

Let's make a circle!

“Holding the form” is a term from marching band and drum corps circles. But, the circles for classroom work is the same concept of spatial orientation. Why do children struggle? You haven't taught them the concept. Drawing a circle on the floor gives the students a target, but doesn't teach them how to apply this in their lives. Here are two lessons to help you out.

The first lesson develops the shape with a “doubling game.” Doubling is one of the four strategies for addition. Use a stretch band, a circle of clothesline, or just hold hands. First, stretch the band to its longest line with one student. Then double the points with each of you selecting another student to join the shape. Now stretch to the largest rhombus—any four-sided shape—you can make. Double again for the largest octagon you can make. Once past a decagon, the shape is the number of sides: 16-agon, 32-agon... Soon the shape resembles a circle. The primary element of this exercise is to GENTLY pull away from the center and “look out” away from the center. “What makes a good circle?” The answer; “it's round and even.”

The second lesson works on spacing. Have the students create a circle using only their eyes. Draw their attention to your space in the circle between two students. “Is it even?” Then, move close to the child on one side and make the space obviously un-even. Ask the children to tell you when to stop as you “fix the space.” Quickly shuffle your feet as you slowly move back to the middle of the space. “Stop!” Repeat from the other side. “Stop!” Now have the children fix their own space.

Bowling for Children! Once you're all in the circle, swing your arm back and “bowl” yourself across to take out two children from the other side. The remaining students have to repair the spacing. They may shrink the size of the circle, or make the spaces bigger. “Bowl” two more “balls,” and then add everyone back to the circle.

Move on to a circle dance that rotates the circle. Put your hands in with “thumbs up,” and join your hands pointing all the thumbs in the line of direction you will start moving. This is where the students collapse the circle because they instinctively want to walk side-by-side. To hold the shape, remind them to “look out” and GENTLY pull away from the center. “Le Salut,” “Irish Stew,” “Shake them ‘Simmons Down.”

Repeat these lessons each year to review the concepts. I also used these lessons with high school marching band, for choral risers positions, and when staging high-school musicals. Students check their own spacing and check for audience sight lines on the stage. Who knows? Someday, people may be able to park their cars *between* the yellow lines and leave room for me.

Zigeunerpolka - Novelty mixer from Weikart Teaching Movement & Dance

Music: “Rhythmically Moving #2”

Random spacing face counterclockwise. Walk forward 4 steps, and backward 4 steps, in toward the center 4 steps and out 4 steps. Move clockwise (to the left) side-together, then three quick pats. Repeat for a total of four patterns. Create four four-beat patterns. “They can’t be all the same, they can’t be everything different.” After a few repetitions, form the dance by replacing the last exploration with a right elbow swing followed by a left elbow swing.

Bingo - North Carolina Play party, skeleton first, add footwork pattern

“There was a black dog, sat on a back porch and Bingo was his name.”

Single circle of partners, thumbs pointing to the right. Walk two phrases to the right, then in four-out four and repeat for the next two phrases. Then spell while pulling with alternate hand starting with the right and stopping on “O.” This prepares for the Grand R/L. Alter the in/out figure to add the step-ball-change footwork pattern. Singing allows the teacher to stop and wait for the children to process the movement. This dance can be altered to “Lucky 7” English Country Dances-Riley.

Blayton Races – single circle with partners, all join hands

Music: “La Bastrinque” Chimes of Dunkirk, New England Dancing Masters, or “The Way You Make Me Feel” Michael Jackson Bad

This is a great preparation for the Sicilian Circle form.

Forward and back facing inward all hands joined or not. (8), repeat (8).

Face partner and join hands, side-close-side-touch, moving in; side-close-side-touch, moving out (8); repeat (8).

Move forward, past your partner—passing right shoulders—perform a right hand swing with the next person (8). Change hands for a left hand/elbow swing (8). Promenade (16) counterclockwise with your new partner. Turn to face in, swinging the outside person forward to complete the dance. To avoid hand holds, the outside person touches the partner’s shoulder.

Black Joke – double circle (two concentric), side-to-side with partners facing another couple –Sicilian Circle contradance Music “Black Joke” Chimes of Dunkirk

Begin with the ending section in random quartets. “Snap, clap, pat,” with the text “Hey, ho, diddley, dum.” (4) Then add “clap, right, clap left,” first with your partner then your opposite. The “do-si-do” the opposite. *This is the corner in most dances, but called the “opposite” in contradances.* Now add the simple beginning. Circle left (8) then, “Hey, ho, diddley, dum.” (4) Repeat to circle right (8) followed by, “Hey, ho, diddley, dum.”

Return to the ending with the body percussion. Do-si-do your opposite (8) and then pass thru, passing right shoulders to progress to the next couple while performing, “Hey, ho, diddley, dum.” Imagine the floor pathway will make a “6” drawn backwards. Move the quartets to form concentric “double circle” formation with partners facing in and out to the center. Each quartet has couple 1 and couple 2. When facing the opposite the 1s face counterclockwise, 2s face clockwise.

Jefferson and Liberty-contradance from Backwoods Heritage, Martha Riley

CD track #23, or “Wake Me Up” Avicii, True. This music doesn’t follow the dance form completely. Add an audible signal for the students to insert free improvisation, then return to the dance.

Contra formation-longways set of couples numbered ones and twos. Couples may alternate gender down the set. This shows the alternation of the numbered pairs.

A section (4-8s): Couples form small circles of four.

Circle left 8, circle right 8, right-hand star 8, left-hand star 8

B section (4-8’s): Ones turn up the set and cast away from their partners down the outside of the set 8. Turn and walk back home 8. Join hands with the twos from your small circle and cast down the *inside* of the set to form ranks of four abreast 8. I altered the step to half-notes here.

The ranks walk backward four steps and then the ones make an arch and pull the twos through the arch to *progress* up the set to a new couple 8.

Everyone keeps their same number, but repeat the dance with a new circle of four.

When couples reach the end of the set, they wait out a turn. On the next repetition they rejoin the group with the opposite number. Ones become twos, twos become ones.

This is an easy introduction to contra dance. To stage this folk dance for a performance, stagger small sets of partners about the stage. As each small set progresses, add another couple on each end to build into a full longways set. You may wish to change the shape to turn this into a *Sicilian Circle* formation. This formation of concentric circles allows dancers to keep their number and continue around the room. Show the children the final formation and work backwards. Paper plates can help as markers to set the formation.

Make a Map!

When planning your teaching process, look for the simple skeleton of the dance. Practice the movement without the formation. Isolate the new material and practice that figure or ornament alone. Then, move from the familiar, known material and re-assemble the dance in order adding the formation when needed.

Lay out your movement concepts in order of difficulty and arrange a logical sequence to create your movement curriculum map. Once the children have acquired the concepts and vocabulary, have them create their own dances to show mastery.