

# Creative Dance Lesson Plan on the Charleston and Dance Culture in the 1920's and 30's

**Grade:** 5th

**Length:** 45 minutes

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**Student Learning Outcome:** The students will demonstrate understanding of American culture and the effects of The Great Depression through the creation of dance steps based on the Charleston and an end of class discussion.

**Equipment Needed:** Hand Drum; CD player; Charleston dance music (I highly recommend "Reader's Digest Music, The Charleston: Roaring Twenties Jazz"); video of how to do steps found at <https://sites.google.com/site/dancingcurriculum/the-classes/hughes-5th-grade-class/1>; word strips of step names.

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## Utah Core – Social Studies

Standard 5: Students will address the causes, consequences and implications of the emergence of the United States as a world power.

Objective 1: Describe the role of the United States during World War I, The Great Depression, and World War II.

- a. Review the impact of World War I on the United States.
- b. Summarize the consequences of the Great Depression on the United States.

## Utah Fine Arts Core -- Dance

Standard 4: The student will understand and demonstrate dance in relation to its historical, cultural, and personal origins.

Objective 1: Perform and understand dances from different time periods and cultures.

- b. Learn and perform a social dance; e.g., fox trot, waltz, and polka. Determine when and where each was created and discuss the difference in music and style associated with each.

## Behavioral Expectations: (3 minutes)

We have two rules for class today:

1. Always keep space around yourself. Never touch anyone else, the walls, or the steps unless I ask you to.
2. When the music or the drumming stops, you must freeze!

Let's practice. When the music starts, gallop around the room, but when it stops you must freeze! Don't move even one eyelash!

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## Experience/Identify: (25 minutes)

After World War I, most of the world, and especially the United States, was very prosperous. There seemed to be enough jobs for everyone and it was a hopeful time after a terrible war. The United States had just become a true world power, and the era was called the Roaring Twenties. Because the United States was respected throughout the world, many countries tried to imitate

the culture of the U.S., and American dances spread throughout the U.S. and Europe. One of the first of these dances was the Charleston.

The Charleston dance was named after a song called "The Charleston." Does anyone have an idea where the song "The Charleston" came from? It was based on rhythms made by African American dock workers in Charleston, SC. It spread across the eastern U.S., and then across the world! Today we are going to learn a few steps from the Charleston.

1. Hands & Knees
2. Sideways Twists
3. Front & Back Kicks
4. Turning Kicks
5. Jell-O Legs

Put word-strips of step names on the wall so that students have a visual reference to steps.

\*While the Charleston has now become somewhat codified, in the 1920's and 30's it was based on a lot of improvisation and freedom to the individual dancer. Therefore some of these steps are based upon original movements, but are simplified so that children have the ability for mastery after only one class.

#### **Explore/Investigate: (7 minutes)**

During The Great Depression, American unemployment escalated to 25%. That means that one person out of every four wanted a job but could not find one. Competitions began called dance marathons. These dance marathons had thousands of participants who danced for at least 24 hours, and sometimes six weeks or more, non-stop to get a cash prize. Let's try putting the steps we've learned together into a mini dance marathon. Can you dance non-stop for just five minutes?

#### **Create/Perform: (5 minutes)**

The Charleston was a dance that Americans did for fun after a long day's work. It allowed dancers to make new steps up themselves. They were creative and made up new ways to dance the Charleston. In the steps we've learned there is a lot of kicking, twisting, and some turning. You have two minutes to create your own step that involves kicking, twisting, and/or turning. Once the students have created their own step, try all the steps they have learned and then give time for students to do their own improvisation and choreographed step.

#### **Connect/Analyze: (5 minutes)**

Participants in dance marathons became so desperate that there were people who died of exhaustion or danced even though they were sick. It became dangerous, but people danced because they were desperate, and they had nothing else to do. Some needed the money to feed their families. In the late 1930's, city and state governments out-lawed or put significant time limits on dance marathons. As time permits, discuss reasons why people would participate in dance marathons and why they were so popular during the Great Depression. Ask students if they would be willing to participate in a dance marathon.