POWER ON POINTE
BY DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM
NOVEMBER 6, 2018
ABOUT THE COMPANY

Dance Theatre of Harlem uses the art form of classical ballet to change people’s lives.

HOW IT BEGAN
In 1969, shortly after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook founded the Dance Theatre of Harlem. Nurtured by the optimism and idealism of the Civil Rights Era, the school began with classes taught in a garage on 152nd Street in Harlem, the community in New York City in which Arthur Mitchell grew up. The school’s curriculum was designed to give the children of Harlem the same opportunities that Mitchell had as a teenager, providing black students a chance to dance ballet professionally or even the access to classes to help them train. Dance Theatre of Harlem flourished and a professional company was born.

AROUND THE WORLD
DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM HAVE:

- Performed in 46 States, The District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands
- Performed in over 280 cities in North America
- Performed on 6 continents, in 44 countries
- Performed at the White House, the Closing Ceremony for the Olympics, and on Sesame Street

THE FUTURE OF DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM
Arthur Mitchell died in 2018, but the company lives on under a second generation of artists inspired by his vision. Click on the video to see an interview with Virginia Johnson, the artistic director of Dance Theatre of Harlem. Dancers also share the importance of their art and about the legacy and future of the ballet.
ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

POWER ON POINTE

“I feel like dance is able to communicate to everyone despite language or age, and the ‘power’ that we bring is a message of hope, unity and possibility. And ‘on pointe’ is a fun pun. It’s a little bit sassy—which I’m all about!” — Lindsey Croop, Dance Theatre of Harlem Ballerina (Pointe Magazine)

Dance Theatre of Harlem has many dances in their repertoire. They will perform four pieces for us in the performance at Des Moines Civic Center.

HARLEM ON MY MIND
Described as a love letter to Harlem, Harlem On My Mind, was created by an acclaimed African-American choreographer, Darrell Grand Moultrie, who grew up in Harlem and attended one of the dance company’s lectures and demonstrations in his youth. The work is also a love letter to jazz, with music by Wynton Marsalis, Count Basie and Chris Botti.

DANCING ON THE FRONT PORCH OF HEAVEN
Dancing on the Front Porch of Heaven, with music by Arvo Pärt, is a tribute for friends and family members lost to death. Love is at the center of the dancing. The choreographer wanted to push the dancers to the very edge of what they could do. The ballet is in four sections: Love, Friendship, Loss and Letting Go. We’ll see just the first movement in our performance.

ADAGIETTO #5
Adagietto No. 5 entered the Dance Theatre of Harlem repertory in 1976 and is being reprised. Arthur Mitchell saw the work (created by British Choreographer Royston Maldoom) when Dance Theatre of Harlem was on tour in England and decided that he immediately wanted to add the ballet to the company’s repertoire. It is an abstract work with music by Gustav Mahler for 3 dancers, 2 men & 1 woman, that lends itself to many interpretations.

Gustav Mahler wrote Adagietto #5, one of his most frequently performed works in 1902. It is said to represent a love song to his wife, Alma. The composer left a small poem about the work:

How much I love you, you are my sun
I cannot tell you that with words.
I can only lament to you my longing
(and my love, my bliss!)

BALAMOUK
Balamouk is a brand new ballet for Dance Theatre of Harlem. The world premiere is only one month before our performance! The music is definitely not what you might expect for a ballet so come to see the performance with an open mind.

Listen to the music in Balamouk by clicking the links:
Balamouk by Les Yeux Noirs
Shadow Hunter by Lisa Gerrard
L’abîme by René Aubry
DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM & CIVIL RIGHTS

In order to understand the importance of the Dance Theatre of Harlem, you have to understand the background of racial discrimination of the 1960s in New York City. Though Harlem was a neighborhood that was largely made of black families and business it was still nearly impossible to imagine that black dancers would be given an opportunity to dance at the highest levels in the mostly-white world of classical ballet in New York or elsewhere. Racist ideas fueled the perception that black people were unable to perform classical dance. Undaunted, Arthur Mitchell was offered a scholarship to the School of American Ballet. His intention was to do in dance what Jackie Robinson did in baseball. The arts have long been used by oppressed people as a means to protest and create social change, and dancer Arthur Mitchell set out to achieve just that.

Arthur Mitchell was successful, dancing on stages around the world, when the murder of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. occurred in April 1968. This important moment in history sparked Mitchell to move forward with his plans to use dance-as-protest right in the neighborhood and with the people he grew up with. Mitchell’s effort towards equality was to found the Dance Theatre of Harlem, where black dancers would be given the opportunity to dance ballet where there previously had been none. Mitchell used ballet as defiance, a way to refuse to allow others to define him and black people, in the same way activists around the country practiced civil disobedience through political protest.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
Why do you think they titled this piece “the Movement?”

The lyrics to the song say:
“Let every challenge show the world how strong you are
Let every hurdle grant a deeper sense of purpose
Though we might falter because the journey seems too far
We Keep Moving, Keep Moving, Keep Moving”

How does the song connect with the content that is shown on the TV?
BALLET CLASS
Every ballet dancer from student to professional who is serious about perfecting his or her art begins each day with a ballet class. A typical class is divided into two parts, the barre and the center.

BARRE
During the barre, dancers execute specific movements to warm up and develop dexterity and control of the muscles of the legs and feet as well as coordination with the upper body. A barre is a horizontal rod or pipe that is placed approximately 3.5 feet from the floor and is used for support. Dancers hold onto the barre with one hand while they exercise the opposite leg. In a normal class exercises are done on the right and left sides.

CENTER
In the center, dancers use the full range of body movement as well as space to execute the movements.

POINTE
Female dancers work ‘sur les pointes’, or on the tips of their toes. To accomplish this, female dancers wear special shoes called pointe shoes.

ADAGIO
Men and women come together again in adagio, or partnering class, in which the male dancer accompanies the female dancer in turns and lifts.

REPERTOIRE
Because ballet was first codified in the court of Louis XIV, the terminology is in French. For a ballet company, repertoire is the collection of dances that a ballet company performs in any given season. Repertoire puts into practice the movement vocabulary—or steps—of class as building blocks for making dances. We will experience four selections from the company’s repertoire. Varied in length and style, the excerpts show how music, steps and dynamics come together to create a dance.

CHOREOGRAPHER
A choreographer is a person who puts movement together to create dance. “Choreo” from the Greek (khoreia), means dance, and “graphe,” means writing. As the person who writes music is the composer, the person who makes dances is the choreographer. In ballet, almost all dances are made up of steps that are put together like words in a sentence.

COMPOSER
A composer is a person who puts sounds together to create music. Each composer makes use of key elements such as meter, rhythm and harmony in a different way. The composers of the excerpts seen in the Dance Theatre of Harlem performance draw on the tradition of western classical music and the African American experience.
HISTORY OF BALLET
People have always danced. In many cultures around the world, dance is a social activity that brings people together to share common ideas or emotions. Dance may also be a part of religious practice or even to bring rain or a good harvest. Dance can also connect a people to their traditions and convey history. Dance can be a form of entertainment. Dance may be improvised or highly structured.

One of the most structured forms of dance is ballet. Ballet began in the 17th-century in the court of Louis XIV in France. In the beginning, the dances told stories about supernatural beings such as gods and fairies and consisted of sequences of steps in elaborate floor patterns. Today ballet has many styles, some of which are included in the performance.

BASIC MOVEMENTS
In ballet, execution of the steps is important and there are certain rules that must be obeyed. For example, movement is done using what is called turnout. Turnout is the outward rotation of the legs from the hips, which means that the knees and the toes point away from the center line of the body. Also, all steps begin and end with one of the five basic positions of the feet. These positions were developed in the 1700s and have remained the same ever since.

The ballet movements have French names because of ballet’s beginning in the French court. You might look for them in the dances performed during the program and other ballet performances.

MOVEMENTS IN DANCE
First learn to pronounce the terminology given below, learn the definition, and then attempt to do the movement described.

PLIE (plee-ay): to bend
Keeping both feet flat on the floor at all times, bend your knees. Remember to send your knees directly out over your toes!

RELEVE (ruh-leh-vay ‘): to rise
This can be done on one foot or both feet together. Start with the feet together, keep the knees straight and lift the heels high enough so all of your body weight is on the balls of the feet – NOT the tips of your toes. Repeat this on one foot.

SAUTE (soh-tay): to jump
This sort of jump is performed “two feet to two feet.” This means that you leave the ground by jumping off of both feet at the same time and you land on both feet at the same time. Begin in a plie (as described above). Using your feet the same way you did to perform releve, propel yourself into the air. Be sure to straighten and extend your legs in the air, but land in plie to cushion your knees.
OBJECTIVE: Students will work with a partner to replicate the dance positions illustrated in the photos below.

MATERIALS: Teacher may choose to print flashcards of each of the movement cards for each set of students or project the positions and work as a large group. If students are creating their own cards - they will need scissors and the printed sheets.

ACTIVITY: In ballet, there are five basic positions of the feet and of the arms, numbered one through five. Each of the positions utilizes turn-out, or a 90-degree rotation of the leg from the hip joint. Refer to the pictures below and the next page. Match your feet and arms to each of them to the best of your ability. Remember: Dancers work many years to achieve a full 90-degree turn-out!

EXTENSION: Print copies for students and cut out as flashcards for practice.
WAIT... WHERE’S THIRD POSITION?

Third position is rarely used anymore because with the high degree of turnout of today’s dancers, it looks too similar to Fifth Position.
LESSON 1:
OBJECTIVE: Students will read a short piece on the Civil Rights Movement’s connection to Dance Theatre of Harlem and note their observations and connections on research response sheet (page i).
MATERIALS: Printed copy of the article (page ii) of this guide or projected copy, connection to internet if using Padlet OR copies of the printable response sheet.
ACTIVITY: Students can use highlighters to outline main ideas in each paragraph. Students may also use post-it notes to make observations or connections or to note questions that they are still curious about after reading the article.
EXTENSION: Watch this video about Dance Theatre of Harlem’s decision to change from the traditional pink shoes and tights to shades that match the skin colors of the dancers.

THINK ABOUT IT!

CONSIDER: Why do you think the choice of shoes matters?

How can you connect the shoes to the larger themes in the article on Civil Rights?

LESSON 2:
OBJECTIVE: Student will complete additional research on the Civil Rights Movement in Harlem, New York City in the summer of 1964.
MATERIALS: Internet access and research form (page iii)
ACTIVITY: Assign small groups of individual students to read or listen to the article links below. Using the research form students can take notes about their main findings and what they have continued questions about.
Note: The linked articles deal with progressively mature subject matter and complex topics surrounding the Civil Rights movement, including violence. Teachers may wish to include additional context and support.
Thank you for coming to see Dance Theatre of Harlem!

Consider the following questions and chose a few to include in a letter to Des Moines Performing Arts.

• What was most surprising to you from the performance?
• Describe a moment in the show when you felt inspired. Why did that inspire you?
• Which moment do you remember most from the performance? What was happening?
• How was this performance different from others shows you have seen?
• Describe your idea of ballet before the show and how you think of it now.
• What was your favorite dance from the show? Why?
• If you were going to tell a friend about the performance, how would you describe it?

We love to hear from students about their experience!

Send your class letter or email to:
Des Moines Performing Arts Education
221 Walnut Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50309
Or email education@desmoinesperformingarts.org

Dance Theatre of Harlem has toured and danced all around the world, including the the White House! Watch this video of Dance Theatre of Harlem, and other dancers, dancing for former First Lady Michelle Obama.

FROM BALLET TO HIP HOP: YOUNG DANCERS AT THE WHITE HOUSE

CONSIDER: What do you think it felt like to meet the First Lady?
If you were invited to visit the White House one day what special reason would you like it to be for? Dancing? Discovering a new scientific solution? Starting a group that helps people in need?

Write a paragraph about your future White House visit. Maybe you’ve got a speech to deliver? Maybe you are awarded a special medal of honor? Maybe you’re moving in?

DREAM BIG!
LESSON 1: HIGH ABOVE
OBJECTIVES: Students will summarize and connect to the experience of the young girl featured in the video.
MATERIALS: Access to video, paper and pencil.
ACTIVITY: Students will watch the short video from Dance Theatre of Harlem and try to tell the story of the video in their own words (summarizing). Next students will connect their own experiences in a few paragraphs.

Using the writing prompt below, students may wish to illustrate, bring in photos or create a collage to share their responses.

WRITING PROMPT: Dance serves as a comfort and source of joy and connection to family for the girl in the video. What activity provides that for you? Does playing sports allow you to forget things that make you sad? Does reading a good book provide an escape? Or maybe cooking a family recipe helps you feel more connected to your past. Use details and sensory language to bring us to that place. What does it mean to you?

TRY TO OBSERVE:
• What can you understand about the dance from the costume? Does the costume remind you of anything? Does the color seem bright and happy or more subdued?

• What does the lighting design in the photo suggest? How does the color of the background impact how you feel?

• What does the dancer’s facial expression contribute to your understanding of the feeling of their movement? What word would you use to describe the facial expression of the dancer?

• What gestures and positions are the dancers captured in? Dance is about movement -- when we freeze the image in a picture you get a chance to stop time and see the dance paused.

• How would you describe the pose of the dancer? Does it remind you of anything else? Can you connect to the feeling of the dancer through the gestures of their body?
RESOURCES AND SOURCES

Dance Theatre of Harlem
www.dancetheatreofharlem.org

Brown Ballerinas: Inside The Dance Theatre Of Harlem
www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BxBVDJg_oM

The Movement Video
www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zsTKHV-6EM

Shoes to match our Feet Video:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=B18qJd2GijE

New York Race Riots Article:
http://crdl.usg.edu/events/ny_race_riots/?Welcome

New York's Night Of Birmingham Horror Article:

The Harlem “Race Riot” of 1964 Article:
www.blackpast.org/aah/harlem-race-riot-1964

From Ballet to Hip Hop: Young Dancers at The White House Video
youtube.com/watch?v=85vBhV61FLk

High Above with India Arie Video
www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNDKONtOz7U&t=13s&frags=pl%2Cwn

Picturing Dance Slide Show
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Cr5nWHHAZ5YZBEzlz7bTilQn2H1ANR8R0fTQNJ3ypQ/edit#slide=id.p1

EXPLORE OUTSIDE THE GUIDE FOR MORE MAGIC

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

Civil Rights Movement for Kids by Mary C. Turck

How They Became Famous Dancers by Anne Dunkin
1. Important Idea!

2. Connection: Text to Self, Text to World, Text to Text

3. I Wonder...
HARLEM HISTORY

Harlem is a large neighborhood in the northern section of the New York City borough of Manhattan. Since the 1920s, Harlem has been an important neighborhood for African-American business, culture and living, with many black people moving there from across the city and seeking to escape the political turmoil of the Southern states.

After World War I, Harlem became the center of the “Harlem Renaissance” an important artistic and intellectual movement that gave voice to African American life and experience.

DANCING THROUGH THE DIVIDE

Harlem-born Arthur Mitchell joined the School of American Ballet, and then trained under the renowned George Balanchine. Mitchell joined the New York City Ballet as the company’s first black principal dancer in 1955. This was at the same time that public schools were being desegregated and when there were laws that were meant to keep black and white people from interacting - especially men and women of different races. Having interracial dance partners perform onstage was radical and propelled Mitchell into new territory. “I am a political activist through dance,” said the 83-year-old dancing veteran.

ARTHUR MITCHELL AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Founding several diverse dance companies in the 1960s, Mitchell was a trailblazer for black artists. The murder of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in April, 1968, sparked Mitchell to move forward with his plans to use dance-as-protest. Mitchell’s effort towards equality was to found the Dance Theatre of Harlem, where black dancers would be given the opportunity to dance ballet where there previously had been none, and to disprove the stereotypes that black people were not meant to participate in ballet. That year, Mitchell and his former teacher Shook established the Dance Theater of Harlem. The school started in a remodeled garage with only two students; soon, attendance ballooned to 400 students. Mitchell used ballet as defiance, a way to refuse to allow others to define him and his people, in the same way activists around the country practiced civil disobedience through political protest.
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