

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Experimenting  
Artist/Organization: Kunst-Stoff  
Discipline(s): Dance

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Kunst-Stoff dancers in rehearsal at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Still image from SPARK story, March 2006

## SECTION I – OVERVIEW

### EPISODE THEME

Experimenting

### SUBJECT

Dance

### GRADE RANGES

K-12 and post-secondary

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Dance, Language Arts, and Science

### OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the work of experimental dance company Kunst-Stoff as they create a new dance about the experience of being blind.

### STORY SYNOPSIS

Kunst-Stoff is an experimental dance company based in San Francisco that explores the intersection of dance with other art forms, such as visual arts and film. Their goal is to explore things that conventional dance cannot. SPARK captures the company a week before opening night of its new piece *As We Close Their Eyes*, a dance about the experience of being blind. This Educator Guide introduces students to experimental dance, and provides strategies to explore movement.

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Individual, partner, and group movement exploration  
Individual student writing  
Group discussions  
Individual student research

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To introduce students to the Kunst-Stoff dance company and its choreographic process  
To personally experience and explore movement  
To conduct research related to the visually impaired community and dance

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story about Kunst-Stoff on DVD or VHS and related equipment  
Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card, and a printer  
Audio music player such as a CD or MP3 player, cassette deck, or record player  
Video camera and means to view the tape, such as a VCR

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Open space for movement activities  
Pencils, pens, and paper  
Dance textbooks (see Resources & Activities)

### INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic – control of one’s own body, control in handling objects  
Interpersonal – awareness of others’ feelings, emotions, goals, and motivations  
Intrapersonal – awareness of one’s own feelings, emotions, goals, and motivations  
Linguistic – the ability to use language masterfully to express oneself rhetorically or poetically. Also allows one to use language as a means to remember information.  
Spatial – ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems



See more information on [Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at [www.kqed.org/spark/education](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education).

## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

### CONTENT/PROFILE

Kunst-Stoff is an experimental dance company that plays with boundary-breaking ways of creating dance. SPARK spends time with this innovative company as they create and prepare for the world premiere of "As We Close Their Eyes." This multi-disciplinary work was commissioned by San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts as part of their Bay Area Now 4 performance series.

Kunst-Stoff was founded by Yannis Adoniou and Tomi Paasonen. Both classically trained and former dancers with LINES Ballet, they formed the Kunst-Stoff company to explore the intersection of dance with other art forms. Their goal was to explore a range of subject matter in ways that conventional dance had not. The name Kunst-Stoff is a play on words based on the German word "kunststoff" meaning "synthetic material." When the word is separated, "kunst" translates to "art" and "stoff" to "things."

In 2005, Adoniou read an article on a museum designed for the blind, which inspired him to explore how the experience of sightlessness could translate into movement. Through LightHouse for the Blind, he met Khoja Aniksa, who has been visually impaired since birth. In a rehearsal, Aniksa shared with the group his unique awareness of space and how he perceived and interpreted the dancers' movements. This experimentation formed the basis of "As We Close Their Eyes," which uses sound and touch to emphasize sensory information other than the visual.

In addition to the two principal choreographers, Adoniou and Paasonen, the Kunst-Stoff troupe consists of 8 dancers. Since its inception in 1998, the group has premiered over 20 new works in the Bay Area, toured internationally, and collaborated with visual and media artists and composers. Kunst-Stoff has performed commissioned pieces for the BERLIN TANZTAGE Festival, the Burning Man Festival, the

Dimitria International Festival in Greece, and the 2005 SCUBA National touring project.



Kunst-Stoff: Jose Campos, Yannis Adoniou, and Kara Davis in rehearsal. Still image from SPARK story, March 2006.

### CONTEXT: THE BIG PICTURE

Kunst-Stoff is part of an exciting array of contemporary dance companies that are committed to innovation in movement and expansion of the field of dance. Building upon the original geneses of modern dance, companies such as Kunst-Stoff continue to invent new choreography, dance vocabularies, types of performances and types of collaborations that push the boundaries of what audiences understand as "dance."

The field of "dance" includes a wide diversity of forms, from Broadway stage shows to folkloric traditions to aerial acrobatics performed off the sides of buildings. Modern dance is described by many different terms including postmodern dance, contemporary dance, dance theater, contact improvisation, performance art, and experimental dance. Terms such as innovative, cutting edge, and avant-garde are employed to characterize different choreography and processes used in the creation of new works.

In the early 1900s, modern dance was created as a distinct dance form and movement vocabulary (see the [Anna Halprin](#) SPARK story and Educator Guide for a full description of modern dance.) Dancers have since innovated this tradition of dance, adding content, context, and new dance vocabularies. For many contemporary choreographers, dance is not about pure movement as it once was, and many dance companies today combine different media with dance --- blending movement with music, theatre, visual art, and video. The essential questions asked in the process of modern dance development are:

*Who gets to dance?*  
*Where can dance take place?*  
*In what ways can choreographers create dance?*  
*What constitutes "dance?"*  
*What can dances be about?*  
*What can inspire and inform dance-making?*

The 1960s in the United States was an incredible time for experimentation in dance. Artists like Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainier, Meredith Monk, and Anna Halprin were some of the first to push the boundaries. The Judson Dance Theater premiered its first piece in 1962 and continued to dominate the field of experimental dance for over 20 years. As dance writer Deborah Jowitt wrote in [Time and the Dancing Image](#), "As diverse as the new dances were, however, as individual their creators and as subject to change, one of the achievements of the period as a whole was a redefinition of the dancer as 'doer' and the dance as whatever was done – whether that meant performing an impressively choreographed piece of offbeat dancing, sitting still, climbing a wall, reading a text, munching on a sandwich, or not showing up to perform."<sup>1</sup>

Now in his 80s, dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham remains an experimental dance adventurer, using chance methods to develop choreography. Cunningham was one of the first to collaborate with artists outside of dance, forming long partnerships with artists such as John Cage, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg. Cunningham and Cage created over 20 works together between 1942 and 1992 that explored the

relationship between dance and music. In the dances from the 40s and 50s, dance and music shared a time structure, and wove in and out of one another. In the later works, the relationship became even more loose, sometimes existing completely independently from one another. This style culminates in Cunningham's recent work in which the dancers in his company learn a piece without music, not hearing it at all until the last moment.

In terms of the visual arts, Cunningham invited artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns to be artistic director of his dance company, placing equal emphasis on the visual appearance of dance by creating elaborate and striking sets for the dancers. The sets extended an experimentation started by Serge Diaghilev, manager of the Ballet Russes (1909-1929) in Paris, who invited artists such as Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau and Henri Matisse to develop set constructions for the dances. For Cunningham, as for Ballet Russes, the constructions added a second, and often otherworldly dimension to a performance, which challenged the notions of how a dance performance could look and be.

Cunningham and other experimenting choreographers such as Bill T. Jones have also explored the use of technology to transform dances and dancers into animated forms, and to create virtual environments. Cunningham's [BIPED](#) (1999) and Jones's [Ghostcatching](#) (1999) and are two notable works that employed technology to explore the idea of "motion capture" – a visual effect in which motion is captured by a camera and replayed at lesser or greater speeds. Dance writer Michael Wade Simpson described BIPED's unique visual effects "Upstage, there was no limiting curtain, just darkness, and dancers would appear and disappear, run in and out of this void. In front of the dance, projected on a scrim, video images by Paul Kaiser and Shelley Eshkar were actual "motion capture" representations of the dancers and choreography. These appeared occasionally, like recurring ghost visions, taking audience eyes for a ride."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jowitt, Deborah, [Time and the Dancing Image](#). Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1989: 310.

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<sup>2</sup> Simpson, Michael Wade, [Merce Cunningham Dance Company: Ground Level Overlay, Biped, Interscape, Sounddance](#). CultureVulture, February 2, 2004.

## SECTION III - RESOURCES

### ARTICLES - KUNST-STOFF

Felciano, Rita. "Kunst-Stoff Dance" San Francisco Bay Guardian November 2-8, 2005.  
<http://www.sfbg.com/goldies05/Kunst-Stoff.html>

Hirshman, Rebecca. "Kunst-Stoff 'as we close their eyes,' 'In-Sight'" Ballet-Dance Magazine.  
<http://www.ballet-dance.com/200603/articles/KUNST-STOFF20060210.html>

Howard, Rachel. "Kunst-Stoff mixes film, speech, dance." San Francisco Chronicle May 15, 2004.  
Available at [www.sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com)

### TEXTS & ARTICLES - TEACHING DANCE

Gilbert, Anne Green. Creative Dance for All Ages.  
Reston, VA: National Dance Association, 1992.

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. Toolbox. Published online at [www.danceexchange.org/toolbox/](http://www.danceexchange.org/toolbox/).

Reedy, Patricia. Body, Mind, & Spirit in Action: A Teacher's Guide to Creative Dance. Berkeley: Luna Kids Dance, 2003. (Book can be purchased at [www.lunakidsdance.com](http://www.lunakidsdance.com).)

### CHILDREN'S BOOKS ON DANCE

Cooper, Elisha. Dance! Singapore: Greenwillow Books, 2001.

Jones, Bill T. and Susan Kuklin. Dance. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1998.

### WEB SITES

Kunst-Stoff  
[www.Kunst-Stoff.org](http://www.Kunst-Stoff.org)

Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
[www.lighthouse-sf.org](http://www.lighthouse-sf.org)

VSA Arts – Arts and disabilities service organization  
[www.vsarts.org](http://www.vsarts.org)

### VIDEO RESOURCES

American Master (PBS)  
Merce Cunningham  
[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/cunningham\\_m.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/cunningham_m.html)

John Cage  
[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/cage\\_j.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/cage_j.html)

Robert Raushenberg  
[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/johns\\_j.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/johns_j.html)

SPARK (KQED)  
Merce Cunningham  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/profile.jsp?id=4655>

AXIS Dance Company – Physically integrated dance  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/profile.jsp?id=4193>

Jo Kreiter – aerial dance  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/profile.jsp?id=4499>

Margaret Jenkins – modern dance  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/profile.jsp?id=4634>

Mark Morris – modern dance  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/profile.jsp?id=4639>

Joe Goode – dance theatre

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/profile.jsp?id=4478>

Michael Smuin – modern dance

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/profile.jsp?id=4669>

Anna Halprin – modern dance

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/profile.jsp?id=5402>

## **BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS**

Kunst-Stoff

Contact Kunst-Stoff to learn more about future performances in the San Francisco Bay Area or to plan a special field trip to watch them rehearse.

[www.Kunst-Stoff.org](http://www.Kunst-Stoff.org)

AXIS Dance Company

Contact AXIS Dance Company to find out about upcoming performances in the community or to bring the dance company to a school or site

[www.axisdance.org](http://www.axisdance.org)

Dance performances are regularly offered at any of the following Bay Area locations:

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

ODC Theater

Cal Performances at UC Berkeley

San Francisco Performances

Stanford Lively Arts at Stanford University

Mondavi Center at UC Davis

## SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

### DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

#### **Artistic Director**

The person in a dance company who oversees the development of dances for performances; artistic directors may also be the primary choreographer for the dance company

#### **Choreography**

A set series of movements; a dance

#### **Classically trained**

A dancer who studied ballet

#### **Commentary**

Saying aloud what is happening in a dance while the dancers are moving

#### **Commissioned**

When a dance company or individual choreographer is asked to create a dance for a particular event or place. The dance company or choreographer is usually offered a stipend of money to create the dance, and possibly also space to use to create the piece

#### **Duet**

A dance for two people

#### **Elements**

The components of a dance: movement, costumes, lighting, music, sound, etc.

#### **Experimental dance company**

A dance company that explores new ideas in terms of movement, where a dance is performed, who gets to dance, or the elements of dance. Experimental dance companies might blend different art forms, such as dance and film

#### **“From the top”**

A commonly used phrase to express starting a dance again from the very beginning

#### **Piece**

Another name for a dance

#### **Rehearsing**

When dancers and a choreographer get together to create and practice a dance

#### **Run through**

To practice an entire dance from start to finish

#### **Space mics (microphones)**

Sound equipment placed on stage to capture sounds made by dancers or to amplify sounds

#### **Visually impaired**

A person whose sight is reduced or compromised

#### **World premiere**

A brand new dance that has never been seen before in public

## SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION POINTS

#### ACTION WORDS LIST (K-12)

As a class, create a giant list of action words (or “dance words”) to use in the dance activities listed below. For younger children, read to them to help them build vocabulary.

Alphabet Movers Teresa Benzwie

Animal Action ABC Karen Pandell & Art Wolfe

From Head to Toe Eric Carle

Jonathan and his Mommy Irene Smalls & Michael Hays

Star Climbing Lou Fancher & Steve Johnson

Quick as a Cricket Audrey Wood

#### GROUP IMPROVISATION (K-12)

Spread students out across the room. Play a piece of music softly in the background and ask everyone to move and dance in his/her own- there is no “right” way to move! Call out different action words from the Action Word List (see above) to inspire movement, such as: reaching, circling, twisting, bending, stretching, jumping, walking, turning, rolling, etc.

#### CREATE A DANCE PHRASE (K-12)

As a class, create a short movement phrase together and practice it so that all students know it. Based on your action words list and your various improvisational activities, create a phrase such as:

Walking	Reaching
Twisting	Jumping
Hopping	Skipping
Freezing	Falling

Practice your phrase with the teacher verbally cuing the movements.

#### IMPROVISING WITH PARTNERS–VERBAL CUES (GRADES 2-12)

Put students into pairs, making one the leader and the other the mover. Ask each leader to VERBALLY cue the mover, telling him or her how to move using the word list created from the Action Word List

activity above, such as reaching, twisting, lifting, etc. After a few minutes, ask the dancers to switch jobs and repeat the activity.

#### PARTNER IMPROVISATION – PHYSICAL CUES (GRADES 2-12)

After trying the first improvisation with a partner, the partners will now cue each other in a different way. The dancer will close his/her eyes. The leader will *gently* move the partner in various ways --- lifting arms, bending knees, turning around, etc. After a few minutes, the students will switch jobs.

Ask students:

*How did it feel moving with your eyes closed?*

*How did it feel getting your directions through touch, versus by seeing the leader or hearing the leader?*

#### RELATED STANDARDS DANCE

##### Kindergarten

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

##### First Grade

1.3 Name basic locomotor and axial movements (e.g. skip, slide, stretch, roll).

##### Second Grade

2.1 Create and improvise movement patterns and sequences.

##### Third Grade

2.6 Compare and contrast the role of the performer with that of a member of the audience.

##### Fourth Grade

2.7 Demonstrate additional partner and group skills (e.g. imitating, leading/following, mirroring, calling/responding, echoing).

##### Fifth Grade

1.5 Use appropriate dance vocabulary to describe dances.

##### Sixth Grade

1.1 Demonstrate focus, physical control, coordination, and accurate reproduction in performing locomotor and axial movement.

### LISTENING TO A DANCE (K-12)

Break the class into small groups and ask each group to perform the dance phrase created in the Create A Dance Phrase activity above. Ask the student audience to experience the dance with their eyes closed, focusing on listening and the other senses. Discuss how it feels to listen to a dance. The audience members can talk or write about their experiences.

### DANCE & THE SENSES (K-12)

After any of the dance activities above, challenge students to reflect on their personal experiences dancing and watching dance. This can be a discussion or writing assignment.

*How does it FEEL to dance?*

*What does it LOOK like?*

*How does it SOUND?*

*What are some important elements of dance?*

*What is important when being an audience?*

### FEELING VERSUS LOOKING (9-12 & College)

Invite students to perform a dance they already know and record the dance on videotape it. Ask the students to watch themselves and to reflect upon how it feels to dance. Challenge students to write a short, reflective essay on their experience.

As a secondary activity, ask students to watch themselves in the video, making note of what they see. Then have a discussion about the differences and similarities between what it felt like to perform and the experience of the dance as an audience. Perform the dance again and see how the performance and the reception changed. Discuss.

### DIFFERENT WAYS OF EXPERIENCING DANCES (9-12 & College)

Take a dance that students already know from their dance class. Experiment with different ways for an audience member to experience the dance.

1. Invite audience members close their eyes and experience the dance with their other senses.
2. Invite audience members to close their eyes and ask one or two students to narrate the dance, describing verbally what happens, like in the SPARK story.
3. Invite audience members to be with the dancers on stage.

Discuss and/or write about these experiences and the different ways in which they facilitated experience of dance.

### RESEARCH PROJECT – LOCAL THEATRES AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED AUDIENCE MEMBERS (8<sup>TH</sup>-12<sup>TH</sup> and college)

Call your local theatres that present dance ask how what kinds of assistive devices they offer for visually impaired persons to attend a performance? In the San Francisco Bay Area, students can contact Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, ODC Theater, Cal Performances at UC Berkeley, Stanford Lively Arts at Stanford University, and/or the Mondavi Center at UC Davis. Compile a list of the various devices and compare them. Discuss as a class the different alternatives.

Consider inviting visually impaired students or adults to your next dance performance. How can your school best support their experience? After the performance, invite the community members to stay and discuss the experience.

#### RELATED STANDARDS DANCE (CONTINUED)

##### Seventh Grade

5.1 identify and use different sources to generate ideas for dance compositions.

##### Eighth Grade

2.1 create, memorize, and perform dance studies, demonstrating technical expertise and artistic expression.

##### Ninth – Twelfth Grade (proficient)

1. 5 apply knowledge of dance vocabulary to distinguish how movement looks physically in space, time, and force/energy.

##### Ninth – Twelfth Grade (advanced)

1.5 select specific dance vocabulary to describe movement and dance elements in great detail.

### EXPERIMENTATION (4-12)

In the SPARK story, Kunst-Stoff talks about experimenting with dance. In school, the word “experiment” is usually used only in science. Compare and contrast the idea of experimentation in science with experimentation in dance.

*Define experimentation in science. What does it entail?  
What does a science experiment sound like?  
How does it move?  
Define experimentation in dance. What does it entail?  
What does a movement experiment look like?  
What does a movement experiment sound like?  
How does it move?*

#### CREATE A DANCE EXPERIMENT (7-12)

What would you like to create a dance about?  
Kunst-Stoff wanted to create a dance to express the experience of being visually impaired. Brainstorm a list of ideas that are of interest to you. Choose one. Develop a question to explore. What research do you need to conduct? Do your research and then create a short movement study. Write down your research and observations.

#### RELATED STANDARDS

##### SCIENCE

Grades K-12

All science standards for grades K-12 include “Investigation and Experimentation” as a core objective. Each grade offers different levels and subjects of investigation, including asking questions, describing and recording observations, and comparing and contrasting

#### COMPARE & CONTRAST

Select one of more of the SPARK stories about dancers and dance companies to compare and contrast to the Kunst-Stoff story (see **Resources: Videos**). Download the SPARK [Media Matters](#) PDF tool for educators to help facilitate the use of video in the classroom.

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>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>.