

Creativity Prompt Ideas for Dance

As part of our recent work with Hull City of Culture's "No Limits" strand, which aimed to improve the engagement of children & young people with culture, we created a series of creativity activity ideas. These ideas are practical, adaptable to different ability groups and easy to incorporate into a wide variety of settings. They're very effective at inspiring pupils to think creatively, generate new ideas and use their imagination.

Blind journey

Students are organised into groups of 3 with one camera/sketch pad per group. One is blindfolded, one is the guide and one is the recorder of the journey. Guide leads blindfolded person around a space and recorder can shout 'freeze' at any point. They do this when they see an interesting movement or shape emerge from the blindfolded person. They either photograph this shape or sketch it (using stick figures). Exercise can be repeated with each playing each role. When they have all been blindfolded, the group examines their recorded images, recreates them with them all doing them and then has to find a sequence and movements that connect the recorded moments. This becomes a dance of uncertainty and fear.

Who's Thinking of You?

Warm Up Game. Begin by asking pupils to walk around the space. Reinforce spatial awareness by prompting them to look for spaces to move into, change directions etc. Ask them to think of someone in the room but not make it obvious who they have selected. They can't let anyone know who it is! On your cue they have to get as close to that person as possible, without that person working out who is trying to be near them (could be multiple people if lots identify the same person). Allow time for pupils to explore this.

Repeat identifying a different person.

Other cues could include:

- Get as far away as possible from that person.
- Pick two people and try to make a triangle between you.
- And any others you can think of...

Find your Robotic Sequence

Students go on a tour of the school/part of the school/the local area and photograph or sketch any interesting shape they find in the landscape, architecture, etc. No agenda for this and no judgement – whatever they think is interesting is fine. On returning to the learning space/studio, they should pick their favourite shape. They should then recreate this shape physically. Teacher should then play some highly rhythmical music or even some staccato clockwork sounds. The students individually need to start in neutral and then move one part of their body at a time and eventually end up in their shape and then back to neutral. What you will end up with is a whole class robotic ‘factory’ that can then be used as a stimulus for small group longer sequences or for stories about the rise of robotics in our society.

Sculpt your Dance

Use mud/clay/plasticine as material for sculpture. Mould it into human shapes. In pairs, partner adopts an interesting body shape (as serious or silly as they want but should be a significant change to their usual sitting or standard form) and partner has to sculpt it in 3 minutes. This is not about masterly recreations of human form, but creating a sense of body shape. Once finished we'll have 15 dancing figures. Each joins up with 2 other pairs and is assigned 3 of the mud sculptures. As a group of 6, they must recreate each shape and then provide a narrative that links them all together and a short dance motif that tells this story and incorporates all 3 positions. Eventually the class will have 5 short sequences that takes us through all 15 figures and tells 5 stories. Audience reflection: what do the 3 positions each group have tell them and what story are they telling? What else could the audience suggest that might be added to the story? How might this change the dance they are creating? Could the whole class use all 15 shapes in the same danced story? This could be linked to both Drama & Design subjects as well.

Change the Dance

Show the class examples of the Sheffield elephants. <http://www.herdofsheffield.com> Explain to them that they'll be working on the same principle: multiple versions of the same piece of dance, each of them beautiful in their own way. Develop/teach them one twenty second piece of dance containing a strong motif. Once they have all learnt it, split them into groups and give them each an instruction to create a new version of this sequence based on changes to:

- Genre
- Different pieces of music behind it
- Narratives that you provide
- Costumes/props

Discussion points: same on the inside but look different on the outside.

Reaction Series

This one is only for the brave: some uncomfortable truths may appear. Ask your students to create a short series of movements that capture their typical reactions to different elements of the school day. What movements would they associate with a maths lesson, as opposed to an art lesson, to lunchtime, to home time, etc.? Each little section can be developed into a short contemporary dance piece. Once they've done it, you'll get a very good idea about the individual's and probably the whole class' feelings about how they learn. Then ask them how they feel each element could be adapted so that they felt, for instance, more active during maths, safer at lunchtime, less intimidated by art.

'The Blade' and Planking

Students recreate a collection of buildings from Hull using only their bodies. When done, one person planks across/above/beneath/upon/amongst them. How do the buildings feel about the intrusion? Create a moving tableau with repeated movements, reactive sounds and a line of spoken thoughts about how the Blade is interacting with the local architecture and heritage. Possible links here to geometry and physics: how do we support each other when 'planking'? What are the forces at play? How was the Blade moved, erected, supported?

Reflect the City Through Dance

Using the Samba 8 beat (and its useful numeracy links), the teacher counts out the regular 8 beats and each student creates a physical movement for any 2 of the 8 beats. Each movement should reflect one element of the city. For instance, if they wish to capture its maritime nature, they might pinch their nose as if holding their breath. Do it every time that beat appears then back to neutral. Teacher conducts others to abandon theirs and join in with interesting ones. Gradually the teacher can conduct groups of students to carry out 4, 6 or even 8 movements per 8 beats, and choreograph the whole class in a physical representation of Hull.