Dancing Through the Decades: 1950s
Teaching Ideas

Learning Objective:	To explore and experiment with historic dance styles from the 1950s to create a sequence for performance.
Success Criteria:	• To explore the movements of social dances performed in the 1950's discovering them practically in the body. • To develop choreographic skills linking and using these set phrases to create dance sequences. • To perform a 1950s-inspired dance sequence.
Context:	This is the first lesson of a four-lesson unit that introduces students to the social dance that was happening in a certain decade. This lesson focuses on the 1950s, creating gestural and travelling phrases. To give students the grounding in dance contextual studies, each lesson takes a brief look at what was happening culturally in that decade naming, films, music and key events. Each lesson can stand alone or can be worked through chronologically.

Starter

Listen to some of the music from the 1950s listed here or use some of your own favourites from the era. Discuss if the group have heard it before, if they can guess which decade it is from and how it makes them want to move or dance.

Doris Day - Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps

Buddy Holly - Peggy Sue

Fats Domino - Blueberry Hill

Little Richard - Tutti Frutti (this one is ideal for this lesson)

Eddie Cochran - Summertime Blues

Etta James - Good Rockin' Daddy

Ritchie Valens - La Bamba

Bill Haley and His Comets - Rock around the clock

Elvis Presley - Jailhouse Rock

Here are You Tube suggestions that give an example of dance styles from the 1950s. Please view them ahead of time to make sure they are suitable for use in your classroom and be aware of your school's media use policy.

Jailhouse Rock

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZJTgYzf9FE

The hand jive on the Billy Otis show

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOrQTh_Cq7U

'Willie and the Hand Jive' 1958. This film has some great moves to follow and copy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xrdjxj3lMD0

The hand jive from 'Grease'.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fY5pmzmiDO8

Main Activities

Using the **Dancing Through the Decades 1950s PowerPoint** to take a look with the group at the 1950s timeline, Movies, Pop stars and fashion. Ask if they have heard of any of the movies or pop stars, as well as what the fashion might suggest about the values and interests of society in the 1950s. Go over any dance studio rules before the warm-up.

1950s-inspired warm-up

Use some of the music suggested above to inspire movements in the warm up. You can choose to warm up the students whenever is most convenient in your lesson but here are some ideas.

• Ask the dancers to explore different ways to travel around in a circle, for example walking, running, galloping, skipping or maybe even crawling and rolling. They can stop and change direction. Add on clicking of fingers whilst they travel, to the sides of the body, by the face, low. Next add in claps, in front of the body, to the side, each other.

• Ask the dancers to pick out the rhythm of the 1950s music when travelling, for example **stepping on the beat, off beat, rolling on a cadence**. Explore stopping and changing direction all to the music as well as travelling in different directions e.g. stepping forwards, running on the spot, galloping sideways. You could also stepping in different rhythmic patterns

• Can they walk like Elvis in 'Jailhouse Rock'? Then stop and strike a 1950s inspired pose (could be Elvis again).

Play the Numbers game. You can use the suggested movements below, come up with movements as a class, or have students make up their own in pairs. Have the students in pairs facing each other. Call out the numbers in any order. The key is for students to be in unison with their partner.

• 1: clap (this could also be clapping each other)

• 2: click your fingers

• 3: salute

• 4: turn

• 5: jump

• Stretch to prepare the students for the next activity.

Learning set phrases of movement

Use the **Dancing Through the Decades 1950s PowerPoint** and the video link to guide the students through the key movements and history of the hand jive. Show each movement slowly then build up speed and add music. Next try adding movements together.

Video movement include a simple hand jive and a travelling sequence from 'Grease'.

Video link: https://vimeo.com/205449872

In groups of 4, 5 or 6, depending on the size of your group, ask the dancers to go over what they have learnt together.

• Ask them to make a hand jive sequence by putting together the movements from the video in any order that they want and adding in their own gestures.

• See if they can incorporate clapping hands with each other; this could be complex or simple depending on whether the group needs a challenge.

• Using the **Dancing Through the Decades 1950s PowerPoint** ask the students to think about creating a travelling sequence using the images of Elvis and the phrase on the video 'I want to dance 1950s' from Grease.

• Ask the dancers to explore different facings for their group; maybe use entrances and exits so that their choreograph feels like the video to 'Willie and the Hand Jive'.

Ask the students to go over these actions and to rehearse so that everyone in the group knows the order. Play music so that the students can use the timing and rhythm as they rehearse.

Groups needing an extra challenge could explore using unison and canon in their group sequence as well as picking moments out in the music to highlight with rhythmical actions. You could also encourage them to include more complex foot work.

Performing your 1950s sequence

The dancers will share their 1950s inspired sequences with the whole group. You can set this up as a formal performance with a given front or just ask the dancers to stand and perform where they are in the studio. If time allows, ask the dancers watching to describe the body actions and the starting and finishing positions that they liked.

In pairs, answer the questions on the **Dancing Through the Decades 1950s Activity Sheet.**

Plenary

Plenary example 1: Sit with the students and discuss the workshop. Each of them, around the circle, are to say something new they learnt today, whether it was something physical, or something they learnt, a task they did. Get students to evaluate their use of actions in relation to the theme. How did they use rhythm effectively? Did they interact with each other? In this circle cool down and stretch.

Plenary example 2:. Watch this version of the hand jive song from Grease from the TV show Glee.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StASsCWGMek

Ask the dancers to describe the movements they can spot and how they are similar to what they have explored and created themselves in class.

Next class

If you wanted to carry on with creating a whole group 1950s inspired piece the groups could share movement material, rehearse and perform as an ensemble.