**Religion and Dance in India**

*This lesson plan was created by Sarah Brown with support from Pamela Lothspeich, an Asian Studies professor at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Padma Rao, a Hindu community member.*

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| **Grade Level** | Middle School Social Studies and Dance |
| **Duration** | 1-2 Days |
| **Learning Objectives** | * Understand the role of dance in Indian culture and history by reading about Bharatanatyam and Bhangra * Discuss how religion impacted Indian society in the past with a specific focus on Bharatanatyam * Analyze the impact of Bhangra in North Carolina * Optional: Create a Bhangra dance |
| **NCSCOS Essential Standards** | Dance   * 6.C.1.1, 6.C.1.2, 7.C.1.1, 7.C.1.2, 8.C.1.1, 8.C.1.2, 6.R.1.1, 6.R.1.2, 7.R.1.2, 8.R.1.2 * *Optional: 6.CP.1,1, 7.CP.1.2, 8.CP.1.2, 6.DM.1.3, 7.DM.1.3, 8.DM.1.3*   Social Studies   * 6.C.1.1, 6.C.1.2, 7.C.1.1, 7.C.1.2, 8.C.1.2, 8.C.1.3 |

**Mini-Lesson**

1. Introduce today’s topic by asking how dance portrays American culture. Dance can depict a society’s values. Give examples of hip-hop moves and hip-hop culture.
   1. Hip-hop culture originated in New York among Hispanic and African-American communities during the late 1960s. The style represents the cultures’ moves from the streets or clubs.
2. In many communities, religion becomes intertwined with a society’s values. Cultural expressions, such as dance, can reveal a religion’s impact on the society. Society can revive past religious art forms. In addition, religious art forms can shed positive light on a culture.
   1. Can you think of a cultural expression of America that went out of style, but has become popular again?

**Activities**

1. *Bharatanatyam* is a classical dance in India. Dancers show their devotion to the Hindu gods and goddesses through their movements. Teach the basic tenets of Hinduism. Information down below.
2. Assess how much students know about Hinduism, Indian culture, and *Bharatanatyam*through questioning.
   1. Explain *Bharatanatyam* has been around as far back as the 17th century, but has been revived in the modern period. Pass out the handouts and have students read quietly to themselves.
   2. Have them actively circle words they do not know. After, have students define words among themselves and then with the class. Lead a discussion on the handout. Suggested topics include how does *Bharatanatyam* reveal the values of the Indian society (give specific examples), how does Hinduism shape Indian society and how is *Bharatanatyam* similar or different to dance here today.

**We caution you to try not to teach the controversy of devadasis. It is very complex, and it is easy to be too quick to judge a culture without understanding the whole picture. I am attaching a handout on the history of *Bharatanatyam* and controversy of devadasis for teachers’ personal knowledge. It is important to know this information to understand why *Bharatanatyam* has gone through a revival.  Please do not hesitate to contact sarbrown@email.unc.edu if you have questions.**

1. Next, watch the video of the beginning dance of *Bharatanatyam*. This dance performs salutations.
   1. Ask the students to try and pick out where she bows to the deity.
   2. Point out to the students how she beats her feet to the *tala* with the bells.
   3. Ask them to notice how her facial expression changes like an actress.
   4. At the end, ask them how she showed her devotion to the Hindu gods and goddesses.
   5. Ask them what kind of emotion she was trying to convey, what kind of emotions did they feel about the dance?
2. Introduce the region of Punjab in India. Point to it on a map.
   1. The dance *Bhangra* originated in Punjab. It is a harvest dance. After the dance was created, there was an influx of Sikhs who moved to Punjab. One can teach the basic tenets of Sikhism. Information down below.
   2. However, emphasize that *Bhangra* is not a Sikh-specific dance.
3. Explain how *Bhangra* has evolved with western culture in North Carolina.
   1. To illustrate this, give the example of how dance music has changed from the hip-hop 90’s to techno now. Some Sikhs in North Carolina feel *Bhangra* has been a way to diminish racial prejudice against the Indian community.
4. Pass out the article on *Bhangra* from the News & Observers shown on the Interlochen Public Radio website. Have students read quietly to themselves. After reading the article, lead a discussion on the handout.
5. Suggested topics are:
   1. How *Bharatanatyam* differ from *Bhangra*?
   2. What does the popularity of *Bhangra* in North Carolina do for Indian culture?
   3. How has the Indian culture impacted North Carolina and American society
   4. What are other cultural expressions that has helped shift attitudes about a certain society in North Carolina?
6. Emphasize how the fusion between two cultures adds to the cultural richness in North Carolina.
7. Next watch a video of a *Bhangra* dance from Bhangra Elite from UNC-Chapel Hill. Discuss what they watched.
   1. What were their reactions?
   2. How did *Bhangra* incorporate western culture into Indian culture?

**Extension**

1. Depending on time and space, you can have them follow along to the intro video of *Bhangra* given below.
   1. LearnBhangraApp is a great YouTube series that shows different steps. You can use the first video of *dhamaal* only or use two or three of these videos. They are about five minutes each.
2. If you have time, you can have students create their own dance. Ask students to use their own music or *Bhangra* pop music online. They can put *Bhangra* moves to them for a 30 second dance.
   1. Make sure that music is school-friendly. They can research what moves they want to do. The LearnBhangraApp YouTube series would be a great choice!

**Assessment**

1. Have students look at *Kathak*, a north Indian dance. Show students two web sites provided below. Ask them to write a short paragraph comparing and contrasting *Kathak* to *Bharatanatayam*.
   1. How do *Kathak* performances show Indian society in their dances?
   2. Compare and contrast Kathak's and Bharatanatyam's ties to religion.
2. Have students find a *Bhangra* YouTube video.
   1. Ask them to write a short "article" pretending to be a reporter.
   2. Have them write about Indian culture's impact on North Carolina.
   3. Ask them to write about *Bhangra's* impact on prejudice in North Carolina.

**Resources**

[Bharatanatyam Handout](https://carolinaasiacenter.unc.edu/files/2016/07/Bharatanatyam-Handout-modified.docx)

[News Article on Bhangra in North Carolina](http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/wiaa/.artsmain/article/1/1083/1247915/Columns/Bhangra.dance.blends.the.ages./)

[Information on Bhangra](http://www.bhangra.org/about/bhangra-history/)

[Information on Hinduism](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/)

*Note: NC schools teach students about the caste system. When you are teaching about Hinduism, please do not focus just on this issue. In the words of one journalist, "any generalizations about it [caste system] need to be regarded with some reservations."*

[Information on Sikhism](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/)

[Map of India](https://www.worldofmaps.net/typo3temp/images/karte-indien-regionen.png)

[Video on Bharatanatyam](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgiLOzFQh14)

[Video on Bhangra](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fndMUI20z1c)

[Kathak Source 1](http://www.kathadance.org/about-2/what-is-kathak/)

[Kathak Source 2](https://www.kathak.org/index.php/about/what-is-kathak)

[Bharatanatyam Performed- A Typical Recital](https://carolinaasiacenter.unc.edu/files/2016/06/Bharatanatyam-Performed-A-Typical-Recital.pdf): Turn to page 45-47 for history of Bharatanatyam and conflict with devadasis

[LearnBhangraApp](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9Gbl6r8ZkE)