

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

Artist: Lily Cai  
Discipline: Dance

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Lily Cai instructs dancers in her company.  
Still image from SPARK story, 2007.

## SECTION I - OVERVIEW

### SUBJECT

Lily Cai

### GRADE RANGES

K-12

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Dance, language arts, and world history

### OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the work of Bay Area choreographer Lily Cai and her company, The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company. Students will learn about Cai's aesthetic and her blending of traditional Chinese dance with contemporary dance forms, as well as the subject matter that inspires her to create her dance pieces. Students will improvise and explore props and express emotions with their bodies, as well as reflect on the idea of dance as a tool to portray historical events.

### STORY SYNOPSIS

Bay Area Chinese-American choreographer Lily Cai recently created a piece entitled "Red Typhoon," that premiered at the Cowell Theater in San Francisco in April of 2007. This dance explores the Cultural Revolution in China, as the world marks its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Spark catches a glimpse of Lily Cai's company, her dancers, and her creative process.

### 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 choreographer Lily Cai and her company's work  
To have students explore dance and write about and discuss the portrayal of history through art

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story on Lily Cai on DVD or VHS and related equipment or a computer with internet access, navigation software, speakers, and a sound card.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Paper and pencils  
CD player and musical selections  
Dance props such as ribbons and lengths of fabric  
Children's books (see pages 9-10)

### INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic – control of one's own body, control in handling objects  
Interpersonal – the ability to apprehend the feelings and intentions of others  
Intrapersonal – awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations  
Linguistic – the ability to use language masterfully to express oneself rhetorically or poetically  
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).

### MEDIA MATTERS

The following Spark stories can be used for compare/contrast purposes:  
*Chitresh Das*, Kathak dancer  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=16485>  
*Carlos Baron*, Political playwright  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=16320>

## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

Since 1988, Lily Cai and her dance company have presented works in the Bay Area and beyond related to the Chinese female experience. In her choreography, Cai strives to portray contrasts of beauty and power, strength and struggle. Spark captures the final rehearsal period for Cai's, "Red Typhoon," which premiered in April 2007 at the Cowell Theater at Fort Mason in San Francisco.

"Red Typhoon" is based on Cai's personal experience in China, when Mao Tse-tung's Red Guards would ambush homes, arresting hundreds of innocent people they deemed counterrevolutionary. This piece explores the Chinese Cultural Revolution, while marking its 40th anniversary and serving as a memorial to those who suffered during this time.

Integrating traditional Chinese dance, both folk and classical, with Western ballet and modern dance, Cai creates highly visual works of art that incorporate costumes, props and multimedia imagery that connect the past and present. Many of her productions are set to original music by Bay Area composer and Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company music director, Gang Situ.

Cai encourages her dancers to fully embody the movement and emotions related to the context of her choreography. To fulfill its founder's artistic vision, the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company is composed of only female dancers of Chinese heritage.

Lily Cai is originally from Shanghai, China, and was a principal dancer with the Shanghai Opera House. She moved to the Bay Area in 1983. Recent works include "She: Portraits of the Chinese Woman," "Si Ji (Four Seasons)" and "Bamboo Girls." Her honors and accomplishments include commissions for the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival and the Santa Fe

Opera and two Bay Area Isadora Duncan Dance Awards.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Lily Cai's work is grounded in traditional Chinese Dance. China has a rich and long history in terms of dance, including dances of the court and folk dances. Characteristics of these dances include stylized gestures, circular movements, use of props, movement accents in relation to the music, and an emphasis on hand and eye coordination. Today, traditional dances are still preserved through classes and performances all over the world. <sup>1</sup>

In many dance forms around the world, choreographers, teachers, performers, and students are confronting and addressing the topics of preservation, tradition, change, and innovation. Lily Cai links past and future by blending together traditional and modern dance techniques.

Lily Cai is one of a growing number of choreographers who are exploring the idea of "fusion" – the blending of two or more dance styles. Companies such as HT Chen, Nai-Ni Chen, and Shen Wei Dance Arts are, like Cai, bringing together Chinese dance and contemporary dance forms. Other noteworthy choreographers incorporating the idea of fusion include Ronald K. Brown, who blends modern and African dance, and Akram Khan, who mixes Indian Kathak dance with contemporary practice.

While some dancers strive to preserve traditional dance forms and pass them on from generation to generation, dance fusion focuses on the idea of creating something new that connects past and present. The larger concepts in fusion dance include:

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<sup>1</sup> Na-Ni Chen Dance Company, [The Art of Chinese Dance: A Study Guide](#)

bridging cultures and highlighting multiple perspectives, celebrating and honoring one's personal background while at the same time creating new works in the present, and using a wider palette of dance vocabulary and tools by tapping into more than one dance form

Today, we see choreographers looking inward and discovering what informs their work -- where they grew up, their cultural background and cultural aesthetic, and other movement forms that contribute to their dancing, such as rock climbing, gymnastics, and martial arts. For example, choreographer Sue Li-Jue's Bay Area-based *Facing East Dance and Music* focuses on the Asian voice in contemporary dance, not just traditional art forms.

In today's dance world, a current trend towards fusion of new and old dance forms allows choreographers to present contemporary perspectives on diverse histories.

## RESOURCES – TEXTS

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company. [The Art of Chinese Dance: A Study Guide](#). Published online at [www.nainichen.org/Tradition/ACDStudyGuide.pdf](http://www.nainichen.org/Tradition/ACDStudyGuide.pdf).

Tierhey, Ron. "Red Typhoon & The Chinese Cultural Revolution." April 2007. Published online at <http://www.fortmason.org/features/2007/04/feature04.shtml>.

## RESOURCES – TEACHING DANCE TO CHILDREN

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, and Spirit in Action: A Teacher's Guide to Creative Dance](#). Berkeley: Luna Kids Dance, 2003.

## RESOURCES – WEB SITES

Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company  
[www.ccpsf.org](http://www.ccpsf.org)

\*Lily Cai's Chinese Dance Company is available for school performances

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company  
[www.nainichen.org](http://www.nainichen.org)

## BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival  
[www.worldartswest.org](http://www.worldartswest.org)  
Occurs every June in San Francisco

Chinese New Year Parade  
<http://www.chineseparade.com/>

## SECTION III – VOCABULARY

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

**Choreographer**

A person who creates and crafts dances

**Choreography**

A set dance that can be repeated

**Dance Company**

A group of people comprised of an artistic director, choreographer, and dancers that work together to create dance performances

**Dance Form**

A phrase used to describe different kinds of dance such as modern dance, tap dance, Chinese dance, and dance theater

**Opening Night**

The first performance in a series of performances for a dance company

**Props**

Items used within a dance, such as ribbon, pieces of fabric, and chairs

**Technique**

Characteristic movements and a particular philosophy of movement set by a dance teacher or choreographer

## SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

#### Exploring Props

Students of all ages love playing with, improvising, and dancing with props such as fabric, scarves, hula hoops, ribbons, balls, and baskets. Investigate what items your school’s physical education teacher and music teacher have on hand. The book The Squiggle by Carole Lexa Schaefer can be a springboard for this activity in K-2 classrooms.

Give the students a few minutes to improvise freely with selected props. Call out what you see, for example: “I see fast moving ribbons, skipping with a ribbon, a ribbon moving like a snake on the ground.” You can also capture on chart paper what you see in this improvisation. Capturing these ideas shows the students that there are many ways to explore body movements with props.

Next, form a circle and do a simple “follow the leader” activity with the prop, giving several students a chance to lead.

Your prop exploration can conclude with the class choreographing a simple dance, incorporating five or more different ways to move with the prop. Capture the dance by noting key words and simple sketches on chart paper. Add music. Practice as a whole class, and then perform for each other in small groups. For example, a ribbon dance might include:

1. Moving ribbon up and down
2. Spinning slowly
3. Shaking ribbon
4. Tiptoeing around the room
5. Stretching ribbon above head, and rock side to side
6. Turning with ribbon still stretched overhead
7. Slowly melting to the ground
8. Throwing ribbon in the air, and collapsing into the ground at the same time as your ribbon

#### Expressing Emotions in Face and Body

The dancers in Lily Cai’s company are required to be strong technically as well as able to express emotions with their whole body.

Start by reading a book to your class about various emotions, or brainstorm a list of emotions. Older students can brainstorm a list of 8-12 emotions and create an accompanying sketch of the related facial expression.

Children’s books about emotions include:

On Monday When It Rained by Cherryl

Kachenmeister

L is for Loving by Ken Wilson-Max

My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss

C is for Curious by Woodleigh Hubbard

Voices of the Heart by Ed Young

Begin with students exploring various feelings with their facial expressions. If you have hand mirrors or large mirrors in your school, place the students in front of the mirror to watch their faces at work.

Next, ask students to convey an emotion with just their hands or their arms. *How can you show sadness with the way your arm moves? How can you express joy with your arms? Do you move faster or slower, smoother or sharper?*

Lastly, have the students use their whole body and freeze in a position (shape) to convey each emotion. Encourage the students to think about their level (low, middle, high), the position of their limbs and back (straight, bent, twisted, curved), and the size of their shape (small, medium, or large.)

More advanced students can improvise with the list of emotions and different kinds of walks. For example, ask them to show examples of a happy walk, a nervous walk, or an angry walk.

## RELATED STANDARDS

### DANCE

Kindergarten

2.1 Create movements that reflect a variety of personal experiences

Grade 1

2.2 Respond in movement to a wide range of stimuli

Grade 2

5.1 Use literature to inspire dance ideas

Grade 3

2.2 Improvise and select multiple possibilities to solve a given movement problem

Grade 4

2.3 Describe, discuss, and analyze the process used by choreographers to create a dance

Grade 5

2.5 Convey a wide range of feeling and expression through gestures, posture, and movement.

Grade 7

5.1 Identify and use different sources to generate ideas for dance compositions

Grades 9 -12, proficient

3.3 Explain how works of dance by major choreographers communicate universal themes and sociopolitical issues in their historical/cultural contexts

### Learning more about Chinese culture

Find a variety of books in your school's library or your local public library to share with your students.

Some books appropriate for K-3 classes include:

Red is a Dragon by Roseanne Thong

Round is a Mooncake: A Book of Shapes by

Roseanne Thong

One is a Drummer: A Book of Numbers by

Roseanne Thong and Grace Lin

Cat and Rat: The Legend of the Chinese Zodiac by

Ed Young

The Dancing Dragon by Marcia Vaughn

Lion Dancer: Ernie Wan's Chinese New Year by

Kate Waters

Also, try tapping into your school community to seek out families with Chinese backgrounds who could visit your class and share information about Chinese culture and customs.

### Stepping into the choreographer's shoes

Lily Cai chose the Cultural Revolution as an significant historical and personal event to convey through dance. If you had to choreograph a piece about history, what event would you choose and why? Would you use props to help tell the story? What would the emotion of the dance be? What kind of music would you select? List 6 action words

to describe the movement in the dance (marching, pacing, falling, running, etc.)

### Reflecting on Chinese History

Ask students to first brainstorm what they know about the Cultural Revolution in China that started in 1966. How does Lily Cai's dance "Red Typhoon" capture the feeling of this period in Chinese history? What is the feeling? Describe Cai's use of movement, props, color, and music.

Have students reflect on his/her own and then discuss in small groups of 2-4 students. Then discuss as a whole class.

## RELATED STANDARDS

### HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE

Grade 10

10.9 Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world

4. Analyze the Chinese Civil War, the rise of Mao Tse-tung, and the subsequent political and economic upheavals in China

### ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 6

1.0 Writing Strategies

Students write clear, coherent, and focused essays. The writing exhibits student's awareness of the audience and purpose.

Grades 9 – 12, proficient

1.0 Writing Strategies

Students convey coherent and focused essays that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly reasoned argument. The writing demonstrates students' awareness of the audience and purpose. Students progress through the stages of the writing process as needed.

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>.