

Hello!

The content here is for the fourth and tenth 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.

This curriculum follows six artists in total. This month's artist is Lester Horton. Lester Horton was interested in clearly defined shapes and how a dancer can use energy and space to move through those shapes. His technique was diverse. It was shaped by anatomical studies and included Native American, Japanese, and even Afro-Caribbean dance elements. Horton began choreographing in 1931. By 1932, he formed his own dance company called the Lester Horton Dancers. The company had several iterations: the Lester Horton California Ballets and then the Horton Dancers, which lasted until 1944. He also choreographed musicals including Moonlight in Havana in 1942 and Arthur Lubin's Phantom of the Opera in 1943. Unfortunately, Horton died, unexpectedly of a heart attack in 1953. Alvin Ailey, a company member of Horton's took over Horton's company at the time—Dance Theater, but Ailey moved to New York City in 1958 and started the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Horton Technique would be taught at The Ailey School and would be the foundation of many of Ailey's works (including Revelations, which is included in this month's video playlist).

Elements of Horton Technique can also be seen today in many jazz warm-ups—movements such as flat backs, lateral stretches, tilt lines, and lunges, for example. The technique develops strength and flexibility. There is a key focus on lengthening the spine and hamstrings. There is an emphasis, too, on developing musicality and performance quality. The technique also incorporates lyrical and circular movements that focus on stretching in opposite directions.

Lester Horton was a pioneer in early modern dance and helped to shape a path for future modern and contemporary artists. 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+ (correlating with our Ballet 1A and Ballet 1B levels). Contemporary B is designed for ages 9+ (correlating with our Ballet 2 and Ballet 3 levels).

Rooting for you, friend!

*Ashley*

Ashley Hartford, Director of Once Upon a Ballet

## Resources + References

[Lester Horton \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Lester Horton \(Alvin Ailey\)](#)

## Recommended Music

[Lester Horton Music Playlist in Spotify](#)

## Videos

[Lester Horton Video Playlist for Inspiration](#)

[OUB Contemporary Lesson Plans Videos: Months 4 and 10 - Lester Horton-Inspired](#)

## Warmup (Ages 7+)

Please note: Flat backs are a signature in Horton Technique. We typically think of flat backs as bending over 90 degrees so that our backs are parallel with the floor. In this young age group, have them bend forward over just 45 degrees to start. (So they will be bending over half as far as what is normal for a flat back.) This will allow them to develop strength and length in their backs without placing strain on them.

### [Warmup Video](#)

#### **SPINE ARTICULATION / Plié**

- Tuck the head, roll down in a parallel second plié, and place the hands on the floor.
- Bend and straighten the legs 2x. Roll Up.
- Roll down and back up twice, faster.
- Repeat in parallel first.

#### **FLAT BACK PLIES**

- Flat back over with hands at your side.
- Bring your arms out to second, keeping the head aligned with the spine.
- Two pliés, raising the arms above the head as you stand up vertically.
- Repeat.

#### **RELEVÉS**

- 4 relevés with the arms starting low by the sides and lifting 30, 90, and 180 degrees.
- Release and recover.
- Repeat.

#### **LUNGES / TWISTS**

- Lunge forward in a parallel 4th so the front leg: plié, straighten, plié straighten.
- Repeat the plié/straighten 2x with the back leg.
- With both legs straight, twist to open up to a turned out second position.
- Lunge right 2x, left 2x.
- Twist, tucking in the knee and coming back up.
- Repeat the lunges: left 2x, right 2x.
- Twist in the other direction, tucking the knee and coming back up.

#### **SIDE LEANS**

- Continue facing the side of the room.
- Bring both arms up above the head and lean to the side, turn the torso parallel to the ground in a flat back, twist to return to leaning to the side, and come up.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Repeat all in a more fluid motion.

## Exercise: Feel the Beat and Release Your Feet (Ages 7+)

### [Exercise Video](#)

Introduce this exercise by putting on different types of music and having students free dance to them. Encourage your students to notice how they feel, to express emotion, and to move slower or faster depending on the music. With the younger 7+ age group, this can be done freeze dance style. Every time students freeze, change the music. It could be very different genres of music as well. For example, play classical music, pause, then play hip hop music. Play sad music, pause, then play happy music. Play techno, pause, then play tranquil music.

## Traveling (Ages 7+)

### Part 1

Continue the previous exercise as a traveling activity. Instead of dancing freely around the room, students dance freely while traveling across the floor.

### Traveling Video

### Part 2

Have students learn traveling steps and then repeat those same traveling steps using a different time signature, a more upbeat tempo, or a slower tempo. Have your students feel how the movement should relate to the movement. Should the movement be rigid lines or fluid and flowy?

- Push the arms away as you rond de jambe and lean over to a flat back.
- Walk backwards.
- Step together and turn.
- Jump, land, release, recover.
- Plié as you slide your right leg into second position. Squeeze as you bring your left leg to first position. The arms reach to second then slide up the body to above the head.
- Drop the same arm as the leg you step out on to the side. Raise your opposite leg in a battement side. Enveloppé the leg into a concave passé as you come up and lean toward the passé leg. The arm comes up overhead as you lean toward the passé. Step over with your passé leg. Continue across the floor. Please note: The battement does not have to be high here. It can be 45 to 90 degrees.
- Traveling backward initially: Step back on the downstage leg en fondu and point the upstage foot in a tendu back. Fouetté around to face forward in tendu front. Take three steps forward. Step and pivot to face backward again on fondu on the downstage leg and point the upstage foot in tendu back. You may let dancers keep their arms down by their sides the entire time, or have them raise their arms above their heads in the tendu section and down by their sides as they walk.

## Combination (Ages 7+)

As you move through the above traveling exercises from week to week, begin combining them into a combination. An example combination could be:

- Push the arms away as you rond de jambe and lean over to a flat back.
- Walk backwards for two steps.
- Three steps into a straight leg pencil turn.
- Jump, land, release, recover.

Each week, change the music to your combination and ask students how they might perform the combination differently from the previous week's music selection.

Optional: For week 4, ask your students to select their own music and as a class see how the combination differs with different selections.

## Warmup (Ages 9+)

### [Warmup Video](#)

#### SPINE ARTICULATION / Plié

- Tuck the head, roll down in parallel second plié, and place the hands on the floor.
- Bend and straighten the legs 2x. Roll Up.
- Tuck the head and roll down. Small, medium, and large plié. Roll Up.
- Roll down and back up twice, faster.
- Repeat in parallel first.

#### ROLL THROUGHS

- Tuck the chin and roll down through the spine, flattening the back. Come up with a flat back.
- Repeat 2x.

#### FLAT BACK PLIES

- Flat back over with hands at your side.
- Bring your arms out to second, keeping the head aligned with the spine.
- Two plies. Raise the arms above the head as you stand up vertically.
- Repeat.

#### RELEVÉS

- 4 relevés with the arms starting low by the sides and lifting 30, 90, and 180 degrees.
- Release and recover.
- Repeat.

#### LUNGES / TWISTS

- Lunge forward in a parallel 4th so the front leg: plié, straighten, plié straighten.
- Repeat the plié/straighten 2x with the back leg.
- With both legs straight, twist to open up to a turned out second position.
- Lunge right 2x, left 2x.
- Twist, tucking in the knee *all the way to the ground* and coming back up.
- Repeat the lunges: left 2x, right 2x.
- Twist in the other direction, tucking the knee *all the way to the ground* and coming back up.

#### SIDE LEANS

- Continue facing the side of the room.
- Bring both arms up above the head and lean to the side, turn the torso parallel to the ground in a flat back, twist to return to leaning to the side, and come up.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Repeat all in a more fluid motion.
- Repeat all in a faster motion.
- For added difficulty: Repeat while lifting the opposite side leg up to balance as you lean to the side.

## Exercise: Feel the Beat and Release Your Feet (Ages 9+)

### [Exercise Video](#)

Introduce this exercise by putting on different types of music and having students free dance to them. Encourage your students to notice how they feel, to express emotion, and to move slower or faster depending on the music.

## Traveling (Ages 9+)

### Part 1

Continue the previous exercise as a traveling activity. Instead of dancing freely around the room, students dance freely while traveling across the floor.

### [Traveling Video](#)

### Part 2

Have students learn traveling steps and then repeat those same traveling steps using a different time signature, a more upbeat tempo, or a slower tempo. Have your students feel how the movement should relate to the movement. Should the movement be rigid lines or fluid and flowy?

Encourage the 9+ year old age group to think about the counts as well. You can even have them think about the counts before moving across the floor.

- Push the arms away as you rond de jambe and lean over to a flat back.
- Walk backwards.
- Three steps into a straight leg pencil turn.
- Jump, land, release, recover.
- Plié as you slide your right leg into second position. Squeeze as you bring your left leg to first position into chaîne turns. Increase the number of chaînes each week. The arms reach to second then slide up the body to above the head during the turn(s).
- Drop the same arm as the leg you step out on to the side. Raise your opposite leg in a battement side. Enveloppé the leg into a concave passé as you come up and lean toward the passé leg. The arm comes up overhead as you lean toward the passé. Step over with your passé leg and swivel turn around. Continue across the floor. Please note, the battement leg does not have to be high here. It can be a 90 degree battement.

### Traveling Progression

- Week 1: Traveling backward initially: Step back on the downstage leg en fondu and point the upstage foot in a tendu back. Fouetté around to face forward in tendu front. Take three steps forward. Step and pivot to face backwards again on fondu on the downstage leg and point the upstage foot in tendu back. You may let dancers keep their arms down by their sides the entire time, or have them raise their arms above their heads in the tendu section and down by their sides as they walk.
- Week 2: Same as the previous exercise, but have students extend their leg to a 45 degree height in place of tendu.
- Weeks 3: Same as week 2, but students rise as they fouetté.
- Week 4: Same as week 3, but students sauté in place of the rise as they fouetté.

## Combination (Ages 9+)

As you move through the above traveling exercises from week to week, begin combining them into a combination. An example combination could be:

- Push the arms away as you rond de jambe and lean over to a flat back.
- Walk backwards for two steps.
- Three steps into a straight leg pencil turn.
- Jump, land, release, recover.
- Plié as you slide your right leg into second position. Squeeze as you bring your left leg to first position into chaîne turns. Increase the number of chaînes each week. The arms reach to second then slide up the body to above the head during the turn(s).
- Drop the same arm as the leg you step out on to the side. Raise your opposite leg in a battement side. Enveloppé the leg into a concave passé as you come up and lean toward the passé leg. The arm comes up overhead as you lean toward the passé. Step over with your passé leg and swivel turn around. Continue across the floor. Please note, the battement leg does not have to be high here. It can be a 90 degree battement.

Each week, change the music to your combination and ask students how they might perform the combination differently from the previous week's music selection.

In the final week(s), ask your students to select their own music and as a class see how the combination differs with different selections.