



Appalachian Spring

A Comparison of Classical and Modern Ballet

Suggested Grades: 3-5, 6-8

Polina Mann

National Core Arts Standards

#7 – Perceive and analyze artistic work

#8 – Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Objectives

Compare and contrast Classical and Modern Ballet

Materials

Book: Ballet for Martha, Making of Appalachian Spring by

YouTube Recordings: See Reference List

Recording: Simple Gifts



POLINA MANN

I PreK-8th grade music at the St. Rita School in Hamden, CT. This is my 8th year in a private school setting and love it! I am certified in music, theatre and technology. I also work as a church music director on the weekends and started the Instagram page Grants for Music Teachers. You can find me on Instagram, Pinterest, or Facebook.

Historical Context:

Appalachian Spring is a groundbreaking historical work of art in American history. Appalachian Spring features the collaboration between three artistic powerhouses: dancer/choreographer Martha Graham, composer Aaron Copland, and architect Isamu Noguchi. Martha Graham commissioned this work from Aaron Copland, requesting a uniquely American theme that celebrated early pioneer life in the 19th century. This score and accompanying ballet achieved widespread acclaim. Most of this lesson will be examining what made the ballet sound and feel American, how it was different from traditional Classical ballet and how it influenced ballet going forward.

Suggested Teaching Process:

1. Listen to the piece "Simple Gifts."
2. Discuss the meanings of the lyrics.
 - What did they mean to the settlers who were going westward in America in the 1900s?
3. Read the book "Ballet for Martha: Making Appalachian Spring."
4. Introduce the characters of the ballet.
5. Discuss why Martha's ballet different than classical ballet (p.8)
6. Watch the beginning of "Appalachian Spring."
7. Discuss Isamu Noguchi's set.
 - What do you see?
 - Why is it designed this way?
 - What is it trying to represent?
8. Observe and discuss the style of dance Martha choreographed.
 - What do you notice in their movements?
 - How is ballet style different from traditional Classical ballet?
 - What do some of these movements represent
(*i.e., when they clasp hands in prayer, jump to the sky, etc.*)
9. Show students a clip from the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy.
10. Discuss the students' observations about how the classical ballet style in this video is different.
 - Classical dancers wear a tutu, whereas Martha and her dancers do not.





- Classical dancers wear pointe shoes and walk on their toes, whereas Martha and her dancers do not.
- One film is in color; the other one is in black and white.
- Martha's dancers rise and fall and do many sudden movements, whereas Classical ballet stays relatively even without rising and falling, and the movements are very graceful.

11. Prompt discussion about the structure of ballet.

- Do all dancers dance at the same time?
- Why do some dancers wait while others dance?

Extension:

Explore how Martha Graham influenced future female choreographers, namely Twyla Tharp. Show a clip from her ballet called "Twyla Tharp's in the Upper Room" and discuss how her work parallels Martha Graham's choreography.

References:

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R. (n.d.). Simple Gifts. Retrieved April 02, 2021, from <https://open.spotify.com/search/simple%20gifts>





Simple Gifts

Joseph Brackett

'Tis the gift to be sim-ple, 'tis the gift to be free. 'Tis the
gift to come down where we ought to be. And
when we find our-selves in the place just right, 'Twill
be in the val - ley of love and de-light. When true sim-
pli-ci-ty is gained. To bow and to bend we shan't be a-sham'd. To
turn, turn will be our de-light, Til by tur - ning, tur - ning we
come round right.

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