

Friends, Families and Travellers
EDUCATION GUIDE

GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER DANCE

Introduction for teachers

Teachers Foreword to dance tutorial

Dance as a subject is unique in that it blends artistic practice with physical activity. Dance has an affirmative impact on young people's education and learning. It offers opportunities for young people to perform in school and in local, regional and national events. When compared to sport and academic activities, dance can exhibit more positive changes in well-being.

Through dance, young people collaborate with other art forms and make connections with design in space, musicality, and creativity. Dance can improve self-esteem and confidence; it can widen aspiration and help tackle obesity and other health issues.
- Arts Council

Romani Dance

Historically, Romani performers – not least Romani dancers – have entertained and captivated audiences wherever they have travelled. We can trace the influences on Turkish, Russian and Spanish dance, among others. There are obvious connections between many of the dances still being performed today, including swirls, pronounced footwork and stomping, hip and shoulder movements and elaborate arm-work. But, despite the strong influence of Romani dance, there has been little detailed available information until recently. This is largely owing to long-standing, widespread discrimination and the dual phenomena of assimilation and annihilation, which have contributed to the virtual absence of Roma from national cultural narratives.

Because of ongoing threats to cultural identity and heritage, many Romani artists and performers may have continued to refrain from publicly identifying themselves as Roma. The resulting cultural isolation presents more challenges when researching Romani culture and archiving relevant works, people and materials.

Crystal's Vardo dance

It is difficult to know what music would have been played by the Romani people as far back as 400AD, or what form the dancing would have taken. We wanted the performances in Crystal's Vardo to give a flavour of what Romani music and dance could have been, based on its evolution to the present day. Music has always been integral to Romani culture, as it is to many travelling communities across the world. Dance is a wonderful way of connecting communities and an opportunity to learn about the diversity and richness of many different cultures.

There were many factors that pushed and pulled the Romani people West from North India. One such legend, is that the Psah of Persia invited 10,000 Romani entertainers and musicians to his country. It is on this journey to Persia Crystal meets her ancestors.

Rosa Cisneros, Roma dancer, choreographer and dance historian presents a tutorial to teach pupils the dance you will see in the clip taken from Crystal's Vardo. It is an opportunity for young people to express themselves using different movement patterns and gestures, to connect with each other and respond creatively to the rhythm of the music.

Key Objectives

To learn a dance using a range of different movement patterns.

To explore rhythm, sequence, unison, stimulus, spatial awareness, enthusiasm, beat, motif, percussion and community.



Image of the play 'Crystal's Vardo'
Find out more here: <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/our-flagship-projects/theatre-for-change/about-crystals-vardo/>

Activity

Find out whether other pupils in the class have dances pertinent to their culture or nationality they wish to share.

29 April is International Dance Day which is a great opportunity to explore this!

You could also explore other dances embedded in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures, such as Step or Tap Dance and Flamenco. You can visit our music resource for a Step Dance tutorial, but to give you a taste, here is Riley Smith practising his wonderful tap-dancing skills:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTclrg5g97g>

Flamenco

Flamenco comes from Spain. It is an art form that highlights the history of the [Spanish Roma](#) community while revealing the paradox of the Andalusian region.

Flamenco is a form of oral history where behaviour, gestures, poetry, dance, music and emotions all come together to document the past of a people as well as a region.

Flamenco originated with the Spanish Roma and is closely linked to interaction between non-Roma and Roma. Flamenco is rooted in the everyday life of the Roma community, which expresses itself in the corporeal language now known as Flamenco.

Flamenco is a Roma art form often portrayed in objects and has been the inspiration for a number of visual art exhibitions and dance performances. Flamenco is often seen as a 'traditional' dance form, but the genre is always developing.



Image by Edgar Serrano, a Flamenco dancer using 'castanets'.



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