

Hello!

The content here is for the first and seventh month of our Contemporary Lesson Plan Sets that go along with our Once Upon a Ballet Story Ballet Curriculum for ages 7 to 12 years old. In the first month you teach these materials, you'll want to introduce the material to your students. The goal here is exposure. In the second month you teach them, you'll be revisiting these same materials. You'll want to further refine your students' technique and their grasp of the concepts taught the second time around.

The ballet side of this curriculum is all about teaching ballet through the stories of classical ballet. When we decided to add a contemporary element to the curriculum, it seemed fitting to continue our historical approach and follow the pioneering artists of modern and contemporary dance.

This curriculum follows six artists in total. Our first artist is Merce Cunningham. We chose Merce Cunningham because his movements are very balletic in form. But that doesn't mean this month's contemporary is ballet by any means. Merce Cunningham saw dance as an art separate from music and other art. Dance and music could exist side by side, but one did not need the other. This was shift in mindset from what was accepted at the time. For him, dance was purely about movement; it did not need to be connected with music, stories, or feelings.

While his movements may look balletic, there are key differences. Arms don't always "go" with the legs like we'd expect in ballet. He had a very strong emphasis on lines and shape. Movement might include unexpected changes weight and direction. Merce Cunningham also applied a principle called the uncertainty principle. With this, he would splice and shuffle together choreography from existing works, and put them to different music in a performance.

We hope you and your dancers enjoy this introduction to contemporary dance. If you'd like to share more resources with students, you'll find them below. You'll also find recommended music links and class lesson plans. Contemporary A is designed for ages 7 to 10 (correlating with our Ballet 1A and Ballet 1B levels). Contemporary B is designed for ages 9 to 12 (correlating with our Ballet 2 and Ballet 3 levels).

Rooting for you, friend!

*Ashley*

Ashley Hartford, Director of Once Upon a Ballet

## Resources + References

[Merce Cunningham Trust](#)

[Merce Cunningham \(Wikipedia\)](#)

## Recommended Music

**World Percussion for Modern Dance Volume 3**

[Spotify](#) | [Apple Music](#) | [Amazon Music](#)

## Videos

[Merce Cunningham Video Playlist for Inspiration](#)

[OUB Contemporary Lesson Plans Video Playlist: Months 1 and 7 - Merce Cunningham-Inspired](#)

## Warmup (7-10 Year Olds)

### **BOUNCES** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first position:

- Head bounces with arms in low first, looking down and elongating the spine. 8x (Legs stay straight.)
- 4 pliés with a straight torso.
- Curve back in port de bras hold.
- 2 pliés with a flat back.

Turned out second position:

- Head bounces to the side with the top arm reaching overhead. 4x on each side. (Legs stay straight.)
- 4 pliés with a straight torso.
- Curve back in port de bras hold.
- 2 plié with a flat back.

### **TOE FLICKS** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first position:

- Put weight on the ball of the foot, using the supporting leg to lift the toe off the ground and utilize the toe ball heel to place back on the ground. Right left, 4x

### **TWISTS** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first

- Keeping legs straight and arms down, twist torso left and then right 8x (4 on each side)
- Add in plie once twist is completed to the side (twist, plie, stretch, come back to center 8x (4 on each side)

### **TENDU & DEGAGE** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first position

- 2 Tendus forward with right foot plie and stretch 2 degages with right foot plie and stretch
- 2 tendus forward with left foot, plie and stretch. 2 degages with left foot, plie and stretch.

In turned out first position

- 2 Tendus forward with right foot plie and stretch 2 degages with right foot plie and stretch
- 2 tendus forward with left foot, plie and stretch. 2 degages with left foot, plie and stretch.
- 4 Tendus side with right foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with right foot, plie and stretch
- 4 tendus side with left foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with left foot, plie and stretch.

### **RONDE DE JAMBE** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first position

- 2 ronde de jambes slow with a pointed toe (straight legs)
- 2 ronde de jambes slow with flexed foot (legs in plie)

In turned out first position

- 2 ronde de jambes slow with a pointed toe (straight legs)
- 2 ronde de jambes slow with flexed foot (legs in plie)

### **PASSE** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first position

- Touch side of right foot to right ankle, then side of foot to right knee, then to ankle, then to floor 4x
- Touch side of left foot to left ankle, then side of foot to left knee, then to ankle, then to floor 4x

In turned out first position

- Touch side of right foot to right ankle, then side of foot to right knee, then to ankle, then to floor 4x
- Touch side of left foot to left ankle, then side of foot to left knee, then to ankle, then to floor 4x

## Cunningham Across the Floor (7-10 Year Olds)

[Video Link](#)

### CHASSE/ARABESQUE

- Starting at diagonal, go downstage 4 Chasses in first position with arms windmilling around, lean weight into arabesque with arms out to side keeping balance, switch directions doing chasses to upstage right.

### SKIPS

- Passe jump up to look up with arms back, next pass jump look down wrap leg

### CHAINE TURNS

- Putting one hand over head and other arm wrapped around body 2 chaine turns go into plie flatback throwing arms forward and repeat

### WALKS

- 2 walks R, L, on the next right there's s plie and reach front slide back up, 2 walks reach right, 2 walks reach left repeat

### RUNS (as a class or in two groups)-

- Exercise the weight of direction by calling out "turn back, face mirror, left, and right."

## Cunningham Dance Exercise (7-10 Year Olds)

### BALLET BOGGLE - [Video Link](#)

On the surface, Cunningham's style looks balletic, but his motives are completely different. There will be unexpected changes of weight or direction, arms that don't "go" with legs.

Have each student pick out a different ballet term. You can pass out ballet cards or write them out and give assignments. They are in charge of changing the ballet move somehow (flexed feet, body lean, different arms) and create 4 counts with it. Teach the class and add it to a sequence of choreography.

## Cunningham Warmup (9-12 Year Olds)

### **BOUNCES** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first position

- Head bounces with arms in low first looking down elongating the spine 8x (legs stay straight)
- 4 plies straight torso
- Curve back in portabra hold
- 4 Plie with flat back
- Roll up slow

Turned out Second

- Head bounces to side with top arm reaching overhead 8x each side(legs stay straight)
- 4 plies straight torso
- Curve back in portabra
- 4 plies flat back
- Roll up slow

Turned Out Second on Diagonal

- Head bounces to side with top arm reaching overhead 8x each side(legs stay straight)
- 4 plies straight torso
- Curve back in portabra
- 4 plies flat back
- Roll up slow

### **TOE FLICKS** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first position

- Put weight on the ball of the foot, using the supporting leg to lift the toe off the ground and utilize the toe ball heel to place back on the ground. Right 4x, Left 4x

In turned out first position

- Put weight on the ball of the foot, using the supporting leg to lift the toe off the ground and utilize the toe ball heel to place back on the ground. Right 4x, Left 4x

### **TWISTS** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first position

- Keeping legs straight and arms down, twist torso left and then right 8x (4 on each side)
- Add in plie once twist is completed to the side (twist, plie, stretch, come back to center 8x (4 on each side)
- Add in curved back to twist plie ( twist, plie, curve back, stretch back up, come back to center)

### **TENDU & DEGAGE** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first

- 4 Tendus forward with right foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with right foot, plie and stretch
- 4 tendus forward with left foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with left foot, plie and stretch.
- 4 Tendus back with right foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with right foot, plie and stretch
- 4 tendus back with left foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with left foot, plie and stretch.

In Turned out first position

- 4 Tendus forward with right foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with right foot, plie and stretch
- 4 tendus forward with left foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with left foot, plie and stretch.
- 4 Tendus side with right foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with right foot, plie and stretch
- 4 tendus side with left foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with left foot, plie and stretch.
- 4 Tendus back with right foot, plie and stretch. 4 degages with right foot, plie and stretch
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In parallel first position

- 2 ronde de jambes slow with a pointed toe (straight legs)
- 2 ronde de jambes slow with flexed foot (legs in plie)
- Stretch leg bringing foot off the ground, point and grande ronde de jambe 1x

In turned out first position

- 2 ronde de jambes slow with a pointed toe (straight legs)
- 2 ronde de jambes slow with flexed foot (legs in plie)
- Stretch leg bringing foot off the ground, point and grande ronde de jambe 1x

## **PASSE** - [Video Link](#)

In parallel first position with faster 2x slow, 2x fast

- Touch side of right foot to right ankle, then side of foot to right knee, then to ankle, then to floor 4x
- Touch side of left foot to left ankle, then side of foot to left knee, then to ankle, then to floor 4x

In turned out first position 2x slow, 2x fast

- Touch side of right foot to right ankle, then side of foot to right knee, then to ankle, then to floor 4x
- Touch side of left foot to left ankle, then side of foot to left knee, then to ankle, then to floor 4x

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