

Episode 24: Heatwave

Clip: Nutcracker

Activity: Safe Stretching

Theme: Dance Skills

Elements of dance: **body**

1. As a class, view the clip, *Nutcracker*, where The National Academy of Dance is preparing to present the ballet, *The Nutcracker*, for the end of year performance. In the clip, Abigail is stretching before rehearsing the Clara solo. She makes her sister force her to stretch, which is in fact quite a dangerous thing to do. We cannot tell what kind of warm-up Abigail has done prior to these stretches but a good warm-up should always be undertaken before this kind of extreme stretching.
2. Discuss with students the importance of a good warm-up session and the kinds of stretches they should be including in their preparation to dance. Make a class list about the reasons to complete a warm-up, and the benefits of a warm-up. Include information about how to stretch properly, and the types of stretching that are appropriate for dance.
3. Divide the class into smaller groups and allocate them one of the three methods of stretching. Ask each group to develop a poster presentation about one of the stretching methods. The group should use **Student Activity Sheet E24.3: Planning for Safe Stretching Poster** to plan their presentation. Have them include in each presentation:
 - a. A description of the method of stretch
 - b. Several images showing the performance of at least three different stretches using this method
 - c. Pros and cons for stretching using this method
4. Once the group completes their presentation, they should share it with the class and conduct a warm-up session using their method of stretching as the prime focus.

Activity: Safe Stretching

Information to assist the activity:

Warming-up raises the temperature to the muscles and peripherals. As it does this, it increases blood flow to the essential muscle groups and ensures mobility around the joints. It facilitates nervous impulses which speed up reflex and reaction time and it helps energise, focus and prepare us mentally.

A good warm-up focuses on the muscle groups to be used in class or rehearsal, and uses dynamic movements. You should start with small, slow controlled movements and work up to larger movements, particularly work the bigger muscle groups first (back, abdominals, gluteus maximus, quadriceps) followed by a focus on more specific areas, hands, wrists, feet, neck. Warm-up exercises could include: cat stretch, spinal rolls, shoulder circles (slow to medium pace), hip rotations, pelvic tilts, foot rotations and isolations, sit ups, walking slowly then building to jogging and occasional sprints, a ballet barre, floor work (contemporary dance and jazz), etc.

NOTE: Stretching can be incorporated into a warm-up as a specific, later section, or as dynamic stretching (i.e. leg swings that start very low for eight swings on each leg, followed by another eight at a slightly higher level, etc., until the student is performing the movement at the range he/she will be expected to perform in class. It is important that this occurs very gradually so that there is as little stress on the muscle groups and joints as possible.

Rules for Stretching

- a. Know your own body and stretch to your own ability and requirements.*
- b. Stretching increases the Range of Movement (ROM) about a joint. When a full range of movement is not used for a time, the muscles around the joint shorten and the range of movement diminishes. If regular stretching is done the ROM around a particular joint is maintained.*
- c. Don't stretch to the point of pain. This is your body telling you to stop.*
- d. People should be judicious when stretching with an injury.*

Methods of stretching

- *Ballistic – high risk method – not recommended. Ballistic stretching involves an extreme movement performed quickly, without control. Stretches are gravity assisted swinging, or bouncing with high momentum (bouncing, jumping into splits, high brushes are an example of this).*
- *PNF Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation. In this stretch, muscles are taken to their full stretch and then alternately contract against a resistance, and then relax (repeated 3-4 times) allowing a relaxed muscle and a greater static stretch.*
- *Static. A stretch where you take a muscle to its limit and then hold it between 10–30 seconds. This allows the muscle to relax at its full range. The stretch must be comfortable. Best results occur when the stretch is repeated at least three times, with a rest in between. When working with a partner this is called “passive stretching”.*

Download

- Student Activity Sheet E24.3: Planning for Safe Stretching Poster

Useful resources

- Ausdance Video Segment 9 -Safe Stretching Yoga Poses
- [Ausdance Factsheet 16: Caring for the dancer's body](#)
- Bramley, I. (Ed.) “Safe Dance Practice for Children and Young People”, *Dance Teaching Essentials*, Dance UK, 2002, pp35-39, 60-70.
- Crookshanks, D. “Better Stretching” *Dance Australia*, Oct/Nov. 2001, pp 66-9.

NAME:

Student Activity Sheet:
Activity:

E24.3
Safe
Stretching

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Planning for Safe Stretching Poster

Create a poster that gives lots of information about safe stretching.

On your poster:

- Name the style of stretching
- Give a description of the method of stretching
- Have several pictures showing people performing at least three of these kinds of stretches, each one for a different part of the body.
- Explain both the benefits and hazards of this style of stretching.