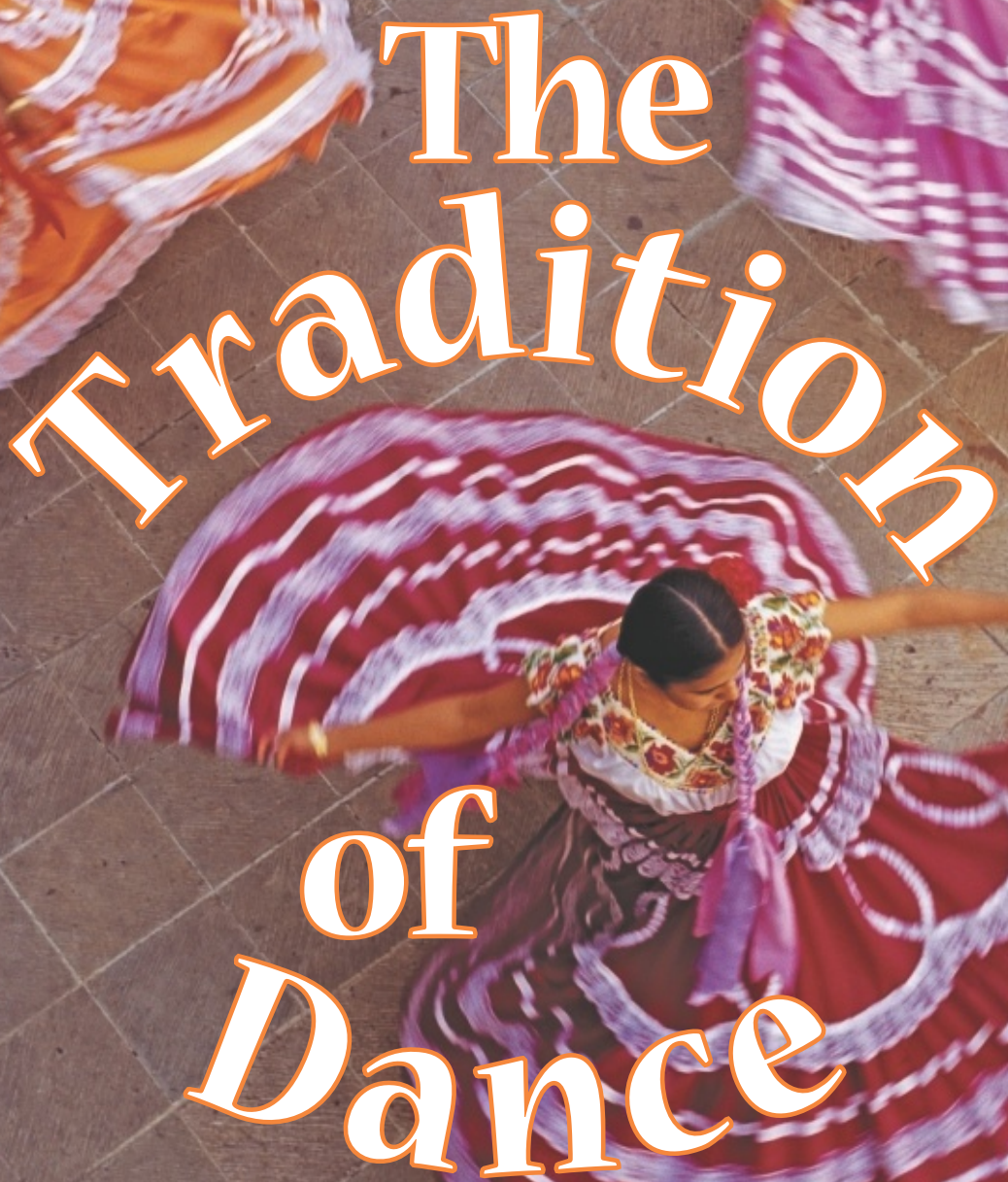


Informational
Nonfiction



The Tradition of Dance

by Johanna Ehrmann

Read to Find Out

How did many traditional dances begin? Why are they still popular today?

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STRATEGIES & SKILLS AT A GLANCE Comprehension

- Strategy: Make Inferences and Analyze
- Skill: Identify Cause and Effect

Vocabulary

- chameleon, famine, generosity, pathetic, ricochets, rummaged, scrounge, undetected

Vocabulary Strategy

- Context Clues: Restatement

CONTENT-AREA VOCABULARY

Words related to dance and movement
(see *glossary*)

CONTENT STANDARDS

Social Studies

- Culture

Word count: 1,933**

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Introduction

Dance is part of almost every culture in the world. In this book, we'll look at dance **traditions** from China, India, Ireland, and the United States. Dance plays an important role in each culture. Many of these dances started long ago and have been passed down from generation to generation.

Dance has been an important art form since ancient times. People wrote music to accompany dance. They designed masks and costumes to better perform their dances. Dances were a way for people to tell stories. Words were not necessary.



Why do people dance? People in some cultures have used dance as a **ritual**. They might have danced to end a drought that caused a famine. Other dances celebrated the harvest. Some traditional dances were performed to cure or heal someone.

Add costumes, music, and masks to a dance and you have more than just movement; you also have a story. Today many dances are performed for entertainment. Ballets often retell fairy tales. Modern dances might retell a myth or demonstrate a feeling. All dances show the dancer's **artistry**.

No matter where you travel in the world, you will almost always find dance. Dances might be traditional and part of a festival or modern with people moving in time to their favorite music. Dance is an art form that people continue to use to express themselves.



👉 These dancers are performing a traditional Indian dance.

CHAPTER 1

The Chinese Dragon Dance

Dance has a long history in Asia. Dances celebrated harvests, the New Year, the moon, and heroes. Dance is a part of the festivals, **ceremonies**, and traditions of many countries in Asia. Let's look at the Dragon Dance from China. It is a **folk dance**.

The dragon has been an important **totem**, or symbol, since ancient times in China. At first, the dragon just had claws and scales, but over time different parts of other animals were added. At last, the dragon included parts of a deer, fish, tiger, lion, horse, ox, donkey, snake, and vulture. Some Chinese emperors claimed to be descended from dragons.





📍 These dragons are part of a New Year celebration.

The dragon can walk on land, swim in the water, and fly in the air. The dragon represents good things, such as power and dignity. It can also bring prosperity. The dragon does not have to rummage or scrounge for food. People give it food. If the dragon shows generosity, then people will have a good year. The dragon has been an important part of Chinese culture since ancient times. The Chinese have been performing the dragon dance for hundreds of years. Even today, it is an important part of festivals throughout China.

In ancient times the Chinese believed that the dragon controlled the rain. So people danced in honor of the dragon in the hope that they would have rain for their crops.

Over time, the Dragon Dance became entertainment. People performed the dance at festivals, such as the Spring or Lantern Festival.

The dragon used in the Dragon Dance is long. It cannot go undetected. It can be from 5 feet (2 meters) to over 300 feet (100 m) long. It is made of bamboo, wood, cloth, and paper. Dancers use poles attached to the belly of the dragon to move it. The dancers have to be strong to carry the dragon, and they have to work together. If they don't, the dragon will tear apart, and that would be a pathetic sight.



Ancient Chinese Dance

One book tells us about ancient Chinese dance. *The Book of Songs*, written more than 2,000 years ago, includes dance **imagery**. Intermediaries—people who could communicate between people and natural forces—performed **rites** to make sure harvests were bountiful and rain plentiful. Some think that the Dragon Dance may have evolved from these early dances. This early **choreography** showed how the dragon moved.



👉 Dragon dancers prepare a dragon before a performance.

There are many versions of the Dragon Dance. One starts with rhythmic drumbeats. The drums build to a roaring sound to suggest the roar of a dragon. Sometimes a man leads the dance. He holds a pearl. The dragon follows the pearl, hoping to grab it. Both the man and the dragon dance to the same beat. At festivals firecrackers are often set off during the dance. The noise and sparks symbolize the fire of the dragon. You might think that the Dragon Dance is the loudest dance in the world as the noise of firecrackers ricochets in the streets, but there is a folk dance from India that is even louder!

CHAPTER 2

The Bhangra Dance from India

In a rural village in northern India, people are celebrating the beginning of the solar year. It is their New Year. This is an important festival because it also celebrates the harvest in mid-April. There is a lot of feasting and fun during this festival. But one important part of the festival is the dancing.

The men dance a traditional folk dance called the Bhangra (BANG-rah). It is a loud and merry dance. During the Bhangra, the men snap their fingers as they move to loud drum music and chanting. Some of the men also perform balancing tricks and **acrobatic** feats like those seen in parades or the circus.





📍 **The Bhangra began in the Punjab area of northern India. The men there have been performing this dance since the 1700s.**

While dancing the Bhangra, the men also sing traditional folk songs. Some of these songs tell of Punjabi heroes. Others are about less serious subjects. The men also mouth meaningless words, such as hoay, hoay. These words keep the beat to the loud drums that are played.

The dancers usually dance around the drummer. The drummer is in the middle of the circle. The men wear brightly colored tunics and turbans for this dance. The audience claps loudly and often joins in the chanting while the men dance. Often men of all ages dance at the same time.



📌 These women are dancing the **Gidha**.

While the men dance the Bhangra, the women have their own dance for this festival. They dance the **Gidha** (GEE-dah). The women's dance is very similar to the men's dance. The women clap and dance to the beat of a drum. They wear colorful clothes and jewelry. They also chant as they dance. For the most part, the women dance in a large group, but sometimes the dancers leave the group and dance in pairs or alone. When dancers leave the group, others will gather around them and clap as pairs or individuals perform.

At first, the Bhangra was part of a harvest festival. But now people also dance the Bhangra at weddings and many other celebrations. Bhangra music is also popular around the world.

Classical Dance

How is folk dance different from classical dance? Classical dance usually requires years of training and study. Classic dance also has carefully defined positions and expressions of the face and hands. Often, classical dances tell a story and each **gesture** tells part of the story.

Like folk dances, though, you can find many different styles of classical dance as you travel around the world. The dancers below are performing a classical dance from Cambodia. Some of these dances were first performed more than 1,000 years ago. At that time, children were selected at a young age to train as dancers. Like today's athletes, they moved away from their village and their family to train. After years of study, they performed at court for the rulers of the country.



Step Dancing from Ireland

Some say that Irish dancing can trace its history back 2,000 years. The Celts settled in Ireland, and they brought their folk dances with them. Little is known about these early dances because the Viking raiders destroyed almost all records of the time. But art from this time period does show people in costumes dancing.

Dancing was a part of the fairs that took place in Ireland during the Middle Ages. At the fairs, which are still popular today, people played music, danced, and sold goods. By the 1500s, there were several traditional dances. Some of them were the Fading, jig, Trenchmore, and sword dances.



No More Pipes!

Traditional Irish instruments are the fiddle, flute, and pipes. However, during England's rule of Ireland England wanted the Irish to be more like the English, so in the 1600s, they banned, or stopped, the Irish from playing the pipes. This caused people to dance and play music in secret. If the English caught them, the Irish could be fined money and were sometimes thrown in prison.

In the Fading dance two lines form, with partners facing each other. The pairs then do simple steps. This dance is more formal than the others. The jig is the Irish dance that many people are familiar with today. In this dance the steps are fast, and the dancers appear to hop. The jig is also a dance of joy. The Trenchmore is a big free-form country dance. Queen Elizabeth I loved to dance the Trenchmore. She ruled England from 1558 to 1603. Sword dances were danced by men with swords. These were popular dances in which men showed their skill with swords as well as their skill as dancers.

Modern-day dancers get ready to perform at this St. Patrick's Day festival in Ireland. ➔



One thing greatly influenced Irish dance. In the 1750s, dance masters began to teach in small towns in Ireland. A dance master traveled within one county. He would stop in a village for about six weeks. While there, the dance master lived with a family. The villagers considered it an honor to give room and board to a dance master. The dance masters taught in kitchens, farm buildings, or even on the roads.

Each dance master had a **repertoire** of dance steps that the students learned. The dance master often created new steps to fit the village he was in. Each dance master had his own territory. So different parts of Ireland developed different versions of the same dance. Later, at fairs, the village would hold a dance contest. The person who knew the most steps won the contest.

👉 These girls are performing an Irish step dance.



The Book of Kells

Many of the costumes for Irish dancers are based on the beautiful illustrations found in a famous Irish manuscript called *The Book of Kells*. This book's pages are decorated with illustrations drawn in bright colors or even in gold.



Today many people learn Irish step dancing. The dancers move very fast, clicking their heels, and keeping their arms at their sides. You may have seen this dance on television.

The dancers wear costumes that are based on artwork from the Middle Ages. The shirts are embroidered. The women wear skirts. The men wear kilts, a kind of skirt. All the dancers wear hard shoes. These shoes have hard soles and taps that make a clicking noise as they dance. Modern Irish step dances take place on large stages. Long lines of dancers move across the stage as their feet fly through the dance steps. At fairs, these dances are often performed on large wooden stages or even flatbed trucks.

CHAPTER 4

Pueblo Corn Dances

The Pueblo people have been living and farming in the southwest for more than 2,000 years. Growing squashes, beans, and corn in the dry desert has been central to Pueblo culture for a long time. Dance is also important to the Pueblo people, and they have several important dance ceremonies. These dances bind the community together and help to preserve their heritage.



📍 The shaded area shows where the Pueblo people have lived in the southwestern United States.

There are 19 different pueblos, or communities, where the Pueblo people live. Each pueblo has its own traditions.



Agriculture and dance come together in the corn dances that are held in the different pueblos during the spring and summer. Each pueblo holds corn dances. But the dances can vary from pueblo to pueblo. Many of the pueblos are divided into several groups for ceremonies. One group is the Winter, or Turquoise, people. Another is the Summer, or Squash, people. There are also the Koshare, respected dancers who represent the Pueblo people's ancestors.

The different groups have separate buildings where they prepare for the dance. In the 1600s the Spanish ruled the Pueblo territory. They tried to stamp out traditional Pueblo dancing. So the Pueblo people became very secretive in order to hide and preserve their customs from the Spanish. That secrecy is still kept today, so not much is known about how the dancers prepare for the corn dance.



When it is time for the dance to begin, the Turquoise people dance first. Then the Squash people dance. Each group has its own chorus and drummers. The drums beat a rhythm, and the chorus chants the corn dance song for the dancers. Each group tries to dance its best.

The women sometimes wear tablitas, or pieces of painted wood, on their heads. They also carry evergreen branches in their hands as symbols of life. The men wear white dancing kilts and have feathers tied into their hair. They carry rattles and evergreen branches. The sound of the rattle symbolizes the rain they hope will fall to water the corn.

👉 Dancers perform a corn dance.





Powwows

Other Native American peoples also have dances to celebrate their culture. Sometimes they are performed at **powwows**, or Native American social gatherings. At powwows, there are dance contests and other dances, some participatory, some to honor specific people. Young people learn dances by imitating other dancers.

Dancers take great care of their traditional clothing. Much of this clothing is decorated with feathers and beads. Traditional clothing is often passed on from generation to generation. The variety of styles and colors seen during the **grand entry** is dazzling!

You can attend a powwow, but you should obey the rules.

- Show respect for the dancers and people at the powwow.
- Do not sit in the dance circle.
- Always ask if you may take a photo. Most dancers do not want their photo taken.

Conclusion

Dance is something people have shared for thousands of years. From China to India to Ireland to the United States, people move their bodies in joyous celebration. New dances are created, and old ones are cherished and passed on. Children learn traditional dances in schools or from their elders.

What role does dance play in the different cultures discussed in this book? What role does dance play in your culture? Dances can give meaning to people's lives. People sharing dances across cultures find common ground. Being a dancer allows you to be a chameleon: You can try on different characters. Dance is fun, it keeps you fit, and it teaches you about your own culture and that of other people. So start dancing!

These Mexican folk dancers use their colorful costumes to add beauty and drama to their performances. ➔



Glossary

acrobatic (*ak-ruh-BAT-ik*) using gymnastic moves, like an acrobat
(page 8)

artistry (*AHR-tuh-stree*) artistic ability that includes imagination and
creativity (page 3)

ceremony (*SER-uh-moh-nee*) a formal act with set rules (page 4)

choreography (*kohr-ee-AH-gruh-fee*) the composition and
arrangement of a dance (page 6)

folk dance (*FOHK dans*) a traditional dance originally invented by the
common people of a region or country (page 4)

gesture (*JES-chur*) the use of movement of the body or limbs as a
means of expression (page 11)

grand entry (*GRAND EN-tree*) the procession of all competitive
dancers at the start of a powwow (page 19)

imagery (*IM-ij-ree*) language used in poetry, novels, and other kinds
of literature that creates vivid images in the mind (page 6)

powwow (*POW-wow*) a Native American social gathering, usually
including competitive dancing (page 19)

repertoire (*REP-uhr-twahr*) the stock of songs or dances that a
player or group is prepared to perform (page 14)

rite (*RIGHT*) rules governing the words or actions of a ceremony
(page 6)

ritual (*RICH-ew-uhl*) a ceremonial act or process (page 3)

totem (*TOH-tuhm*) an object serving as the symbol of a family, clan,
or people (page 4)

tradition (*truh-DISH-uhn*) the handing down of customs or ideas
from one generation to the next (page 2)

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Comprehension Check

Summarize

Use a Cause and Effect Chart to help you summarize the information in *The Tradition of Dance*. Identify reasons why people dance. How did those reasons affect their dances?

Cause → Effect
→
→
→
→

Think and Compare

1. Reread page 13. Why did the English ban the playing of Irish pipes? What did the Irish do in response?
(Identify Cause and Effect)
2. Which of the dances described would you most like to see or take part in? Explain your reasons. **(Analyze)**
3. Do you think it is important to preserve traditional dance in today's world? Explain. **(Synthesize/Evaluate)**

Literacy Activities



Interview a Dancer

Choose your favorite dance from the book. Pretend that you are going to interview a person who performs that dance. Write a list of questions that you would like to ask that person. Include questions about the history of the dance and what the dance might have been used for.



Research Dance Traditions

Learn a traditional dance from someone who knows it, from a video in the library, or at a local dance class or event. Demonstrate the dance for your class and tell your classmates a little of its history.

The Tradition of Dance

Did you know that people around the world do traditional dances that have existed for centuries? Learn how people all over the world express themselves through movement.



6.1 Week 4

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