



# REPERTORY DANCE THEATRE

## LESSON PLAN: HUMPHREY/WEIDMAN technique

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Grades: 7-12

### Utah Standards

#### PERFORM

7-8.D.P.3: Direct energy and dynamics in technique exercises and dance performance in such a way that movement is textured and enhanced.

#### CREATE

L2.D.CR.1: Demonstrate openness, willingness, persistence, respect, and cooperation in trying new ideas, methods and approaches in creating dance.

#### CONNECT

L1.D.CO.3: Analyze and discuss dances from selected genres, styles and/or historical time periods, and formulate reasons for the similarities and differences between them in relation to the ideas and perspectives of the peoples from which the dances originate.

#### RESPOND

L2.D.R.2: Explain how the elements of dance and other choreographic principles are used in a variety of genres, styles, or cultural movement practices and explain how their differences affect intent.

**Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman** left the Denishawn Company in 1928 in search for a more basic style of movement. They wanted to explore the art of choreography and dance about contemporary America. They formed a partnership and company known as Humphrey-Weidman which created a large repertory of dramatic and abstract dances.

Doris Humphrey wanted to re-define dance. She wanted to “move from the inside out.” She searched for an emotional center, to initiate movement from the center of the body. She wanted to connect with universal movement and experimented with the force of gravity. The body is in a constant state of losing and restoring its equilibrium.

Her movement style grew organically out of the natural rhythm of breath, and the heft and swing of the body’s weight. She developed a movement theory based on the interplay of balance, control, and risk. “Fall and recovery” is how Humphrey described it.

She created a repertory using falls, tilts, swings, suspensions, turns and elevations that ran a theatrical gamut from safety to risk, from sudden changes of direction to lyrical sweeping spirals. For Humphrey, the drama of motion lay between the desire for stability and calm on the one hand, and on the other, the desire to explore the passions that throw you off-balance, “the call to danger.”

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## LESSON PLAN

### Goals:

- Experience how the force of gravity affects movement.
- Develop ways to use the breath to enliven movement.
- Explore “fall and recovery” a principal of Humphrey/Weidman technique.

### Preparation

#### **BALLOON ARMS: Exploring the use of the breath:**

Begin with feet together, back is curved, knees bent, arms are down.

1. Inhale and straighten the legs as you let the arms open slightly outward as if the breath is expanding a balloon. Exhale and let arms release to original position and bend the knees.
2. Inhale again, rise slightly and let the arms increase their expansion and open to the side. Exhale, plie and release the arms to the original position.
3. Inhale again and let the arms increase the expansion as they form a “V”. Exhale and release the arms to the original position.
4. Inhale again and let the arms increase the expansion as they form a “V” then the arms will cross and the back will curve forward Exhale, plie and release the arms to the original position.

#### **Explore Gravity:**

1. Stand with feet close together, arms at sides of body and close your eyes. Try to stand perfectly still. Notice that you are being pulled off balance because of the force of gravity.
2. With your eyes open, stand with your feet close together and slowly begin to lean forward. Eventually, you will fall forward.
3. With your eyes open, stand with your feet close together and slowly begin to lean sideward. Eventually, you will fall. Repeat leaning to the opposite side.
4. With your eyes open, stand with your feet close together and slowly begin to lean **backward**. Eventually, you will fall.

## **EXPLORE A SIMPLE BACK FALL and RECOVERY**

1. Stand with feet together, arms down. Step forward with the right foot as you inhale, lift the chest, and use the breath to motivate your arms to expand into a high “V” shape then arms cross.
2. Bend your knees (your left leg is in back) drop your chin and **curve your back** with your arms crossed. Roll back onto the floor. Leg stretches straight. Arms expand out to the side.
3. Recovery: Arch your back and the arms with help you to come to a sitting position with the right leg bent in back of the left
4. Curve the back forward and rise upward.
5. Continue the action of unfolding the spine and come to standing.
6. Hold

Repeat on the other side.

### **VARIATION: add elevation**

Repeat the back fall action but as you step forward, the back leg will go to an attitude.

Remember: always drop straight down to the ground to a sitting position to avoid hurting yourself

## **WAVE MOTION EXPLORATION**

Divide into two groups and make two lines facing each other at opposite sides of the space.

1. Perform all together.  
Breath action opens the arms to a high suspension. Cross the arms, curve the back, reach forward and run toward each other. Meet in the center of the space and perform a hop and back fall sequence simultaneously. Recover and run to the opposite side of the space.
2. Variation: Repeat the action in a cannon. Each couple will begin to run toward each other and as they hop into the air, the next couple will begin running toward each other.

## **EXPLORE A SIDE FALL: Six counts**

**Begin in a 4<sup>th</sup> position with the left foot in front.**

Count 1: Swing your arms to the right and they will take a circular path over the head.

Count 2: As the arms travel downward, drop the chin and curve the back as you go to a sitting position with the right leg bent in back. Slide out on your right side and extend both legs.

Count 3. Roll onto your back with the arms going to the side.

Count 4. Arch your back and come to a sitting position with the right leg bent.

Count 5. Curve your back and continue to unfold and go to a standing position with the weight on your left foot.

Count 6. Step toward the diagonal and lung onto the right foot with the left arm reaching forward with the front knee bent and the back knee straight.

- Repeat the action on the other side.
- Repeat the entire process but add going into the air...fist in an attitude hop, then with both legs bent.

VARIATION: divide into 4 groups. Repeat the side falls but ask the groups to perform in a cannon.

### **CREATE YOUR OWN FALL**

Ask students to design their own way to go to the floor (fall) using the force of gravity. They may design a back fall, side, or front fall, a spiral or a hinge fall.

Ask students to use their breath and find a suspended moment before the fall.

The recovery could be very inventive.

Ask each student to share their exploration.

Select one of the students to teach their fall to the class.