



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1995 Volume II: Film and Literature

Living Pictures Representing the History of Black Dance

Guide for Curriculum Unit 95.02.03
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The proposed unit, “Living Pictures Representing the History of Black Dance,” is intended to teach students to use research for choreography. Students will embark on a study of the history through books, photography, poetry and paintings. The collected data will be used to reinterpret their findings and tell stories through dance. The culmination of these stories will ultimately be presented in a video that the students will shoot together.

The video format will consist of various poses or pictures taken from the photography of a noted black photographer, James Van der Zee. We will also draw upon paintings and pictures that depict dance or inspired dances. Each picture will be reenacted by students as a living still life that evolves into story told through movement.

Students will initiate the project with an African dance chosen to represent nobility and a great civilization they don't often see. The first chapter of *Roots*, by Alex Haley, seems an appropriate first reading.

We will then study black pioneers in modern dance, like Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus. These great women studied anthropology and traveled extensively to study the influence of African dance on other cultures. They also applied their knowledge to future choreography. These women and others famous for dance, like Alvin Ailey, are profiled in *Black Dance in America*, by James Haskins. This text will serve as an invaluable tool in preparation for the video.

Videos on African and ethnic dance are available for rental and will be shown to the students both to serve as a model and to inspire choreography.

The poetry of Langston Hughes will also serve as a source of inspiration. It will be both challenging and fun for the students to match pictures to the poetry of Hughes. His poems will also be used in the video.

The culmination of all art forms will result in a promising video which through its preparation will hopefully excite as well as enlighten students about the history of black dance and its influence on dance in general.

(Recommended for Dance/Drama, grades 6-8)

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