

teacher resource guide

schooltime performance series



alvin ailey
american dance
theater

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about the performance

Magnetic. Electrifying. Passionate. Beautiful. Soulful.

These are just some of the words that audience members and critics use to describe Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT), a uniquely American modern dance company known for its vibrant blend of modern, ballet and other dance styles. Audience members will be treated to a wonderful experience that will touch their hearts and inspire a greater appreciation for dance and the arts.

This storied dance company had humble beginnings but a grand vision from the very start. In the 1950s, dancer and choreographer Alvin Ailey envisioned a company where African-American dancers could not only display their talents and skills, but also express their experiences and heritage. He gathered a group of young African-American modern dancers and premiered their first performance in March 1958 at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. That now fabled performance forever changed the perception of American dance with its expressiveness, technical prowess and influences from African-American culture.

The Company's early days were spent traveling on what Alvin Ailey called "the station wagon tours"; dancers were transported from performance to performance in a station wagon driven by one of Ailey's friends. From these modest beginnings, AAADT has grown to be one of the foremost modern dance companies in the world. Dancers of all races and backgrounds perform with the Company, which is also NJPAC's principal resident dance affiliate.

"The texture of their dancing is powerful and juicy, brilliant in speed and marvelous in slowness. You feel as if you've always known them," hailed *The New York Times* in a recent review of a performance.

about alvin ailey

Born on January 5, 1931, in Rogers, Texas, Alvin Ailey came from quite modest beginnings. His mother was a teenager when she gave birth to him. When Alvin was young, his father left. Ailey grew up poor but steeped in the arts. Church services and a local dance hall introduced him to music and the arts. When he was 12 years old, he moved to Los Angeles, where he excelled in school as an athlete and a natural at languages.

He was introduced to dance through performances of the world renowned Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. This fired him up to pursue dance seriously. Ailey began his dance career at a time when African-American dancers like him had few opportunities. He had to work hard to forge his own path, which informed his desire to start his own company.

His formal dance training began with Lester Horton, whose Lester Horton Dance Theater was one of the first racially-integrated dance companies in the United States. Horton soon became one of Ailey's mentors and, when Horton died in 1953, Ailey became the company's director. There, he began choreographing works of his own.

He also made his debut on Broadway as a dancer in 1954 in the Truman Capote musical *House of Flowers*. He appeared in other Broadway productions, such as the 1957 performance of the musical *Jamaica*, which starred Lena Horne and Ricardo Montalban. He also studied with famed dancer Martha Graham and acting with Stella Adler while he was working on Broadway. All of these experiences crystalized and informed his path toward founding Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

The first performance by AAADT was in 1958, but it was Ailey's masterwork *Revelations*, which premiered in 1960, that catapulted the Company and its choreographer to stardom. Drawing on memories of his rural Texas childhood, with movement set to gospel music, spirituals and the blues, Ailey created a dance that powerfully expressed the African-American experience. Ailey called the experiences that inspired *Revelations* "blood memories" because he felt that they were as much a part of him as the blood running through his veins. Since its premiere, more than 23 million people in 71 countries have seen *Revelations*—more than any other modern dance work in history.

In 1969, Ailey established a school in New York City, Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, now called The Ailey School. He also formed the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, now Ailey II, in 1974. Both institutions supported Ailey's pioneering work, promoting arts in education, particularly to benefit underserved communities.

In 1987, Alvin Ailey received the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award, modern dance's most prestigious honor. And in December 1988, he received The Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime contribution to American culture through the performing arts—the nation's highest official distinction for creative artists.

Since his death in 1989 at the age of 58, Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation has continued to carry out Ailey's vision. In 2008, a U.S. Congressional resolution designated Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater as "a vital American cultural ambassador to the world." With more than 235 works by over 90 choreographers in the Company repertory, including 79 of Ailey's own ballets, the Company continues to enrich the American modern dance heritage and preserve the uniqueness of the African-American cultural experience.

In 2014, Alvin Ailey posthumously received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the country's highest civilian honor, in recognition of his contributions and commitment to civil rights and dance in America.

"His work made an important contribution to American culture," dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov told *The New York Times*.

Dancers: Linda Celeste Sims and Jacqueline Green
Photo by: Andrew Eccles





Dancers: Chaiwar Monteiro and Jacqueline Green Photo by: Andrew Eccles

in the spotlight

A deeper look into Mr. Ailey and his mission

What makes Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater different from other dance companies?

In March 1958, Alvin Ailey launched his own dance company because he didn't see enough people of color dancing on the concert stage at the time. That first performance changed forever the perception of American dance, and six decades later, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is now the most popular and most-traveled modern dance company in the world—a cultural community that includes performances, education, and community programs. Alvin Ailey's signature work, *Revelations*, has been seen by more people around the world than any other modern dance.

Alvin Ailey's seminal work, *Revelations*, drew on his roots in the rural American South. Today, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues to address to specific aspects of the African-American experience in its repertoire.

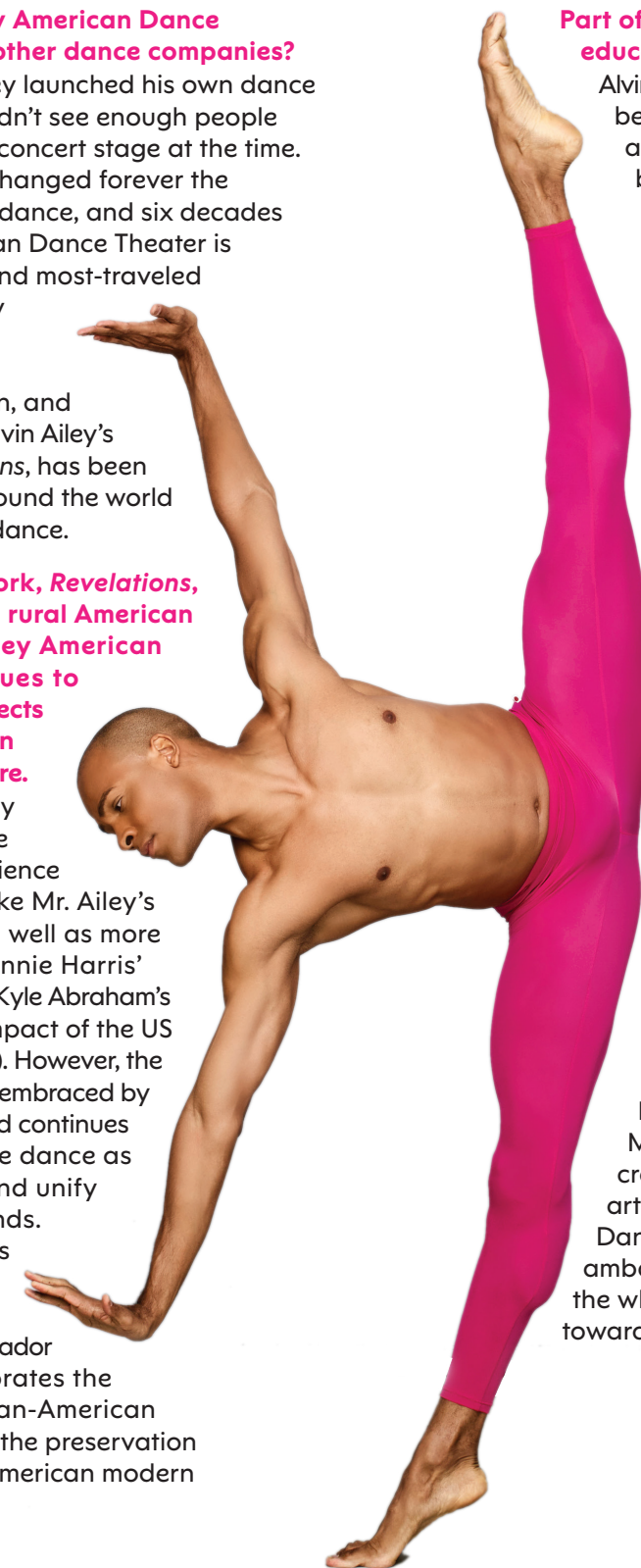
The Company's repertoire addresses aspects of the African-American experience through classic works like Mr. Ailey's enduring *Revelations* as well as more recent additions like Rennie Harris' *Exodus* (urban unrest) or Kyle Abraham's *Untitled America* (the impact of the US prison system on families). However, the Company has long been embraced by audiences of all races and continues Mr. Ailey's mission to use dance as a means to enlighten and unify people of all backgrounds. In 2008, the US Congress designated the Ailey Company as "a vital American cultural ambassador to the world" that celebrates the uniqueness of the African-American cultural experience and the preservation and enrichment of the American modern dance tradition.

Part of Ailey's mission is to provide arts in education for underserved communities.

Alvin Ailey said, "Dance is for everybody. I believe that dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people." The Ailey School, Ailey Arts In Education & Community Programs, the Ailey Extension ("Real Classes for Real People") and outreach conducted by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey II dancers represent a large-scale continuation of Mr. Ailey's original vision to use the power of dance to enrich and positively impact lives, especially those of young people. Many of the 100,000 young people who participate in these programs each year face serious academic, social and domestic challenges that have been linked to an increased risk of dropping out of school. These challenges include exposure to drugs, violence, poor nutrition and a lack of structure or positive role models in their everyday lives. Ailey Arts in Education programs provide a strong foundation and positive influences for participants, helping them to identify their own decision-making power and individual potential.

Artists and dancers of color continue to face challenges head-on.

During the height of the Civil Rights Movement, Alvin Ailey was a pioneer of creating opportunities for marginalized artists of color. Today, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater serves as a cultural ambassador to the world that celebrates the whole of human experience with an eye toward diversity.



Dancer: Yannick Lebrun

Photo by: Andrew Eccles

inspired ideas in the classroom

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Teacher Focus		Student Activity	NJ Student Learning Standards
Prepare for the performance	<p>Prepare your students for the performance by watching this video clip about the inspiration behind <i>Revelations</i>. youtu.be/44nqeAXLS-k</p> <p>Discuss with your students how Alvin Ailey used dance to bring people together, and how he believed dance came from the people and should be delivered back to the people.</p> <p>Discuss with your students the importance of telling your story.</p>	<p>After viewing the video clip “Why See Ailey Now?” (youtu.be/zAEHbdlkgcGs), write 3 reasons why people should see Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at NJPAC. Discuss your answers.</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.R4. NJLSA.SL1. Social Studies 6.1.4.D.13</p>
Experience the performance	<p>As you bring your students to the performance, encourage them to notice the difference in the movements of each dance and what the movements represent. They should notice how the dancers express the feeling of the music. Ask students to distinguish between movements that are inward and tight (bound flow) and those that are “out of control” and loose (free flow).</p>	<p>As you watch the performance, observe how the dancers and the music express various emotions. What emotions (happiness, sadness, joy, sorrow, excitement, despair, hope, fear, etc.) do you experience as you watch the performance? Which of these emotions are evident in the dancers’ movement? How can you tell they are expressing a particular emotion?</p>	<p>NJ Arts Standards 1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique National Arts Standards Anchor Standard 7</p>
Reflect, respond and read	<p>Encourage your students to reflect on how the performance affected them. Ask them about their favorite parts and why they preferred certain dances over others. Encourage students to demonstrate how they felt during certain dances and then explain how they felt. Revisit the discussion on the importance of telling your story.</p>	<p>Read the “In the Spotlight” section of this guide. Respond to the questions posed to Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. What do you think Alvin Ailey meant by “I believe that dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people”?</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.R1. NJLSA.SL1.</p>
Focus	<p>Ask your students to focus on their own stories of growing up or a memorable event in their life. Are there any family traditions or stories they could share with the class? How can they share this story through movement, song, drama or art? Ask them to think about why they picked this particular story.</p>	<p>Turn and talk to a partner about a memorable childhood event or family tradition. Describe the details of the event. Now describe the event again without talking. You can sing, but you can’t talk. Use pantomime, gestures, movements, drawings or lyrics from a song. Think about how you can turn your story into a dance, song, piece of artwork or dramatic presentation.</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1. NJ Arts Standards 1.1 The Creative Process 1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique</p>
Originate	<p>Discuss with your students the various ways to share their creativity. Review how Alvin Ailey used his own personal story to create the masterpiece <i>Revelations</i>. Share with your students a story from your childhood. Encourage your students to use their imagination to express their story.</p>	<p>How do you feel when you are happy? How do you feel when you are angry? Identify any emotions from your story. Identify colors, movements, words and gestures associated with those emotions. For example, when you are angry, do you see red or blue? Is your movement tight or loose? What words are similar to angry? What gestures tell someone you are angry? Use your answers to create a dance, poem, song, artwork or short play to express your story.</p>	<p>NJ Arts Standards 1.1 The Creative Process 1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique</p>
Rehearse	<p>Allow your students time to rehearse their presentations. Permit the students to give feedback and constructive criticism on their presentations. Enlist the help of visual and performing arts teachers in your school to help students create. Explain to students that their presentations do not have to be literal but represent the overall theme of their story.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rehearse your presentation with a partner.• Explain your creative process to your partner. Explain your reasoning for choosing a particular art form.• Ask for feedback. Ask your partner to identify the emotional words depicted in your story.• Videotape or take pictures of your presentation. Make revisions as needed.• Share your presentation with the class.	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1. NJ Arts Standards 1.1 The Creative Process 1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique National Arts Standards Anchor Standard 10</p>
Make magic	<p>Create a performance area for your class. Explain the importance of performance etiquette and audience etiquette. Invite other classes and administrators to see the student presentations. Show your audience the video “A Look at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater” (youtu.be/lcFgDgke7uk). Encourage students to explain their inspiration and creative process.</p>	<p>Share your creative piece with your peers and the administration. Be proud of your creation and your process. Show pride in your story. Ask your audience for feedback and comments. Discuss the importance of telling your story.</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1. NJ Arts Standards 1.3 Performance</p>

curriculum standards

NJ Arts Standards

1.1 The Creative Process

All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles that govern the creation of works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.

1.2 History of Arts & Culture

All students will understand the role, development, and influence of the arts throughout history and across cultures.

1.3 Performance

All students will synthesize skills, media, methods and technologies that are appropriate to creating, performing and/or presenting works of art in dance, music, theatre and visual art.

1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique

All students will demonstrate and apply an understanding of arts philosophies, judgment and analysis to works of art in dance, music, theatre and visual art.

National Arts Standards

- 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

FIND THE STANDARDS

For more detailed information on the standards, visit these websites:

NJ ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

state.nj.us/education/cccs/2016/ela

NJ SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

state.nj.us/education/cccs/2014/ss

NJ WORLD LANGUAGE STANDARDS

state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/wl

NJ ARTS STANDARDS

state.nj.us/education/cccs/2009/1.pdf

NATIONAL ARTS STANDARDS

nationalartsstandards.org

new jersey student learning standards

English Language Arts

NJSLSA.R1.

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences and relevant connections from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

NJSLSA.R4.

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

NJSLSA.SL1.

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Social Studies

6.1.4.D.13

Describe how culture is expressed through and influenced by the behavior of people.

vocabulary

Ballet

Highly technical dance that evolved in the Italian Renaissance era and French aristocratic courts.

Blues

One of the root forms of jazz music, evolved from African-American slave songs such as field hollers, work songs, spirituals, and country string ballads.

Choreography

The art or practice of designing combinations and sequences of movements of physical bodies. The person who creates the steps, combinations and patterns of a ballet or dance is called the choreographer.

Gospel music

Music that relates or celebrates the teachings of Christianity and events of Jesus’ life.

Katherine Dunham

Dancer-choreographer who was one of Alvin Ailey’s early inspirations. Dunham’s dance style combined Caribbean, African and American dance influences.

Kinesthetic awareness

The sensory skill that allows you to know where your body is in space and in relation to other people and things around you. Dancers must develop a strong kinesthetic awareness in order to keep their spacing during choreography.

Lester Horton

African-American dancer and choreographer who was one of Ailey’s early mentors and teachers.

Martha Graham

Pioneering modern dancer and choreographer whose technique, based on the opposition of contraction and release within the body, has been called the cornerstone of American modern dance.

Modern dance

A form of contemporary theatrical and concert dance that uses special techniques and the entire body in movements that express abstract ideas.

Multi-racial

Consisting of or representing members of more than one racial group.

Repertory

A stock selection of plays, dances or pieces that a company or performer knows or is prepared to present regularly.

Revelations

Things that are revealed or disclosed, especially something striking that has not been realized before.

Rural

Relating to, or living in the country, as opposed to living in towns or cities.

Spirituals

Music that relates to religion, the spirit or soul.

Time

A measurable period during which movement, dance or music occurs. Dance and music make the passage of time palpable by dividing it into anything from complex, rhythmic patterns to periods of long, unbroken stillness.



Rennie Harris's
Lazarus

Photo by: Paul Kolnik

cultural connections

Popular dances and their connections with Africa

On the African continent, people danced to celebrate weddings, births, good harvests, and other occasions. During the height of the transatlantic slave trade, millions of souls were placed in bondage and shipped to the Americas, bringing with them their particular traditions of dance from various West and Central African communities, tribes and kingdoms. When the African diaspora settled in the New World, people from different regions in Africa mingled and forged communities, remixing European and different African cultures that laid the seedbed for many cherished art forms, such as jazz, blues, hip hop and others. On the plantation, enslaved Africans continued their tradition of dancing every day or for celebrations but they blended different tribal practices. One example of this cultural remixing is capoeira, an art form born in Brazil that is both dance and martial arts and is practiced all over the world.

In America, dance moved from the plantation to minstrel shows in the 19th century. These shows consisted mostly of white entertainers in black face, performing in comic skits, dance numbers and song—most of which caricatured and stereotyped black people and culture. There were some African-American performers also in minstrel shows. These shows were racist in nature and portrayed black people in a negative light but they were vehicles to present some aspects of African-American culture to a mostly white audience.

One of the most significant cultural transferences via minstrel was the popularization of the cakewalk, a dance created by slaves who were imitating high society ball dances. This dance became very popular among white people in the late 19th century. Other dances with African roots that became widely practiced were the Charleston, the Lindy hop and the jitterbug.

Tap dance has its roots in 19th century Manhattan, where free African Americans lived closely together with Irish immigrants and other recent European arrivals in slum neighborhoods. In these communities, black people would incorporate African tribal movements with Irish jigs and English clog dancing, creating a new form of dance that tap legends like Howard “Sandman” Sims, Jimmy Slyde, Bunny Briggs and Gregory Hines perfected into a dazzling rush of expressive, virtuoso movement.

Sandman was famous for introducing sand into his tap, which produced sounds that could range from soft and gentle to loud and gritty. Slyde was known for his energetic

jazz-inflected dance performances and his signature move, the slide. Briggs, who had been dancing since he was a young child, performed with bandleader Duke Ellington and at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. Hines, a multi-talented performer who could sing and act, did much to introduce tap to new audiences in the late 20th century via nationally televised specials and movies and by mentoring younger stars like Newark native Savion Glover.

Contemporary popular dance, such as breakdancing, twerking and krumping, have roots in urban black communities. Breakdancing’s rise is closely tied with the evolution of hip hop as a whole and is considered a vital element of that culture. Twerking has become massively popular, moving from clubs to national television. Krumping is another dance form with origins in urban black communities in California.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has incorporated vernacular popular urban dance into choreographed modern dance pieces, such as *Exodus*, which takes hip hop and burnishes it into something stirring and timeless.

“It is very much alive ... so arresting that the audience welled up in cheers several times in the dance’s course... *Exodus* turned hip-hop from its usual cocky individualism to spiritual ends. A miraculous conversion,” *The Financial Times* writes.

Another Alvin Ailey piece that is clearly influenced by popular dance is *Stack-Up*, an energetic, disco-inflected performance about a couple in love and a drug pusher. The dancers’ balletic moves mix with soul and funk in a nightclub setting in Los Angeles. It has hints of Soul Train and even very early hip hop.

A key figure in this country’s dance history is Katherine Dunham, who was an innovator in incorporating ballet and modern dance forms with African and Caribbean movements. She had an academic background in anthropology, which aided in her research on various dances of the African diaspora and also in driving her artistry as a groundbreaking and prolific choreographer. She formed her own dance company, which was widely acclaimed and most active in the 1940s and 1950s. Her revolutionary performances had a big impact on many dancers, including Alvin Ailey, who was inspired to take classes with her.

Others who advanced the artistry of African-American dance are Carmen de Lavallade, Geoffrey Holder and

Judith Jamison—acclaimed performers who have been involved with AAADT. Lavallade, 88 years old and still dancing, has a background in ballet and was also a member of the Lester Horton Dance Theater, like Ailey. She had danced for the Metropolitan Opera in large-scale productions as well, making her one of the first black people to do so. Such is her long and fruitful career, which has involved not just Ailey but also dancing for jazz greats like Ellington. She was named a 2017 Kennedy Center Honors recipient.

De Lavallade’s husband, Geoffrey Holder, was a great dancer, actor, singer and director. Holder, who died in 2014, specialized in folk dance but also was a principal dancer with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in the 1950s. For AAADT, Holder choreographed the pieces *The Prodigal Prince* and *Adagio for a Dead Soldier*. To a wider audience, he was known for his 7UP commercials in the 1970s and 1980s and as a James Bond villain in the movie *Live and Let Die*.

Judith Jamison has been associated with AAADT since 1965 and is currently the Artistic Director Emerita. As a dancer in the company in the 1960s and 1970s, she performed major roles in productions, earning wide praise for her skill, passion and stage charisma. She is especially known for her performance in *Cry*, a solo piece choreographed by Alvin Ailey for his mother. Before becoming Artistic Director in 1989, she guest-starred at other ballet companies and formed her own dance troupe. Under her leadership at AAADT, she choreographed dance pieces, and the Company also performed classics from its repertoire and new works by other choreographers. Her success as a dancer and artistic director has earned her many plaudits, among them a primetime Emmy Award, a Kennedy Center Honors, and a National Medal of Arts.

resources

Websites

About Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
alvinailey.org/about/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater—History
alvinailey.org/about/history

Alvin Ailey Then and Now
danceadvantage.net/alvin-ailey-then-and-now/

Alvin Ailey Biography
notablebiographies.com/A-An/Ailey-Alvin.html

Master + Work: Alvin Ailey and Revelations
artsedge.kennedy-center.org/students/features/master-work/ailey-revelations

African-American Spirituals
authentichistory.com/1600-1859/3-spirituals/

What Is the Blues?
pbs.org/theblues/classroom/essaysblues.html

The Women of Alvin Ailey
njpac.org/women-of-ailey

African-American Dance, a Brief History
aaregistry.org/story/african-american-dance-a-brief-history/

Videos

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater on Vimeo
vimeo.com/channels/ailey

Alvin Ailey’s Revelations
vimeo.com/17307366

Alvin Ailey talks about Revelations
youtu.be/GTF3FoRJYdA

Books

Ailey, Alvin, and Peter Bailey – *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*. Replica Books, 2000.

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DeFrantz, Thomas F. – *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey’s Embodiment of African American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

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Tracy, Robert – *Ailey Spirit: The Journey of an American Dance Company*. Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2004.

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the arts in your school

In-School Residencies: Drama + Social Studies. Dance + Math. It all adds up in NJPAC's In-School Residencies in which professional teaching artists partner with educators to bring the arts into the classroom. Each 7- to 10-week program culminates in a student performance or an interactive family workshop. All programs address state and national standards. NJPAC is the regional provider in New Jersey for international arts programs like the NJ Wolf Trap Program and Dancing Classrooms Global.

Assemblies: NJPAC presents engaging school assembly programs that are presented by professional artists that invite students into the enchanting world of live performance. NJPAC's assembly series promotes cultural awareness and invigorates learning by presenting works that are connected to your school's curriculum.

Professional Development: NJPAC Professional Development engages classroom teachers, arts specialists and teaching artists as integrated teams that combine arts pedagogy, content, classroom management and social behavioral strategies to ignite and inspire arts-rich classrooms. Working as a team empowers teachers to share practice and strategy. Our goal is to inspire artistic and intellectual capacities in students, building competence and confidence in both students and teachers.

study the arts at njpac

Saturday Programs: NJPAC's Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level—from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in film, contemporary modern dance, hip hop, jazz, musical theater and symphonic band.

Summer Programs: Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call our education sales team at 973.353.7058 or email artseducation@njpac.org. Visit njpac.org/education

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