

Lesson 10
The Charleston

Subject Area: Dance

Grade/Group: 5/6 Grade

Lesson Overview:

This lesson provides an introduction to an American dance popular in the 1920's, the Charleston, which emphasized coordination of both fine and gross motor skills within the melodic structure of American ragtime jazz. Students will develop an understanding of aesthetic valuing in a musical context and will recognize popular dance trends as they evolve within a historical context.

Time Frame: Two or more 45-minute periods

Objectives:

The students will:

- compare and contrast past methods of dance with today's dance styles and musical practices.
- learn the four steps to the Charleston.
- dance the basic four-step Charleston, adding one or more complementary moves of their choice.
- compare and contrast at least two elements of music and dance from the 1920's with today's popular music styles.

Key NCSS Standards:

5 b. identify and analyze examples of tensions between expressions of individuality and group or institutional efforts to promote social conformity

4 b. describe personal connections to place—as associated with community, nation, and world

Materials:

<http://www.homesteadmuseum.org/jtt/1920s%20charleston.pdf>

http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2129/2129_charleston_rubric.pdf (for rubrics and dance maps)

Strictly Dancing: Charleston

Strictly Dancing (Laserlight Series), [French Charleston Orchestra](#)

If possible get a video of a recent dance at the local school—showing what kind of dances are popular. Videoclip/music of the waltz, The Charleston, copy of the rubric, copy of the Venn Diagram; essential to check out the websites, make footsteps for students to follow; try to find flapper costumes and local folks who can demonstrate the Charleston.



Learner Factors: Some students may be shy, have poor gross motor/movement skills or not used to moving with music with others. Have students work with supportive partners; provide lots of encouragement and praise for moving with the music. For those who truly do not want to dance allow them to explore the historical aspects, draw a picture of the dance, or dance steps.

Motivational Activities: If possible, show a film clip or come dressed as a “flapper” ready as a flapper or dapper gent ready to demonstrate the Charleston. See if there are some folks from the “flapper” generation who might be able to come to demonstrate these simple steps (possible: a local retirement home). Demonstrate the Flapping Charleston. See if students might determine why these folks were called Flappers. Flappers wore fitted dresses and raccoon coats. It may be possible that a local furrier would lend a raccoon coat for the day. See names of local dance schools, below for personal contacts. Also, see if the gym teacher will support this curriculum. Dances and music represent the culture of the time; sometimes they are very controversial because they may class with what has been traditional.

Lesson Development:

Warm Up

Play Charleston Music—have students tap out the beat with their feet and hands at their desks; next have them stand by their desks and simply take some steps forward and backward while snapping their fingers to the music. Then begin to show them the 8-count.

Discuss the following vocabulary words with your students:

This dance started during the early 1900’s then became particularly popular during the 1920’s.

Roaring 20s: An era in American history during the 1920s of great economic growth and cultural and social changes.

Charleston: Popular dance in the 1900’s utilizing partner and individualized moves.

Eight Count: Each melody segment in popular music is often found in counts of eight. (Learning to recognize the beginning and ending of an eight count in the melody is an important skill for learning dance routines.)

Procedures

Introduce the lesson. Begin by asking students to raise their hand if they listen to music. Ask them if they dance to music. Have students share what types of music they listen to, their favorite groups, why they listen to music, when they listen to music, and how it makes them feel. Write responses on the board. Have students write for five minutes in their journals, reflecting on why they listen and dance to music, when they like to do this, and how it makes them feel.

When students are finished writing, pose the question: "Did people in the U.S. dance the same way we do today, say, 100 years ago? Was the music the same?" Provide time for groups to discuss these questions. After five minutes, elicit responses from each group.

Play a sample of the music from a recent school dance. Show the video of dancing from this dance. Discuss when the music was from and how the students were dancing. (There may be examples of rock, rap, punk).

Play a sample of waltz music by Johann Strauss (i.e., "The Blue Danube Waltz"). Ask students to listen again and consider the style, tempo, and rhythm of the piece, as well as the instruments used.

Play the music again. Ask for observations from class. How might someone dance to this music? Have a brave volunteer demonstrate. Prepare students for a video clip, having them pay attention to style of the clothing, dance, and music composition. Show a video clip of waltz dancing. (Videos such as *Music Man* or *The Age of Innocence* offer good clips.) Tell students that this form of music was popular in the U.S. about 100 years ago, when people danced the waltz. Use a second video clip to illustrate the fact that just twenty years later people were dancing in a different way. Play "Charleston" from *The Great Gatsby* soundtrack. Ask students how the style of the music changed, and whether they think the style of dance changed as well. Allow time for students to brainstorm and record observations.

Show a video clip of dancing from the movie *The Great Gatsby*. Discuss changes in fashion, dance, and music. Record students' observations. Explain how the Charleston was a break from the traditional, memorized dances of the past, and allowed for personal expression and style. Give historical background for the era of the Roaring 20s, a time of great economic growth and social decadence. *Long Term Possibility:* Tell students that the Charleston is the first dance they will learn for a class performance, "Dancing through the Decades." As they learn the steps, students should think about how this dance is similar to and/or different from dance movements today.

Demonstrate the Charleston dance sequence to recorded music.

Provide, or have students clear, a space for dancing. Teach students the four steps to the Charleston, focusing first on the placement of the feet.

1. Step forward with the right foot.
2. Touch forward with left toe. (*Note: this is a touch and not a complete step. This is important so that the foot is ready to move back or forward easily for the next dance move.)
3. Step back with the left foot.
4. Touch back with right toe.
5. Repeat the sequence above, this time starting with the opposite foot. Step forward with your left foot, touch forward with your right toe, step back with your right foot and touch back with your left toe.
6. Start the next sequence with the right foot, the next with the left, and so on. While the student's attention should be focused on the feet, always do the moves with the arms as well.
7. Have students stand up as a class and find their personal space. Guide them slowly, talking them through the steps, "Step forward, touch forward, step back, touch back." Proceed methodically, repeating the steps out loud. Have students repeat the steps out loud as well. For written instruction on how to perform the dance, refer to the Homestead Museum lesson plan "[How to Dance the Charleston](#)."
8. As students continue going through the steps slowly, sing the song "Charleston, Charleston, made in Caro-Lina" to their tempo. Use your voice to emphasize the points at which students should step down with their steps. Walk around checking and helping anyone having trouble. Work with individuals as needed. Caution them not to take large steps, just normal walking steps.

Teach arm and hand placement.

As the foot touches forward, say the right toe, the left arm, slightly bent, should swing up to chest, with the palm flexed upward. The right arm swings out to the side in the same position. When the right toe touches back, the left arm drops down and the hand points down to the ground. The right arm swings to the back and points upward to the sky. When you point down, your body should go downward as well, so you are bending at the torso. Guide students slowly through the moves, combining feet and hand movements. Keep practicing, helping students as you circulate. Practice dancing to Charleston music. Once students are comfortable, you can teach additional moves.

Introduce the complementary moves.

After students have learned the basic four-step Charleston down, introduce the Wing Dance and the Shake the Hand move.

Wing Dance: Stand with feet 1 1/2 feet apart, with the knees and torso bent slightly. Bring knees together every two counts. When the knees come together or go apart, the arms swing downward crossing over each other or opening out again; each time, place the hands on the knees; left on left and right on right. When the knees come together, the

hands switch knees; left on right and right on left. You should get a criss-cross effect when knees and arms go back and forth.

"Shake the Hand" move: Raise the right hand to about head level and shake the pointer finger. The left hand rests on the hip. While shaking the pointer finger, turn right in one place and kick each leg back, bending at the knee while kicking up the heels.

Demonstrate the three eight count dance routine to music.

For the first eight counts, do the four-step Charleston; on the second eight counts, do the Wing Dance; on the third eight counts, do the four step Charleston, again. Repeat this three eight count series, alternating the Wing Dance or the Shake the Hand move, but always return to the Charleston. Allow time for students to practice dancing. Use this time to evaluate whether students are able to perform the three eight count series. Other partner moves can be introduced at another dance session. Offer help as needed.

Closure:

Have students share their feelings about the dance. In groups, have students reflect on what they learned about the Charleston, as well as what they liked or didn't like. Pass out butcher paper and markers and have each group create a large Venn diagram modeled after the Dance and Music Venn Diagram handout. The title should say "Dance and Music" and the two circles should be labeled "The Roaring 20s" and "Now". Have students compare and contrast the two, also listing the similarities in the middle section of the Venn diagram. Students may list observations of style, movement, and sound, as well as their own opinions. Groups then share their observations. Put the song "Charleston" on and listen to it while the students work. The Venn Diagram can be located at the website listed in the next line.

http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2129/2129_charleston_venn.pdf

Were there likely to have been flappers in Newport? Why or why not? Who would have been typical flappers?

Follow-Up:

If time allows, put lyrics to the song "Charleston" on the overhead and sing it together. Students can find dance partners and elaborate on routines. Partners can then perform together in the musical at the end of the year.

Student Assessment:

Using the Assessment Rubric handout, evaluate performance during the students' practice in class (exposure, not mastery, is the goal of the lesson) and in presentation of the Venn diagrams. Look for student participation in following the basic structure of the dance and also participation in discussion groups. Rubric can be found at this website:

http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2129/2129_charleston_rubric.pdf

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Background:

The Charleston may have a long history. The Branle of 1520 is presumed to be very similar to the Charleston. As far as an African-American influence, some dance historians summarize that the "Ash-Ante Peoples" of Africa to be the originator. On the other hand, there are descriptions and pictures to a dance in the Harper's Weekly Magazine (October 13th. 1866) that is very similar to the Charleston (*most likely the Branle*).

Nevertheless, the Charleston dance became established (*worldwide*) during the Ragtime-Jazz period. The series of steps are thought to have originated with the African-Americans who were living on a small island near Charleston, South Carolina. And some say it is from the Cape Verde Islands in Western Africa. The Charleston, (*as we know it*) was performed as early as 1903 and made its way into Harlem stage productions by 1913. Harlem is in New York.

In 1922/3, it was introduced to the theater going public at the New Amsterdam Theater in New York when the "Ziegfeld Follies," staged a dance that featured the Charleston. Ned Wayburn was the choreographer, and Sissle (1889-1975) and Blake introduced a young African-American boy to Wayburn. The boy demonstrated what was to be the signature step of the Charleston. Wayburn supposedly choreographed a few more steps and Sissle and Blake wrote the songs ... it was an immediate hit.

In the same year, (1922) a stage play by the name of "Liza" had introduced the dance. Again on October 29th, 1923 with the Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles Broadway show "Runnin' Wild." Runnin' Wild was produced by George White who introduced a song and dance called the "Charleston" which was written by James P. Johnson. Elida Webb did the Choreography as well as alleging to have invented it (*not true*). Edith Mae Barnes claimed it was she who introduced the dance in Runnin Wild. The 1921 show called 'Shuffle' Along' also had some Charleston dancing, but not yet recognized as such.

In the 1920's, women who did the Charleston were called "Flappers" because of the way they would flap their arms and walk like birds while doing the Charleston. Many collegiates (college students) of the period, predominantly men, wore raccoon coats and straw hats.

Not everyone had good luck with the Charleston. Many non-dancing jobs of the day required you to be competent to dance or teach the Charleston in order to get the job. Many Waiters and waitresses would have to do the Charleston during their jobs. Many saw the Charleston and Flappers as the downfall to many moral issues of the day. In 1925, Variety Magazine reported that in Boston, the vibrations of Charleston dancers were so strong that the dancers caused the "Pickwick Club" (*a tenderloin dance hall*) to collapse, killing fifty of its patrons.

In February of 1926, Jim & Louise Sullivan won the National World Charleston Championships with Ginger Rogers placing third. It was held in Chicago, IL. at the Beach Hotel's "Trianon Ballroom." Tom Sheehy sponsored this contest.

RESOURCES:

<http://www.homesteadmuseum.org/jtt/1920s%20charleston.pdf>

http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2129/2129_charleston_rubric.pdf

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2129/>

<http://www.streetswing.com/histmain/z3chrilst.htm>

Video clips of waltz from *Music Man*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Age of Innocence*, from Blockbuster, or available on line. See if the music teacher will record a piece of the waltz: *The Blue Danube*.

Local dance companies:

Island Moving Company, 3 Charles St. Newport	847- 4470
Off the Curb Studio, Middletown	847 – 2872
Arthur Murray Dance Studio, Swansea, MA	508 679-0071
East Bay Ballroom, www.eastbayballroom.com	682-2272
All Star Dance Academy	849-9555
Gladding School of Dance	846-4598
Position One School of Dance	683-2119

Video/Audio

Strictly Dancing (Laserlight Series), French Charleston Orchestra (available from Amazon.com for \$5.98)

Nearby Furriers: Harris Wm H Furs 1-800-422-3877, Warwick

Tolchinsky Furs 946-0400

Or, try calling the theatre department at Salve Regina University for sources, 847-6650