**Title of Work:**
*Dance of the Furies*

**Creator:** Isadora Duncan (1878 - 1927)
danced by Risa Steinberg

**Background Information:**

Born May 27, 1878 in San Francisco, California, Isadora Duncan was one of the originators of a new dance form in the early years of the twentieth century. She broke new ground which led to a dance style called “modern dance.” Modern dance is especially significant to Americans because it is ours. We inaugurated a form of dance which moved theatre dancing from the stage into the everyday actions, thoughts and feelings of ordinary people. It was timely and new, a contemporary dance, and so it was called “modern.” Duncan’s innovative dance ideas conveyed a zeal and rapture of spirit which led to a physical expression of great freedom. To create a foundation for what she called the “Dance of the Future,” Duncan built on a compelling past, specifically the splendors of the ancient Greeks. Working with the Greek ideals, she was primarily moved by beauty in the ideal of the human body, and the expression of the body in movement and in repose. Today, a dance company called the American Repertory Dance Company has a mission to sustain the formidable modern dance legacy through research, reconstruction and performance of timeless choreography such as Isadora Duncan’s *Dance of the Furies*.

**About the Artwork:**
*Dance of the Furies* is drawn from Greek mythology, in which the Furies represent primeval beings - avengers of crime, especially crimes against the ties of kinship. They are the guardians of the Gates to the Underworld and are represented as winged women, often with snakes in their hair. In *Dance of the Furies*, Duncan synthesized all the Furies of the Underworld into one figure and portrayed her as a condemned soul doomed to lift and cast away heavy stones. In the video, the dancer, Risa Steinberg, portrays Isadora Duncan as the single Fury.

**Creative Process of the Artist or Culture:**

Duncan’s starting point was from a simple belief that Dance is innate in all. Her research was carried out on herself and from the premise that all movement arises at an inner source, which she called “the soul,” and the corollary that the soul is located in the solar plexus was the basis of all her work. The dancer portraying Isadora Duncan in the video says, “I will never look like Isadora Duncan, but my goal is to strip away anything that doesn’t belong to her intention. The objective is to have an audience see where the American Modern Dance was born; the place where dance was no longer telling a pretty story and where a dancer’s body was exposed in ways never seen before.”

“My Art is just an effort to express the truth of my Being in gesture and movement.”

Isadora Duncan
**About the Work Continued:**
Duncan paid increasing attention to drama, returning to her earlier interest in creating a kind of ‘total’ theatre, uniting music, drama and dance. It was the chorus, the source and essence of Greek tragedy, that Duncan was thinking about. “My dances, in fact, are a revival of the Greek chorus,” she said. “In the time of the ancient Greeks, dances did not exist separately, but were tightly fused with music and poetry. . . and in just this united state was the dance recognized as a total artistic composition.” However, Duncan’s goal was not to reproduce Greek theatre. Rather, she aimed to adapt the spirit of the great Greek theatre for the modern age: a unified vision of drama-music-dancing. Mirroring the body architecture of many Greco-Roman statues, movements in this dance focus on the strength and power of the upper body. This single figure of the Furies created by Duncan is guarding the gates of the underworld, always looking to see who is approaching. When she skips and points with her arms, she is motioning for Orpheus and allowing him to pass through. The weight and use of the ground, which is now an intrinsic element of modern dance, is well utilized here to signify the tremendous burden the Furies carry.

**Discussion Questions:**
* After the video has been viewed:
  • What is/are the main emotion(s) you see conveyed in this dance?
  • What gestures or actions convey that emotion?
  • How does the music contribute to the mood of the performance?
  • Can you remember some of the movements that represented the emotion you saw conveyed?

**Multidisciplinary Options:**
* Duncan thought that all movement began in the Solar Plexus (the network of nerves at the pit of the stomach). Research the Solar Plexus to find out more about this part of the body, then decide whether or not you agree with her idea.
  * Isadora Duncan was a rebel in her time. She rebelled against the established dance form of ballet and also against the accepted roles of men and women during her time. Do you think that she felt trapped or confined? Why do you think that she needed to revolt? Do you know others who have revolted against the established ways of doing things in their time?

**Audio-Visual Materials:**
* Artsource® video excerpt of The Furies, courtesy of the Los Angeles Dance Foundation and Risa Steinberg.

**Additional References:**

**Sample Experiences:**

**Level I**
* In Dance of the Furies Duncan represented the furies as creatures doomed to lift and cast heavy stones. Physically explore the concepts of heavy and light.
* Duncan experimented with rhythms found in nature. Think of some rhythms and movements that are found in nature, such as the waves on the sea, the swaying of trees, or the rain, and try expressing them in your own body.

**Level II**
* Explore the characters of The Furies in Greek Mythology drama and dance.
  * Research the clothing, fashion and the costumes worn by women during Duncan’s time (1878-1927). Contrast the styles of the times with the costumes Duncan chose to wear on stage as she danced. Refer to the video.

**Level III**
* Compare and contrast modern dance and ballet.
  * Read the Orpheus myth (see page 3) from Greek Mythology and design a play, pantomime or dance based on Orpheus’ journey to the Underworld.

* Indicates sample lesson
Orpheus was an extraordinary musician and poet who played the lyre. He was in love with a young woman called Euridice who returned his love. On their wedding day, he sang songs of joy and happiness as she danced barefoot in a meadow.

As she was dancing, she accidentally stepped on a snake and immediately sank to the ground - dead - from its poisonous bite. Hermes, herald of the Gods, gently closed her eyes and led her into the Underworld where dead spirits dwell. Orpheus was consumed with grief and could no longer sing nor play his lyre. All the joy from his life left with Euridice.

In his grief, Orpheus wandered about, trying to find the entrance to the Underworld. At last he found it and descended into the realm of the dead, singing for the return of his beloved. He decided to use his music to soften the cold heart of Hades who was the king of the Underworld. As he journeyed down the dark, steep path, his beautiful voice drifted before him as he approached the iron gates. Guarding the gates was a three-headed watch dog named Cerberus. The dog was enchanted by the music and lay down peacefully, letting Orpheus pass as he continued singing songs of his love for Euridice. He pleaded with Hades for her return. Deeply touched, the Avenging Furies stopped groaning, dropped their whips, and wept tears of blood. Hades, even though he was usually cold and unfeeling, was so moved by the music of Orpheus, that tears rolled down his cheeks. His wife, Persephone, deeply moved, implored her husband to let Euridice return with her husband.

Hades finally gave his consent with one condition: Euridice had to walk behind Orpheus as they ascended and he could not look back at her before they reached the outer world. If he broke this condition she would have to return to the Underworld. Orpheus was overcome with joy at his success and together they began their long, tedious climb. As the journey continued he began to doubt that she was still behind him and he believed that he might have been deceived. Just as he had almost reached the end, he could bear it no longer and he turned to see if she was really still there. He saw her radiant face for an instant but Hermes appeared at her side, tuned her around and led her back to the dark, gloomy Underworld. Euridice whispered a faint good-bye to her love, but he had lost her forever through his lack of faith.

He never again found joy on Earth and wandered grieving in solitude. He continued to sing, but now his songs were so sad that tears streamed down the faces of anyone who heard them.
INTRODUCTION:
The myths of ancient Greece have inspired countless artists and art pieces. *Dance of the Furies* is drawn from the Greek myth of Orpheus. The Furies are the guardians of the gates to the Underworld where it was believed mortals go after they die. As the gatekeepers of the Underworld, the Furies are monstrous and unhappy. Isadora Duncan portrays their unhappiness and frustration by movements that force them to lift and cast away heavy stones.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Use their bodies to portray different sensations of weight, such as heavy and light. (Creating & Responding)

- Recognize the differences in weight as they watch a dancer move. (Responding)

- Connect the physical qualities of heavy and light to different emotions. (Responding & 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:

- *Artsource®* video excerpt of *Dance of the Furies*

- Video and monitor

PROGRESSION:

- Write on the board things that the class thinks of as heavy and light. For heavy this might include such things as rocks, a bag of sand, bricks; for light - feathers, clouds, scarf, bubbles.

- Experiment walking as if your body were very heavy, or you were carrying a heavy weight. Make sure that your legs, back, arms and head are all heavy. Then, try walking as if your body were very light, moving as if gravity was not pulling you down.

- Discuss briefly the differences they felt while moving in these contrasting ways.
• Using the list on the board, select one of the objects and do the following actions with the imaginary object. Pick it up, carry it, throw it, kick it or set it down.

• Pick up something heavy and throw it as if it suddenly became light. Then, pick up light and throw it as if it suddenly became heavy.

• Explore lifting up heavy stones and how you would throw, or cast, them away. Use all of your body parts as you do these movements. For example, bend your legs and back as you pick up the stones and use your whole torso as you cast them aside. Your weight should also shift from one leg to the other on this last action.

• Discuss with the students the differences they felt while moving in these contrasting ways.

• View the video of *Dance of the Furies* and pay particular attention to movements that you think are light and movements that you think are heavy. Can you identify movements in the video that are like movements you did?

**EXTENSIONS:**

• Make up a story about something using the ideas of heavy and light. You can create characters that have qualities of heavy or light. e.g. a light flea and a heavy cow that are friends or a little boy that finds a light feather with magical qualities to make heavy objects light enough to lift.

• Make up heavy and light movements to illustrate the story.

**VOCABULARY:** heavy, light, cast away, weight, fury, mythology, Underworld, ancient Greece, Greek mythology, artists, art pieces

**ASSESSMENT:** (Responding & Connecting)

**DESCRIBE:** Describe how you felt when you moved in a heavy way as contrasted as you moved in a light way.

**DISCUSS:** Discuss what you learned in doing the movement and in watching the video.

**ANALYZE:** Analyze which movements you did that were similar to the movements you saw in the dance.

**CONNECT:** Discuss why some things are heavy and why some things are light. What role does gravity play in weight?

Emphasis on: Common Core - CA State Standards for Language - Reading; Writing; Listening; Speaking
INTRODUCTION:
Isadora Duncan spent most of her career exploring the story of Orpheus's journey to the Underworld to rescue his wife Euridice. Duncan wrote, “I do not try to represent Orpheus or Euridice but rather the forms, or movements, of the Chorus.” In Greek plays, a chorus was a group of people who commented on or gave the mood of the story being enacted. Furies, in Greek mythology, guard the gates to the Underworld. Orpheus must pass through these gates that the Furies guard to retrieve his wife. Isadora Duncan made a solo for herself where she represented an entire chorus of Furies.

OBJECTIVES:
Students will be able to:

• Design an original character based on one or more of the qualities of the Furies. (Creating & Connecting)

• Dramatize, mime or dance that character. (Creating)

• Demonstrate the use of intent, focus, and concentration necessary to maintain a dramatic character. (Performing & Responding)

• Recognize that different body postures convey different meanings and messages. (Responding)

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

MATERIALS:

• Artsource® video excerpt of Dance of the Furies

• Video and monitor

PROGRESSION:

• After reading page 1-2, define the word Fury. (wild anger and rage)

• Explore ideas about what a character called a Fury would be like.

• Write down words that describe the emotions (angry, hopeless, frustrated, etc.). What actions would represent these emotions? (throwing, stomping, jumping, beating, thrashing, etc.)
• Select an emotion and explore several different actions to represent that emotion. Try different levels, different body facings, different body parts, different energy.

• Pick one emotion and one action that represents that emotion. This will be called “Action #1.”

• Combine in groups of two’s. Learn each other’s action. Each partner performs his/her own action (Action #1) followed by his/her partner’s action (Action #2). The teacher calls out “Action #1” and “Action #2” and the students perform their action #1 and #2 in sequence. A percussion instrument, such as a drum or woodblock can be used when calling out the action changes.

• Then, partners combine with another set of partners and learn their actions. These will be called “Action #3 and Action #4.”

• Each group practice these actions several times as the teacher calls out, “Action #1, #2, #3 and #4.”

• After the groups have practiced several times, ask each group to perform their sequence of actions.

• After the performances, discuss how the different individual actions combined to make a “chorus of Furies.”

EXTENSIONS:

• Combine two, three or four groups together and have them all show their sequences at once, as the teacher calls out the numbers. This will create a sense of great fury and frustrated energy within an organized structure. Also the timing of the performances will vary and overlap.

• Have groups of four combine with another group of four and learn their actions, for a total of 8 actions.

• Add music if desired.

VOCABULARY: fury, Furies, Orpheus, mythology, chorus, drama, dramatization, character, mime, intent, focus, concentration, body posture

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe the feelings you had when you performed your actions.

DISCUSS: Discuss what you had to know and be able to do in teaching your action to someone else.

ANALYZE: Discuss how the single actions of each person, when combined, created a more complete picture or feeling of the characters of Furies.

CONNECT: What things can you identify in the natural world that have a similar energy to fury (storm, volcano, shark attack on other fish, etc.)?

Emphasis on: Common Core - CA State Standards for Language - Reading; Writing; Listening; Speaking
ORPHEUS’ DESCENT INTO THE UNDERWORLD
TRANSFORMATION

LEVEL III Sample Lesson

INTRODUCTION:

Orpheus was an extraordinary lute player, poet and lyricist. He fell in love with Euridice and married her. On the day of their wedding, while dancing in a meadow, a snake bit her and she died. Orpheus was overcome with grief and unable to play any more music. All the joy went out of his life and he was desperate to be reunited with his wife. He went down to the realm of the dead to beg for the return of his beloved. He walked down the dark, steep path to the “Underworld.” As he played and sang, the magic of his music moved the iron gates guarding the underworld. The avenging Furies, who guarded the gates, grew still and listened to his music. Even the King of the Dead was moved by Orpheus’ music. His wife begged him to let Euridice return to Orpheus. The King agreed on one condition: that Orpheus must not look at his bride until they reached the world of the living.

They began their journey upward, with Euridice walking behind Orpheus. The way was long and doubt began to enter into his mind. Was she really following him? He could see the light of the world of the living, but had to make certain that she was still behind him. He could not resist looking back, and so turned to make sure she was there. He saw her sweet face, but only for an instant as she was led back to the gloom below. Through his lack of trust, he had lost her forever. He never found joy on earth again.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

• Learn and discuss the basic story of Orpheus and his journey to the Underworld (Responding & Connecting)

• Enact a story through dramatic pantomime with a beginning, middle and end. (Creating & Performing)

• Discuss the story in terms of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW. (Responding & Connecting)

• Demonstrate the use of intent, focus, and concentration necessary to maintain a dramatic character. (Responding)

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

MATERIALS: Props, costumes and music (all optional).
PROGRESSION:

- Tell the story of Orpheus. (See the introduction or page 3 of this unit.)
- Discuss the plot, the characters, the setting and the conflict.
- Divide the story into a beginning, middle and end through a discussion with the students. Label these as Act I, Act II. and Act III.
- Divide the class into three groups, giving one Act I (beginning), another Act II (the middle) and a third group Act III (ending).
- Each group should discuss and then write down three to five main parts of their act. Each group must sequence and organize their ideas of how to present their part of the story.

For example: Act 1: Scene 1) Orpheus and Euridice get married. Scene 2) Orpheus plays his lyre while Euridice dances in the meadow. Scene 3) She is bitten by a snake and dies. Scene 4) Orpheus is grief-stricken as she descends to the Underworld.

- When this is done, have each group select a director for their Act. Choose a narrator who tells the story and gives the cues for the mime action.
- Start each scene with a frozen picture, or tableau. The director calls “Action!” The narrator begins his/her text and the scene unfolds. Freeze the ending scene, as well.
- Perform each of these scenes for each other.

EXTENSIONS:

- Combine the three scenes together into one story. Make sure that there are smooth transitions between them.
- Add props, painted scenery, costumes and music.
- Select a different myth and use this same process to dramatize it.

VOCABULARY: scene, underworld, tableau, director, narrator, Furies, pantomime, characters, setting, conflict, section, act, scene, grief, lyre

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe the characters of Orpheus, Euridice and the Furies.

DISCUSS: Discuss some of the problems you had in creating your scene and how you solved them.

ANALYZE: Analyze how you decided what was the beginning, middle and ending scenes of the story.

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