

# **Study Guide for Kyle Abraham performance**

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*Modern dance draws its materials from  
natural human movement.*

*-Peter Kraye*

## **Introduction**

This Study guide is designed for teachers of students K-12 who will be bringing students to the Kyle Abraham performance. I have included general concepts and ideas as well as suggestions for activities. It will be up to you, the individual teacher, to decide what is appropriate for your specific age group of class and accommodate the lessons and concepts as needed. This document is not meant to be prescriptive, rather it is meant to be a stepping off point for your exploration into dance and preparation for your class experience of viewing a live modern dance performance. Your input, ideas and expertise, as well as the input and ideas of your students, are important additions for a successful experience overall. The study guide is divided into three sections, before the performance, during the performance and after the performance. However, first it is important to discuss and define modern dance!

## **What is Modern Dance?**

Modern dance can be many things. It is often difficult to define because it is ever changing and evolving. Modern dance is an art form based in movement and expressive communication and has been around since the beginning of mankind. The material or vocabulary for modern dance comes from the dancers own instrument, which is the body! The potential for expression from human movement is limitless. We all have bodies, therefore, we all have the potential for expressiveness through movement and dance. Have your students write or draw a picture of what they think modern dance is. Older students can write their own definition. Come back to these definitions and pictures after the performance and notice if there are any revisions or additions to the original thought.

## **Before the Performance**

Prepare your students for viewing a live dance performance. Start by asking if anyone has seen a live dance performance before, if yes, what can they tell you about it? If not, what do they think they might see? This could be discussion or a written response.

## **For the teacher – What can you expect?**

The format of the Performance/Lecture Demonstration will be something like this:

- 1.) The Company will present a brief excerpt from the dance “Radio Show”
- 2.) Introduction of Company members and discussion of latest works
- 3.) Kyle Abraham will talk about the importance of gestures in his work
- 4.) Students will be taught a gesture phrase, volunteers will be chosen to demonstrate
- 5.) Demonstration continues with variations and discussion of process
- 6.) Volunteers return to seats, excerpt of “Pavement” is presented
- 7.) Talk back with audience
- 8.) Demonstration of improvisation
- 9.) Time for questions.

NOTE: The Thursday matinee may focus only on *The Radio Show*, which is the public performance for Thursday evening. The Friday matinee may focus only on *Pavement*, which is the public performance for Friday evening.

## Activity Suggestion:

1. Choose a dance video\*, preferably something in which you and your class are unfamiliar. Before you show the video discuss what you might see based on the title and description. What type of predictions can you make? Will it be hip-hop, ballet, modern or jazzy? Will there be a story to understand? What kinds of movement might you see?
2. Show the video (or excerpt) to your class.
3. After viewing the dance on video discuss what you actually saw.
  - Was there a story or theme?
  - What were the dancers wearing?
  - What types of movements did you see?
  - Can you do any of those movements?
  - Can you relate what you saw to something you know?

### **Musicals:**

*“Singin’ in the Rain”* The full movie is available on Netflix or in the public library I would suggest showing excerpts of dances such as “Moses Supposes”, “Make em Laugh”, and “Singin’ in the Rain”. These can also be found on you-tube.

*Oklahoma:* The full movie is available on Netflix or in your public library I would suggest showing the “Dream Ballet.”

*Mary Poppins:* The full movie is available on Netflix or in your public library I would suggest showing “Step in time” (the chimney sweep dance)

### **Ballets:**

*The Sleeping Beauty:* There are many full -length versions of this by many different ballet companies. If you only look at act I, you can discuss the use of gestures and pantomime. What might they mean in the context of a classical ballet?

*Swan Lake:* There are many full -length versions of this by many different ballet companies. If you only look at the variation of the dying swan, you can discuss the use of gestures and movement as having meaning and emotion, as well as how the movements imitate the movement of a swan.

### **Modern dance:**

*Dancing in the light: Six dances by African American Choreographers.*

ISBN: 0-7697-8520-4 this video has 6 dances. I suggest the teacher preview the video to decide which would be appropriate for their students.

*Esplanade* by Paul Taylor. This dance is based on everyday movements such as running, jumping, sliding etc. You might discuss how the choreographer used such movements to create a dance.

\*Video Suggestions: BE SURE to preview the selection & choose only age-appropriate materials to show in class. Access to modern dance or ballet videos can be difficult if you are not part of an institution that has a library with dance resources. In that case, there are many musicals from which to choose.

## Lesson Suggestion: “Body Language”

1. Find an open space such as a gym, or clear some space in your classroom. Create a “safety word,” such as “freeze” or “stop,” that can be used to insure student security.
2. Warm-up: Lead the students in some basic isolations to warm-up all body parts; head, shoulders, arms, torso, legs, ankles, feet.
  - Have the students perform a sequence of movements done in 8 beats, then 4, then 2, then 1. (rolling down and up, reaching, etc.) Discuss the change in dynamics and energy as it applies to mood. “How did it feel to move slowly? “How did you feel when you moved quickly?”
  - Instruct students to use their imagination to divide the body down the mid-line. You can illustrate this by tracing your hand from between your eyes in a downward motion towards your feet. Ask your students to move the right half of their body. Explain that the opposite side of their brain is actually controlling those movements. The left side of the brain is in control of the right side of the body. Repeat on the other side. Note the symmetry of the body & brain halves. Cross the mid-line to get both halves of the brain working. This can be done by lifting the right knee and touching it with the left elbow and vice versa.
3. Moving through space: Ask your students to move through space. Create opportunities for introducing the dance elements, time, energy, space and the body (body element was experienced in the warm-up). For example, walk & freeze to the beat of the drum. Change the walks to tiptoes, skips, slow motion giant steps, wiggles, and hops on one foot. Discuss the qualities they used and the mood created. Then stay in one place and create shapes, round, wide, narrow and angular. Vary the amount of drumbeats or counts allotted for the shapes. For example: “You have 8 beats to create a round shape, now you have 6 beats to create a wide shape.” “1 beat to create a shape with corners and points!”
4. Composition assignment: give the students the opportunity to create a composition using body language and expressive gestures. For example, demonstrate the gesture for “stop”, “safe” (as in baseball), “cut”, “I’m choking”, thumbs up, thumbs down, etc. Discuss how gestures are commonly used and recognized. Now discuss everyday movement gestures such as brushing your teeth, swinging a bat, kicking a soccer ball, etc. Instruct the students to choose three movements to perform on their own (1 minute max). Then create groups and ask the students to combine their movements into a sequence to be performed by all members of their group (younger students should be in pairs as they will have a total of six movements to remember, older students up to 4 in a group).
  - Have the groups perform for each other.
  - Does it tell a story?
  - Can they re-arrange the movements to create a narrative?
  - What does the audience see in the movements?
  - Do they see a story?
  - What can you add?
  - Does the sequence have a beginning, middle and end?
  - If not, how can you edit or change your sequence to achieve a clear beginning, middle and end?
  - What happens when you add music to the movements?

5. Back in the classroom, or seated, discuss what elements of dance were used, space, time, energy and/or the body. Here are some sample questions to ask your students:
  - “Were you able to make meaning out of your gestures?”
  - “Did you understand what other groups were presenting, why or why not?”
  - “What were some choices you made while designing your phrase that made it better?”
  - “Did you notice that I did not teach you any dance movements?”
  - “Were you dancing today?”
  - “Were you being expressive with your body?”
  - “How did the activity make you feel?”

## **During the performance**

### **Audience Behavior and etiquette:**

It is important to discuss proper audience behavior for a live performance. Unlike TV, you can't pause, rewind or fast forward. You need to be ready to experience the performance in the moment. Talking to one another during the performance is distracting to the audience as well as the performers. Cell phones should be off (this is a standard announcement in many theatres) Texting or checking your phone during a performance is not only rude it undermines one's ability to be fully engaged in the experience. Dance happens in real time in the now, don't rob yourself of this amazing experience. The actions may be fast; if you look away you may miss something. Some movements may be slow, this is the time to take in the whole stage, notice what other dancers are doing, notice if there are lighting changes or other production elements such sets, props or special effects.

## **The Program**

Look at the program, read as much as you can before the performance begins. The title of the dance, number of dancers and music may give you some clues as to what you are about to see.

## **Curtain Up**

Seeing, hearing and feeling are important senses to use when experiencing a live dance performance.

What do you see?

How many dancers are on stage?

Can you sense a relationship between the dancers?

Are the dancers using props?

What type of costume or clothing are the dancers wearing?

Are there special effects with the lighting?

Can you hear the dancers breathing?

What is the accompaniment/music - is it helping the production?

What are you feeling?

Notice if your body is tense, excited, relaxed?

Are you feeling emotions, happy, sad, or indifferent?

What type of movements do you see?

Are the movements recognizable to you?

Is anything making sense to you?

Do you recognize a theme or a story?

## **After the Performance - reflect and analyze**

Reflection is an important step for turning short-term memory into long-term memory. It also builds on perspective and helps to contextualize the experience. Analysis is higher order thinking, which involves breaking down material or components into parts to be more easily understood. Ask your students how and why questions.

Here are some sample questions to ask your students;

- \*Describe:** What is the overall feeling of the dance?  
Can you describe the performance in one word?, one gesture?  
Can you describe one or two vivid details?  
What was most memorable?
  
- \*Analyze:** What lines or shapes did you see?  
Did you notice a theme or story?  
Did you notice pathways in space?  
Were there level changes in the dance? In the lights?  
Can you name other art forms used in this performance?  
How well or competently did the dancers perform?  
What do you think the choreographer emphasized?
  
- \*Interpret:** What is the mood of the dance?  
What feelings did you have while watching the dance?  
What was the meaning behind the movements in the dance?  
What do you think the relationship was between the dancers?  
Does the dance have meaning?  
How did the movements convey meaning?
  
- \*Evaluate:** What do you think of the dance?  
Did the dance have a beginning, middle and end?  
What did you like about the dance?  
What did you not like about the dance?  
How does this dance compare to other dances you have seen?  
Was this dance well crafted?  
Did you see influences from other cultures in this dance?

\* These concepts were adapted from “Teaching Dance as Art in Education” by Brenda Pugh McCutchen (p.277)

## **Vocabulary**

(Choose the vocabulary that best fits your grade level)

Dancer

Space

Time

Energy

Force

Quality

Dynamics

Line

Audience

Designer

Choreographer

Gesture

Stage

Rehearsal

Expressiveness

Body

Modern dance

Accompaniment

Excerpt

Phrase

Improvisation

Images

Theme and variation

Original

Dance Company

Symmetrical

Asymmetrical

Ephemeral

# Dance word search

I T L K O N E J S Q T J P T B O V T E Y F R E B E  
S M I M P R O V I S A T I O N B N L C Y M E V J M  
Q C A C F Z A Z Y T E G A T S E A Y N S L H J Z E  
Z T I G L A K A J H T N Z E M V N J E I T P C F H  
Y Q B M E Y H C K Q F N E I C T D D I L D A O I T  
P X L P A S H M C U L Z N V Z N I P D I O R S D B  
L I N E T N A O Y X L A X R I P A W U Z C G Z L L  
K U F W A E Y S H V P C E M S S H D A E O O T G B  
L P Q P M D D D Y M L N X X W K S W W R V E F H I  
O G U I B Z O I O M G J L Y Y K U E U D D R Y D M  
C B T Z J R D C E I M O R L D W K Z R K S O G F U  
O T V B O N C X S R M E B P H R A S E P F H R F G  
U A X X X A C E W R H B T F V R C Z K O X C E V X  
H F I M U E D C L E E A O R I G I N A L W E N E S  
S Z W T R L O A A V B C O D I U K T G J V H E L J  
Y N A P M O C R T A W M N Q Y C B X E Z J H J R M  
M P T S C E S Z J C P Q Y A V G A N S B P X X B J  
M N L G G A O L I K L B V Z D K F L T I Q L N P G  
E Q Y N L N O I T A I R A V S Q N H U G D R A A P  
T X U Q P T U G K Q R G I D P H D B R G E M I G Q  
R O K A F I G O Q X F Y U L A T Z U E D M W E C I  
I G O N L M X N C M U M Q W C U D C O O W V N E P  
C D C Y W I X N S R G M F N E Z N M L V H G Q N P  
A K D D R T T S W C P C G V C Q O E N N A V S U X  
L I C C X T Q Y H C L G M N I I J S E N S B I Y C

ACCOMPANIMENT ASYMMETRICAL AUDIENCE BODY CHOREOGRAPHER

COMPANY DANCE DANCER DESIGNER DYNAMICS ENERGY EXCERPT

EXPRESSIVENESS FORCE GESTURE IMAGES IMPROVISATION LINE

MODERN ORIGINAL PHRASE QUALITY REHEARSAL SPACE STAGE

SYMMETRICAL THEME TIME VARIATION



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