

Hello!

The content here is for the second and eighth 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. This month's artist is Martha Graham. For Martha Graham, the purpose of dance is communication rather than telling a story or projecting an idea. It is to communicate through movement. Her dances were often dramatizations of conflict between the individual and society, highlighting the human experience and our inner nature.

Because the purpose of dance was to communicate, each movement or pose had a distinct meaning. Her technique can be characterized by contractions and releases, bounces, breathing, swings, long leans, and stretches. The contraction and release, in particular, are symbolic of the dichotomies of life—the contrast between desire and duty, fear and courage, or weakness and strength.

Martha Graham was such an iconic figure in the dance world. The following lesson plans have been inspired by her work and adapted to younger, beginning age groups. 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

[Martha Graham History and Company](#)

[Martha Graham \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Graham Technique \(Wikipedia\)](#)

## Recommended Music

**Music for Modern Dance Graham Technique Vol. 1**

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

## Videos

[Martha Graham Video Playlist for Inspiration](#)

[OUB Contemporary Lesson Plans Videos: Months 2 and 8 - Martha Graham-Inspired](#)

## Warmup (7-10 Years Old)

[Warmup Video](#)

[Leans Clarification Video](#)

### **BOUNCES**

- 4 bounces in butterfly, 4 with straight legs forward (with flexed feet), 4 with straddle split.
- Butterfly position, bounce 2x in center with round back over, snake into flat back and come back up 4x.

### **LEANS**

- Sit in a straddle position with both feet pointed. Bring the arms up to 5th position as you bend the right knee and flex the right foot. Next, lean toward the right leg (twisting just slightly so your upper body is in line with your right leg, almost facing front instead of facing the leg as you bend) as you stretch your knee and point your foot. Repeat, ending leaning over your right leg. Swoop around the middle to the left leg, then back to the middle and then right leg. Sit up to center.
- Repeat the leans in straddle on the left.

### **BREATHING**

- Sit on your bottom your legs straight in front of you. Breathe in with the knees coming to the chest. Breathe out, lengthening your legs and twisting to the right side. Bring the knees in (breathing in) and exhale with the legs extending and twisting to the left. Finally, breathe in pulling your knees up, and breathe out lengthening your legs and stretching forward. Inhale to sit up and exhale to lay on your back.
- Breath and Swings: Tuck the legs and twist so your lower body is lying on the right side. Swing the top leg (left leg) in a front and back attitude with your foot along the floor. While swinging the leg, let your diaphragm contract and release with your breath. Do 4 sets of swings. Let the motion roll you over to the other side. Repeat 4x.
- Bring yourself up to stretch in a double attitude on both sides.

### **POINT/FLEX**

- Sitting with your legs stretched in front of you and your back straight, point and flex the feet 8x.
- In a butterfly position flex and point feet 8x.
- Flex and point your feet with your right leg in butterfly and left leg straight 4x.
- Flex and point your feet with your left leg in butterfly and right leg straight 4x.
- Bring both legs into the butterfly, grab the feet and lift them in the air balancing in a straddle or a boat pose (legs together).

### **BATTEMENTS**

- Laying on your back execute 4 battements with the right leg and 4 battements with the left leg.

### **PLIE WITH HIGH CONTRACTION**

- Begin in parallel. Plié, bringing the arms up to a 5th position and open to a 2nd position with the palms facing up. Your focus is up as you're arching your upper back. Contract the upper back and arms change to a curved 2nd position with the palms facing down. Lengthen the spine to a flat back. Come up to standing.
- Repeat in turned out first position, parallel second, and turned out second.

## Traveling (7-10 Years Old)

[Traveling Video](#)

### TRAVELING

- Communicate an experience getting up and getting ready for the day.
- Run, run, first arabesque en l'air to the right, bend the arm so the elbow is in the air having gravity take/pull you to the other side. Repeat.
- Run, run, first arabesque en l'air to the right, bring the left leg into fondu to coupe in back with concave bring back foot to run to repeat left.

## Exercise: Dichotomy through Dance (7-10 Years Old)

[Exercise Video](#)

*“The contraction, or strong pulling back and curving of the torso, and the release of this movement by returning to a straight torso are symbolic of the dichotomies in life. It is the contrast between desire and duty, between fear and courage, between weakness and strength.” - Martha Graham*

A quick note: At this age, the act of creating their own movement and performing it in front of a group in a charades-type style may be difficult for some. Be encouraging to your students. At this age, it is fine to give students help if they can't think of what movements to do to communicate their assigned dichotomy word in the first half of the exercise. (For their 8-count choreography in pairs, however, do encourage each pair to come up with movements on their own.)

### WEEK 1

Stick a post-it to a dancer's back with one of the following words on it. Have them guess their dichotomy by students acting out their word for them. Then, as a class, help each other find one another's partners. Once they are paired up, ask who is the contraction and who is the release. Have each pair create an 8-count movement phrase using both words.

#### Dichotomies:

Sleeping/Awake

Happy/Sad

Strong/Weak

Lost/Found

Captured/Free

Fear/Courage

Open/Close

Hot/Cold

In/Out

Up/Down

Wrong/Right

Try/Fail

### WEEK 2

Give out the remaining dichotomy words (the ones you didn't get to the previous week) to each student. This time, each student knows their word. They'll each go across the floor doing a traveling movement to act out their word. Next, students will try to guess who their dichotomy pair is. (For example, if one person traveled across as "try", another may have traveled across as "fail". The two students may have recognized as they watched each other travel that they are each other's dichotomies. If needed, help student pairs find each other. Have each pair create an 8-count movement phrase using both words.

## **WEEK 3**

First, pick several emotions from the list below. Use only facial features for the rest of the class to guess “how you’re feeling”.

Next, have students travel across the floor. Call out an emotion and suggested step. Students travel across the floor while making facial expressions and doing a movement to represent that emotion.

### Emotions:

Excited—jump

Sad—cry

Worried—pace

Frustrated—stomp

Tired—sleep

Hungry—eat

Scared—run and hide

Surprised—sharp action, startle

Disgusted—convulse

Peaceful—walking

### Week 4:

Assign an emotion from week 3 to each student. Have them make a facial expression (like you did the previous week) and the rest of the class guesses “how you’re feeling”.

Next, have students go across the room 2 at a time. Give students an emotion/action to travel with. Give each pair of 2 a different emotion/action. See if the rest of the class can guess the emotion as each pair travels across the floor. Continue until each pair has had a chance to try several different emotions/actions.

Optional: Give student pairs only the emotion and allow them to come up with their own movements and facial expressions to communicate their assigned emotion.

## Warmup (9-12 Years Old)

[Warmup Video](#)

[Leans Clarification Video](#)

### BOUNCES

- 4 bounces in butterfly, 4 with straight legs forward (with flexed feet), 4 with straddle split.
- Butterfly position, pulse 2x in center with round back over, snake into flat back and come back up. Repeat right and left. Repeat the whole sequence.

### LEANS

- Bring the right arm up to 5th position while leaning to the left, bending the right knees and flexing the right foot. Lean toward the right leg (twisting just slightly so your upper body is in line with your right leg, almost facing front instead of facing the leg as you bend) as you stretch your knee and point your foot. Lean to the left with both arms in 5th, bending the right knee and keeping the right foot pointed. Lean toward the right leg while stretching the knee like before. Swoop around the middle to the left leg, then back to the middle and then right leg. Go past the right leg, place the right arm on the floor behind you, lifting your hips up, and continuing to swoop your left arm around to 5th position.
- Repeat the leans in the straddle position to the left.
- In a double attitude sitting position (right leg in front), twist to the front leg then the back leg. Extend the back leg to straight and twist front and back.
- Bring both legs to the side and slowly roll to the back. Lay straight.
- Lift the heart 2x then come all the way up bending the knees. Change to double attitude right, bring it together, then double attitude left.
- Repeat the attitude section to the left.
- With the left knee on the ground and the right knee up in front, lunge forward, come back with straight torso (still kneeling on the left knee), lunge to the right. Repeat 2x. Bring both knees together and repeat on the other side.

### BREATHING

- Sit on your bottom your legs straight in front of you. Breathe in with the knees coming to the chest. Breathe out, lengthening your legs and twisting to the right side. Bring the knees in (breathing in) and exhale with the legs extending and twisting to the left. Finally, breathe in pulling your knees up, and breathe out lengthening your legs and stretching forward. Inhale to sit up and exhale to lay on your back.
- Breath and Swings: Tuck the legs and twist so your lower body is lying on the right side. Swing the top leg (left leg) in a front and back attitude with your foot along the floor. While swinging the leg, let your diaphragm contract and release with your breath. Do 4 sets of swings. Let the motion roll you over to the other side. Repeat 4x.
- Bring yourself up to stretch in a double attitude on both sides.

### POINT/FLEX

- Sitting with your legs stretched in front of you and your back straight, point and flex the feet 8x.
- In a butterfly position flex and point feet 8x.
- Flex and point your feet with your right leg in butterfly and left leg straight 4x.
- Flex and point your feet with your left leg in butterfly and right leg straight 4x.
- Bring both legs into the butterfly, grab ahold of feet and lift them in the air balancing in a straddle or a boat pose (legs together). Come up to standing.

## BATTEMENTS

- Laying on back execute 4 battements with right leg. Roll backward to your upper back with your knees bent, Roll forward to stand on your right leg. Hand should be on the floor and left leg extends to a standing split.

## PLIE WITH HIGH CONTRACTION

- Begin in parallel. Plié, bringing the arms up to a 5th position and open to a 2nd position with the palms facing up. Your focus is up as you're arching your upper back. Contract the upper back and arms change to a curved 2nd position with the palms facing down. Lengthen the spine to a flat back. Come up to standing.
- Repeat in turned out first position, parallel second, and turned out second.
- Also repeat with the torso at the diagonal in a turned out second position—toward the diagonal the right side then to the left side.

## Traveling (9-12 Years Old)

### [Traveling Video](#)

- Communicate an experience getting up and getting ready for the day.
- Run, run, first arabesque en l'air to the right, bend the arm so the elbow is in the air having gravity take/pull you to the other side. Repeat.
- Run, run, first arabesque en l'air to the right, bring the left leg into fondu to coupe in back with concave bring back foot to run to repeat left. After 2 sequences, when you fondu to coupe, tuck and roll to stand up.

## Exercise: Dichotomy through Dance (9-12 Years Old)

### [Exercise Video](#)

*“The contraction, or strong pulling back and curving of the torso, and the release of this movement by returning to a straight torso are symbolic of the dichotomies in life. It is the contrast between desire and duty, between fear and courage, between weakness and strength.” - Martha Graham*

## WEEK 1

Stick a post-it to a dancer's back with one of the following words on it. Have them guess their dichotomy by students acting out their word for them. Then, as a class, help each other find one another's partners. Once they are paired up, ask who is the contraction and who is the release. Have each pair create an 8-count movement phrase using both words.

### Dichotomies:

Sleeping/Awake

Happy/Sad

Strong/Weak

Lost/Found

Captured/Free

Fear/Courage

Open/Close

Hot/Cold

In/Out

Up/Down

Wrong/Right

Try/Fail

## WEEK 2

Give out the remaining dichotomy words (the ones you didn't get to the previous week) to each student. This time, each student knows their word. They'll each go across the floor doing a traveling movement to act out their word. Next, students will try to guess who their dichotomy pair is. (For example, if one person traveled across as "try", another may have traveled across as "fail". The two students may have recognized as they watched each other travel that they are each other's dichotomies. If needed, help student pairs find each other. Have each pair create an 8-count movement phrase using both words.

## WEEK 3

First, pick several emotions from the list below. Use only facial features for the rest of the class to guess "how you're feeling".

Next, have students travel across the floor. Call out an emotion and suggested step. Students travel across the floor while making facial expressions and doing a movement to represent that emotion.

### Emotions:

Excited—jump

Sad—cry

Worried—pace

Frustrated—stomp

Tired—sleep

Hungry—eat

Scared—run and hide

Surprised—sharp action, startle

Disgusted—convulse

Peaceful—walking

### Week 4:

Assign an emotion from week 3 to each student. Have them make a facial expression (like you did the previous week) and the rest of the class guesses "how you're feeling".

Next, have students go across the room 2 at a time. Give students an emotion/action to travel with. Give each pair of 2 a different emotion/action. See if the rest of the class can guess the emotion as each pair travels across the floor. Continue until each pair has had a chance to try several different emotions/actions.

Optional: Give student pairs only the emotion and allow them to come up with their own movements and facial expressions to communicate their assigned emotion.