

Danceable Thoughts Ideation Kit

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.

Shaped Straws – Pathways through Space

Become familiar with the “Pathway” by tracing the straw with your fingers.

Put the straw down and “draw” the pathway in the air.

Activity 1 -- Traveling through the Dance Space: use the shape as a roadmap to travel across the room. Where will you start and where will you finish? The goal of this exercise is not to always travel in a straight line. Plot paths in a variety of ways beyond traveling from one side of the room to the direct opposite. Experiment with diagonals and upstage/downstage pathways.

First try: Use simple locomotor movements such as walking and running to travel the pathway all the way across the dance space.

More Interesting: Use more complex rhythmic dance moves or moves that change levels. Try using chasses, turning movements, rolling movements.

Challenge Level: Take a traveling phase that you already know (or you might quickly create one) 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 your body parts. The easiest way to start is by using your arms. Now repeat the creative process by transferring the path to other areas of the body such as the head/shoulders/torso or the hips/knees/legs. You can even 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. You might recognize that this object has geometric and three-dimensional possibilities. Take some time to explore the range of possibilities that the jointed connections will allow.

Activity 1 -- Traveling through the Dance Space:

Prep Step: Start by straightening the snake into a line.

Step 1: Create a unique shape/design by choosing three points to create a twist in the snake.

Step 2: Analyze and discover your path by choosing a “color” of the rectangles that you will follow. Begin at one end and count the number of rectangles in each “section” you’ve created.

To create your movement phrase, keep this in mind:

“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” you will “pause” for a count of 4 or 8 to reorient and change facings to get ready to travel the next section.

Option 1: simply walk and then pose and pause at the twists.

Option 2: dance the paths and when you “Pause at the Twists” -- 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.

Option 3: connect movements with seamless transitions from traveling movements to the stationary time throughout the entire phrase.

Activity 2 -- Observation 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.

Examine your design:

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

Activity 3 -- Make it a Work of Art: Choose a way to place the design on the floor so that the design can be viewed like a statue. You will recreate/respond to this “work of art” with your dancing body in three ways:

- Interpret and Pose: shape your body to imitate the sculpture as a “pose.”
- Living Statue: Start by using only your 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 a Prop, Creative Problem Solving, Imagery and Expression

Activity 1 – Observation: Start by playing with the prop (it is a great way to learn) but let your thinking evolve to a more analytical approach by experimenting and using these questions as a guide:

- 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 it feels to the 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 movement phrase and practice it a few times -- this will now be called “The Original Phrase”

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

Dance the Original Phrase but modify the movements/timing/style 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 with your teacher and other dancers to discuss the differences you experience when working with a prop in contrast to dancing empty-handed. Note how using a prop changes the way you move and the way you use energy (softer, stronger, in bursts or continuously controlled.) Imagine and discuss how using the prop might create a narrative or storyline for the choreography. Share your thoughts with the group.

Activity 4 -- Working with other Dancers: There are endless ways for dancers to share the manipulation of a prop. Create an original phrase where you share the responsibility of utilizing the prop with other dancers to create visually interesting shapes, movements, storylines.

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 an 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 and energy/effort a dancer should use to successfully communicate those ideas throughout 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 discovered. Dancers can make movements look and feel different by controlling the effort and energy they put into a 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: Start by designing a basic arm movement phrase. Perform it several times, always using the same path through space but varying the sounds that the shaker will make.

Keep this idea in mind as you try new things: “The Same Only Different” -- the movement should be modified slightly but the arm path should stay the same. As the performer you will control the energy that flows through the movement.

Produce different sounds with the shaker by varying effort, speed, and control. Discover ways to create sounds that are 1) in a continuous and repeating pattern, 2) in rhythmic bursts, and 3) steady and even.

Dancers often use these terms to describe 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. Working in small groups, designate a leader that 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 either react to the sound or the movement. If time permits, let all dancers experience being the leader of the group,

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 to respond to? Do you like creating movement based on the sounds you hear, or do you prefer to react and dance based on visual ideas?

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

Activity 1 – Observation: Activate your powers of observation by working with everyday objects. Using similar questions from the Scarf/Elastic exercise, discover these characteristics of the object.

- 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 the object 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.

Movement Level 1: Use your fingertips on the floor to pantomime the experience of feeling the different textures. Next, make it more ‘dance-like’ by changing the pantomime into exaggerated, abstracted movements.

Movement Level 2: Move your feet along the floor as if your bare feet are experiencing/interpreting the words on the list and the textures of the object.

Imagination Level Up: Imagine that you are standing inside a cylinder of tube and the inside of the container is covered by the textures you’ve observed. Move by using the sides of your body, your torso, elbows, and shoulders as if you were trying to escape from inside the cylinder or a tube. Your movements should seem like you are reacting to the imaginary textures.

Activity 3 -- Build a Dance Phrase of Opposites: Pick a characteristic of an object you 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 your *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 to make the content more dance related and less like a pantomime: Plie, chasse, rond de jambe, lunge, leg extensions or kicks, simple jumps.

Reflection Ideas

Which way do you prefer to categorize the observation requirements of this study? Would you rather write it up like a science experiment or write a 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

Activity 1 – Formation Translation

This is an activity that will be done with small groups.

Create or choose a general 16 count unison movement phrase and take a few minutes to review the combination for memory so that you have a solid working knowledge of the content.

Check out the domino – it will have dots on one side of a straight line and dots on the other side of the straight line.

Using the domino's two numerical designations as a "plan", your challenge is to arrange the members of your group in a 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 change into the other side's arrangement. The "Trick" is that you 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, experiment with those number combinations as well.

Activity 2 – Count Structure

Begin by counting aloud the numerical designations on the domino and then repeat that several times. Here's an example, with a "three | two" domino – dancers would count "1,2,3 – 1,2" and then that would be repeated several times designated by your teacher. Three or four total times is optimal.

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. Repeat three or four times. Movement can vary each time through.
- Option 2: Assign a movement for each individual count of the first number, hold for the duration of the second count – using the example above you would MOVE on 1, on 2 and on count 3 and then you would be perfectly still for the second part: 1-2 – then you'd repeat the process again for three or four times.
- Option 3: Modify a known phrase into this new count structure. This is pretty challenging. The goal is to break yourself out the habit of thinking every movement tends to in 2,4, or 8 counts.

Reflection Ideas

How do you feel 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 is 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 had to 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?