

Early Childhood  
(Ages 3-5)



**Dancin' Art:**  
**Movement and Degas' *Dancer Moving Forward***

**Overview**

Using Degas' *Dancer*, students will identify different movements and gestures. They will then create their own sculptures with Play-Doh.®

**Age Group**

Early Childhood (Ages 3-5)

**Length of Lesson**

One 30-minute lesson

**Rationale**

Examining Degas' sculpture and imitating it with their own bodies will help students make visual and physical connections with the artwork. The tactile experience of sculpting introduces students to the process of sculpture while fostering spatial awareness and creativity.

**Objectives**

*Students will be able to*

- Identify at least two body parts of the dancer
- Identify and demonstrate two kinds of gestures and/or movements
- Use Play-Doh® and other materials to create a three-dimensional sculpture

**Massachusetts Curriculum Framework Connection**

**Visual Arts:**

- **Standard 1: Methods, Materials, and Techniques**  
1.1: "Use a variety of materials and media, for example, crayons, chalk, paint, clay, various kinds of papers, textiles."

- **Standard 3: Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression**  
3.3: “Create a 2D or 3D artwork from memory or imagination to tell a story or embody an idea or fantasy.”
- **Standard 5: Critical Response**  
5.1: “In the course of making and viewing art, learn ways of discussing it, such as by making a list of all the images seen in an artwork.”

### Materials

- Image of Degas’ *Dancer Moving Forward, Arms Raised, Right Leg Forward* and a way to display the image to the class
- Play-Doh®

### Lesson

1. *Warm-up:* Introduce students to the topic of movement with questions like: Do you like to dance? When and why do you dance? What other kinds of activities make us move around a lot? Which do you do?
2. Show the image of *Dancer Moving Forward*. Ask students what they notice. What is this thing? Explain and define *sculpture*. Help students to identify the different body parts (arms, legs, body, head, feet etc.) What is this person doing? Explain that this is a sculpture of a dancer as she is dancing; the artist, Edgar Degas (*De-gah*), was interested in how people move. How can we tell this woman is dancing?
3. As a class, go through several different kinds of gestures/movements and identify them. For example, teacher holds up his or her hands to mean “stop!” and asks students what the gesture means.
4. Game time! When you have a small repertoire of motions, play “Freeze.” Have the students spread out. Call out a gesture or expression (“stop!” or “scared” etc.) and students have to make that gesture and hold it.
  - Alternatively, you can play “Statues,” in which students move or dance around until the teacher suddenly calls “freeze!” Everyone freezes like a statue for as many seconds as the teacher chooses, and whoever moves is out.
5. *Hands-on project:* Go back to the image of *Dancer Moving Forward*. Hand out the Play-Doh® and invite students to make their own sculpture of a person. Encourage them to show someone moving or doing something, using one of the gestures you discussed or Degas’ work as a model. If the sculpture cannot stand on its own, help students make a base with more Play-Doh® and press the two parts together (Degas did this too).
6. Have each student come up to show his or her sculpture to the class and explain what the figure is doing. Display all the sculptures on a table, like in a museum.

## About the Art

*Dancer Moving Forward, Arms Raised, Right Leg Forward* by Edgar Degas. Modeled ca. 1882-1895, cast posthumously. Bronze. Ca. 2 ft. tall. Purchased, SC 1965:29. Smith College Museum of Art.

### **The artist: Edgar Degas**

Degas is recognized as one of the greatest artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a key part of the French Impressionist movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. During his lifetime, though, he was best known for his paintings and exhibited only one sculpture, *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*, in 1881. His other sculptures, such as *Dancer Moving Forward*, were informal studies of movement in people and animals to help make his paintings more lifelike. They were done in wax and occasionally plaster and never meant for sale.

### **The sculpture**

*Dancer Moving Forward, Arms Raised, Right Leg Forward* was one of 74 wax sculptures found in Degas' studio after his death that were later cast in bronze by the foundry of A.-A. Hébrard under the supervision of its master founder, Albino Palazzolo. It shows the bare body of a ballet dancer in a basic pose. Ballet dancers were a favorite motif for Degas and this seems to have been a general study of a dancer in motion. The sculpture is so fragmented because Degas experimented so much on the wax original that it was falling apart when it was found. The bare metal rod on the right arm is exposed armature, the underlying framework of a sculpture that provides structure and stability in plastic media like wax and clay. Degas never stopped fiddling with his work and of the 150 sculptures found in his studio, only half could even be cast. Those that survived, like *Dancer Moving Forward*, established Degas' reputation as a revolutionary sculptor as well as painter.



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This work of art may not be currently on display at the Museum.