

INTRODUCTION TO DANCE

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Hi. I'm Professor Ying Zhu. I'm an Assistant Professor of Dance, in the School of Theater and Dance. And I'm the creator of this course, Introduction to Dance.

So we have this form, this embodied form, called dance. And it doesn't happen in a vacuum. And not only that, it's not only a form that's for entertainment or arts, but it's a way of looking at the world. And so what this course is going to introduce you to, is this idea that we can use dance, in its multiple genres and forms, to kind of examine not only history, but its relationship to the shapings of culture and society.

So as part of this module, I've invited my colleagues to come and start a conversation. Start us thinking about why is dance important to these experts and professionals. And to also give you an idea of why it would be important, and fun, and relevant, and compelling, to study this art form both in a theoretical and practice based context.

We see in dance. We see life through the lens of movement. And that's a really important way to study something. Even when you go back to the Renaissance, and how they used dance to reflect the cosmic order of the universe to explain things, religion and society. That's important to look at. When we look at the advent of modern dance and how it rebelled against social norms, those are reflected in the society at the time. An American society that was rebelling against everything that came before it.

When we look at dance on film. When people dance on film, it teaches us about ourselves. It teaches us about our own culture. We learn from what we see in the movies. From what we see on television. From what we see in the theater. They teach us how to behave. They teach us what to do. How to think. How to dress. How to act. How to move. How to be with one another. And it reveals secrets about politics and sociology, and how we behave, and how we've evolved as a human culture.

I think dance, in and of itself, remains constant. But because dance remains constant, it's always open to being influenced. And it's open to influencing trends, and society trends, and even politics, and social justice. So for me dance has become a way of framing the world, in that it always leads me to ask questions. It leads me to ask questions about what I value, what I assume, and how I can move forward in a healthy, open, and inclusionary way.

For one thing you learn a great deal about your own self. It's a huge self awareness tool. Who are you in the world? How do you relate to other people? How do you move your body? You're always expressing your body, even though you maybe think you don't dance, you dance every day.

You're dancing every day in the way that you are moving through the grocery store. In the way that you are saying hello and goodbye to people. In the way that you are hugging. In the way that you

are connecting in general. So that becomes a tool of self awareness. When you start to study dance and see how are these people relating to one another. How are they setting up a structure, in which groups are connecting or not connecting, and how are they connecting.

So studying dance, I think, helps you understand not only yourself better, but then starting to get insight into another culture. Into another community. How does this community connect with one another? Right? And that's information for understanding, frankly the world, and how we live and are in the world, and what choices we're making. So every movement is a choice. Every movement gives a specific indication about motivation. What is that person? How are they motivating their body to move, and connect, and move in space, and relate to other people?

Dance educates people on how to empathize with somebody. How to put yourself in somebody else's shoes on a really kind of simple level. That's what it does. There's something about this teamwork and collaboration. That is what we've been doing. We've been creative problem solvers.

From all directions, we are able to look at an issue and say, oh I see it this way. If I turn it this way, I can see it this way. If I turn it this way, I see all this over here and what kind information does that give me and how can I respond to this information. Well if I turn it over this way, oh I notice that this has a little bit stronger of an angle or stronger of a shape. Or maybe there's something about that I need to focus on. So dance does that for us.

And so it's just fascinating to me that that's part of what is a part of our world now. Is that we are actually looking for everything that dance is, and what the groundwork of the dance field is based on.

I have worked with a lot of different dance companies. And a lot of different modern dance companies. And I find that there is different aspects of dance that you can gain by different choreographers. And everyone has their own voice and everyone has something to say. And through my exploration in terms of working with dance companies, black dance companies in general, I found out that their contribution, black choreographers and black dances contribution to the world dance is vast. They contribute a lot to the growth and the continuation of comments, and ideas, and philosophies, in dance and throughout the world. But they're not noted in history. I'll give you an example.

Broadway was dying. No one was coming to the theater. There was no new ideas. So the brilliant idea was to have revivals. And we're still having revivals. Some 30 years later, they're still revivals. But what elevated Broadway, was the sense of The Wiz. The Wiz was done and people started coming to the theatre again. It was that turnaround of a black consciousness, doing a white classic, that really sparked ideas and concepts in terms of Dream Girls, Chorus Line, and all of these other shows. Bubbling Brown Sugar and all these other shows. Because of the popularity of that show.

Students are not only studying dance so that they can be professionals, they're studying dance so that they can have a very enlivened experience. And one that enriches them in a very creative way.

Creativity doesn't only reside in the world of the arts, but creativity is relative to all different disciplines across any campus. So we can be in the discipline of engineering, we can be in mathematics, we can be in international affairs, or sociology, or education. And we are all curious about how to be creative within our personal discipline. So in the broader context of dance, I think it is for everybody.

I actually had my first dance class when I was an undergraduate at the University of California at Berkeley. I stepped into a beginning modern studio dance class. And from the very first day, I knew that this particular experience was something special and it actually translated into a career of sorts.

When I left Berkeley, I became a professional modern dancer. And so I have particular sympathy and understanding of how one dance class, or one semester's worth of dance classes, can really change or affect a person's perspective. And so I hope that maybe, like me, when you guys start and end this class, you'll also find that this experience will kind of change a little bit of how you go about being a college student. And finally, how you go about being a person in this world.