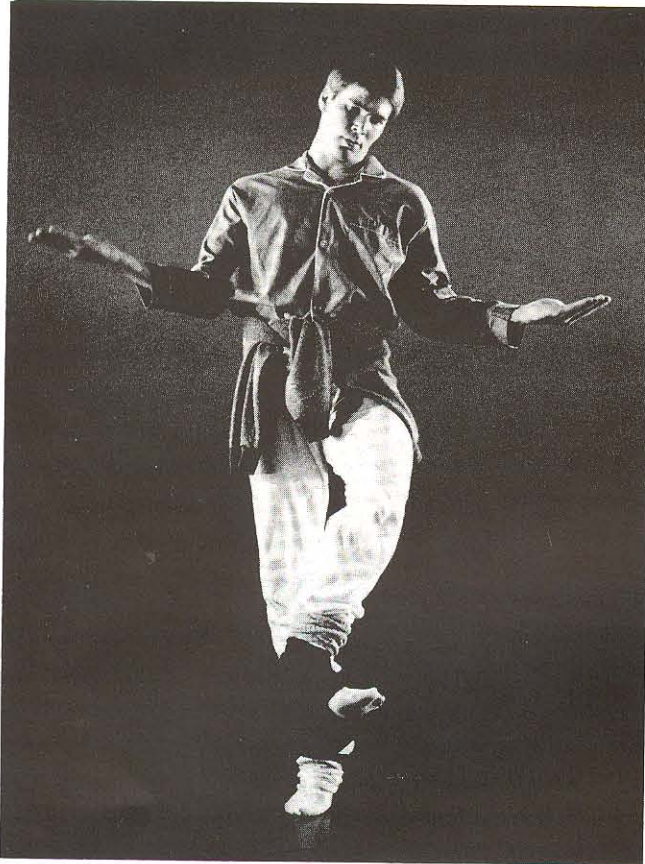


DAVID PARSONS
PATTERN**About the Program**

Behind the Scenes with David Parsons follows a choreographer as he transforms ordinary movements into a dance he calls *Sleep Studies*. Dance differs from all other activities that use movement by communicating an idea through the creation of an expressive *form*. As he choreographs *Sleep Studies*, Parsons works with his dancers to select and define eight movement shapes that form the vocabulary that expresses his idea. Children are invited to experience sleep in a new way—to consider that “we might all be making dances as we sleep.”

About the Artist

Born in Illinois and raised in Kansas City, Missouri, David Parsons was a dancer with the Paul Taylor Dance Company from 1978 to 1987, when he left to form his own company. He has choreographed for the American Ballet Theater, Paris Opera Ballet, Feld Ballet, and Harkness Ballet, in addition to his own company, and has been described by Anna Kisselgoff of the *New York Times* as “the best dancer I’ve seen in recent memory.”

Jumping Off Activity**Making Shapes**
(40 minutes)

This activity helps students develop an awareness of the body as an instrument of expression, explore different shapes the body can make in space, and become familiar with the use of level in dance.

Have the class make shapes with their bodies. They may choose any position they can hold. Have students stand facing different directions. Clap or beat a drum to signal when to move into a new shape. Do the students move freely or timidly? Do they use their whole bodies or isolate individual body parts? Encourage the class to stretch, bend, and twist into different shapes.

Explain that all dance takes place on one of three levels: high, medium, or low. Ask the class to make shapes that occur on different levels in space. First, have students get as low and close to the ground as they can and tell them to make different shapes each time you signal them to move. Then have them make shapes at a high level. Did they feel a difference between high-level and low-level shapes? Did they think about real or imaginary spaces as they made their shapes? For example, did low-level shapes make them think of being underwater?

Now have the class develop “dance pictures” using both high and low levels: One student (*A*) makes a low-level shape in the middle of the circle. A second person (*B*) enters the circle and creates a high-level shape. *B*’s shape should fit in or around *A*’s shape so that the two fit together like jigsaw puzzle pieces. The two shapes should not actually touch. Remove the first shape-maker and bring in a third student to make a different low-level shape. Continue until everyone has had a turn. Encourage the class to work quickly and to push for extremes of high and low as they make shapes. Stop the exercise once or twice to allow students to discuss what they see and experience.

Viewing

Before continuing the activities, observe how choreographers can use movement to express an idea by viewing *Behind the Scenes with David Parsons*.

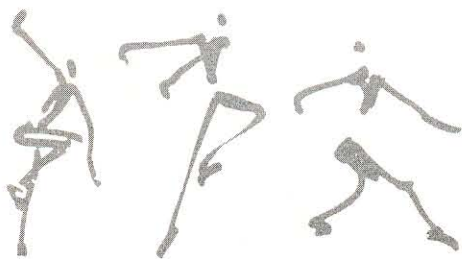
Follow-up Activities

1. Viewing a Dance (20 minutes)

This activity helps students make connections between the choreographic devices used by David Parsons in *Sleep Studies* and what they have learned from the program about making a dance.

Ask students to think about what they learned from the program about shapes, movements, and sequences. Which movements in the dance did they find most interesting? What interested them about these movements?

Ask for volunteers to demonstrate some of the shapes or movements from the dance. Remind students how the first curled-up and closed-in shape of Parsons's basic phrase contrasts with the second straight and open shape. What level of shape was used most frequently in *Sleep Studies*? What effect did this have on the dance? Did the dancers' movements appear heavy or light when they were on the ground working at a low level? What mood did this create in the dance? Encourage students to express their own ideas rather than relying on Parsons' explanations. The meaning of dance will be different for each person who views it. Did the dance express ideas or feelings about sleep that students had never considered or felt before? What were some of those feelings?



2. Finding Shapes in the Everyday World (30 minutes)

This activity helps students extend their exploration of movement.

Collect photographs of people in everyday situations. Discuss the shapes and have students try some of the positions. Notice how the shape, position, and relationship of one body to another tells the viewer something about the people in the photograph.

3. Dance Shapes (30 minutes)

This activity expands students' awareness of different kinds of movement in dance.

Have the class bring in photographs of dancers from newspapers or magazines. Discuss the shapes, lines, and levels of the dancers' movements, and have students try to reproduce some of these shapes.



4. Mirror, Mirror (40 minutes)

This activity develops students' skills of concentration, imitation, and observation; teaches them how to move shapes through space; and develops their understanding of moving in unison.

After a warmup, divide the class into pairs. Partners should identify themselves as *A* and *B* and sit facing each other. Tell students that the objective is to connect different shapes. Demonstrate the exercise with a student before having the class try it.

Have *A* students initiate a low, smooth movement that *B* students duplicate in mirror fashion. Have the two groups switch roles. Repeat the exercise several times. Then ask the class to do the movements standing up. Tell them to remember the shapes they made earlier and to use a combination of these shapes as they work.

Next, ask students to move (travel) from one point in space to another. They should continue to follow their partners and to change shapes as they move. Now have half of the pairs watch the other half as they work. Switch so that everyone can observe as well as create and follow.

Did students find it easy or difficult to follow their partners? Here you might introduce the concept of *choreography* by explaining that when students initiated the movement, they were the choreographers. Which movements did they find interesting? Why? Someone may use the word *mirror* to describe what it felt like to do the activity. Examine the idea of mirroring with

the students. In mirroring, the two partners seem to become one. Their movements are synchronized and they move in unison. *Unison* is a familiar choreographic device and a way of expanding a movement idea.

Here are some variations to try with students: (1) Divide the class into groups of four, with one member of each group making shapes and the other members mirroring the leader. (2) Act as movement leader and have the whole class follow as you lead them through a sequence of changing shapes. (3) Divide the class in half and let each group watch as the other group mirrors the movements of its leader. Discuss the resulting movement improvisations with the class.

Related Curriculum Activities

Language Arts

Shapes in Stories—Work with a favorite poem or section from a short story or book as source material for a dance study. Find movement shapes to express the feeling of the written word.

Music

Finding Levels in Music—Identify low-level and high-level sounds in several pieces of music. Have students *match* and *contrast* low-level and high-level movement shapes with those in the music.

Social Studies

Dance around the World—Discuss how different cultures view and use dance in their lives. On what occasions do people around the world dance? Ask students to bring in examples of dances known to them and their families.

Visual Arts

The Shape of Art—Look for abstract and realistic shapes in works of visual art. Use them as material for creating new movement shapes and as ideas for dance making.