students will understand and explore how perspective and experiences alter perception. For example, two students watching the same dance may find different meanings based on their culture, personal experiences etc
- Students will utilize appropriate audience etiquette
- Students will give peer feedback
- Students will self assess their work before presenting to the class
- Students will apply elements of time, space, weight and flow
- Students will execute technical skills from a variety of dance traditions

Refer to Appendix I – Teaching Standards for more details on learning objectives that are specific to the North Carolina Teaching Standards.

## Classroom Lessons and Activities

I have italicized the type of activity, then provided an explanation followed by the estimated time that I think the activity will take.

### Lesson 1 - Introduction to Music and Rhetoric

*Journal* - How do different kinds of music influence how you feel? Students are required to write 5 sentences for each journal entry. (5 minutes)

*Improvisation* - Lead students on a structured improvisation in moving to different kinds of music. Be sure to participate along with the students so you are showing them the types of things you want to see. Verbally give students insight on how the movement of each song might look encourage students to move around the room how the song makes them feel. Encourage students to try the quality as whole body vs. a specific body part. This will increase their exploration. Instead of using just arms or legs try using only the head or elbow etc.(5 minutes)

*Discussion* - Lead students in a discussion about how music influences the movement. (5 minutes)

### Lesson 2 - Movie Clips and Pathos

*Journal* - Pathos is a persuasive quality used to evoke emotion. This could be used in theater, movies, music etc. Think of an example of a movie, advertisement or piece of music that evokes an emotional response. Remember emotional could be happy, sad, joyful, hopeful etc. Students must write 5 sentences for each journal entry. (5 minutes)

*Guided Practice* - Watch the following videos and lead a class discussion on how the music in each video adds to a viewer's pathos. (20 minutes)

1. Circle of Life - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GibiNy4d4gc><sup>11</sup>
2. Stronger - Finding Neverland <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fevDew-8oSo><sup>12</sup>
3. Rocky - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMhDQFLwrAA><sup>13</sup>

### Lesson 3 - Campaign and Ethos

*Guided Practice and Journal* - Today, students will complete the activity first, then write a journal reflecting on the activity. Explain to students that the activity will have them explore ethos. Ethos is the believability and trustworthiness each person possesses. Today, students will choose a song to aid them in a silly debate. The goal is to choose a song that enhances their platform. Students must consider the ethos of the artist, as well as song lyrics. Students will choose a partner and choose a silly topic to debate about. They will present their silly campaign



topic and share a clip of the song they chose. Following the activity they will write a journal reflecting on today's activity. (30 minutes)

#### Lesson 4 - Dance and Rhetoric

*Journal* - Explain how costume, lighting, song choice, staging, etc. work together to enhance a dance performance.

*Guided Practice* - Watch the two videos below and lead students in a discussion about how the elements in video #2 helped tell the story.

1. The Greatest Showman Rehearsal Clip - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6Kh1eSQNFs><sup>14</sup>
2. The Greatest Show Clip - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkjhhqJ5511I><sup>15</sup>

#### Lesson 5 - Introduce Dance Solo Project

*Solo Project Intro* - Since today is the first day students are learning about the solo project, you will need to go over all the elements. You can either go over the handout on the projector or give each student a handout to begin and then go over it. Students will be creating a dance solo with given criteria. The solo will be based on a topic of the student's choice. It could be a personal experience, based on a poem or other story, a topic of interest to the student, etc. Students will choose a song and explain how that song helps their topic. Students are able to add lighting, costume and prop choices if they choose to. Students will need to explain their choreographic choices.

\*Following Lesson 5, students will need adequate work time to prepare the project. You may choose to have them work for less sessions for longer periods of time or more sessions for shorter periods of time. I suggest to provide 1 - 1.5 in class work hours. This time can be spent alone brainstorming or working in groups to bounce around ideas.

#### Lesson 6 - Peer Feedback and Self Evaluation

For this lesson, students will be performing for a small group of students to get feedback on their work. Students will also use the chromebook to video their performance so they can critique themselves.

#### Lesson 7 - Final Solo Presentation

In this final lesson students will present their work to the class. During this lesson you will formally evaluate each dance.

## Assessment

You can adapt the lessons and activities utilized in this unit to whatever assessment method works for you. I have outlined how I plan to assess students during given activities. However, feel free to make changes to allow the unit to better fit your students and your classroom. I have italicised the activities you saw in the lessons above for consistency.

*Journals* – In my classroom journals are counted as a formal grade. We complete a journal during each class period and students are expected to keep up and maintain a quality journal. They are required to have at least 5 sentences for each journal topic. As long as they have 5 sentences and their journal is written about the given topic, they receive full credit for that journal.

Participation Points – During each class period students are assessed on their participation. This includes *Discussion*, *Improvisation*, and *Guided Practice* activities. Students can receive up to 5 points each day for participation. I will take off points if students are not actively engaged during class. This is considered an informal grade.

Embedded Assessment - While this form of assessment does not result in an actual grade for the student it will help you understand what students know and do not know. Consistently during each class you should be asking yourself the following: Do the students understand the content? Are the students demonstrating their understanding of the content? Are the students dancing in a way that demonstrates their understanding of the content? If at any time during the duration of these lessons your answer is “no” you must find a way to cover a topic again. This could be as simple as stopping the class and verbally reviewing the content before continuing. Maybe you need to backtrack to the last activity and discuss it again. The goal of embedded assessment is to always ensure students are demonstrating their understanding, and ready to move forward.

*Final Solo Presentation*- Since this is a culminating activity this will be counted as a formal grade. Utilize the rubric in Appendix 2 to grade this presentation.

## Appendix I: Teaching Standards

### Lesson 1 - Introduction to Music and Rhetoric

- 8.DM.1.2 Apply combinations of time, space, weight, and flow in dance.

### Lesson 2 - Movie Clips and Pathos, Lesson 3 - Campaign and Ethos, Lesson 4 - Dance and Rhetoric

- 8.C.1.2 Exemplify connections between dance and concepts in other curricular areas.

### Lesson 5 - Introduce Dance Solo Project

- 8.CP.1.2 Create dances that fulfill aesthetic criteria including: beginning, development of an idea, resolution, and end; use of variety in the elements of dance; artistic form; and communication of the intent of the choreographer.
- 8.CP.1.3 Organize dance sequences into simple dances that communicate ideas, experiences, feeling, images, or stories.
- 8.C.1.2 Exemplify connections between dance and concepts in other curricular areas.
- 8.DM.1.2 Apply combinations of time, space, weight, and flow in dance.
- 8th Grade English Language Arts standard:
  - SL.8.5 Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

### Lesson 6 - Peer Feedback and Self Evaluation

- 8.CP.2.3 Integrate self-assessment, teacher feedback, and peer feedback in the process of refining dance performance.

### Lesson 7 - Final Solo Presentation

- 8.R.1.2 Use multiple perspectives and criteria in evaluating dances.
- 8th grade English Language Arts standard:
  - CCR Anchor Standard: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

**Appendix 2: Solo Handout**

Dancing solo written components      Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Topic:** Write a paragraph describing what your dance is about.

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**Elements of Dance Checklist:** Your dance must utilize the following elements. Explain where/ how you use these elements in your dance.

- use of high, middle, and low level \_\_\_\_\_
  - use of both fast and slow tempo \_\_\_\_\_
  - use of symmetrical and asymmetrical \_\_\_\_\_
- 

**Song Choice:** Write the name of the song and artist and explain how this song relates to your topic/ dance.

Name of Song: \_\_\_\_\_

Artist: \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

**Other Elements:** Explain your choice to use or not use other elements such as: costume, lighting, staging, props etc. \_\_\_\_\_

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Dance Steps – Fill out the following chart once your dance is COMPLETE

Dance Step	Explain how this step helps show your topic

## Appendix 2: Solo Presentation Rubric

Points - Criteria	0 - No Evidence	1 - Developing	2 - Accomplished	3 - Distinguished
Knowledge of the Steps	Less than 50% of the choreography matches what is written on the chart.	At least 50% of the choreography matches what is written on the chart.	At least 80% of the choreography matches what is written on the chart.	The choreography in the performance matches what is written on the chart.
Focus	Did not utilize.	Had over 3 “breaks” in focus.	Had between 1-3 “breaks” in focus.	Maintained focus for the duration of the performance.
Clarity	Less than 50% of the quality is clear.	At least 50% of the choreography is clear.	At least 80% of the choreography is clear.	The choreography is clear and has a polished quality.
Utilizes fast and slow tempo.	None.	Tempo changes are unclear/ not overly apparent.	Tempo changes are present, clear and apparent.	Uses a variety of <i>clear</i> tempo changes.
Space - Levels	None.	One level is used.	Two levels are used.	All three levels are used and clearly seen in final performance.
Symmetrical/ Asymmetrical	None.	Utilizes one, not both,	Uses of both symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes.	Use of both symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes is clearly seen in final performance.
Audience Etiquette	Did not utilize.	Had over 3 “breaks” in audience etiquette.	Had between 1-3 “breaks” in audience etiquette.	Showed all positive audience etiquette traits with 0 “breaks in audience etiquette.
Written Components Page 1	Did not complete.	Some written components on page 1 are complete.	Most written components on page 1 are complete.	All written components on page 1 are complete.
Dance step chart (written components page 2)	Did not complete.	Some written components on page 2 are complete.	Most written components on page 2 are complete.	All written components on page 2 are complete.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Score: \_\_\_\_\_ / 30 point

## **Resources**

List of materials needed for classroom use:

Chromebooks or other electronic device to access the internet

This will be used in many lessons to write the journal, to look up music, plan solo presentation and record solo dance.

Projector

Used for videos and examples

Paper Hand Outs

Used for solo project information and peer/ self evaluation

## **Student Resources**

Circle of Life Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GibiNy4d4gc>

Stronger - Finding Neverland Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fevDew-8oSo>

The Greatest Showman Rehearsal Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6Kh1eSQNFs>

The Greatest Showman Movie Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkjhqJ55I1I>

Students will watch these videos in class

Journal Link: [tinyurl.com/journal8a](https://tinyurl.com/journal8a) and [tinyurl.com/journal8b](https://tinyurl.com/journal8b)

Students will utilize this google form to submit their journal entries

## End Notes

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1. Walker and Welsky, *Achievement Data, Key Findings*.
2. Ruppert, *Critical Evidence How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*
3. Robinson and Aronica. *TedTalk*
4. Sousa, *AASA*
5. *New England Journal of Medicine*
6. Swartz, *Integrating Arts, Art is not extra, it's integral*.
7. Kassing, *Discovering Dance, 44*.
8. Bannerman, *Dance Research*
9. LaVinge, *Rhetorical Moves: Pursuing the Potential for Movement in the Arts of Rhetoric and Dance*
10. [Alvinailey.org](http://Alvinailey.org)
11. Circle of Life Video
12. Finding Neverland Video
13. Rocky Video
14. Greatest Showman Rehearsal Video
15. Greatest Showman Show Video



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Example of pathos

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkjhqJ5511I>.

Example of rhetoric elements