

Activity Plan

<i>Title</i>	Fancy Fencing
<i>Subject</i>	Dance: Connecting
<i>Author</i>	ArtsEdge: Mary Beth Bauernschub <i>Original Writer</i> Ann Reilly <i>Adaptation</i>
<i>Grade level</i>	Grades 6-8
<i>Time duration</i>	60-120 mins
<i>Overview</i>	Stage-fighting, and especially sword-fighting, is important to the plot of many Shakespearean plays. In theatre, fights are based on precise choreography. This lesson introduces students to the art of stage-fighting. After learning basic ballet and stage-fight moves, students view several versions of a fight scene in Hamlet and use their newly gained knowledge to write critical reviews of those scenes.
<i>Objective</i>	Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify and practice several ballet positions and movements• Identify and practice several sword fighting movements and stances• Create a 16-beat movement combining the sword fighting moves• Present their 16-beat sword fight to the class• Read Hamlet (<i>Act V, scene ii</i>)• Observe three different film versions of an excerpt from Hamlet• Write an analysis of the three film versions indicating similarities and differences in movement
<i>Materials</i>	Materials Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Printable• Critical Review• Performance Checklist

Activities and procedures

- [Assessment Rubric](#)

Required Technology

- DVD Player

Technology Notes

Have charged batteries, extension cords on hand as needed

ENGAGE

Shall We Dance?

1. Play a video clip of Act V, scene II, of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. After viewing the video clip, ask the students to describe what they saw. They are likely to respond that they saw two men in a sword fight, fencing or in a duel. Now ask the class were these people fighting or dancing? See how many students make that connection.
2. Tell the students what they watched was a highly choreographed dance. All of the steps and actions that the actors did for the film were planned out and practiced in advance.

BUILD KNOWLEDGE

1. Teach the students that the sport of fencing has its roots in ballet. Explain to the students that to become adept at fencing they must first learn and practice basic ballet moves for balance.
2. Inform the students that ballet terminology comes to us from the French language.
 - *Relevé*: to raise or lift up
 - *Plié*: to bend
 - *Demi-plié*: to bend half way
3. Refer to the 'Ballet Positions Chart or video'. Tell the students that they will be learning and practicing the first through the fourth ballet positions plus lunges and stretches in slow controlled motions.

NOTE: For some students this may be the first time they have been exposed to ballet and may be uncomfortable doing ballet moves. Other students may have negative or misguided ideas about ballet. This can result in lack of participation or inappropriate behavior. Help students to feel comfortable by assuring them that ballet is an activity enjoyed by many people, including professional athletes and that with practice it becomes easier and can enhance their ability to do sports and other more popular kinds of dance.
4. Advise the class that any students who move at a regular speed or get carried away will be removed from the activity.
5. Have students begin in a neutral position. They may use a chair for support. They should stand up straight with hands at side, shoulders down and relaxed chest up, and feet parallel. Tell students to imagine

that a balloon is attached to their chest and head, and it is pulling them upright.

6. Direct the students to warm up the body with the following ballet positions and moves:

First Position : Feet begin parallel, then the hips rotate and the toes turn-out. Heels remain touching. Weight is evenly distributed to each leg.

- *Relevé*: Facing the chair and holding onto it for balance. Lift heels off the floor. The body should remain straight and upright. Hold for eight counts.
- *Demi-plié*: Holding onto the chair for balance, bend the knees. The heels remain on the floor and the body remains straight. Repeat this for eight counts.

Second Position: Starting in *First Position*, move the feet to an open position, shoulder-width apart. Weight is evenly distributed.

- *Relevé*: Facing the chair and holding onto it for balance, lift heels off the floor. The body should remain straight and upright. Hold for eight counts.
- *Demi-plié*: Holding onto the chair for balance, bend the knees. Heels remain on the floor and the body remains straight. Repeat for eight counts.

Third Position: Standing in *Second Position*, point the right foot, and in a small curved move, get the right foot's heel to touch the instep of the left foot. Weight is evenly distributed.

- *Relevé*: Facing the chair and holding onto it for balance, lift heels off the floor. The body should remain straight and upright. Hold for eight counts.
- *Demi-plié*: Holding onto the chair for balance, bend the knees. Heels remain on the floor and the body remains straight. Repeat for eight counts.
- Switch so that the left foot's heel is touching the right foot. Repeat the relevé and demi-plié moves for eight counts each.

Fourth Position: Standing in *Third Position*, take the left foot and slide it about four to six inches away from the right foot's instep. Weight is evenly distributed.

- *Relevé*: Facing the chair and holding onto it for balance, lift heels off the floor. The body should remain straight and upright. Hold for eight counts.
- *Demi-plié*: Holding onto the chair for balance, bend the knees. Heels remain on the floor and the body remains straight. Repeat for eight counts.

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- Switch to the opposite side so that the right foot is six inches away from the left foot's instep with weight evenly distributed. Repeat the relevé and demi-plié moves for eight counts each.

Lunges: While in *Fourth position*, shift to the front foot. The foot slides across the floor, with toe leading, to about 12 inches away from the original Fourth Position. The knee bends deeply, with the knee over the foot, while the foot remains flat. The back leg elongates and the heel presses up with the toes down. Do lunges on the right and left feet holding the position for about 15 seconds. Hands rest on the lunging leg.

Stretch: Conclude this part of the lesson with the following stretching exercises:

Go back to *First Position*. Shake out the right arm, then the left arm. Shake out the right leg and left leg. Slowly roll the spine down so that the body is flopped over from the hip. The head and arms should dangle down like a rag doll. The legs should be bent a little. Slowly roll up, vertebra by vertebra. Repeat one more time.

Go to *Second Position* and inhale, lifting both arms over the head. Slowly exhale as the arms lower. Repeat two more times.

Curve and lead the left arm slowly toward the right side and stretch. Repeat eight times and then repeat on the right side. With both curved arms together, stretch left and right. Finally, curve the left arm over the head going right and the right arm going left across the middle, stretch. Then switch directions. Repeat eight times.

Roll the shoulders slowly front and back. Breathe in with arms raised and release.

7. Check for student understanding. Allow a few moments for students to share their experience trying ballet moves. In particular, if there are any students with previous ballet experience point out how graceful and in balance they were. Invite them to share how perhaps ballet was uncomfortable at first but became easier with practice.

8. Transition the class from ballet to fencing. Tell the students now that they have learned about and practiced the ballet moves they will use this knowledge to learn about fencing. Keep the ballet chart or video available for students to refer as needed as they try the fencing moves

9. Teach students that sword-fighting came into vogue in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries, among Europe's upper classes. After gun powder and firearms made it became impractical for knights to wear armor. Fencing masters taught foot soldiers how to attack and defend themselves.

10. Draw a connection between fencing on the battlefield and fencing on the stage. Explain to the students that in Shakespeare's time, many

plays featured sword fights and battles. The players and apprentices practiced fencing extensively so that it would look real to an audience, but no one would be injured. Today, fight directors teach actors the same safe fight moves that have been practiced in the theatre for hundreds of years. Refer to the 'Fencing Positions Chart/video'.

11. Ask a student volunteer to come forward to model the area of safety for the fencing activity. Explain that the target area is from the shoulders to the hips.

Make the announcement that at no time is any fencing move to target the head or groin. Remind students that when they follow directions well everyone stays safe and can have fun and you'll be more inclined to do more of these special kinds of lessons again in the future.

12. Have students line up in rows with an arm's length distance between themselves and any other student. Students should pretend they are holding a fencing weapon in their dominant hand. Right-handed people should lead with their right foot, left-handed with their left foot. *(Students practice empty-handed in the beginning. Wrapping paper tubes are not recommended to be used as "weapons" at this early stage. Explain to the students that once they practice and create their own moves, they can perform with the tubes.)*

13. Stand in front of the class, and instruct students to mirror your movements. Model the moves in slow motion for safety. Remind students that their knees should always be slightly bent. Introduce the following moves, continually reviewing the moves as you add new ones:

- *Salute* : Stand straight in Third Position with the dominant arm bent close to the body and raised in front of the face. Keep the non-dominant arm straight at the side. The hand goes down and straightens out toward the opponent.
- *En Guard*: Stand straight in Third Position with the dominant arm waist-high, bent, and facing the opponent at a right angle. Keep the other arm shoulder high and bent. That hand is flat and the palm faces the floor. Open the feet to the Fourth Position. The arms remain the same.
- *High*: 'Sword' held about chest high at a diagonal.
- *Low*: 'Sword' held at a diagonal, pointing toward the floor.
- *Thrust*: The arm is extended and the 'sword' is directed toward the opponent's mid-section.
- *Lunge*: Start in Fourth Position, like the lunge in ballet, except to get into it, the feet move starting with the heel first, then the toes. (This is usually a two-step move.) The front knee is over the ankle and the back foot is flat on the floor. The arms are

extended straight and in opposite directions. The dominant arm is thrusting.

- *Retreat:* Start from Fourth Position and as the opponent advances, the move is toe to heel. The arms are straight and extended in opposite directions.
- *Highward:* Stand in Fourth Position. Find the center of the body and raise the dominant arm to about 12 o'clock. Make a semicircle in clockwise motion. Practice this a few times, stopping about 6 o'clock. Then practice moving in a full circle from 12 to 12. Finally practice moving counter clockwise.
- *Loward or Baseward:* Stand in Fourth Position, find the center of the body, and turn from 6 o'clock to 12 o'clock in a curved sweeping motion, moving clockwise. Practice a few times, stopping at 12 o'clock. Then practice moving in a full circle from 6 o'clock to 6 o'clock. Finally, practice moving counterclockwise.
- *Top Hat:* Each student should return to their partner from the earlier "Mirrors" activity. Facing a partner, but at a safe distance, both do a "Highward" move in a full circle, moving clockwise. Where both 'swords' and crosses slightly meet is called "Top Hat." Try meeting at a "Loward" position.
- *Engage:* 'Swords' are touching.
- *Disengage:* 'Swords' separate by both moving counterclockwise. Point 'sword' in a low position.

14. Introduce and read Act V, scene II, of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a famous example of conflict. Explain to the class that they will be watching videos of this scene after they read the text. If the text is not available in the classroom or the local library it can be found at:

- [The Complete Works of Shakespeare](#)
- [William-Shakespeare.info](#)

APPLY

1. Have the 'Fencing Positions Chart/Video' available and briefly review the following:

Go over with the students the importance of a partnership between the actors to make a fight believable.

Review the fencing terminology and positions. Solicit two student volunteers to explain the terms and model the following positions:

- Salute
- En Guard
- High
- Low

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- Thrust
 - Lunge
 - Retreat
 - Highward
 - Loward
 - Baseward
 - Top Hat
 - Engage
 - Disengage

2. Instruct the students how they will use the knowledge they have gained about staged sword fights to be critics of three different interpretations of the fight at the end of *Hamlet*. Questions the students can consider:

- Are the actors in control of their bodies, voices, emotions?
- Are they believable in their characterizations?
- Are they working in partnership to convince us of their contest?
- Are their bodies in balance, does it seem choreographed?

3. Play the Act V Scene ii Hamlet scenes one a time for the students to watch. Give a few minutes for reflection after each version has been shown before beginning the next version of the scene. Pose the question again, are they fighting or dancing?

4. After all three versions have been viewed, give students time to analyze and compile their notes. Each student is to write a critical review of the scenes comparing and contrasting the actor's performances. They should express their opinion as to why one was better than the others, with examples from the films supporting their reasons. Consider the following writer's guidelines for the student writing, or use guidelines of your own:

- Critiques should be between 400 and 600 words.
- Specific details and descriptions make for interesting reading

Quality reviews include the following characteristics:

- Clearly expressed opinions supported by specific examples
 - The reader can imagine the scene from the description whether or not they have seen the scene
 - Gives the reader just enough information to intrigue without spoiling the story's outcome
 - The reader is free to form their own opinion
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5. Arrange classroom furniture so that students have a good space in which to move.
 6. Divide students into pairs to do a five minute mirroring warm up activity. Each pair should choose a leader for the first round of the game. When the teacher says, "Switch leaders," the person who was the mirror should become the leader. Students will face one another but not touch or talk. Explain that working with and anticipating the movements of your partner are key skills in fight sequences.
 7. Direct the lead student to begin a slow movement and the partner to mimic it precisely. Partners should look each other in the eye. Remind students not to move too quickly. Have students switch roles after about 2 minutes
 8. Instruct students that they will have 15 minutes, working in pairs, to create an original fencing sequence. Each sequence will include sixteen moves. They must use the moves taught in the Fencing moves part of the lesson.

Optional: At this time you may wish to introduce the wrapping paper tubes, but the activity can also be done without them. Alternatively you can make a sword from a newspaper page following these steps:

 1. Open the page flat
 2. Fold one corner back towards the center of the page about 6 inches and crease it. This crease forms a 45° angle from the vertical to the horizontal edge of the paper
 3. Grab the creased fold and begin rolling it as tightly as you can
 4. Continue to roll up the page until you have a tight narrow tube
 5. Secure it with scotch tape
 6. If you want to be even more realistic, you can tape a dome shaped "to go" coffee lid to one end of the newspaper sword to create a hand guard.
 9. Remind students that all moves should be practiced and presented in slow motion. This will ensure that students pay attention to each other and that the moves are completed correctly and safely. Inform students that choreographers always make sure the actors practice in slow motion first.
 10. Direct students to present their fencing moves to the class. Tell the students to pay special attention to the presentations and to be ready to discuss with the class what they experienced or observed. They can use the fencing [Performance Checklist](#) located within the Resource Carousel to help them make their observations.
 11. Distribute the [Critical Review](#) worksheet located within the Resource Carousel to the students to use in taking notes. Go over the worksheet with the students to check for understanding of how they
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	<p>are to fill it out. Instruct the class that they will take notes during and after each scene.</p> <p>REFLECT</p> <p>1. Talk with the students about the role of conflict in life and on the stage. Conflict is a natural part of life, so Shakespeare naturally included conflict in his work. Through drama, actors and the audience can enter into the emotion of the “created” drama to experiment with feelings associated with conflict. We can thereby gain insight into our ability to manage conflict in our own lives.</p> <p>2. Engage the class in a discussion about the activities. Have the students refer to their notes on the fencing Performance Checklist. Consider the following prompts or come up with your own to facilitate the discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did practicing the ballet moves affect your ability to do the fencing moves? • Describe how working with a partner in the fencing practice or presentation did/did not feel like a dance. • Was this a fun exercise? • Describe the experience of pretending to have a conflict. <p>Sample student responses might be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who had previous knowledge of ballet may express that they found this to be easy to do • At first it was awkward to do the ballet positions, but then it got easier • I clicked with my partner or I was out of step with my partner • It was fun to have permission to fight with someone <p>3. Engage the class in a group discussion of the qualities of the three different fight scenes. In a round robin format, give the student critics an opportunity to share their reviews and opinions with the class.</p> <p>ASSESS</p> <p>Assess your student's work using the Assessment Rubric located within the Resource Carousel.</p>
<p><i>Conclusions</i></p>	<p>Extending the Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have each group choreograph an eight-count transitional movement that connects their hour to the next hour. • Videotape the 12 hours and present them as a complete dance.
<p><i>Links and Websites</i></p>	<p>Teacher Background</p>

Teacher should have:

- Read/seen Act V, scene ii of Hamlet by William Shakespeare
- Some awareness of basic ballet and fencing moves

Prior Student Knowledge

- Students should have read Act V, scene ii of Hamlet by William Shakespeare.