

Kathaka:

Dancing Rhythms and Stories of India Educational Guide, Grades K-12



About the Performance

The ancient art of Kathak is one of the eight forms of Indian classical dance. Its name comes from the Sanskrit word for “story.” Kathak dancers use rapid footwork and graceful gestures to tell traditional Indian stories with irresistible rhythms, captivating choreography, and improvisation. Through movement, music, and math, Kathaka dancer Anjali Nath will also perform “Kathak Yoga,” a technique which unifies the recitation of taal (rhythm), the singing of a melody, and the dancing of complex footwork and rapid spins. Throughout the program, students will use mathematics to help the dancer keep time, and a few volunteers will get to learn some basic Kathak dance steps.



About the Artist

Anjali Nath is a senior disciple of Pandit Chitresh Das and Chhandika artistic director Gretchen Hayden. Anjali has been engaging audiences through performance and educational outreach from the US to India since 1997. She is known for her swift chakkars (spins), crisp footwork and delicate abhinaya (gesture). Anjali’s solo performances are rooted deeply in the Kathak tradition and dazzling to watch. Anjali holds a Masters in Public Health from Boston University and a B.A. in Psychology from Tufts University. She has passionately pursued her career in Kathak and public health simultaneously for over 27 years working with communities and engaging youth in leadership and activities to improve self esteem and overall health and well-being.

Program Learning Goals

1. To identify the key elements of Kathak, North Indian classical dance.
2. To explore the history, philosophy, storytelling, and performance practices of Kathak.
3. To foster an appreciation for and connection to the art of Kathak by emphasizing its important values and traditions.

Essential Questions

1. How do Kathak dancers use gesture to create meaning and tell stories?
2. How does your family and community tell stories?
3. What role do math and rhythm play in Kathak dance?

Kathaka:

Dancing Rhythms and Stories of India Educational Guide, Grades K-12

Vocabulary

- **Taal (beat):** the steady pulse of a song or piece of music
- **Laya (rhythm):** a strong pattern of notes or beats in music
- **Bhav:** the emotion that a dancer brings to the performance
- **Abhinaya:** the dancer's facial expressions, gestures, and body language
- **Chakkars:** the rapid and graceful spins performed by dancers

Key Facts and Cultural Context for Students

Storytelling Through Dance

Kathak dance is used to tell stories. Its name comes from the Sanskrit words *katha*, meaning "story," and *kathakar* which means "the one who tells a story" or "to do with stories." Kathak dancers use specific hand gestures, movements, and facial expressions to bring characters and events to life. Kathak is one of the eight forms of Indian classical dance and has evolved over hundreds of years to include rhythm, footwork, movement, and spins. The four key elements are **Tayari** (powerful technique), **Layakari** (deep understanding of rhythm), **Khubsoorti** (beauty and grace) and **Nazakat** (subtly in movement and expression).



Where Does Kathak Dance Come From?

Just like the USA, India is a large country with many different states. Kathak dance originated in Northern India in Lucknow and Jaipur.



Kathaka:

Dancing Rhythms and Stories of India Educational Guide, Grades K-12



Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about India and Indian dance? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What kinds of dance are you familiar with? Where are those dances popular?
- What are ways that you can communicate without using words?

Pre-Performance Activity: Kathak, North Indian Classical Dance

Learning Goal:

To explore the geographic and historical context of Kathak dance

Materials:

Maps:

- World map
- Map of India

YouTube videos:

- [Traditional Kathak Solo by Anjali Nath](#)
- [Chhandika Dance Performance at TEDxNatick](#) (beginning until 6:15)



Directions:

1. Talk about India. Find it on a map, point out different regions, identify Lucknow, Jaipur, Kolkata (Calcutta) and Mumbai (Bombay). Ask students what they know about India and what they would like to learn.
2. Tell students that they will be seeing a performance of Kathak, an ancient storytelling dance tradition which has evolved over hundreds of years and includes rhythm, footwork, movement, and spins.
3. Watch the YouTube videos which feature Kathak dance. What do you notice? What do you wonder about? How is it similar to other dance forms? How is it different?
4. Ask students to write or describe something they observed or learned from the video.
5. Discuss students' observations.

Extensions:

- Research the history of Kathak dance (*see Further Resources on page 5*) and its significance in North Indian culture. Write a paragraph about your findings.
- Write down a question to ask the dancer after the performance.

Kathaka:

Dancing Rhythms and Stories of India Educational Guide, Grades K-12



Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- How is Kathak dance similar or different to other dance styles? What other types of dance are used to tell stories?
- What did you notice about the relationship between the music and rhythm of the dance and the footwork and hand gestures of the dancer?
- How did the dancer's movements and gestures combine with music and spoken word to convey meaning and emotion?

Post-Performance Activity: Understanding Kathak Philosophy and Principals

Learning Goal:

To explore the history, philosophy, creativity, and improvisation of Kathak dance

Materials:

Paper, pens/pencils, large space to sit or stand in circle



Notes for the teacher:

This lesson gives students the opportunity to explore two elements of Kathak dance:

Seva (selfless sacrifice) and **Upaj** (meaning "from the heart" or improvisation).

Directions:

1. Discuss the meaning of Seva, or selfless sacrifice. Talk about how it means thinking about someone else, what they might be going through, and what they might need. Note that the first lesson is to always take care of your needs so that you are able to help others.
2. Have students write down one thing they promise to do to take care of themselves and one thing they will do to help someone else, even if just once (i.e. get your parent a glass of water after they come home from work, help someone with a task, etc.).
3. Put students into pairs or small groups to share their ideas and to discuss other ways to help those around them. Explore how art, dance, and music can be used to help others.
4. Discuss the meaning of Upaj ("from the heart") in reference to the idea of improvisation. What does it mean to improvise? How can improvisation be "from the heart"?
5. Choose a story or theme to develop a skit around (i.e. a favorite folktale, the current season, a recent classroom event, etc.).

...continued on next page

Kathaka:

Dancing Rhythms and Stories of India Educational Guide, Grades K-12



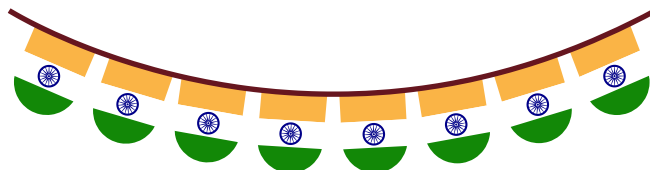
Post-Performance Activity, continued

Directions, continued:

6. Break into small groups and ask each group to create a skit without using words. It should contain both planned and improvised elements, and focus on conveying meaning and plot through movements, gestures, and expressions. Explore pairing the skit with music or rhythm to add depth.
7. Perform the skits for the class.
8. Discuss students' observations as audience members and ask creators to describe their process. Reflect on other ways students could share their stories without words.

Extensions:

- Plan a class service project to help the school or community.
- Think of a story to share. It could be a true story about a personal experience or a folktale or fairytale. What kinds of movements could be used to tell this story? Fit these movements to a rhythm to create a danced story. Share with friends and family.



Further Resources

- [Anjali Nath Artist Website](#)
- [“What is Kathak Dance?” Article by Katha Dance Theatre](#)
- [“Kathak Dance” Article on Cultural India](#)
- [The Kennedy Center's Digital Indian Arts Collection](#)
- Bilan, Jasbinder: *My Incredible India*, Candlewick (2023)
- Chowdhury, Radhiah: *The Katha Chest*, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers (2022)
- Patel, Meenal: *Priya Dreams of Marigolds & Masala*, Beaver's Pond Press (2019)
- Senzai, N.H.: *Ticket to India*, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers (2015)
- Soundar, Chitra: *Mangoes, Mischief, and Tales of Friendship: Stories From India*, Candlewick Press (2019)

Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Dance and Theatre

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (D.Cr.01, T.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (D.Cr.02, T.Cr.02)

Performing

- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (D.P.06, T.P.06)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (D.R.07, T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (D.R.08, T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (D.R.09, T.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (D.Co.10, T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (D.Co.11, T.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

History and Social Science

K

- Topic 1: Civics: classroom citizenship (HSS.K.T1)
- Topic 3: History: shared traditions (HSS.K.T3)

Grade 1

- Topic 1: Civics: communities, elections, and leadership (HSS.1.T1)
- Topic 3: History: unity and diversity in the United States (HSS.1.T3)

Grade 2

- Topic 2: Geography and its effects on people (HSS.2.T2)
- Topic 3: History: migrations and cultures (HSS.2.T3)

...continued on next page

Kathaka:

Dancing Rhythms and Stories of India Educational Guide, Grades K-12

Curricular Connections, continued

History and Social Science, continued

Grade 6

- Topic 1: Studying complex societies, past and present (HSS.6.T1)

Grade 7

- Topic 1a: Physical and political geography of Central and South Asia (HSS.7.T1a)
- Topic 1b: Early Indian and Central Asian civilizations, religions, and cultures (HSS.7.T1b)

Mathematics

Counting and Cardinality

- Know number names and the count sequence. (K.CC.A)
- Count to tell the number of objects. (K.CC.B)
- Compare numbers. (K.CC.C)

Measurement and Data

- Classify objects and count the number of objects in each category. (K.MD.B)
- Represent and interpret data. (1.MD.C, 4.MD.B)

Geometry

- Analyze, compare, create, and compose shapes. (K.G.B)
- Reason with shapes and their attributes. (1.G.A)

Number and Operations - Fractions

- Develop understanding of fractions as numbers for fractions with denominators 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8. (3.NF.A)

