

# Dance Units

## Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad

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School of Performing Arts at P.S. 315

4th and 5th Grade

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## Ana Nery Fragoso, Dance Teacher, Observations

I have taught this unit to several fourth grade classes for the last three years allowing its content and structure to develop slowly to its current form. At first, I was interested in learning more about US history since I didn't grow up here and finding a way to share that interest with my students. The student population I work with is very international, coming from countries such as Jamaica, Haiti, Mexico or Pakistan. I thought that bringing history to life through dance would help them understand in a creative way the circumstances surrounding the Underground Railroad and the work of one of its most well known "conductors," Harriet Tubman. Since American History is at the core of the social studies curriculum in fourth grade, I decided to focus on developing materials and experiences appropriate for this age.

Most of the fourth graders learning this unit have been in general education, but this year I taught it to a self-contained and an inclusion class with great results. Although some of the research and written assignments were slightly simplified, the rest of the unit was completed successfully and the two classes collaborated on a presentation during the school's Black History Month Assembly in February.

The two main ideas I considered while creating this unit were that dances can be inspired by historical events and that dancers/choreographers can be historians and researchers if their projects demand the knowledge and skills. My main goal as an instructor was to provide students with experiences, historical context and tools that would help them create an original dance inspired by the Underground Railroad events.

The first lessons of the unit introduced the students to the book *Harriet and The Promised Land* by Jacob Lawrence. The book's actions and descriptive words became the movement palette of the groups' choreographic projects. In a section called crossing the river, the students did a partnering improvisation inspired by one illustration in which some slaves help others cross and jump the river by pulling them. This experience opened up interesting class discussions about family and community and how important it is to help each other, especially during times of hardship.

Throughout the unit, students engaged in different improvisations, exploring and manipulating actions using different directions, levels, pathways and qualities. Once they were ready, they worked with movement sentences that became the structure for the group choreographies.

Using the Notes from Georgia Sea Island Songs by Alan Lomax, the students reconstructed a traditional slave dance called The Buzzard Lope. There was no video recording available of this dance, so they had to identify its movement characteristics by paying attention to the descriptions in the text.



For the final project, all the classes presented a dance that was a collage of the different sections of the unit, either informally in the dance studio or more formally in a school assembly. The students' work was assessed individually throughout the unit and in groups at the last session using a rubric. The skills I looked for were clear performance of actions, shapes, use of the body and focus. I also wanted to see how well each member had participated in the group's work and how all the elements of the movement sentence were included in the dance. I found it very useful having a solid unit structure that allowed me and my students to move and create freely within a lesson, spending as much time as we needed to explore each section.

In the future, I would like to continue experimenting with different ways to integrate and synchronize social studies in the classroom with the experiences the students are having in the dance studio.



Ana Fragoso's students performing their Underground Railroad dance at PS 315K.

Unit:

# Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad

## Overview

Teacher:  
Ana Nery Fragoso

School:  
School of  
Performing Arts  
at P.S. 315

Grade Level:  
4th Grade

Sessions: 8-10  
45 minutes each

### Dance Making Benchmarks:

- Develop Skills and Techniques, Improvise, Choreograph, Perform

### Big Ideas of this Unit

- Dances can be inspired by a historical event, people and earlier dances.
- Dancers/choreographers are historians and researchers.

### Project Description

#### What will students do in this unit? (one to three brief sentences)

- Students will use their knowledge of dance concepts and choreographic devices to collaboratively create an original group dance inspired by the experiences and events related to the Underground Railroad.

### Instructional Goals

- Through dance research and movement experimentation, the students will explore the historical events and circumstances surrounding the Underground Railroad.
- Students will use the knowledge they gained to inform their movement improvisations leading to choreographic process.
- Students will learn about the role of dance researchers and dance historians.

### Indicators of Student Learning

#### Students will know:

- What the Underground Railroad was, and the role Harriet Tubman played in the escape system.
- The vocabulary extracted from the *Harriet and The Promised Land* book by Jacob Lawrence.
- The movement characteristics of the Buzzard Lope.

#### Students will be able to:

- Travel in space pulling and jumping with a partner.
- Create short group dances based on a movement sentence.
- Reconstruct the Buzzard Lope from a written description.

#### Students will understand that:

- Sometimes dancers/choreographers research historical events to gather information to create and develop their dances.
- Dance historians and anthropologists play a crucial role in preserving cultural dances.

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Continued

## Assessments

### Pre-Assessment/Planning

#### What activities can I do to assess students before teaching this unit?

#### Have I taught these students before?

- I have had these students for two years.

#### What do students already know and understand about this area of Dance Making?

- Have some experience in making small group dances.
- Understand the routine and expectations of a dance class.

#### What skills related to this unit have students already developed?

- Can follow the structure of a movement sentence.
- Can improvise and explore actions and descriptive words.
- Are familiar with group formations and directions.

#### How will the students' needs be addressed?

- Activities will further develop their ability to make decisions and solve problems as a group, explore their movement expression, and understand the role of dance in history.

### Unit Assessment Strategies

#### What is the evidence of student learning?

##### *Self-Assessment*

- Fill out "final thought" slip.
- Drawing and written assignment after viewing videotape of the performance.

##### *Peer Assessment*

- Peer observation/discussion during feedback sessions.
- Class discussion of videotaped performance.

##### *Teacher Assessment*

- Observation of live and videotaped student work using a rubric.
- Research paper on the Underground Railroad.
- Recording and mapping of dances.

##### *Teacher Self-Assessment Strategies*

#### What is working well? How do I know this?

- Peer and teacher feedback sessions have a positive effect on the development of the dances.
  - After receiving feedback, students revised and improved their dances

#### What should be changed? How do I know this?

- Written assignments need to be coordinated with testing schedule and other academic priorities of the class. Better access to video recording for self-assessment.
  - Interruptions due to ELA prep and testing and equipment breakdowns

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Continued

### Learning Experiences

| Learning Experiences   | Strands       |                 |                    |                  |                |
|--|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------|
|  | <i>making</i> | <i>literacy</i> | <i>connections</i> | <i>resources</i> | <i>careers</i> |
| Dance warm ups to develop strength, flexibility and coordination.  | ◆             |                 |                    |                  |                |
| Individual student research paper on the Underground Railroad historical events.                                   |               | ◆               | ◆                  | ◆                | ◆              |
| Partnering work on pulling and jumping through.  | ◆             | ◆               |                    |                  |                |
| Shared reading and discussion with a partner of a book on the theme.   |               | ◆               | ◆                  |                  |                |
| Creating a tableau: Slaves crossing the river in a boat.   | ◆             | ◆               |                    |                  |                |
| Learning to sing "The Drinkin' Gourd".   |               |                 | ◆                  |                  |                |
| Improvising with action words and descriptive words from the book Harriet and the Promised Land by Jacob Lawrence. | ◆             | ◆               |                    |                  |                |
| Working with a small group to create a dance from a movement sentence.   | ◆             | ◆               |                    |                  |                |
| Recording, notating and mapping the dances.  |               | ◆               |                    |                  |                |
| Reconstructing the Buzzard Lope from a written description.  | ◆             | ◆               | ◆                  | ◆                | ◆              |
| Class discussion of dance research and the role of a dance historian.  |               |                 |                    |                  | ◆              |
| Peer observation and discussion of group dances during feedback sessions.  | ◆             | ◆               |                    |                  |                |
| Performance at the Black History Month Assembly.   | ◆             |                 |                    | ◆                |                |

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 1: Harriet and the Promised Land

### **Objective:**

- To introduce the students to the book *Harriet and The Promised Land* by Jacob Lawrence.
- To learn about the historical context in which the Underground Railroad took place.
- To web and list actions and descriptive words that will become the movement palette of the choreographic project.

### **Materials/ Equipment:**

1. *Harriet and The Promised Land* by Jacob Lawrence.
2. Underground Railroad music CD compilation from the Ann Biddle unit.
3. Drum.

### **Warm Up:**

- Short warm up to the Buzzard Lope music emphasizing rhythm and repetition.

### **Development:**

- **Pre-Assessment** – The teacher asks initial questions such as “Who is Harriet Tubman?”, “What is the Underground Railroad?” to reveal what students know and/or want to know, to provide a class awareness of students’ knowledge. This can serve as an informal baseline assessment for comparison when these same questions are asked again at the end of the unit, indicating what students have learned.
- The teacher and the class read the book *Harriet and The Promised Land* by Jacob Lawrence.
- Together, the students look at the illustrations, pulling out the action words and adjectives that will become the movement vocabulary of their dances.
- Short discussion about Harriet Tubman and her role in the Underground Railroad.

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 1: Harriet and the Promised Land *continued*

### Homework assignment:

In pairs, students will read a book (from the library list) about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. After reading the book together, they will discuss the content, share with each other what they have learned and decide why this is a book they would like to recommend. Each student will write a book report based on the reading and discussion.

This session will be planned with the classroom teacher, who will work with the students on this assignment during their Shared Reading time. By reading these books and sharing them in the classroom, the students will become more familiar with the events surrounding the Underground Railroad without taking away from their 45 min period of dance per week. The collaborating classroom teacher could do this project as part of the class work on literacy and social studies.

### Formative Assessment:

- The discussion with a partner will provide the students an opportunity to reflect on and synthesize this information before writing the book report.
- Reading the book report will allow the dance teacher to assess which historical anecdotes and circumstances the students find most interesting, so they can find a way into the choreographic project.

### Underground Railroad Dance Vocabulary

| Action Words | Working Actions | Descriptive Words |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Walk         | Clean           | Scared            |
| Point        | Scrub           | Hopeful           |
| March        | Dig             | Sad               |
| Raise Hands  | Pick Cotton     | Disappointed      |
| Pull         | Sweep           | Threatened        |
| Jump         |                 | Frightened        |
| Run          |                 | Upset             |
| Sleep        |                 | Proud             |
| Hold (baby)  |                 | Tired             |
| Climb        |                 | Helpful           |
| Cross        |                 | Hungry            |
| Reach        |                 |                   |
| Kneel (pray) |                 |                   |
| Hide         |                 |                   |
| Creep        |                 |                   |
| Crawl        |                 |                   |
| Struggle     |                 |                   |

(Future idea to consider, add motif symbols next to words where easy to do so, i.e. travel sign next to “walk”, gesture sign next to “point”, extension sign next to “reach”, etc.. Just by having these here, it might make documenting dances easier later on.)

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 2: Crossing the River

### **Objective:**

- To explore the actions of pulling and jumping over.
- To create a movement sequence traveling in a diagonal straight pathway.
- To work with partners.
- To create a tableau of the students traveling in a boat.

### **Motivation:**

- The students will choose and work with a partner.



### **Development: Dance Task 1:**

The teacher will demonstrate with one of the students the actions of pulling and jumping over taking turns with a partner. The teacher will emphasize the importance of making eye contact and stating a clear intention with the body of helping the other to jump over an imaginary river. The students will practice with a partner and later perform the actions traveling in a straight diagonal pathway.

### **Formative Assessment:**

Teacher observes students, giving process feedback related to partner work:

- Develop coordination of grasping contact and weight sharing with the body in working safely to pull (guide) other person.
- Efficient use of space to organize execution of pulling with the aim to travel in a diagonal pathway.
- Finding ways to effectively advance through the space.

### **Development: Dance Task 2:**

The teacher will create in collaboration with the students a tableau based on the idea of the slaves crossing a river on a boat at the end of the journey to freedom. They will make a group sculpture of a boat using their bodies. This tableau will become, at the end of the unit, the finale of their choreographic project. While they hold their shapes and move slowly, the students will sing a cappella the Drinkin' Gourd song.

### **Formative Assessment:**

Teacher observes students looking for and providing guidance related to:

- How movement and shape create, develop and communicate character.
- The use of stillness as a choreographic tool.

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 2: Crossing the River **continued**

### **Homework Assignment:**

The students will receive a copy of the music and lyrics of the Drinkin' Gourd and will practice it with the school's music teacher in their classroom.

### **Dance Vocabulary:**

- Diagonal
- Partnering
- A Cappella
- Tableau

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 3: Movement Manipulations

### **Objective:**

- To introduce the students to the idea of movement abstraction.
- To explore elements of movement variation and manipulation such as change of direction, level, quality, effort, canon and repetition.

### **Materials/ Equipment:**

1. Action words and descriptive words chart from the previous lesson.
2. LMA charts.
3. Drum.

### **Motivation:**

Each student selects one action word and one descriptive word from the list that they would like to work with during this session.

### **Exploration:**

The students select an action word and perform it in any way they think it accurately describes the action. They are asked to repeat the action for 8cs trying to find a pattern in the movements.

### **Dance Task:**

Each student finds an empty space in the dance studio and begins an independent movement exploration based on the action he/she selected. The teacher guides them playing the drum and giving them different options to manipulate the action. E.g. exaggerate the action and make it very big, slow, change the level it is usually performed, change the facing, make the movements soft or hard and sharp. Once they have a series of variations, they will add the descriptive word to change the quality of their action.

### **Analysis:**

The class will look at the LMA charts with the teacher identifying some of the ways they have manipulated their actions. They would look at the RELATIONSHIPS chart and discuss the various ways they can design their groups.

### **Formative Assessment:**

- This identification process reflects to the teacher student awareness of movement experience and knowledge of concepts that they identify.
- Students explain how particular elements modified or developed their initial word selections to revealing to the knowledge and understanding.

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 3: Movement Manipulations **continued**

### **Development:**

The students will work with a partner. They will show and teach each other their variations.

### **Formative Assessment:**

- The teacher walks around observing the students during this process looking for use of vocabulary explored in the lesson and evidence of their collaborative skills.

### **Assessment:**

The students will fill out a “final thought” slip in which they have to identify and describe the action, the descriptive word and the variations they did in this session.

### **Conclusion:**

The class will perform in two big groups (or duets if there is time) their variations to the rest of the class in an informal sharing that includes discussion and feedback.

### **Dance Vocabulary:**

- Right, left, forward, backward, diagonal
- Low, middle, high levels
- Repetition, canon, unison, simultaneous, action and reaction
- Quality
- Effort: strong, weak
- Pathways: Circle, zigzag
- Tempo: fast, slow

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 4 Movement Sentence:

### **Objective:**

- To review movement sentence principles.
- To model for the students how to create a dance based on a movement sentence.
- To introduce the idea of transitions.

■

### **Motivation:**

The class will create (with the assistance of the teacher) a short group dance based on the following movement sentence:

- Descriptive word: **Sad**
- Movement Sentence: **Shape – Scrub – Dig – Pick Up Cotton - Shape**

### **Exploration:**

- The teacher will lead an exploration of the actions in the movement sentence.
- Low level shape-facing any direction
- **Scrub** the floor forward and back to center –reach out – slowly –still sad
- Begin to change directions, backwards, sideways
- Scrub a window in front of you rising to the high level and back down-keep the sad quality in your body
- Scrub in circles, all around you
- Scrub traveling in zigzags
- FREEZE
- **Dig** a whole on the ground-find a different way of doing this action
- Do it moving forward in slow motion-now try it fast
- Make it really small
- Now make it big and throw the soil over your head
- FREEZE
- **Pick Up Cotton** – it is very delicate-use your hands softly near you
- Keep moving forward in the middle level in straight pathways
- Change directions
- Twist and reach to the sides
- Try to pick up the cotton in the tallest trees/bushes
- Get higher and higher
- Sink slowly to the floor
- Freeze in a sad middle level shape

### **Formative Assessment:**

- During the process of guiding students through the movement exploration, the dance teacher looks for the various ways the students embody the different elements. Thus identifying the ones that need further review in subsequent lessons.

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 4 Movement Sentence: **continued**

### **Development:**

The whole class will brain storm with the teacher about how to put all the action words explored in the improvisation into a choreographed sequence. E.g.:

#### **Beginning shape**

- The class is divided in two groups. Each group begins in a different SAD low-level shape.

#### **Scrub**

- Group A does the action fast on the floor.
- Group B does the action in circular motion while rising.
- Both groups scrub all around themselves making the movement big and “stylized”

#### **Dig**

- Both groups dig three times going from low to middle to high level throwing the soil over their heads. The two groups move through space creating a rhythmic pattern while digging until they exchange places with each other.

#### **Pick-up cotton**

- The two groups begin to mix with each other while they do this action very big for 8 counts. They repeat it in the high level, in the middle level and around their bodies.

#### **Ending shape**

- The class ends in a SAD middle level shape and connected with different body parts.
- Once the class agrees on the choreographic choices for this section, they will dance it as many times as time allows.

### **Formative Assessment:**

- This activity will give the dance teacher an opportunity to:
- Observe how ready the students are to create their short dances independently.
- Look for performance indicators such as how the students reproduce complex sequences accurately, dance with focus and intent and improve performance through repetition and correction

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 5: Choreographic Project (session 1)

### Objective:

- The students will engage in dance making using the movement sentence structure.
- To record/notate/map the dances.
- To apply compositional tools.
- To discuss ideas about how to make their dances more interesting.

### Materials:

- Music of the *Freedom Train*
- Movement sentence cards for each group to hold while they are working (so they don't have to refer to the poster and stay in their working area)

### Motivation/development:

- The class will create short dances based on the following movement sentences:
- Descriptive word: **Scared**  
Movement Sentence: **Shape – Creep – Point– Run - Shape**
- Descriptive word: **Hopeful**  
Movement Sentence: **Shape – Walk –Climb - Struggle - Shape**
- Descriptive word: **Hungry**  
Movement Sentence: **Shape – Kneel (Pray) – Reach – Hide – Shape**

### Dance Task:

The class will be divided into groups. When the teacher taps the shoulder of a student-leader, he/she will stand up, tap the shoulder of another three or four dancers he/she wants to work with. The group will find a space in the dance studio to work on their dance. The groups will be directed to work with one of the movement sentences listed above using a variety of directions, pathways, levels and dynamic changes. They need to make sure that one of the actions in the movement sentence and the beginning and ending shapes include the descriptive word assigned to the dance. The students will rehearse and perform the movement sentences to the music of the *Freedom Train*.

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 5: **Choreographic Project (session 1)** **continued**

### **Conclusion/Sharing:**

One group will perform their dance for the class. The teacher will use this group as a model for a discussion about the different compositional tools choreographers use to make their dances more interesting. The students will use the two sample sentences to give feedback to their peers.

The teacher will allow some time for the groups to go back to work on their dances so the students can apply right away some of the tools discussed at the sharing.

### **Formative assessment:**

During the sharing, the class is reminded to avoid using words such as “good” or “bad.” Focus on describing what they see and offer suggestions to the group to improve their dance. The teacher solicits comments from the class about how the group has:

- Structured their dance.
- Chosen to perform the actions.
- Decided on their formations, directions, levels, etc.

### **Dance Vocabulary:**

Write all the action and descriptive words used in the movement sentences as well as any vocabulary related to compositional tools that came up during the discussion, i.e.

- Canon
- Formations: line (horizontal and vertical), triangle, circle, square, V, etc.
- Clockwise and counter-clockwise

### **Homework:**

- The students will record/notate/map their dances in any way is comfortable to them so they can share their strategies with the rest of the class during the next session.

### **Formative assessment:**

- If the students have had previous experience mapping the pathways of a dance or notating their movements using symbols, this project will be useful as a review of these skills.

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 6: Choreographic Project (session 2)

### **Objective:**

- To continue working on their group dances.
- To share with the class how each student recorded their dances.
- To discuss the dances and give positive feedback to peers.

### **Development:**

**Gallery Walk:** The students will place their recordings/notations/maps of the dances on the side of the studio and the class will do a “gallery walk” looking at the works. The class will discuss which were the clearest and more effective and explain why.

### **Formative assessment:**

- The teacher looks for evidence of students’ ability to “reconstruct” and explain the dance from their own score.

**Dance task:** The students will work in groups independently. They will continue making choreographic choices to further develop their dances. The teacher will walk around the dance studio facilitating the process and answering any questions the students might have about the dance making process.

### **Formative assessment:**

- How are the students working together? Are they all participating?
- Are they using the new vocabulary in their discussions?
- Is the ensemble dancing with focus and intent?
- Are they repeating the sequence and making corrections to improve performance?

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 7: **The Buzzard Lope** (see page 22 for background information shared with students)

### **Objective:**

- To introduce students to the *Buzzard Lope*
- To analyze the characteristics of the *Buzzard Lope* using literary descriptions
- To reconstruct the *Buzzard Lope* based on the analysis
- To choreograph in collaboration with the students a version of the *Buzzard Lope*

### **Materials:**

- Overhead projector using transparencies of the text to be read in class
- *The Buzzard Lope* music
- A small scarf

### **Motivation:**

Read aloud the chart of the *Notes from Georgia Sea Island Songs* by Alan Lomax.\* Talk to the students about the idea of reconstructing a dance using a written document that describes some of the characteristics of the dance. The class discusses, compares and contrasts other ways of learning a dance. E.g. from a teacher, a friend, a videotape, etc.

### **Development:**

The students will web key characteristics of the dance from the research excerpts. They will listen to the *Buzzard Lope* song, paying attention to the lyrics. The students (in collaboration with the teacher) will reconstruct the dance from this analysis. The students could add new components to the dance to connect it more to their own knowledge and experience.

### **The Buzzard Lope - Movement Analysis \***

- Soloist imitates the Buzzard:
  - High stepping
  - Arms spread out wide
  - Hunched shoulders
  - Swooping
  - Whirling
  - Crouching
  - Dances into center of the circle
  - Picks up cloth from ground
- Group travels counter-clockwise
- Circular pathway
- Shuffling step
- Clapping and singing accompaniment
- Turn taking

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 7: The Buzzard Lope **continued**

### **Formative assessment:**

- During the discussion, the teacher listens for how the students are able to identify the movements and qualities of this dance.
- The students are asked to demonstrate physically each one of them, thus showing their understandings of each element.

### **Homework Assignment:**

The students will research the *Buzzard Lope* in the Internet and will write a short paragraph describing the main characteristics of the dance.

### **Formative assessment:**

- The students are encouraged to search for internet information that describes the dance (actions and descriptive words).
- The papers are collected by the dance teacher who looks for interesting quotes or discrepancies to share with the class.

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 8: Structure of the Dance

### Objective:

- Students will demonstrate understanding of how themes are expressed in dance through their own choreography
- To create a dance using all the elements and movement material developed during the previous sessions.

### Materials:

- Underground Railroad music CD compilation from the Ann Biddle unit.
- *Drinkin' Gourd* music

### Development/Dance Structure:

- The dance will begin with *The Buzzard Lope*. The class will make a circular formation and will travel counter-clockwise in a circular pathway doing the shuffling step, clapping and singing while the soloists take turns imitating the Buzzard.
- The *Crossing of the River*. The circle becomes a double straight line upstage. The students progress on the diagonal (from the upstage left corner to the downstage right corner) performing the “pulling and jumping over” sequence with their partners.
- *Group Dances*. While the rest of the class stays off stage, one group at a time will show the choreography they developed from the movement sentence.
- *Boat-Drinkin' Gourd*. The students will create a “tableau” in the form of a boat filled with slaves guided by Harriet Tubman. While they hold their shapes focusing on the diagonal (the North Star), they will sing *a cappella* the *Drinkin' Gourd*.

### Homework Assignment:

The students will record/notate/map the structure of the dance in any way is comfortable to them.

### Assessment:

They will keep this record in their dance folders, which will be reviewed at the end of the marking period.

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## Lesson 9: Rehearsal Session

### **Objective:**

- During this lesson the students synthesize the information learned in the unit and use it to rehearse, revise, edit, and perform their original dances in small groups as well as the class' choreographic project inspired by the life of Harriet Tubman.

### **Notes:**

- The class collaborates with their classroom teacher, the dance, music and visual arts specialists in the school to facilitate and guide them through the process of creating this project. The students will perform at the Black History Month Assembly where they can share their work with their upper-grade peers.

### **Assessment:**

The performance is recorded and viewed in class as a self-assessment tool in which the students evaluate their individual, group, and class work.

The class creates a rubric addressing the following criteria:

- Perform clear actions
- Group work/each member participation
- Clear focus and intention
- Clear shapes and use of the body
- All elements of the movement sentence are included
- Use of space, time and energy

\* (This unit was inspired by Ann Biddle's Underground Railroad/The Buzzard Lope Unit and includes some of her music and documentation sources)

# Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**

## The Buzzard Lope

### The Buzzard Lope

The Buzzard Lope was similar to the more modern Eagle Rock Dance and was very popular in the South and most likely related to the W. African Buzzard dance. Sunbury Georgia was the first discovery of this dance but may not have originated there.

The Buzzard Lope used outstretched arms like a bird and consisted of a shuffle step and a little buzzard like hop. The dance is said to be similar to the West African Buzzard Dance. It's original form is representing a Turkey Buzzard getting ready to eat a dead Mule (some report a Cow). Many people in the sidelines watching the dance would do a 'Patting', or make a rhythm by slapping (patting) their thighs, etc.

#### Calls During a Buzzard Lope Dance

|                           |                                      |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| March Around!             | .....(the Cow)                       |
| Jump Across!              | ..... (Checking to see if it's dead) |
| Get the Eye!              | ..... (Always go for that first)     |
| So Glad!                  | ..... (Cows dead)                    |
| Get the Guts!             | ..... (They like 'em next)           |
| Go to eatin'!             | ..... (On the Meat)                  |
| All Right!-Cow mos' Gone! |                                      |
| Dog Comin'!               |                                      |
| Scare the Dog!            |                                      |
| Look aroun' for mo' meat  |                                      |
| All Right!-Belly Full!    |                                      |
| Goin' to tell da res'.    |                                      |

Source: Marshall & Jean Stearns Book ... Jazz Dance, pg. 25.

<http://www.streetswing.com/histmain/z3buzzardlope1.htm>

Unit: **Bringing History to Life Through Dance: The Underground Railroad**  
 In-Class Peer/Self Rubric

| <b>Underground Railroad Dances</b><br>Class: _____<br>Objectives / Performance Indicators | Not Clear Yet | It Needs More Work | Very Clear |
|---|---------------|--------------------|------------|
| Actions Performance   |               |                    |            |
| Shapes Design/Use Of The Body   |               |                    |            |
| Beginning / End   |               |                    |            |
| Space / Pathways  |               |                    |            |
| Energy / Quality  |               |                    |            |
| Time / Rhythm / Accents   |               |                    |            |

| <b>Group Working Together</b><br>Collaboration/Cooperation | Not Present | It Needs More Work | Enthusiastic! |
|--|-------------|--------------------|---------------|
| <b>Group:</b>  |             |                    |               |
| <b>Name of Students:</b>                                   |             |                    |               |
| 1.   |             |                    |               |
| 2.   |             |                    |               |
| 3.   |             |                    |               |
| 4.   |             |                    |               |
| 5.   |             |                    |               |
| 6.   |             |                    |               |