

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

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Discipline(s): Dance

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Pandit Chitresh Das dances at the Kathak Dance Festival, San Francisco.  
Still image from the Spark Story, 2007.

## SECTION I - OVERVIEW

### SUBJECT

Chitresh Das

### GRADE RANGES

K-12

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Dance, music, language arts, world history

### OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to Kathak dance and to Bay Area virtuoso Pandit Chitresh Das. Students will learn about Kathak dance and Das' personal history, and see him at work at one of his schools and the recent Kathak Festival. Students will improvise, create rhythms, and reflect on the role of dance in their own lives.

### STORY SYNOPSIS

Bay Area Kathak dancer Chitresh Das is world-renowned. At age 62, Das continues to perform, teach, and organize events such as the Kathak Festival and Symposium in San Francisco. Kathak is a classical dance form from Northern India, known for its footwork, rhythms, gestures, and storytelling.

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Hands-on group projects, in which students assist and support one another

Hands-on individual projects, in which students work independently

Group oral discussion and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing

Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To introduce students to Kathak dance and dancer Chitresh Das.

To have students explore and improvise movements.

To reflect, write, and discuss the role of dance in student's lives.

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story on Chitresh Das on DVD or VHS and related equipment or a computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Musical instruments, such as drums, shakers, or Orff instruments

Children's books (see page 9)

Paper and pencils

### INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic – control of one's own body, control in handling objects

Intrapersonal – awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Spatial – ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems

Logical-Mathematical – ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



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

### MEDIA MATTERS

The following Spark stories can be used for compare/contrast purposes:

Shri Krupa Dance Foundation  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/places/spark/profile.jsp?id=4893>

Halau o Keikiali'i  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=4449>

Naomi and Zak Diouf  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=4353>

Rosa Montoya  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=4818>

Derique  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=4348>

## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

Pandit Chitresh Das was born in Calcutta, India, in 1944. At age 9, he began studying kathak under teacher and guru Pandit Ram Narayan Misra. In 1970, Das was brought to the United States on a Whitney Fellowship. A year later, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan brought Das to the Ali Khan College of Music in San Rafael to teach kathak. In 1980 he created the Chhandam School of Kathak Dance and the Chitresh Das Dance Company. It grew to five Bay Area locations as well as schools in Boston, Canada, and India. Spark visits with Das and discusses his personal history and his work, including his school and, more recently, the Kathak Festival and Symposium.

A classical dance from northern India, kathak is improvisational and takes a lifetime to learn. "Kathak" comes from the word "katha," meaning "to tell stories." Kathak has two main elements, storytelling and abstract dance. A solo kathak dance can last several hours, progressing through various specific elements. The dancer, who wears about five pounds of bells around the ankles, recites a spontaneous rhythmic phrase that is repeated back by the musicians.

For centuries, the form has been passed from guru to disciple. Das has passed this traditional dance form to a broad range of students. His classes involve not only dance, but also history, philosophy and math. Das has also taken the art to a new level through the creation of kathak yoga, a meditation technique in which participants dance, drum and sing simultaneously.

In 2006, the Chitresh Das Dance Company organized a three-day festival of kathak dance at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. The largest kathak festival ever to take place outside of India, it brought together dancers from all over the world and incorporated both traditional and innovative elements. Das performed with Emmy Award-winning tap dancer Jason Samuels Smith in "India Jazz Suites," which has since received a Bay Area Dance Award and the Isadora Duncan Dance Award for Best Ensemble Performance.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Kathak dance is one of the major classical dance forms from India; other forms include Bharatanatyam, Odissi, and Kathakali. The word "Kathak" comes from the Sanskrit word "katha" meaning story. "Kathakas" were storytellers.

Kathak dance started as a way to tell the stories of Hindu epics such as the Mahabharata through movement, music, and acting. During the 15<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Kathak became a form of entertainment in the courts. In the mid-1800s Kathak shifted again, transitioning from an entertainment form back to a classical dance form. Kathak is unique in that it has both Hindu and Muslim influences. Dances are traditionally performed solo, and improvised, sometimes for several hours at a time.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "What is Kathak Dance?", [www.kathak.org](http://www.kathak.org)

It takes a lifetime of commitment and training to master Kathak dance. This form is passed on from generation to generation, from guru to disciple. Dance writer Rachel Howard noted in a recent article about Chitresh Das and the Kathak Festival, "Kathak academies are becoming as plentiful in India as ballet studios in America, and workshops with big-name gurus are in demand in Germany, Australia, and beyond" (New York Times, September 24, 2006).

Today, in 2007, one big concern in Kathak dance is the idea of innovation within a traditional dance form. Some Kathak professionals are choreographing group Kathak dances. Dancers like British-Asian Akram Khan are blending Kathak with contemporary dance technique.

Kathak dance is a dynamic and energetic dance form involving storytelling, movement, and music. Footwork, turns, gesticulation, facial expressions, and improvising in the moment are all essential elements of Kathak, allowing for a colorful whirlwind of sight and sound.

#### **RESOURCES - TEXTS & ARTICLES**

Howard, Rachel. "Dance awards buoyant, despite tremendous loss." San Francisco Chronicle April 26, 2007. Published online at [www.sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com).

Howard, Rachel. "The downbeat and mystical meld amid flash, whirl of Kathak dance." San Francisco Chronicle October 3, 2006. Published online at [www.sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com).

Howard, Rachel. "When Many Feet Make Loud Work." New York Times September 24, 2006. Published online at [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

"Kathak." [www.worldartswest.org](http://www.worldartswest.org).

Venkataraman, Leela and Avinash Pasricha. Indian Classical Dance: Tradition in Transition. New Delhi, India: Lustre Press, 2002.

"What is Kathak Dance?" [www.kathak.org](http://www.kathak.org).

#### **RESOURCES – WEB SITES**

Pandit Chitresh Das' Web site  
[www.kathak.org](http://www.kathak.org)

World Arts West  
[www.worldartswest.org](http://www.worldartswest.org)

#### **RESOURCES – CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

Ajmera, Maya and John D. Ivanko. To Be an Artist. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2004.

Ancona, George. Let's Dance. New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1998.

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

#### **RESOURCES – ARTS PROVIDERS**

Young Audiences of the Bay Area  
<http://www.ya-nc.org/>

Luna Kids Dance  
[www.lunakidsdance.org](http://www.lunakidsdance.org)

AXIS Dance Company  
[www.axisdance.org](http://www.axisdance.org)

California Dance Education Organization  
[www.cdeadance.org](http://www.cdeadance.org)

#### **BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS**

San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival  
June 2007; occurs every June  
[www.worldartswest.org](http://www.worldartswest.org)

Annual Chhandam School Performance  
San Jose, CA  
[www.kathak.org](http://www.kathak.org)

Chhandam School of Kathak Dance  
[www.kathak.org](http://www.kathak.org)  
415.333.9013

## SECTION III – VOCABULARY

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

**Child Prodigy**

A young person who displays exceptional skills and performance in an art form.

**Disciple**

A follower, a student of a guru.

**Fusion**

The blending of dance forms, such as Kathak and tap dance.

**Guru**

A master teacher that a student trains and studies with extensively over a period of time.

**Improvise**

To create movement or music on the spot.

**Kathak**

A dance form of Northern India that expresses stories using improvisation, intricate footwork and hand gestures, and music that includes tabla drums and sitars

**Kathak yoga**

A technique created by Chitresh Das where dancers dance, drum, and sing simultaneously.

**Ustad**

A master or teacher.

**Western Dance**

A phrase commonly used to describe dance styles such as ballet, modern, and jazz.

## SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

#### PLAYING WITH RHYTHMS

Have students form a circle and allow each student have a turn in creating a rhythm (about 4 counts) using clapping, tapping, or stomping. The class should echo the rhythm back to the rhythm-maker.

Repeat the activity, but give half of the class instruments. The dancer creates his/her rhythm, and the musicians repeat it back on their instruments.

#### WORD RHYTHMS

It is easy to take words, and use them to create a rhythmic phrase. You can take fruits, vegetables, spelling words, etc. to create interesting pairings. They can be poetic and need not “make sense.” For example, using some words related to school such as library, recess, school lunch (li-brar-y, recess, school-lunch).

Have the students play with words, and create a phrase, using only their voices at first and then expanding by tapping the rhythm out with their feet, while still reciting it. Try with just your feet, and saying the words to yourself. Lastly, try making body movements to the rhythm (without the words).

#### MOVEMENT IMPROVISATION

The key to dance improvisation is being open to moving in many different ways, using different body parts, tempos, levels, and qualities.

Ask the students to explore how many different ways they can move their....

- Head
- Eyes
- Arms
- Hands

- Fingers
- Lower body
- Legs
- Feet

While leading the improvisation, prompt the students to think about and try different tempos (fast, medium, slow), levels (low, middle, high), and qualities (smooth, sharp).

#### IMPROVISING TO A STORY

Kathak dance is a storytelling dance form. Many childrens’ stories are wonderful springboards for improvisation in K-5 classes. A short list includes:

Caretakers of Wonder – Cooper Edens

Cloud Dance – Thomas Locker

In the Space of the Sky – Richard Lewis

How to Make a Night – Linda Ashman

Mountain Dance – Thomas Locker

My Many Colored Days – Dr. Seuss

Mystery Bottle – Kristen Balouch

Star Climbing – Lou Fancher and Steve Johnson

The Squiggle – Carole Lexa Schaefer

Quick as a Cricket – Audrey and Don Wood

Water Dance – Thomas Locker

Read a story to your class first. Discuss story elements such as the characters and setting. Then have the students spread out in an open space and improvise movements while you read the story again. You can play music in the background for added inspiration.

#### SPARKLER!

Watch the story on Chitresh Das again, and ask the students to write a description of the movements they see.

- What does it look like?
- What does it sound like?

Use the words in the descriptions as a springboard for an improvisation exercise. (Examples of words include: turning, stomping, circling, looking, fast feet).

### **MUSIC**

#### **Grade 1**

2.4 Improvise simple rhythmic accompaniments, using body percussion or classroom instruments.

#### **Grade 3**

3.1 Identify the use of music in various cultures and time periods.

### **ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS**

#### **Grade 2**

2.1 Recount experiences or present stories

- a. Move through a logical sequence of events
- b. Explain story elements

#### **Grade 8**

1.6 Revise writing for word choice; appropriate organization; consistent point of view; and transitions between paragraphs, passages, and ideas.

### **WHY DO YOU DANCE?**

Have students reflect on and write about the following questions:

- Why do people dance?
- Where can dance take place?
- What are your personal reasons for dancing?
- What is the role of dance in your personal life?
- Do you dance with someone else, in a group, or by yourself?

Discuss the students' responses in partners or as a whole class.

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>.

### **COMPARE & CONTRAST**

Kathak dance is a very rhythmic dance form.

SPARK has highlighted several other forms that also have a strong relationship between music and movement. Compare and contrast the Spark story about Chitresh Das with other Spark stories about dance and address the following:

- Similarities of the two dance forms
- Differences in the two dance forms
- What is the relationship between the dancers and musicians?
- Are the dancers also musicians in a way?
- Write down 5 descriptive words for each dance form. Are any of the words on your lists similar?

### **DANCE**

#### **Grade 1**

2.1 Use improvisation to discover movements in response to a special movement problem

#### **Grade 2**

5.1 Use literature to inspire dance ideas

#### **Grade 3**

1.2 Demonstrate the ability to start, change, and stop movement.

3.1 Describe commonalities among and differences between dances from various countries.

**Grade 4**  
1.2 Name and use a wide variety of movements

#### **Grades 9 – 12, proficient**

3.4 Explain how dancers from various cultures and historical periods reflect diversity and values

4.5 Identify and evaluate the advantages and limitations of viewing live and recorded dance performances.

5.4 Explain how participation in dance develops creative skills for lifelong learning and well-being that are interpersonal and intrapersonal.