



NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE CENTRE NATIONAL DES ARTS

Canada is our stage. Le Canada en scène.

EXPLORING SHAPE

In this video, we looked at the concept of shape and how we can visually draw out and explore the different types of shapes that a dancer's body (or any body!) can make as it moves through space or is held in pause.

We also discussed how the shapes a dancer's body makes are INTENTIONAL choices made by choreographers to express a certain emotion, create a feeling, or push along their narrative.

The SHAPES we discussed:

- 1) Linear - Any shape that does NOT bend at a joint. Straight, clean, clear, crisp lines with the arms, legs, and/or torso. Might give off the impression of power, strength, rigidity, cleanliness, etc. to the audience.
- 2) Angular - Any shape that DOES bend at a joint in the arms, legs, and/or torso. It is any shape where the body appears to create angles. Angular shapes are seen as clean and clearly defined; they can give the impression of strength, tenacity, energy, tension, distortion, etc.
- 3) Curved - A curved shape is any shape that appears curved or circular in the arms, legs, and/or torso - for example, a curved (contracted) back. Curved shapes can give the audience a feeling of weakness, fragility, softness, perhaps fear, or a lack of energy or confidence, of being mournful, etc.
- 4) Twisted - Any shape that is twisted or contorted around the spine or limbs. All spirals are twisted shapes. Twisted shapes can create feelings of awkwardness, fear, pain, strangeness, frustration, comedic moments, etc. and are most often used as accents in a piece of choreography in order to help draw out a feeling, emotion, or element in the choreographer's story.
- 5) Symmetrical - Any shape that is equal on both sides of the centre of a dancer's body - for example, standing in a neutral position with the arms by one's side or with both arms outstretched parallel to the floor. Symmetrical shapes can give the impression of unity or sameness when a group of dancers comes together symmetrically. They can also give a sense of strictness or rigidity.
- 6) Asymmetrical - Any shape that is NOT equal on both sides of the center of a dancer's body. It is more common to see dancers' bodies moving through asymmetrical shapes; they can be seen in any number of ways but can reflect individuality, uniqueness, beauty, contrast, etc.

It should also be noted that choreographers create contrast between shapes as an effective way to tell their story. For example, if one dancer is creating very clean linear and angular shapes, versus another who seems to spend their time in curved or twisted shapes, we might infer as an audience that the dancer creating the linear and angular shapes is stronger or more powerful than the dancer who is spending time in curved or twisted shapes.

Learning Activities:

LEARNING ACTIVITY EXAMPLE #1: Shouting out shapes! Stand still in a circle, then moving through space. This is a way to have students become familiar with these shapes, by memorizing them through repetition and kinesthetic learning.

- Have students stand in a circle and call out a shape eg. Curved!
- Students make their shape and then return to a neutral position waiting for the next shape to be called
- Mix it up! Shout out “Curved Arms, Angular Legs”! Etc.....
- Move students into random space throughout the room and have them face in all different directions if the circle is too intimidating. Each time you finish with one shape, have them walk to a new space and repeat.

LEARNING ACTIVITY EXAMPLE #2: Shape one, shape two, shape three! After students are finished memorizing and moving through shapes, they can move to this activity.

- Have students standing around the space facing in all different directions. Shout out SHAPE #1 (you can ask that it be e.g. Linear and Medium Level or any other combination of shapes and spaces)
- Count 1-8 and have them move to their shape one for those 8 counts and hold it when they arrive.
- Ask them to return to neutral.
- Call SHAPE #1 again, count to 8, and have them return to shape 1.
- Do this several times until they have memorized their shape 1.
- Repeat this for shapes 1, 2, and 3.
- Once they have all 3 shapes, randomly call out: “Shape one!” Or “Shape 3!” Etc... Have students move in and out of their shapes.
- NEXT: Do this same thing but have them moving around the room, call out shape 1, 2, or 3... Students have to stop walking around (or crawling or skipping, floating, running, etc)...and make their shape, then continue on when you give them the cue to continue moving.

Once the 3 shapes are learned, you can add other extensions: add transitions, between the shapes, move them through space, use retrograde (3,2,1), use repetition and combos (e.g 3,3,2,1,1,2...)

FINAL STEP: I like to have students teach their 3 shapes plus transitions (I usually have them create 4 counts of transition between each shape) to another person and have them combine both of their phrases for a larger piece. We show each other our 'duets' and then I might add groups on stage at the same time, I will have students watch and make suggestions to add music to the combos they are watching, or we play "Musical roulette" and play any music that comes up on a playlist. There are lots of options here.

LEARNING ACTIVITY EXAMPLE #3: PRACTICE DEMONSTRATING THEMES VIA SHAPE

- In groups of 4-5 I will give students a SHAPE that they will need to feature. Example: your group is to use twisted shapes to tell a story. (I will typically present this as a 'study' as opposed to being an attempt at creating a full piece.)
- The goal is to have them come up with 30 seconds to 1 minute of choreography which features their shape.
- After they present their movement, I have my student observers guess at the story or feeling that the group was trying to portray using their shape.
- I then have the group stand and explain their intentions and how they used their shape to tell the intended story or to reflect the feelings/emotions they meant to express.

LARGER ACCOMPANYING STUDENT PROJECT:

This is a combo students put together in partners. It is done without music at first, then at the end we add music and make modifications to the original choreography that is created following the steps below:

- Students are put into groups of 2.
- Each student in the group has to create 8 shapes plus transitions (Note: "Transitions" in this case, are the movements between each shape. They can be short or long in length, and I usually ask students to make their transitions varied in length and complexity.)
- Next, each member of the group teaches their 8 shapes, plus transitions, to their group member. This ends up being a total of 16 shapes plus transitions that the students will be required to learn.

- How to present:
 - Student 1 dances their 8 shapes, plus transitions, while Student 2 holds their first shape.
 - Next, Student 2 dances their 8 shapes, plus transitions, while Student 1 holds their final shape.
 - Finally, both students transition together and dance through all 16 together in unison,

** If a group is finished quickly, I will usually ask them to add repetition, sequential timing, longer transitions, retrograde, pause, etc, so that they can begin to see (and later demonstrate to the group) how we can take these basic shapes and transitions, add modifications, and build a larger piece.