WHISPERS, ECHOES, VOICES

October 30, 2026

Brooks Center for the Performing Arts – Clemson University

Educational Pointers Guide & Lessons



CHARLOTTE BALLET

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EDUCATION MISSION STATEMENT

Charlotte Ballet's Education program engages students, teachers and the community-at-large in a range of artistic activities that allow them to learn about dance as an art form.

CHARLOTTE BALLET MISSION

Through dance, we create authentic connections, engaging and inclusive educational opportunities, and transformative experiences.

CHARLOTTE BALLET VISION

We inspire individuals and communities to explore the boundless potential of the imagination.

WELCOME LETTER

Dear Educators and Students,

As you prepare your students to experience *As I Am* by Charlotte Ballet Resident Choreographer Mthuthuzeli November alongside the world premiere of *Solo Echo* by Crystal Pite, I encourage them to look beyond the movement on stage and consider the many artists and collaborators who bring a production to life. From the choreographic process and musical choices to the lighting and production design led by Production Manager Aaron Muhl, every creative decision contributes to the audience's experience. Together, these artistic elements help shape the stories, emotions, and ideas communicated through dance.

I hope this educational guide enriches your classroom experience by providing insight into the choreographers, composers, and designers behind these works. Inside, you'll find background information as well as pre- and post-performance activities designed to encourage observation, reflection, and meaningful discussion, helping students engage with both the artistry on stage and the collaborative process that makes live performance possible.

Reminder, we will have a question-and-answer opportunity with dancers during intermission. Our entire team looks forward to welcoming you to the theater.



With gratitude,

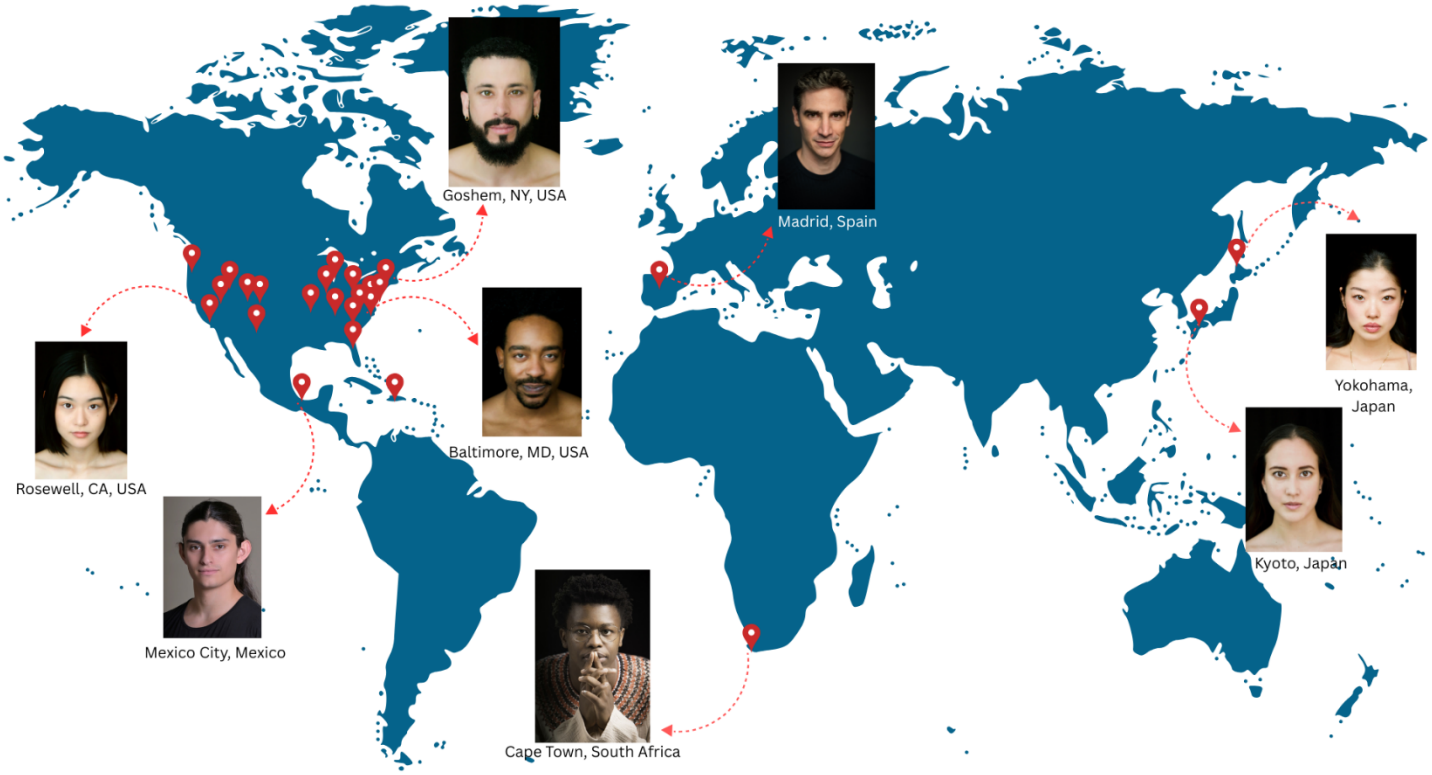
Kimberly Pereira

Director of Education & Community Engagement

CHARLOTTE BALLET **COMPANY**

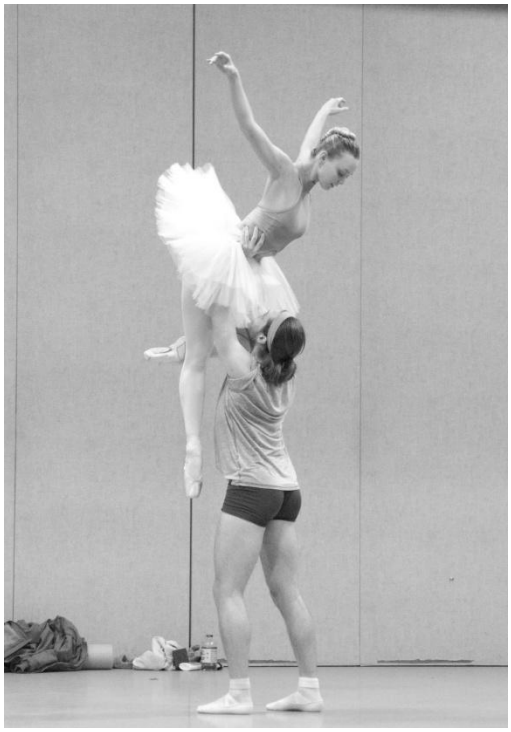


Charlotte Ballet, led by Artistic Director Alejandro Cerrudo, is comprised of 29 professional dancers in the main company and CBII. Our dancers come from across the world to perform Charlotte Ballet's extensive repertoire of work including full-length classical ballets and innovative contemporary works. Charlotte Ballet Dancer's are known internationally for the energy, precision and athleticism imbued in every performance.



BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL DANCER

Each dancer's journey to becoming a professional is different. Many begin dancing as a child while some don't begin taking class until middle and high school. When a dancer decides they want to pursue a career as a professional dancer there are many paths to follow. Some forgo traditional high school and join pre-professional programs like Charlotte Ballet's, others continue with their education and obtain college degrees, while some go from high school directly into their careers. But to join a company everyone must go through the same process; auditions.



Most companies hold auditions in January or February to join the company for the next season. In auditions, directors look for dancers with strong technique, professionalism, movement quality, and stage presence. With a set number of spots available in a company, 100's of dancer's can all be auditioning for one open position.

Professional dancers begin their day with a 90 minute technique class to prepare their bodies and minds for a full day of work. The rest of the day is spent in rehearsals, costume fittings, physical therapy appointments, photoshoots, and interviews.

Charlotte Ballet Dancers Daily Schedule

9:30 AM – 11:00 AM	Company Ballet Class
11:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Rehearsals
2:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Lunch
3:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Rehearsals

DANCER SPOTLIGHT
MARIO GONZALEZ



Mario started dancing at the Marya Kennett School of Dance in Goshen, N.Y. He received his pre-professional training at Walnut Hill School for the Arts and went on to attain his BFA from the Conservatory of Dance at SUNY Purchase College. Mario has also studied dance at the San Francisco Ballet School, The Juilliard School, Nederlands Dans Theater, M.I.P., The Cunningham Fellowship Workshop and Springboard Danse Montreal. Prior to joining Charlotte Ballet, Mario danced with Los Angeles Dance Project, Visceral Dance Chicago and American Repertory Ballet.

During his career he has performed internationally, most recently Festival in Motion, the first-ever western dance festival in Doha, Qatar. During his time at LADP he premiered Benjamin Millepied's Romeo and Juliet, dancing the part of Juliet, later filmed for French TV networks. Throughout his career he has danced in works by Kyle Abraham, Danielle Agami, George Balanchine, Dimitri Chambles and Kim Gordon, Merce Cunningham, Nicolo Fonte, Mark Godden, Madboots Dance, Charm La'Donna, Stephan Laks, Paul Lightfoot and Sol Leon, Jose Limon, Benjamin Millepied, Matthew Neenan, Kevin O'Day, Kirk Peterson, Salia Sanuo, Erica Sobol, Bobbi Jene Smith and Or Schraiber, Jermaine Spivey and Spenser Theberge, Pam Tanowitz, Saburo Teshigawara, Doug Varone, Yin Yue and others.

Years with Charlotte Ballet : 4

Hometown: Brooklyn, NY



Mario in Ohad Naharin's *Kamuyot*

DANCER SPOTLIGHT
MAIA LEE

Maia was born in Roseville, CA and began dancing at the age of 6. She trained at various local Bay Area studios under the instruction of many teachers, including Pat Colgate and Tina DeVine.

In 2020, Maia joined the Sacramento Ballet Trainee program and was promoted to Sacramento Ballet 2 during the second company's inaugural year under the direction of Jill Marlow Krutzkamp. Maia was promoted to an apprentice in Sacramento Ballet's main company in 2023

She has had the opportunity to perform several soloist roles in works by Ihsan Rustem. Val Caniparoli, and Andrea Schermoly.

Maia joined Charlotte Ballet's main company in 2024 and since has performed featured roles in pieces by Crystal Pite, Ohad Naharin, Alejandro Cerrudo, and Mthuthuzeli November.



Click Maia's headshot to learn more about her!

Years with Charlotte Ballet : 3

Dancing Since: Age 6

What inspires you as an artist? The connections that I experience with the dancers around me as well as the connections I discover within myself. Feeling the energy of the other people in the room creates such a strong sense of community that is so rare and so precious. I also find dance very meditative, and I love exploring different areas of my body and mind to move through.



Maia as the Snow Queen in *Nutcracker*

CHARLOTTE BALLET HISTORY TIMELINE

1970 - Robert Lingdren founds North Carolina Dance Theatre in Winston Salem

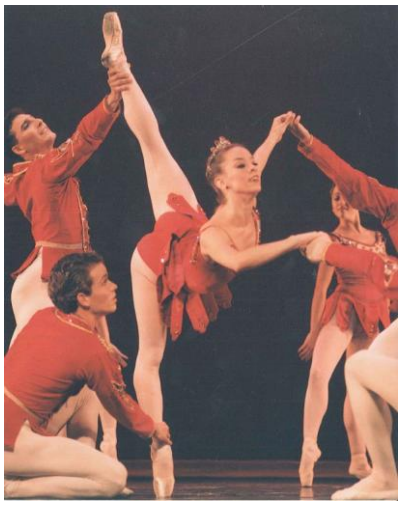
1985 – Salvatore Aiello becomes the second Artistic Director



1990 – The company moves to Charlotte and Aiello opens a school and presents his new Nutcracker

1996 – Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux and Patricia McBride become the new Artistic Director and Associate Artistic Director

2000 – NC Dance Theatre 2 is established as a second company of professional dancers



2008 – Bonnefoux and McBride receive the first Lifetime Achievement Awards from the Arts & Science Council

2009 – NC Dance Theatre breaks ground on its new uptown facility later to be named the Patricia McBride & Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux Center for Dance.

2012 – Sasha James is named the company's Associate Artistic Director after eight years dancing with the company



2014 – The company is renamed Charlotte Ballet and Patricia McBride becomes a Kennedy Center Honoree at the 37th Annual Kennedy Center Annual National Celebration of the Arts

2016 – Charlotte Ballet receives $1 Million from the McColl family to support the creation of new sets and costumes for Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux's *Nutcracker*

2017 – Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux retires after 20 years with the company. Hope Muir is announced as the fourth Artistic Director of Charlotte Ballet

2022 – Alejandro Cerrudo is named the new Artistic Director for Charlotte Ballet

2025 – South African choreographer Mthuthuzeli November is named Charlotte Ballet's resident choreographer and creates his third piece for Charlotte Ballet I

AFRICAN DANCE **INFLUENCES**

TRADITIONAL AFRICAN DANCES –

Africa is home to several individual ethnic groups who have contributed their own style and form to the global dance vocabulary. Traditional African Dances date back for centuries, keeping the social and cultural fabric of Africa alive.

Traditional African dances are often performed in large groups, incorporating rhythmic movement with music and percussive noises.

SOUTH AFRICAN DANCE FORMS

IsiPantsula *– an energetic dance style that emerged in the 1950's and 19060's, as a response to the Apartheid Government. Born in Johannesburg, the style is influenced by tab dance and blended with everyday gestures. Pantsula is performance commonly to Kwaito and House music and incorporates other musical elements like whistling.*

Amapiano *– Ampiano is a style of House music meaning "The Pianos" in Zulu. The genre combines deep house music with jazz and can be most identified by high-pitch piano melodies. The style of music sparked a new dance style which features quick-step movement and body popping.*

Bhenga/Gqom *– Gqom, Zulu for "drum", emerged in Durban and is a genre of House music using raw and repetitive beats. The dance style, called Bhenga, asks dancers to move to the beat and aims to make the dancer seem flexible. The dance style is characterized by wavy arm movements, wobbly knees, and distinct foot work.*

S-bujwa *– Emerging in the 1990s by dancers in Soweto, S'bujwa is a freestyle dance form incorporating Hop Hop, Jive, and isiPantsula. S'bujwa is high energy and requires dancers to have full body muscle control to complete the steps.*

Gumboot *– Gumboot dance (or Isichatulo) is rooted in workers from gold mining in South Africa and is performed waring workers gumboots (rainboots). Dances are percussive stepping style and are often parodies of officers who patrolled the mines.*



Click the picture to watch Gumboot Dancers on South Africa's Got Talent

AS I AM



Original Performance – Charlotte Ballet, October 30, 2025, The Knight Theater, Charlotte NC

Choreographer: Mthuthuzeli November

Lighting Designer: Aaron Muhl

Costume Designer: Mthuthuzeli November with Kerri Martinsen

Music: Mthuthuzeli November

SOLO ECHO



Premier Performance: Nederlands Dans Theater, February 9, 2012, The Lucent Danstheater, Den Haag, The Netherlands

Choreographers: Crystal Pite

Music: Johannes Brahms

Lighting Design: Tom Visser

Associate Light Designer: Reed Nakayama

Scenic Design: Jay Gower Taylor

Costume Design: Joke Visser, Crystal Pite

Staged by: Eric Beauchesne

WORKING IN THE ARTS

There are many professions available in dance companies that do not involve performing for those with a passion for the arts.

PRODUCTION MANAGER A production manager is responsible for overseeing all logistical and technical aspects of a production, ensuring the artistic vision of the choreographer is realized within the constraints of the budget and performance space. This includes coordinating between costumes, lightening, set designers, sound designers and stage management.

AARON MUHL, Charlotte Ballet Production Manager

COSTUME SHOP MANAGER Costume shop managers are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the costume shop and supervises all activities associated with the shop. Managers produce/create costumes from renderings, sketches and verbal ideas based on a choreographers vision. They are responsible for making alterations, managing fittings, upkeep, and maintenance of all costuming and props. You can obtain a degree or work your way up within the industry starting as a Wardrobe Supervisor or Sewer.

KRISTIN PONDY, Costume Shop Manager

ROSIBEL HERNANDEZ, Assistant Costume Shop Manager

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER Social media managers are responsible for all internal and external marketing materials, ensuring brand consistency across the organization and communications. The position serves as an organizations storyteller. The role creates content for social media feeds, to include videos, posts, hashtags, e-mail campaigns and more. Creativity is key in this position. They manage the creation of design concepts and implement them through communication campaigns. Follow us on Instagram

LILY HERON, Charlotte Ballet Social Media Manager

CHOREOGRAPHER SPOTLIGHT
MTHUTHUZELI NOVEMBER



Born in Cape Town, South Africa, November grew up dancing traditional African dance forms and took his first ballet class at 15 through an outreach program, Dance For All. In 2011 we was accepted with full scholarship to attend the Cape Academy of Performing Arts and graduated with distinction in 2014. He went on to dance with Cape Dance Company and made his professional choreography debut in 2014. In 2015, November joined Black Ballet.

November has choreographed for dance companies across the globe, earning him international acclaim and awards including a Laurence Olivia Award, an Emerging Artist Award from Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunsteffees, and the Benpos de la Danse Award.

His work has been commissioned by renowned companies and festivals world wide including Royal Ballet, Paris Opera Balelt, English National Ballet, Washington Ballet, Northern Ballet, and Charlotte Ballet.

November has created three pieces for Charlotte Ballet. *As I Am* (2025), November often takes inspiration from his childhood in South Africa and background in Kwaito dance.



Mthuthu in rehearsal with Company Member Raven Barkley

PRE PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

Use these questions to spark discussion before seeing *Whispers, Echoes, Voices.*

1. What do you expect when you go to a live performance like a ballet?

2. How do you think the music will affect the performance?

3. Do you think the dancers will tell a story through their movements?

4. What production element are you most excited about? Costumes, Sets, Props, Lighting, Etc.

5. How do you think this performance will be different than other live performance experience you've attended?

Name:_____ Date:_____

Reflection and Response: Live Performance Review

Writing and Dance Lesson

Summary

Students will reflect, respond and write a critical review of live performances including dance, theater, music, and more.

Materials

Worksheets: Expectations and Questions, Reflect and Review, A Critic Prepares

Lesson Steps:

1. Before attending a performance, complete "Expectations and Questions" worksheet to prepare.
2. After attending the performance, complete the "Reflection and Response" Worksheet to organize your thoughts on the performance you just watched. Make sure to fill out all sections in legible handwriting.
3. In small groups, share three things that changed, surprised you, or fulfilled your expectations of the performance. See how different students noticed and experienced various aspects of the show.
4. Use the "A Critic Prepares" worksheet to organize your thoughts into three key points you feel someone should know before seeing the show. Use your previous worksheets to guide you.
5. Write a five-paragraph newspaper or magazine review of the performance to encourage or discourage new audience members from seeing the show.

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Name:_____ Date:_____

Expectations and Questions: Prepare to see a performance!

Before you see a performance, use the questions to prepare!

Name of Performance: _____

Type of performance: _____

(Theater, dance, orchestral, choral, musical theater, poetry, puppetry, etc.)

1. What do you think you will observe today?

_____

_____

2. Do you think there will be a story/narrative? Will words be spoken?

_____

_____

3. Do you think there will be music? What do you think it will sound like?

_____

_____

4. Do you think you will enjoy the experience?

_____

_____

5. What do you wish you knew before seeing the performance?

_____

_____

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Name:_____ Date:_____

Reflect and Review: Post Performance Reponses

Name of Performance: _____

Name of Performance Company or Artist(s): _____

Type of performance: _____

(Theater, dance, orchestral, choral, musical theater, poetry, puppetry, etc.)

Date of performance: _____

Venue of performance: _____

1. On a scale from 1 to 5, did the performance live up to your expectations?



2. How did this performance change the way you view the type of performing arts?

_____

_____

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much did you enjoy the performance, and why?



_____

_____

CHARLOTTE BALLET

Name:_____ Date:_____

4. Would you recommend other people see this performance, and why?

_____

_____

5. Were there costumes in the performance? _____
6. On a scale from 1 to 5, do you think the costumes added to the performance?



7. If so, describe at least TWO costume pieces you saw?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Were there sets or props used in today's performance? _____
9. If so, describe the set(s) you saw in the performance.

_____

_____

10. What was your favorite part of the performance?

_____

_____

11. What was your least favorite part of the performance?

_____

_____

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Name:_____ Date:_____

A Critic Prepares

Prepare to write a review as a critic. Your piece should be persuasive, informative, and creative. Use the space below to prepare three topics to discuss in your review.

Topic One: _____

Examples: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Topic Two: _____

Examples: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Topic Three: _____

Examples: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

POST PERFORMANCE LESSON

African Dance Research Project–

Mthuthuzeli November drew inspiration from his South African dance roots in the creation of *As I Am.* Use this performance as inspiration to learn more about different dance styles from Africa.

Steps –

1. As a class, make a list of every style of dance you can think of. Then discuss what you know about the history of those styles: location, time period, costume, etc.
2. In small groups or individually, research different African dance forms that you have not listed as a class and complete the "Stepping into a new culture" sheet provided.
3. In small groups or as a class, discuss your findings
4. Pick **one** style to build a research project around, using the "Further Findings" sheet as a foundation.
5. Create a 3-5 minute presentation on your dance style making sure to highlight all the parts of your research sheet and answer the following on the "Share Your Knowledge" worksheet.

Name:_____ Date:_____

Stepping into a new culture

Use this worksheet to start researching different African Dance Forms.

Remember, all parts of history and culture can influence art forms so make sure to learn about the countries as much as the style of dance.

Tip: Africa is a large continent, pick a few countries that interest you to begin your research around.

Country:_____ Style:_____

Time Period of Origination: _____

Defining Features (ex. Rhythm, percussion, costume, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

Country:_____ Style:_____

Time Period of Origination: _____

Defining Features (ex. Rhythm, percussion, costume, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

CHARLOTTE BALLET

Name:_____ Date:_____

Country:_____ Style:_____

Time Period of Origination: _____

Defining Features (ex. Rhythm, percussion, costume, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

Country:_____ Style:_____

Time Period of Origination: _____

Defining Features (ex. Rhythm, percussion, costume, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

Country:_____ Style:_____

Time Period of Origination: _____

Defining Features (ex. Rhythm, percussion, costume, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

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Name:_____ Date:_____

Further Findings

Pick ONE style of dance from your research and prepare to create a presentation on that style. Use the prompts below to collect answers and prepare for your project.

Style of Dance: _____

Country: _____

What music is often used when performing: _____

_____

Describe the costumes / Outfits most often worn. Is there a historical or cultural reason behind them? : _____

_____

_____

_____

Use scratch paper to draw if you would like!

Time period the style began: _____

What historical events or moments were happening during that time in that country and/or globally? _____

_____

_____

_____

How did the style become popular: _____

_____

_____

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Name:_____ Date:_____

What person or group is attributed to the creation of the style? Is there one? If so, give a brief biography on them: _____

_____

_____

_____

Name three people, groups, companies who are famous for this style and give a brief biography:

1. _____
   _____
   _____
2. _____
   _____
   _____
3. _____
   _____
   _____

When is this dance style most typically performed? Onstage, in rituals, in community, at weddings, etc.: _____

_____

Describe the dance technique itself. Is it rhythmic, fluid, quick, percussive?

_____

_____

_____

What drew you to this style? Why did you decide to do your project on it?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Name:_____ Date:_____

Share Your Knowledge

Time to show what you learned. In a presentation, use your research to create a compelling informational project on your dance style. Make sure to include the following:

- Name and origin.
- When it began and why.
- The historical or cultural context of its creation.
- The costumes or clothing worn by dancers (use visual aids).
- A link for readers and your audience to watch the dance style.
- Who made it famous and why.
- What music is typically used for this style.
- What sets this dance form apart from others.
- Where you could go to see this style performed.
- How culture, lifestyle, and history affected this style of dance.
- Why did you choose this style?

Bonus! Learn a small phrase of the style and show it to the class.

Remember to cite your sources, use visuals to best explain if necessary, and make your project fun!

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