



Student Matinée Study Guide

Diavolo Dance Theater



Diavolo Dance Theater is an internationally renowned modern acrobatic dance company. Diavolo company members are dancers, gymnasts, actors, athletes and, above all, teammates. Under the guidance of Artistic Director Jacques Heim, the Company has developed a reputation

for stunning, innovative movement on oversized surrealistic sets and everyday structures. Through working together, Diavolo dancers explore the challenges of relationships, the absurdities of life, and the struggles to maintain our humanity.

Jacques Heim founded Diavolo Dance Theater in 1992. Based in Los Angeles ever since, Diavolo was officially recognized as a cultural treasure by the City of Los Angeles in 2007. The 2011-12 season marks Diavolo's thirteenth U.S. tour, with over fourteen weeks on the road in twenty cities. In addition, Diavolo has toured extensively throughout Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

MISSION STATEMENT

Diavolo redefines dance through dynamic movement, enlightening communities through trust, teamwork, and individual expression.

ARTISTIC STATEMENT

Diavolo is propelling the evolution of dance and entertainment to make the arts more integrated within the mainstream of

ABOUT OUR NAME

Di-a'-vo-lo

Dia – Spanish for “day”

- Greek for “through, across, from point to point.”
- The first syllable of Diaghilev, whose Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo was supported in part by Baron de Gunzburg and whose great grand nephew is Jacques Heim.

Volo – Latin for “I fly”

Diavolo has other connotations –

- “Diablerie” (French) – playfulness of humans, the clever, astounding or comical pranks of a child, clown or rascal.
- The name of a Russian avant-garde circus performer who in the 1920's did outrageous stunts on a bicycle.

WHAT IS DIAVOLO?

What You Will See:

Diavolo reinvents dance, re-imagines theater, and redefines thrills. Diavolo takes movement, athletics, and daring to the extreme, creating abstract narratives through surreal tableaux in which inspiration thrives. “Transit Space” Transit Space explores themes of feeling lost, finding a sense of purpose, and coming together. Influenced by the documentary Dogtown and Z-Boys, Transit Space uses skateboard ramps as set pieces to represent an urban environment with ever-shifting physical and emotional spaces. There will be two more pieces after the interaction portion and after the last dance, there is a question-and-answer session.

Diavolo recently created Transit Space, a new piece inspired by the movement of skateboarding.

Diavolo is propelling the evolution of dance and entertainment to make the arts more integrated within the mainstream of America.

Excerpt from “Transit Space”, danced and performed on multiple structures resembling skateboard ramps and metallic bridges. It explores our interaction with our inner emotional journey and the secret life of public spaces. By working together and helping one another discover the true powers that are within us, we can be truly free and united as one.

OTHER PERFORMANCES INCLUDE:



CAGED

Using the cage-like structure, a Man is exploring, establishing and claiming his space. It is within the structure and the reactionary movement that themes of confinement, pressure, freedom, escape, and entrapment are explored. (running time: 11 min, A work in progress 2009)



HUMACHINA

Combines the word “human”, with the Latin word for machine, “machina”. The principal of human motion and mechanical relations, a combination of the human form, and the simplicity of the most important of machines, the wheel. (2004)



FOREIGN BODIES

An epic journey through the evolution of mankind. Flesh and texture collide in a barrage of corporal imagery contrasting a range of architectural form in an ever-transforming environment. Abstractions of strangers in a strange land of bacteria invading a body evoke metaphors of loss of identity and the wonder of life's persistence until the full cycle of life is completed. (running time: 20 min, 2007)



2R A

A wall peppered with protruding metal bars reveals an abstract military obstacle course in the trenches of war. The restrictions of being wounded or physically limited influence movement, and the dancers must achieve their goals despite self-imposed handicaps and inescapable gravity – yet they have no destination. (1995, revised 2002)



LE SEIGE

When mankind discovers the intriguing value of the lowly bench, everyone who encounters it wants it, and will do anything – anything! – to get it. And once a person has it, he or she will do anything to keep it, mostly away from everybody else – and also by any means. Even if it means destroying it. (2000)



PHANTOME

A passageway to the future, through a doorway from the past, we are made of the people that have touched our lives in some way, all of whom are now just ghosts to us. (1996, revised 2005)



ATOM

The beginning of the world, and the smallest particle that creates life is you. If you look within the center of yourself you find balance, unity and equilibrium (2005)

PREPARE FOR THE PERFORMANCE!

The performance is presented in 5 sections; the first is a choreographed piece showing the style and aesthetic of Diavolo. The second is a representation of the creation process Diavolo uses to make work. The third is a longer choreographed piece combining a multitude of creative elements. The next piece is a fun and clear definition of teamwork, and then there will be an interactive section where students will be chosen from the audience to participate on stage. And the finale piece is a touring repertoire piece with a large and innovative moving set piece.

LOOK FOR B.A.S.T.E* ELEMENTS OF DANCE

Body, Action, Space, Time, Energy

Body shape: curving, angling, twisting the body parts: arms, legs, head, feet, hands, torso

Action locomotor: walk, run, leap, hop, skip, gallop, slide (anything that moves from one point to another) other action: following and leading

Space levels: low, medium, high direction: forward, backward, diagonal, sideways focus: straight, curved, open, closed, peripheral

Time tempo: fast, medium, slow with or without music long/short patterned/counted

Energy quality: strong, light, sharp, smooth, soft, sudden, sustained, free, bound

*From Dance Education Initiative Curriculum Guide, Perpich Center for the Arts Education. May be reproduced for educational purposes

BEHIND THE SCENES INSPIRATION

To prepare for the performance, read the below statement by the Diavolo's artistic director, Jacques Heim.

After the show, identify examples of:

- Architectural structures or sculpted adaptations of everyday items
- Collaboration, interconnectivity and relationships
- Answer the following:
 1. Describe the set and/or objects used in the performance.
 2. What characters represent? What was their purpose in the performance.

VOCABULARY

Level 1

1. Consequences
2. Abstract
3. Metaphors
4. Navigate
5. Compels
6. Improvisation
7. Static

LEVEL 2

1. Recontextualize
2. Ironic
3. Interconnectivity
4. Constructivist
5. Functionality
6. Cultivating
7. Preconceptions

As Modern society becomes more complex with new technologies and marvelous possibilities, the everyday act of survival becomes increasingly fraught with danger and anxiety. My work investigates the latent absurdities of contemporary human life and seeks to recontextualize those absurdities through the body, exploring the influences of the environment, possessions and relationships. My aim is to capture and comment upon the ironic and frequently humorous patterns, as well as the darker consequences, of human behavior. I am also searching to expand the boundaries of what is considered to be dance by trying to create movement that offers audiences a cinematic experience of powerful images and abstract narratives.

Through the company, I try to convey an appreciation for movement by breaking down barriers to dance via a vocabulary based on everyday activities. Diavolo is made up of people of varied abilities and training - dancers, gymnasts, rock climbers, and actors - all of whom are teammates. Building a team that allows for complete trust has been essential to creating a kind of work where dancers are inspired to take serious risks. Architectural structures or sculpted adaptations of everyday items - sofas, doors, stairs - provide the backdrop for dramatic and risky movement, revealing metaphors for the challenge of maintaining human relationships in modern environments.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Collaboration, interconnectivity and relationships play important roles in my work. When asked about my process, I often think of a quote I once read by essayist Roger Rosenblatt: "The best in art and life comes from a center, something urgent and powerful - an idea or emotion that insists on its being. From that insistence, a shape emerges and creates its own structure out of passion. If you begin with structure, you have to make up the passion. And that's very hard to do." I am really excited about exploring the very tension that exists between passion and structure. I am concerned with how we navigate this terrain, how we adapt to it, and finally, how we remain free. Although no two Diavolo pieces are created identically, they do always start with a passionate idea - born out of artwork that moved me in a certain way, or an exchange I watched between two people on the street, for example. I immediately decide on an idea for a constructivist set piece. Whether found or constructed, I choose the set because of its role in our lives - its architectural qualities, its geometric shapes and its mechanical functionality. In short, it must be something striking, as landscape or as object, that compels exploration and the desire to understand the ways in which it influences human behavior.

Using a structured improvisation process, I engage dancers in a journey of "working out" with a new prop for at least six weeks - exploring the set's possibilities, and cultivating the story behind the work. Sometimes the process takes more time, or goes off in an entirely new direction. It helps me toss out any preconceptions with which I might have entered the process, and allows the piece to emerge. After the improvisation period is over, I develop the structure and movement script, setting the piece and developing metaphoric content. Most commonly, once the movement has been set, the music is then laid onto the piece. My work is never static, and pieces will change from performance to performance, sometimes quite radically over the course of a year. — Jacques Heim

PRE-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When you hear the word DANCE what is the first thing that comes to mind? (Emphasize to students that dance is an expression of self through movement.)
2. What is your favorite style of dance?
3. Why do you think that this particular style of dance was created?
4. What do you think the creator of this particular style of dance was trying to express when this style was created?
5. How do you think a story be conveyed through dance?

POST-PERFORMANCE REFLECTION:

1. Describe your reaction to the performance. What did it make you think and feel?
2. What were some of the objects used in the performance? Why do you think that they were chosen?
3. Identify an example of metaphor through movement or lighting that you witnessed in the performance. What did they mean to you?
4. What do you know about story-telling through dance that you didn't know before?
5. Create a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the style of dance that you witnessed in the performance and a style of dance that you are familiar with before seeing Diavolo.

FOR TEACHERS:

Branching Out With Curricula: Classroom Connection

Metaphors and symbolism are elements used in a variety of subjects and mediums.

- Discuss with your students how symbolism and/or metaphor relate to a text or other media subject in your curriculum.
- If they were to create a dance inspired by that text, what would the movements look like?
- Brainstorm ideas for an appropriate set?
- What objects might they incorporate into the piece?

CURRICULUM APPLICATION/ARTISTRY

Dance is an excellent barometer of student understanding of various concepts and lessons. “It’s hard to dance it if you don’t understand it.” Dance can also enhance and help understanding, leading the student to explore, think creatively, and ultimately learn. To follow are some ideas for dance artistry/ curriculum application. Use the warm up and BASTE elements, as well as the activities as guides to incorporating these ideas.

GEOGRAPHY

Students can create a dance that demonstrates their understanding of terrain by using changes in body levels. A narrator can be added to describe a tour across a place. The dance will show a relationship to mountains, valleys, deserts, canyons, etc. Students can pick a specific country, or area, or state, then use movements, shapes, as well as their imaginations, to create a dance metaphor.

HISTORY

Students can create a dance, with corresponding movements, to illustrate an historical event, like the Signing of the Declaration of Independence, or the Bering Strait Migration.

VOCABULARY

Common social studies words – such as democracy, revolution, or freedom, can be demonstrated by students using movement, shape, tempo, etc.

SCIENCE

Movement, and Diavolo concepts of trust, collaboration, and teamwork, are particularly valuable in the sciences. Dances can be created to show the dependence (collaboration or teamwork) of:

Body Systems: respiratory, circulatory, digestive, nervous
Seasons and Cycles: life cycles, a specific season
Machines and Mechanical Actions: pulleys, levers, tools, engines
Electricity and Magnetic Forces: polar opposites, pull, repel, circuits
Space and Solar Systems: rotation, relative size, order of planets
States of Matter Gravity

MATH

Math dances can be enlightening exercises to demonstrate how clearly students understand basic math concepts. Students can be given problems (adding, multiplying, geometric shapes, fractions, etc.) and then asked to show the solution to the problem through movement, phrases, shapes and working together.

In addition, dance can help a student understand quantity, for example, 75%, 1/3, etc. Students can be given set tempos at which to move, and then changes in tempo will be called out (“now move at 50% of that speed”). Areas can be marked out, or students may be asked to walk through 2/3 of the space.

LANGUAGE ARTS

There are a variety of ways to demonstrate or enhance students’ understanding of language, and ideas. For example: story telling through dance and a narrator, or using word cards to increase vocabulary and an understanding of the meaning of individual words.

Students can create poem dances, by choosing a poem, then using BASTE elements, choreograph movements for each line of the poem.

Create antonym and synonym movement comparisons by asking students to create movement for basic emotions and their opposites: love/hate, sad/happy; etc. Move onto other word pairs: smooth/jerky, tight/loose. Pair the students and have one create movement for one word, the other for its antonym. Do the same for synonyms.

Dance a scene from a play or a story. Or, in groups working together, choose a scene from a play or story and create a shape that best describes it. Freeze in the shape.

Branching out lessons and final thoughts adapted from CJSB/ SJU Fine Arts Programming “Catch” Study Guide developed by Tim Ternes.

English Language Arts Standards » Speaking & Listening
Grade 7

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

English Language Arts Standards » History/Social Studies
Grade 6-8

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

English Language Arts Standards » Science & Technical Subjects
Grade 6-8

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases.