

Year 8 Dance Project Black History Through Dance



*I am trying to show the world that we are all human beings and that colour is not important. What is important is the quality of our work
– Alvin Ailey*





A range of dance styles originated through black history including the tribal dances of Africa, the slave dances of the West Indies and the American Deep South, the Harlem social dances of the 1920s and the jazz dance of Broadway musicals. These styles of dance are hugely influential, inspiring new choreography as well as supporting the story of black history.

TASK 1 – Read all of the information below

Africa and the West Indies



The two main origins of black dance are African dance and the slave dances from the plantations of the West Indies.

Tribes or ethnic groups from every African country have their own individual dances. Dance has a ceremonial and social function, celebrating and marking rites of passage, sex, the seasons, recreation and weddings. The dancer can be a teacher, commentator, spiritual medium, healer or storyteller.

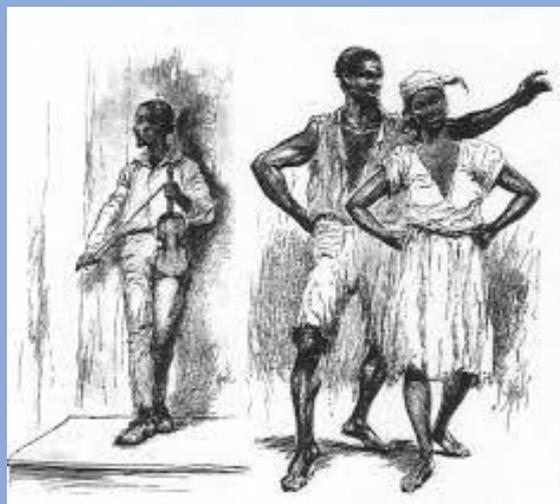
In the Caribbean each island has its own traditions that come from its African roots and the island's particular colonial past – British, French, Spanish or Dutch. 18th-century black dances such as the Calenda and Chica were slave dances which drew on African traditions and rhythms.

The Calenda was one of the most popular slave dances in the Caribbean. It was banned by many

plantation owners who feared it would encourage social unrest and uprisings.

In the Calenda men and women face each other in two lines moving towards each other than away, then towards each other again to make contact - slapping thighs and even kissing. The dance gets faster and faster and the movement more and more intense. It is thought that the Calenda and the Chica come from the courtship dances of the Congo.

Popular social dances of the 20th century such as the Charleston and Cakewalk are descended from these slave dances. Also, the Cuban Rumba is said to be a descendant of the Calenda Dance.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xep4_99Wimw



CONGO SQUARE

Congo Square (now known as Louis Armstrong Park) was a grassy plain on the edge of the swamps at the far side of the French Quarter where gens de couleur fibre (free blacks) and slavers would congregate. The square became a place where African rituals and ceremonies were kept alive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUSyJKEIXos>



Follow the link to learn more!

EUROPEAN INFLUENCE



Africans taken to America as slaves continued to express themselves through dance.

As slaves forced into America, starting during the 1600's, Africans from many cultures were cut off from their families, languages and tribal traditions. The result was an intermingling of African cultures that created a new culture with both African and European elements.

The Slave Act of 1740 prohibited slaves from playing African drums or performing African dances, Foot stamping, clapping and vocal rhythms were woven into a new style called jazz dance, blending old and new cultures.

The first international jazz dance to imitate slave dancers was "Jump Jim Crow," performed in 1828 by Thomas Rice. "Jump Jim Crow" copied the movement of a crippled slave and became the foundation of an era of American entertainment based on crude stereotyping of a dancing slave.

MINSTREL AND SLAVE STEREOTYPING



- Caucasians began darkening their faces and imitating slave dancers in the 1800s.
- John Durang, one of America's first professional dancers, described part of his performances as containing a movement of slave dancers called "shuffles."
- The minstrel show was a big influence on American jazz dance.
- The minstrel show was popular from 1845 to 1900 and consisted of comic skits, variety acts, dance and music performed by white people who darkened their faces to look black.
- Minstrel shows were performed by a troupe of up to 50 Caucasian performers who portrayed black people as being ignorant, lazy, superstitious, joyful and musical

- It was difficult for a black dancer to gain stature as part of a dance troupe. Because of this, many black performers migrated to Europe, where they introduced the newly emerging forms of jazz music and jazz dance. Minstrel shows lasted as professional entertainment until 1910.
- As the civil rights movement began and African Americans gained more political power, minstrel shows lost popularity.
- The minstrel shows evolved and were eventually absorbed into the 20th century musical comedy.



Master Juba



- Master Juba (William Henry Lane), was born in Rhode Island, USA. He made his name in the clubs and music halls of Manhattan in the 1840s where he was nicknamed the King of all Dancers.
- Charles Dickens, visiting New York in the 1840s, attended a performance of Juba's and wrote afterwards that Juba was 'the wit of the assembly and the greatest dancer ever known'.
- He was famous for dancing the jig and toured to London in 1848 with Pell's Ethiopian Serenaders. He appeared at Vauxhall Gardens on 1 July 1848 in an evening's entertainment that also included Tom Barry the clown who sailed down the river Thames in a wash tub drawn by four geese.
- Juba died in London in 1852. The name Juba comes from a dance derived from Africa via the West Indies. The dance is very rhythmical, using lots of stamping and clapping.

Black Musical Dance History

Two US musicals to visit the UK at the end of the 19th century was to spark a craze for the popular dance, the Cakewalk.

The Creole Show

- The Creole Show was the first all-black musical and had premiered in New York in 1889. The show starred 16 black women as chorus girls.
- The black leads were Dora Dean and Charles Johnson who performed the dance, the Cakewalk, as the finale.
- The dance came from the mocking dance created by slaves in the West Indies to imitate the way that white people danced.
- In the Cakewalk the upper body was stiff, but the legs were fluid. It was danced to Ragtime music made popular by Scott Joplin. The syncopated rhythms of Ragtime music developed from the rhythms of West African drumming.

THE "CAKE-WALK" AND HOW TO DANCE IT A Chat with the Prima Donna of "In Dahomey."

The "cake-walk," as popular in Paris in the early spring, has at length "troughed" its way and across to have "come to stay." The reason of its success is not far to seek, for this is a "joy-and-glee" dance just what every one is after these four get moments at Court-Festivals, Matrons and Parties of all accounts, Princess Miss of Affairs, and Princess Miss of Household—and that any woman who wishes to be in the running must of necessity give a ball for the young people. And perhaps it is that the young people all love the cake-walk. In *In Dahomey* at the Shaftsbury Theatre we are rightly seeing and enjoying dancing the most attractive and novel the great and new invention of the dance.

Quint Ada Overton Walker, the leading lady at the Shaftsbury and the leading cake-walking exponent in New York, when asked by those asking for the right inspiration

about the cake-walk a smart affair, all being and other promising. Like the *Can-Can* it has undergone changes, but both retain their first essential qualities.

In early days the dance was performed with greater dignity—was less of a dance and more of a walk. The *Libby* was in such a prominent place. He used about his neck with an elaborate, some of them, carried his hair back with a brush, dressed his hair with oil, and was accused of using his pocket with a long and graceful swing. As for his voice and countenance and even they turned all in the dance to prominence and to honor. And they still do. The English and American dancing of the cake-walk, either such or may be regarded from the original. In some forms it degenerates into a song, but according to the expert, no true development is of song, prominence should be mixed with serious,

steps may be granted. Some are very intricate; but the nature of cake-walking depends largely on temperament, and so far as the actual steps are concerned the people may give their instructors in them." The dance must be learned and known, and the cake-walk is characteristic of a cheerful man to be properly appreciated it must be danced in the proper spirit—it is a game dance.

In dancing all the muscles of the body are brought into play, any effort or fatigue is avoided, the shoulders thrown well back, the back curved, and the knees bent with suppleness. The swing, all justness and graceful poses, must come from the shoulders, and the feet may just see. The trouble is between that of the dancing and the march—no-right time. The tempo matters which may be played for the dancers are without number. In the opinion of the women should be taught to manage their



THE "CAKE-WALK" BE DANCED AT THE SHAFTSBURY THEATRE IN THE BROADWAY MUSICAL COMEDY, "IN DAHOMEY"

The dancers are Mr. Gardner and Mrs. Davis

in the dance: "Bend in your knees. Think of moonlight nights and give looks and yellow eyes, and at last surrounded by the darkness of hell, the I tell you there was nothing in the faces of those who had danced the cake-walk."

The cake-walk has traces of the African dances of centuries ago, and in the Southern States of America was developed into an art long before the Civil War. Always linked upon as a festival dance, it was danced by the masses in celebration of any happy occasion—on wedding, a home day, the end of a season, giving or your checking, or anything which gave cause for jollity. Moonlight nights were strange dances, if possible, for the moonlighting; but if the moon proved benevolent lighted your faces and yellow eyes were passed into the position. The cake was made of uncooked flour, water, baked in the shape of the woman of a piped hat, and surrounded with cottage loaves. In fact

Shakespeare should be done away with the good and all. Dance slowly but not too well, and be sure to let the music of the be wholly unimpaired with voluptuous."

The cake-walk is danced by a man and woman. The latter should support his partner with the grace of his walking, and she should lean with her whole grace and poise. The feet depend upon the woman, and the woman upon the man for the progress of moving the pair.

"It is difficult," explains Mrs. Walker, the high position, "to define steps of the cake-walk by words." In the walk you follow the music, and so you keep that with it is what is best defined as a march you imagine. In some, melismatic poses, will come to you as you go through the dance. The partner must observe steps which they think will impress the judges. Every muscle must be in perfect control. The step of the cake-walk is light and elastic; often it has been found being

being slight gracefully, an act which requires a good deal of practice, and beginners do well to make the dance slow.

The cake-walk may be danced by any number of couples. A ball might look all, holding up the hands as in a ball dance. A cake is placed in the center of the room on a pedestal, the opening bars of the music are played, and the dancers march round. The walk goes, with its various features, its intricate steps, and girls coming in an end, the speaker asks, "Who takes the cake?" "The couples how much round it all admirably and how to the cake as present." A ball at midnight when every couple has passed by, then the music of the instrument begins the victory. The cake is carried before them by the master or one of the party, but they are turned of the dance, and the happy couple dance between the lines to grand lead, stepping. In each the cake-walk.

Copyright 1903 Taylor.

Magazine article relating to The Cakewalk at the Shaftsbury Theatre (1888-1941), 1903

In Dahomey

- The musical *In Dahomey* came to London in 1903 from New York. It was the first all-black musical to reach the London stage.
- The show played at the Shaftesbury Theatre and featured the comic duo of writers Bert Williams and George Walker.
- *In Dahomey* was a huge success in London and the Cakewalk and Buck and Wing dances that featured in the production became the latest dance hall crazes in the UK.
- The show was heavily publicised. Photographs of the production showing the prettiest chorus girls appeared in all the illustrated magazines and the front of the theatre was covered with posters and photographs.
- At this time, there were few black people to be seen in the West End, so the management made sure that the performers were seen walking up and down Shaftesbury Avenue to increase public interest in the show.



In Dahomey chorus members at Shaftesbury Theatre (1888-1941), The Sketch Magazine, print cutting from a magazine, London, United Kingdom, 1903.



Two scenes from In Dahomey at Shaftesbury Theatre, The Sketch magazine, 1903.

TASK 2: Answer the following questions
Display your answers creatively
(use images and colour)

Q1) What are the two main origins of black dance?

Q2) Name the different roles a dancer could have when performing African dance?

Q3) Describe the popular slave dance 'Calenda'

Q4) Research and describe what the following dances were (remember to use ASDR in your descriptions)

A – The Cakewalk

B – The Charleston

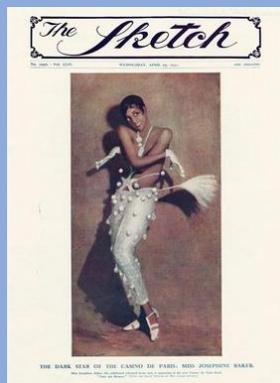
C – Cuban Rumba

Q5) Who was 'Master Juba'? Why was he famous and where did his nick name originate from?

Q6) What do you think Black people thought about the Minstrel Shows? How do you think they would have felt about being portrayed in this way?

History of Black Dance: 20th-Century Black American Dance

- Black culture had a real influence on dance and other art forms in the 20th century.
- After the American civil war, a surge of people from the Caribbean and Deep South migrated into North American cities.
- In New York the district of Harlem became home to black people from different cultural traditions with their own dances and music.
- Harlem became the ‘in place’ to be amongst both black and white New Yorkers – its clubs brought together dance and music that was alive and exciting.
- Dances such as the Charleston, Lindy hop, and Jitterbug sprang from these clubs as did Jazz music.
- The influence of this Harlem Renaissance on music and dance in New York in the early 1920s spread into Europe.



Shuffle Along



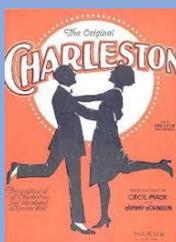
The first all-black musical on Broadway (written and performed by all African Americans) called Shuffle Along opened in 1921. This was a smash hit, creating an interest in black dance in the theatre. The show also developed opportunities for individual black performers and dancers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4c7mj7D8Ofk>



Watch a recent performance from the Shuffle Along

In 1923 the Broadway hit **Running Wild** came to England and **the Charleston** became the dance of the decade.



Have a go at the Charleston!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d0YTAE_WRQ



Josephine Baker



The Revue Nègre in Paris introduced the dancer Josephine Baker. She became a huge star in Europe but was never as popular in America (where racial tension continued to marginalise black dance and dancers). All black musicals disappeared from Broadway in the 1920s when white musicals started to employ more black performers and black dance was incorporated into their programme.

Josephine devoted herself to fighting segregation and racism in the United States during the 1950's and 60's. Baker refused to perform to segregated audiences in the United States. In 1968, she was offered unofficial leadership in the Civil Rights movement in the US by Coretta Scott King, following the assassination of Martin Luther King. Although after thinking it over she felt that she had to decline out of the concern of the welfare of her children.



Florence Mills.

In Britain, black dancers appeared in musicals and revues from the early 20th century. In the 1920s Florence Mills starred in the Broadway musical *Shuffle Along* (which inspired the growing popularity for tap dancing) and later toured to London in 1924.

Her next musical *Blackbirds* opened in London in 1926 and her song 'I'm a little Blackbird looking for a Bluebird' became Mills's theme song. Her singing was beautiful and her dancing had a comedy streak that audiences loved. Florence Mills became a star in both New York and London. In the UK reviewers proclaimed her talent and she was the talk of London.

Mills is credited for being an outspoken supporter of equal rights for African Americans, with her signature song 'I'm a little Blackbird' being a plea for racial equality, and during her life she broke many racial barriers to fight for this.

Tragically Florence died at the age of 32, after an operation to remove her appendix. Thousands of people attended her funeral in Harlem.



Buddy Bradley

In 1933 C. B. Cochran invited Buddy Bradley to London to work on the Rodgers and Hart musical Evergreen. It was the first time a black dancer had worked on an all-white show.

Buddy Bradley was a major force in musicals and revue in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s. Born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 1908, he was mostly self-taught and made his debut as a dancer in 1926 in the Florence Mills Revue in New York. He staged dances in the great 1920s revues for Ziegfeld, George White, Earl Carroll and Lew Leslie's legendary black revue Blackbirds. He also staged routines for such stars as Eleanor Powell, Ruby Keeler and Adèle Astaire.

In the 1930s he left New York and danced in London in C. B. Cochran's 1931 Revue. There was a rumour that he was forced to leave New York because the Mafia owner of Harlem's Cotton Club did not appreciate Bradley teaching his girlfriend to dance.



Bradley went on to work with Jessie Matthews and Jack Buchanan on their major musical shows and films throughout the 1930s. In 1932 he collaborated with Frederick Ashton on a ballet High Yellow. Bradley had to teach the ballerina Alicia Markova how to dance with snake hips. He said that the most difficult thing to teach classical dancers was how to bend their knees.

Until 1967 Bradley ran a dance studio in London. He also continued choreographing in England, France, Switzerland, Italy and Spain. His choreography mixed classical and modern dance and he also took movements from ice shows and jazz. When tap fell out of favour in the 1950s, he concentrated on jazz dance. He became the first African American to run a British white company when he formed his own group to appear in variety shows and television in the 1950s.

TASK 3: Answer the following questions
Display your answers creatively
(use images and colour)

Q1) Where in New York became home to black people from different cultures?

Q2) Describe in your own words what the Harlem Renaissance was?

Q3) Which Broadway hit promoted the popular dance the Charleston?

Q4) Who was Josephine Baker and how did she help the right for equal rights?

Q5) Buddy Bradley became the first African American to run a British white dance company. Why was this significant for African Americans at this time (1950's)?

Q6) Why do you think it is important to have role models from all different ethnicities and cultures in the arts?

Modern black dance

The emergence of a black modern dance movement was inspired by the work of two black American women, Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus. Both were academics as well as dancers and spent a great deal of time researching the origins of black dance in the USA. Both toured to Britain with great success. In particular their work influenced the young Berto Pasuka, who went ahead to form the first British black dance company Ballet Nègres.



Ballet Nègres.

"Dance as if your feet were connected to the earth"

Katherine Dunham



Katherine Dunham



Pearl Primus

Katherine Dunham



Dunham made her name in 1934 on Broadway with musicals *Le Jazz Hot* and *Tropics* where she introduced a dance called *L'ag'ya*. This was based on the rhythms and martial arts dances of the slaves who used dance to develop their stamina in preparation for uprisings against their white masters.

Dunham researched dance from Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Martinique for her choreography. She believed that black dance should have equal status with the white European tradition and wanted to trace black dance roots. The technique that she developed also drew on ballet and modern dance. In 1944 she founded a school of dance. At her school students learnt philosophy, anthropology and languages as well as tap, ballet and primitive dance and percussion

Pearl Primus



Pearl Primus was the first black modern dancer. *Strange Fruit* was her first performance. It had no music but a sound tape of a poem about a black man being lynched by a white racist. It was passionate and angry. Like other black dancers in the emerging black dance culture she used the art form to express the social and political constraints on black people within America.

She was born in Trinidad before her parents immigrated to Harlem in 1919. She worked at the New Dance Group Studios which was one of few places where black dancers could train alongside whites. She went on to study for a PhD and did research on dance in Africa. Her most famous dance was the Fanga, an African dance of welcome which introduced traditional African dance to the stage.

In the 1940s, Pearl Primus was one of the first dancers to make an in-depth study of black dance traditions, embracing West Indian, African, and primitive dance. Her recitals and performances with

her company showed these dances both in their authentic form and used as a basis for new choreography. She was an important figure in the preservation and study of ethnic dance and was consulted on dance in many countries, including Libya.

She spent three years in Africa making a survey of native dances and, on her return in 1951, she presented many performances based on the dances and rituals she had studied.



Why do I dance? Dance is my medicine. It's the scream which eases for a while the terrible frustration common to all human beings who because of race, creed, or color, are 'invisible'. Dance is the fist with which I fight the sickening ignorance of prejudice.

— Pearl Primus —

AZ QUOTES

TASK 4: Answer the following questions
Display your answers creatively
(use images and colour)

Q1) What was the name of the dance style that Katherine Dunham introduced? It was based on the rhythms and martial arts dances of the slaves who used dance to develop their stamina in preparation for uprisings against their white masters.

Q2) What different subjects did the students at Katherine Dunham's school study?

Q3) Where did Pearl Primus work when she was younger?

Q4) What did Pearl Primus go on to study for three years in Africa? Why was she doing this?

Q5) Who is Arthur Miller and why is he so inspirational in Black Dance? (You will need to research)

Q6) Who is Alvin Ailey and why is he so inspirational in Black Dance? (You will need to research)