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Cultural Centre of India

Indian Culture Comes to You: Dance of India



Classroom photo by Rich Sofranko

STUDY GUIDE

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Artists on Tour

SHOW PROGRAM

- Culture and Arts of India
- Dances of India
- Culture and Lifestyles in India
- Religion and Mythology in Hinduism
- People in India – Who are they?
- Understanding India

BRIEF PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This hands-on program covers a wide range of multidisciplinary activities. The topics include, but are not limited to, multiculturalism, history, religion, citizenship, geography, music, dance (classical, folk & contemporary), mythology, choreography, art, sculpture, language arts, costumes and makeup artistry. Each one is created or modified as per the request from the organizers and the length of the time allotted. All the presentations are interactive, informative and entertaining. Program will include a wealth of visual aids to maximize the learning.

CULTURAL CENTER OF INDIA

To preserve and strengthen the culture and arts of India through dedication and discipline.

Padma Chebrolu has a Masters in Education from the University of Cincinnati and is currently pursuing a Masters in Business Administration from Xavier University. She works at Procter & Gamble and is the artistic director for the Cultural Center of India.

Ms Chebrolu started choreographing and directing dances and dance dramas from an early age in India. She attended different fine arts institutions, studying under several gurus. Her knowledge in various Indian classical dance, folk and contemporary dance styles and music gives her more freedom to work with any piece of music. Ms Chebrolu enjoys the challenge and satisfaction associated with each production. She performs and conducts workshops on culture and arts of India, all over the U.S., and says her in-depth approach to the discipline is both philosophical and spiritual.

DANCES OF INDIA

Dance is a form of communication that brings out the innermost feelings and at the same time depicts the cultural aspects of a civilization. Classical dances of India were born in the temples and they are the dances of the mind, soul and divine. They still follow the rules set by Bharata (the master Teacher and a saint) in his *Natyashastra* (Science of Dancing) from second century AD. Since then, the art of dance has passed on to the next generation in a *Guru Sishaya Parampara* (Teacher to Student Tradition).

Classical dance, along with folk dances, present a spectacular aspect of this magnificent and continuous dance tradition. The beautiful choreography of these dances reflects highly complex technique and elegant mime. Every simple gesture has a meaning. The intricate movements — eye, finger and facial expressions are all symbolic. Due to the dances' expression of devotional life and relationship to spirituality, each rehearsal, recital or presentation still begins and ends with a prayer.

There are mainly seven styles of classical dances. Each style lends itself to both solo or group performances. The professional has a substantial knowledge and appreciation of the thematic and philosophical content of India's storehouse of myth and legend, in addition to a thorough grounding technical skill. The expression of various forms of poetic verse pose a challenge to the dancer. In these, she or he assumes the role of the main character of a theme and depicts a whole range of reactions given to a situation.

To be able to express subtle emotions, a dancer has to be sensitive, abundantly creative and inspired. The dancer's ability to present a story at several levels of meaning absorbs the attention of the audience. The dancer in Indian classical forms is visually among the most colorful and fascinating. The dancer is adorned from head to foot in such an array of costumes and jewelry that one wonders how she or he is able to move at all.

The majority of the dance styles are rooted in Hinduism, more specifically, in Hindu myth and custom. This is clearly evident in the verses used for interpretation, the sculptural evidence in ancient Hindu temples and in the very philosophy underlying the dance style. It includes melody, rhythm, poetry, drama and mime.

"Pure dance" at its best should bring unalloyed joy, uncontaminated by either more subtle or stronger moods. In Indian dance, attention gets drawn to the expression on the dancer's face rather than to the line of the body or of the movement. This is in contrast to the art of ballet, where the dancer's expression and execution of movements are strongly influenced by the role he or she is portraying. Here, "pure dance" is not a vehicle for expressing varying moods. It is a decorative passage of dance.

To appreciate this, the artist and the viewer have to be trained about the culture: not merely in terms of knowledge of a particular art form or mere expertise, but in terms of a total awareness and appreciation of life, people, manners and customs.

SINGLE-HANDED GESTURES



Hand gestures vary from region to region.

According to the "Abhinaya Darpanam"

PATAKA: clouds, a forest, saying "no," the chest, strength, a river, the heavens, a horse, cutting, wind, lying down, departing, moonlight, opening doors, waves, entering a street, equality, 'I,' taking an oath, silence, a shield, touching things, benediction, the sea, holding a sword, a month, a year, cleaning with a broom



TRIPATAKA: a crown, a tree, the god Indra, the ketaki flower, the flame of a lamp, a pigeon, an arrow, turning around



ARDHAPATAKA: leaves, a board for writing, the bank of a river, indicating "both," a knife, a banner, a tower, an animal's horn



KARTARIMUKHA: the separation between a man and a woman, overturning, opposition, plundering, the corner of an eye, death, estrangement, lightning, separation, falling and weeping



MAYURA: a peacock, a vine, a bird, an ornamental mark on the forehead, discussing the scriptures, something famous



ARDHACHANDRA: a phase of the moon, a hand seizing the throat, a spear, consecrating an image for worship, a plate, origin, waist, meditation, prayers



ARALA: drinking poison, nectar, violent wind

SHUKATUNDA: shooting an arrow, a spear, remembering one's home, saying mystical things, a violent mood



MUSHTI: steadfastness, grasping, knotting the hair, holding things, the fighting mood of wrestlers



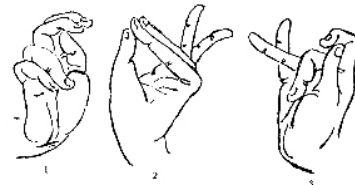
SHIKHARA: Cupid, a bow, a pillar, certainty, the upper lip, a tooth, questioning, recollection, embracing, ringing a bell



KAPITHA: the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess Saraswatu, holding cymbals, milking cows, holding flowers, grasping the end of one's robes, gathering cloth, offering incense



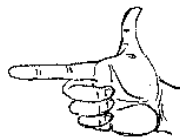
KATAKAMUSKHA (three varieties): picking flowers, drawing the string of a bow, offering betel leaves, preparing sandalwood paste, applying perfume, speaking, glancing



SUCHI: the number "one," the Supreme Soul, one hundred, the sun, a city, the world, saying "like that," solitude, threatening, growing thin, a rod, the body, astonishment, a braid of hair, an umbrella, beating drums, a potter's wheel, consideration, the decline of the day



CHANDRAKALA: the crescent moon, the face, the span between thumb and forefinger, the crown of the god Siva, the Ganges river, a cudgel



CHATURA: a small amount of something, gold, copper, iron, wetness, sorrow, aesthetic pleasure, the difference between castes, proof, sweetness, slow gait, breaking into pieces, face, oil, ghee



PADMAKOSHA: fruit, a circular movement, a ball, a cooking pot, eating, a flower bud, a mango, scattering flower petals, clusters of flowers, a bell, a lotus, an egg



BHRAMARA: a bee, a parrot, a wing, a crane, a cuckoo and similar birds



SARPARISHA: a snake, sprinkling, nourishing, pouring water to the gods and sages, the arms of wrestlers



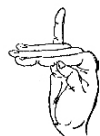
HAMSASYA: blessing, festival, tying with thread, ascertaining instruction, goosebumps, pearls, pulling up the wick of a lamp, a jasmine flower, a painting, the act of pointing, a dike impeding a current



MRIGASIRSHA: women, a cheek, a wheel, limit, fear, a quarrel, costume, calling, a deer's head, a lute, holding an umbrella, stepping, calling one's beloved



HAMSAPAKSHA: the number six, construction of a bridge, a covering or sheath, a swan's wing



SINHAMUKHA: a rabbit, a cow, an elephant, fire, a lotus garland, a lion's face, the preparation of medicines, rectification



SAMDAMSA: the belly, the womb, presentation of an offering to the gods, opening and closing, a wound, a worm, great fear, worship, the number five



KANGULA: fruit, ankle bells, any other bell, a partridge, a waterlily, the chataka bird, a coconut, the betel-nut tree



MUKULA: a blossom, a waterlily, eating, the god of love (Cupid) with his five arrows, holding a signet or seal, the navel, a plaintain flower



ALAPADMA: a full-blown lotus, elephant apple fruit, circular movement, separation from the beloved, looking glass, the full moon, beauty, a hairstyle, a turret, a village, height, anger, a lake, murmuring sound, praise



TAMRACHUDA: a rooster's cock, a crane, a cow, a camel, a calf, a pen



TRISULA: a trident, a bel-leaf, the number three, the concept of the Trinity (in Hinduism)



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY ONE

There are several dance styles in India. On a map of India, identify where these dance traditions have originated. What similarities and differences do you find between them? Describe how the surrounding culture and religion have influenced dancing in India.

How does this relate to dance in North America? How did the surrounding cultures and lifestyles influence the dance in North America? Use the library and internet as your resource.

ACTIVITY TWO

A feature of Hinduism (most predominant religion in India) is its caste system, a set of cultural rules which place individuals in a particular socio-economic status. The major groups are: Brahmins (priest caste), Kshatriyas (warrior), Vaishyas (merchant), and Sudras (laborers). Within these groupings are several sub-castes. The Hindu caste system has an overt set of societal rules.

Within every culture there exists a system of group distinctions. How does the Hindu caste system differentiate from classifications in the North American culture? Are there life style differences among these different groups in the United States? How does the Hindu caste system relate to the hierarchical system in the U.S.? On a map of Cincinnati, outline the different neighborhoods. Comment on the similarities and differences.

ACTIVITY THREE

Gandhi led the people of India to independence from British Rule. He is still admired today for his belief in nonviolent opposition.

Comment on the concept of nonviolent resistance. What are the things that fascinate you about Gandhi's life? Comment on how Gandhi influenced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement in America.

ACTIVITY FOUR

Ramayan and Mahabharat are the most famous and the longest epics in the world (you can find shorter versions and children's versions of it too). All the heroes and heroines are worshipped by the Hindus all over the world, even today.

Which character(s) fascinate you the most, in these epics and why? Compare them to the stories in the Greek mythology and stories from American culture.

ACTIVITY FIVE

The British and other westerners experienced a bit of culture shock when they first viewed Hindu sculpture. European art had developed a different set of aesthetic criteria than their counterparts in India. Since the Renaissance, artists in Europe produced realistic art, depicting the world as it appears. Conversely, Hindu art is symbolic, the images do not appear how we see them. Certain features are emphasized to express a particular meaning or a message.

Compare and contrast the opinions on the visual and symbolic representation of sculptures and paintings of gods and goddesses of Hindu religion and its relation to art.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY ONE

Pretend you are planning to visit India. Design a travel plan that includes all the details. Use a map to plan your travel and describe the reasons for choosing this route and the significance of the place(s) you would like to visit.

Describe the weather conditions, food habits, currency exchange, language difference. Discuss how you will work out these cultural differences to make your travel fun.



ACTIVITY TWO

Clothing in India is most elegant and breathtaking. Designing costumes can be a challenging effort. Choose a time period, religion, socioeconomic level and design male and female (boy or girl) costumes. Use creativity in selecting the needed materials.

Describe the research you have done in creating them. Explain how costume/clothing of people represents their lifestyles. How does climate effect costume/clothing?

ACTIVITY THREE

All the holidays in the world have a unique story behind them. These stories help us in understanding the culture of the people in that society.

Select an Indian holiday and describe it. How does understanding the holiday help you in learning to appreciate cultural diversity?

ACTIVITY FOUR

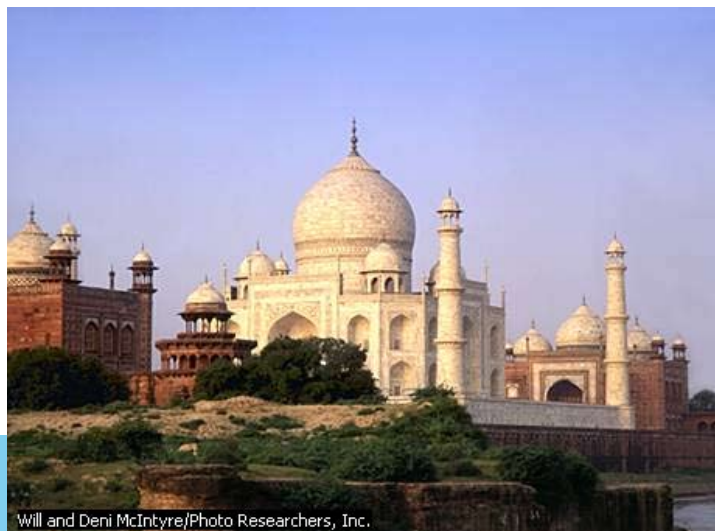
Homeopathy is an ancient and very popular medical tradition in India and its neighboring countries. Yoga and meditation are part of curing diseases.

What are the advantages and disadvantages between Western and Homeopathic medicine practices? Do you believe Homeopathic medicine still has relevance in today's world, why or why not?

ACTIVITY FIVE

The Taj Mahal is one of the wonders of the world. It stands as a loving memory by the King Shajahan to his wife. This magnificent structure has an intriguing architectural value.

- Build a model of Taj Mahal with the materials of your choice. Describe the process you had to go through to recreate the Taj Mahal (include details on blue print, mathematical calculations, geometry, etc.) Dedicate it to the most important people in your life. Explain why you chose this individual.
- Have your students study the building of the Taj Mahal. Have a local architect come in and talk about the mathematics of architecture.



Taj Mahal, 1632-1654

Will and Deni McIntyre/Photo Researchers, Inc.

REFERENCES

You can call Cultural Center of India at (513) 677-9886 or (513) 230-5991 with questions and concerns on children's activities.

Pitara For Kids: Virtual Community & E-Magazine for Children, <http://www.pitara.com>

- Pitara (PIH-TAH-RAH) is a Hindi word which translates into 'a chest full of surprises.'
- Pitara For Kids is designed for children ages two to thirteen. Most of the material on this site has been approved/liked by children.
- Children's E-Magazine contents:
 - **ON-LINE STORIES:** This section contains on-line illustrated stories that are complete in themselves.
 - **BOOKS:** This section presents books in English and all major Indian languages.
 - **FOLKTALES:** These are stories from a very long time ago, based on Panchatantra, Jataka, etc. from various parts of India.
 - **POEMS:** This section contains poems in English and Hindi, by some famous and some not so famous Indian poets.
 - **ACTIVITIES:** Here you can find all kinds of fun activities — from coloring to on-line Crosswords to making craft toys.
 - **EARTH:** This is the environment section. Get to know the world a little better — the animals and the plants and yourself.
 - **PARENTING:** Articles on what is possibly the most important as well as the most underrated job in the world.
 - **FEATURES:** This section carries articles, features and opinions on varied issues.



Shiva as Nataraja (Lord of the Dance)