



Activity Guide for Educators



Photo by Adam Tolbert | JanpiStar & Students

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Photo by David DeSilva | Dancers JanpiStar, Zara Anwar, David Calhoun, Louisa Mann, and Alaja Badalich

AXIS Redefines Dance and Disability

Our Mission

AXIS collaborates with disabled, non-disabled, and neurodiverse artists to create world-class productions that challenge perceptions of dance and disability.

Our Vision

AXIS strives to create a radically inclusive dance sector and world by removing barriers and showcasing the beauty of difference for artists, audiences, and community across the disability spectrum.

Our Three Pillars

AXIS works towards this vision through our three pillars of Artistry, Engagement and Advocacy.

About AXIS Dance Company

Led by Artistic Director Nadia Adame and Managing Director Danae Rees, AXIS is one of the nation's most acclaimed ensembles of disabled, non-disabled and neurodiverse performers.

In tandem with a robust performance calendar, AXIS provides unparalleled integrated dance education and outreach programs. AXIS builds paths to dance education for people of all ages, experiences, and spectrum of disabilities.

Our Engagement Programs embody our philosophy that **ANYONE CAN DANCE**.

We believe that by providing arts opportunities to all people, breaking through social, economic or physical barriers, the entire community is enriched. We trust that any AXIS program will serve as a vehicle to educate students about the diversity of dance, while creating a better understanding of the capabilities and achievements of all people.

This Activity Guide offers a few tips and activities to help teachers/leaders prepare their students for AXIS. Our Staff is always available to discuss and brainstorm further. For questions about our activities, please contact Katherine Nauman, Engagement Project Manager at engagement@axisdance.org. We look forward to working with you to create an unforgettable experience.

Use Words That Empower

Positive language empowers. When speaking about disabled people, a wide variety of language choices can be appropriate. Preferences may vary by type of disability, individual inclination, or based on the setting/situation. Someone may identify as ‘a disabled person’ (to center their disability identity), or as ‘a person with a disability,’ (to emphasize their personhood first before their disability). Some people may even use the two interchangeably. At AXIS, we employ disability first language. Please note that language is fluid and it is always best to allow someone to share their preference. Additionally, catch-all phrases like ‘the blind,’ ‘the deaf,’ or ‘the disabled,’ do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of disabled people. Below are some examples of affirmative phrases to use, and negative phrases to avoid.

Affirmative Phrases to Use:	Negative Phrases to Avoid:
person with a disability, or disabled person	the disabled, the handicapped
person who has muscular dystrophy	afflicted by (stricken by, victim of, suffers from) muscular dystrophy
person who uses a wheelchair, or wheelchair user	confined to (restricted to) a wheelchair; wheelchair-bound
non-disabled person or person without a disability	normal person



Photo by Adam Tolbert



Photo by Nick Flagg

Special Note on Language: slurs such as: lame, deformed, cripple (crippled, crippling etc), retard, spaz/spastic are inappropriate and offensive.

Making the Most of Engaging with AXIS

Try these with your students!

Before the Engagement:

- Facilitate a discussion about perceptions, stereotypes, and ideas about disabled people. Have a disabled person come and speak to the class.
- View and discuss one of our recommended movies or stories (see Bibliography) about a disabled person. Research and discuss famous people who are/were disabled.
- Have an inaccessibility scavenger hunt, where students can go around with checklists finding all of the inaccessible spots in their school for a given disability. This can help students reflect on the ways inaccessibility shapes disabled lives (example: signage, stairs, seating, fluorescent lights, etc).
- Facilitate a discussion about dance. What and who is a dancer? Is all movement dance, or potentially dance? What kinds of dance styles can you name?

During the Engagement:

Encourage students to be good audience members by making mental or physical notes of things they notice during the presentation. Suggestions for directing student awareness:

- How do you feel while watching this style of dance? Do you sit on the edge of your seat, getting really involved? What is happening when you're on the edge of your seat? Did your mind wander at times? Try to be more specific than "I liked it," or "I didn't like it."
- Were you surprised at the dances or the dancers? How did the disabled dancers and non-disabled dancers move with each other?
- What kinds of props were used and how did the dancers use them?
- What were some of the themes of pieces the dancers performed? How did you feel about the different dances? Did you have a favorite one? Why?



Photo courtesy Glenview Elementary, Oakland

After the Engagement:

- Encourage students to share their observations (see “During the Engagement”) using creative mediums.
- Discuss how the students’ perceptions of disability and dance may have changed after experiencing AXIS perform, lecture or teach.
- Encourage students to talk openly about disability and what they’ve learned.



Photo courtesy the Lied Center

Try These Creative Dance Activities

Please note that music is optional, but recommended for any of the activities. A drum or other percussive instrument is always handy.

Body Part “Painting”: Beginning in a circle, try using different body parts to “paint” your name in space. This can begin as a stationary activity and build into moving through space. With younger children you may want to ask them what colors they are using and always elicit body part ideas from the students. You can also incorporate ideas about size and orientation. ex: Paint your name as big as you can on the ceiling.

Milling with the Elements: Have students begin to move in a pedestrian way through their designated space. They will be listening for the teachers’ directives with ways to think about their movement. Have a list of words related to space, time, or force that you can call out for the students to explore. You may coordinate the words with the present curriculum or any other theme that makes sense for your students. In more advanced situations, consider combining ideas. ex: Try moving at a low level on a curvy pathway.

Movement Conversation with Vocabulary Cards: Create vocabulary cards that contain words related to special concepts, actions, and qualities. You might use a color system for tracking cards. In partners, students have a movement conversation using only movement that reflects three chosen cards, no words. After some exploration, they

guess each other's words. By combining and arranging the cards, the duos create a dance with a beginning, middle and end using the chosen words. It's great to have them share dances with the class.

Mirroring: There are many levels of mirroring that can be used - here are a few ways to approach mirroring:

- Choose one student to lead as an example of how it works. ex: Max moves to the front of the group facing the students and models how to be a good leader. It is not about tricking each other but working to keep your partner with you.
- Have the class arrange themselves in two lines facing partners with an imaginary mirror down the center. One side (partner) begins to move while the other tries to mirror the movement as accurately as possible, making any necessary translations to their own body, (such as substituting one limb for another, or focusing on just the movement of the upper or lower body at a time) while staying true to the action and quality. Switch roles. Advance it by allowing 'leaders' the option to move anywhere on their side of the line. Switch roles.
- For older students, advance one step further by allowing the side that is leading to no longer pay attention to their partner, but focus on interacting with the dancers on their side of the line.



Photo courtesy Glenview Elementary, Oakland

AXIS & Disability Vocabulary

Axis	A central or principal line around which an object rotates or is arranged.
Access	A means or capacity to enter or approach.
Adaptation	Something that is changed or changes so as to become suitable to a new or special use or situation.
Translation	In dance, staying true to the intention, action, and quality of a movement while altering it to fit a new body.
Choreography	The art of making dances. A whole dance with a beginning, middle and end.
Choreographer	One who finds movement for and organizes actions into dances.
Contact Improvisation	Spontaneous movement drawn from actions while relating to the environment or while in contact with another moving body.
Energy	One of the elements of movement. Movement is propelled by energy.
Ensemble	A group of dancers who perform together.
Improvisation	In dance, movement that is not planned or choreographed, but which happens spontaneously in the moment.
Inclusion	The action or state of commitment to a rigorous, thoughtful, and comprehensive diversity of people in a group.
Integrate	To make whole by bringing all the parts together.
Modern	A type of dance, which in this country evolved at the beginning of the 20th century, as contrasted with ballet, tap or jazz dance. Creative work or choreography is an important part of the learning experience in modern dance.
Lecture Demonstration	An informal performance including movement and verbal explanations of aspects of dance.
Lift	A machine used to raise objects; some vans have lifts in them; lifts allow people who use wheelchairs to ride in or drive vehicles.
Movement Vocabulary	A set of dance movements or a style of dancing which is specific to or characteristic of a choreographer, dancer, or dance company.
Phrase	The smallest unit of movement in an entire dance.

Integrated Dance	Disabled and non-disabled people dancing together.
Ramp	A surface that slants to connect two levels; access ramps provide an entrance into a building or passage between floors of a building.
Rehearsal	A practice session for a dance, play, or musical work.
Repertory	All of the dances that a company choreographs and performs.
Sequence	A series of movements longer than a phrase but much shorter than an entire dance.
Shape	An interesting and interrelated arrangement of body parts of one dancer or of a group of dancers.
Space	One of the elements of movement. Movement occurs in and crosses space.
Time	One of the elements of movement. Movement takes place through time.



Photo by Yuko Monden Juma | Workshop with LINES Ballet Community Programs

Try These Resources

Children's Books on Dance:

Early Childhood

- “Baby Dance” (1998): By Ann Taylor, Harper Festival
- “Hip Hop Lollipop” (2018): By Susan Montanari, Schwartz & Wade
- “Kitchen Dance” (2008): By Marie J. Manning, Clarion Books
- “Dance With Me: Super Sturdy Picture Books” (2008): By Charles R. Smith Jr., Candlewick
- “How Do You Dance?” (2019): By Thyra Heder, Harry N. Abrams
- “Giraffes Can’t Dance” (2012): By Giles Andreae,
- “Flora & the Flamingo” (2013): By Molly Idle, Chronicle Books
- “Let’s Dance, Little Pookie” (2017): By Sandra Boynton

Kindergarten – 5th Grade

- Maya Ajmera, Jacques D’Amboise, John D. Ivanko, How to be an Artist, Charlesbridge Publishing, 2004. Ages 4-8
- Jonas, Ann. Color Dance, Harper Collins Children’s Book Group, 1989.
- “Katarina Ballerina” (2020): By Tiler Peck & Kyle Harris, Aladdin
- “Feel the Beat: Dance Poems that Zing from Salsa to Swing” (2017): By Marilyn Singer, Dial Books
- “Lupita’s First Dance / El primer baile de Lupita” (2013): By Lupe Ruiz-Florez, Pinata Books
- “Drumbeat in Our Feet” (2014): By Patricia A. Keeler, Lee & Low Books Inc.
- “Firebird” (2014): By Misty Copeland, G.P. Putnam’s Sons Books for Young Readers
- “Swan: The Life and Dance of Anna Pavlova” (2015): By Laurel Snyder

Middle - High School

- “Mao’s Last Dancer” (2008): By Li Cunxin, Berkeley (Reprint Edition)
- “How They Became Famous Dancers: A Dancing History” (2015): By Anne Dunkin, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform
- “The Magic in Changing Your Stars”(2020): By Leah Henderson, Union Square Kids
- “Black Ballerinas: My Journey to Our Legacy” (2021): By Misty Copeland, Aladdin

Children's Books on Disability:

Early Childhood

- “Moonbird” (2007): by Joyce Dunbar, Transworld Publisher
- “The Girl Who Heard Colors” (2013): by Marie Harris, Nancy Paulson Book

Kindergarten – 5th Grade

- “The Pirate of the Garden” (2011): by George Ella Lyon, Atheneum books for young readers
- “King for A Day” (2013): by Rukhsana Khan, Lee & Low Books Inc.
- “Emmanuel’s dream: The true story of Emmanuel Oforu Yeboah” (2015): by Laurie Ann Thompson, Schwartz & Wade
- “How To Talk To An Autistic Kid”(2011): By Daniel Stefanski, Free Spirit Pub
- “Kockin’ On Wood” (2012): By Lynne Barasch, Lee & Low Books Inc
- “I Will Dance” (2020) By Nancy Bo Flood, Atheneum Books for Young Readers
- “The Chance To Fly” (2021): BY Ali Stroker & Stacey Davidowitz, Harry N. Abrams
- “I Am Not a Label: 34 Disabled Artists, Thinkers, Athletes and Activists from Past and Present” (2020): By Cerrie Burnell & Lauren Mark Baldo, Wide Eyed Editions
- “Wonder”(2012): By R.J. Palacio, Knopf Books for Young Readers
- “We Move Together”(2021): By Kelly Fritsch & Anne McGuire, AK Press
- “Fighting for YES!: The Story of Disability Rights Activist Judith Heumann” (2022): By Maryann Cocca-Leffler, Abrams Books for Young Readers

Middle – High School

- “El Deafo (Own Voices)” (2014): By Cece Bell, Amulet Books
- “Accidents of Nature” (2006): By Harriet McBryde Johnson, Henry Holdt
- “Mia Lee is Wheeling Through Middle School” (2016): By Melissa Shang, Woodgate Publishing
- “Roll With it” (2020): By Jamie Sumner, Atheneum Books for Young Readers
- “Blind” (2014): By Rachel DeWoskin, Viking Books for Young Readers
- “Show Me a Sign (Own Voices)” (2020): By Ann Clare Lezotte, Scholastic Press
- “Born Just Right (Own Voices)” (2019): By Jordan Reeves & Jen Lee Reeves, Aladdin

Teacher's Books on Dance & Disability:

- “Breadth of Bodies: Discussing Disability in Dance” (2022): By Emily Weiderholt & Sliva Laukkanen, Stance on Dance
- Albright, Ann Copper, Choreographing Difference, Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1997.
- Benjamin, Adam, Making an Entrance, Routledge, 2001.
- Dobbs, Jean, Kids on Wheels(Adult volume), Leonard Media Group, 2004.
- Dwight, Laura, We Can Do It!, 1992. Grade 1-2
- Fahy & King, Peering Behind the Curtain, Routledge, 2002 .
- Gilbert, Ann Green, Creative Dance for All Ages, Human Kinetics, 1992.
- Humphrey, Doris, The Art of Making Dances, Princeton Book Co. 1959/1987.
- (Useful for high school dance/theater teachers)
- Lloyd, Marcia. Adventures in Creative Movement Activities, Eddie Bowers Publishing, Inc. Dubuque, CA 1998.
- Reedy, Patricia. Body, Mind & Spirit in Action: A Teacher’s Guide to Creative Dance. Luna Dance Institute, Berkeley, CA 2015
- Rowen, Betty, Dance and Grow, Princeton Book Co., 1994.
- “No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging A New Civil Rights Movement” (1993): By Joseph P. Shapiro, Times Books

Videos:

- AXIS Dance Company YouTube Links:
 - [Adelante 2022 promo: https://youtu.be/yH9_BIOmLBE](https://youtu.be/yH9_BIOmLBE)
 - [re:surge 2021 promo: https://youtu.be/MLncj7ThJmM](https://youtu.be/MLncj7ThJmM)
 - [in*ter*twine 2019 promo: https://youtu.be/1omc9HvYCNc](https://youtu.be/1omc9HvYCNc)
 - [Radical Impact 2018 promo: https://youtu.be/cavIXwIWgHs](https://youtu.be/cavIXwIWgHs)
 - [AXIS for ALL On Demand Movement Classes](#)