

Dance! Dance!

People have danced for thousands of years. Long before television, recorded music or even written language, communities used movement to celebrate, tell stories and mark important occasions. Today, dance can be a competitive sport, a form of entertainment, an art form or simply something people do for enjoyment. Although styles of dance can look dramatically different from one another, they all use the human body to communicate through movement.

Ballet: Strength Disguised as Grace

Ballet is one of the world's best-known forms of dance. Its roots can be traced to the royal courts of Renaissance Italy before it developed further in France. This French influence can still be seen in ballet vocabulary: dancers across the world use terms such as *plié*, *pirouette* and *arabesque*.

To an audience, an experienced ballet dancer may appear to glide effortlessly across the stage. However, this apparent ease is deceptive. Ballet demands extraordinary strength, balance and control. Dancers may spend years perfecting movements that last only a few seconds during a performance.

Ballet can also tell a story without relying on spoken dialogue. In famous narrative ballets, dancers use movement, facial expressions, costumes and music to communicate characters' emotions and actions. The audience must interpret these clues rather than being told directly what is happening.

Ballroom: It Takes Two

Unlike a ballet dancer performing alone, ballroom dancers usually work with a partner. Ballroom dancing includes several different styles, such as the waltz, tango and foxtrot. Each has its own rhythm and character.

The waltz is known for its flowing movements and turning steps, whereas the tango is often sharper and more dramatic. Successful partners must be highly aware of one another. A small shift in weight or change in direction can act almost like an unspoken instruction.

This means ballroom dancing depends on cooperation as much as individual skill. A technically brilliant dancer who ignores their partner may produce a less convincing performance than two dancers who move together with precision.

Street Dance: From the Streets to the Stage

Street dance is not a single dance style. The term describes a broad family of dances that developed largely outside traditional dance studios, often in social spaces such as streets, clubs, parties and community gatherings.

Several styles associated with street dance emerged in the United States during the twentieth century. Breaking, for example, developed as part of hip-hop culture in New York City. Other forms include popping and locking, although each has its own history and techniques.

Improvisation is particularly important in many forms of street dance. Instead of following an entirely predetermined routine, dancers may respond spontaneously to the music and to one another. In a dance battle, competitors take turns displaying their creativity, musicality and skill. The aim is not merely to reproduce movements accurately but to perform them with individuality.

Street dance has travelled a remarkable distance from its informal beginnings. Styles once practised mainly at neighbourhood gatherings can now be seen in theatres, international competitions, music videos and major sporting events. Breaking even became an Olympic sport at the Paris 2024 Games.

Some people argue that moving street dance onto enormous stages risks separating it from the communities that created it. Others believe its worldwide popularity demonstrates the adaptability of the art form. Either way, its journey shows how culture can travel far beyond the place where it began.

Tap: Making Music with Your Feet

A tap dancer is both a dancer and, in a sense, a musician. Metal plates attached to the heel and toe of each shoe create sounds when they strike the floor. By combining steps at different speeds and strengths, dancers can produce complicated rhythms.

Two tap dancers performing the same sequence might not sound identical. One might emphasise particular beats or alter the timing slightly, giving the performance an individual character. Listening, therefore, is nearly as important as moving.

Tap has been influenced by several traditions, including African American dance and Irish step dancing. Over time, performers combined and developed these influences into new forms. Like street dance, tap provides an example of how dance styles can evolve when different cultures and traditions meet.

Contemporary Dance: Breaking the Rules?

Contemporary dance can be difficult to define because experimentation is one of its main characteristics. It developed partly from dancers seeking alternatives to the strict conventions of traditional ballet.

Contemporary dancers might perform barefoot, deliberately fall to the floor or use movements that appear unusual or awkward. This does not mean that anything goes. Behind an apparently chaotic performance may lie careful planning, physical control and a deliberate artistic choice.

A choreographer might use a sudden collapse to represent defeat, repeated movements to suggest routine, or dancers moving apart to communicate loneliness. As with poetry or painting, audiences may interpret the same performance differently.

Different Steps, Similar Purpose

It would be easy to concentrate only on the differences between these styles: ballet values precise traditional technique; ballroom relies heavily on partnership; street dance often celebrates improvisation and individuality; tap transforms movement into rhythm; and contemporary dance frequently experiments with convention.

Yet these differences disguise something they share. Dance allows people to express ideas that may be difficult to communicate in words. A dancer can suggest excitement, conflict, sorrow or confidence without saying anything at all.

Styles change. New ones emerge, old ones evolve and dancers borrow ideas from one another. What has remained remarkably constant is the human desire to move, perform and communicate.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does the writer describe ballet as “strength disguised as grace”?

- A. Ballet dancers deliberately hide their muscles from audiences.
- B. Ballet requires considerable physical strength although skilled dancers can make it appear effortless.
- C. Ballet dancers are stronger than dancers from every other style.
- D. Ballet was originally designed to make people physically stronger.
- E. Audiences are not supposed to notice the dancers' movements.

2. What evidence in the text most clearly demonstrates the lasting influence of France on ballet?

- A. Ballet originated entirely in France.
- B. French dancers are considered the world's best.
- C. Ballet is normally performed to French music.
- D. Ballet dancers around the world still use French terminology.
- E. All famous ballets tell French stories.

3. According to the section on ballroom dancing, what does the phrase “unspoken instruction” suggest?

- A. Partners can communicate through their movements without speaking.
- B. Ballroom dancers are forbidden from speaking during training.
- C. Dancers must memorise secret instructions before performing.
- D. Audiences tell dancers how they should move.
- E. Ballroom dancing does not require communication.

4. Which statement about street dance is NOT supported by the text?

- A. It includes several different forms of dance.
- B. Some street dance developed in social and community settings.
- C. Improvisation can be important in street dance.
- D. Street dance is now performed in major international settings.
- E. Street dance was originally created for formal theatre performances.

5. What does “predetermined” most nearly mean in the sentence “*Instead of following an entirely predetermined routine...*”?

- A. difficult to perform
- B. copied from another dancer
- C. decided in advance
- D. performed very quickly
- E. judged by an audience

6. Why does the writer mention that breaking appeared at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games?

- A. To argue that breaking is more difficult than ballet
- B. To prove that all street dancers want to become athletes
- C. To explain why street dance was invented
- D. To show how far a dance form can travel from its informal origins
- E. To suggest that street dance should only be competitive

7. What similarity between tap and street dance does the writer particularly emphasise?

- A. Both must always be performed competitively.
- B. Both have developed through cultural influences and change.
- C. Both require dancers to wear specialist shoes.
- D. Both originated in royal courts.
- E. Both depend upon dancing with a partner.

8. In the contemporary dance section, why does the writer say “This does not mean that anything goes”?

- A. To explain that contemporary dancers must follow ballet rules
- B. To criticise contemporary dance for being confusing
- C. To suggest that contemporary dancers rarely practise
- D. To show that audiences often dislike unusual movements
- E. To emphasise that unusual-looking movements can still be deliberate and carefully controlled

9. Which of the following best describes the main purpose of the whole text?

- A. To compare several dance styles while explaining both their distinctive features and what they have in common
- B. To persuade readers that street dance is the most important form of dance
- C. To provide instructions for learning five different dances
- D. To argue that traditional forms of dance are disappearing
- E. To rank different dance styles from easiest to most difficult

10. Which idea is developed throughout the text, rather than in just one section?

- A. All successful dancers must compete against others.
- B. Traditional dance is more demanding than modern dance.
- C. Dance can communicate meaning without relying on spoken words.
- D. Most dance styles began in the United States.
- E. The best dances are those that allow improvisation.

Answers

1. B

2. D

3. A

4. E

5. C

6. D

7. B

8. E

9. A

10. C

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