

Danceable Thoughts Ideation Kit

Suggested Activities

Improvisation, Creative Thinking, Exploration

What is Ideation?

Ideation is a term borrowed from current business-world design thinkers. **Ideation is a process for exploration.** Ideation involves *problem solving, strategic and reflective thinking, and trial and testing.*

In the dance world we utilize improvisation as a method to introduce and explore movement concepts. The ***Danceable Thoughts “Ideation Kit”*** is filled with both traditional and non-traditional suggestions for activities for dancers to think more broadly about the creative process and their own ability to produce and interpret movement. With the items in the Ideation Kit, students of all experience levels can infuse their movement with new levels of understanding.

The beautiful thing about ideation is that it is a process and while the goal is to eventually produce a final product, within an ideation session, the **PROCESS** is where the learning is richest. The suggested activities are just starting points for you and your students. This Ideation Kit belongs to **YOU**, the instructor, and therefore you can use your own creative thinking for ways to share it with your students. There is no particular or prescribed order to the process. The topics covered may be explained in depth or they may be utilized as fun-time activities. For those lesson plans you may need to write, here is an “objective” that you can utilize to document the learning experiences that you will be sharing with your students.

Dancers will utilize multiple senses to observe non-dance specific items. Using these observations as creative inspiration, the students will design and perform movement that creatively interprets the characteristics of the objects as expressed with dance concepts. These dance concepts may include topics such as the following:

use of space, levels, facings
use of energy, force
use of imagery to enhance expressive intent
improvisation and choreographic problem solving

Objects found in the ***Danceable Thoughts Ideation Kit***

Shaped Straws
Bendable-squares Snake
Scarf
Elastic
Shaker Egg
Nail File
Bolt
Sponge
Domino

Concepts that Can Be Introduced

use of space, levels, facings
use of energy, force
use of imagery to enhance expressive intent
exaggeration/abstraction
working cooperatively with others
improvisation and choreographic problem solving
choreographic basics such as formations, transitions

Here are some suggested activities for the objects. Activities are in no specific order. When applicable some descriptions have a progression of ideas based on ideas for beginning dancers and progress to ideas for

more experienced dancers. Whichever activity you choose to utilize with your students be sure to build in time for reflection and conversations about the students' experiences and observations. For some students the most important revelations will come to them once you have skillfully guided them to a more in-depth level of understanding. Be sure to check out the last page for Reflection Ideas related to the entire kit!

Shaped Straws – Pathways through Space

Activity 1 -- Traveling through the Dance Space: use the shape as a roadmap to travel across the room. Encourage students to plot paths in a variety of ways beyond side to side. Have students experiment with diagonals and upstage/downstage pathways. For beginner students, simple locomotor movements such as walking and running will be sufficient. Intermediate students can use more complex rhythmic dance moves or moves that change levels. Encourage them to use chasses, turning movements, rolling movements. Ask advanced or more experienced students to take a traveling phase that they already know (or might quickly create on the spot) and then change it from a linear path to something that echoes the shape of the straw.

Activity 2 -- Body Incorporation: use the straw shape to create a movement combination with body parts. The easiest way to start is by using the arms. After students gain understanding then encourage them to transfer the path to other areas of the body such as the head/shoulders/torso or the hips/knees/legs. Some shapes are complex enough that you might have students begin with one body part and let the path “evolve” from head to toe or vice-versa.

Reflection Ideas

Why do you think that most dancers choose straight paths across the dance space?

What makes non-linear movement more interesting to the audience?

Bendable-Squares Snake – Pathways through Space, Interpreting Objects

This unusual manipulative can be used in similar ways as the straw, but it can have infinite possibilities. The more advanced thinkers will recognize that it has geometric and three-dimensional possibilities. Allow the students time to explore the range of possibilities that the jointed connections will allow.

Activity 1 -- Traveling through the Dance Space: Start by straightening the snake into a line. Guide students to create a unique shape/design by choosing three points to create a twist in the snake. Instruct students to begin by choosing a “color” of the rectangles that they will follow then begin at one end and count the number of rectangles in each “section” they’ve created. For clarity, verbally explain that dancers will “Travel the Rectangles” and “Pause at the Twists.”

Choreography the Path: Each rectangle represents a traveling movement (for beginners just use simple walking steps) then at the “twist” they can “pause” for a count of 4 or 8 to reorient and change facings to get ready to travel the next section. Beginners can simply walk and then pose and pause at the twists. Intermediate students can dance their paths and when they “Pause at the Twists” they could add in a featured skill such as a turn or leg extension or some non-traveling coordination phrase that features arm work or footwork. Repeat this process to finish out the full design.

Experienced dancers should be encouraged to make seamless transitions from traveling movements to the stationary time throughout the entire phrase.

Activity 2 -- Body Incorporation: One of the most intriguing ideas that this object brings to the creative process is that the shape can easily be interpreted from different angles. Use these leading questions to help students view their design:

- Can it balance (stand up) on its own? Is there a side that will allow it to lie flat?
- Which sections seem level (parallel to the surface)? Which descend? Which ascend?

Activity 2 -- Make it a Work of Art: Ask students to choose a way to place on the floor so that their design so it can be viewed like a statue. Dancers will recreate/respond to this “work of art” in their own body.

- Interpret and Pose: dancers shape their own bodies to imitate the sculpture as a “pose.”
- Living Statue: Start by using arms but gradually incorporate the rest of the body to “draw” the shape.
- Animated Geometry: for each “section” of the sculpture, use a different part of the body to dance and demonstrate the angle/shape/directional parts of design.

Reflection Ideas

The human body has hinges that allow you to make straight lines bend into angles. Take time to think of all the different places in your dancing anatomy that can hinge to create a “twist” or a change of direction, your body can also create curved shapes. What do you do to make angular lines become curved?

Scarf and/or Elastic -- Use of Prop, Creative Problem Solving, Imagery and Expression

Activity 1 – Observation: Dancers of all ages can find wonderful ways to “play” with both these types of props. To create more intellectually interactive experiences, ask some leading questions:

- What is the weight of the material? When you toss it up and let go, describe how it moves through the air.
- With your eyes closed, describe the way this feels using your sense of touch.
- Does the fabric “resist” or “give” when you stretch it in different ways?
- What mood or idea does the color suggest?
- What are practical ways this material might be used? What are decorative ways it could be used?

Activity 2 -- Working as an Individual: Choose a general 16 count unison movement phrase for all students to use as a base phrase for this activity. Allow students to practice the phrase a few times and tell them that this will now be called “The Original Phrase”

Using a Prop to Experience Variation: Three Versions: Both Hands, One Hand, Transfer

Allow students to experiment with ways to modify the movements/timing/style of the original phrase to accommodate these different requirements:

- Both Hands: Dancers perform the phrase with both hands always holding the material
- One Hand: Dancers only use one hand at a time to manipulate the material
- Transfer: Throughout the choreography the dancer changes which body parts are interacting with the material: use the material around the neck or waist, foot, or leg. The possibilities are endless.

Activity 3 -- Experiencing Differences and Using Imagery: Follow up with a discussion and help students verbalize what they perceive as differences when working with a prop and how it changes the way they move and use energy (softer,

stronger, in bursts or continuously controlled) and discuss how using the prop might create a different narrative or storyline for the choreography. This discussion is a great lead-in to explaining how dancers use texture as imagery and inspiration to interpret choreography and add meaning to movement.

Activity 4 -- Working with other Dancers: There are endless ways for dancers to share the manipulation of a prop. Students can “observe” the material using the same questions above and then create an original phrase where they share the responsibility of utilizing the prop to create visually interesting shapes and movements.

Reflection Ideas

As dancers we are very similar to other artists who must interpret the ideas of others and then perform or communicate those ideas to the audience to create emotional reactions. Singers have lyrics. Actors have scripts. Dancers have choreography. Create a list of emotions and then discuss the kind of posture, energy, and effort a dancer should use to successfully communicate those ideas through choreography.

Shaker Egg – Use of Effort/Energy, Improvisational Response

Few people can resist the fun of making noise with a shaker item. A shaker is a fun and non-traditional way to “hear” movement and a way for a dancer to self-monitor and adjust energy output. While vibratory movement is surely the easiest to produce with a shaker egg, other movement concepts can be introduced. Encourage students to recognize that they can make movements look and feel different by controlling the effort and energy they put into the movement. Many dancers compare the use of energy to the way you can control the flow of water from a faucet: full blast, steady, or slow drips.

Activity 1 -- Working as an Individual: Allow students to start by designing a basic arm movement phrase. They will perform it several times, always using the same path through space but varying the flow of energy. Use this phrase, “The Same Only Different” to describe the way the movement should be modified: the path stays the same, but the dancer will control the energy that flows through the movement. Challenge the dancers to produce different sounds with the shaker by varying effort, speed, and control. Students should explore how they control their own movements to create sounds that are 1) in continuous and repeating pattern, 2) in rhythmic bursts, and 3) by moving in a steady and even way. These are great ways to introduce these movement qualities:

- Vibratory: pulsing, continuous, repeating
- Percussive: bursts followed by stillness
- Sustained: even and steady

Activity 2 -- Working with Other Dancers: this is a fun activity to experience as a “follow the leader” type improvisation exercise. One leader will begin by moving with the shaker while others (who do not hold a shaker) react by mimicking and then abstracting the movement. “Followers” can be directed either to react to the sound or the movement. As the teacher, you can call out when you’d like the leader to pass off the shaker to another dancer.

Reflection Ideas

Working with the shaker is definitely fun, almost like playtime, but can you reframe your movement choices as an experiment for scientific discovery? Think of your body as bottled-up energy. How much or how little do you have to use to create different effects?

If you have the opportunity to follow another dancer, which do you prefer responding to? Do you like creating movement based on the sounds you hear, or do you prefer to react and create based on the visuals ideas?

Nail/Bolt/Sponge – Use of Imagery for Expressive Interpretation

Activity 1 – Observation: Activate the dancers’ powers of observation by working with everyday objects. Using similar questions from the Scarf/Elastic exercise, encourage students to think about how their senses can provide inspiration for movement.

- What is the weight of the object? When you toss it up and catch it, describe how it moves through the air and how much effort does it take to catch it and/or throw it “higher” each time?
- With your eyes closed, describe the way to feels to the touch?
- How many sides does the object have and how do they differ?
- What are practical ways this item might be used? What are some unusual ways it could be used?

Activity 2 -- Surrounded by Texture Improvisation: Prepare for the movement phrase by first creating a list of words or phrases that describe an observed object. Begin by asking the dancers to use their fingertips on the floor and ask students to pantomime the experience of feeling the different textures. Next, ask the dancers to abstract that pantomime into exaggerated, abstracted movements. It is very helpful for the instructor or a student leader to call out the words from the list as inspiration for the movers.

Next, instruct the dancers to move their feet along the floor as if their bare feet were experiencing/interpreting the words on the list.

Imagination Level Up: Encourage the dancers to move by using the sides of their body, their torsos, elbows, and shoulders as if they were trying to escape from inside a cylinder or a tube that was covered by the textures they observed.

Activity 3 -- Build a Dance Phrase of Opposites: Ask students to individually pick a characteristic of an object they observed and then create 8 counts of movement that expresses that concept. This will be called the *Part A* phrase. Working with a partner, share and teach each other the *Part A* phrases. Next, working as a team, the partners should create *Part B* which is another 16 counts of movement that expresses *opposite interpretations of the same movement*. For example, if the *Part A* phrases focuses on “heavy” and “smooth” then *Part B* should focus on performing the same basic movements with energy and interpretations that are “light” and “bumpy.”

Here are some suggested movements to include in the dance phrases if you would like the dancers to focus on movement more than pantomime: Plie, chasse, rond de jambe, lunge, leg extensions or kicks, simple jumps.

Reflection Ideas

Which way do you to prefer to categorize the observation requirements of this study? Would you rather write it up like a science experiment or write a paper descriptive paper about the object? Does your answer match what you like to do in your academic classes?

When you think of “dance” as a subject to you think of it as a physical challenge or an artistic challenge?

Domino – Choreography Basics. Working Cooperatively with Others

Using a domino or dice is a great way to help students visualize simple formations. For more experienced dancers using a domino or dice is an unusual way to randomly assign non-typical count structures.

Activity 1 – Formation Translation

Begin by asking students create or choose a general 16 count unison movement phrase. Allow students to review the combination for memory so that they have a solid working knowledge of the content.

Using the domino's two numerical designations as a "plan", challenge the dancers to arrange themselves in the formation suggested by the dots on one side and dance in that shape for the first 8 counts and then during the second 8 counts ask them to change into the other side's arrangement. The "Trick" is that they must utilize the original movement phrase to move without making major changes. In simpler terms: "Dance the formation change -- don't just walk it!"

If you have multiple dominoes, give the students other dominoes with which they can experiment as well.

Activity 2 – Count Structure

Begin by having students count aloud the numerical designations and repeat them. Here's an example, with a "three | two" domino – the students would count "1,2,3 – 1,2" and then that would be repeated for number of times that you designated. Three or four total times is optimal.

Ask students to explore ways to break up movement phrases into these new count structures.

- Option 1: Simply take a shape and hold for the duration of the first count and then change and hold for the duration of the second count.
- Option 2: Assign a movement for each individual count of the first number, hold for the duration of the second count
- Option 3: Modify a known phrase into this new count structure.

Reflection Ideas

What does it do your brain when you have to "change the counts" or "change the timing" of the movements in a combination? It requires concentration – does that make you worry, or do you find that it interesting to do things in different ways?

Reflection Ideas for the Ideation Kit Experiences

Which objects did you find were the easiest to work with? Which were the most difficult?

Which objects did you initially think were very simplistic but after working with them, found that they were actually interesting?

If you must combine 3 objects for a final project, which 3 would you choose and why?

If you could add 3 objects to the kit for future study/inspiration, what would you add?