

Integrating Traditional Japanese Dance into

# Social Studies and Humanities Curriculum

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**Grade Levels:** 5 – 8

**Duration:** Five days.

**Ohio Dance Standards:**

***Historical, Cultural and Social Contexts:***

Students understand dance forms and styles from a diverse range of cultural environments of past and present society. They know the contributions of significant choreographers, dancers and dance organizations to dance heritage. Students analyze the philosophical beliefs, social systems, and movement norms that influence the function and role of dance in the lives of people.

Benchmark A: Perform and describe the dances from various cultures and historical periods with emphasis on cultures addressed in social studies.

Benchmark B: Explain the social and historical contexts that influence the development of dance in a culture.

Benchmark C: Explain a recognized contributor to dance, (e.g. choreographer, dancer, or educator) and trace the development of the individual's work to its historical and cultural influences.

***Creative Expression and Communication:***

Students create, interpret and perform dances to demonstrate understanding of choreographic principles, processes and structures. They understand how to use dance and movement to express ideas and to make meaning of their world.

Benchmark A: Perform basic body movements, body positions and spatial patterns from one or more dance forms, styles or traditions.

Benchmark C: Perform a full dance for a peer audience that demonstrates artistic expressions and performance skill

### ***Analyzing and Responding:***

Students express orally, and in writing, their interpretations and evaluations of dances they observe and perform. They understand and use the vocabulary of art (dance) criticism to discuss their responses to a variety of dance forms and styles.

Benchmark B: Analyze how dance elements are used to convey concepts or themes in dance performances.

### ***Valuing the Arts (Aesthetic Reflection):***

Students inquire about the nature and experience of dance in their lives. They reflect on the significance and value of dances they observe and perform. Students present points of view about dance and respond thoughtfully to others' point of view.

Benchmark B: Demonstrate reasoning skills when engaging in inquiry about dance.

### **Lesson Purpose:**

In this lesson, students learn introductory history and cultural purposes of selected Japanese dance forms. Specifically, students analyze the philosophical beliefs, social systems, and movement norms that influence the function and role of Japanese dance in the lives of its people. Students learn and perform dances representative of national and regional traditions, past and present. Students deepen their understanding of how Japanese dance makes meaning and expresses ideas in the lives of its people.

### **Essential Questions:**

1. What are functions, forms and styles of Japanese dance?
2. What are the characteristics of Japanese dance?
3. Why is Japanese dance taught and performed?
4. How does Japanese dance reflect the beliefs and lives of its people?
5. Why learn Japanese dance?

### **Lesson Process:**

1. Discuss traditional Japanese dance. Ask: What do we already know about Japanese dance? Why would we want to know about it? What else?
2. Share a video/DVD of traditional Japanese dance. Resources may include the film, *Dancing* or *The Diary of a Geisha*. Conduct an Internet search and preview the media before showing it in class.

3. Ask students to write about the dances that they see. Prompt: After seeing examples of traditional Japanese dance, describe what you saw? Felt? And why?
4. Whole group participates in a Read Aloud of a version of the information found below in the commentary section.
5. In small groups, students collaborate to create their own traditional Japanese dance, paying close attention to the details described from the DVD showing and their reading.
6. Students share their dance studies with class members. Students tell the dance's title, purpose and featured characteristics.
7. At end of lesson, students write a one to two page reflective paper to discuss what they learned from this experience. Detailed information in complete sentences is essential.. Students are required to turn in papers with correct grammar, capitalization and punctuation.

**Assessment:** Develop assessment rubrics to support the instructional experience and align anticipated learning with interest grade level benchmarks and grade level indicators for dance, language arts and social studies.

**Commentary:**

In ancient times, traditional Japanese dance was performed for religious or ceremonial purposes and divided into two distinct types— Odori, characterized by detailed movements of the upper body, and originated in the Edo period, and Mai, characterized by movements of the lower body and originated in the western part of Japan. Both forms make up Kabuki dance. Mai traditionally performed in Japanese rooms instead of on the stage and was influenced by the Noh Drama. Mai means revolving. In this dance your body moves in a restricted way. This dance started when shrine maidens danced around the ceremonial site with twigs of bamboo and the sacred Sakaki tree. Initially, this dance was supposed to bring tranquility to the land. Later this dance changed into the art of dancing while holding fans. A variation of the Mai style of Japanese dance is the Kyomai or Kyoto Style Dance. Kyomai developed in the 17th century Tokugawa cultural period. It is heavily influenced by the elegance and sophistication of the manners often associated with the Japanese Imperial Court. Gigaku and Bugaku were performed majestically with a masculine flair and preserved by the Imperial Court.

Quite the opposite of the Imperial court dance form was Sangaku. Thought of as a grass roots, side-show dance at sumo wrestling matches it is featured as unsophisticated entertainment and included moments of slight-of –hand, acrobatic stunts, riding displays, comical pantomimes, puppetry and improvised dances.

Today, traditional Japanese dance can be viewed as two distinct genres- classical and folk or regional dance. It ranges from dances performed for show or dances performed with the thought of an audiences in mind, such as theatrical dances, to those not intended for show, say, religious dances, which to do anticipate having beings, it these are called spectators expecting the gods or other supernatural beings. Japan, was a land of paddy fields. Dances originated a form of prayer

to garner good crops from seed planting to harvest. A feature of this dance was the feet stomping in rhythmic patterns. In China and later developed into a dance known as Dengaku.

Noh dance was considered a prototype to Kabuki dance and originated in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Noh was understood as a blended form of drama and dance and popularized by nobles and warriors during the Muromachi period (1338-1573). It is characterized by its use of masks and unreality. Most Noh plays deal with the invisible world of the gods, unknown regions or the other side of the grave. They seldom deal with the everyday lives of common people or the mundane world.

Odori, a forerunner to Kabuki, is another traditional Japanese dance form. This dance was popular during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is characterized by jumping movement. This dance form consisted of a group of people jumping to the rhythm of a bell while chanting a prayer. Today part of Kabuki dance can be seen in selected folk dance. One feature are the gestures or movements that have specific meaning. There is no abstract movement in Kabuki. There are three elements of Kabuki- *odori*, *mai* and *furi* a.k.a. *shosa*. Kabuki was performed first by females (*Onna*) and then youth (*Wakashu*) and then males (*Yaro*). The government eventually forbid all except *Oyama* or the female impersonators to perform Kabuki. There was even a time when the government forbid all Kabuki theatre, music and dance. Today, Kabuki dances or local dances have found resurgence and are viewed as popular, often taught to many. Geishas perform Kabuki dances in parlors or salons.

The most famous and celebrated dance is the Bon dance or the "Bon Odori" in Japanese. People dance the Bon Dance during the Bon Festival that is held every summer in August districts and neighborhoods in every city in Japan. *Obon*, as it is often known, continues on for about a week. Bon means to welcome ancestors' souls. This acknowledgement is done through memorial services offered in each person's name. During Bon, sometimes all relatives of a family gather and hold a memorial service for their ancestors, and reflect and reminisce. This practice comes from Chinese Buddhist tradition and blends Buddhist beliefs and ancestor worship. The Bon Dance should be held in the night because many Japanese people believe that their ancestors' souls come back during the night.

Butoh, a classical Japanese dance developed after WWII by Hijikata Tatsumi, uses creative dance to capture expressive motions and combine eroticism, social criticism, and avant-garde theater ideas. Tatsumi considered the body to be a repository for "stored memories," which could, in turn, be metamorphosed into dance forms. White body paint covering the entire body, elaborate costumes with extensive props, simple leopard or loincloth or even nudity is characteristic of butoh. Hair may be wildly teased, elaborately coiffed or completely absent (head shaven clean). Individual performance or groups of 10 or more dancers may perform. Movements that characterize Butoh include- leaping wildly about in a frenzy with loud music or performing with no soundtrack or dancing small movements so subtle that at any distance they would appear to move very subtly and very slowly.

The most unconventional aspect of Butoh is its movement and the preparation that the dancer undergoes to prepare for the dance. It is a dance that has as much to do with meditation or

martial art training as it does to dance in the conventional sense. It derives its power from what the individual who dances it brings to it in a very mental as well as physical sense. It is a directing of energy to the audience from the surroundings, the environment and the audience themselves as much as from the mind in a way similar to how a pastry chef uses a paper cone to direct the icing onto a cake. Beginning dancers who have not had the benefit of training the mind may look at what they have seen before live or on videotape and may try to imitate those physical movements. Merely imitating the physical movement that one sees on a videotape or from a seat in a theater tens of yards away will most likely lead to a dance that may seem different, unusual and interesting to someone who has never seen the dance before, but which is hollow and uninteresting to one who has experienced Butoh performance up close or has gone through the process of preparing for and carrying out a performance of Butoh.