**Purpose:** This CISM will work on critical thinking and analysis.

**Enduring Question:** The artist Beverly Sills states that civilization is measured by the art it creates. Is that statement true?

**Essential Question:** Can art survive without fiscal support?

**CCGPS:**

1. **Theatre: TAHSADII.8(b)** Examines the impact of theatre on the quality of life in society.
2. **Dance: DHS2RE1** Demonstrates critical and creative thinking in all aspects of dance.
3. **Economics: SSEMI3** The student will explain how markets, prices, and competition influence economic behavior.

**Vocabulary:** Niche, precarious, idiosyncratic, intricacies, garret, proscenium, repertory, indulgence, moonlighting, avant-garde

**Suggested Coding for: Assessing the future of modern dance, a fragile American art form.**

\*T- Threat \*H-Hopeful \*-Neutral (OR)

\*M=Much Impact \*L= Little Impact \*C=Cause \*E=Effect

**Materials:**

* The Article: *Assessing the future of modern dance, a fragile American art form.*
* Graphic Organizers: directed note taking guide, and writing assignment sheet.

Procedure

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| Suggested Time | Teacher Will | Student will |
| 0-10 minutes | Facilitate discussion on the enduring question. | Breakup into small groups to discuss the question then come together for group discussion. |
| 10-20 | Teacher will front load the article’s vocabulary | Students will define the vocabulary terms either through context clues or searching for the words definition. This may be done via internet search, smart-phone, or dictionary. |
| 20-40 | Teacher will read the text and model the text coding through paragraph 6. After paragraph 6, teacher will read orally stopping at the bold subtitles to discuss coding.  *(Optional popcorn read with students)* | Students will take notes and mark coding. Stopping for group discussion on why they choose any given code.  *(students may practice fluency)* |
| 40-50 |  | Students will fill out their Directed- Note-Taking graphic organizer. |
| 50-55 |  | Students will create “I wonder questions” from the text. |
| 60-75 | Teacher will facilitate answering and discussion activities. \*Deposit/Withdrawal  \*The Lottery  \*Stand and Whip  \*Popcorn |  |
| 80 | Closing activity teacher will post a multiple choice question for the final group discussion | Students will choose the BEST possible answer and discuss. |
| 85 | Teacher will assign final responses | Take home for homework, or do as a warmup next class. ` |

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| **Using the information from the text to support your answer, which of the following best describes the author’s purpose?**   1. **To explain why modern dance is a dying art form** 2. **To explain why Paul Taylor is the best living choreographer today.** 3. **To explain despite economic times, modern dance is evolving with new choreographers and avant-guard ideas.** 4. **To discuss the new movement in modern dance.** |

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| **Extended Writing:**  RAFT Writing assignment:  Role: Mayor 2. Role: Director  Audience: The Artist Audience: National Endowment for the Arts  Format: Letter Format: Letter  Topic: You are no longer able to donate Topic: The creation and support for new works. |

A few weeks ago, Paul Taylor did something no other modern-dance choreographer can do: He watched his company perform for 2 1/2 weeks at New York's City Center, seating nearly 2,000 a night. He's been doing that for years -- and has booked it for next season. Taylor is the only dancemaker who pulls in that kind of audience anymore in the modern-dance world. Look at this indigenous but fragile American art form, and you see fundamental change. There's been a downsizing, a redefining, a splintering into countless small niches. As a result, its very future feels precarious.

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No one with broad-based stature and a track record of creating marketable and enduring work is poised to take over from the pillars of the field. With the deaths of Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham, with Twyla Tharp having disbanded her troupe years ago to work for ballet companies and Broadway, the major players in modern dance -- as defined by the scope of their activities and the sizes of their audience, budget and touring calendar -- number exactly two. There's Taylor, who turns 80 in July, and Mark Morris, 54.

2

Not to be overlooked is the idiosyncratic multi-genre artist Bill T. Jones, 58, who runs a smaller operation, yet one that still enjoys wider audiences than anyone in the rest of the field. (Not surprisingly, Taylor, Morris and Jones will perform locally next season, as they do most years.) The question, then, is: Once the old guard is gone, what happens to the art form when modern-dance choreographers are no longer attracting the public and the funders, no longer employing and developing the dancers on the scale that their elders did?

3

"Have we nurtured anyone to replace these people?" asks Douglas Sonntag, dance director of the National Endowment for the Arts, referring to Graham, Cunningham and their peers. "It's sad, to me, that we don't have a generation that's as powerful as the one we're losing."

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Given a barren economy and the drop in government support for dance over the past decade and a half, Andrea Snyder, who heads the service organization Dance/USA, wonders how future generations of choreographers "will be able to thrive and solidify to become masters."

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"We really are in a sea change," she says, "and nobody can see the end of this."

**Market economics**

It's not that creativity is lacking. Interesting work is absolutely going on -- memorable examples presented here include Shen Wei's explorations of altitude and atmosphere on the Tibetan steppe ("Re-," returning in expanded form to the Kennedy Center April 29-30); the piercing nostalgia of Dan Hurlin's puppet-driven "Disfarmer" (at the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Center last fall), and the intricacies of partnership in "A Light Conversation," by experimentalists Wally Cardona and Rahel Vonmoos (at Dance Place last year).

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Is it, then, that brilliant, big-thinking minds such as Taylor, Morris and Jones just haven't come along lately? Perhaps, but consider another question: Is genius born -- or paid for? Surely the romantic notion of art emerging whatever the circumstances, whatever the scarcities, is outdated. The reality is, art exists in a marketplace, and it's hard to argue that artists can, with any consistency, make great works on a large public scale without financial support.

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George Balanchine, one of the most influential and enduring ballet choreographers of the 20th century, did not achieve that status in a garret. Among his many backers was the Ford Foundation, from which in 1963 his New York City Ballet and its school received a staggering $7.7 million grant. With the numerous works that followed (including the major opuses "Jewels," "Symphony in Three Movements," etc.), and Balanchine's continued strength at the box office, we are still feeling the effects of that investment today.

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Modern dance has never been that richly endowed. Still, it has progressed in this country on a modest mix of public and private financial support that has, in recent years, taken a dive. For choreographers, this has made mainstream success, let alone survival on the fringes, hard to come by.

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It has also meant that American choreographers no longer dominate the field they invented. There has been an explosion of visionary work in Europe, particularly in England, much of it subsidized by dance-friendly governments. American companies are finding that this means they're even getting nudged out on their home turf. Theaters here have a reason to embrace foreign troupes -- their governments often help out with travel costs, making them a relative bargain over their fee-dependent U.S. counterparts. State support can also mean that foreign troupes have richer production values. Think of the visual impact of Germany's Pina Bausch, with her heaps of pink carnations or water-flooded sets.

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This year marks the 15th anniversary of one of the biggest blows to American modern dance: the loss of individual choreography fellowships -- money for emerging artists, as opposed to established companies -- funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. They aided hundreds: all the big names, when they were starting out, as well as those now viewed as the next tier of strongholds, if on a much more modest scale: Susan Marshall, Stephen Petronio, Elizabeth Streb, Doug Varone.

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The choreography fellowships, and their counterparts in other genres, fell victim to congressional pressure following the uproar over controversial art tied to NEA funding. Dance activists say we're seeing the effects now, in what we're not seeing. The choreography fellowships helped foster the experimentation and discovery that modern dance relies on-- artists drawing meaning from the body in new ways.

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"If you look at American dance as an ecological system, there's that research and development time in an artist's life that we are not putting money into," the NEA's Sonntag says. Since the fellowships have been cut, "there are still lots of people performing but I haven't seen any company break through, to get past the small performing spaces, to be able to tour nationally and internationally."

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The fellowships weren't just a springboard into the establishment; they also funded the driven individualists who rejected the conventional route. Victoria Marks's experiments with dance on film were boosted by the fellowships. "We lost a huge amount of support for experimental artists," the UCLA choreography professor says, "and that is a very, very active part of what the field is about."

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**On the road**

Modern dance companies chase small audiences, and have to hit the road to find them. But in the current recession, tickets aren't selling, which means touring is drying up, which means it's harder to fund new work. Many choreographers are teaching more, creating less.

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"There's nearly no such thing as a substantial tour," Morris said in an interview earlier this year. "Even a company like mine -- we go out for maybe two weeks at a time. That's a big tour." More common, he says, is a sketchy array of weekend jaunts, like the one that would have brought the Mark Morris Dance Group to George Mason University for two nights in February but was snowed out.

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Marshall, who works in a distinctive, dreamlike style of dark humor and fantasy, says this is one of her worst years ever for touring. Luckily, she has a new professorship at Princeton to fall back on, where -- ironically, given the atmospheric fullness of her stage work -- she's been experimenting with one-minute dances designed for a cellphone. ("The new proscenium," she says with a wry laugh.)

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Ronald K. Brown says his group, Evidence, which comes to Harman Hall April 30 and May 1, is doing only a third of the tours it did last year. Liz Lerman, whose Dance Exchange has been a Washington institution for 34 years, had 10 full-time dancers a few years ago; she's cut down to five. In her own studio as well as across the field, she says, cutting costs also means fewer rehearsals -- and less impact onstage.

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"This means the choreographers are relying on old tricks rather than new methods," Lerman says. "You don't have time to get that one performer to have a breakthrough."

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It may be that artists like Lerman are a dying breed. As a number of experts interviewed for this story have pointed out, the single-choreographer company could become a thing of the past, forced into history by financial realities. Taylor and Morris boast budgets of around $6 million and relatively stable support, but no other troupe stands to achieve that.

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Also, having a $6 million company hanging around your neck, as Taylor and Morris do, does not look like artistic freedom to some. "I don't want to get larger," says Brown, whose work blends African influences with Western dance. He's afraid he'd have to change his style if he had to fill a space like City Center.

22

Now consider Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, whose healthy $25 million budget dwarfs any other modern-dance troupe (as well as a lot of ballet companies). The difference is, Ailey is a repertory company, performing the works of many artists -- Brown among them -- which is a big reason why it is so successful. At an Ailey show, if you don't like the style of one choreographer, you don't have to stomach a whole evening of it. Could the Ailey model save modern dance?

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"Would I rather sit in the theater and watch three completely different works? Yes," says Robert Yesselman, Paul Taylor's former executive director. He envisions a national repertory company that performs less marketable avant-garde works sandwiched between the brand names, thus attracting audiences -- and funding.

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"Somebody's got to make it happen," Yesselman says, "or modern dance as we know it is going to disappear."

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At the very least, it's headed for the margins, with fewer dancers finding work, which means even fewer who might later transition into choreography, and pickup troupes as the new norm.

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**The next generation**

That is, unless a new generation can turn things around. Meet Jonah Bokaer and Chase Brock, who have figured out novel ways to survive in the dance world.

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At 18, Bokaer was the youngest dancer ever to join the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. He saw firsthand the ups and downs of running a large company, and when he struck out on his own after eight years, he wanted to do things differently.

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"Dance is one of the most space-dependent art forms," says Bokaer, 28, reached in Paris, where he is performing. Affordable studios are a matter of "social action," he says, "to put the terms in the hands of artists." Bokaer rounded up a team of backers to develop two low-cost rehearsal and performance spaces in Brooklyn: Chez Bushwick and the Center for Performance Research, which he founded with choreographer John Jasperse.

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In his own work, he stays small. "Replica," a piece about memory and perception that he performed last summer in the basement of Harman Hall and has taken overseas, is a 70-minute duet. Its sculptural visual design is dramatic, but portable -- "a recession special." He has tours lined up for most of the year.

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Brock, 26, also runs his Chase Brock Experience out of Brooklyn, performing in the smaller niches around New York. He was financing his four-year-old troupe on parental indulgence and credit cards, and by moonlighting for a cruise line show ("a really awful and soulless experience").

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Then he landed a deal to design a dance-based video game due out this fall for Wii and the Xbox 360. To play, you'll copy the steps you see on-screen, which Brock devised. None of it is strictly modern dance, though he's tucked in a homage to Tharp. Brock's 10 dancers are the models for the players' digital alter egos, thanks to motion-capture technology.

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Which brings this enterprise, destined for living rooms across America, back around to the vital experimental core of modern dance. It was Cunningham, years ago, who pioneered the use of computer software and motion capture in choreography.

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"I'm definitely feeling the influence of Merce," Brock says. "This is possibly the widest audience I'll ever have the chance to speak to, and I hope that it is a connection to that tradition of technology in dance."

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Sneaking the avant-garde into the avatars -- that is so contrarian, so unexpected, so modern dance.

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MAIN IDEAS

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| Main idea | Details |
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