# Introduction to the Art of Dance Discussion Questions

These questions I created for my class(es) came out of my training for creating writing intensive assignments. My goals, from John Bean’s *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, were to: “1) present students with an authentic problem requiring their own critical thinking…, and 2) present the problem within a rhetorical context that gives students a role or purpose, a targeted audience, and a genre (98).” This is not a complete list. These questions are preceded by low-stakes exploratory questions. Regardless my students’ career paths, they will have to discuss complex topics with their colleagues, support or respectfully disagree with their colleagues’ opinions, and defend their positions clearly and with evidence. I hope with these questions to give students practice with qualitative arguments. And to move them toward a dialogical engagement with dance/history rather than a regurgitate information. Enjoy!

## Opinion

Ballet does/does not have a race problem. Choose a position. Using your notes from the text and the lecture as well as any relevant personal experience, defend your position.

My working definition of dance did/did not change this semester? Choose a position. Use your notes and/or personal experience to defend your position.

Watch the TED Talk, "The Magic of Khmer Classical Dance," and answer the prompt.

Performing cultural dance forms for an audience not of that culture is/is not an acceptable way to preserve that culture. Choose a position and use points from the TED Talk, your notes, and/or your personal experience to defend your position.

Read "Alice Sheppard Brings a New Perspective to Disability Dance" by Kevin Gotkin. Encouraging intersectionality in the arts (to use Ms. Sheppard's example, creating dances from a black-disabled-queer-woman perspective) adds to the art form/does not add and weakens the art form in some way. Choose a side and defend your opinion.

## Letters and Emails

Systemic racism allowed white choreographers in the first half of the 20th century to profit from the appropriation of dances from Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized cultures, which resulted in devaluing of those dances forms in comparison to ballet and modern. Today, choreographers continue to appropriate ideas and dances from Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized cultures to "spice up" their choreography without acknowledging the communities that created these dance forms. Write an email to a choreographer explaining why this appropriation is harmful not only to the Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized communities but also to theirs, and how they should properly credit the communities from which they borrow. You can address the choreographers from the lecture (i.e. Ruth St. Denis, George Balanchine, Martha Graham) or you may address a fictitious choreographer.

In "Danger of a Single Story", Ms. Adichie says, "our lives, our cultures are made up of overlapping stories." When has someone prejudged you based on their "single story" of you? Write a letter to that person telling them how it felt to be prejudged by that "single story" and describing the "overlapping stories" you wish they knew of you.

"If you think artists are useless, try spending your quarantine without music, books, poems, movies, and paintings." What art did you consume during the quarantine? Write a thank-you note to an artist whose work helped you during the quarantine.

Write a letter to the artistic director of a funding (granting, promoting, or producing) organization explaining why it is important to support the work of Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized artists because their work is "unrelatable".

Watch the TED Talk "Ballroom That Breaks the Rules" and answer the prompt.

Twyla Tharp, an American choreographer, states, "I have always felt one of the things dance should do -its business being so clearly physical- is challenge the culture's gender stereotypes." Write a letter to Ms. Tharp that either supports or criticizes her statement. Use the TED Talk, your notes, and/or your experiences to defend your position.

At the beginning of the semester, we watched the lunch counter sit in scene from Lee Daniel’s *The Butler*. Many of you believed that the lunch counter protests were not a form of dance because they were political protests. Later in the semester, we read Ellen Graf’s “Dance Is a Weapon” and watched the documentary *Paris Is Burning*. Both materials show how movement organizes people to bring about social change, displays power or hierarchy, and validates an oppressed group’s existence; they show how dance is political. As an email to your past self, summarize the purpose of the lunch counter sit ins of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and explain how “Dance Is a Weapon” and *Paris Is Burning* cause you to view the lunch counter sit ins more complexly as a dance.

## Applications and Explanations

Write an email to a friend explaining how contemporary a baby shower can be traced back to prehistoric rituals and/or ceremonies.

As cultural dance forms become ubiquitous and co-opted by other cultures, what should be done to make sure the culture is not appropriated, misrepresented, or the history behind the dance form lost?

Decode the social dance the Wobble. You know the primary reason for this dance, but looking at who is dancing, and what they are doing, how does the Wobble socialize and what does it say about those who dance it?

In the past two lectures, European dance forms are presented with their Asian and African counterparts. But the question is, is it necessary to present Asian and African dance forms as a counterpoint to European dance forms? Explain why the lectures are structured as a point-counterpoint (The west vs. The rest of the world) and propose an alternative way to present dance forms from different parts of the world.

There are many skills dancers gain from their training that will serve them long after their performing career. They are a 1) knack for problem-solving, 2) a teamwork mentality, 3) a "thick skin" and perseverance, 4) unwavering dedication, and 5) a sense of self-discipline.\* In your chosen career, how will these skills help you succeed? \*<https://www.dancemagazine.com/five-life-skills-learned-dance-2307028929.html>

Remember the dances that you most (or least) enjoyed watching this semester, what did you most enjoy about those dances? Do any patterns emerge? Explain the qualities present (or lacking) in the dances you watched this semester to determine what you value in dance (or art).

Read "Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance" by Diedre Sklar and answer the discussion questions below.

* Sklar's academic writing style can be challenging to read. Explain the 5 premises in a way that makes sense to a younger sibling or friend who is not in college.
* Tell of an event (either in the news or personal background) in which someone did not engage with another in a culturally sensitive way. Explain how the event would have been better if people engaged with each other in a culturally sensitive way.

Watch *The Green Table* (1932) by Kurt Jooss and answer the discussion questions below.

* When artists create work that criticizes the state (government) it is because they want to bring attention to an injustice that needs to change. What change(s) do you think Mr. Jooss wanted to see when he created *The Green Table*?
* How well did Mr. Jooss fulfill his intent with *The Green Table*? Defend your judgment with a description and analysis of relevant movement and technical elements and their connections to social, historical, and personal contexts.

## Resources

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2009. “The Danger of a Single Story”. *TED Talk*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg>

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, Second Edition. California: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

Copp, Trevor and Jeff Fox. 2016. “Ballroom Dance That Breaks Gender Roles”. *TED Talk*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mq-HqRnngc&t=40s>

Dils, Ann and Ann Cooper Albright. *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*. North Carolina: Wesleyan University Press, 2001.

Gotkin, Kevin. 2018. “Alice Sheppard Brings a New Perspective to Disability Dance”. *Dance* *Magazine*. <https://www.dancemagazine.com/disability-dance-2574024089.html>

Ok, Prumsodun. “The Magic of Khmer Classical Dance”. *TED Talk*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEIYHTlbeLA>.