

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Fusion
Subject: Sha Sha Higby
Discipline: Performance Art

SECTION I - OVERVIEW	2
SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT	3
CONTENT OVERVIEW	3
THE BIG PICTURE	
RESOURCES – TEXTS	
SECTION III – VOCABULARY	7
SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK	9



Still image from SPARK story, 2004.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Fusion

SUBJECT

Sha Sha Higby

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-Secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Theatre, Language Arts & Visual Arts

OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the work of Sha Sha Higby and to become familiar with historical and contemporary performance art

STORY SYNOPSIS

Sha Sha Higby's work is difficult to describe and to categorize. Her artworks are moving sculptures – tornadoes of colors, textures and shapes – that are worn in performances the artist choreographs. While particular elements of the pieces may be familiar to viewers, they are utterly unrecognizable, wholly unique constructions exclusively made for and worn by the artist. Higby's performances echo traditions of pageantry and theatre, including the masquerade of the Venetian Carnevale, African tribal dancing, Japanese Noh theater and Kabuki, and Commedia dell'Arte.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Individual student work on creative art pieces
Individual student conceptual writing and drawing
Group Discussion
Research into cultural and historical art movements

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To help students understand the concept and history of performance art in Western art

To introduce students to the ancient Japanese traditions of Noh and *Butoh*

To help students develop an understanding of the term hybrid as it pertains to modern art

To introduce students to the process of mask-making and the use of meditative practices to stimulate the artistic imagination

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story about Sha Sha Higby on DVD or VHS and related equipment

MATERIALS NEEDED

Paper and Pencils
Gauze strips
Plaster of Paris (or clay in lieu of gauze and plaster)
Vaseline
Acrylic paints
Various decorative elements for masks
Examples of performance artist performances (video, TV or visual images)
Examples of dance or theatre performances from different cultures such as Noh, Butoh, Indonesian shadow puppetry, etc. (video, TV or visual images)

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Linguistic - syntax, phonology, semantics, pragmatics
Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
Bodily-Kinesthetic - the ability to use one's mind to control one's bodily movements



Sha Sha Higby (front) in performance in one of her constructions. Still image from SPARK story, 2004.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

ARTIST PROFILE

Sha Sha Higby's work is difficult to describe and to categorize. Her artworks are moving sculptures – tornadoes of colors, textures and shapes – that are worn in performances the artist choreographs. While particular elements of the pieces may be familiar to viewers, they are utterly unrecognizable, wholly unique constructions exclusively made for and worn by the artist. Higby's performances echo traditions of pageantry and theatre, including the masquerade of the Venetian Carnevale, African tribal dancing, Japanese Noh theater and Kabuki, and Commedia dell'Arte.

That familiar images make up an otherworldly whole in her costumes is perhaps appropriate, given the experience of the artist herself. The path of Higby's artistic development has been a journey through distant places, landing her here in the Bay Area. When Higby was a child, she made birds, filling her house with paintings and drawings of them. Her parents were divorcing at the time, and she described the birds as "something to divert me, a way out." While a form of escape, the artmaking was also the first step in her artistic development.

After college, Higby's career took flight, carrying her from her home in Marin to Asia. These experiences abroad impact upon her aesthetic – influencing both the form she makes, and her design. "I studied with a craftsman who creates for the Noh theater. They have very elaborate costumes -- and these heads, these masks -- they move so slowly, they're like sculptures. They have this strong, emotional quality, but it's very slow. It's subtle."

Back in the States, Higby received a Fulbright scholarship to study shadow puppetry and make sculptures in Indonesia, a country whose artistic sensibilities complimented those of Japan. "I went

to Indonesia to study the elaborateness," she explains. "Japan is simplicity. Indonesia is the fullness of the ornate. [...] It's like a flat landscape when you look at it, but when you peel it away, there's all this richness and complexity of layers, which I like in my work."

In the **SPARK** episode "Fusion," viewers get a glimpse of Higby's creative process, a process that has wandered through time, leaped over oceans and slowly grown by accretion. Each individual costume that is used in performance can take years to construct and is informed by a lifetime of experience. Their semi-abstract nature allows viewers to color the experience with their own imagination -- one might end up in a place far away that the artist herself may not have imagined. With her art, Higby has found her journey and achieved her escape.



Sha Sha Higby shows one of her constructions.
Still image from SPARK story, 2004.

THE BIG PICTURE

Sha Sha Higby's living sculpture performances cannot be easily slotted into one artistic genre. Higby defies traditional categories of dance, theater, and visual art, drawing from both Eastern and Western influences, and using ancient art forms to create a new and unrecognizable style of performance art.

The term ‘performance art’ embraces all creative disciplines, making room for poetry, dance, theatre, sculpture, and music. Artists have been using performance art to address subjects such as social issues and politics for the greater parts of the 20th and 21st century. The first performance art is most commonly attributed to the Italian Futurist Art Movement of the early 20th century. Hugo Ball, a Futurist, was one of the first artists to employ performance art with his Sound Poems, or “verses without words,” which he first performed for a live audience in 1916.

Performance artists rely on their bodies as the material for the work, rather than an outside medium. Their forms are as diverse and numerous as the artists who make them. They employ any number of props, costumes, players, and settings to create a conceptual piece that is usually performed in front of an audience. There is an emphasis on the performer’s relationship to the audience and the space around them. Performance art became well-known in the 1950s and 60s with the emergence of artists like John Cage, a composer who collaborated with painter Robert Rauschenberg and modern dancer Merce Cunningham on an avant-garde, non-narrative performance piece.

She Sha Higby is inspired by a number of Eastern influences, including the Japanese dance form, *Butoh*, a discipline in which not only the performer, but the audience and environment play a huge role in the direction of the performance. Originated by Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno in post-war Japan, *Butoh* was created in response to World War II and the increasing westernization of Asian countries. Rather than creating a dance piece that is considered beautiful along the lines of traditional dance aesthetics, *Butoh* dancers aim to express ideas about socially taboo topics using their bodies as the central medium and taking cues from the audience and their interpersonal feelings in the spontaneous direction of their movements.

Higby also draws from her experiences of Japanese Noh, a traditional theatrical form combining diverse elements of performance into one unique and incomparable performance tradition. Usually based on a minimalist aesthetic, Noh (the Japanese word meaning “talent”) entails the use of puppetry, masks and costumes.



Toshifumi Tanaka as the mythological sprite Shojoh, and members of the Noh Performance Circle at the International Conference on Software Engineering Conference in Kyoto, April 1998. Photograph by Wolfgang Emmerich.

The term “hybrid” has been used consistently to describe artwork of the post-modern era. Higby’s work falls into this category for many reasons, first by using ancient forms of dance, theater, and visual art and weaving them into contemporary performances that both astound and amuse her audiences. Layering sculpture, textile design, and mask-making onto her already complex process, Higby borrows elements of traditional art and synthesizes them with her own experience and environment. Higby lives in a remote, idyllic ocean town called Bolinas in Western Marin county in Northern California, which is renowned for its dedicated locals who remove directional signage and mile markers to prevent tourists from finding their community. Higby’s unique, cross-cultural blend of Eastern and Western influences is an homage to traditions from both regions, intertwined with her own personal traditions.

Higby’s fusion of diverse cultures demonstrates how the world histories and cultures can be deeply interwoven. Adding another layer to the hybridity¹, Higby builds her sculptures to costume her body, presenting them to her audiences in artful movement-based performance pieces. The masks become the mediators between performer and audience, and even though the character is completely of Higby’s design, audiences connect to the artists’ work through any one or more of its visual, theatrical, musical or dance facets.

¹ See <http://www.qub.ac.uk/en/imperial/key-concepts/Hybridity.htm> for a good overview of the term hybridity, commonly attributed to cultural theorist Homi Bhaba. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994.

SECTION III – RESOURCES

TEXTS & ARTICLES

Fraleigh, Sondra Horton, and Sandra Fraleigh. 1999. Dancing into Darkness : Butoh, Zen and Japan. Pittsburgh: Univ of Pittsburgh Press. 192p. ISBN 0822940981

Hoffman, Ethan, Mark Holborn, Yukio Mishima, Tatsumi Hijikata, and Haven O'More. 1987. Butoh : dance of the dark soul. New York: Aperture. 131p. ISBN 0-89381-216-1.

Kozel, Susan. "Moving beyond the double syntax." *Dance Theatre Journal* 13 (1) Summer 1996: 36-37. – The second of two articles considering how Western dance has embraced Butoh's potential for "altered awareness." The writer also investigates the shift in Butoh from familiarity to "otherness" as well as issues of gender.

Komparu, Kunio. The Noh Theater Principles and Perspectives. New York/Tokyo: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1983.

Lombard, Frank Alanson. An Outline History of The Japanese Drama. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1928.

Nichi Bei Times - <http://www.nichibeitimes.com>
Japanese American bilingual daily newspaper for Northern California published in San Francisco

Nikkei West - <http://www.nikkeiwest.com>
Japanese-American bi-weekly newspaper published in San Jose.

Pound, Ezra and Fenollosa, Ernest. The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan. New Directions Paperbook, 1959.

Tyler, Royall ed. Japanese NŌ Dramas. Penguin Classics, London, 1992.

Waley, Arthur. The NŌ Plays of Japan. Charles Tuttle Company, 1976.

Goldberg, Rose Lee. Performance: Live Art Since 1960. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998

Loeffler, Carl E. and Darlene Tong, eds. Performance Anthology: Source Book of California Performance Art. San Francisco: Last Gasp Press, 1989.

Tythacott, Louise. Dance (Traditions Around the World). Thomson Learning, 1995.

Goldberg, Roselee. Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present (World of Art) Thames & Hudson; Revised edition, 2001.

WEB SITES

Butoh article by Liz Waring - <http://www.honors.sbc.edu/HJSpr03/Waring.htm>

Butoh.net - <http://www.Butoh.net>

Center for Japanese Studies @ UC Berkeley
<http://ieas.berkeley.edu/cjs/>

Collapsing Silence - Web site for San Francisco-based Butoh dance troupe founded in 1992, including a comprehensive bibliography, links, information on the company, and a history of Butoh - <http://www.collapsingsilence.com>

Japan Society of Northern California
<http://www.usajapan.org/>

Japanese American History Archives
<http://amacord.com/fillmore/museum/jt/jaha/jaha.html>

Japan Performing Arts Net - Information on Japanese performing arts, links to a wide range of theatre and dance companies and details of Japan Foundation Performing Arts exchange programs. - <http://www.performingarts.jp/index.html>

Japan Information Network – Follow: “Web Japan”
“Culture” - “performing arts” - “music.” -
<http://jin.jcic.or.jp>

Kazuo Ohno –Official Web site of Butoh co-
founder and dancer Kazuo Ohno and his son
Yoshito Ohno. - [http://www.asahi-
net.or.jp/%7Eab4t-mzht/index.html](http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/%7Eab4t-mzht/index.html)

Mask Making Techniques
[http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/exhibits/tiepolo/
masks.html](http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/exhibits/tiepolo/masks.html)

National Theatre of Japan Excellent informational
site for Noh, Kyogen and Bunraku -
<http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/noh/en>

Performance Art and Alternative Theatre Links
<http://www.artslynx.org/theatre/perfart.htm>

Performance Art Description -
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_art

Sha Sha Higby’s Web site - www.shashahigby.com

VIDEOS

Japan: The Living Tradition: The Performing Arts,
Parts 1 & 2 [VHS] (Color; 1976) Lincoln, NB:
University of Mid-America. Nebraska ETV
Network; GNP Distributors; Directed by Ken
Rockefeller, Produced by Robert J. Allen (Program
#11 and #12 of a television series)

Japanese Theatre in the World. [VHS] (Japanese
title: Sekai no naka no nitron Engeki) (Color;
1997) Tokyo: Process Sihizai Co. Images for an
Exhibition “Japanese Theatre in the World” held in
New York and Munich, October 1997 – May 1998.
Overview of Noh, Kyogen, Kabuki, Bunraku and
Butoh.

The Well-Curb [VHS] (Color; 1999) National Noh
Theatre, produced by Nippon Eiga Shinsha Co.,
Ltd.

Noh Theatre (The Style of the Classic Japanese
Noh) (171 min) Discusses the origins and forms of
Noh. Narration written by Richard Abel.
Performance excerpts enacted by Sadayo Kita
assisted by Akiyo Tomoeda and members of the

Kita School of the Noh. Noh, Theatre of Japan (29
min, 1980) Excerpts from the Noh plays “Funu
Benkei” (Benkei in the Boat) by Kojiro and “Hanjo”
(The Lady Han) by Zeami. Directed by Larry D.
McMullen. Performed by Akira Matsui.

The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan: The
Heart of Kabuki, Noh and Bunraku [VHS] (38 min.,
1989) Produced by Shin-El, inc.; Written and
directed by Hajime Funatsu, B and CI Distributors,
1989. Nippon Steel Human Resources
Development Co. Documentary examining the
artistry and technique of the Kabuki, Noh, and
Bunraku theatres in Japan.

Sample Noh Theatre clip (Color; 18 minutes)
[http://www.city.kanazawa.ishikawa.jp/hayabunka/
beauty/noh/noh_ps.mov](http://www.city.kanazawa.ishikawa.jp/hayabunka/beauty/noh/noh_ps.mov)

Quidam [VHS] Cirque du Soleil. Images and
Serpent Films production for Granada Media
International; producer, Rocky Oldham; director,
David Mallet. Columbia TriStar Home Video, 2000.

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

Asian Art Museum 200 Larkin Street San Francisco,
CA 94102 415/581.3500
<http://www.asianart.org/pastexhibitions.htm>
Programs for Educators -
<http://www.asianart.org/foreducators.htm>

Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park
http://www.frp.org/japanese_tea_garden.asp

Japanese American Museum of San Jose 535 North
Fifth Street San Jose, California 95112 Phone (408)
294-3138 FAX (408) 294-6157 mail@jamsj.org
<http://www.jamsj.org>

Theatre of Yugen
2840 Mariposa Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
415/621.0507
Web: www.theatreofyugen.org

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
701 Mission St @ 3rd
San Francisco, CA 94103-3138
415.978.ARTS (2787)
Web: www.ybca.org

SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Ankoko-Butoh

Dance form developed in the 1950s in post-war Japan meaning “dance of pitch darkness,” given by one of its founders, Tatsumi Hijikata. Later the name was shortened to simply ‘Butoh’. In Japanese characters, “Bu” means “dance”, and “toh” means “step,” literally “stomping dance.”

Brocade

A heavy fabric interwoven with a rich, raised design

Cross-cultural

An event or work that crosses over boundaries between different cultures by implementing elements/characteristics of those cultures

Hybrid

Something of mixed origin or composition

Lacquer

A glossy, resinous material used as a surface coating

Lighting

Lights for efficacy and effect in a dramatic performance or presentation

Meditate

Quiet, reflective thought, contemplate

Mesmerize

To captivate, hypnotize, or hold spellbound

Minimalist

A reductive style or approach that is spare and reduced to bare essentials

Mica

Pigment in powdered form, usually made with a metallic inclusion

Noh

Noh is the oldest professional theater that still exists today, and has been a part of Japanese culture since the 14th century. It is a highly artistic and stylized form of musical theater. The story is told through dialogue, utai (singing), hayashi (musical accompaniment) and dance. The characters are dressed in heavy, elaborate costumes that remain from the days when Noh was economically supported by wealthy patrons, who gave gifts of rich robes and masks to show their favor. The leading actor usually wears a lacquered wooden mask, which depicts such characters as an old man, a young or old woman, a divine figure, a ghost and a young boy.

Noh is a highly refined, richly symbolic and beautifully stylized dance drama written in lyric poetry. It is tragic theatre, deeply philosophical and concerned with man’s spiritual beliefs and moral codes. Theatrical elements include a simple elegant setting, elaborate costumes, two-three main characters, a chorus and a musical ensemble of three drummers and flutist.

Following a philosophy of simplicity, the Noh stage is almost entirely bare, adding to the stylized, ethereal feel of the performance. Connected to the dressing room by a long bridge is the rear stage, and in front of that, the main stage. The musicians sit between these two stages during the performance. The form of Noh is so structured that the performers even have specific places to stand. The main character (the shite) stands by the pillar on stage right, while the supporting character (usually a monk or religious figure called the waki) stands at the pillar on stage left.

Performance Art

Performance art incorporates a wide variety of activities and actions. While the artist’s own body is often the focus in Performance art, Performance

artists often also use sound, light, costumes, props and other people in their work. Performance art pieces can be spontaneous or rehearsed, and of short or long duration. Performance art is often recorded in photographs or video. Some Performance artists create works specifically for the camera

Ritual

The prescribed order of a ceremony

Shaman

A member of certain tribal societies who acts as a medium between the visible world and an invisible spirit world and who practices magic or sorcery for purposes of healing, divination, and control over natural events

Shibori

An ancient Japanese method of binding and dyeing fabric or paper with naturally cultivated indigo dye.

Stylized

Make or design according to a particular style or convention

Textile

A cloth, especially one manufactured by weaving or knitting; a fabric

Texture

The appearance and feel of a surface

Tradition

A time-honored practice or set of such practices

Transformation

A change in the nature, function, or condition of something

World War II

Known as the “war to end all wars,” WW II was a conflict that took place from 1939-1945, in which Great Britain, France, Russia, Belgium, Italy, Japan, the United States, and other allies defeated the countries united under Adolph Hitler, including Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria

Winter Solstice

The winter solstice is the shortest day and the longest night of the year. Following the winter solstice, the days begin to grow longer and the nights shorter. Cultures around the world have celebrated the winter solstice for centuries as a commemoration of light and the sun

SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION POINTS

Mask Making

*Students will need to choose a partner for this activity.
An art room is preferable, as it is a fairly messy process.*

One of each pair of students will layer wetted strips of plaster-coated gauze, taking care not to cover the nostrils or eyes. Students should first coat his/her face in Vaseline so the mask materials won't stick to the skin. Build up the plaster strips to about 4-5 layers on all areas, smoothing the strips down after each layer. It is important for the first student not to move their face when the partner is working on the layering. Suggest that students practice a short meditation as their mask is being created. Ask that they begin thinking about the theme of their mask and how they might want to embellish it.

Allow the mask to dry until stiff enough to gently remove from the student's face. Place masks in a moisture-free area until completely dry and ready to paint, usually 1 or 2 days depending on weather conditions. During the drying time, students can work more on the theme for their mask. Ask students to participate in another five-minute meditation during which they think more about their mask and what feeling they want it to convey. When the meditation is complete, ask students to write or draw about the ideas they came up with while they were focused on their mask's identity.

Remind students of how Sha Sha Higby discussed the importance of "talking to the mask" and ask them to think about why that might be important for a performer. Initiate conversation about what Higby called "working in layers." Suggest students start by brainstorming what decorative materials they might want to use to give their mask character and personality. They should think as elaborately or minimally as they would like. Encourage them to think creatively on a personal level and to listen to their instincts thoughtfully, much the way a performer like Sha Sha Higby follows her instinctual feelings when on stage.

Once students have chosen a theme for their mask, they can begin embellishing. Provide an array of materials, such as fabric scraps, paint, beads, paper scraps, feathers, and any other materials that could be used for mask decoration. Encourage students to also bring in items from home or other sources.

The exercise can be taken further by allowing students to create and perform short, silent movement pieces, or even simple gestures using their masks as a basis for the motion of the body that expresses the mask personality. Again remind students that spontaneous motions are appropriate and that they can respond to and interact with the student audience while in character.

If time is a constraint, this activity can be done on a smaller scale with clay. Sticks can be glued to the small clay masks and then decorated as puppets.

RELATED STANDARDS VISUAL ARTS

Grade 7
2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION
2.5 Interpret reality and fantasy in original two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art.
2.7 Create a series of works of art that express a personal statement demonstrating skill in applying the elements of art and the principles of design.

RELATED STANDARDS THEATRE

Grade 7
2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION
2.1 Use improvisation in rehearsal to discover character and motivation.
3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT
3.1 Design and create masks, puppets, props, costumes, or sets in a selected theatrical style drawn from world cultures, such as Javanese shadow puppets or Kabuki masks.

Five-Minute Meditation

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years by many cultures, mainly for spiritual and religious purposes. Meditation is an exercise used to focusing the mind, and concentrating on being still, clear, and fully present in the moment.

Turn off the lights and ask students to close their eyes and concentrate on being still for two to five minutes. Encourage deep breathing, and calmly talk students through the process of clearing their minds. Follow with a full body relaxation process, beginning with the toes, up through the ankles and to the rest of the body, focusing on relaxing one part at a time. Instruct them to try breathing deeply through the nose, and then slowly exhaling to a count of ten. Once students are relaxed, ask them to open their eyes and take out some paper and write or draw what they noted about their body and their mind during the meditation.

Performance Art & Artists (Presentations)

Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a performance artist or specific piece to research. Challenge students to use all resources, including print, Web, and, if possible, video of current and historical performance art. (Videos may be streamed on the Web, loaned from a museum, library, film center, archive, or other art resource center, or purchased through a specialized distributor.) The teams should divide the research work across the group – assigning different aspects of the project to individuals.

Ask the groups to include at least one, detailed description of a (the) piece, also addressing how it is different from other types of performance (theatre, dance, spoken word). In addition to writing, students should present their findings to the class verbally with visuals or performance (i.e. re-enacting a piece they learned about, or creating a new piece inspired by their research.) They could also create a static artwork (sculptural, painted, collage, etc) and offer a description of how it might be used in a performance by their chosen artist.

The audience teams can also be asked to critique the performances for the performing group. If time allows, they could perform a second time and implement any changes or add spontaneous elements.

RELATED STANDARDS

VISUAL ARTS

Grade 5

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.2 Identify and describe characteristics of representational, abstract, and nonrepresentational works of art.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Identify and describe various fine, traditional, and folk arts from historical periods worldwide.

Grade 6

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.2 Discuss works of art as to theme, genre, style, idea, and differences in media.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

4.1 Construct and describe plausible interpretations of what they perceive in works of art.

4.3 Develop specific criteria as individuals or in groups to assess and critique works of art.

4.4 Change, edit, or revise their works of art after a critique, articulating reasons for their changes.

SELECTED PERFORMANCE ARTISTS

(Note: art content should be reviewed carefully before sharing it with students – some work is of an adult nature and is unsuitable for young viewers)

Alan Abel
Marina Abramovic
Vito Acconci
GG Allin
Laurie Anderson
Damali Ayo
Joseph Beuys
Chris Burden
(early period) Cabaret Voltaire
Diamanda Galás
Gilbert and George
Jack Goldstein
Youri Messen-Jaschin
Deej Fabyc
Allan Kaprow
Wladyslaw Kazmierczak
Miki Malör
Gordon Matta-Clark
Jamie McMurry
Linda Montano
Charlotte Moorman
Hermann Nitsch
Yoko Ono
Dennis Oppenheim
Nam June Paik
Nikki de Ste. Phalle
Wolf Vostell
Welfare State Theatre Group

Traditional Dance Study

Noh and Butoh are just two of many traditions that involve dance from around the world. Have students watch videos of these or other forms of traditional dance and performance. If possible, ask students to memorize some of the movements from these dances and perform them together. Some other examples are Hawai'ian Hula, Irish folk dance, Argentine Tango, West African Dance (there are many forms), or Country Western line dancing, or Cuban danzon, to name a few. Review the SPARK stories about dance artists for additional ideas - <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/index.jsp?genre=dance>. After the demonstrations, discuss the differences and similarities in dance styles from different traditions.

Movement for Early Childhood Students

Show students the performance clips from Sha Sha Higby's SPARK segment and 2-3 other visual movement videos. Ask students to try and imitate the dancing and movements they observe. Lead students in experimenting with other movements, such as imitating how animals or water or trees move. Try playing different audible stimuli, such as musical sounds or rhythmic sounds at varied tempos and ask students to respond with abstract, improvised body movements.

Media Matters

Talk about the representation of performance art on film or video. How does it differ from seeing live performance? Discuss the production of the performance and how this impacts reception. Use the SPARK Video Tips document on the [SPARK Education Web](#) page to help guide discussion about specific elements of video, such as lighting, narration, camera work, and editing.

Compare the Sha Sha Higby story to other performing artists featured on SPARK:

[Halau 'o Keikiali'i](#), traditional hula

Butoh dancer [Ledoh](#)

Aerial dance artist [Jo Kreiter](#)

Hambone practitioner [Derique](#)

Vocal artist [Pamela Z](#)

RELATED STANDARDS

DANCE

Pre-K

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Move in a variety of directed ways.

1.2 Imitate the movements shown.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.2 Respond to visual and sound stimuli (e.g., bubbles, feathers, bell, clock, ball) with original movement.

2.3 Respond spontaneously to different types of music and rhythms.

Kindergarten

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Build the range and capacity to move in a variety of ways.

1.2 Perform basic locomotor skills (e.g., walk, run, gallop, jump, hop, and balance).

1.4 Perform simple movements in response to oral instructions (e.g., walk, turn, reach).

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.2 Respond to a variety of stimuli (e.g., sounds, words, songs, props, and images) with original movements.

2.3 Respond spontaneously to different types of music, rhythms, and sounds

Grade 3

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.1 Describe commonalities among and differences between dances from various countries

Grade 4

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.1 Create, develop, and memorize set movement patterns and sequences.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.1 Perform and identify dances from various countries with different arrangements of dancers (e.g., lines, circles, couples)

3.3 Perform and describe dances that reflect the geographical place in which the dances are performed (e.g., deserts, rain forests, islands).



Butoh dancer Ledoh. Still image from SPARK story, 2004.
<http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/ledoh.jsp>

Looking deeper - design and symbolism

Introduce students to the elements or components parts that can be identified in any visual design or work of art. The elements include line, form, shape and space, movement, color, pattern and texture. The relationship between these elements creates a composition that communicates visual codes. The viewer is then invited to make sense or “read” the images according to their own imaginings and cultural frame of reference.

Play the SPARK story on Sha Sha Higby, freezing the frame on her sculptural constructions. Ask students to look closely at each work and identify as many of the design elements in each performance piece as they can. Invite students to discuss these elements in pairs, articulating how they work together. They should also talk through their response to each piece using the following questions as prompts:

- Describe your response to the sculptural form?
- What words would you use to describe the work?
- What associations does it bring to mind? Different elements of each work may evoke different thoughts and associations
- Can you identify specific cultural references?

Higby’s artwork is rich in symbolism. Invite students to brainstorm their understanding of symbolism including the concept of iconic representation in the discussion. Explain that symbols denote literal conventional meanings as well as allude to or conote abstract and hidden meanings.

Move on to discuss with students the ways in which art expresses the symbol systems of a culture. Every culture has its system of images (iconography) that is interpreted and understood in specific ways. Encourage students to think of examples from contemporary artwork.

Ask students to once again work with a partner and examine Sha Sha Higby’s work in the context of this discussion. Invite students to identify the use of symbolism in Higby’s performance art, looking at:

- Costumes
- Movement/dance
- Music and sound effects
- Expression – verbal and non-verbal
- Settings

Finally ask students to differentiate between symbols with specific meanings and symbols with universal meanings.

Conclude by sharing the discussions and asking students to write a 500 word piece on symbolism and art, using examples to support their arguments.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



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