

S

Middle and Secondary | Performance Guide



Walton Arts Center

Martha Graham Dance Company



American pioneer, Martha Graham, has been compared to Picasso, Stravinsky and Frank Lloyd Wright in terms of her influence on world culture. The Martha Graham Dance Company brings her work to life and explains its importance in American culture through live performance, vintage film footage and narration by artistic director Janet Eilber. Graham's influence continues to be felt world-wide as an important American innovator. She was an artist activist who commented on the effects of war and new technologies on the 20th century, issues that students experience today.

Common Core Learning Standards: CC6 RL: Key Ideas and Details 3; Craft and Structure 5 and 6; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7 and 9. CC6W: Research to Build and Present Knowledge 8. CC6SL: Comprehension and Collaboration 1d and 2. CC6L: Knowledge of Language 3a. Arkansas Learning Standards in Theatre, Music, Visual Art and Dance.

Ready, Set, Show!



Tadej Erdnik and Miki Orihara in Martha Graham's "Appalachian Spring" Photo by John Deane Copyright John Deane

The Artist

Martha Graham was born in Pennsylvania in 1894 and grew up in California. She began her career as a dancer at age 14, moved to New York in 1923 and started her own company in 1926. Today Martha Graham is recognized as one of America's greatest artistic inventors in the 20th century. She created her own style of movement, continually refined her dance and training techniques, and choreographed 180 dances. She collaborated with young musicians, designers, dancers and photographers. Many of them, like composer Aaron Copland and sculptor Isamu Noguchi, are luminaries of Modern Art. She even designed and sewed her own costumes. Martha Graham herself performed many of the premiers of her choreography. Working into her 80th year, she developed a distinct style of American dance. Today, her work as a dancer, choreographer, collaborator and innovator is respected around the world.

The Art Form

Martha Graham's style is unique. Her dances reflect the rapidly changing world of the 20th century and show human response to it. An important part of her technique revolves around the concept of **contraction and release** in the muscles of the dancer and the movement of the body. Graham choreographed her dances to live music. She often commissioned new scores by innovative composers of her day specifically for her new dances.

The Company

The Martha Graham Dance company is known as one of the great companies of the world and is one of the oldest contemporary dance companies in America. The company was a seminal leader in the development of contemporary dance and played a role in nurturing the young choreographers and dancers of the 21st century, including Paul Taylor and Merce Cunningham. The movement style and technique of Martha Graham continues to influence dancers and choreographers in the performing arts and has earned her company respect throughout the world. Some of the company's most celebrated works, like *Appalachian Spring*, with music by composer Aaron Copland, reflect Graham's keen observation of the American spirit.

The Performance

The performance is a multimedia presentation, narrated by Janet Eilber, Martha Graham Center Artistic Director and a former Martha Graham dancer. The performance combines history, biography, movement, music and design, along with live performances of Martha Graham's masterpieces, including dances from *Steps in the Street* (1936) and *Appalachian Spring* (1944).

Learning Activities

Analyze

Prepare to see dance by thinking about BEST:

Body, Energy, Space and Time.

The elements of dance are useful to help plan what to look for and guide reflection and discussion after a performance.

Body – Parts of the body, like head, arms, hands, hips, legs and feet are used to create shapes and perform actions like stretching, bending, falling, walking or leaping.

Energy – The way the body moves with force, weight, strength or flow.

Space – Direction, pathway and destination in space. Levels, like low, medium and high are important for still bodies in space. Focus of the dancer (where the dancer looks in space) is important.

Time – Speed and duration of movement, and also rhythm, accents and use of dance patterns.

Observe & Present

> Screen films of Martha Graham dance. Notice that Graham's choreography uses strong and angular movements. Movements are percussive and energetic. Notice the use of controlled falling, leaps and jumps. Notice that dancers are athletes as well as actors. Communication of strong emotion through the face and body is an important part of Graham's movement vocabulary.

> A good resource is the Kennedy Center Performing Arts Archive of 9 video lessons on Martha Graham Dance (See 2004-2005 Season)

<http://www.kennedy-center.org/education/pwttv/archive>

> Research the concept of contraction and release. Locate images of athletes, animals and people as natural examples of contraction and release in our world. Provide citations for the images used and prepare an informational presentation.



Change over time

In Martha Graham's work, we can trace a history of America. Her dance showed the hope, love and strength of pioneers. She created dances reflecting sorrow and lamentation, and images implying the destruction and danger of warfare. She collaborated with immigrants to America and was one of the first companies to employ African American and Asian dancers.

> Examine how influences like the Industrial Revolution, new methods of transportation, such as cars and planes, and new inventions, such as light bulbs and iPads, change the way artists express the world through their art form. Think, discuss, then write about how changes over time influence artists, designers and other innovators.

> Think, discuss, then write about how changes over time influence artists and the performing arts.

Research

Write about Graham's collaboration with musicians. Many choreographers use music from other centuries to accompany their dance. However, Martha Graham was challenged by her music director and frequent collaborator, Louis Horst, to use music of the 20th century to accompany her work. Research some of the characteristics of modern classical music and locate good samples of 20th century music. Research the composers, like Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber and Gian Carlo Menotti, who collaborated with Martha Graham. Prepare a presentation combining the best sample of 20th century music appropriate for dance, and images of dancers that fit the music. Think, discuss, then write about what you noticed about the music in the Martha Graham performance. Use statements from your reflection in the presentation.



CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

This season Walton Arts Center celebrates twenty years of integrating the arts with your curriculum. We welcome Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art with excitement! As allies in arts participation, we are working together to create even better access for students and teachers. In this new performance guide feature,

Crystal Bridges' Education team makes connections between the visual and performing arts. Introduce learning about artworks from the Crystal Bridges collection while you enrich student understanding of Colgate Classroom Series performances.



Marisol, b. 1930

Portrait of Martha Graham, 1977

Oil and pencil on wood and plaster

53 x 25 1/2 x 32 1/2 in.

About the artwork

Sculptor Marisol Escobar, known primarily by her first name "Marisol," was born in Paris in 1930 to Venezuelan parents. Receiving strong support from her family, Marisol pursued a career in the arts. She studied in Paris, then moved to New York to study more unique forms of art making. During her time in the United States she became very influenced by abstract expressionism, pre-Columbian, and South American art and began to create sculptures that incorporated various techniques including carving, painting, and assemblage. *Portrait of Martha Graham* is a sculpture Marisol created in 1977. The work depicts the internationally known dancer and choreographer as a life-sized wood carving sitting in a chair. Marisol represents Graham with eyes staring straight ahead and hands knotted in bindings resting on her lap, a dramatic contrast to the fluid lines of a dancer. In addition to representing Martha Graham, Marisol also designed stage sets for dancers and choreographers. One of the most well-known of these was *The Eyes of the Goddess*, which was performed in 1992 at City Center Theater in New York.



Martha Graham Center Artistic Director and former Martha Graham dancer Janet Eilber. Photo by John Deane Copyright John Deane

Research & Inquiry

Martha Graham Center Artistic Director Janet Eilber will support student research to build and present knowledge by narrating a presentation on the work of Martha Graham in the context of a changing nation and world. She will share relevant information from multiple sources. Through the

presentation of live dance samples, Eilber will provide students with information and experiences to support analysis, reflection and continued research in the creative and historic contribution of Martha Graham Dance.

Use this presentation to meet college and career readiness anchor standards for writing. After seeing the presentation students will have a wide variety of sources of information to write about an art form, change over time and creative collaborations.

Learn more online

> Official website of Martha Graham Dance Company
<http://marthagraham.org>

> Martha Graham Learning Sites
<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/multimedia/series/AEMicrosites/martha-graham.aspx>

> Martha Graham Biography, Encyclopedia Britannica
Search.eb.com/women/articles/Graham_Martha.html

Volume 9 Number 1

Colgate Classroom Series performances help students meet Arkansas Learning Standards.

Learn more at:
www.waltonartscenter.org

Walton Arts Center

Learning & Engagement

- Laura Goodwin, *Vice President*
- Dr. Patricia Relph, *Arts Learning Specialist*
- Katie Williams, *Coordinator*
- T.J. Williams, *Schools Concierge*
- Rachel Pianalto, *Intern*

Performance Guide Contributors:

- Janet Eilber, Artistic Director of the Martha Graham Dance Company
- Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

Walton Arts Center 2011-2012 Learning programming is generously supported by these funders, sponsors and benefactors:

- Colgate-Palmolive
- Crayola®
- Edy's Grand Ice Cream
- J.B. Hunt Transport, Inc.
- Kimberly-Clark
- Prairie Grove Telephone Co.
- Procter & Gamble
- Pruitt Tool Company
- Shibley Motor Co.
- Tyson Foods, Inc.

- Education Grantors:**
- Arkansas Arts Council
- The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
- Walmart Foundation

- Education Partners:**
- Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
- Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative

Education Benefactors:

- Ted & Leslie Belden
- Dr. J.B. & Rachel Blankenship
- David & Tina Bogle
- Ann & Gene Bordelon
- Joel & Lynn Carver
- Carolyn & Nick Cole
- Joanie & Jon Dyer
- Michael & Susan Duke
- Joanie & Jon Dyer
- Malcolm & Ellen Hayward
- Johnelle Hunt
- Pat Parsons
- Mark & Lynn Richards
- Mary Lynn Reese

- The Rose Family
- Jeff & Eileen Schomburger
- Kenneth & Debra Senser
- Jack & Mechelle Sinclair
- David & Candace Starling
- Jerry & Brenda Walton
- Jim & Lynne Walton
- John & Kitten Weiss

Season support provided by Walmart / SAM'S CLUB