

MAD HOT BALLROOM



AN INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDE FOR A  
"MADE IN NY" FILM  
FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS  
AND STUDENTS

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**Mad Hot Ballroom** is a movie that tells the story of New York City youth learning to dance and then participating in a dance competition. It is a documentary film and is consequently based on footage edited from actual events in the American Ballroom Theater dance program. The film can generate discussion and reinforce concepts and learning from the New York City Department of Education's **Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts**.

**Paramount Classics' Mad Hot Ballroom** is also one of the many films and video productions made in New York City under the auspices of the New York City Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting, this year celebrating its 40th anniversary.

## ACTIVITIES AND QUESTIONS BEFORE SEEING THE FILM

- As you watch **Mad Hot Ballroom**, note the different New York City neighborhoods represented in the film. What cultures, countries of origin, languages and religions are represented in the movie?
- As you watch the film, consider how you might describe the theme of the movie. What is the message of the film?
- Think about which character you most relate to and describe why.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILM'S CONTENT

### **BALLROOM IS ABOUT LEARNING SOMETHING NEW.**

- How do you learn something new?
- What are the difficulties in learning something new?
- What behaviors make for the most successful learning?
- What are the behaviors and obstacles that obstruct successful learning?

### **BALLROOM TELLS THE STORY OF A BIG COMPETITION.**

- How do you prepare for a competition?
  - How do you deal with anxiety or nervousness?
  - Is the goal of the competition to win...or do your best...? Which is a meaningful goal and why?
  - How do you feel if you don't win first place? Or any place?
  - If, as in the film **Mad Hot Ballroom**, you are on a team, what are your responsibilities to your team?
  - If you don't win, was it worth trying? Why or why not?
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## **BALLROOM IS A MOVIE MADE IN NEW YORK CITY TELLING THE STORY OF NEW YORK CITY PEOPLE.**

- Sometimes the term “New York movie” is used to describe a movie that paints a picture of New York City life especially well. Can **Mad Hot Ballroom** be considered a “New York movie”? What does it show about life in New York?
- What New York landmarks are shown in the film?
- How can people of different cultural and ethnic groups work together and respect one another? What obstacles stop people from working together successfully?
- Can children from one cultural group learn the skills and traditions of another group? How is this learning shown in the movie? What message does **Ballroom** offer about learning the traditions of a culture other than your own?
- What do you know about the achievements of these important people who show skills in mastering the traditions of a culture different than their primary culture?

Research and report about the following artists:

Yo-Yo Ma, Asian American cellist

Andre Watts, African American pianist

Eminem, Caucasian rapper

Arthur Mitchell, African American ballet dancer and choreographer

Nam June Paik, Korean artist of video and television

## **BALLROOM SHOWS STUDENTS LEARNING TO DO BALLROOM DANCING.**

- Does dancing encourage girls to act in certain ways?
- Does dancing encourage boys to act in certain ways?
- In the “Electric Slide,” there are no partners. Do you think dancing without a partner is different than dancing with a partner? How? Describe the differences.
- Do you think conforming to distinct gender roles in dance has any implications in a modern society that wishes to promote gender equality?
- What might be the benefit socially and in gaining discipline from learning how to partner dance?

## **BALLROOM DEPICTS YOUNG PEOPLE DISCUSSING THE CHOICES THAT TEENAGERS IN NEW YORK CITY HAVE TO MAKE.**

- What are some the choices or decisions that the characters in the movie discuss?
  - One of the teachers in the film talks about “learning to do something you love.” Discuss how learning to do something you love can influence the choices you make in life.
  - What are some of the obstacles the young people in the movie talk about?
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What are some of obstacles that can keep teenagers in New York from achieving their dreams of success?

## ART MAKING - DISCUSSION ABOUT THE TECHNIQUES OF FILM AND VIDEO PRODUCTION Terminology and Basic Technical Knowledge

- **Mad Hot Ballroom** is a documentary film. What makes a documentary film different from a fictional narrative?
- Even though **Ballroom** is a documentary, several essential storytelling elements of the film are similar to those in fictional narratives. Discuss setting, character, conflict, climactic scene and theme as they relate to **Ballroom**.
- Using a film glossary identify and discuss a few basic film terms such as Close Up, Medium Shot, Wide Shot, Quick Cut, Fade and Pan. Provide examples of these film techniques from **Mad Hot Ballroom**.

### ART MAKING

#### **BALLROOM TELLS THE STORY OF SEVERAL YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BALLROOM DANCE PROGRAM AT THEIR SCHOOLS, AND THEIR JOURNEY THROUGH REHEARSALS INTO THE COMPETITION.**

- Choose one of the characters profiled in the film, and write the story of what happens next for that character. Can you imagine what that character might be like and where they might be in five years? Ten years? (Prompt: Help the students define the different characters: The Girl Who Wants To Be an Actress/Dancer, The Boy Who Speaks Little English, or The Mischievous Girl Who Has Changed This Year, etc.)
  - Write a description of a scene in a movie you might make about a particular character's future. Make sure to describe the setting, the characters in the scene, the conflict and even the theme of your scene. What is the plot in the scene?
  - Create a storyboard for your scene, sketching out the "shots" you will use and the dialogue linked to each shot. For a storyboard template, please refer to: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~ricky/etec/sboardtemplate.html>
  - Write a short treatment (a literary summary or presentation of a film's story) for a documentary film you might make about a program in your school or neighborhood that helps teenagers learn to do something new. Who would the characters in your film be? Where would you shoot the film? What would the theme of the film be? What would be the climactic scene, like the dance competition finals in **Mad Hot Ballroom**?
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## MAKING CONNECTIONS - RESEARCH

### **BALLROOM TELLS THE STORY OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES AND DIFFERENT NEIGHBORHOODS LEARNING A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT DANCES.**

- Individually or in small groups, investigate the dances depicted in **Ballroom**. In what country did each dance originate? When was that dance first introduced to the United States and to New York City? Why did that dance become popular in this city? How are the dances in the film similar? How are they different?
- Have the visual artists in your group make sketches of the different costumes associated with each cultural dance and explain their design choices.
- Have the musicians or music lovers in your group research the music and musicians associated with each type of dance. Research the singers associated with these styles of music and dance. Are there connections or comparisons that can be made among the various styles of music? Can you find another song besides the ones used in the movie that could be used for a swing dance, a tango or a meringue?

## CAREERS IN THE ARTS: FILMMAKING

### **IF YOU CAREFULLY LOOK AT THE CREDITS OF *MAD HOT BALLROOM*, MANY PEOPLE DOING MANY DIFFERENT JOBS ARE REQUIRED TO MAKE A FILM.**

- As a group, decipher the credits and list the different jobs listed in the film credits.
- Using the Internet, research and create short definitions of each job.
- Stage an interview with a film professional in class asking creative, thoughtful and incisive questions about their career in film. What is their job all about? How and where do you learn to do this job? How much money do you make? What are the most thrilling, satisfying or frustrating parts of the job? What advice would you give a young person wanting to do this job?
- Explore the role of a film critic by reading a published review of **Mad Hot Ballroom**. Write your own review of **Mad Hot Ballroom**.
- As a class, publish a newspaper that includes your interviews, your stories, treatments, scenes and scripts, your sketches, your reviews and any other writings you have done inspired by watching **Ballroom**.



## RESOURCES

### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

For information about the *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts*, arts activities for students and the "Arts and Cultural Education Services Guide"  
<http://www.nycenet.edu/projectarts/>

### THE NEW YORK CITY MAYOR'S OFFICE OF FILM, THEATRE AND BROADCASTING

Celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, the Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre & Broadcasting is the one-stop shop for all entertainment needs in New York City. The agency markets New York City as a prime location, provides premiere customer service to production companies, facilitates production throughout the five boroughs and develops incentive programs for the industry. The City's "Made in NY" incentive program, which includes tax credits, free outdoor advertising, vendor discounts and a concierge service for the industry, led to a record-breaking year for production in New York City in 2005, where our production industry employs 100,000 New Yorkers and contributes \$5 billion to our local economy annually.

[www.nyc.gov/film](http://www.nyc.gov/film)

### CITY OF NEW YORK

The City's official website contains information about all City government agencies and programs.

[www.nyc.gov](http://www.nyc.gov)



### THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
MAYOR'S OFFICE  
OF FILM, THEATRE  
AND BROADCASTING

### THE CITY OF NEW YORK MAYOR'S OFFICE OF FILM, THEATRE AND BROADCASTING

**Katherine L. Oliver**  
Commissioner

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