

## Dancing Is a Language

**DANCE:** Storytelling

**USE THIS LESSON TO:** Devise character and choreography through basic movement.

**TIME:** 45 minutes

**MATERIALS:**

- *The Little Mermaid JR.* Rehearsal CD
- CD player

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will:

- Create movement based on character
- Listen for and respond to cues
- Understand the importance of dance in storytelling
- Work independently and in small groups to devise choreography

**INTRODUCTION:** After Ariel trades her voice for human legs, Prince Eric tells her that dancing is a language that is felt instead of heard. Let's explore how we can use the language of dance to communicate character and story in *The Little Mermaid JR.*

**WARM-UP:** (10 minutes) See How Much a Single Gesture Can Reveal!

1. Ask students to stand in a circle. Discuss the groups that comprise the inhabitants of *The Little Mermaid JR.*: fish, crustaceans, merfolk, birds and humans.
2. As you mention each category, solicit a pose from your students that represents each group. For example, your bird pose might consist of extended arms and a tilted torso. When a student volunteers a pose, ask the rest of the circle to take on the position as well.
3. Next, ask the group to walk around the space. When you call out each of the character categories, instruct the group to bring each pose to life. For example, your bird pose might become animated through flapping wings and swooping motions.
4. When students become each type of animal, side coach the group to make their movement choices specific. "What kind of fish are you?" "Are you a predator or prey?" "What is the weather like today? How does that affect the way your seagull flies?"

**HOOK:** (15 minutes) Character Choreography

1. Divide students into five groups, and assign one group each to explore fish, crustaceans, merfolk, birds and humans.
2. Ask the groups to devise three distinct poses based on their animal category. For example, your crustacean group might pinch their claws, crab-walk and fall on their shells.
3. Now ask the groups to connect their three poses with movement to transition between each pose. Give them time to explore the possibilities. Side-coach your students by asking them to play with levels, rhythm, and mood.
4. Have each group share their newly devised character choreography with the larger group.

**MAIN ACTIVITY:** (15 minutes) Devotin' Full Time to Floatin'

1. Within the animal groups, assign each student a number. Each group should have a 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.
2. Ask the students to form one large circle. Tell the group that when the music starts, they are to swim/fly/sail clockwise around the circle. When you call out a number, all of the students with that number should jump into the circle and perform the choreography they created within their small groups. Students on the perimeter should continue swimming/flying/sailing. When you call another number, those students should take the place of the students already in the circle.
3. Continue until students are comfortable with the activity. When they are, inform the group that you are adding a new level.

4. When you call out “storm” everyone on the perimeter and in the center must move as if a major storm has hit the sea. When you call out “shark,” everyone must move as if they’ve spotted a shark. When you call out “ship,” everyone must move as if they’ve encountered a passing ship. The students in the center must perform their choreography with each of these new layers in mind, and those on the parameter should allow the new information to effect the way they swim/fly/sail.
5. Side coach the group with questions like: “How does a seagull react to a passing ship?” “What about a sailor?” “A mermaid?”
6. Continue the activity, but play different songs from *The Little Mermaid JR.* to see how the music influences your students’ choices.

**REFLECTION:** (5 minutes) Dialogue

Engage the group in a discussion using the following prompts:

- What was it like creating choreography?
- How did you communicate character or personality through your movements?
- How did the storm, shark, and ship influence your movement? Did your actual choreography change, or did you just perform it differently?
- What was it like performing your choreography to different songs? Did some feel more appropriate than others?