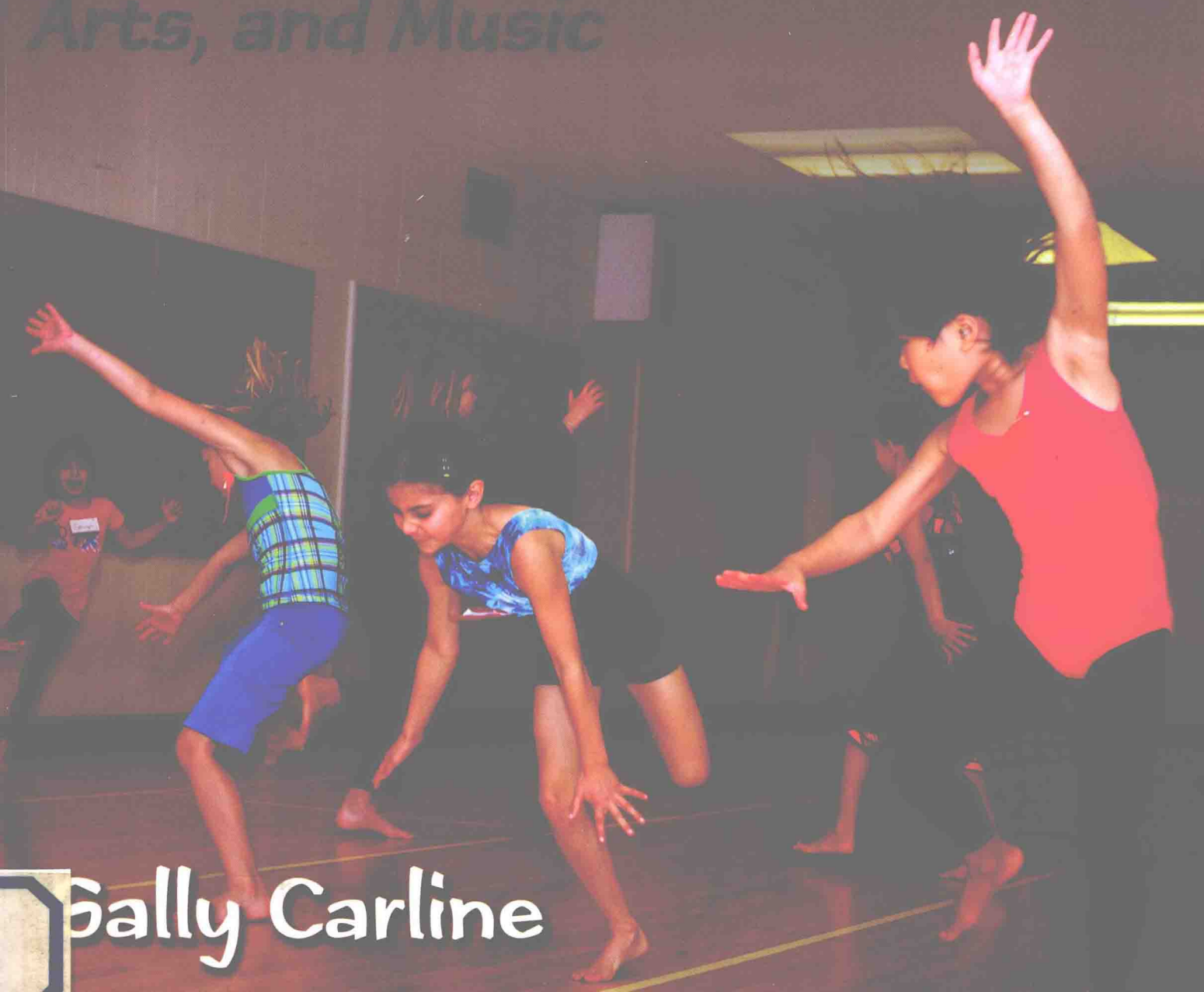


# Lesson Plans for CREATIVE DANCE

*Connecting With Literature,  
Arts, and Music*



Sally Carline

# Lesson Plans for Creative Dance

CONNECTING WITH LITERATURE, ARTS, AND MUSIC



Human Kinetics

## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Carline, Sally.

Lesson plans for creative dance : connecting with literature, arts, and music / Sally Carline.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4504-0198-2 (soft cover)

ISBN-10: 1-4504-0198-8 (soft cover)

1. Dance--Study and teaching. 2. Movement education. 3. Dance for children. 4. Lesson planning. I. Title.

GV1753.5.C37 2011

372.86'8--dc22

2010045128

ISBN-10: 1-4504-0198-8 (print)

ISBN-13: 978-1-4504-0198-2 (print)

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The Web addresses cited in this text were current as of February 11, 2011, unless otherwise noted.

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We thank the University of Alberta, Edmonton, for assistance in providing the location for the photo shoot for this book.

Printed in the United States of America 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper in this book is certified under a sustainable forestry program.

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**This book is dedicated to the Joeys,  
Jens, Ginas, and Jackies,  
and all children who dance.**

# PREFACE

**I** have taught dance as part of the physical education program at both primary and secondary levels and have spent many years working with university education students in the areas of curriculum and instruction of creative dance and physical education. At the same time, I had the good fortune to work with Dr. Joyce Boorman in a creative dance program on Saturdays and then to run that program—a total of 34 years to date. Working weekly with classes of children aged 4 to 13 years has provided the drive to continue to develop new materials.

Many of the children dance in our program for eight consecutive years. This has provided me the opportunity to learn about their growth and development in dance, to discover what concepts they understand and when, and to know how much complexity children can deal with at each age. It has also showed that with regular, well-prepared dance classes over time, children can become proficient, confident movers. Dance becomes part of their lives.

This book is a creative dance resource for teachers of children ages 4 to 12 years. This includes classroom teachers responsible for all subjects including physical education; specialists in dance, physical education, or music; university students in teacher-training programs; and instructors in schools of dance where creative dance is taught.

Over the years at in-services and workshops for teachers, it became apparent that many teachers wanted to teach more creative dance. They had the teaching skills but lacked the time in their demanding work schedules to find appropriate music and to develop and plan their own material. My hands-on ideas were useful because each teacher could adapt them to suit the needs of their own classes. Given the resources with concepts to be explored and the teaching progressions described, teachers could select and develop lesson plans to fit their gymnasium time and sometimes find connections between ideas in dance and other curricular areas.

It was time to organize some materials from my experience in teaching into more than a few pages for an in-service. The format of the resulting book is significant because it is divided into three major parts: activities for the warm-up part of the class; a variety of means of exploring dance through words, rhymes, poetry, and rhythm; and ways of exploring dance through stories and music. In part III, accessible music is visualized with notations so that those with or without a music background can follow while listening and then readily see how the story or image and the dynamic, spatial, and relationship concepts all tie together before moving on to the teaching progressions that follow.

Each dance is based on solid movement principles. The suggested teaching processes challenge children to think as they work on their physical responses. This combination of cognition and physical exploration, together with the affective and social involvement inherent in the ideas, means that the children are actively engaged in their learning.

All the dance ideas presented in this book have been tested with classes of children with a range of experience and from different socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Edmonton, where I teach, is a multicultural city. Despite initial resistance to dance from some children (Edmonton is also an ice-hockey city), they become increasingly interested and engaged once challenged physically and mentally. In part, this might

be due to the choice of content: It was right for the children affectively and allowed them to see that it is as physically demanding as other areas of physical education. An additional factor is that dance is experiencing new respect as a result of the athleticism shown by both men and women on television series such as *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dancing With the Stars*.

The organization of the book makes it an easy tool for planning creative dance lessons. Part I provides a review of the movement concepts on which the dances are based and offers some tips for assessment. Chapter 2 includes many possibilities for rhythmic traveling actions and information about developing them as warm-up activities for the first few minutes of each class. (See appendix A for information on accessing the music referenced in chapter 2.) You can read the section devoted to the appropriate age group and follow the progressions aided by diagrams to clarify the use of space.

Part II presents ways to explore creative dance through action words, rhymes, poetry, and rhythm. Some of these ideas may take a relatively short time to develop; others can develop into longer dances. There are opportunities here for you to link the learning in dance with work in language arts.

Part III includes four dances with music and stories for each age group. (See appendix B for information on accessing the music referenced in part III.) These dances are intended to be developed over a series of classes.

To use the materials effectively, you can select a traveling action from part I to use for the first few minutes of several consecutive classes. Then you can develop another traveling action for the next few, and so on. Later in the year, you may revisit some earlier actions and put them into a more complex situation, such as one involving a partner relationship.

After the warm-up, you can select an idea from one of the chapters in part II. Again, you would review and develop it in subsequent classes. Or you may decide to start work on a dance with story and music from part III after the warm-up. Fortunate children whose classes run for 35 to 40 minutes may be able to experience a warm-up (part I), a short time with some aspect of part II, and some work on a dance from part III during one session.

Once you have decided on the content, you can make a lesson plan incorporating the teaching progressions that are given throughout the book. You can copy the relevant tables, poems, and so forth from the book to go with your plans.

Working and developing dances over time are valuable for the children's involvement and long-term learning. Some ideas may be completed in a shorter time, and others will take longer. But introducing, reviewing, and developing materials from class to class are key.

From the outcome of the first lesson, the second lesson will develop. What skills and concepts do you need to review, and how? What ideas should you add? With help from the materials in the book, you can provide your classes with a variety of creative dance experiences, thus meeting the needs of the children—and enjoying this rewarding experience yourself.

A good dance lesson has variety. The children need to experience a range of actions so that various body parts and muscles are worked. They need to work sometimes intensely at great speed and with power, sometimes slowly and gently. They need to use lots of space and to learn to work in a group. They also need to develop their peripheral vision, spot an open space, dodge an object or classmate, and come to an abrupt halt. They need to dance alone at times, and at other times sort out their ideas with a partner or in a small group.

Children need to dance about many things—real, imaginary, funny, happy, and sad. Mostly they need to develop their ideas over time to let things gel physically and mentally—and to change their minds.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My gratitude is extended to the people who helped in various ways to shape this book:

Dr. Joyce Boorman taught me much about children and dancing over many years.

Jackie Best-Walushka, my co-teacher, helped me to clarify the teaching processes, and contributed some delightful dances.

Dr. Tim Hopper triggered the writing of the book by insisting that I put some of my resources onto paper.

Jo Vickers, Dr. Qingbin Li, and Gang Tao captured the photographs of the children dancing—a difficult task in a room full of moving bodies!

Sheila MacMillan made all the text additions and corrections on the computer; noticing errors that I missed.

John Carline showed great patience when I needed material to be scanned or photocopied “now.”

Gayle Kassing, Bethany Bentley, and the staff at Human Kinetics took a rough manuscript and helped me to give it form.

All the children I work with every week whose energy and delight in dancing inspire me to continue to develop new ideas.

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## **PART I**

# **Introduction to Teaching Creative Dance**

**C**hapter 1, Teaching and Assessing Creative Dance, has two purposes: to introduce and describe movement analysis and to offer some general guidelines for assessing creative dance. The dance material in this book is based on Rudolf Laban's analysis of human movement. Chapter 1 explains the content and meaning of body awareness, dynamic awareness, spatial awareness, and relationship awareness. When you are planning a lesson and need further information about the concepts involved in a particular dance in later chapters, this movement analysis should provide clarification. The second part of the chapter offers some insights into the challenges of assessing children in creative dance, followed by observation tips and the benefits of using rubrics to evaluate how your students are progressing in their knowledge and performance of dance.

Chapter 2, Introductory Activities, describes age-appropriate rhythmic traveling activities to use in the first few minutes of a class. Teaching progressions are included. Developed over a series of classes, each warm-up increases the children's heart rates, channels their energy, and improves their footwork and rhythmic skills for creative dance.



# Teaching and Assessing Creative Dance



**S**ome of my distinct memories as a new teacher, with potentially good ideas but little knowledge of teaching process, are of panic! Many faces looked expectantly my way, but I wasn't sure how to proceed. I still experience feelings of worry, excitement, and nervous anticipation prior to starting a new term, but I have come to the conclusion that this is part and parcel of being a teacher.

The best preparation for teaching creative dance is to know your material thoroughly and have a lesson plan with key ideas to explore, including steps for processing those ideas with the students. Know exactly what you are going to do the moment the students enter the room, and have the music ready. This eases the somewhat hurried transition from, for example, moving from a language arts class to the gymnasium a few moments later. I learned to have extra material ready in the event of a breakdown of a plan or in case I rushed too quickly through my lesson, a tendency in new teachers.

In those days I did not have many resources at my disposal and spent a great deal of time listening to music, searching for pieces that I could use. (I still do that, but I enjoy it.) The abundance of material in this book, along with the music resources suggested, should provide a jumping-off point for new teachers and perhaps extend possibilities for those with experience.

Even if a dance idea was not working very well, I had the feeling that it would if only I could clarify my teaching process. Some classes develop better than others. I honestly think it is important to think "What could I have done better or differently?" rather than thinking the children are at fault.

So, I persisted. The reactions of the children who clearly remembered concepts explored during the previous class, together with their desire to continue convinced me that teaching creative dance was worth the effort. Watching as they became involved in a story and became confident enough to take risks was exciting. Watching them develop their skills and ability to express ideas was rewarding.

Gradually, my fear of trying new ideas faded. Now I am excited when I am starting new dances. Teaching creative dance requires belief in what you are doing. In turn, the students will believe in what they are learning.

The first part of this chapter describes the four areas of movement analysis, which are important for understanding both the teaching process and the learning possibilities in creative dance. The vast information in this section will be useful for developing lessons based on material in the chapters that follow. The latter part of this chapter introduces some ideas for assessment and provides sources of further information.

## **Movement Analysis**

The dance material in this book is based on Rudolf Laban's (1879-1958) analysis of movement. This framework can be a guide when planning, teaching, and assessing progress in creative dance. If you know exactly which concepts are important for exploration in each dance idea, the children will be challenged over time to extend the range and quality of their movement. Those same concepts will also be the focus for the movement aspects of assessment.

There are four areas in movement analysis:

1. Body awareness: what the body is doing
2. Dynamic (or effort) awareness: how the body is moving
3. Spatial awareness: where the body is moving
4. Relationship awareness: with whom or with what the body is moving

These four areas are interrelated as you help children to explore action words selected for a particular dance idea by emphasizing aspects of dynamics, space, and

## TIP

Learn to observe a child's actions in order to give helpful feedback. When a child is jumping, are the arms assisting in gaining height or distance? During moments of stillness, you can see whether a child is aware of each body part and whether the shape is spoiled because a single limb is not part of the whole. Timely reminders to the class to stretch the toes or be sure the whole body is involved in the curled shape assist the children in becoming bodily aware.

relationships. This process opens up possibilities within movement cognitively and physically and provides choices for the children.

## Body Awareness

### What the body is doing

Creative dance is the expressive area of physical education, and its action vocabulary is large. Whereas in games a player runs or shuffles to project, receive, or guard a ball, a space, or another player, in dance there are many ways and reasons to travel. Rush, flee, and dart are all runs, but each is used for a unique purpose and to convey a unique meaning. There are shades of meaning as each action is altered by the way it is performed dynamically, spatially, and in relationship with others.

The focus of body awareness is on the use of the body as actions are explored. These may be whole-body actions (such as jump, spin, and freeze) or isolated actions of a particular part of the body (such as reach, punch, or kick).

## Dynamic (Effort) Awareness

### How the body is moving

Laban divided effort into four categories: weight, time, space, and flow. With younger or less experienced children, I concentrate more on the areas of weight and time.

### *Weight: Firm to Fine*

Weight, the degree of bodily tension required for performing an action, is measured on a continuum from firm to fine. Firm tension involves tight and powerful muscles. Fine tension involves a light tension in the muscles and soft touch. In daily life, we tend to operate somewhere in the middle—neither totally powerful nor very fine. The intent in dance development is to help the children to extend their dynamic range, so often the dances will explore the contrast between firm movement and fine movement.

Some actions are essentially firm, such as punch and explode. Others are fine, like tremble and float. However, many actions may be either firm or fine, so lots of exploration can occur with these words. Spin and open are good examples of this. In the Battle of the Seasons dance for 6- to 8-year-olds (see page 123), the children work on the difference between turning powerfully and turning lightly to contrast the cold of winter and the warmth of spring.

### *Time: Sudden to Sustained*

Actions are also performed along a time continuum from sudden to sustained. Sudden involves an immediate, often surprising, action. At the other end of the continuum, the body takes time to execute a single action; the movement is sustained, lingering, and ongoing. In the vocabulary, some actions are sudden, such as freeze, bounce, and stamp; others are sustained, like settle and sink. Many can be explored at either end of the continuum. The Changes dance for 9- to 11-year-olds (see page 168) helps children to explore with a partner and a rubber band the action opposites of open and close, expand and contract, and rise and sink with sudden and sustained movement.

Some children are naturally sudden movers, while others have to work at moving suddenly, so the intent is to extend their range. Young children have a hard time sustaining an action because it requires control and concentration.

All actions have both weight and time. Skipping is sudden (lots of skips) and may be fine, but if the intent is to show power or anger, it becomes sudden and firm in the body (but with light feet). A turning action has room for exploration. It could be sudden and firm, sudden and fine, sustained and firm, or sustained and fine, depending on the context of the dance.



Contrasting opening and closing with a rubber band in the Changes dance.

### ***Space: Curved or Linear***

The spatial factor within effort is more difficult for younger, less experienced children, but it's something that can be introduced as their understanding of movement develops. An arm gesture, for example, can move away from the body in a curved (roundabout) fashion, or it can move directly outward in a linear (direct) way. The sparkle jumps so enjoyed by children from the age of 8 or 9 require the arms to thrust directly from the chest until fully extended above the body, then to return directly inward. This takes practice because many tend to fling their arms around and out instead. The Wizards dance for 7- to 9-year-olds (see page 132) works with direct extensions into space as the children try to remember the order of a spell.

### ***Flow: Free or Bound***

The body can move freely in a continuous motion, or movement can be interrupted and come to an abrupt halt, binding the flow. During the last part of the Miners dance for 10- to 12-year-olds (see page 183), the children whirl in what appears to be an unstoppable motion, then bind their movement, interrupting the flow. The older children enjoy this difficult challenge. You can introduce the concept of flow by exploring speedy tumbling with the body close to the floor and then suddenly halting the movement, binding it in unexpected positions. This requires good muscle control.

## **Spatial Awareness**

### **Where the body is moving**

Where the body moves has many possibilities for explorations:

- Personal and general space
- Directions

## TIP

Choose a specific type of pathway to explore with the class, because the open-ended statement of "Make a pathway" causes random responses without conscious thought from the children.

- Pathways
- Levels
- Body bases
- Body shapes
- Spatial prepositions
- Extensions into space

### ***Personal and General Space***

Nonlocomotor actions occur in the children's personal space. They can shiver, rise, spin, pause, or sink within their personal bubbles around their bodies. Traveling actions, many jumps, and often turning actions are examples of movements into general space.

The ability to move more freely and safely in general space develops as a result of practice and with regular reminders from you, the teacher. You might notice that when a child has been working on mastering a traveling action and starts to show good quality of movement, the quality is compromised once he is asked to focus on moving along a particular pathway. With reminders and ongoing practice, the what and where come together.

### ***Directions***

The use of directions (forward, backward, sideways, up, and down) is exciting for young children. The body is designed for forward travel, so if a child is asked to run or skip or creep, she will go forward. Just as toddlers are delighted when they discover that (with great concentration) they can walk backward, the 4- to 6-year-olds enjoy mastering backward skipping.

It helps if young children establish the rhythm of skipping forward and then change to a backward skip rather than starting from a standstill. In this case, they learn to change direction first. Traveling backward is tricky because of a child's high center of gravity, and they tip over easily. Plenty of reminders are needed about checking for an empty space behind them. The dance Pattern to Cure a Headache for 5- to 7-year-olds (see page 103) is about doing everything backward, and children in this age group love it!

### ***Pathways***

A pathway is the pattern made on the floor when traveling (a person can make a pathway in the air with gestures too). It may be a direct, straight line; a series of short, straight lines; an organized pattern of straight lines with sharp corners (zig-zags); a curved, meandering path; or a circle. In northern climates, children can relate to pathways in the context of footprints left in the snow; similarly, those familiar with beaches and deserts know about tracks in sand. Imagining dipping feet in bright red paint, thus leaving footprints, helps children to think about making a particular pathway.

If a pathway is a key element in a dance with story, there is a reason for using that particular path that the children will remember. In the Queen's Guards dance for 4- to 6-year-olds (see page 85), the guards skip in circular paths around their sentry boxes, and this idea helps the children to skip in a circle. The Snowstorm (a dance for 5- to 7-year-olds; see page 99) explores meandering pathways as the gentle wind blows the snowflakes before the onset of a blizzard. The path may be specifically linear as in the Archers for 7- to 9-year-olds (see page 128), where each archer, loaded with an imaginary quiver and arrows, pursues a foe.

With younger children, it is better to focus on either an aspect of direction or a pathway in one dance. Trying to involve both tends to be confusing. They need plenty of experience before they can concentrate on executing a particular pathway while also changing direction.

### **Levels**

Levels are a concept that young children can grasp, especially for times of stillness (for example, skipping along and then freezing in a high or low shape). As with early language comprehension, it pays to work with the opposites of high and low before adding the medium level.

Some actions, such as darting, are at a medium level. Jumps can take the body high, whereas tumbles take the body over the floor at a low level. Much of the action vocabulary, such as twirl, wobble, or release, can be explored with the use of different levels. It is through this exploration that children learn that there are choices and will begin to use these possibilities at opportune times. One example is when a child discovers that he can rise from a low to a medium level instead of the more common low to high level.

### **Body Bases**

An area of space exploration that uses different levels is that of body bases. Children 6 to 8 years of age can understand and enjoy playing with making shapes that are standing, sitting, kneeling, or lying. A standing shape can involve one or both feet touching the floor. Children can be guided in experimenting with interesting ways of achieving this: A crouch balancing on one foot with the other leg extended is one way of making a low standing shape. Sitting shapes must have only part of the buttocks in contact with the floor; non-weight-bearing parts can be extended or tucked. Kneeling requires balance on one or both knees, and many body shapes are possible. Lying shapes allow only part of the trunk to take the weight, and these shapes require awareness of bodily tension in order to be interesting.

A dance idea called Building Castles that I sometimes work on with 6- to 8-year-olds shows the thinking involved when exploring body bases. The bricks are variations of standing, sitting, kneeling, and lying shapes. At different points in the dance, the children rush together quickly in groups (not prearranged) and attach to one another as they attempt to build a castle. When they rush into a group of four, a brick of each body base must be represented. In other words, one child must be standing, one sitting, one kneeling, and one lying. It is fascinating to watch how quickly some of them make shape adjustments to make it work.

### **Body Shapes**

As a dance student, I remembered the four basic body shapes as wall, ball, pin, and screw. In other words, the body can be wide in a variety of shapes, at different levels, and on different bases. Round shapes curl around the center of the body. Narrow shapes are as long and thin as possible, whether vertical, horizontal, or even diagonal. A twist requires the trunk to face more than one front so that if the lower body faces one way, the upper body faces another. The Sheriff and the Cowboy dance for 10- to 12-year-olds (see page 174) involves jumping over and then hiding behind wide, round, narrow, and twisted features in a ghost town.



Stretching into a low, wide shape.