

Urbanity Dance

Dancing in Each Other's Shoes

Educational Guide, Grades PreK-8



About the Performance

Drawing from the techniques and traditions of various dance styles including classical ballet, modern, hip hop, and styles from around the world, **Urbanity** dance artists use cutting edge contemporary dance to communicate a story of empathy, partnership, and emotion. This fresh and highly interactive performance celebrates diversity and encourages community. Through the art of movement, students are encouraged to foster a fuller understanding of themselves, their relationships, and will ultimately be inspired and empowered to utilize lessons of self-expression and acceptance in all aspects of their lives.



About the Artists

Urbanity Dance, a Boston-based dance company, exists to inspire, engage, and empower individuals and communities through the art of dance and movement. The Company's hyper-athletic aesthetic aims to bridge the gap between concert and commercial dance. Known for its effortless curves and use of breath, Urbanity places a strong emphasis on the foundations of modern, jazz, and ballet, while also utilizing the highly detailed gesture work and hard-hitting articulation usually associated with Hip Hop Dance. Hailed by *The Improper Bostonian*, *Boston Magazine*, and *The Boston Globe*, Urbanity has presented at venues and festivals across the United States including Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, The Alvin Ailey Citigroup Theater, and The Institute of Contemporary Art. Additionally, Urbanity runs a contemporary dance school for students of all ages and partners with schools, hospitals, and homeless shelters in the Greater Boston community.

Program Learning Goals

1. To experience and describe dance generally, and note influences to dance, such as music, culture, and expression.
2. To explore a range of diverse movement styles and observe the visual, qualitative, and expressive attributes of each style.
3. To highlight diversity and community within the context of dance, connecting these concepts to students' own life experiences, those of their peers, and to the world.

Essential Questions

1. What is dance and what words can we use to describe different styles of dance?
2. How can dance help us to express ourselves?
3. How can we celebrate and affirm the various cultural backgrounds and identities of others?

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Vocabulary

- **Beat:** the steady pulse of a song or piece of music
- **Rhythm:** a strong pattern of notes or beats in music
- **Tempo:** the speed of a song or piece of music
- **Choreography:** planning and arranging the movements, steps, and patterns of dancers
- **Composition:** a piece of music, dance, art, or literature
- **Improvisation:** composing, executing, or arranging something in real time

Key Facts and Context for Students

What is Dance?

Dance is a form of artistic expression that involves moving the body, often inspired by music. There are many lineages or traditions of dance, including some passed down over generations through one's family or cultural heritage, and some learned in a dance studio with an expert dance teacher. Each style has its own expression, vocabulary, techniques, and cultural significance. Dance allows people to express a range of emotions, from joy and celebration to sorrow and longing. Dance may be performed or presented to audiences on stages in theaters, on streets, or in social gatherings. Dance may be improvised (dancers create movements on the spot), or choreographed (a specific sequence of movements planned and repeatedly rehearsed). Dance also serves as a special way to communicate, tell stories, share about the human experience, and connect people beyond language barriers.



More About Urbanity Dance

Urbanity Dance is a nonprofit arts organization that exists to inspire, engage, and empower individuals and communities through the art of dance and movement. Founded by **Director Betsi Graves**, Urbanity Dance was created in 2011 in the spirit of three goals: to propel dance to the forefront of Boston's cultural landscape, to serve an unmet demand for access to affordable and accessible dance training, and to leverage dance as a tool to foster bodily autonomy and creativity in local schools and community spaces.

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Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What kinds of dance are you familiar with? Where are those dances popular?
- What are ways that you can communicate without using words?
- What do you think different cultures can communicate through dance?

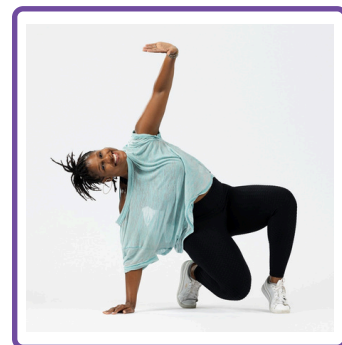
Pre-Performance Activity: Dancing in Each Other's Shoes

Learning Goals:

- To explore themes of diversity and community safely within the context of dance and movement.
- To connect these themes to students' own life experiences as well as those of their peers and the world around them.

Materials:

Shoe and footprint templates (see *pages 4 and 5*), art supplies, old magazines and newspapers



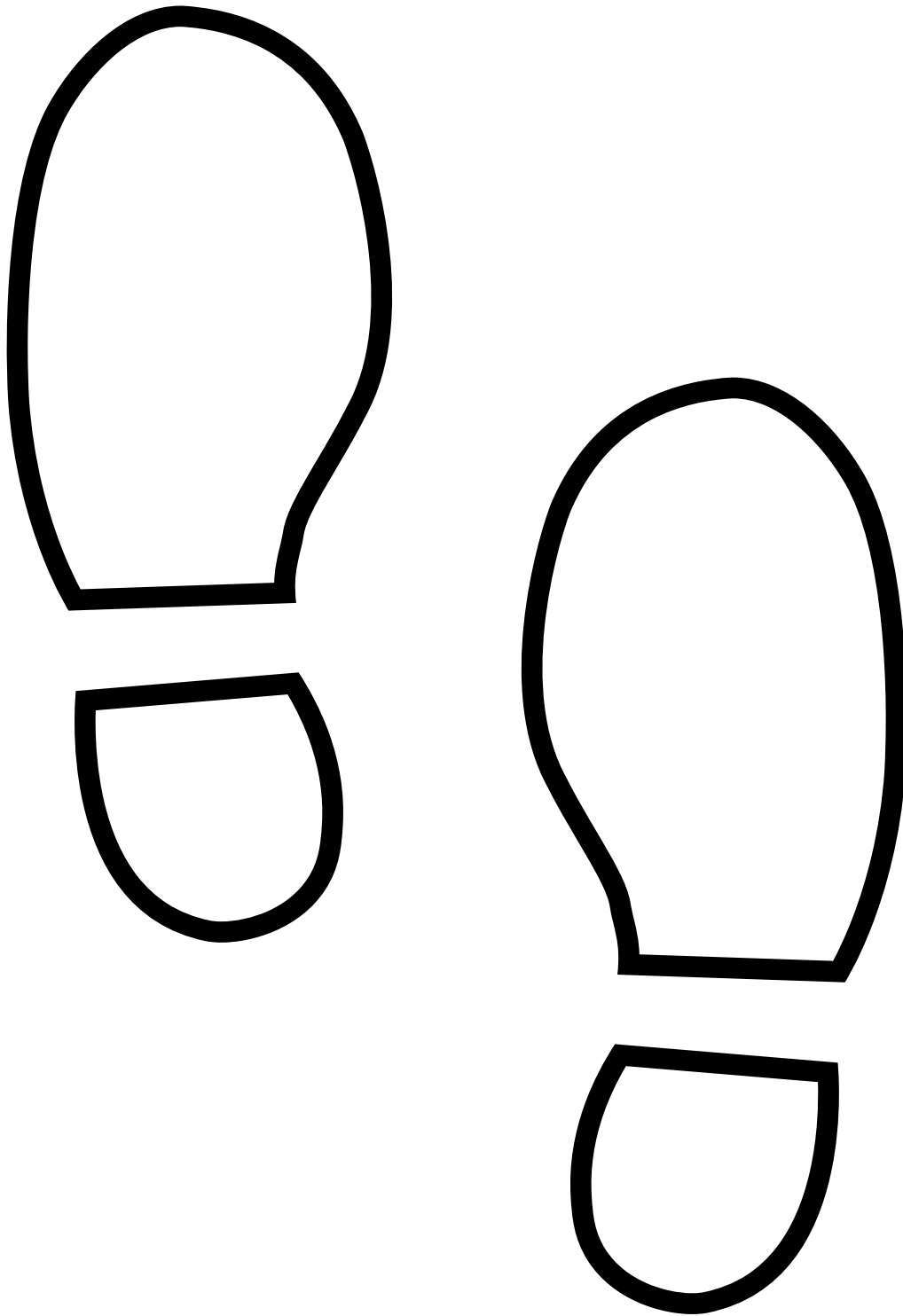
Notes for the teacher:

Projects can be scaled up or down based on availability of information, time, and supplies. For example, students may find it a valuable experience to interview family members to learn more about a specific element of their unique cultural heritage, but this is not necessary. A school or community library would be an excellent resource for students in conducting their research, but the internet might be an easier and faster option.

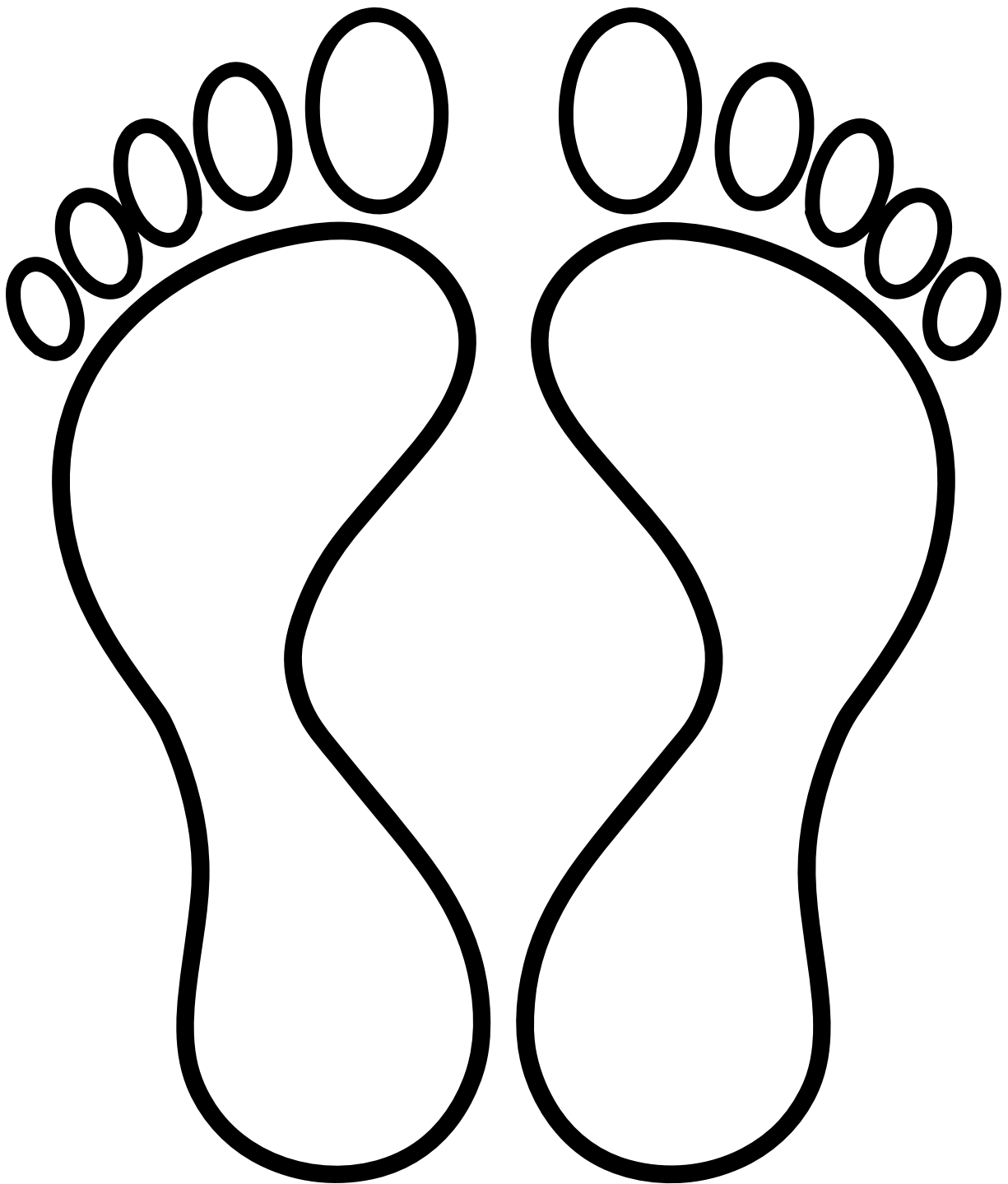
Directions:

1. Discuss different types of dance. What styles are students familiar with? Are there dancers in the class?
2. Ask each student to pick a style of dance to learn about that is representative of an aspect of their culture. Where is this dance style from? How do you do the dance? What do you wear while dancing? Are there special holidays, celebrations, or events that feature this dance? What type of music accompanies this dance?
3. Have students create their own unique pair of dancing shoes inspired by the dance style/dancers they've researched by embellishing one of the templates provided.
4. Take turns presenting the dancing shoes along with short descriptions about the dance styles and why they are important to each student. If possible, ask students to teach the rest of the class how to perform the dance!
5. Discuss similarities and differences between dance styles. What do students notice about the different cultures, music, and celebrations?

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Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What was your favorite part of the performance? Why? What did it teach you?
- How does the dancing from the performance compare to dance styles that you are familiar with? Did the dancers move in new and interesting ways?
- What did you learn about yourself and your community while participating in the performance?

Post-Performance Activity: Telling a Moving Story

Learning Goals:

- To understand the importance of both verbal and nonverbal communication and honesty in friendship and partnership.
- To explore the unique lens of contemporary dance movements through collaboration with peers.

Materials:

An open space



Notes for the teacher:

- Students must understand that the movements they create are completely up to them! These authentic movements may be literal, interpretive, abstract, or anything in between, as long as they do not place the mover or their peers in danger (whether emotional or physical).
- For a portion of this activity, students will need to work in pairs.
- Student pairs may feel more comfortable performing their phrases in a casual circle of their peers, with pairs presenting one after the other. This will also significantly decrease down time between pairs.

Directions:

1. Ask students to think of a memorable moment from childhood which they can describe in a word phrase which is 10 words or fewer. For example: "Eating ice cream with my mom on the steps."
2. Have students create a short movement phrase that corresponds with their word phrase. To start, encourage students to assign a specific gesture or movement to each word of their original phrase. For example: "eating" might be represented with an exaggerated chewing motion, "ice" might be a dramatized shiver, linking words like "with" might be a skip, hop, or spin, etc.

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Post-Performance Activity, continued

Directions, continued:

3. Have each student share their moment with a partner using both their word and movement phrases.
4. Have each student teach their partner the movement phrase they created individually.
5. Task pairs with working together to create a single new movement phrase that integrates the movement phrases created by both partners.
6. Perform the final integrated movement phrases for the class. Encourage audiences to be supportive and cheer for their classmates.
7. Discuss the performances. How were the dances similar and different from each other? What was challenging about combining movement phrases? How do the word phrases connect to the movements in the movement phrases?



Further Resources

- [Urbanity Dance Website](#)
- [Urbanity Dance YouTube Channel](#)
- [The Kennedy Center's Digital Dance Collection](#)
- Acevedo, Linda: *Breaking to the Beat!*, Lee & Low Books (2023)
- Cline-Ransome, Lisa: *My Story, My Dance: Robert Battle's Journey to Alvin Ailey*, Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman Books (2015)
- Copeland, Misty: *Firebird*, G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers (2014)
- Jain, Mahak: *Bharatanatyam in Ballet Shoes*, Annick Press (2022)
- Rhodes, Jewell Parker and Kelly McWilliams: *Soul Step*, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers (2024)
- Schofield-Morrison, Connie: *I Got the Rhythm*, Bloomsbury U.S.A. Children's Books (2014)
- Thundercloud, Ria: *Finding My Dance*, Penguin Workshop (2022)
- Tonatiah, Duncan: *Danza!: Amalia Hernández and El Ballet Folklórico de México*, Abrams Books for Young Readers (2017)

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Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Dance, Music, and Theatre

Creating

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

Performing

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

Responding

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

Connecting

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

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)



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Curricular Connections, continued

History and Social Science

PreK

- Topic 1: Civics: fairness, friendship, responsibility, and respect (HSS.Pre-K.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: maps and places (HSS.Pre-K.T2)
- Topic 3: History: personal experiences and memories (HSS.Pre-K.T3)

K

- Topic 1: Civics: classroom citizenship (HSS.K.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: connections among places (HSS.K.T2)
- Topic 3: History: shared traditions (HSS.K.T3)

Grade 1

- Topic 1: Civics: communities, elections, and leadership (HSS.1.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: places to explore (HSS.1.T2)
- Topic 3: History: unity and diversity in the United States (HSS.1.T3)

Grade 2

- Topic 3: History: migrations and cultures (HSS.2.T3)

Grade 6

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

