

# Artsource

The Music Center's Study Guide  
to the Performing Arts

TRADITIONAL

CLASSICAL

CONTEMPORARY

EXPERIMENTAL

MULTI-MEDIA

ARTISTIC PROCESSES

1. CREATING (Cr)

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TRANSFORMATION

ENDURING  
VALUESFREEDOM &  
OPPRESSIONTHE POWER  
OF NATURETHE HUMAN  
FAMILY

## Title of Work:

*Revelations*

## Creators:

Company: The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Choreographer: Alvin Ailey (1931-1989)

Music: traditional black spirituals and gospel songs

[www.alvinailey.org](http://www.alvinailey.org)

## Background Information:

Alvin Ailey was born in Texas, but moved to Los Angeles when he was twelve. On a junior high school class trip to a performance of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, he discovered ballet. Later he was inspired by a performance of the Katherine Dunham Company, featuring dances from Africa, Haiti and Latin America. Mr. Ailey began his formal dance training with Lester Horton, a west coast modern dance pioneer and founder of the first racially integrated dance company in this country. His independent career began when, after Horton's death, he directed the company until it disbanded. In 1958, he formed The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, based in New York. The Ailey Company performs classical ballet and modern works by well-known choreographers, but is best known for pieces drawn from Mr. Ailey's African American background. These masterpieces capture the essence of his black experience in America and feature music and material based on African American cultural heritage such as blues, spirituals and jazz. During his lifetime he choreographed seventy-nine ballets.

## About The Artwork:

As a child, Alvin Ailey attended Sunday school at The Baptist Young People's Union. It was these

experiences that inspired *Revelations*. Choreographed in 1960, it has become the 'signature piece' for the company. A signature piece is a dance which clearly captures the spirit and aesthetics of a given group and its artistic director. This dance, which has been seen by audiences world-wide, celebrates the human spirit and its ability to overcome adversity. In it there are several sections which evoke strong emotions by expressing through movement the joy and strength of the music and capturing a sense of personal freedom, wit and humanity. The beginning formation of the dance is particularly memorable as a tight grouping of men and women reach out in unison, conveying powerful feelings of support, dignity and hope.

## Creative Process of the Artist or Culture:

Alvin Ailey allowed the music he selected to influence his ideas and his choreography. To communicate the feelings in his works to an audience, he selected dancers with both technical ability and strong personalities. In addition to works by Alvin Ailey, other black choreographers, such as Donald McKayle, create dances for the company. Since Mr. Ailey's death, Judith Jamison, one of his most well-known dancers, has taken over the helm as artistic director.

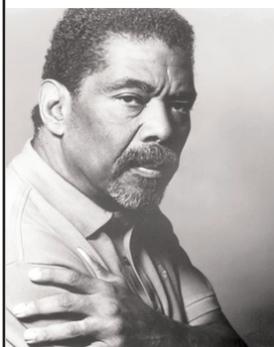


Photo: Eric N. Hong

"One needs dancers  
to make dances, so I  
made a company."  
Alvin Ailey



## Discussion Questions:

After the video has been viewed:

- Why do you think this work was called *Revelations*?
- Describe the beginning of *Revelations*. What was the feeling or mood?
- What movements do you remember from the beginning of the dance? Can you demonstrate?
- Can you show a movement idea from the dance?
- What emotions do you think this dance is about? How did the dance make you feel?
- What ideas came into your mind as you watched it?
- What words do you think best describe the dance?
- What were the dancers saying to you in their movements?
- What was the song about?
- How did the music and lyrics affect the movements?
- Can you clap or sing any part of the song?

## Multidisciplinary Options:

- The word 'revelation' means something that was unknown and is now revealed. Have students think of, and write about, a time when they, or someone they know, had a revelation.
- Using clay, paints or crayons, show one part of the dance. Think of the positions of the bodies, the spatial relationship between the dancers and the energy words which describe the movement.
- Have the class write a letter about their impressions of the dance. Contact information is available at [www.alvinailey.org](http://www.alvinailey.org).
- Identify the themes in the dance that relate to the African American experience. (struggle, hope, strength)
- Identify these same themes as they relate to the American experience socially, historically and economically.

## Additional References:

- *A Tribute to Alvin Ailey*, which contains *For Bird - With Love, Witness, Memoria, and Episodes*. Both Ailey videos are available through Films Inc. Video, (800) 323-4222, ext. 323.
- American Dance Festival. *The Black Tradition in American Modern Dance*. Duke University, Raleigh, NC:

1990.

- Video excerpt: *Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder*, danced by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Refer to the *Artsource* Unit, Donald McKayle.

## Sample Experiences:

### LEVEL I

- \* • Think of movements that reach out and pull back into the body. Find several ways to show this idea in movement. How do these movements make you feel?
- Explore contrasting movements, such as open/close, up/down, strong/weak, suspend/collapse.
- Learn a traditional spiritual. Explore different ways of walking to the rhythm. Add turns, move the arms, head, hips, shoulders and hands in patterns as you walk.

### LEVEL II

- List some universal emotions, such as love, hate, sadness, fear, anger and joy. In partners or small groups, create living tableaux that show these ideas. Remember to use levels, energy, space and body design.
- Explore ways to move the weight concepts of heavy and light. How does weight affect our emotions?
- \* • Create a short movement idea which can represent you like a 'signature piece' does for a company. It should show the spirit of who you are and what you are like.
- Choose different leaders to create slow, strong, clear movement ideas which small groups can follow. Try this first without music and then with spiritual or gospel music. How does the music affect the movement?

### LEVEL III

- Look at the video of *Revelations*. Working in small groups, learn the beginning of the dance. (The actual dance has nine people, but you may vary this.)
- \* • Research a poem by Langston Hughes, or another African American poet, and express the ideas of the poem through dance movement.

\* Indicates sample lesson



## Audio-Visual Materials:

- *Artsource*® audio recording: *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* by Langston Hughes, with permission of Harold Ober Associates; interpreted by Wayne Cook, with violin improvisation by Vincent Gomez.
- Photos: The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in *Revelations*, courtesy of the Company.

- *Artsource*® video excerpts: *Revelations*. Footage courtesy of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

### REVELATIONS

Choreographed by Alvin Ailey (1960)

Performed by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

“I Been 'Buked” - Music arranged by Hall Johnson\*

“Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel” - Music arranged by James Miller+

“Fix Me, Jesus” - Music arranged by Hall Johnson\*

“Processional/Honor, Honor” - Music adapted and arranged by Howard A. Roberts++

“Wade in the Water” - Music adapted and arranged by Howard A. Roberts++

“Wade in the Water” - Sequence by Ella Jenkins

“A Man Went Down to the River” - Original composition by Ella Jenkins

“Sinner Man” - Music adapted and arranged by Howard A. Roberts++

“Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham” - Music adapted and arranged by Howard A. Roberts++

\* Used by arrangement with G. Schirmer, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.

+ Used by special arrangement with Galaxy Music Corporation, New York City.

++ Used with permission from the Estate of Howard A. Roberts.



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's A. Douthit, Y. Lebrun and K. Boyd  
in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*  
Photo by Andrew Eccles

# REACH AND WITHDRAW

## THE HUMAN FAMILY

### LEVEL I Sample Lesson

#### INTRODUCTION:

Much of life is about reaching out when we feel joyous, and withdrawing when we feel sorrowful. This lesson will help each student experience the emotional feelings that go with the gestures of reaching and withdrawing. They should be able to experience the emotions connected to these gestures when responding to different relationships and experiences. In daily life, we should be able to reach towards someone who is kind to us and pull away from someone who harms or abuses us.

African Americans, against their will, were placed in circumstances which motivated both of these feelings. Children, too, are often placed in circumstances where they have little control. The dance, *Revelations*, explores the motivations and emotions of African Americans who experienced great trouble and sorrow, but who also reached towards hope for freedom and deliverance.

*Spirituals sung of woe triumphantly, knowing well that all rivers will be crossed and the Promised Land is just beyond the stream. The Spirituals ask no pity for their words ride on the strongest of melodies, the melody of faith. That is why there is joy in their singing, peace in their music, and strength in their soul.*

Langston Hughes

#### OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate the contrasting emotions of joy and sorrow as two sides of one coin. (**Performing**)
- Explore and demonstrate movement ideas which come from the gestures of reaching outward and pulling inward. (**Creating**)
- Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to *Assessment* at the end of this lesson. (**Responding & Performing**)

#### MATERIALS:

- *Artsource*® video excerpt (or entire dance, if available) of *Revelations*, danced by The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.
- Any spiritual music or song of your choice (optional).

#### PROGRESSION:

- Show the *Artsource*® video excerpt of *Revelations*. Discuss the movements of reaching and pulling inward and what feelings these movements represent. When do you reach towards something? When do you pull away? What feelings go with each of these movements?

- Ask the class to find a space where each student can move freely. Direct them to reach upward slowly and then reverse the action and pull inward slowly. Repeat these movements several times, asking them to reach in different directions each time.
- Repeat the actions, reaching outward and pulling inward quickly.
- Repeat the actions, reaching outward slowly and pulling inward quickly. Reverse, reaching outward quickly and pulling inward slowly. Discuss the differences between these two uses of time and how each felt.
- Repeat with very weak energy. Try doing one action very strongly and the other action very weakly. How does the amount and quality of energy change the meaning of the movements?
- Try the same actions again using time in different ways. Use eight counts to reach outward and eight counts to pull inward. Repeat, using four, two and finally one count for each gesture. How does the amount of time change the feeling of the action?
- Explore the ideas of reaching and closing inward while traveling through space to another spot. Travel forward while reaching outward and retreat backward while pulling inward. How does space change or affect the movement idea?
- Play a recording of a spiritual or learn a song which half the class can sing while the other half improvises with these two gestural ideas, experimenting with different energy, time and space variations.
- Discuss the movement experience with the class. You might also want to view the video again.

### EXTENSIONS:

- Divide the class into two groups. Group A does a reaching gesture towards Group B, and Group B does the same towards Group A. Repeat with gestures which pull away. Then have one group reach and the other group pull away, reversing roles each time.
- Add motivations of joy to the reaching movements and feelings of sorrow to the gestures which pull away. Repeat several times. Discuss the class responses.
- Try repeating the movement ideas with two different emotions; for example, aggression for the reaching and fear for the pulling away movement. Have the class work in partners or small groups, improvising with these different emotional motivations.



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's  
Linda Celeste Sims and Glenn Allen Sims in  
*Alvin Ailey's Revelations*  
Photo by Andrew Eccles

- Have several groups of partners share their improvisations with the class. Discuss what the audience observed in terms of how the dancers used time, space and energy in different ways. Switch groups.

**VOCABULARY:** reach, withdraw, gesture, contrast, emotion, improvisations

**ASSESSMENT:** (Responding & Connecting)

**DESCRIBE:** Describe the feelings you get when you reach upward and those that you feel when you pull downward and inward (for younger students, up and down or open and closed). Discuss if these feelings are the same or different.

**DISCUSS:** Use the 'Discussion Questions' on page 2 of the Unit and select a few to discuss.

**ANALYZE:** Discuss how doing the same movement quickly or slowly changes its meaning and feeling. Also discuss how using either strong or weak energy affects the meaning and feeling of a specific movement. What are the differences you can identify?

**CONNECT:** Discuss how songs the students know and like communicate different feelings and stories. Select one or two and discuss what kind of movement each would inspire.

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



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Matthew Rushing, Briana Reed and Rosalyn Deshauteurs  
in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*  
Photo by Andrew Eccles

# A SIGNATURE PIECE

## THE HUMAN FAMILY

### LEVEL II Sample Lesson

#### INTRODUCTION:

Many dance companies have a specific dance in their repertoire which gains such popularity with audiences that they seldom perform without including it in their concerts. It captures the spirit and aesthetics of the group and its artistic director or choreographer in such a clear way that it becomes their 'signature piece.' The signature of every person's individual name does a similar thing for each of us.

#### OBJECTIVE: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Create a 'signature dance' from each person's name. (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:

- The *Artsource*® video excerpt of *Revelations*, danced by The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

#### PROGRESSION:

- Show the video excerpt of *Revelations*, (or entire dance if available). If not, discuss the work and give the class some background on Alvin Ailey.
- Talk about the concept of a 'signature piece' and how it must show the traits of the person it represents. Our signatures show whether we are bold, shy, dramatic, orderly, sloppy, energetic, plain or fancy. We communicate something about ourselves in the way we write our name.
- Ask the students to find a space where they can move freely. First, have them write their name in space in front of them, as if they were writing on a chalk board. Use cursive style.
- Then, have them repeat the writing of their signature using little space and small movements.
- Repeat the idea again, this time using large movements and covering lots of space as they move.
- Have them try it again using large movements with strong, bold energy, then with light, soft energy.

- Try it again, exaggerating the high and low parts of the letters. Be aware of the energy and style used in dotting the i's and crossing the t's and the way the last letter is ended.
- Repeat the idea using sharp strokes, then exaggerated curly strokes.
- Use different parts of the body, such as the head, foot or elbow, to write your signature.
- As the ideas develop, turns, jumps, slides, etc. can be added to develop the signature into a dance.
- Ask the students to think of all of the variations they have explored in developing their dance 'signature piece.' Have them plan how they want their final 'signature piece' to be choreographed. What can they do to it to capture their individuality? Remind them of level changes, energy possibilities, size of the movement and even the idea of 'writing' with different body parts. Give them an opportunity to evolve their ideas, then have several show their ideas simultaneously. Ask all the performing students to have a clear beginning pose and to hold their ending until everyone in the group has completed their signature.
- Discuss what the audience observed in terms of how different people used space, time and energy, and the choices they made to capture their spirit and aesthetics. Then switch groups.
- If there is time to extend this lesson, it is fulfilling to students to have the opportunity to work on a revision of their piece after they have assessed it to see what they might change.



The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater  
 in *Revelations*  
 Photo: Jack Mitchell

**EXTENSIONS:**

- Have students combine with partners and learn each others' signatures, then perform them.
- Have two students perform their 'signature pieces' at the same time, planning when each will start and where the movements will go in relationship to one another.
- Give the students dowels to extend their movements.

**VOCABULARY:** signature piece, variations, spirit, aesthetics

**ASSESSMENTS: (Responding & Connecting)**

**DESCRIBE:** Describe your own 'Signature Piece' and how it represents you.

**DISCUSS:** Discuss what you liked about your piece and what you might change if you were to perform it again.

**ANALYZE:** Analyze what elements of dance ( i.e. space, pathway, levels, energy, timing, rhythm) you used in creating your piece.

**CONNECT:** Discuss other things we do in life that reflects our special qualities or personality. (i.e. the way we dress, our accent and rhythm when speaking, hobbies, sports we play, etc.)

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

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE:

# I'VE KNOWN RIVERS

## THE HUMAN FAMILY

### LEVEL III Sample Lesson

#### INTRODUCTION:

Langston Hughes was a respected African American poet, playwright and novelist who was a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. The following poem has many powerful images that can be felt in a different way when experienced in dance movement. Mr. Hughes wrote this poem during a long train ride from Illinois across the Mississippi and into Missouri, where he was born. As the train pulled into St. Louis, he was moved by how the river and sky looked as the colors of the sunset touched them. He heard a phrase in his mind and took out an envelope on which he scribbled the following poem. It is about beauty and death, hope and despair, all fused together.



#### *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers as ancient as the world and older  
than the flow of human blood through human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe  
Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen  
its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.



(*The Negro Speaks of Rivers* by Langston Hughes reprinted with permission by literary agency Harold Ober Associates, New York, NY. [www.haroldober.com](http://www.haroldober.com))

#### OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Interpret a poem's images and feelings through dance. (**Creating & Performing**)
- Learn, discuss and analyze the poem, *A Negro Speaks of Rivers* by Langston Hughes, an African American poet and philosopher. (**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:

- The *Artsource*® video excerpt of *Revelations*, danced by The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.
- The *Artsource*® audio recording of the poem, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, with violin accompaniment.
- About ten copies of the poem, one per small group.

## PROGRESSION:

- Using the information in the *Artsource*® Unit on the dance, *Revelations*, tell the class how Mr. Ailey made dances which were drawn from his African American cultural heritage and experience. Explain that Langston Hughes, with a similar background, was an artist who wrote poetry, essays and plays which also expressed his feelings and observations about African culture and American history.
- Show *Revelations* and use the ‘Discussion Questions’ to involve the students in sharing their observations and responses to the dance.
- Read the poem, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*. Ask the class if there were any words they did not understand. Make sure that the class understands the meaning of all of the words in the poem and any images such as Euphrates River or the Pyramids. This is necessary in order to avoid misconceptions and to fully appreciate the meaning of the images. Read the poem again and ask some of the following questions:



- What does the image of a river suggest to you? Why do you think Langston Hughes chose this image?
  - What four specific rivers are mentioned in the poem? Where are they located? (Perhaps show where they are on a world map.)
  - What is the mood or feeling you get from hearing the poem?
  - What do you think the poem is about?
  - Why does he compare his soul to the rivers?
- Why do you think he mentions Abe Lincoln in New Orleans?
  - What are the main images in the poem? List them on the board.
- Arnold Rampersad, who wrote *The Life of Langston Hughes*, gives the following information about the poem:

“The muddy river is his race, the primal source out of which he is born anew; on that ‘muddy bosom’ of the race as black mother, or grandmother, he rests secure forever. The angle of the sun on the muddy water is like the angle of a poet’s vision, which turns mud into gold. ... its eloquence is like that of the best of the black spirituals.” \*

\* Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes*, Vol. I. Oxford University Press. New York. 1986.

- It is interesting to note that a choral piece was specially written for this poem by Margaret Barnes, an African American composer. The melody is interpreted on a violin for the *Artsource* cassette. Ask the class

to close their eyes and listen to the audio recording of the poem with the music. Afterward, ask what images they were able to visualize. What mood or feelings did the audio performance inspire? How did the hut on the banks of the Congo look? Encourage them to be specific.

- Have the students find their own space to explore some of the ideas of the poem in movement. As they explore rivers, direct them to be aware of the path they take, the speed of the water, the banks, etc. Contrast human veins to the rivers. Would they be faster or slower? Larger or smaller? Stronger or weaker?

- In small groups, guide them to explore two contrasting ideas in the poem (i.e. bathing in the Euphrates River when dawn was young and building a hut near the Congo which lulls one to sleep). Encourage them to use improvisational movements, but work as a group to achieve a sense of unity in conveying the idea through movement.

- When several ideas have been explored, pass out copies of the poem and ask small groups of students to compose a dance which communicates two ideas in the poem in any way they wish. Have them also listen to the music and the reading of the poem again for additional understanding and inspiration.

**Task:** Select two feelings or images drawn from the poem and choreograph your interpretation using gestures and pathways.

#### Suggested Criteria for Dance:

- group cooperation
- variations in the images and gestures/movement
- unity within the movement study
- focus and concentration during performance
- use of at least three different elements of dance: pathways, energy, tempo change, levels, rhythm



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*.  
Photo by Gert Krautbauer

## **EXTENSIONS:**

- This project could take a few sessions to complete. Give the students time to choreograph their dance, designing a clear beginning and ending and developing each of their ideas. Have them show their dances and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each.

- Have them go back and re-work, develop and refine their pieces and show them again. Discuss the changes which occurred. It is possible to repeat this process several more times, giving each group an opportunity to refine and shape their work into a richer, more comprehensive presentation.

**VOCABULARY:** poem, rehearse, choreograph, visualization, imagery

## **ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)**

**DESCRIBE:** Describe the two images your group selected and how you interpreted them in your dance.

**DISCUSS:** Use the discussion questions embedded in this lesson to discuss the poem.

**ANALYZE:** Study the criteria for the dance task and analyze how your group met the criteria. Discuss what could be refined in a future revision of the dance task.

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

## **RUBRIC:**

### **Advanced:**

- Group fully cooperated and worked respectfully to solve problems and make decisions.
- Included three or more variations in images and gestures/movement.
- Choreography had unity throughout.
- Group demonstrated strong focus throughout performance.
- Dance incorporated three or more specific elements of dance (pathways, energy, rhythmic changes).

### **Proficient:**

- Group cooperated most of the time to solve problems and make decisions.
- Included one to two variations in images and gestures/movement.
- Choreography had some unity throughout.
- Group demonstrated good focus through most of the performance.
- Dance incorporated one or two specific elements of dance (pathways, energy, rhythmic changes).

### **Approaching Proficient:**

- Group lacked cooperation and respect when working together.
- Did not include variations in the images and gestures/movement.
- Choreography lacked unity.
- Group lacked good focus throughout the performance.
- Dance lacked specific elements of dance choices.

dance