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WATER STREET DANCE MILWAUKEE EDUCATOR GUIDE



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Educator Guide

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Welcome to the Show!



Welcome to the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts!

We can't wait to welcome you to a special student matinee with Water Street Dance Milwaukee — a contemporary dance company known for bold, creative movement and stories told entirely without words. You'll see dancers combine powerful athleticism with emotional storytelling, bringing ideas and feelings to life through motion, rhythm, and connection.

This is your chance to watch, feel, and be inspired by a live performance that's full of energy and imagination. As you watch, think about how movement can tell a story, spark emotion, and connect people — no matter where they're from or what language they speak.

We hope this guide helps you look closer, listen deeper, and leave with new ideas about what dance can be.

Sincerely:

Dr. Kimberly Stephenson
Director of Education
Tobin Center for the Performing Arts



WaterStreet Dance

Water Street Dance Milwaukee identifies strongly—and publicly—as a contemporary repertory dance company, blending athleticism, innovation, and artistry to “push the boundaries of contemporary dance” through diverse and expressive performances. Further emphasizing their style, artistic director Morgan Williams describes the company’s aesthetic as “contemporary fusion,” integrating ballet, modern, and street dance elements into a dynamic and collaborative choreographic process.

About the Artist – Morgan Williams

Morgan Williams is the founder and artistic director of Water Street Dance Milwaukee. Known for his bold choreographic style and commitment to inclusion and innovation in dance, Williams has created a platform for emerging artists and diverse voices in contemporary movement. His work blends narrative and abstraction, drawing from a deep background in modern dance, hip-hop, and theatrical performance. Under his leadership, Water Street Dance has become one of the most exciting and progressive dance companies in the Midwest.



Growing up on the South Side of Chicago, being a dancer wasn’t the most obvious path. In school, I was classified with an IEP and labeled EBD, which often felt limiting. Everything shifted when I entered my arts high school, where I finally felt a sense of belonging and normalization. Like many artists, I was sensitive, but dance became my lifeline—it truly saved me. Through dance, I’ve been able to see the world in ways I never imagined possible.

A big part of that journey was my grandmother, my greatest supporter. She rode buses and trains with me into downtown Chicago so I could get the best training. She never missed a performance, and she was in the audience for my very first professional show. Her constant love and encouragement gave me the resilience to keep going, and they built the foundation for the artist I am today.

Contemporary Dance

Contemporary dance is a blend of many techniques, some of which are ballet, modern, jazz, and hip-hop, emphasizing versatility, emotion, and experimentation. Water Street Dance Milwaukee is known for its boundary-pushing style, blending athleticism with social commentary. Contemporary dance emerged in the 20th century, shaped by artists like Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, and Merce Cunningham, and continues to evolve with modern influences.

Shaping Steps, Shaping Stories *Dance style descriptions*

Modern Dance

- Origins: Emerged in the early 20th century as a reaction against the strict rules of classical ballet.
- Key Features: Focus on natural movement, gravity, and personal expression. Often grounded, using floor work and asymmetrical shapes.
- Influences: Early pioneers like Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan, and Lester Horton shaped the style.
- Purpose: Originally sought to rebel against ballet's rigidity and explore individual emotion and storytelling through movement.

Contemporary Dance

- Origins: Developed in the mid-to-late 20th century, blending elements of modern dance, ballet, and other forms like jazz and cultural dance , emphasizing versatility, emotion, and experimentation.
- Key Features: Fluid, versatile, and adaptable — dancers often shift between grounded movement and lifted, balletic lines. Emphasizes connection between movement and breath.
- Influences: Draws from multiple dance traditions, including modern, ballet, and global styles.
- Purpose: Often abstract or interpretive, focusing on creativity, innovation, and connection to the music or concept.



From Arabesque to Airflare *Dance Vocabulary*

Basic Dance Terms

- **Choreography** – A planned sequence of dance steps and movements created by a choreographer.
- **Footwork** – The pattern of steps or movements made with the feet.
- **Tempo** – How fast or slow the music (and the dance) is.
- **Step** – A single movement of the foot to a new place.
- **Turn** – Spinning or rotating the body around in place or while traveling.
- **Jump** – Pushing off the floor with your feet and landing back down.
- **Traveling** – Moving from one place to another during a dance.
- **Freestyle** (Improvisation) – Making up dance moves on the spot.
- **Formation** – How dancers are arranged in space during a performance.
- **Dynamics** – How movement is performed, specifically the varying use of energy, speed, and force to create a distinct quality or feeling.
- **Gesture** – A body movement, often of the hands, head, or other body parts, that conveys an idea, emotion, or intention.
- **Motif** – A single movement, gesture, or short recognizable phrase that embodies the theme or concept of the dance.

Contemporary Dance

- **Floor-to-Standing Transition** – Smooth movement between levels, characteristic of contemporary phrasing.
- **Counterbalance** – Using the weight of two or more dancers to create shared stability.

Word Search: Basic Movement Terms Grades 2-5

Name: _____

Find the words: JUMP, TURN, TWIST, STEP, BALANCE, POSE, SPIN, WALK, RUN, SKIP

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



Pre-Show Discussion Questions

1. What is Contemporary Dance? What do you think makes contemporary dance different from ballet, jazz, or hip-hop?
2. How can movement tell a story or express emotions without speaking? Can you think of examples?
3. If you were to show “joy” or “anger” using only your body, how might you move?
4. Based on what you know about Water Street Dance, what do you expect to see or hear in the performance?
5. Why do you think dance companies travel to perform for different communities? What might we gain from seeing artists from another city?

TEKS - ELAR: K 1AB, 2 1.1.E, 5 1.ABG, English II 1.ABCD, English IV 1.ABCD

Post-Show Discussion Questions

1. What was the first thing you noticed when the performance began?
2. Was there a movement, formation, or dancer that stood out to you? Why?
3. Did any part of the performance feel like it was telling a story or sharing a message? What was it?
4. How did the performance make you feel at different points?
5. What types of movements or patterns did you see repeated? How did they help create mood or energy?
6. How did the music or sound effects influence the way you understood the movement?
7. Did anything in the performance remind you of your own experiences, community, or culture?
8. How did being an audience member change your experience of the performance compared to watching dance online or on TV?

TEKS - ELAR: K 1AB, 2 1.1.E, 5 1.ABG, English II 1.ABCD, English IV 1.ABCD

2nd Grade

Lesson – *My Dance Story: Stories Told with Movement*

TEKS:

- Social Studies: §113.16 (3)(A) – Cultural traditions
- Music: §117.109 (2)(A)(C) – Rhythm & terminology

Objective: Students will identify and describe how dancers tell a story through movement and music.

Materials:

- Short Water Street Dance video clip (2–3 min, no dialogue)
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Drawing paper & crayons

Steps:

- 1.Intro (5 min): Explain that Water Street Dance tells stories with movement instead of words.
- 2.Viewing (5 min): Watch clip once for enjoyment.
- 3.Guided Observation (5 min): Watch again; pause to note beginning, middle, and end moments.
- 4.Art Response (10 min): Students draw three boxes showing the story's progression.
- 5.Share (5 min): Students explain their drawing to a partner or small group.

Worksheet Option: “My Dance Story Map” with three labeled boxes.

Extension: Compare with a picture book story; discuss similarities in storytelling.

***Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae**

This picture book beautifully captures the idea of using movement to express individuality and emotion. Gerald the giraffe feels out of place until he finds his own rhythm, which connects well to the concept of contemporary and street dance as personal storytelling.

2nd Grade

My Dance Story Map

Name: _____

Watch the dance performance and think about the story it is telling. Draw or write about what you see in the boxes below for the BEGINNING, MIDDLE, and END of the story. You can include characters, actions, and feelings you notice.

BEGINNING	MIDDLE	END

This was my favorite part of the dance because:

4th Grade

Lesson - *Telling History with Movement*

TEKS:

- Social Studies: §113.15 – Texas historical events
- Music: §117.115 (1)(C) – Musical elements in performance

Objective: Students will create movement sequences representing historical events.

Materials:

- List of Texas history moments
- Music track for accompaniment
- Open space

Steps:

- 1.Intro (5 min): Discuss how movement can tell history.
- 2.Choose Event (5 min): Groups select event.
- 3.Choreography (15 min): Create 3–4 moves representing sequence of events.
- 4.Performance (10 min): Share with class.
- 5.Debrief (5 min): How did movements help tell the story?

Assessment: Ability to connect history to physical storytelling.

Extension: Write a short paragraph narrating the dance.

6th Grade

Lesson – *Poetry in Motion*

TEKS:

- Social Studies: §113.18 – Cultural influences
- Music: Middle School Music Level I – Rhythm & form
- Dance: §117.205 (2)(B)(C)(i) – Movement composition

Objective: Students will create movement phrases to interpret a poem.

Materials:

- Short, rhythmic poem
- Music track for performance

Steps:

1. Read and discuss Poem (5 min)
2. Line Assignment (5 min): Groups take sections.
3. Create Movement (15 min)
4. Rehearse & Perform (10 min)
5. Reflection (5 min)
- 6.

Assessment: Movement alignment with text meaning.

Extension: Add projected poem text to performance.

8th Grade

Lesson – *Dance as Social Commentary*

TEKS:

- Social Studies: §113.20 (1)(A) – Historical eras/events
- Music: §117.103 (1)(C) – Rhythm, terminology
- Dance: §117.306 (2)(B)(C)(D) – Improvisation, emotion, composition

Objective: Students will analyze how dance communicates social and political themes.

Materials:

- Clip of Water Street piece with social theme
- Observation guide worksheet

Steps:

1. View (5 min)
2. Identify Themes (10 min): Use worksheet prompts.
3. Group Discussion (10 min)
4. Share Insights (10 min)

Extension: Create a digital slide connecting dance moments to real-world events.

Dance as Social Commentary Observation Guide

Use this guide to observe and analyze how a dance performance communicates ideas, emotions, and social messages. Follow the BEST format (Body, Energy, Space, Time) to structure your observations.

B – Body

Describe the movements you notice in the dancers' bodies. What parts of the body are emphasized? How do these movements help communicate the message?

E – Energy

What is the quality of movement—sharp, smooth, heavy, light, sudden, sustained? How does this energy support the story or theme?

S – Space

How do the dancers use space—levels, directions, pathways, proximity? How does space help shape the meaning of the piece?

T – Time

How is timing used—fast, slow, pauses, syncopation? Does the timing match or contrast with the music and message?

Overall Reflection

Summarize the social or cultural commentary you think the dance was making.

This was my favorite part because...

Answer Key

Word Search: Basic Movement Terms Grades 2-5

Find the words: JUMP, TURN, TWIST, STEP, BALANCE, POSE, SPIN, WALK, RUN, SKIP

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

DIGITAL RESOURCES

Contemporary & Modern Dance

- **Jacob's Pillow Interactive** - <https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org> Archive of performance videos, artist interviews, and dance history for modern and contemporary works.
- **American Dance Festival Video Archives** - <https://americandancefestival.org> Streaming library of influential modern and postmodern choreographers.

Cross-Style Learning & Analysis Tools

- **DancePlug** - <https://www.danceplug.com> Online classes and tutorials across multiple genres, including fusion styles.
- **KQED Arts** - If Cities Could Dance - <https://www.kqed.org/arts/series/if-cities-could-dance> Short videos documenting local dance scenes blending cultural and modern elements.

Local Dance Resources

- **sumRset Movement:** A contemporary dance company directed by Tanesha Sumerset Payne. Their work emphasizes accessibility and visibility for modern movement, with immersive performances that blend movement and emotion. [Collective Dance Artistry+2San Antonio+2Mysite](#)
- **NXG Dance Crew:** NXG (standing for Next Generation) is a celebrated underground street dance crew based in San Antonio. They're known for hosting free dance sessions for all ages, showcasing styles like breaking, popping, krumping, and tutting. Their mission emphasizes self-expression, movement exploration, and community building. <https://www.facebook.com/nxgdancecrew/>
- **City of San Antonio Parks & Recreation (Hip-Hop Classes):** Provides accessible, multi-level hip-hop dance classes through public community venues. These are especially ideal for schools looking for inclusive, affordable options. <https://www.sa.gov/Directory/Departments/Parks/Programs-Classes/Dance>
- **Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center / Guadalupe Dance Company:** A vibrant cultural hub providing folklórico and flamenco training and performance, rooted in Chicano, Mexican, Latino, and Indigenous traditions. A strong site for exploring cultural dance heritage and fusion. [thrivedancecollective.com+8Wikipedia+8Wikipedia+8](#)

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Powerful Art. Powerful Education. Excellence in both.

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