Title of Work:
Billy The Kid
Reconstruction and performance: The Joffrey Ballet

Creators:
Choreographer: Eugene Loring (1911 - 1982)
Composer: Aaron Copland (1900 - 1990)
Vision and libretto: Lincoln Kirstein (1907 - 1996)
Costumes and scenery: Jared French (1905 - 1988)

Background Information:
Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as LeRoy Kerpestein, Eugene Loring was part of a large family, but was raised primarily by his grandmother. As a teenager he became interested in the theatre and began his career in vaudeville. He trained as an actor, studying dance to gain more skills and to supplement his income. He enrolled at the School of American Ballet where he worked under choreographer George Balanchine and artistic visionary Lincoln Kirstein. These two men were instrumental in creating a distinctive American ballet style which shocked traditionalists. Kirstein organized Ballet Caravan as a second company which featured American themes and gave opportunities to young American choreographers. In 1937, he invited Loring to choreograph a ballet based on the notorious outlaw, Billy the Kid. Loring accepted, also dancing the lead. It was the first work to combine ballet and modern, as well as to use the spoken word. His other collaborations with Kirstein included: Harlequin For President (1936), Yankee Clipper (1937), and City Portrait (1939). He danced with The American Ballet Theatre under the artistic leadership of George Balanchine, and later became a staff choreographer for MGM studios. In 1948 he founded the American School of Dance in Hollywood and in 1965 he pioneered dance education at University of California, Irvine where he remained on the faculty until 1981. Patrice Whiteside, a student of Loring and formerly a principal dancer with the Oakland Ballet Company, safeguards the integrity of his life’s work and reconstructs and teaches the ballets.

About the Artwork:
Eugene Loring, at age 27, began the process of choreographing Billy The Kid by creating a storyboard of the legend. He organized the events of Billy’s life sequentially into scenes, determining their dramatic impact and length. He sent these plans to composer Aaron Copland in Paris who used them to create his musical score, based on themes from cowboy songs. The work was premiered by a small group who danced all the parts, changing both their costumes and the lights each time they exited. The score was played on two pianos. However, the ballet met with tremendous success and Mr. Loring was featured on the cover of Life Magazine in 1938. Today it takes Ms. Whiteside 100 hours to stage, teach and rehearse the ballet. First the movement is taught, and then she “fleshes it in with emotional intent.”

Creative Process of the Artist or Culture:
Mr. Loring felt there was no true movement unless there was an emotional impetus behind it. His dancers were directed to feel the emotion before doing the movement. At rehearsals he asked them to get inside themselves and analyze their own likes and dislikes. When dancing any role, they explored all aspects of the characters in order to fully understand their motivations.

“Dance is a language like painting, sculpture and music. It sometimes needs interpretation but never translation.”
Eugene Loring
Discussion Questions:
After a video or live performance has been viewed:
• What is a motif? What are some of the basic ideas from pioneer life which could inspire actions in this ballet?
• What makes this ballet American? (the story and motifs) Have you seen other ballets? Which ones? How do they compare?
• Why do you think score composer Aaron Copland chose to use old cowboy melodies as inspiration for the score?

Summary of the Dance Scenario:
The ballet begins with the “Opening March” of pioneers traveling westward, and is composed of various actions (motifs) inspired by the activities in their daily life. This is followed by a scene set in a small town in New Mexico during the 1870s, where twelve year old Billy sees his mother accidentally killed during a cowboy quarrel. Losing control in his outrage and grief, he kills her murderer. This event alters the course of his life, for he goes on to kill many more men without remorse. In the next scene, Billy is portrayed as an adult who kills a land agent and also cheats his friend, Pat Garrett, while playing cards. Eventually a posse, led by Garrett who has become the sheriff, captures Billy. However, he escapes from prison and flees to the hideout of his Mexican sweetheart, symbolically danced by the same woman who portrays his mother. An Indian guide betrays his whereabouts and Billy is killed in his sleep by Garrett. The ballet ends as he is mourned by his Mexican friends.

Audio-Visual Materials:
• In order to get the most of out these lessons, we recommend that you perform an internet video search for Billy the Kid and Eugene Loring.
• Photos courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine, Irvine Libraries. Eugene Loring Papers. MS-P002.
• Examples of Motif writing and Labanotation sample of the Opening March, courtesy of Patrice Whiteside and the Eugene Loring Estate.

Additional References:
• Billy the Kid Suite by Aaron Copland

Multidisciplinary Options:
• Have the class look up the word ‘legend’ in the dictionary. (A legend is a story, which may or may not be true, handed down from the past.) Make a list of legends or folklore characters the students know about. These might include Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, Davy Crockett and John Henry. Discuss them, then divide into small groups to retell these stories. When all the stories have been told, ask each group to select one to act out.

Sample Experiences:
LEVEL I
• Choose different characters from the Old West and show three different poses for each. Move from one to the other, making four-count transitions. Combine characters to form group portraits.
• List action words describing pioneer life (riding horses, pushing, pulling, digging, hammering, chopping, washing). Show in movement, using strong, then light energy.

LEVEL II
• List and explore other activities of pioneer life, such as baking, sawing, riding, pulling a cart. Mime, then abstract ideas by giving them a rhythm, changing the size and level. Design one as a motif and teach to a partner.
• Use the storyboard technique to show the sequence of the different scenes in the ballet version of Billy the Kid. In groups of three or four, each portray a selected scene.

LEVEL III
• Search the internet for a video of Billy the Kid and learn two or three of the dance motifs from the Opening March. Discuss the emotions which underlie each idea. Strive to feel how the emotion influences the quality of the movement.
• Using the Motif Writing Charts, write the symbols on the board, or put them on cards, and have the class interpret the ideas in movement. Using the codes, combine an action, path, level, weight and quality to create original motifs.

* Indicates sample lessons
INTRODUCTION:

The ballet, *Billy the Kid*, introduces us to portraits of men and women who lived during the western pioneer era. Often, a ballet emphasizes the poses, as well as the actions of different characters to portray a story. Since words are not used, these poses and actions must communicate the emotional motivation, style, work and personality of each character through body language. However, it is important to note that a choreographer also selects these poses for the ‘aesthetic’ design of the individual body and the way that several bodies combine to form group designs, or tableaux, on stage.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

• Create characters from the pioneer era and show their specific role or work without using words. *(Creating & Responding)*

• Combine different poses using a selection of characters, aesthetically arranged to depict an impression of pioneer life. *(Creating & Connecting)*

• Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to Assessment at the end of this lesson. *(Responding & Connecting)*

MATERIALS:

• Photos of pioneers which show a variety of different types of work and body poses.

• Search the internet for video clips of *Billy the Kid*, to show the stylized versions of the pioneers as characterized in the ballet.
PROGRESSION:

• Prior to conducting this lesson, have the students view a *Billy the Kid* video. Ask them to pay particular attention to the different characters, as well as the costumes.

• Have the class brainstorm different types of characters who might be found in pioneer life. Ideas could include: blacksmith, prospector, sheriff, school mistress, dance hall entertainer, pioneer mother or father, cowboy, Cheyenne Indian, rancher, stage coach driver, farmer, etc.

• In their own area of space, ask each student to take a pose quickly, conveying his/her idea about each character as it is called. Select about five to seven characters to explore in this way. Every pose, or shape, should have active, contained energy which makes each ‘living photograph’ come alive.

• Ask the students to show three different poses, or shapes, that communicate the purpose, role and style of each specific character. For example, when ‘blacksmith’ is named, call out “Shape #1.” Then pause for 2 to 3 seconds. “Shape #2.” Pause again before calling “Shape #3.”

• Encourage students to design each shape at a different level (height) so that there is a high, medium and low variation for each character. Also, suggest that each shape face a different direction in order to create a new perspective for both the performer and the viewer.

• After all the characters have been explored in terms of shape, divide the class into groups of about five to seven people. Ask each group to collectively show its individual shapes in response to commands from the teacher. Then, repeat the idea with each student changing from Shape #1 through #3 in his/her own timing. It is very important to stress sharp, quick changes in order to work for strong energy and clarity.

• Have the class make positive remarks after viewing each group. Encourage them to notice the relationships between the different people who are performing.

• Give each group the problem of creating a ‘living photograph,’ showing two scenes from pioneer life. This is also called a ‘tableau.’ Have each group find motional transitions to get from one scene to the next.

• Each group should have clearly defined characters which are represented in two or three photographs or tableaux. If the space is large enough, have them create a traveling movement which takes the group collectively from one spot to another so each tableau is shown in a different location. Each traveling movement should be based on the ideas of walking, galloping, skipping, etc.

• Have each group share its completed work with the class. Stress the concept of ‘performance energy’ which has personal focus, strong motivation and purposeful energy. Also discuss the behavior of those viewing so that there is an agreement to support and appreciate the performers. Direct the class to discuss the strengths of each group’s portrayal of pioneer life and give constructive criticism.
EXTENSIONS:

• Have each group think of a simple story line that will describe its three photographs and link one to the other. For example, a scene might depict a family waiting to start their trip, followed by a climb up a hill in their covered wagon and ending with the group sitting around a campfire.

• Using the concept of shape and design, create non-human things found in pioneer life. Each person designs one part of the whole. Examples might include: covered wagon, log cabin, cart, plow, river and wheel, church.

VOCABULARY: aesthetic, ‘living photograph,’ tableau/tableaux, shape, traveling movements

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe how your group made decisions when creating the tableaux.

DISCUSS: Discuss the differences between making a play about the characters and portraying them in poses and movement only. What is important to do when communicating non-verbally?

CONNECT: Think about the roles and jobs done by people in pioneer times and people today. How are they similar and how are they different? How have roles and jobs changed?

Emphasis on: Common Core - CA State Standards for Language - Reading; Writing; Listening; Speaking
INTRODUCTION:

The everyday actions of pioneer life are the basis for the dance motifs in the ballet, *Billy the Kid*. These actions include such concrete ideas as riding horses, playing cards, chopping, pulling and pushing westward. All these actions were transformed from everyday movement to dance movement by using the elements of dance: *space* (levels, size, pathway, direction), *time* (rhythm, tempo, meter), and *energy* (dynamics, weight, quality). Some of the ideas are less concrete, such as the concept of memory and its impact on Billy or the motion of the covered wagons. But they were also transformed into dance motion by manipulating the dance elements.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Discuss the life style of American pioneers and create some of their work movements through the art forms of mime and dance. *(Connecting & Responding)*

- Select work actions of the pioneers and transform them into original dance movement by manipulating the elements of dance.* *(Creating & Performing)*

MATERIALS:

- Perform an internet search for video of *Billy the Kid* by Loring.
- Acquire a recording of the *Billy the Kid Suite* by Aaron Copland, if possible.
- Photos of pioneers; reference material about the everyday life of pioneers.

PROGRESSION: (This progression may be broken down into several lessons.)

- If you have a video of *Billy the Kid*, show it. You may choose to show the entire video or just the first part in which the legendary Billy is introduced. The first part is called “The Opening March.”

- Discuss the “Opening March,” in which the dancers enter the stage doing a sequence of motifs based on the westward movement of the pioneers. These motifs are based on such action themes as reining in the horses, chopping wood, the covered wagons bouncing over the trail, and whipping the lead mule of a 20 mule team. Use the Discussion Questions on page 2 as an entrance into the discussion. Specifically deal with the concept of ‘motif’ and the ideas which inspired the motifs in this ballet.

* These are expanded in the Dance Glossary & Addendum
• Make a list of the work actions of pioneer life. These might include such ideas as baking bread, hammering, chopping wood, sawing, pulling carts, riding horses, building log cabins, sewing, washing clothes, hunting, etc. Select a few of these words to explore in terms of body positions and actions.

**Example:** Take actions of chopping, hunting, washing clothes and carrying a heavy load as actions to be explored. Ask the class to take a specific position which shows the action, as in a photograph which stops the action, but captures the full energy of the motion. Call each action three times, directing the class to find a different position (shape and level) which shows each idea.

• After the class has explored the positions or shapes which represent each action, select a few which are the clearest and strongest examples of ‘active stillness.’ Discuss the concept of ‘motivation’ and how that gives the dancer or actor the internal energy to give the idea power and intention. It is the motivation which allows dancers and actors to communicate effectively with an audience.

• Repeat the above idea with each person finding a motivation to add an emotional energy.

• Next, ask the class to take each specific idea and mime it, showing how it would actually be done. Observe each other and make suggestions in terms of how the back moves, whether the weight of the body is light or heavy, or how much tension is required to pull a threaded needle through a cloth. Try the ideas again working for clearer quality, appropriate muscle tension and light or heavy weight in the body.

• State that in dance, a choreographer must capture the idea of the action but exaggerate it to make it different from ordinary movement. Dance has a conscious rhythm, selected movement, attention to the quality, weight, size of the motion, and pathways. Tell the class that they are going to experiment with ways to transform ordinary actions into dance movement.

• Ask each student to select one of the ideas they have already explored. Direct them to:
  • Make the movement larger. Make it smaller. Combine large and small movements.
  • Give the movement a definite rhythm, using long and short beats in any pattern. Add stops in the rhythm. Repeat the rhythmic pattern of the movement several times.
  • Do the movement in three different directions.
  • Add a traveling movement to the action. Design the path on the floor so it is clear and can be repeated. Explore the difference between a curved path and a path made of straight lines and sharp changes of direction.
  • Put the motion into a different part of the body. Repeat the motion using three different parts of the body.
  • Design one or two changes of level.

**Task and Criteria:** Each student select an action from pioneer life, either from the ones explored or a new idea. Create a ‘dance motif’ that has the following criteria:

  • a clear beginning, middle and end
  • uses at least two different elements of dance (levels, directions, change of energy, travels, etc.)
  • has a rhythm pattern; is performed with focus

• When this is done, divide the class into partners. Each partner teaches his/her idea to the other. Partners
then put the two ideas together and perform them as a duet, in a selected sequence. Divide the class into three or four groups of partners and have them perform their motif sequences simultaneously.

• Ask students to make positive responses and observations about the work of each group. Place special emphasis on how the elements of dance were manipulated to change ordinary actions into dance movement.

• Partners rework and edit their dance sequences, adding an entrance and an ending partner shape.

• Show the work again, having the students make choices as to where they want to enter and place themselves on the stage in relationship to other pairs. Make choices about where they want to ‘face’ in relationship to the audience and other groups. Add music and stress ‘performance energy’ and focus. Ask the students to have a clear ending which is held until all the students in the group finish their motif studies.

EXTENSIONS:

• Combine pairs of students and have them learn four motifs which they sequence and perform. Suggest that at least one motif travel through space to another spot. Design the traveling movement to follow a specific path on the floor.

• Using the above techniques, choose another category of everyday actions such as sports, school activities or modern-day work actions.

VOCABULARY: motif, performance energy, sequence, path, motivation, focus, elements of dance: space, time, energy

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe the process you went through in making your choices about which elements of dance to stress in your work dance study.

DISCUSS: Discuss the differences between an actual work movement, a mime of that work and a dance about the work.

ANALYZE: Discuss the reasons that people make dances. How is creative dance different than ballet, tap, popular or folk dance? Be as specific as you can.

CONNECT: Discuss the life of a pioneer child and the activities he or she might participate in during a day. Compare these with your daily life. What has brought about these changes?

Emphasis on: Common Core - CA State Standards for Language - Reading; Writing; Listening; Speaking
INTRODUCTION:

“Motif Writing” is a language of symbols which allows us to record simple movements of the body. Motif Writing gives students a quick look at the scope of dance notation and acquaints them with some of the notation terminology. Motif Writing provides students with tools to record, communicate and read dance movements. Learning about the movement and how to symbolize it happens through the process of discovery. This is a method of organizing movement information on paper. The students write down, in symbolic form, a movement motif (theme) they have designed and also develop the ability to read and perform the movement ideas of others.

Motif Writing focuses on a significant dance element or motivation in a phrase. Although the phrase may include movements which incorporate specific body parts, it is the principal movement motif (theme) which is to be emphasized. In this lesson, these movement themes will be built around the elements of *paths, directions, levels* and *actions*. The Motif ‘score’ provides only one significant element in a dance phrase. *Direction* is judged by the shape of the symbol; *level* is indicated by shading; *duration* is shown by the length of the symbol.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Acquire and use some basic skills of Motif Writing. *(Responding)*

- Demonstrate the ability to design original movement motifs. *(Creating)*

- Read, comprehend and perform the motifs of others. *(Responding & Performing)*

- Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to *Assessment* at the end of this lesson. *(Responding & Connecting)*

MATERIALS:

- Paper and pencils or marking pens for each student.

PROGRESSION:

- Introduce Motif Writing and explain its function. It is a code system for writing and reading dance.
MOTIF WRITING SYMBOLS

PATH (floor design when traveling through space)

- Straight path of body through space
- Circular path to the right
- Circular path to the left
- Slightly curved path to the left
- Slightly curved path to the right

DIRECTIONS

- Moving in place
- Forward motion
- Backward motion
- Straight pathway to the right sideways
- Straight pathway to the left sideways

TIME

- Action
- Pause
- Movement Phrase

- Duration of Time
  - Duration is shown by the length of each symbol. Give the first action stroke any time value and continue in relation to that.

ACTIONS

- (   ) Jump
- Turn left
- Turn right

- Have the students try to read and perform exercises 1, 2, and 6 as individuals and exercise 9 with a partner (pages 13 and 15). Read each movement phrase from the bottom to the top of the exercise. The traveling movement they select is of their own choice.

- Introduce the idea of high, medium and low levels as possibilities for manipulating and varying motion. These are the symbols which denote levels:
• Do exercises 3 and 4 which focus on different levels (page 14). Try exercise 5 which adds different directions.

• Do exercises 7 and 8 which include jumping actions, illustrated on the previous page.

• Add other action ideas such as contracting (bending) and extending (lengthening). Do exercise 10 (pages 15, 16.)

**ADDITIONAL ACTIONS**

![Diagram showing additional actions]

**ENERGY**

![Diagram showing energy changes]

**CULMINATION**

• Ask the students to create a short, simple Motif Phrase showing time, path, direction and level. Make sure they start and end their phrase with double lines (as shown in the symbol for ‘movement phrase’). Each person needs to have a few moments to work out their motif in movement. When this is done, they should find a partner and perform their ideas for each other.

• Have each partner learn the other’s motif. Together they will perform both motifs simultaneously in the same direction. After they have completed this assignment successfully, have them vary their relationship to each other. This will increase the dramatic effect because now the partners have choices about performing the motifs side to side, one leading and one following, toward each other, or in opposition.

**EXTENSIONS:**

• Have the partners trade motifs with another set of partners, reading and performing them for each other.

• Look at the Motif Writing for the Opening March of *Billy the Kid*. Ask the students if they can they recognize any of the symbols which are like the ones they worked with? How would they interpret them?

• Experiment with *weight* and *flow* factors using the following symbols.

**WEIGHT**

![Diagram showing weight factors]

**FLOW**

![Diagram showing flow factors]
• Experiment with twisting actions and then add them to your motifs.

VOCABULARY: Motif writing, time, path, direction, level, locormotor movement, quality

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe the main differences between the symbols for *path*, *level* and *duration*. (See second paragraph in the ‘Introduction’)

DISCUSS: Discuss your understanding of Motif Writing and why it might be helpful to people making dances, as well as those learning a dance.

ANALYZE: Think of the symbols used to write music. Discuss the similarities and differences between both systems.

CONNECT: Discuss other ways in which symbols are used in society. Why are symbol systems valuable? What is needed to make a symbol system work for large numbers of people?

Emphasis on: Common Core - CA State Standards for Language - Reading; Writing; Listening; Speaking
Unless specified, select any movements you wish.

Select any movement choices you wish. These symbols indicate the direction, duration and level only.
ADDITIONAL REFERENCES:


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Overture M. 1-13
Slow curtain M. 9

M. 14 = A1
rein motif
M. 15 = A2
axe or sledge
hammer motif
M. 16 - 17 = A3
covered wagon motif
M. 18 = A4
running motif
M 19 = A5
scouting motif

Movement of Section A
is assertive, direct,
weighty.

Only this area of
stage is
lit by
the downstage
right wing.
The rest of the
stage is dark
except for
downlighting
on the back
drop. Dancers
must stay
within lighted area.
Breath is like the involuntary sobs following heavy crying. It should be audible.