

## Using your school grounds as a stimulus for dance

'The best classroom and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky.'

Margaret McMillan

The outdoors offers a wonderfully rich, multi-sensory environment that encourages movement, exploration and discovery. Providing high-quality outdoor learning experiences should thus be high up on our learning and teaching agenda, but this doesn't have to involve the time, money and organisation of a school trip. The school grounds are available in an instant, at little or no cost, right on your doorstep.

Here are some guidelines for subject leaders to consider when planning to use your school grounds as a stimulus for dance.



### Stimulus and improvisation

- ▶ Ask the children to share their outside environment with you.
- ▶ Keep the activity open-ended so the children make genuine responses rather than adapting their behaviour to your pre-conceived agenda.
- ▶ Watch and record their responses trying to collect both verbal and movement reactions accurately. Use cameras and dictating machines and your own observations.
- ▶ Balance moments of energy and exploration with quieter moments of reflection. *What did we find interesting?*

### Movement material

- ▶ As a class copy, clarify and extend the children's movement responses, making each one significant and memorable. *Freya felt the warmth of the sun on her cheek and stroked it with the back of her hand. We all practised the movement extending the arm into a long downward stretch and leaning the body to the side to feel the sun better.*
- ▶ Use the children's verbal responses to create movement responses. *Jamie described the flight of a bird we were all watching. We used his words 'swoop' and 'glide' to create our own bird actions.*

### Development

- ▶ As a class organise the actions into groups of ideas. *Tom and Sarah's actions were about playing in the leaves. Isaac's ideas were about the difference between the flat field and the straight up telegraph poles.*
- ▶ Link several actions for one idea together to make a phrase. *Sam's run followed by Jack's turn and Gemma's gesture – repeat.*
- ▶ Ask the children how they think they should organise the dancers in the space to show their ideas. *We should start by all running into the space laughing to show how excited we are to be outside. We should make our shapes in groups because I'm not big enough to do the hills on my own.*

### Presentation

- ▶ Perform your dance outside in the environment that was the stimulus for its creation.
- ▶ Perform your dance indoors using photographs of the outside environment to project behind the dance.
- ▶ Film the performance outside and show it indoors as a dance film.

### Reflection

- ▶ How has the dance journey furthered the children's understanding of their initial line of enquiry: climate change, the seasons, or sense of place? *The project extended Jake's field of vision. He could see the field and the sky but had never noticed the hill in between. His world has just got bigger.*
- ▶ What additional unexpected learning outcomes have been discovered? *Making the real daisy chains and dancing them has led on to research into environmental art and we are now making a whole class collaborative outdoor work with found objects.*



# Dancing in your school grounds



Here are three great dance ideas, which use school grounds to provide high-quality outdoor learning experiences, from Julie Leach an independent Primary and Early Years dance education specialist and author of *The Inspiring Dance Scheme of Work*.

## A sense of place Years 1 and 2

'Learning in this way engaged children who hadn't previously responded.'

Sue – Year 1/2 teacher – Sense of Place Project

This dance, created by Year 1/2 children, was part of a whole-school learning journey about cultural identity. The children were asked what gave them a feeling of belonging. Responses ranged from what it felt like to be part of the class, to older children's awareness of their religious, community or national group. The interest of the Year 1/2 children showed a strong sense of the place in which they lived and why they thought it was special.

'This place is very peaceful and quiet. It can be really nice at night-time when I can hear the wind blow.'

Casey



The dance began in the school nature garden with the children playing in the leaves and bushes and listening to the birds. Later on the work developed into the larger scale with a walk through the village, looking at the more distant landscape of fields, hills and woods.



The children's sense of place grew as they developed a keener awareness of their local environment and, through dance, began to appreciate how it made them feel and how their environment was a part of who they are as people.

'I don't think I would feel the same if I lived where there is lots of traffic and concrete. I think it might make me cross.'

Anya

## In touch with nature Years 3 and 4

'What was really important was that it was born out of real experience.'

Chris – Year 3/4 teacher – In Touch with Nature Project

This dance created by Year 3/4 children was part of their curriculum work on the seasons. The work began in the school grounds in early spring, with the children observing and reflecting on what interested them in their environment including playing with mown grass, smelling blossom and making daisy chains.

'These dead daffodil heads feel like crusty French bread.'

Louis

It was their multi-sensory engagement with the real world that was so valuable and that led to high quality movement and choreographic ideas. The children developed and linked several sections of dance work including birds in flight, buds and blossom shower. The children went on to develop the dynamics and structure of the dance to reflect what they felt they wanted to communicate about spring.



'I want the audience to feel the magic of new life starting up again after the winter – they should be thinking how amazing it is.'

Chloe

## Carbon footprints

### Years 5 and 6

'There was a freedom in it that I think was really important – it generated an energy and engagement that was with us right through the project and beyond.'

Ros – Year 5/6 teacher –  
Carbon Footprints Project

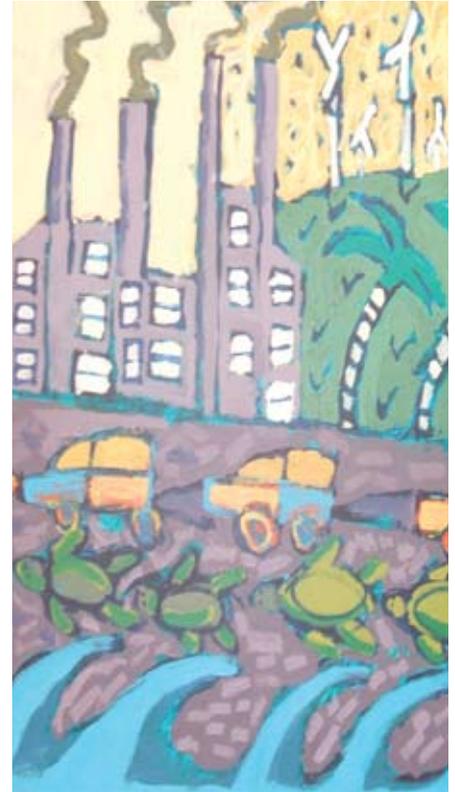
This dance created by Year 5/6 children was part of a Key Stage 2 project celebrating the opening of their new eco-friendly school. Different classes explored the causes, effects and solutions of climate change particularly focussing on the solutions incorporated into their new building and grounds. These included a swale maze to make effective use of rainwater in the local habitat. The swale maze had ditches with railway sleeper bridges, big trees, long grass and plants. The children's response to the maze included stroking the grass and



bark, smelling the leaves, running along the pathways and playing hide and seek in the ditches.

The dance they went on to create was a celebration of nature and it reflected a determination to communicate the importance of making changes in order to save it. The work culminated in a large-scale outdoor promenade performance with contributions from five other classes in different parts of the school grounds.

For units of more detailed work available with music visit [www.inspiringdance.co.uk](http://www.inspiringdance.co.uk)



## Exploring historic sites in and through dance

Exploring dance in historic sites is much more than just a pure dance experience, exposing children to a variety of art forms and approaches to learning. As sites encompass an architectural, historic and social context, they open up interesting opportunities for cross-curricular learning. There are many sources of inspiration within a site that have the potential to stimulate the creation of movement. These include the:

- architectural features of the building or environment
- historical context of the site
- social and human context of the site and
- children's personal response.



Jane Woolley, South East Dance National Dance Agency here provides an example of a dance project that draws on experiences in the Great Hall at Dover Castle as part of a choreographic and performance collaboration between South East Dance and English Heritage. The following dance ideas may be adapted for development in any suitable historic site.

### Warming up activities

- Ask the children to move around the space pausing to familiarise themselves with the limits of the space – walls, corners, highest and lowest points, sources of light, entrances and exits, any obstacles and other people.
- Individually explore the space using a multi sensory approach; touch the wall or floor with body parts such as hands or back, gain support from it, and push away from it.
- Explore the space in relation to others; move around, across, away from, behind, next to and in front of others.
- Pause opposite a partner and go through a series of stretches, reach up, reach to the side, push into and pull away from your partner, touch the floor, spiral up, leap past.
- Continue to walk in the space and as they pass someone whisper in their ear an observation about the space. Develop this by moving around, under, over, through the shapes the children make in space.
- Warm up game – 'The King is coming'. Let the children move in the space in different directions and on the following commands carry out the following actions:  
DEFENCE – seek protection from a partner

- KING'S COMING – bow low, roll and stand up
- LINE OF ATTACK – all form a line in space or against a wall
- CROSS THE MOAT – explore different jumps.

### Using the historical and social context of the site as a stimulus

- Teach your class a phrase of movement based on a court dance incorporating set step patterns, such as parading, walking forwards and backwards, around in a circle and stepping to the side, combined with gestures such as bowing, curtseying and greeting.
- Ask the children to experiment with these ideas and dance them in any order of their choosing performing to a piece of Tudor or Baroque music.
- Ask the children to develop their own phrase in pairs and small groups meeting and parting, follow my leader, going over and under passing each other, using floor patterns such as lines, curves and circles.
- Explore the use of unison, canon and repetition.
- Explore playing with moments of stillness.
- Let the groups perform their dance within the site.



## National Dance Teachers Association (NDTA)

The National Dance Teachers Association is the leading subject association for dance in schools. We support the teaching of dance wherever it is located within the curriculum and maintain links with physical education and arts organisations in order to promote high quality learning and teaching in dance.

### NDTA website

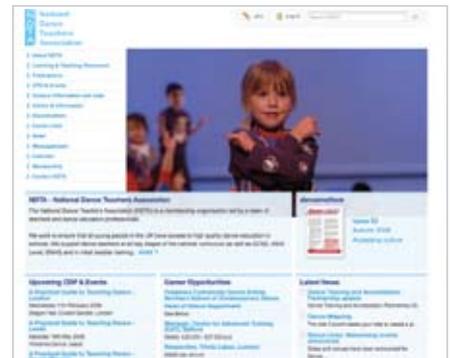
The NDTA has recently redeveloped its website and it now has a fresh, clean look as well as new features and new material. The new format provides clear, simple navigation between sections and there is a full search facility.

The new site includes:

- ▶ online membership and renewal
- ▶ information on NDTA CPD, training and events with online booking and payment

- ▶ learning and teaching resources for members to download
- ▶ information and advice on a wide range of issues including careers, health and safety and a comprehensive links directory
- ▶ complete archive of the NDTA publication *Dance Matters* with articles, lesson plans and resources
- ▶ job vacancies and the facility for members to post their own
- ▶ events calendar and the facility for members to post their own
- ▶ messageboard
- ▶ full information about the NDTA, including information and contact details of Regional Representatives network.

Take a look for yourself at [www.ndta.org.uk](http://www.ndta.org.uk)



### NDTA

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## Resources for dance outdoors

### Inspiring dance

A fully integrated dance resource for Nursery to Year 6 written by Julie Leach and Andrew Kristy [www.inspiringdance.co.uk](http://www.inspiringdance.co.uk)

### Exploring historic sites through dance

For further information on Dance on Site contact South East Dance National Dance Agency and English Heritage.

### South East Dance National Dance Agency

South East Dance is the national agency for the South East region, providing commissions, productions, tours and professional development for artists and practitioners, support and advice for local arts/cultural organisations and community and education projects.

### South East Dance

5 Palace Place  
Castle Square  
Brighton  
BN1 1EF  
[www.southeastdance.org.uk](http://www.southeastdance.org.uk)

### English Heritage

English Heritage aims to help teachers at all levels to use the resource of the historic environment. For further information contact:

### English Heritage Education

Freepost 22  
London  
W1E 7EZ  
tel: 0870 333 1181  
email: [education@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:education@english-heritage.org.uk)  
[www.english-heritage.org.uk/education](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/education)

### Soil Dances

DanceEast produces the Soil Dances resource pack. Based on a dance education and heritage project from Suffolk, the pack contains ideas for creating dance with Key Stage 2 children.

For further information contact:

### Dance East

The Northgate Arts Centre  
Sidegate Lane West  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP4 3DF  
tel: 01473 639230  
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For further information about all of these resources (and more) visit the NDTA at [www.ndta.org.uk](http://www.ndta.org.uk)