

Kathaka:

Kathaka: Dancing Rhythms and Stories of India Educational Guide, Grades K-12



About the Performance

The ancient art of Kathak is one of the eight forms of Indian classical dance. Its name comes from the Sanskrit word for “story.” Kathak dancers use rapid footwork and graceful gestures to tell traditional Indian stories and perform irresistible rhythms and captivating choreography and improvisation. Through movement, music and math (yes, math!) Kathaka dancer Anjali Nath will also perform “Kathak Yoga” - a technique which unifies the recitation of taal (rhythm), the singing of a melody, and the dancing of complex footwork and rapid spins. Throughout the program, students will use mathematics to help the dancer keep time, and a few volunteers will get to learn some basic Kathak dance steps.



About the Artist

Anjali Nath is a senior disciple of Chhandika artistic director Gretchen Hayden and Pandit Das, and one of the most dynamic artists of a new generation of Kathak soloists. Known for her swift chakkars (spins), crisp footwork and delicate abhinaya (gesture), Anjali’s solo performances are rooted deeply in the Kathak tradition and dazzling to watch.

Anjali holds a Masters in Public Health from Boston University and a B.A. in Psychology from Tufts University. She has passionately pursued her career in Kathak and public health simultaneously for over 14 years working with communities and engaging youth in leadership and activities to improve self esteem and overall health and well-being.

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Program Learning Goals

1. To explore elements of the dynamic art of Kathak, North Indian classical dance and its four key elements: Tayari (powerful technique), Layakari (deep understanding of rhythm), Khubsoorti (beauty and grace) and Nazakat (subtly in movement and expression) in an accessible and age-appropriate manner.
2. To engage young audiences in experiencing the history, philosophy, story telling and rhythm of Kathak as well as the traditional and improvisational aspects through performance, demonstration and participation.
3. To foster an appreciation for and connection to the dynamism, imagery, physicality, relevance and universality of the art of Kathak across age, culture and disciplines, emphasizing values and traditions from my own training such as the power of hard work, discipline, overcoming fear, taking chances, confidence, creativity, improvisation, positive attitude, possibility and joy.

Essential Questions

1. How do Kathak dancers use gesture to create meaning and tell stories. Can you think of other dance forms that tell stories? How do they accomplish this?
2. How does your family/community tell stories?
3. What role do math and rhythm play in Kathak dance?



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Key Facts and Cultural Context for Students

What is Kathak Dance?

The ancient art of Kathak is one of the eight forms of Indian classical dance. Kathak dance changed over hundreds of years and now also includes rhythm, footwork, movement and spins. Watch these videos linked below to get a sense of this art form.

Video: Traditional Kathak Solo by Anjali Nath [3:00 min]

Video: Chhandika Dance Performance at TEDxNatick [until 6:15]

How is Kathak dance similar or different to other styles that you have seen performed or danced yourself? What do you notice about the relationship between the music and rhythm of the dance and the footwork and hand gestures of the dancers?

Where Does Kathak Dance Come From?



Just like America, India is a large country with many different states. Can you find Lucknow, Jaipur, Kolkata (Calcutta) and Mumbai (Bombay) on the maps? Kathak dance originated in Lucknow and Jaipur.



Left: Map of India; Right: Detail of Northern India

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Pre-Performance Activity: Kathak, North Indian Classical Dance

- **LEARNING GOALS:** To engage students in exploring the geographic and historical context of Kathak dance in preparation for the Kathakas performance.
- **MATERIALS/PREP:** Map of World, Regional map of India, ability to play YouTube video
- **TIME NEEDED:** 15-20 Minutes

[Video: Traditional Kathak Solo by Anjali Nath \[3:00 min\]](#)

[Video: Chhandika Dance Performance at TEDxNatick \[until 6:15\]](#)

STEP 1: Talk about India – where it is on the map, point out different regions, find Lucknow, Jaipur, Kolkata (Calcutta) and Mumbai (Bombay). Lucknow and Jaipur are where Kathak originated. Ask students what they know about India already, and what they want to learn.

STEP 2: Tell students that they will be seeing Kathak an ancient storytelling dance that changed over hundreds of years and now also includes rhythm, footwork, movement and spins.

STEP 3: Have students watch one or both of the videos linked below to get a sense of Kathak dance. What do they notice? What do they wonder about? How is it similar to other dance forms they have seen? How is it different?

STEP 4: Ask them to write or describe something they observed or learned from the video.

STEP 5: Use the resources linked below to read about the history of Kathak dance.

[WEBSITE: "Kathak Dance" on culturalindia.net](#)

[WEBSITE: "What is Kathak Dance" on kathadance.org](#)

STEP 6: Ask students to write down a question they have that they may get to ask the performer.

Post-Performance Activity: Understanding Kathak Philosophy & Principals

OVERVIEW:

This lesson gives students the opportunity to explore two elements of Kathak dance, Seva (selfless sacrifice) and Upaj (meaning "from the heart" or improvisation).

- **Learning Goals:** To engage students in experiencing the history, philosophy, creativity, and improvisation of Kathak dance.
- **MATERIALS/PREP:** Seva—Place to write down ideas of students Upaj—Space to sit or stand in circle
- **TIME NEEDED:** 60 Minutes

Seva: Selfless Sacrifice

Seva means selfless sacrifice. It means thinking about someone else and what they might be going through and what they might need instead of only thinking about ourselves. This is important for children at any age. The first lesson is to always take care of your needs so that you are able to help others.

Have students write down one thing they promise to do to take care of themselves and one thing they will do to help someone else, even if just once (i.e. get your parent a glass of water after they come home from work, help a friend, neighbor, teacher with a task, etc.) Put students into pairs or small groups to share their ideas and to discuss other ways to help those around them. How can art/dance/music be used to help others? If inclined, come up with a class service project to help the school or community.

Upaj: Improvisation

Upaj means "from the heart" and refers to the idea of improvisation. Students can work alone or in groups to improvise or create stories, skits (without words) or rhythms based on any theme they choose and perform it for the class.

STEP 1: Choose or have the class choose a story theme to develop a skit around

STEP 2: Break into groups and ask each group to come up with a skit that stays in a rhythm without using words (can be improvised or crafted)

STEP 3: Have each group share their skit with the class

STEP 4: Ask students to share their observations as audience members and ask creators to describe their process

STEP 5: Ask students to reflect on what other ways they could share their story without words.

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Storytelling Through Dance

Kathak dance is used to tell stories. Its name comes from the Sanskrit word for “story.” Kathak dancers use specific hand gestures, movements, and even facial expressions to bring characters and events to life.

Can you think of other styles of dance that are used to tell stories?

How do the dancers movements and gestures combine with music and spoken word to convey meaning and emotion?

What are some other ways that we can communicate without using words?



Anjali Nath Kathak Dancer



Tell Your Own Story Through Movement

Think of a story that you would like to share. It could be a true story about something that happened to you, or a folktale or fairytale that you know well. What kinds of movements could you use to tell this story? Fit these movements to a rhythm to create a danced story. Share your dance with a friend or family member.

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Further Resources

- Kathak Dance" on culturalindia.net
- "What is Kathak Dance" on kathadance.org
- Videos and Interviews at anjali-nath.com

Curricular Connections

Dance K-8

Creating:

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. Use a variety of props when exploring movement. (D.Cr.01)

Performing:

6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (D.P.06)

Responding:

7. Perceive and analyze artistic work. (D.R.07)
8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (D.R.08)
9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (D.R.09)

Connecting

10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (D.Co.10)
11. Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (D.Co.11)

History/Social Science K-8

K Topic 2. Geography: connections among places [K.T2]

Topic 3: History: shared traditions [K.T3]

Gr-1 Topic 2. Geography: places to explore [1.T2]

Gr-2 Topic 2. Geography and its effects on people [2.T2]

World Geography and Ancient Civilizations II Topic 1. Central and South Asia [7.T1]

Physical and political geography of Central and South Asia [7.T1a]

Early Indian and Central Asian civilizations, religions, and cultures [7.T1b]