

Camera Creativity and Collaboration

Parent Guide, page 1 of 2

Read the “Directions” sheets for step-by-step instructions.

SUMMARY

In this activity, children will take a close look at a photograph of Martha Graham, then collaborate with a partner or family member to create their own dance photographs.

WHY

Teamwork and decision-making are very important for learning, playing, and working together in the 21st century.

TIME

- 25 minutes

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in 2nd through 4th grades.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **Collaboration:** working with others
- **Perspective:** the appearance to the eye of objects in space with respect to their distance and positions in relation to each other
- **Photograph:** a picture made by a camera, which directs the image of an object onto a surface (as film) that is sensitive to light
- **Scale:** size in comparison

GET READY

- Read *Ballet for Martha: Making Appalachian Spring* together. *Ballet for Martha* tells the story of three artists who worked together to make a treasured work of American art. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Guided Reading Activity (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/dance/dance_reading.pdf).
- Read the Step Back in Time sheets.

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/dance/>.

Camera Creativity and Collaboration

Parent Guide, page 2 of 2

YOU NEED

- Directions sheets (*attached*)
- Step Back in Time sheets (*attached*)
- ThinkAbout sheet (*attached*)
- Camera (*recommended*)
- Costume (*possibly*)
- Magazine *OR* Computer with Internet

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/dance/>.



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Camera Creativity and Collaboration

Directions, page 1 of 2

For adults and kids to follow together.

1. Take a look at the ThinkAbout sheet.

2. Imagine how this picture would be different if the artists made a different decision.
 - What if the picture was taken after Miss Graham's kick? Her skirt might still be floating a little, but her leg would be coming down.
 - What if the picture was taken from the front of Miss Graham, instead of from the side? We would see her head and both feet, all in a straight line, but we wouldn't see the big half-circle made by her skirt.
 - What if the picture only showed her face and hand? We might never know she was doing a kick, or that she was alone. (You can fold the picture to show what this might look like.)

3. Pick up a magazine or visit the website of a newspaper or magazine. Look carefully at one of the photographs you find and think about all of the decisions that were made to make this photograph. Consider the lighting, scale, perspective, timing, position, and costume.

4. (*Optional*) If you have access to a camera and can work with a friend or family member, team up to make an amazing photograph. Choose a dance move and make decisions about lighting, scale, perspective, timing, position, or costume. If you take more than one photograph of the same dance move, see how different you can make the photograph, just by changing one of your decisions.

Tip For the youngest learners, some of these decisions might be difficult. Scale is probably the easiest decision to play with—explain it to your young learner that you're deciding how big or small to make the dancer look.

Camera Creativity and Collaboration

Directions, page 2 of 2

Tip If you and your partner disagree on an artistic decision, consider these ideas for working together:

- Articulate your idea about what the photograph should look like. What do think is most important or interesting: lighting, scale, perspective, timing, position, or costume? Rank what is most to least important to emphasize in your opinion. Is there more than one way to achieve your goal? Can you combine your solutions?
- Try taking the photograph in both ways. Look at the photographs and talk about the ways one decision may work better or differently than another.
- Take turns making important decisions. For one photograph, you get to be in charge for all of the decisions. For the next one, your partner is in charge.
- Talk it out and try to convince your partner. Explain why you think your decision makes the photograph meaningful/powerful or effective at conveying what you think is important.

For more activities about Martha Graham and performing arts, visit [OurStory: An American Story in Dance and Music](http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/dance/) (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/dance/>).

Camera Creativity and Collaboration

Step Back in Time, page 1 of 2

For more information, visit the National Museum of American History website <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/dance/>.

Martha Graham (1894–1991) was a dancer and **choreographer** who had a big impact on modern dance. She performed dance for over 60 years and **choreographed** more than 180 works. In fact, she was 75 years old when she danced in her last performance!

People did not always enjoy Miss Graham’s dances, since she often told stories about people that weren’t happy and her dances were more about telling stories than about being pretty to watch. But by the end of her career, many important people from around the world gave her awards.

For Martha Graham, dance was a way to share the feelings that have been a part of stories from many different cultures. Through her dances, she told stories about America, ancient Greece, and the Bible. But she tried not to tell these stories through **mime**, and instead focused on sharing the feelings of the characters. This idea of showing feelings through **abstract** shapes was important to many sculptors, painters, and other artists whose art is considered “modern.”

Martha Graham’s **collaboration** with other artists, such as sculptor Isamu Noguchi and composer Aaron Copland, showed her interest in using many kinds of art to tell a story, not just using one kind of art as a decoration for another.

Miss Graham was an especially important leader in modern dance because she made a way to describe her dance style so it could be taught to students. Many of the students she worked with became famous later on and many dancers still study her style today.



Martha Graham and her partner Erick Hawkins, posing in costume and on a set piece from *Appalachian Spring* [Library of Congress]

Camera Creativity and Collaboration

Step Back in Time, page 2 of 2

Her dance style focused on the idea of breathing, with breathing in (contraction) and breathing out (release) as the two important opposites in the ways our bodies move. Her style is powerful, sharp, and sometimes sudden, instead of being soft and flowing like some dance.

She was also interested in American **folkdance** and traditional American Indian dances and used ideas from those dances to tell her stories. Miss Graham once said, "We must look to America to bring forth an art as powerful as America itself." At the same time Miss Graham was thinking about American traditions for her art, other artists were also inspired by the idea of using traditional American art styles and themes, with examples like Grandma Moses' paintings and musical theater by Rogers and Hammerstein.

These are some very simple ways of comparing ballet and modern dance.

	Ballet	Modern Dance
When?	Started around 1600s	Started around 1920s and 1930s
Where?	Mostly developed in Europe	Mostly developed in America
For Example?	<i>The Nutcracker</i>	<i>Appalachian Spring</i>

Abstract: using elements of form (as color, line, or texture) with little or no attempt at creating a realistic picture

Choreography: the art of arranging dances (A choreographer is an artist who arranges dances.)

Collaboration: working with others

Folkdance: a traditional dance that was started by common people from specific a region or country

Mime: acting out the movements and gestures used by a person in a specific situation or while doing a specific thing



Camera Creativity and Collaboration

ThinkAbout

Martha Graham collaborated with many artists, not just Aaron Copland and Isamu Noguchi. Take a look at this photograph of Martha Graham, taken by Barbara Morgan. This photograph shows part of the dance *Letter to the World*.



- Can you see the shadows on the floor? The artists decided on lighting to make this exciting photograph. The lights on Miss Graham make her stand out from her dark background. **(Lighting)**
- Guess how much of the picture's rectangle is filled with Miss Graham's picture. The artists decided how large or small they wanted Miss Graham to appear. She fills about half of the space. **(Scale)**
- Can you see all of Miss Graham's body? The artists decided how much of Miss Graham's body to show. All of her body fits in the picture, but we can't see both sides of Miss Graham's face because we see her from the side. **(Perspective)**
- Can you see the half-circle made by Miss Graham's legs? The artists decided to take the photograph when Miss Graham's leg was at its highest. The skirt makes the half-circle of Miss Graham's kick easy to see. **(Timing, Position, and Costume)** The costumes for this dance were made by Edythe Gilfond. She and Miss Graham made many decisions together about what the costumes should look like.

Camera Creativity and Collaboration

Teacher Guide, page 1 of 2

Read the “Directions” and “Parent Guide” sheets for step-by-step instructions.

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- Identify artistic decisions in photographs.
- Plan decisions in group/partner projects.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Conversation reflects understanding of the impact of artistic decisions.
- Thoughtfully applies one or more artistic decision in the creation of a photograph.
- Successfully collaborates with a partner.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

- 2H. Draw upon the visual data presented in photographs, paintings, cartoons, and architectural drawings.

National Standards for Arts Education (K-4)

Dance, Standard 7: Making connections between dance and other disciplines

Visual Arts, Standard 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

ISTE Education Technology Standards for Students (NETS.S)

Creativity and Innovation

- B. Create original works as a means of personal or group expression.

Communication and Collaboration

- D. Contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems.

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/dance/>.

Camera Creativity and Collaboration

Teacher Guide, page 2 of 2

21st-Century Skills

Learning and Innovation Skills

- Creativity and Innovation
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Communication and Collaboration

Information, Media, and Technology Skills

- Media Literacy

