



Tales of Goddesses and a Painter

Study Guide

Pre-Show Discussion, Classroom Activities, Background Information,
Suggestions for Further Study

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Presented in association with

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About the Show

“Tales of Goddesses and a Painter” is a dance drama, meaning a drama conveyed by dance movement. The performers speak at certain moments during the show, but they mostly use dance to tell the story.

Synopsis:

This is a story about how the cave paintings along the Silk Road came to be. During the Tang Dynasty, the emperor dreams of his country plagued by draught. Praying for instruction from his ancestors, he receives a divine message, saying, if he built a Buddhist temple with a painting of flying goddesses, his empire would be saved and prosper. The emperor commissions the country’s best painter for this job. To get inspiration for his project, the painter travels along the Silk Road to India. He observes many cultures, including Han, Xin Jiang and India. He is incredibly moved by all the colors and sounds of Silk Road. He works in the cave for ten days straight without rest. When he finally takes to bed, the picture comes to life. Buddhist goddesses bring water to the land.

About the Company

The Little Pear Garden Dance Company (LPGDC) develops and promotes Chinese dance and opera in Canada via the production and presentation of performances, lectures, workshops, demonstrations, and exhibitions at the local and national levels. LPGDC does so by creating an environment that supports Canadian artists practicing Chinese traditional and contemporary artistic expressions. We aspire to develop a distinct voice in the opera and dance ecologies and to be the premiere Chinese performing arts company in Canada that features professional artists, innovative programming, stimulating workshops, and creative new works that reflect passion, honesty, integrity and excellence.

Why is the company called Little Pear Garden?

The collective’s name is derived from Peking opera’s tradition of nomenclature. During the Tang dynasty in China, approximately 712 – 755 AD, Emperor Hsuan Tsung founded the Pear Garden Academy inside his royal court, thereby establishing China’s first professional music and dance performance troupe. This important institution is considered to be the origin of Chinese opera. Subsequently, Chinese opera has been referred to as the “pear garden profession”, and opera performers may be referred to as the “children of the pear garden.” Thus, when *William Lau* founded the company to promote Canadian appreciation of Chinese performing arts, he named it the Little Pear Garden Collective. We updated to name to Little Pear Garden Dance Company in 2015 to better reflect the change of focus from Chinese opera to Chinese dance.

For more information about the Chinese connection to our performance, please see “Teacher’s Resource” on pg. 12.

Learning Goals

You will learn about the origin and style of Chinese Classical and Folk Dance

Criteria for Success

You will be able to discuss different types of Chinese Dance

You will demonstrate some of the movements from Chinese Dance

You will demonstrate knowledge about aspects of Chinese culture

Dance Expectation from Ontario Ministry of Education

For junior students (Gr. 1-3), see page 86-87 of the arts curriculum:

Creating/presenting--A1.2

Reflecting, responding and analyzing--A2.2

Exploring forms and cultural contexts--A3.1, A3.2

For intermediate students (Gr. 4-6), see page 122-123 of the arts curriculum:

Creating/presenting--A1.1, A1.2, A1.3

Reflecting, responding and analyzing--A2.1, A2.2

For senior students (Gr. 7-8), see page 148-149 of the arts curriculum:

Creating/presenting--A1.1

Reflecting, responding and analyzing--A2.1, A2.2

Exploring forms and cultural contexts--A3.2

About the Dance

The piece will demonstrate 2 categories of Chinese dance: Chinese classical and folk dance

Chinese Classical Dance

Chinese classical dance began in the late 1980s when many of the Chinese traditional dances were destroyed by various civil and international wars. These artists wanted to reinvent and imagine what Chinese traditional dances were like during various Chinese dynasties. During the 80s, many Russian ballet masters were invited to China. Chinese dancers all learned classical ballet as part of their professional training. Hence, the newly invented Chinese classical dance had an essence of Ballet, Chinese opera and folk dances fused into the dance.

Pictures of various hand positions in Chinese classical dance:



Classical dance is designed specifically to be performed in front of an audience. Different vocabulary, techniques and props are used to portray different characters and to convey different meanings.



Chinese Folk Dance

China is an extremely diverse country. There are 56 ethnicities. Each preserves their own language, music, dance and costumes, which adds to the richness of Chinese dance. Their arts are influenced by the local geography, climate, religion, custom and lifestyle. The dances vocabulary and props are usually taken from the people's daily lives. For example, the Mongolians are traditionally nomadic herders. Their dance is often about the wildlife that they observe, tending the animals and riding horses.

Pre-Show Discussion & Activities

Preparatory activities and discussions for students

For all students (Gr. 1-8)

- Have you seen Chinese dance before? What kind of dance did you see? What did the dancers use in their performance?
- Have you seen court dances and folk dances from any culture? How do people usually like to dress and dance in formal versus casual settings? What is the music like?

For junior students (Gr. 1-5)

- Ask them if they know what dance drama is and if they had seen stories being told with dance, without using any word.
- Talk to them about the Dun Huang murals. (see Teacher's Resource on pg. 12) Introduce them to dance captured in art works such as photos, painting and sculptures. Compare examples from a few different cultures like China, India, Europe and Africa. Talk about how different shapes are popularly portrayed in each culture. Are there shapes that are common in all of them?

For intermediate students (Gr. 6-8)

- While Silk Road originates in China, it crosses many countries and has benefitted cultures beyond its geographic coverage. Talk to students about other countries that the land Silk Road passes through and items, arts or ideas that have been transported via that route.
- Find images of Buddhist arts, from Dun Huang or other places, and familiarize students with them, so they could look for those poses in the performance.

What to expect at the show

Dance pieces that you will see in the drama include:

1. Uyghur Dance

The Silk Road covers a large geographic area and is home to many different ethnicities. The Uyghur lives in the western end of China, bordering Russia and Mongolia. The dancers describe the brilliant flowers around them through intricate movement in the eyes and hands.

2. Mongolian Dance

Growing up on horseback and living on the wide open grass plain, the Mongolians are known to be bold and generous. It is customary for the host and his family to personally entertain guests with music and dance at dinner. Being constantly on the move, they can only have basic necessities and simple objects. At the height of the evening, people get so excited that they sometimes pick up common bowls and chopsticks to use as dance props.

3. Dun Huang Dance

Dun Huang dance is a sub-category of Chinese classical dance. It is specifically dance that is modeled after Buddhist art in the Dun Huang area. The most iconic images among the murals are of the Western Paradise and of beautiful goddesses, called Apsaras, perform elaborate dance and music among the clouds. The costume design and the use of mudras or hand gestures are unique to Dun Huang dance to show its connection with Indian culture. Flowing ribbons represent the clouds that the goddesses fly through.



Post- performance activities and discussion

Dance specific questions

Take the opportunity to discuss about dances that the students have seen or learned before the show, which countries those dances are originated and how the performers are usually dressed. As you go through each dance below, review the corresponding steps or gesture that the students have learned from the workshop.

- **Mongolian Dance**

Primary students (Gr. 1-3)—What does it mean to be a nomad? Why do we call the Mongolians a nomadic people?

--Point out how the Mongolian costume design and dance show that the people comes from a nomadic culture.

Junior students/Intermediate students (Gr. 4-8)--Have you danced with eating utensils and dishes before? Look at what you usually eat with and invent ways to them in a dance. How would you use yours as a music instrument and dance prop?

--Have you seen other people using everyday objects in their dance? Find some examples from other dances and share with your class.



- **Uyghur Dance**

Primary/Junior students (Gr.1-5)—The dance is about the beautiful garden that the girls are in. They are dancing in celebration as much as they use movement to describe

the garden. Ask the students to remember what they saw in the dance, demonstrate then guess what part of the garden is portrayed by each shape or move.

Intermediate students (Gr. 6-8)—Stylized movement means the way to do a particular movement has come unique to the person or to the group over time. Think of how the Uyghur dancers cross their legs and turn their feet when they walk sideways. Ask a few of your students to demonstrate that step.

--What other moves from that dance are stylized to the Uyghur? Prompt the students to think of small details such as lifting of the upper chest, how the hands are turned and placed, how the eyes are coordinated with the head and the hands, etc.

--You can also ask students that have studied ballet to demonstrate how they coordinate the eyes and arms when doing the basic hand positions as another example of stylized movement from a different dance form.

- **Dun Huang Dance**

All students (Gr. 1-8)—demonstrate the mudras are used in both the Indian Dance and Dun Huang dance

Primary/Junior students (Gr. 1-5)—Dun Huang dance is an animation of the Dun Huang murals, which portray different Buddhist stories and beliefs. Use the pictures that you have collected as part of the pre-show discussion and the ones provided in the “Teachers’ Resource” on pg. 11. Guess the story behind the Dun Huang dance that you just saw.

Intermediate students (Gr. 6-8)—Pick out a few pictures or paintings with people in different poses. Copy the poses one by one. Pay attention to how your body moves in order to switch smoothly from one pose to another.

- **General/concluding question**

All students (Gr. 1-8)—Seeing the story of how Dun Huang arts came to be, you would know that art is constantly evolving to reflect the world in which it is created.

--Recap on what the different cultural influences are behind the Chinese dance program that you have seen.

Extension:

--Discuss the type of dances that you and the students can see and learn in your city, on television and over the internet.

--Expand the discussion to the different cultural food, clothing design and world music that we love today. How is our world similar or different from 7th century China, where the story comes from?

Additional activities

Remember the Indian mudras and how they are integrated into Chinese dance and how the Uyghur develop stylized movements around their hands and neck. Those moves have history behind their creation. Can you create your own dance style? Form groups of 5 to 7 students and try these exercises to get them to think about how regular motions become dance and how to personalize their dance to acquire a style or flavor.

For junior students (Gr. 4-Gr. 5)

1. After reviewing the moves that you learned in the workshop, ask the students who know other dance forms to each teach the group one move or pose. If no one knows any other dance form, ask the students to each choose one easy move, like swinging an arm or hopping.
2. Each group can try to create their own dance sequence, using what they have reviewed and learned. Teacher can help decide how to switch from one move to the next. Practice a few times after you set the routine.
3. Let the students choose how they would like to perform the routine, or have the teacher assign a different expression to each group. It can be happy, grumpy, fast, slow, etc.
4. Perform the routines to the class.

For intermediate students (Gr. 6 to Gr. 8)

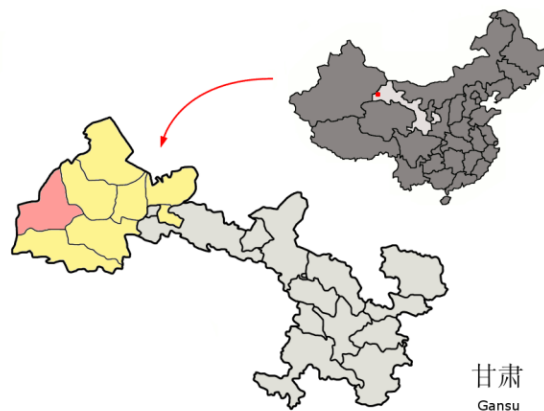
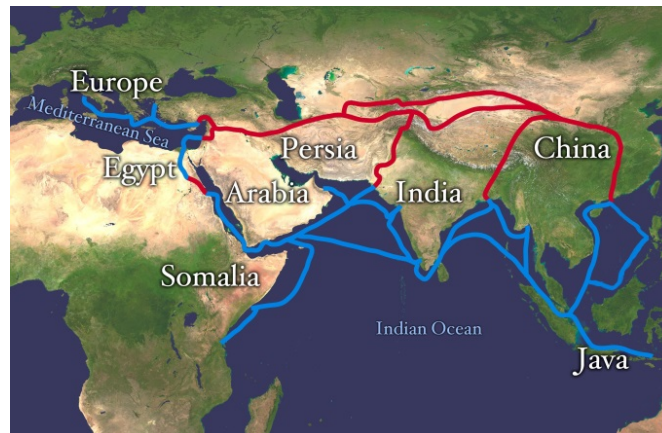
1. Do you have a unique walk, a favourite way of shooting a basket, a stance that everyone recognizes you by, a gesture that has special meanings for you, etc.? Try using those moves or gestures from your everyday life, combining with others that you have learned from today's workshop or dance classes that you have taken before.
2. Work out a sequence of movement until it feels natural. If you'd like a bigger challenge, rearrange that sequence or create another sequence with your favourite moves from before.
3. Choose a rhythm or style for your sequence. It can be very slow and smooth with all the elements flowing from one to another with sweeping motions, staccato with very short, quick motions alternating with sudden pauses, etc.
4. Practice your routine a few times. The more you work with the same moves and expression, the more they become a part of you. Other people may be able to learn and do your sequence, but it would look different. Voila! You have your own dance style.

Suggested research projects for intermediate students (Gr. 6 to Gr. 8)

- There are 17 different ethnicities living the Xin Jiang Autonomous Region recorded in China's 2009 census. Break students into working groups, let each group research a different ethnicity, find samples of their arts such as dance video or music clip and traditional costumes and share their finding with the class.
- Research on the maritime Silk Road. (See the blue lines on the Silk Road map on the next page) What countries did it reach? Make a visual representation of the arts from

each country on the same map. Discuss similarities and differences and explore any cultural influences among those countries.

Teacher's Resource



Silk Road and the Dun Huang Grotto

The Silk Road is a network of trade routes that connects China to Southern Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. It includes paths on land and on sea. Between the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) and the Yuan Dynasty (1271 AD -1368 AD), the Silk Road carried not only goods but also arts, religion, science, technology and philosophy between the East and the West. Among those was Buddhism, which originates in India. Furthermore, the Silk Road also facilitated human movement and migration. People from different backgrounds settled in western China, even though most of that area suffered harsh climate, because of the protection offered by the Chinese army, the lucrative business and urban conveniences. More than a dozen ethnicities reside in today's Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Dun Huang, which literally translates to "Blazing Beacon," is a county in the Gansu province in western China. In ancient, it was a major city on the Silk Road, protecting the frontier and controlling the path that led to the north Chinese plains and the old national capital, Chang'an. Outside of the city are the famous Mogao Caves or Dun Huang Caves. It is a system of 492 temples containing high quality Buddhist art made over a period of 1000 years. Started in 366 BC, the caves were designed as places of Buddhist worship and meditation.



Gradually, most of the caves, along with the land routes of Silk Road, were abandoned when sea travel became more popular. Many of the chambers were blocked by sand over time. When caves were rediscovered by western explorers in 1900, they attracted a lot of attention from the west. However, because of political unrest in China, there was not a lot of motivation from Chinese government to properly excavate and protect the site. The Dun Huang Caves were finally declared by the State Council of the People's Republic of China as a specially protected historical monument in 1961 and became a UNESCO world heritage site in 1987. Today it is still an active archeological site.



Tang Dynasty (618 AD – 907 AD)

The Tang Dynasty is one of the golden periods in Chinese civilization. Benefiting much from successful military campaigns, stable relations with its neighbours and wealth generated by the Silk Road, the Chinese flourished. The period was most well-known for its poetry, academic writing and the invention of woodblock printing. The country was very diverse and welcoming of foreign cultures. Its capital city, Chang'an, was the most populous and cosmopolitan city in the world at that time and was a popular destination for travel, trade and study. The Tang was also the first Chinese government to adopt Buddhism as the official state religion, funding many art commissions, temple building projects, residencies in India and other countries for Buddhist scholars and translation of scriptures. Many of the

art works in the Dun Huang Caves were made at that time. The achievements during Tang Dynasty were so remarkable that it is still evident today. Chinese often call themselves the Tang people. Much of that period's culture was integrated into other East Asian countries. You can still see it in the language, religion, arts and costume designs in Korean, Japan and Vietnam.