

DANCE TO BELONG A HISTORY OF DANCE AT 92NY

**An 150th Anniversary
Online Exhibition**



DANCE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

WRITTEN BY ANN BIDDLE

DEL Professional Learning and Curriculum Senior Consultant for 92NY DEL

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For Grades 6-12

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Introduction	3
Learning Activity 1: Stepping Into Dance to Belong	5
Learning Activity 2: The Life and Work of Yuriko	12
Learning Activity 3: The Life and Work of Pearl Primus	16
Learning Activity 4: The Life and Work of José Limón	20
Dance Artist in Context (DAC) Questions & Note Catcher	24
Works Cited	26
Acknowledgments	27

Dance to Belong: A History of Dance at 92NY

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Dance to Belong: A History of Dance at 92NY* online exhibition learning activities. This resource includes **four sequenced learning experiences designed for students in grades 6 through 12**. Each activity draws from the archival materials and thematic threads of the exhibition and may be adapted across grade bands to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Grounded in culturally responsive, inquiry-based, and embodied pedagogical practices, these activities invite students to engage critically and creatively with dance history. Students examine archival resources, consider multiple perspectives, and participate in movement-based investigations that connect historical research with choreographic exploration.

The activities are aligned with the 92NY DEL Dance Framework and offer flexible entry points for educators seeking to integrate embodied learning into dance history instruction. Lesson structures support historical inquiry, interdisciplinary connections, and student-centered meaning-making.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Students will understand that:

- Dance exists within specific social, cultural, political, and historical contexts.
- Histories are constructed narratives shaped by perspective; some voices have been centered while others have been marginalized, obscured, or omitted.
- Dance history can be explored through embodied, multimodal, and interdisciplinary approaches.
- Multiple entry points, including archival research, dialogue, and movement exploration, deepen historical understanding and expand interpretive possibilities.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Examine and articulate connections between personal dance experiences and broader historical narratives.
 - Analyze archival materials from the *Dance to Belong* exhibition to investigate the history of dance at 92NY.
 - Trace artistic lineages within American modern dance through research, discussion, and embodied movement study.
 - Develop and apply choreographic responses informed by historical inquiry.
 - Synthesize historical insights into written, verbal, and movement-based reflections.
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LEARNING ACTIVITIES CONTENTS

Learning Activity 1: Stepping Into *Dance to Belong*

- Part 1: Introduction to the *Dance to Belong* Online Exhibit
- Part 2: For Teachers: Overview of the Dance Artist in Context (DAC) Framework
- Part 3: Personal Dance History Activity
- Part 4: Mapping Personal Dance History Activity

Learning Activity 2: The Life and Work of Yuriko

- Part 1: Introduction to the Life and Work of Yuriko
- Part 2: Dance Artist in Context Activity
- Part 3: Reflecting on the Big Ideas

Learning Activity 3: The Life and Work of Pearl Primus

- Part 1: Introduction to the Life and Work of Pearl Primus - A Shape Exploration
- Part 2: Dance Artist in Context Activity
- Part 3: Imagined Reconstruction Activity

Learning Activity 4: The Life and Work of José Limón

- Part 1: Introduction to the Life and Work of José Limón
- Part 2: Dance Artist in Context Activity
- Part 3: Imagined Reconstruction Activity

DANCE TO BELONG LEARNING ACTIVITY 1

Stepping Into Dance to Belong

Part 1: Introduction to the Dance to Belong Online Exhibit

Begin with a self-guided tour of the online exhibition. Spend time reviewing the archival photographs, video excerpts, and curatorial themes to build foundational knowledge of the artists and historical contexts represented.



Begin in the Hall of Mirrors

Start at the Hall of Mirrors entrance outside the Weill Art Gallery. Invite students to view the four video and photo montage walls. Each circular floor marker activates a corresponding montage.

These montages introduce key artists and establish thematic threads that will reappear throughout the exhibition.

Video Montage 1

Highlights include Alvin Ailey in *Hermit Songs* (1961) and Judith Jamison in *Cry* (1971); Doris Humphrey's *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* (1946) performed by José Limón; Limón's *Sonata for Two Cellos* (1961); Talley Beatty's *Mourner's Bench from Southern Landscape* (1947); and Donald McKayle's *Rainbow Round My Shoulder* (1959).

Video Montage 2

Features Pearl Primus in *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (1946) and *Spirituals* (1950); Carmela Maracci in *Flamenco* (1936); Martha Graham in *Strike* (1928); and excerpts from *Graham's Chronicle* (1937).

Video Montage 3

Includes Lin Pen-Fen in *The Survivor* (1940s); Tom Two Arrows in *Iroquois Indian Dance* (1940s); Janet Collins in *Chain Gang* (1949); and Indrani performing *Tarangam* (1979).

Video Montage 4

Features Janet Collins in *Three Psalms of David* (1949); Hadassah in *Shum Nafshi* (1947); Anna Sokolow in *Kaddish* (1945) and *Lyric Suite* (1954); *Jewish Folk Dance* by Fred Berk and Katya Delakova (1947); Sophie Maslow's *Folksay* (1942); Pearl Lang's *Song of Deborah*; and Lar Lubovitch's *Meadow* (1999).

These montages position 92NY as a vital site in the evolution of modern dance, highlighting artistic lineages, cultural identities, political engagement, and global perspectives.

Enter the Weill Art Gallery

Once inside the gallery, invite students to read the introductory curatorial statement below before exploring the thematic walls:

Dance to Belong explores 150 years of community building through dance. Since 1874, dance has been vital to the cultural life of 92NY. Recently arrived Jewish immigrants found a sense of belonging in dance classes and events hosted here or at associated organizations. Dance helped connect immigrants of different cultural backgrounds both to each other and to the urban fabric of New York City.

Against the backdrop of fascism, war, and racial violence in the 20th century, 92NY became a sanctuary for modern dance artists and community members who used the fluidity of dance to challenge the notion that national and cultural identity is fixed. Under the influence of exiled Habima Theater artist Benjamin Zemach, who served as an early dance director of 92NY, and then Dr. William Kolodney, who officially opened the doors of the Dance Center in 1935, 92NY was instrumental in the development of modern dance, providing a space for modern dance performers from all over the world to develop their art—from Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm to Si-lan Chen, Pearl Primus, and Alvin Ailey. It also contributed to the development of Israeli folk dance, a form that blended dance traditions from Jewish communities across Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Dance to Belong celebrates 92NY as a place where community, dance, and cultural reinvention came together to shape the very contours of modern dance itself. More than a stage, 92NY expanded ideas about what modern dance could be, breaking down barriers of language, race, nationality, and religion. The Harkness Dance Center and Dance Education Laboratory, a dance education training program for teachers, continues this work today. At 92NY, dance itself remains a force for belonging.

Explore the Thematic Walls

Guide students to move clockwise through the gallery, engaging with the following sections:

- Dance to Belong: History of Dance at 92NY
- Dance as Political Manifesto
- Bodies of War
- Global Stage
- Black Modernism

Encourage reflective inquiry using prompts such as:

- What thematic patterns emerge across artists and time periods?
- How do social and political contexts shape the work presented?
- Whose perspectives are centered? Whose may require further investigation?
- How can historical study become relevant and meaningful for contemporary learners?

Part 2: For Teachers - Overview of the Dance Artist in Context (DAC) Framework

The *Dance to Belong* Learning Activities invites students to experience dance history as something living, embodied, and relational. At the center of this work is the **Dance Artist in Context (DAC)** framework, developed by DEL Facilitators, Ann Biddle and Felice Santorelli (2020). This framework is used across all four *Dance to Belong* learning activities as a guiding lens for embodied dance history. The DAC framework supports a holistic, culturally responsive approach to understanding dance artists by examining:

- Who they were (Personal History)
- When they lived (Socio-Cultural and Political Context)
- What shaped their artistry (Movement Characteristics and Artistic Processes)
- Who they influenced (Contemporaries, Collaborators and Protégés)

This framework was born out of the acknowledgment that there were often few resources about various artists available to us as dance teachers, and that made it incredibly challenging to offer students information about the life and work of a broad range of dance artists. Sometimes there is only a 30-second video clip, and sometimes not even that. What instructional strategies can we implement to learn about dance artists when there are limited resources available?

We utilize an inquiry-based learning model in which students and teachers work together to engage in research and inquiry tasks to learn about an artist using a range of resources, including photos, video clips, diverse texts, and interviews. Drawing from multiple sources helps build a more complete picture of an artist's work, values, and dance-making processes.

The DAC framework actively engages students in the learning process. Students participate in a collective process of research and discovery, take part in embodied activities, and collaborate on dance-making tasks. These embodied strategies lay the groundwork for deeper learning and comprehension, and give students the opportunity to engage in higher-order critical thinking skills.

Rather than isolating technique or choreography from lived experience, this framework invites students to investigate the full ecosystem of an artist's life and work. It supports critical inquiry, historical thinking, embodied exploration, and reflection, helping students see themselves as part of an ongoing dance continuum.

Why This Framework Matters in the Classroom

The DAC framework:

- Humanizes dance history by offering a comprehensive understanding of the dance artist's life and work
- Centers marginalized voices and lived experience
- Encourages critical thinking and cultural awareness
- Supports identity exploration and lineage tracing
- Aligns with culturally responsive, inquiry-based, and embodied learning
- Shifts dance history from memorization to meaning-making

Students learn that dance does not emerge in isolation; it grows from community, struggle, resilience, imagination, and collaboration.

Part 3: Personal Dance History Activity

Find the Dance Artist in Context (DAC) Framework, including guiding questions for students and a note-catcher, at the end of this document.

Invite students to use the prompts provided in the DAC to reflect on their own personal dance history and document their insights in the DAC note catcher. You can choose to invite students to focus on one lens of the DAC framework or focus on all of them.

Invite students to use the prompts provided in the DAC to reflect on their own personal dance history and document their insights in the DAC note catcher. You can choose to invite students to focus on one lens of the DAC framework or focus on all of them.

Note 1: Younger learners may not have the perspective to fully understand the social or historic context they are living within. However, high schoolers and college students can complete all four lenses of the DAC framework in their research.

Note 2: We invite you, the educator, to also complete your own DAC alongside your students!

Individual Reflection:

After students have completed the DAC, invite them to reflect individually:

- What did you notice in *your* DAC?
- What stands out as being a formative experience?
- Do you see any themes that seem important?
- Who can you identify as being instrumental as teachers or mentors along your dance history journey?
- How do you see your place in the dance history continuum?

In Small Groups:

Invite students to share their completed DACs with a peer or in a small group.

- Do you notice any similarities in your dance history journeys?
- Any differences?
- Are there common themes? Divergent themes?
- How does this activity help you understand your place in the dance history continuum?

Part 4: Mapping Personal Dance History Activity

This activity invites students to pause, remember, move, and honor the dance history they carry. The objective of this activity is to help students recognize and honor their personal dance history as part of the living dance continuum.

Invite students to reflect on their own dance history through movement to understand how they arrived in this learning space. Explain that our cultures, experiences, teachers, and communities live in our bodies and shape how we move. Encourage students to reflect on their completed DAC as they move through this activity.

Note: All text in *italics* below are written in a teacher's voice.

STEP 1: Ground & Arrive

- *Stand in a comfortable space.*
 - *Bring attention to your feet on the floor; soften your knees.*
 - *Take a few slow breaths and feel your weight dropping downward.*
 - *Imagine roots growing from your feet into the ground, grounding and supporting you.*
-

STEP 2: First Dance Memory

Gently shift your attention to your personal dance history. We are going on a dance journey backwards in time:

- *When did dance first appear in your life?*
- *What is your earliest dance memory?*
- *Where were you? Who was with you?*
- *What kind of movement or rhythm do you remember?*

Let the memory surface without forcing it. Follow what arises in your imagination. As the image becomes clearer, allow your body to begin to move. Let the memory emerge as a gesture, shape, or rhythmic pattern in your body. There is no right or wrong way to move.

STEP 3: Reflect & Create

Choose ONE option, A or B:

Option A: Dance Making

- Identify one meaningful dance memory.
- Create a short movement phrase inspired by that memory.
- Begin in still shape. End in a still shape.

Note: As an extension, identify three meaningful dance memories and create movement phrases for each memory. Add traveling transitions between each phrase. Refer to the [92NY DEL Dance Framework](#) to gather movement vocabulary and choreographic ideas.

Option B: Visual Mapping

- Create a simple personal dance history map using drawing, writing, or images.
- Include key places, people, dance memories, dance styles, teachers, and moments that shaped your dance journey.

STEP 4: Reflection

Invite students to consider their personal dance history and reflect on the following prompts:

- *What did you notice or remember?*
 - *What did you learn about your own dance history?*
 - *How does your story connect to the larger dance history continuum?*
-

STEP 5: Closing

Each of us carries dance history in our bodies. By reflecting and moving, we honor where we come from and recognize that dance history is not only something we study, but something we live. We are all part of the dance history continuum!



Photo by Cherylynn Tsushima for Nel Shelby Productions

DANCE TO BELONG LEARNING ACTIVITY 2

The Life and Work of Yuriko

Before beginning this learning activity, visit the **Bodies of War** wall in the Weill Art Gallery and read this note from the curators:

World wars, revolutions, the Japanese internment—waves of strife and suffering found an outlet for expression in dance. Choreographers fleeing war in their homelands, including José Limón, La Argentina, Carmen Amaya, and Antony Tudor, sought asylum in the US. They created and presented work on 92NY's stages that gave insight into what was unfolding in the larger world. Artists already living in America faced different fates. Some were lost to the draft. Japanese Americans living west of the Mississippi River, like Yuriko, were forced into internment camps. The Dance Center provided space for artists to explore and express, fueling the establishment of New York City and The 92nd Street Y as the epicenter of the global dance world.

Part 1: Introduction to the Life and Work of Yuriko

In this learning activity, students will investigate the life and work of Yuriko (1920-2022) to deepen their knowledge of her contributions as a dancer, choreographer, educator, and activist.

Yuriko Kikuchi, referred to simply as Yuriko, was a legendary dancer who danced with the Martha Graham Dance Company from 1944 to 1967 and continued as a guest artist for many years. As a Japanese American during World War II, Yuriko and her family were forced to relocate to an internment camp.

Read this short curator's note about Yuriko's life:

Japanese American dance artist, choreographer, and Martha Graham Ensemble founder and director, Yuriko Kikuchi was a singular force, dancing and directing for the Graham company for over fifty years and blazing a path for Asian American dancers in the mostly white world of modern dance. Born in San Jose, California, she was sent to Japan after the Spanish flu claimed the lives of her sisters and father. In Japan, she studied experimental performance with Ms. Bishi. Before the outbreak of World War II, she returned to California, and in 1942 she and her family were interned in Arizona on Pima Nation Land at the Gila River Relocation Camp, where she taught dance classes.

As a stager, Yuriko set *Panorama* (1935) on the company as well as many of Graham's well known works. Yuriko also had a robust performance career on Broadway and played Eliza in the original Broadway musical *The King and I* (1951) as well as in the movie (1956), both choreographed by Jerome Robbins.

Begin an exploration of Yuriko's life and work by viewing a photo of Yuriko featured in the **Bodies of War** wall.

Also view a program from Yuriko's 1949 solo concert at 92NY. To find it, navigate to the column displaying 92NY performance programs in the Weill Art Gallery. Yuriko's program is yellow.



Photo by Martha Swope

Part 2: Dance Artist in Context Activity

Locate the **Dance Artist in Context (DAC) framework** at the end of this document. Invite students to learn more about Yuriko's life and work by reviewing 3 or 4 of the resources provided below, and considering the following research questions.

Encourage students to note 2-3 pieces of their research to the DAC note catcher.

Review these Resources:

- [Watch this video](#) created by the Martha Graham Company to honor Yuriko
- [Read this article](#) written by Wendy Perron, after Yuriko's death in 2022
- [Watch this video](#) of Yuriko in *Primitive Mysteries* from 1931
- [Read this article](#) which shares Yuriko's reflections on being interned as a Japanese American during WWII.
- [Click here](#) to learn more about the incarceration of the Japanese Americans in WWII.

Dance Artist in Context (DAC) Research Questions:

PERSONAL HISTORY:

- What was Yuriko's artist's family history? (Place of birth, nationality, ethnicity, etc.)
- What were the formative experiences that influenced Yuriko's artistic journey?
- Who were Yuriko's teachers, and what dance experiences was she exposed to?

SOCIO-CULTURAL & POLITICAL:

- What time period did Yuriko live and create works?
- What were the major societal trends, belief systems, and structural forces and restrictions that impacted Yuriko during her dance career?
- What were the cultural influences that characterized the time period (i.e., music, fashion, education, laws, religion, social organizations, etc.)?
- What were the major historical events and political movements of the time period?

MOVEMENT CHARACTERISTICS & ARTISTIC PROCESSES:

- What was Yuriko's distinct philosophy or belief system that guided her creative approach and process?
- What are the key characteristics of Yuriko's movement style and choreographic signature?
- What influences from specific dance forms, genres or movement vocabulary are evident in Yuriko's dances?
- What other disciplines informed her work?
- What were Yuriko's contributions to the fields of dance and dance education (i.e., repertoire, pedagogy, writings, political and social activism, etc.)?



CONTEMPORARIES, COLLABORATORS & PROTÉGÉS:

- Who were Yuriko's contemporaries and collaborators (i.e., composers, set and costume designers, poets, visual artists, writers, etc.)?
 - Who were Yuriko's most notable students and protégés who preserved and continued her dance traditions and practices?
-

Part 3: Reflecting on the Big Ideas

After students complete their DAC activity, invite them to consider the following prompts. Students can reflect individually, pair-share, or share in small groups:

- What is most important to remember about Yuriko's legacy?
- What were some key moments in Yuriko's life?
- How did WWII impact Yuriko and her family?
- How did she come to become a principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company?
- What other roles did she play as a performer? Dancer? Choreographer?

DANCE TO BELONG LEARNING ACTIVITY 3

The Life and Work of Pearl Primus

Before we begin this learning activity, visit the **Black Modernism** wall in Weill Art Gallery and read this note from the curators:

A Negro Dance Evening, presented in Kaufmann Concert Hall in 1937, put 92NY on the path to becoming a home for Black modern dance. Organized by Alison Burroughs and Ada Guy, the event brought together choreographers who explored Black identity through the lens of exile. Katherine Dunham, who had studied African diasporic dance in her anthropological research at the University of Chicago, brought her own ensemble—which included a 19-year-old Talley Beatty—for their New York debut. The program began with African dance, moving on to dances of the West Indies, and ending in the US with Guy and Burroughs' Modern Trends, exemplifying a sensibility that resonated with 92NY's Jewish audience in fostering acceptance of difference.

During World War II, Black artists built upon the trailblazing work of Guy and Burroughs while making explicit connections between the fight against Nazism in Europe and the struggle against racial violence in the American South. Pearl Primus, a favorite of 92NY audiences, protested racism in the South in dances such as *Hard Time Blues* (1943), against sharecropping, or *Strange Fruit* (1943) against lynching, while drawing connections to racial violence and discrimination more broadly. "I want my dancing to apply to Jews, Turks, Russians and Indians as well as Negroes."

In 1961, Alvin Ailey debuted *Revelations* at 92NY, a piece inspired by his church experiences in Rogers, Texas. Bringing together the experience of slavery, African American spirituals, and Ailey's own childhood experiences of racism, the work solidified 92NY's support for Black artists fighting for racial justice.

Part 1:

Introduction to Pearl Primus - A Shape & Motif Exploration

In this learning activity, students will learn about the life and work of Pearl Primus. Students will complete the Dance Artist in Context (DAC) and engage in an embodied reconstruction dance-making activity using information gathered from their research process.

In the exhibit, find two photos of Pearl Primus - one on the **Bodies of War** wall and one on the **Black Modernism** wall.

On the **Black Modernism** wall, read this note about the *Speak to Me of Rivers* solo, choreographed by Pearl Primus in 1943.

“My soul has grown deep like the rivers.” —Langston Hughes

Speak to Me of Rivers was danced to a reading of Langston Hughes’ poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” Hughes had written the poem at the age of 17, while crossing the Mississippi on a journey to visit his father in Mexico. Like Hughes, Primus initially had in mind the Mississippi, along which was shipped the cotton grown by enslaved Blacks, as the river was symbolic of resistance and strength under bondage. By 1950, after her first trip to Africa, and seeing the Congo and Niger, the river also signified for Primus African civilization and the power and creativity of Black culture. Hughes wrote of Primus: “Every time she leaped, folks felt like shouting.”

Next, invite students to view the two photos of Pearl Primus and reflect:

- What do you notice?
- How would you describe these photographs?
- What predictions can you make about Primus’s movement style based on these photos?

Shape Exploration:

- Notice the shapes Pearl Primus is making in these two photos. What is the effort quality of these shapes?
- In your body, replicate Primus’s shapes to the best of your ability. Explore how to transpose the shape into different body parts to make your own shape.
- Try to make the shapes on different levels, facing different directions.
- Make the shapes move slowly or move quickly.
- Imagine what movement might come before the shape and what movement might come after the shape.
- Remember your shape ideas!



Photo by Barbara Morgan

Part 2: Dance Artist in Context Activity

Locate the **Dance Artist in Context (DAC)** framework at the end of this document. Invite students to learn more about Pearl Primus's life and work by reviewing the resources provided below.

Students can add key facts and information they gather from their research to their DAC note catcher.

Pearl Primus Resources:

Read Pearl Primus's Artist Statement

- As you read Primus's statement, highlight key passages that stand out to you.
- What does this statement tell you about Primus's artistic vision?
- What did Primus care about?

Read this short bio of Pearl Primus.

- What important information about Primus's life and work did you discover in this bio?

Read this article and this article, written by New York Times dance critic John Martin in 1946 and 1944 respectively.

- How would you summarize dance critic John Martin's view of Primus's work?

Revisit the short clip of Primus performing *Spirituals*

Part 3: Imagined Reconstruction Activity

The Imagined Reconstruction approach is designed to integrate research with dance making using the 92NY DEL Dance Framework. This dance-making activity focuses on visual learning and experiencing the power of archival artifacts (photographs, film, dance reviews and written text from the artist).

In this activity, students will create an Imagined Reconstruction solo that aims to capture the essence of Pearl Primus based on their research. Students may take artistic liberty in their choreography that may be informed by, inspired by, or adapted from movement components that seem essential to Primus. Consider incorporating movement elements from the 92NY DEL Dance Framework, as well as images and information gleaned from your research.

Invite students to include the following in their Imagined Reconstruction solo:

- Shapes reconstructed from the photographs of Pearl Primus
- Movement motifs noticed in the short video excerpt of *Spirituals*.
- 1-3 Movement Characteristics from the Dance Artist in Context note catcher.
- Words/phrases/imagery from Pearl Primus's *My Statement*.



Photo by Barbara Morgan

Encourage students to use 2 to 3 choreographic tools:

- Canon
- Action/Reaction
- Retrograde
- Repetition
- Advance/Retreat
- Lead/Follow
- Accumulation

To conclude, invite students to provide a **short written or verbal explanation** of their Imagined Reconstruction choreographic process.

DANCE TO BELONG LEARNING ACTIVITY 4

The Life and Work of José Limón

Part 1: Introduction to José Limón

In this learning activity, students will learn about the life and work of José Limón. Begin this activity by viewing archival photos and film clips of Limón in the *Dance to Belong* online exhibit.

Enter the Weill Art Gallery and visit the first wall: *Dance to Belong: History of Dance at 92NY*.

View the **interactive video** of *Sonata for Two Cellos*, choreographed by Limón in 1961 and performed by Desmond Richardson in 2001. Read the program label included with the film:

Sonata for Two Cellos is an exquisite piece that merges the elegance of classical music with the expressiveness of modern dance. Through Limón's masterful choreography, the duet embodies the interplay between the cellos, creating a visual representation of the music's depth, tension, and harmony.

Consider these prompts:

- What do you notice about Limón's movement style?
- What themes and emotional qualities does his work evoke?

Now, visit the **Bodies of War** wall, and click into the **interactive videos**. View the 7th video: a film clip of Limón performing *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* choreographed by Doris Humphrey and recorded in 1946 at Jacob's Pillow.

Read the exhibit note to learn more about the work:

Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías is a deeply moving dance tribute to the celebrated Spanish bullfighter, Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, whose tragic death in the bullring shocked the world. Through her choreography performed by José Limón, Humphrey captures the tumultuous waves of grief and admiration that Mejías's death elicited, blending elements of modern dance with motifs reflective of Spanish cultural traditions. This piece not only mourns the loss of a national hero but also critiques the spectacle of bullfighting and its costs.

Part 2: Dance Artist in Context Activity

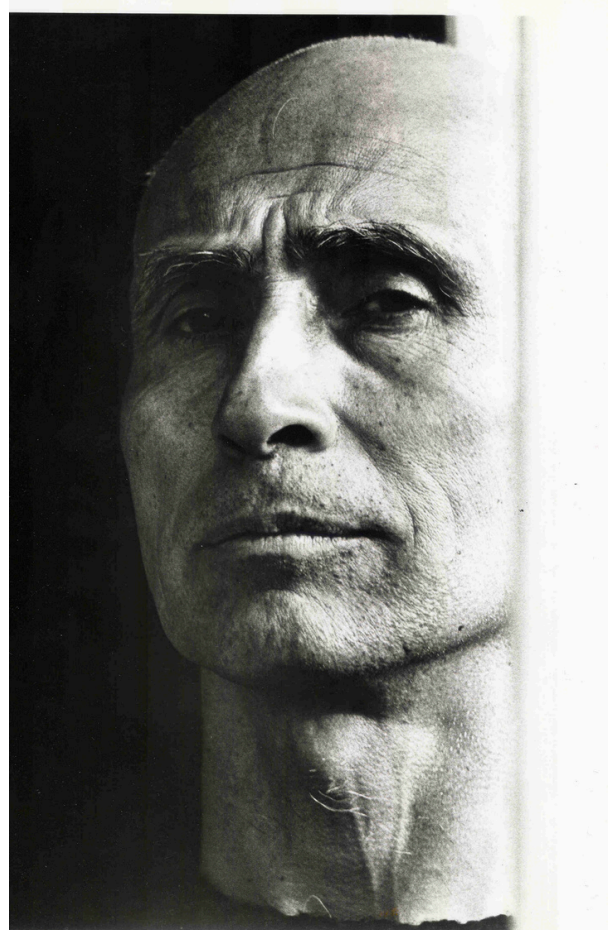
Locate the **Dance Artist in Context (DAC)** Framework at the end of this document. Review the resources provided below about the life and work of José Limón.

Add key facts and information you gather from your research to your DAC note catcher.

Note: You can assign students different resources to review or designate specific categories of the DAC for students to focus on. This approach is referred to as a “jigsaw,” in which students gather distinct pieces of information and share them with the larger group, putting the puzzle pieces together to create a more comprehensive portrait of an artist’s life and work.

Review these resources:

- Read the José Limón Biography from the University of Washington Dance website.
- Watch this short Limón Documentary from the José Limón Dance Foundation.
- Read this essay written by J. Soto from Jacob’s Pillow Dance Interactive and scroll down to view the solo: *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, choreographed by Doris Humphrey in 1946 and performed/recorded by Limón at Jacob’s Pillow in 1946.
- Listen to the podcast, *A Study of José Limón: Artist and Immigrant* from PillowVoices: Dance Through Time
- Read about the Limón Dance Company on the Limón Dance Company website.



Group Discussion:

Once students have completed their research, invite them to share findings with the larger class.

Invite students to discuss key themes that emerge from their DAC research.

The **reflection questions** below are designed to invite reflection, interpretation, and connection so students can engage in José Limón's work as embodied history, rather than fixed facts:

Dance Artist's Personal History

- José Limón did not begin dancing as a child and came to dance through inspiration rather than training. How might discovering dance later in life have shaped the way he approached movement, storytelling, or discipline as an artist?
- José Limón grew up in a large immigrant family and was deeply influenced by music and visual art. How do you think family background and early artistic exposure can shape an artist's creative voice—even before formal dance training begins?

Socio-Cultural & Political Context

- José Limón lived through major global and national events such as World War II, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement, and the McCarthy Era. How might living through times of conflict, fear, and social change influence the themes an artist chooses to explore in their work?
- José Limón served in the U.S. Army during World War II, creating dances and performances for soldiers. What role do you think dance and art can play during times of war or crisis?

Movement Characteristics & Artistic Process

- José Limón believed the human body could be a powerful vehicle for storytelling and emotional expression. How is dance able to communicate stories or emotions in ways that words sometimes cannot?
- José Limón was drawn to archetypes, mythology, and narrative, and emphasized fall and recovery, groundedness, and dramatic intention. How might these movement qualities help an audience connect emotionally to a dance performance?
- José Limón's Mexican heritage strongly influenced works like *Danzas Mexicanas*. Why is it important for artists to honor their cultural roots, and how can that strengthen the impact of their work?

Legacy, Collaboration & Continuity

- The Limón Dance Company continues today, making it the first modern dance company to survive beyond its founder. What do you think it takes for an artistic legacy to last across generations? Why does preserving dance history matter?

Part 3: Imagined Reconstruction Activity

The Imagined Reconstruction approach is designed to integrate research with dance making using the 92NY DEL Dance Framework. This dance-making activity focuses on visual learning and experiencing the power of archival artifacts (photographs, film, dance reviews and written text from the artist).

In this activity, students will create an Imagined Reconstruction inspired by Limón's movement characteristics and choreographic principles, paying homage to his artistic vision and movement style. Consider incorporating movement elements from the 92NY DEL Dance Framework as well as images and information gleaned from your research.

To create their Imagined Reconstruction solo, students will first:

- View the photos and video of Limón on the **Dance as Political Manifesto** wall.
- Create a list of descriptive words that capture the essence of the photos and video.
 - Pay attention to the mood, emotion, texture, and tone in the images.
- Identify **three shapes** from the images and video that resonate and try to recreate the shapes in your body.

Next, invite students to incorporate the following in their Imagined Reconstruction solo:

- Select a **theme** linked to Limón's work
- Incorporate the **three shapes** inspired from the images and video of Limón.
- Select **two characteristics OR core principles** of Limón's dance technique to emphasize in your dance (refer to the DAC note catcher).
- Include a reconstructed phrase or motifs from the *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* work.

To conclude, invite students to **perform** their José Limón Imagined Reconstruction solos and offer peer feedback.



The Dance Artist in Context (DAC)

Guiding Questions & Note Catcher

Look for information related to these big categories to ensure you are able to get a holistic picture of your artist.

Delving into the Dance Artist's Personal History

- What is the dance artist's family history? (Place of birth, nationality, ethnicity, etc.)
- What were the formative experiences that influenced their artistic journey?
- Who were their teachers, and what dance experiences were they exposed to?

Delving into the Dance Artist's Socio-Cultural and Political Context

- During what time period did the dance artist live and create works?
- What were the major societal trends, belief systems, and structural forces and restrictions that impacted the dance artist during their dance career?
- What were the cultural influences that characterized the time period? (Music, fashion, education, laws, religion, social organizations, etc.)
- What were the major historical events and political movements of the time period?

Delving into the Dance Artist's Movement Characteristics and Artistic Processes

- What is the dance artist's distinct philosophy or belief system that guides their creative approach and process?
- What are the key characteristics of the dance artist's movement style and choreographic signature?
- What influences from specific dance forms, genres, or movement vocabulary are evident in their dances?
- What are the dance artist's major contributions to the fields of dance and dance education? (Repertoire, pedagogy, writings, political and social activism etc.)

Delving into the Dance Artist's Contemporaries, Collaborators and Protégés

- Who were the dance artist's contemporaries, and what was their impact on the artist?
- Who did the dance artist collaborate with over the course of their career? (Composers, set and costume designers, poets, visual artists, writers, etc.)
- Who were the dance artist's most notable students and protégés who preserved and continued their dance traditions and practices?

The Dance Artist in Context (DAC) Note Catcher

Name of Dance Artist: _____

Personal History	
Socio-Cultural and Political Context	
Movement Characteristics & Artistic Processes	
Contemporaries, Collaborators and Protégés	
Outstanding Questions for Primary Source	

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Dance to Belong: A History of Dance at 92NY An 150th Anniversary Exhibition:

Co-Curated by: Jessica Friedman, PhD, and Ninotchka Bennahum, PhD with Jeanne Haffner, PhD (Thinc Design)

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