Using Dance and Movement to Foster Learning

Grades 6-12
Originally from Wilmington, Delaware, Raphael Xavier is an award-winning artist and alumnus of the world renowned Hip Hop dance company, Rennie Harris Puremovement. A 2013 Pew Fellowship Grantee, 2016 Guggenheim Fellow and 2016 United States Artist Fellow, Xavier has been a professional breaker/dancer for the last 20 years, working in a variety of fields including music, photography and film.

A self taught Hip Hop dancer and Breaking practitioner since 1983, Xavier continues to learn and recreate new ways to expand the vocabulary of the dance form through constant research of the culture, performance, practice and by staying present in the community.

His extensive research in Hip Hop forms and culture, specifically Breaking, has lead to the creation of Ground-Core, a Somatic dance technique that gives the practitioner a better understanding of the body within all dance forms. His goal is to make the form accessible to any body type and level. Ground-Core technique is featured in most of his choreography and repertory works.

The culmination of a 20-year exploration, Sassafrass is Xavier’s newest work inspired by three distinct interpretations of the word itself: 1) The word sassafras: a dried root used for flavoring; 2) The old character based dance styles and flavor in Breaking; and 3) The acceptance/privilege of maturing as a dancer in the Breaking genre in search of the combined: aging & mastery.

Sassafrass focuses on the embodied experiences of a Breaker’s life through three styles of Breaking: Top Rock, Footwork, and Ground Text. With four Breakers and four musicians, Xavier holds onto the traditional elements of breaking while drawing parallels to Jazz music. It is a practitioner’s journey and search for graceful aging and maturation in an art form associated with youth.

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The Brooklyn born composer/alto-Bboy ProfoWon has been in the BAY AREA HIP HOP is an anomaly. A poet since birth, he has (Breaker) began dancing in January
Touring Performing Arts Program, the Philadelphia Clef Club of Jazz, private instruction, in his living room and on the bandstand.

Bobby Zankel (Saxophone). The Brooklyn born composer/alto saxophonist first began attracting national attention around 1971, while a student at the University of Wisconsin as a member of the NBA Jazz Master and MacArthur Fellow Cecil Taylor’s “Unit Core Ensemble”. Downbeat described Zankel as “a skillful young altoist with a powerful music at his fingertips”. Zankel was combining his performing and research with Taylor while working with master drummer George Brown’s quartet that featured the brilliant under appreciated organist Melvin Rhyne. His “underground” reputation grew on the New York “Loft Scene” (73-75), where he performed with the likes of William Parker, and Ray Anderson.

Jocko MacNelly (Upright Bass) is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, arranger and teacher. At any given moment he is as likely to break into a calypso tune as to be writing a choral arrangement of an African soukous song. Though he considers the Blues and Soul Music to be his “base camp,” he takes great joy in covering a range of styles: Jazz, R&B, calypso, reggae, Afro-Cuban, country, bluegrass, various styles from Brazil and Africa, Arab and Jewish music, along with European classical music from all periods. His instrumental versatility and expertise are equally as far ranging from playing electric bass with an R&B band or accompanying jazz singers on guitar or string bass to playing banjo with the Café Accordion Orchestra.

Sumi Tonooka (Piano). Tonooka (pronounced To-NO-ka) has been called a “fierce and captivating composer and pianist” (Jazz Times), “provocative and compelling” (New York Times), and “continually inventive, original, surprising, and a total delight,” (Cuadranos de Jazz, Madrid). During a career spanning more than 30 years that has taken her from bases in Philadelphia & Boston, to New York & Seattle, Tonooka has been developing a body of work that surprises and delights audiences – quietly piling up accolades from jazz writers and fellow musicians. Her recent activity as a composer includes receiving the Music Alive: New Partnerships residency with The South Dakota Symphony Orchestra through New Music USA to take place in November 2015. The residency will culminate with a premier of her symphonic work Full Circle and a new work for woodwind quintet.

Leigh "Mr. Lei" Nelson is an anomaly. A poet since birth, he has worked production wherever he finds himself in the world, but has never found the time to publish a book of his poetry. He has performed with Ramblin' Jack Elliot, at Jack's invitation, with Jack backing him on a piece and has collaborated with other musicians and poets over a vast spectrum of genres and ideas. Mr. Lei currently dwells in the Berkshires and is the Stage Manager at the Mahaise Performing Arts Center in Great Barrington, MA. In fact, it was at the Mahaise that Mr. Lei met Raphael Xavier. It was a brief conversation and sharing of work that exploded in a dance and poetry piece. Mr. Lei also continues to work with the band Higher Organix]
The South Bronx in the 1970’s was heavily influenced by the Civil Right Movement. In the decades prior, African Americans constitutionally gained rights against racial discrimination and segregation. However, the country was socially many steps behind. Supreme court rulings began to implement the busing of African American students to white schools in efforts to desegregate. The ruling was resisted by many white families so much so that they would protest and/or move to new areas. For the white families in resistance, the South Bronx was no longer where they wished to live. As large numbers moved away and not enough people were replacing their living spaces, the property value of the area began to decrease and the racial demographic became predominantly African American. Despite the drop in property value, landlords were raising rent to new highs. This enforced the cycle of poverty in the community as unemployment also went up. When the tenements almost lost all of their value, landlords would set fire to their buildings to collect insurance money. Amidst the urban decay the borough faced, the cultural and artistic movement known as hip hop was born. Hip hop is a movement that originated with African American youths. The movement brought about breaking, MCing (or rapping), graffitiing and DJing. The founding father of hip hop is DJ Kool Herc, who experimented altering music of R&B and funk records with turntables. While DJing at large block parties in the Bronx, DJ Kool Herc would sample the break of a song and create a rhythmic base known as the break beat. The break beat is where DJ Kool Herc noticed the dancing of the crowd elevated. He began to call the especially talented dancers “b-boys” and “b-girls”. Break dancing, inheriting its competitive nature from earlier gang-related mock-battle forms, emerged as a dance challenge between b-boys and b-girls. Important moves within breaking include toprock, downrock, 6-step, and freeze. As the media began to take notice of the hip hop movement and its popularity grew, the dance form became even more acrobatic and extreme. Today, breakdancing is no longer done just in the streets but in traditional theater spaces, dance studios, universities and schools. Hip hop in all of its facets has become ingrained into what we and the world associate with American culture.
6-step - A floor movement that transfers weight between the hands and feet in a circular motion.

Break - An instrumental or percussion section of a song.

Breaking/Breakdancing - A style of street dance coined by its acrobatic floorwork and intricate footwork.

B’boys/B’girls - A break boy or break girl; A breakdancer.

DJ - A title for a person who mixes and alters music to create a new sound.

Downrock - Movements done on the floor.

Freeze - A sudden stop in a routine that is typically difficult or eye catching (shown to the right).

Graffiti - Writings or drawings scratched, scribbled or spray painted on public spaces.

Improvisation - The process of spontaneously creating and/or implementing movement in dance (and music).

Jazz - A type of music of black American origin characterized by improvisation, syncopation, and usually a regular or forceful rhythm, emerging at the beginning of the 20th century.

MC - A master of ceremonies, more popularly known as rappers today.

Sample - A portion of a song recorded and replayed to as part of a different song.

South Bronx - A sub-borough made up of the neighborhoods called Melrose, Concourse, Mott Haven and Port Morris; The Bronx is the most northern borough of New York City.

Spoken-Word - An oral art that focuses on the aesthetics of word play such as intonation and voice inflection.

Tempo - The speed (or pacing) of a dance or song.

Toprock - Movements done while standing upright.

Urban decay - Economic, social and physical decline of a once highly functioning city.
Culture is defined as the shared beliefs, traditions, practices, expressions, etc. of a group. Culture is generally passed down/transmitted through the group's outward expressions. This can take the shape of imagery, fashion, music, movement, storytelling and other methods. Across cultures, each of these things is directly connected to the arts. The arts (or aesthetic experience) are also at the root of how most humans naturally learn. Movement, and dance specifically, is an art form that is able to communicate the complexities of human emotion and experience and bridge social and cultural divides. Dance is also a mode of sharing and expressing one's own culture. From ritualistic dances to greet spirits and tell stories in Ghana to dance battles in cities across America in the 1980's, dance has been an indispensable aspect of cultures around the world. The integration of arts into classroom curriculum and pedagogy provide a solid basis for allowing students of all backgrounds to better connect with learning. The "Resources" section of this guide will provide some specific readings on these connections.

A well-rounded education must include both cognitive and experiential exploration in order to prepare students for the world...so that they can make it better.

Reflection Questions

- What emotions and movements were presented by the dancers?
- What dynamics did they have and what shapes did they create?
- What is the relationship between the movement and the music?
- What role did the drum play in this performance?
- How did the performance make you feel?
- Was there anything you recognized in the gestures, movement or music?
- Does it remind you of any personal experience or something you’ve witnessed before?
- What will you take away from this?
Relevant Content Area and Arts Strands:
Academic standards are often presented as overarching goals for content areas. Instead, look at them as suggested baselines. Using this viewpoint enables educators to plan for excellence and avoid diminished expectations (which tend to disproportionately affect marginalized children). Below you will find the list of standards and project/lesson outlines that connect with Sassafrass. This is not an exhaustive list; it acts as a starting point. These ideas are intended as a starting point or framework; you know your classroom better than anyone. Make these ideas your own.

ELA:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
Identify aspects of a text that raise an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other text when necessary to supplement arguments and advancing claims.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the relationship between a particular text and the entire body of work under consideration. (Include media used.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3
Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events cause later ones or simply precede them.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary descriptive of political, social, or historical contexts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the relationship between a particular text and the entire body of work under consideration. (Include media used.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary descriptive of political, social, or historical contexts.

Dance:
DA:Cr1.1.6
Explore various movement vocabularies to transfer ideas into choreography.

Grade 7
DA:Cr1.1.7
a. Compare and contrast the movement from a variety of stimuli (for example, music, observed dance, literary forms, notation, natural phenomena, personal experience/reality, current news or social events) and make selections to expand movement vocabulary and artistic expression.
b. Explore various movement vocabularies to express an artistic intent in choreography. Explain and discuss the choices made using genre-specific dance terminology.

Grade 8
DA:Cr1.1.8
a. Demonstrate recurrent patterns of movement and their relationships in dance.
b. Observe the movement characteristics or qualities observed in a specific dance genre. Describe differences and similarities about what was observed to one’s attitudes and movement preferences.
c. Observe the movement characteristics or qualities observed in a specific dance genre. Describe differences and similarities about what was observed to one’s attitudes and movement preferences.
d. Observe and compare how the elements of dance are used in a variety of genres, styles, or cultural movement practices. Use genre-specific dance terminology.

Grade Hs proficient
DA:Cr1.1.HSI
a. Explore various stimuli for sourcing movement to develop an improvisational or choreographed dance study. Analyze the processes and the relationship between the stimuli and the movement.
b. Experiment with the elements of dance to explore personal movement preferences and strengths, and select movements that challenge skills and build on strengths in an original dance study.

Grade 6
DA:Cr:1.1.6
a. Explore choreographic devices and dance structures to develop a dance study that supports an artistic intent. Explain the goal or purpose of the dance.
b. Demonstrate an artistic criteria to choreograph a dance study that communicates personal or cultural meaning. Based on the criteria, evaluate why some movements are more or less effective than others.

DA:Re:7.1.6
a. Demonstrate a variety of movement and their relationships in dance.
b. Observe the movement characteristics or qualities observed in a specific dance genre. Describe differences and similarities about what was observed to one’s attitudes and movement preferences.
c. Observe and compare how the elements of dance are used in a variety of genres, styles, or cultural movement practices. Use genre-specific dance terminology.

Grade 9
DA:Re:7.1.8
a. Describe, demonstrate and discuss patterns of movement and their relationships in dance in content of artistic intent.
b. Explain how the elements of dance are used in a variety of genres, styles, or cultural movement practices to communicate intent. Use genre-specific dance terminology.

Grade Hs proficient
DA:Re:7.1.HSI
a. Analyze recurring patterns of movement and their relationships in dance in content of artistic intent.
b. Analyze the use of elements of dance in a variety of genres, styles, or cultural movement practices with cultural context to communicate intent. Use genre-specific dance terminology.

Grade 6
DA:Cn10.1.6
a. Observe the movement characteristics or qualities observed in a specific dance genre. Describe differences and similarities about what was observed to one’s attitudes and movement preferences.
b. Conduct research using a variety of resources to find information about a social issue of great interest. Use the information to create a dance study that expresses a specific point of view on the topic. Explain whether the experience of creating and sharing the dance reinforces personal views or offers new knowledge and perspectives.

Grade 7
DA:Cn10.1.7
a. Compare and contrast the movement characteristics or qualities found in a variety of dance genres. Discuss how the movement characteristics or qualities differ from one’s own movement characteristics or qualities and how different perspectives are communicated.
b. Research the historical development of a dance genre or style. Use knowledge gained from the research to create a dance study that communicates the essence of the style or genre. Read the study with peers as part of a lecture demonstration that tells the story of a historical journey of the chosen dance genre or style. Document the process of research and application.

Grade Hs proficient
DA:Cn10.1.8
a. Relate concerns found between different dances and discuss the relevance of the connections to the development of one’s own personal perspectives.

Grade Hs proficient
DA:Cn10.1.HSI
a. Analyze how dance contributes to determination of the dance related question or problem. Conduct research through interviews, research database, text, media, or movement. Analyze and apply information gathered by creating a group dance that answers the question posed. Discuss how the dance communicates new perspectives or realizations. Compare orally and in writing the process used in choreography to that of other creative, academic, or scientific procedures.
Dance Interview and Presentation:

Grade 6-8

Dance has existed in many forms across cultures and generations. The goal of this activity is to enable students to explore dance in their own lives and across the years. In Sassafrazz, Raphael and his crew look at the connection between music and the human experience.

- Students will select a family member or friend to interview about the role dance and music have played in their life.
- The interviewee should be at least 15 years older than the student.
- Interview questions:
  - What dances were popular when you were my age? Can you show any of them to me?
  - How important was dance in your community when you were growing up?
  - Why do you think dance was (or wasn't) important?
  - In what ways do you think dances have changed since then?
  - When you think about different dances over the years, does the music change with the dances?
  - Students will create at least 5 additional questions.
- Students will then create a visual chronology/timeline.
- Students will analyze interview answers and look for visual and textual evidence to display their findings. (students should focus on evidence that relates to the interviewee’s responses in order to further examine their views)
- During this analysis, students should be thinking about how physical movements evolved alongside musical trends.
- Grade 6-8 students will present their findings using a trifold or digital presentation tool.

Alternate Assessment

The assignment can also be completed by having students complete an essay that analyzes the interview and explores the evolution of dance in their genre.

High School

High School students will create a video in which they recreate the dances in their chronology and display the range of differences in physical movement. After sharing their video with the class, students will briefly explain how and why they modified movements.

Words and Movement

Grade 6-12 (with modifications)

Language takes many forms. Raphael’s work explores how the body can communicate things like perseverance, strength, and connection. He also connects words to his movements. In this activity, students will explore the ways in which the body can communicate alongside words. After analyzing the lyrics to Gang Starr’s “Jazz Thing” (another poem or song can be substituted), students will answer the following questions in a group discussion in order to examine ways in which the body can “speak” just as words do.

- What was the song’s main point?
- Are there specific lines that say more about that point than others?
- If you were going to summarize the lyrics in one word, what would it be?
- Can you create a physical movement or gesture that represents that word?

Students will then be asked to pair up and create a poem on a topic of their choosing. Once the poem is completed (using any scheme/meter the teacher prefers), each pair will create a series of at least 5 movements/gestures to communicate specific points from the piece. Each pair will perform their piece for the group with one member reading the poem aloud as the other performs the movements.

Dance Product/Ad Campaign

High School

In Sassafrazz, Raphael and his crew emphasize the importance of remembering one’s roots. In this activity, groups of students will be asked to create and market a dance related product from another era. After researching dances that contributed to or derived from breaking, students will select one era or dance style to create a product for (shoes, windbreakers, hats, pads, etc.). Groups will be required to devise the following:

- Logo (Digital/Collage/Hand Drawn)
- Slogan/Jingle (Phrase or Tune, Spoken or Recorded)
- 1 Minute Elevator Speech/Product Pitch (Spoken)
- Pricing (Including at least one chart)
- Target Demographic
- Spokesperson

*Each component is expected to be refined and be accompanied by rationales.

Upon completion, students will create a sales pitch presentation for classmates in which they share each item and receive critical feedback.
Additional Reading:


#HipHopEd: [https://hiphoped.com/](https://hiphoped.com/)


National Arts Standards: [https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/](https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/)

Movies:

- Wild Style (1982)
- Beat Street (1984)
- Breakin (1984)
- The Freshest Kids (2002)
- Planet B-Boy (2008)