

## Introduction to Dance Improvisation

*Improvisation* is making *choices* within a set of guidelines. In *dance improvisation*, these guidelines are called the *score*. Dancers make *choices* within the *score* that they are given by using their *bodies* and *imagination*s. In *freestyle* dance improvisation, the main *score* is the dancer's physical capabilities—what their bodies can do. Freeze-dance is an *improvisational score* that combines *freestyle* dancing with *stillness*. Other *improvisational scores* ask dancers to make *choices* in relation to the people, animals, and natural and manmade things around them.

*Dance improvisation* helps to build choice-making strategies, deepen understanding of the body and increase awareness of how the body's movement through space works in relation to the world. Below are a few *improvisational scores* listed in a progression designed to get your student dancers started. Each *score* can be repeated, and the progression from one *score* to the next can be completed in one or many classes. Throughout this document, vocabulary words are italicized. The "additional possibilities" provided are meant to help you adapt the *scores* to your group.

### **Freeze Dance**

- Each dancer gets their own *spot* by spreading out in the room and reaching their arms in opposite directions to make sure that they will not pop anyone else's *personal space bubble*.
- When the music plays, dancers move *freestyle* in their *spots*. When the music stops, dancers freeze.
- Additional possibilities:
  - Dancers do not have designated spots and can move throughout the room or designated *performance space* (without popping *personal space bubbles*) during their *freestyle* dancing.
  - Instead of *freestyle* dancing, dancers are asked to focus on particular movement ideas. For example, jumping, dancing on lava or moving through water.

### **Tableau/Museum**

- Dancers stand outside of the *performance space* which can be defined by making a circle with their bodies or placing items from the room (chairs, shoes, backpacks) to mark boundaries. Smaller *performance spaces* often prove to be more dynamic for this *score*.
- A *tableau* is a non-moving image that captures in-progress action. To emphasize the importance of stillness, dancers can consider themselves *sculptures* and the *score* can be called *museum* instead.
- The first dancer enters the *performance space* and takes a pose. Dancers then enter one-by-one making poses building on the *tableau/museum* that is evolving. They hold their poses until everyone has joined in.
- Once all the dancers are part of the *tableau/museum*, they take a deep breath or two together and then exit the *performance space*.
- Once the *tableau/museum* has ended/closed, dancers discuss what they *imagined* and why they made the *choices* that they did with their *bodies*.

- Additional possibilities:
  - Discuss *positive/negative space* and/or *physical proximity*.
  - Have dancers leave the *performance space* one at a time. Discuss *accumulation* and *de-accumulation* and what they do.
  - Encourage dancers to walk around the performance space to get a 360-degree view of what is going on before posing. Consider having a dancer take a video walking around the finished *tableau* so dancers can see what they created.

### Machine

- Set-up performance space in one of the ways described at the beginning of “Tableau.”
- The first dancer enters the *performance space* and does one repeatable *gesture*. This *gesture* can stay in one *spot* and/or repeat in such a way that it returns to a *spot*. Dancers then enter one-by-one making gestures that build the *machine*. They continue doing their *gestures* until everyone has joined in.
- Once all the dancers are part of the *machine*, each dancer repeats their gesture one final time and then exits the *performance space*.
- Once the *machine* has stopped, review what happened discussing what dancers *imagined* and why they made the *choices* they did with their *bodies*.
- Additional possibilities:
  - Additional possibilities for “Tableau/Museum” also apply here.
  - Discuss *rhythm* of the *machine*. How did the timing of the parts of the *machine* relate to one another?
  - Compare and contrast the experience of doing “Tableau” to doing “Machine.” Emphasize that there are many different answers to the following questions: Was it more or less freeing to imagine oneself as part of a *machine* or part of a *tableau* (or alternatively as a *sculpture* in a museum)? Why?

### Living Tableau/Museum

- Dancers enter the *performance space* one-by-one and take poses.
- Once everyone is in the *performance space*, dancers bring their *tableaus/sculptures* to life by moving their *bodies* and using their *imagination*s.
- Encourage dancers to pay attention to when their bodies are *still* or moving in relation to the other dancers in the space.
- The score ends when all of the dancers have exited the space.
- Discuss *narrative/story*. What occurred between the beginning and end of the score? How did the dancers’ *choices* shape this?
- Additional possibilities:
  - Dancers end in a second *tableau* or with *gestures* that stay in one *spot*.
  - Have half the class be an *audience* while the other half performs. What does it take to be a supportive audience member? How is the experience of watching similar to and/or different than performing?

**Wrap-Up:** After completing (or even at various points throughout) the improvisational scores, discuss how dance improvisation relates to our everyday lives.