

teacher resource guide

# schooltime performance series



alvin ailey  
american dance  
theater

Jacquelin Harris photographed by Dario Calmese

arts  
education  
**njpac**

## about the performance



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) is a uniquely American modern dance company known for its vibrant blend of modern, ballet and other dance styles. 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 brought together a group of young African-American modern dancers and premiered 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" where the dancers were transported from performance to performance in a station wagon driven by one of Ailey's friends. From these modest beginnings, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has grown to be one of the foremost modern dance companies in the world. Dancers of all races and backgrounds perform with the company.

Born on January 5, 1931, in Rogers, Texas, Alvin Ailey began his dance career at a time when African-American dancers like himself had few opportunities. He was

first introduced to dance through performances of the world renowned Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Katherine Dunham Dance 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.

The first performance by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was in 1958, but it was Ailey's masterwork *Revelations*, which premiered in 1960, that catapulted the Company and Mr. Ailey 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.

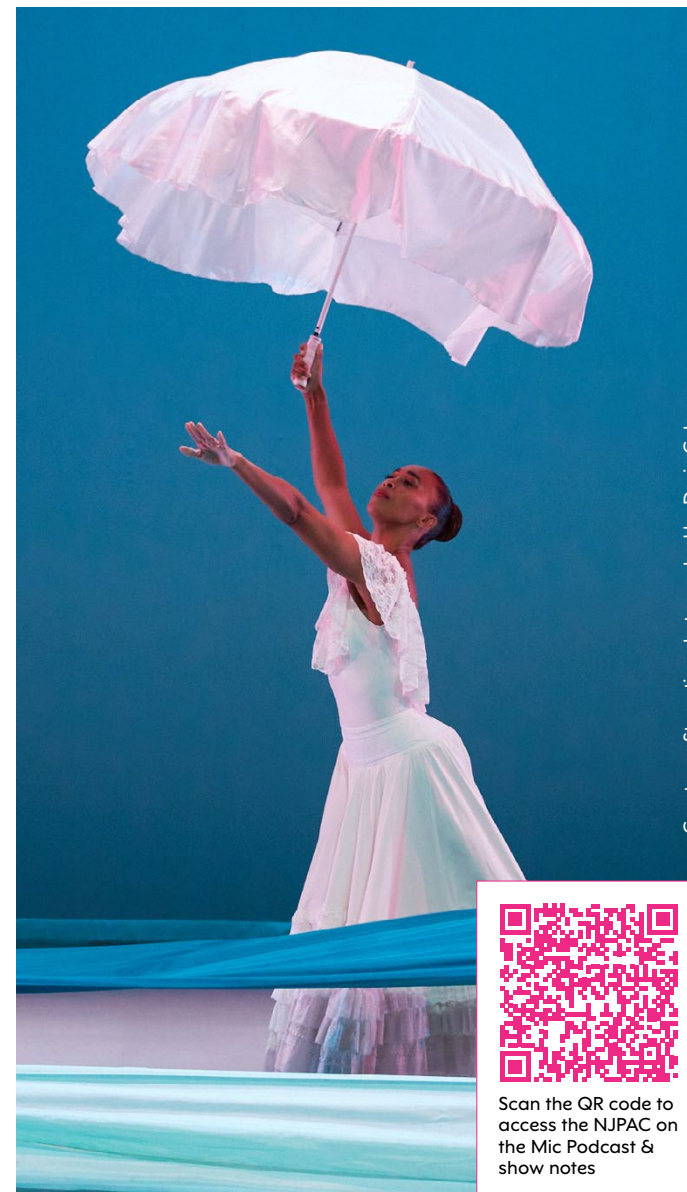
In 1969, Ailey established a school in New York City, Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, now called The Ailey School. He also formed the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, now Ailey II, in 1974. Both institutions supported Ailey's pioneering work promoting arts in education, particularly to benefit underserved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

## njpac on the mic podcast



### About NJPAC On the Mic

NJPAC On the Mic is an audio resource that takes SchoolTime performances to the next level. This podcast series features three exclusive, curriculum-aligned episodes for all of NJPAC's 2022-2023 SchoolTime performances. On the Mic offers students the opportunity to engage their listening skills, deepen their understanding of the performance and learn about the process of bringing a live or recorded production to life. This immersive audio experience features a theme song by students in the NJPAC arts education program.

with Nasha Thomas  
& Christopher Taylor

### How to listen to this episode of NJPAC On the Mic

Scan the QR code or visit: [njpac.org/education-program/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater-resources/](https://njpac.org/education-program/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater-resources/) to access the podcast and the following show notes:

**Part 1: About** | *Pre-show audio, 7 minutes*

**Includes:** An introduction to the performance, artists & venue, welcome message

**Written and hosted by** Dania Ramos

**Additional writing by** Sharon Adarlo and the team behind Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

**Sound editing, sound design, and voiceover by** Michael Aquino

**Theme and outro music by** Slim Beats from NJPAC Hip Hop Arts and Culture Program

**Additional music from** Epidemic Sound

**Welcome message voiced by** Nasha Thomas

**Series producers:** Michael Aquino and Dania Ramos

**Part 2: Connect** | *Post-show audio, 10 minutes*

**Includes:** Reflection questions, a look at the life of Alvin Ailey, a brief selection of vocabulary words

**Written and hosted by** Dania Ramos

**Sound editing and design by** Michael Aquino

**Theme and outro music by** Slim Beats from NJPAC Hip Hop Arts and Culture Program

**Additional music from** Epidemic Sound

**Opening question voiced by** Christopher Taylor

**Series producers:** Michael Aquino and Dania Ramos

**Part 3: Spotlight** | *Post-show audio, 20 minutes*

**Includes:** An exclusive interview with the national director of AileyCamp and a member of Ailey's first company

**Written and hosted by** Dania Ramos

**Sound editing and design theme by** Michael Aquino

**Theme and outro music by** Slim Beats from NJPAC Hip Hop Arts and Culture Program

**Additional music from** Epidemic Sound

**Interview guests:** Nasha Thomas and Christopher Taylor

**Series producers:** Michael Aquino and Dania Ramos



# inspired ideas in the classroom

P

Prepare for the performance

Prepare your students for the performance by listening to gospel music and African-American spirituals. Learn about the roots of the blues. Look at images of rural life in the South from the mid-20th century. Then watch a video excerpt from Alvin Ailey’s *Revelations*.

Listen deeply to the music of the rural American South and imagine what life might have been like for people living there and then. Discuss how *Revelations* expresses and reflects upon those experiences.

English Language Arts  
NJLSA.SL6.1  
NJLSA.SL6.2

E

Experience the performance

As you bring your students to the performance, encourage them to let the excitement and energy of the presentation sink in. They should pay close attention to how the performers’ movements and music work together to communicate thoughts, feelings and ideas. With body and mind, encourage them to experience the performance flowing over them.

Observe how the dancers use their bodies individually and as a group, the expressiveness of their movements and the interplay between music and dance. Do some dancers seem to play a character or role? Does a particular dance seem to tell a story? What elements in the choreography, music, costumes or props feel particularly appropriate to communicate an emotion or idea?

Visual & Performing Arts  
1.4 Aesthetic Responses & Critique

R

Reflect, respond and read

Encourage your students to discuss the performance and how it reflects on what they’ve learned about the African-American experience. Go back to source materials on the web and elsewhere to dig deeper into the message and meaning behind the dances they’ve seen.

Using source materials on the web or elsewhere identify specific aspects of the performance, including music, costuming, choreography and more, that represent the heritage and experiences of African-Americans. Read more about its origins and meaning. Consider how these experiences relate to all Americans and how they may have changed over time.

English Language Arts  
NJLSA.SL6.4  
Social Studies  
6.1.4.D.20

F

Focus

Ask your students to focus on their own experiences with childhood memories and cultural identity. Is there a cultural or family story or memory that they can turn into a presentation—whether as a story, poem, artwork or song?

Describe one of your most powerful childhood memories—especially one that relates to your heritage and culture. How can you use that experience as a springboard to self-expression—whether it’s a story, poem, artwork or song?

English Language Arts  
NJLSA.SL6.4

O

Originate

Prepare your students to use their specific memory or family story to write a story, poem, song, or create an artwork.

Write a story, poem, song, or create an artwork based on that childhood memory. Focus on a single recollection and develop it fully. Don’t be afraid to relate emotions and dialogue in your writing, even if you don’t remember exactly what was said. Use your imagination. Taking risks is always part of making art

Visual & Performing Arts  
1.1 The Creative Process

R

Rehearse

Ask your students to read aloud their stories, songs, poems or share their art. With artwork, ask students to explain aloud the story or experience that their work represents. Encourage students to discuss what they’ve heard and give constructive feedback to help make each student’s work clearer and stronger. Have students revise and reread their works as a kind of rehearsal: practicing sharing aloud so that they polish their ideas and build confidence in their presentation.

Share your poem, story or song and ask for feedback from your listeners. If you’ve created an artwork, explain aloud the story behind it. Listen to the feedback with an open mind and try to incorporate some of the comments to polish and improve your creation. Reread or share again to build confidence in your work and presentation.

Visual & Performing Arts  
1.1 The Creative Process

M

Make magic

Set up your classroom as a “coffeehouse” where students can present their creations. Hang artwork on the walls as a gallery-style backdrop and invite family, friends or other classes to visit, look and listen to the stories, poetry and songs that the students have made. Encourage visitors to clap or snap their fingers after each reading.

Now it’s time to share your creations with confidence! After you’ve experienced the thrill of sharing your work, make sure to talk with your audience and listen to their reactions. What did they think? Were they inspired by your creation?

Visual & Performing Arts  
1.3 Performance  
1.4 Aesthetic Responses & Critique



Ghráí DeVore-Stokes and Chalvar Monteiro photographed by Paul Kolnik

## curriculum standards

### NJ Visual & Performing Arts Standards

- 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- 3: Refine and complete artistic work.
- 4: Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- 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.
- 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work
- 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding. curriculum standards.

### FIND THE STANDARDS

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

NATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

[corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy](https://corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy)

NATIONAL SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

[socialstudies.org/standards](https://socialstudies.org/standards)

NATIONAL CORE ARTS ANCHOR STANDARDS

[nationalartsstandards.org](https://nationalartsstandards.org)

## common core state standards

### English Language Arts

#### NJSLSA.SL.6.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.

#### NJSLSA.SL.6.2

Interpret information presented in diverse media

#### NJSLSA.SL.6.4

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas.

### Social Studies

#### 6.1.4.D.20

Describe why it is important to understand the perspectives of other cultures in an interconnected world.

## vocabulary

### 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 Ailey 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.



Renaldo Gardner photographed by Gert Krautbauer





## resources

### Websites

Arts Education programs  
[njpac.org/arts-education](http://njpac.org/arts-education)

About NJPAC  
[njpac.org/about](http://njpac.org/about)

NJPAC Teacher Resources  
[njpac.org/arts-education/teacher-resources](http://njpac.org/arts-education/teacher-resources)

About The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater  
[alvinailey.org/about/company/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater](http://alvinailey.org/about/company/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater)

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater | History  
[alvinailey.org/about/history](http://alvinailey.org/about/history)

Alvin Ailey Then and Now  
[danceadvantage.net/alvin-ailey-then-and-now/](http://danceadvantage.net/alvin-ailey-then-and-now/)

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater  
[alvinailey.org](http://alvinailey.org)

Alvin Ailey Bio  
[alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/alvin-ailey](http://alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/alvin-ailey)

Nasha Thomas Bio  
[alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/nasha-thomas](http://alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/nasha-thomas)

Christopher Taylor Bio  
[alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/christopher-taylor](http://alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/christopher-taylor)

Katherine Dunham Bio  
[alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/katherine-dunham](http://alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/katherine-dunham)

Lester Horton Bio  
[alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/lester-horton](http://alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/lester-horton)

Revelations  
[alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/revelations](http://alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/revelations)

Blues Suite  
[alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/blues-suite](http://alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/blues-suite)

Master + Work: Alvin Ailey and Revelations  
[kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/dance/alvin-ailey--revelations/](http://kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/dance/alvin-ailey--revelations/)

African American Spirituals  
[authentichistory.com/1600-1859/3-spirituals/](http://authentichistory.com/1600-1859/3-spirituals/)

Smithsonian Folkways Website  
[folkways.si.edu](http://folkways.si.edu)

What is the Blues?  
[pbs.org/theblues/classroom/essaysblues.html](http://pbs.org/theblues/classroom/essaysblues.html)

The Women of Alvin Ailey  
[njpac.org/about-njpac/spotlight/features/the-women-of-Alvin-Ailey#.VIEeHarSUK](http://njpac.org/about-njpac/spotlight/features/the-women-of-Alvin-Ailey#.VIEeHarSUK)

African American Dance | A Brief History  
[aaregistry.org/story/african-american-dance-a-brief-history/](http://aaregistry.org/story/african-american-dance-a-brief-history/)

### Videos

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater on Vimeo  
[vimeo.com/channels/ailey](http://vimeo.com/channels/ailey)

Cry – Part 1  
[youtube.com/watch?v=3qk4v\\$33aGE](http://youtube.com/watch?v=3qk4v$33aGE)

Slave Songbook : Origin of the Negro Spiritual  
[youtube.com/watch?v=8zeshN\\_ummU](http://youtube.com/watch?v=8zeshN_ummU)

In Performance at the White House |  
The Gospel Tradition 2015  
[youtube.com/watch?v=1iBMaxghAq8](http://youtube.com/watch?v=1iBMaxghAq8)

### Books

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

Cline-Ransome, Lesa  
*My Life, My Dance. Robert Battle's Journey to Alvin Ailey.*  
Simon and Schuster, 2015.

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

Dunning, Jennifer  
*Alvin Ailey: A life in Dance.*  
Da Capo Press, 1996.

Gladstone, Valerie, and Jose Ivey  
*A Young Dancer: The Life of an Ailey Student.*  
Henry Hold and Co., 2009.

Jamison, Judith  
*Dancing Spirit.*  
Doubleday, 1993.

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



## njpac staff

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### NJPAC Arts Education performances team:

Treasure Borde, Randal Croudy, Natalie Dreyer, Rosa Hyde, Danielle Vauters. On the Mic is an NJPAC Arts Education production, produced in partnership with CM Studios. NJPAC and CM Studios are located in Essex County, New Jersey, situated on the traditional territory of the Leni Lenape people.

## the arts in your school

**In-School Residencies:** NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible in-person residencies are designed to meet your needs and you'll have a dedicated program manager to help you every step of the way. It's the perfect program to keep your students creating, connecting and expressing themselves through the magic of the arts.

**Professional Development:** Calling all educators! Expand your teaching skills, deepen your curriculum and give yourself a creative boost in NJPAC's forward-thinking professional development workshops. Our virtual PD programs are for teachers all the way from pre-K to high school and include hip hop, dance, storytelling, theater, music and more. Not only will you learn something... you'll also have fun and be inspired.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please email our education sales team at [artseducation@njpac.org](mailto:artseducation@njpac.org). Or visit [njpac.org/education](http://njpac.org/education)

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+ deceased

## 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 hip hop, jazz, theater, 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.