

# Creative Movement

---

## Understanding Creative Movement

Integrating creative movement across the curriculum is an engaging approach to teaching that allows students to experience, translate, and communicate social studies concepts kinesthetically. In 1983, Howard Gardner identified bodily-kinesthetic intelligence within his theory of multiple intelligences (2011) as one way that students learn. Neuroscientists are finding that memory and recall are improved when the body is engaged in the learning process (Zull 2002) and that the mind uses the body to make sense of ideas (Carpenter 2010).

While important for all learners, opportunities to express themselves nonverbally can be particularly powerful for some students. Such opportunities can provide students with access to social studies content that would not be possible otherwise. Stacey Skoning states that creative movement, or dance, “is important to incorporate into our inclusive classrooms if we want to meet the needs of more diverse groups of students” (2008, 9).

Creative movement allows students to be physically active, which often increases their attention spans, but it is much more than just the incorporation of movement into classroom activities. When students are involved in creative movement, they become more mindful of their bodies’ abilities to communicate, explore what happens when they move with intention, engage in problem solving through movement, and develop awareness of their creative choices. It is important to keep the possibilities for this work in mind as your students explore these model lessons.

As students deconstruct and reconstruct concepts, they take ownership of the ideas through kinesthetic means and creative choices. As choreographer and former elementary school teacher Paula Aarons notes, “figuring out things in your body and through movement weaves ideas together. This builds a sense of intuitive knowledge, of working with an interchange of acting and responding, of physical problem solving” (Aarons, pers. comm. 2012).

# Embodiment

## Model Lesson: Freedom of Expression

### Model Lesson Overview

Students use embodiment to explore how sayings and slogans demonstrate freedom of expression and protest and how they communicate values and principles. Students work in groups to physically explore and deepen their understanding of the values and principles communicated through movement, share their ideas with the class, and view the presentations of others.

### Standards

#### K–2

- Knows the state's motto
- Knows the state's slogan
- Moves his or her body in a variety of controlled ways
- Creates shapes at low, middle, and high levels

#### 3–5

- Knows that slogans are a means of expression
- Knows the significance of patriotic sayings that were written long ago
- Creates shapes at low, middle, and high levels
- Uses kinesthetic awareness, concentration, and focus in performing movement skills

#### 6–8

- Knows examples of how an individual's values had an impact on history
- Understands various movements and their underlying principles

#### 9–12

- Analyzes the values held by specific people who influenced history and the role their values played in influencing history
- Understands how movement choices are used to communicate abstract ideas and themes in dance

### Materials

- *Embodiment Brainstorming Guide* (page 31, [embrainstormingguide.pdf](#))
- *Observing Others* (page 32, [observingothers.pdf](#))

# Embodiment *(cont.)*

## Preparation

Prior to this lesson, have students conduct research about patriotic American slogans and sayings, such as “United We Stand,” “Home of the Brave,” and “Let Freedom Ring.” In accordance with the time period you are studying, students can research slogans from the Boston Tea Party, the abolition of slavery, women’s suffrage, labor movements, or the civil rights movement. Consider what grouping would be most productive for students to create these embodied representations. Additional ideas are provided in the Specific Grade Level Ideas.

## Procedure

1. Model embodiment with the whole class by playing “Answer Me in Movement.” Tell students that you are going to say a vocabulary word such as *freedom*, *democracy*, *values*, *principles*, or *protest*. Say, “As I introduce each idea, show me how you understand the concept in movement.” You might say, “Freedom,” and then say, “Answer me in movement.” Students should respond by using their bodies to create shapes or movements that demonstrate their understanding. Students demonstrating their understanding of freedom might move their arms in a sweeping gesture upward and away from their body toward the sky to show joy and the ability to move (speak, act, think) without obstruction. Encourage students to use low, middle, and high levels of space to make their shapes more interesting and to show different directions with the lines their bodies make.
2. Have students compare and contrast the different embodiments. For additional support with more abstract ideas, you can build capacity by giving students more concrete ideas to embody within an idea. For example, open arms could show the democratic principles of including everyone, or arms swinging up to the sky could show the idea of reaching for one’s dreams.
3. Discuss with students what a *slogan* is. Ask questions such as, “What is a slogan? What is the purpose of a slogan? What are examples of slogans and sayings from the past? How do slogans and sayings show what people value?”
4. Distribute the *Embodiment Brainstorming Guide* (page 31) activity sheet to students. Have them record slogans or sayings that they discovered in their research, events or ideas that inspired them (including what the people valued), and ways to represent the ideas through creative movement.

## Embodiment *(cont.)*

5. Have students break into small groups and choose one of the slogans or sayings from the *Embodiment Brainstorming Guide* to show in movement as a group. Encourage groups to choose a slogan or saying that they would like to understand more fully. Tell groups that they should not share their chosen slogan or saying with other groups so that when they present their movement, classmates can identify the concept being represented. Ask students to distill their ideas into gestural movement in which brief movement choices are used to symbolize big ideas.
6. As students work, check in with each group to provide encouragement, using the Planning Questions to deepen conceptual development. Encourage students to move beyond iconic symbols (e.g., peace symbol shown by holding two fingers up) and explore the meaning of the idea in inventive ways through movement (e.g., *peace* could instead be shown by students moving together with arms linked).
7. Have each group present their embodiment to the rest of the class twice so that the audience has time to take in the details. The viewers can note their observations by using the *Observing Others* (page 32) activity sheet. Ask viewing students to use their observations to help them identify the idea being represented. Use students' observations as a catalyst to spark conversations about the ideas represented.
8. Use the Questions for Discussion to prompt students' reflections on how they translated ideas into movement and what they saw in other groups' embodiments that suggested a particular idea or concept.

### Planning Questions

- How might you show the meaning of a slogan or saying with your body?
- What qualities of the slogan or saying are important to share?
- How might you boil down the essence of a slogan or saying into a gesture or embodied movement that represents the qualities of the idea?

# Embodiment (cont.)

## Questions for Discussion

- What ideas did your group identify to translate a slogan or saying into embodied movement?
- How did you translate the ideas into movement?
- What choices did you make in creating movement?
- In what ways did movement help you understand the values and principles of people in the past?
- What struck you about other groups' presentations?
- What ideas do the movements seem to represent?
- What similarities and differences were there in the different movements of the same slogans or sayings?
- Which ideas were challenging to illustrate?

## Specific Grade Level Ideas

### K-2

To brainstorm a variety of movements, invite students to close their eyes, if they are comfortable, and slowly move their arms any way they wish while staying in the same place. After a minute or so, have students open their eyes and brainstorm and record a list of verbs to describe their movements (e.g., *raise, lower, bend, point, circle, swing, and stretch*). Ask them to demonstrate these movements with different parts of their bodies. Ask them to show you how they would point with their pinkies, legs, or torsos.

Students can use embodiment to understand state mottoes in more depth, such as Texas's motto (Friendship) or Maine's motto (*Dirigo*, meaning "I lead"), or slogans, such as "The Lone Star State" (Texas) and "The Pine Tree State" (Maine). Students can also explore through embodiment the history and significance of American symbols and figures, such as the bald eagle, the Liberty Bell, George Washington as the father of our country, and the national flag. It would also be powerful for students to use embodiment to represent the importance of buildings, statues, and monuments in the state's history and how they memorialize important people and events.

## Embodiment *(cont.)*

### **3–5**

In addition to mottoes and slogans, students can also locate songs and poems with similar purposes and messages and distill the essence of these messages through embodiment.

Extend the lesson by exploring the historical significance of the Pledge of Allegiance through embodiment. Students can also research and record famous quotations from important historical figures, such as, “In the truest sense, freedom cannot be bestowed; it must be achieved” (Franklin D. Roosevelt), and express the essence with creative movement.

### **6–8**

Students can research a specific person from history and how the individual’s values had an impact on history, showing the values and principles through embodiment. Different groups can choose individuals with opposing views and embody compromises that took place. They can also use embodiment to understand various positions of individuals during religious, philosophical, and social movements of a given time period of study.

### **9–12**

Students can use embodiment to understand various positions of individuals during times of war and oppression. For example, they could demonstrate people’s personal reasons for resisting Nazi policies and orders.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Embodiment Brainstorming Guide

**Directions:** Brainstorm ideas for using movement to represent the slogan or saying.

<b>Movement Ideas</b> Focus on qualities of ideas rather than “acting out” a scene.		
<b>Events or Ideas that Inspired the Slogan or Saying</b> Include what the people valued.		
<b>Slogan or Saying</b>		

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Observing Others

**Directions:** As you watch each group perform, record your observations and questions on the chart.

Group Members	What movements did you observe?	What values and principles did the movement suggest? How? Why?	What questions or comments do you have for the artists?