

Artsource

*The Music Center's Study Guide
to the Performing Arts*

TRADITIONAL

CLASSICAL

CONTEMPORARY

EXPERIMENTAL

MULTI-MEDIA

ARTISTIC PROCESSES

1. CREATING (Cr)

2. PERFORMING, PRESENTING, PRODUCING (Pr)

3. RESPONDING (Re)

4. CONNECTING (Cn)

TRANSFORMATION

ENDURING
VALUESFREEDOM &
OPPRESSIONTHE POWER
OF NATURETHE HUMAN
FAMILY

Title of Work:

The Green Table

Performed by The Joffrey Ballet

Creator:

Choreographer: Kurt Jooss (1901-1979)

Background Information:

Born in Germany, Kurt Jooss became an innovative dancer, choreographer, teacher and director. Though he studied music, voice and drama, it was a chance meeting with dance theatre specialist Rudolf Laban that changed the direction of his life. Laban was searching for a new form of movement. Jooss was also interested in finding and developing a new language of movement, a form of dance that would work for contemporary themes. He believed in a synthesis of music, dance and acting which would flow into and at the same time stem from the material being presented. Similarly, Laban wanted a style in which emotional expression would find its most direct and essential means. Kurt Jooss applied Laban's theories to great theatrical effect in *The Green Table* and other dances. *The Green Table* depicted the indecencies and inhumanities of warfare, a medieval Dance of Death in modern terms. Conceived in Germany between the two World Wars, it premiered in Paris in 1932. It is now regarded as one of the most important dance works of the twentieth century.

About the Artwork:

The Green Table takes its movement vocabulary from ballet. At the time of the creation of *The Green Table*, ballet was a "seen" art primarily, an "expressive" art secondarily. It was highly formalized, and therefore not very capable

of presenting ideas that dominated life in Europe in the late 1920s and '30s. A new concept of dance came into being in response to the formalism of ballet. Jooss' "theatre dance" gave expression to ideas growing from contemporary man's preoccupation with the modern world. His movement was sincere, simple and unpretentious, striking a responsive chord with the audience.

Creative Process of the Artist or Culture:

At the time that *The Green Table* was created, "most modern choreographers were interested in expressing themselves and searching for their personal individuality," says Anna Markard, Jooss' daughter. "My father was interested in broader problems of society." *The Green Table* won first prize at a prestigious competition in Paris in 1932, making Jooss and his dance company internationally famous overnight. In Germany, the Nazi authorities offered Jooss a supported future on condition that he dismiss the Jewish members of his company. Jooss' natural sense of justice was outraged and he refused. In doing so, he endangered himself. Secretly warned that he was to be taken into protective custody, which meant concentration camp, he escaped the country overnight with his full company.



Photo: Weigelt, 1976

"Jooss was a true creator, and his metaphors still catch the imagination."

Nicholas Dromgoole
The Sunday Telegraph



Discussion Questions:

After a video has been viewed:

- In *The Green Table*, why do you think the ‘gentlemen’ at the table wear masks? (Some are portrayed by women.)
- Ballet is, for the most part, a world of myths, fairies, and mechanical dolls. Can ballet be political? Should ballet confront disturbing issues? Can it do so successfully?
- *The Green Table* was choreographed in 1932 between World Wars I & II. What were the philosophical and political ideas at this time? How do you think this affected the creation of the piece?
- How would you portray the character, Death? What kind of attitude and movements would you have him perform?

Dance Scenario:

The curtain rises on a rectangular green table, with ten gentlemen wearing masks, in mourning coats and spats. They posture and disagree until pistols emerge, a shot is fired and war is declared. The scene goes black. Next we see the figure of Death. In the scenes that follow, soldiers are called to fight, battles rage, refugees comfort one another, a young girl loses her elderly mother and is sold into slavery, a profit-maker preys on the miseries of his fellow man, a lone soldier holds watch. Through every scene, Death stalks the stage, claiming victim after victim, warrior and citizen alike. In the end the scene returns to the table, where the Gentlemen in Black start it up all over again. *The Green Table* is compassionate and humanistic Dance Drama. The mysterious figure of Death is a constant companion, at once strong and sensitive, sinister and soothing. Ultimately he comes to each character, slipping into their lives, and claiming them. Some victims he takes swiftly and surely, others slowly and gently. Some resist, some welcome him. Through the movement vocabulary, we see each character meeting Death in their own way, just as we all will.

Audio-Visual Materials:

- *The Green Table* video footage of dance academy students from Spring 2013 dance recital courtesy of CHAMPS Charter High School, Van Nuys, CA; directed by Madeleine Dahm.
- Drawings: pp. 3, 7, and 8, by Richard Ziegler, from

The New Ballet: Kurt Jooss and His Work, by A.V. Coton, 1946, Dennis, Dobson Ltd., London (out of print).

Multidisciplinary Options:

Movement specialist and psychologist Moshe Feldenkrais suggests that “the majority of adults tend to live behind a mask of personality that the individual tries to present to others and to himself.” Write about, or draw, one of the “social masks” you put on.

Additional References:

- Laban, Rudolf. *The Mastery of Movement*. Plays, Inc. Boston, MA. 1971.

Sample Experiences:

Level I

- * • The political figures that sit at *The Green Table* wear masks. Design and make a mask that represents or reflects a leader of your choice from any time period or culture.
- Think of, or watch, news clips of political leaders, statesmen or business leaders. Observe their body language and gestures. Try to replicate them either with your own body movements and/or by drawing them. Compare them with the body language and gestures of the diplomats at *The Green Table*.

Level II

- A dance drama such as *The Green Table* portrays a complex idea having to do with emotion and intellect. Make three paintings or drawings: one that represents a person expressing a simple emotion, one that portrays the emotion abstractly and a third that portrays an idea or story line based on the emotion.
- * • Search the internet for a video of *The Green Table*. View it several times. In groups of three or four, select different characters to focus on and learn one or two phrases of their movement. Find a way to combine these movements together as a group.

Level III

- Reconstruct *The Green Table* section using a video of the dance as the source material to study.
- * • Investigate the work of Laban and Delsarte and their ideas and theories about emotions and the intellect and how these feelings and ideas are expressed through body posture and movement. Keep a journal reflecting your emotions and the physical state of your body during those emotions. See if you think Delsarte’s system has a rational basis.

* Indicates sample lessons

MAKE A MASK

TRANSFORMATION & FREEDOM & OPPRESSION

LEVEL I Sample Lesson

INTRODUCTION:

One of the more fascinating elements of *The Green Table* -- the cartoon-like look of the diplomats -- was more a matter of necessity than invention. As related by the choreographer's daughter, Mr. Jooss wanted ten gentlemen diplomats around the table, but there were only seven men available in the company. He needed to use three women to fill the parts, so he decided on masks that allowed the women to dance the parts of men. Similarly, masks often allow us to portray people other than ourselves, or magnify characteristics.

In ritual ceremonies, masks are often used to represent some form of power -- whether a deity, an animal or a super-human representation. In *The Green Table* the masks of the diplomats suggest both political power and anonymity. People are playing out a role that the mask represents.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Research the characteristics of a leader or important person from any culture and portray them in a mask form. (Connecting & Creating & Presenting)
- Exaggerate and abstract facial characteristics to create a mask that communicates well to an audience (Creating & Presenting)
- Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to *Assessment* at the end of this lesson. (Responding & Connecting)

MATERIALS:

- A video clip of excerpt of *The Green Table* found on the internet.
- Newspapers (will be torn into strips), paper towels, papier mâché paste (starch or diluted glue can also be used), balloons, paint and other materials needed to create a papier mâché mask.

PROGRESSION:

- Begin by viewing the video segment of *The Green Table*, paying particular attention to the various masks worn by the diplomats.
- Discuss the similarities and differences in the characteristics of the diplomats and how the masks reflect those similarities and differences.



Pencil sketch of "Death"
by Richard Ziegler

- Decide on a leader or other important person you want to portray as a character and brainstorm a list of characteristics that you think represent him or her. You can also combine the selected leader's traits with those of animals to further enhance the leader's personality. Examples might be: Ra, the ancient Egyptian god of creation and the sun, who had a falcon's head.
- Sketch out your idea and study it to think of changes or additions you might want to make.
- Make a papier mâché mask based on your drawing.
- Steps to make a papier mâché mask:
 1. Tear newspapers into strips.
 2. Blow up balloons to act as a base for building the mask or use wadded newspapers as a base.
 3. Either dip the strips in papier mâché paste or rub paste on them.
 4. Apply the strips to your support base.
 5. Use wide strips for large shapes. Use thin strips for smaller shapes. Use about five or six layers. Change directions with each layer so you can keep track of the number. After applying the strips, rub your fingers over the surface to keep it smooth.
 6. Use torn paper towels for the last layer. Make sure there are no rough edges sticking up.
 7. Store unused paste mixture in a refrigerator to prevent spoiling.
 8. Additional pieces can be added for characteristics like horns, raised eyebrows, noses, etc. These supports can be made in different ways. Some ideas include:
 - wadding up dry newspaper into shapes you want and wrapping them with string or tape.
 - bending wire coathangers into the shapes you desire and wrapping them with rags and tape.
 - cutting and shaping cardboard or wood, or using chicken wire.
 9. Dry the masks (you may also want to dry them in-between the layering processes), pop your balloon and then paint. Holes can also be cut or drilled into your mask.
- Display the masks in an aesthetic way on a wall, on stacked boxes or in a display case.

EXTENSIONS:

- In small groups, have everyone put on their masks and take a body posture that represents their leader. Group the characters together and design a tableau.
- Hold or wear the mask and do a monologue, speech or famous quote of the person represented by the mask.

VOCABULARY: papier mâché, leader, representation, abstract, essence, characteristic

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DISCUSS: Discuss the characteristics of the leader you chose to represent. If you added animal traits, discuss why they were selected to represent your leader.

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

DANCE A MOTIF OR VIEW AND LEARN

ENDURING VALUES

LEVEL II Sample Lesson Middle School & High School

(*Video is needed for this lesson.)

INTRODUCTION:

The Green Table is often referred to as “the great Expressionist ballet.” Expressionism traditionally refers to a movement in Germany between 1905 and 1940, and it includes a variety of approaches. Expressionism is sometimes called the twentieth century’s neurotic form of romanticism because it approached humanity in terms of its psychological relationship to the modern world. Humankind was helpless in a world beyond its control. This is represented in *The Green Table* in that the diplomats indirectly decide the fate of the members of the society they represent.

Much of learning dance is duplicating what one sees. This is a major way that choreography is learned. Now that we have video as a tool, it allows the work of great choreographers to go beyond the studio and connect with aspiring young dancers who can study their work. One way to enjoy dance is to view it as an audience, but it is even more involving and interesting to try to do what you see. This lesson is a challenge in observing with increased awareness and demonstrating what you see.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Perform one or more movement motifs from *The Green Table*. (**Responding & Performing**)
- Vary the movement motifs and phrases by changing one or more Dance Elements, such as tempo, rhythm, level, size, quality, direction, etc. (**Responding & Creating**)
- Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to *Assessment* at the end of this lesson. (**Responding & Connecting**)

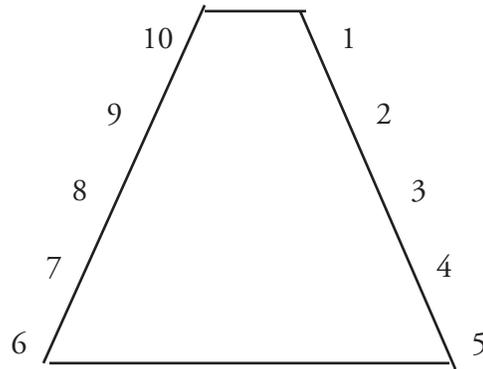
MATERIALS:

- Video of *The Green Table* found on the internet.
- Video screen or computer monitor.

PROGRESSION:

- Do a series of viewings of the video, each with a different focus or emphasis:
 1. Watch first to gain a general impression of the characters and story line.
 2. Notice that there are two teams of diplomats, one on the right side and one on the left side of the table. Keep your focus on only one side or team of diplomats.

3. Look for contrasts. Watch for emphatic gestures, ones that make strong points or are argumentative gestures. Then look for courtly, diplomatic or gentlemanly gestures or moments.
4. Look for spatial patterns, specifically moments at the table and moments away from the table. What do you think the significance of these groupings and spatial arrangements might be?
5. Pick one of the diplomats and follow their movements and postures throughout the scene. Number the class off so that different students are observing different dancers.



(An alternative would be for all 10 dancers to create a series of their own gestures, poses and facings.)

6. Watch, paying particular attention to the music (a tango). How does the tango's rhythm and style help to represent or enhance the action or interactions?
7. What does the diplomat's final gesture of pulling out their guns and shooting them into the air signify?

- Select one or two movement motifs or phrases to explore or demonstrate. Share them or combine them with a partner. Learn each other's ideas. Do them simultaneously or as a conversation.
- Perform these dance sequences for your class.
- Identify what you could refine or further develop in your dance sequence.

EXTENSIONS:

- Refine, rework and "re-perform" your dance sequence.
- Make groups of four or five. As in step 5 above, each person selects one of the diplomats and learns a movement phrase. Combine them and perform.
- Add masks and costumes to the performance.
- Create your own political dance scene.

VOCABULARY: diplomat, motif, movement sequence, spatial pattern, Expressionism, tango, reconstruct

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe the movement characteristics of the diplomat you selected to replicate through dance.

DISCUSS: Discuss what you learned from the experience of viewing a video to reconstruct or learn a dance.

ANALYZE: Analyze how this process helped improve your powers of observation and the value of repeated viewings of a work.

CONNECT: Discuss how you could use this process in other areas of study.

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



A pencil sketch by Richard Ziegler

PASSION, REFLECTION, AFFECTION

THE HUMAN FAMILY

LEVEL III Sample Lesson

High School

INTRODUCTION:

Rudolf Laban, a pioneer in analyzing human movement, searched for an anatomic code of principles involving an analysis of mind, nerve and muscle co-ordination, as well as psychological and mathematical thought. His teachings were an elaboration of the principles of anatomical expression and gesture conceived by Francois Delsarte in the mid-nineteenth century.

The following is an idea of Delsarte's pertaining to his "law of motion" in the human body and its relationship to emotion:

Excitement or passion tends to expand gesture;
Thought or reflection tends to contract gesture;
Love or affection tends to moderate gesture.
 Thus,
Passion tends to extreme expansion of the muscles;
Thought tends to extreme contraction of the muscles;
Affection tends to a happy medium of activity of the muscles.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Recognize and demonstrate the differences between gestures that reflect excitement (or passion), thoughtfulness and love. **(Responding & Creating)**
- Create gestures that reflect three or more distinctly different emotions, and vary them using the Dance Elements. **(Creating & Responding)**
- Write about or draw their knowledge and understanding of the correlations between feelings and movement postures/actions over a period of time (journaling). **(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:

- Pencil and/or drawing utensils and paper or a journal.



In *The Green Table*, many people suffer because of war. There are a variety of emotions expressed depending on the role and situation.

Pencil sketch by Richard Ziegler

- A variety of classical music selections that suggests passion, thoughtfulness and love. Good sources include: *Afternoon of a Faun* - Debussy, *Pictures at an Exhibition* - Moussorgsky, *Carnival of the Animals* - Saint-Saëns, *Carmen* - Bizet, any Schubert recordings.
- Look at the Effort Shape Possibilities in the Dance addendum, page 17.

PROGRESSION:

- Sitting or standing in a neutral position, use 8 counts to open up (expand) your arms as wide and as high as possible. Then use 8 counts to close (contract) the arms into a closed position. Return to a moderate position.
- Do this several times, feeling as if you are getting as wide and open as possible and as closed and narrow as possible. Play different types of music to see how this impacts the movement. Try it with slow and fast tempos, strong/direct movement or gentle/indirect movement.
- Do this several more times and be aware of any emotional state that seems to come from the movement.
- Try this again changing the number of counts, such as 4 counts or 2 counts or using a longer number of counts for one part and a lesser number of counts for the other.
- Try exaggerating the level changes or travel through space.
- Try these ideas with a partner. Expand together, contract together, or do the opposite idea simultaneously.
- Journal Keeping: For one week, every day, observe your different emotional states and record them. Try to observe the physical state and positions of your body when these different emotions occur.
- After you have done this, come back and create gestures that reflect three or more distinctly different emotions.
- Create a dance sequence, draw a series of pictures or write a narrative that illustrates your understanding of the correlations between your feelings and your body's posture, attitude, movement and energy.

EXTENSIONS:

- Select a piece of music and choreograph a small section that reflects one or more specific emotions.
- Choose a partner and compare your observations and dance movement or body language.

VOCABULARY: expand, contract, moderate, passion, reflection, affection, “happy medium”

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe your body language when you were experiencing excitement, reflection, and love or friendship. Refer to your journal for ideas.

DISCUSS: Discuss the differences in the gestures and postures for each of the above emotions.

ANALYZE: Analyze the correlation between your body language and emotions.

CONNECT: Discuss why it is important for painters, sculptors, poets, song writers and writers to have an understanding of how different emotions are expressed through gesture, body posture, attitude and motion.

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