

## Clip: Contemporary Dance

### Episode 11: One Perfect Day

#### Activity: Origins of Contemporary Dance

Theme: Dance Knowledge, Dance Skills

Elements of dance: body, space, time, dynamics, relationships

1. As a class, view the clip, *Contemporary Dance*, where Tara dances her solo choreographed by Ethan. Tara's solo is 'new and original' and represents her freedom of expression and her escape from the confines of classical ballet. She is bare foot, her hair is down and she moves more freely to contemporary music. For Tara the 'break away' from traditional ballet is contemporary dance.
2. Discuss with the class what the term 'contemporary' means, explaining the term using examples such as contemporary music, fashion, furniture, etc. Ask the students what the opposite term for contemporary is and have them suggest examples of 'traditional' objects and 'traditional' dance. Draw up two columns on the board or IWB titled 'traditional' and 'contemporary' and list the suggestions in each column. Compare and contrast the two columns and have students suggest evidence on how the two concepts may be merged.
3. For dance, contemporary means dance produced 'NOW'. Dance that looks through current aesthetic, cultural, political, economic, and social perspectives. It usually uses words such as 'new', 'original', 'innovative', 'radical', 'pushing boundaries' and 'cutting edge', among others. Have students suggest a list of terms that could define the concept of 'contemporary'. Have students analyse the steps and movements of Tara's dance.
4. Divide the class into small groups of six. Each group is to analyse Tara's dance and segment it into six parts. Each member of the group is to take one segment of the dance to practice and dance it as a relay of parts. As a group, the students can reproduce the dance in the order that Tara danced or they can rearrange the segments to create an original dance based on Tara's dance.
5. Each group will perform their dance for the rest of the class.
6. Historically there are many dancers who were pioneers of 'break away' forms of dance. The birth of modern dance was in the early 1900s and some early modern dance pioneers were: Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Loie Fuller, Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman. These dancers were also choreographers who developed slightly different styles. Modern dance has remained a popular form in Australia

**Activity: Origins of Contemporary Dance**

through to the early 1960s and beyond. Ask students to research Australian dance pioneers and select one Australian dance pioneer to research further. Ask students to complete **Student Activity Sheet E11.1: History of Modern Dance** adding information about the Australian dance pioneer they researched.

7. In small groups, have students select one innovative modern dancer/choreographer (Australian or International) and research some information about their style and their legacy to the history of dance. The students should develop a poster, PowerPoint, presentation, webpage, blog or wiki about the dancer and include information, images and video footage. They should present their research to the rest of the class.
8. As a class, start a Dance History Timeline and display the information students collected along the timeline.

**Download**

- Student Activity Sheet E11.1: History of Modern Dance

**Useful resources**

- [Ausdance Factsheet 16, Caring for the dancer's body](#)
- [Groovy Games, Article on modern dance pioneers](#)
- [australia.gov.au/aboutAustralia/Contemporary Dance in Australia](http://australia.gov.au/aboutAustralia/Contemporary Dance in Australia)
- [Contemporary, Sydney Dance Company, video](#)
- [Australian Dictionary of Biography: Bodenwieser, Gertrud \(1890 -1959\)](#)
- [National Library of Australia, Trove record: Barr, Margaret \(1904 - 1991\)](#)
- [National Library of Australia, Trove record: Dalman, Elizabeth Cameron \(1934 - \)](#)



NAME: .....

Student Activity Sheet: E11.1  
Activity: Origins of Contemporary Dance

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## History of Modern Dance

Choose one Australian dance pioneer and write their name here:

\_\_\_\_\_

Name three of the above named Australian dance pioneer's most famous works in the numbered places below, in the order they were created

1. Name of work: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/s performed: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue/s Performed at: \_\_\_\_\_

Idea/Story behind the dance: \_\_\_\_\_

Main Dancers: \_\_\_\_\_

Draw costumes/sets here

2. Name of work: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/s performed: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue/s Performed at: \_\_\_\_\_

Idea/Story behind the dance: \_\_\_\_\_

Main Dancers: \_\_\_\_\_

Draw costumes/sets here



3. Name of work: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/s performed: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue/s Performed at: \_\_\_\_\_

Idea/Story behind the dance: \_\_\_\_\_

Main Dancers: \_\_\_\_\_

Draw costumes/sets here

