

Night Creature: An Imaginative Journey Through Dance

Overview

In the spring of 2017 Ailey's Arts In Education & Community Programs launched its newest curriculum initiative: *Night Creature: An Imaginative Journey Through Dance*, modeled after the *Revelations* curriculum. This new program for elementary-age youth in 3rd through 5th grades is based on the study of Alvin Ailey's *Night Creature*, a fusion of Ailey's buoyant choreography and Duke Ellington's sparkling music. As a large ensemble work, replete with movements that invoke animals in joyful celebration, is ideally suited for engaging young minds.

For more than fifteen years, Ailey's Arts In Education & Community Programs has brought, *Revelations: An Interdisciplinary Approach* into classrooms in cities such as Atlanta, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Newark, Washington, D.C., London, and Copenhagen.



Nasha Thomas teaching *Night Creature* Residency in Miami. Photo by Daisy Cabrera

Night Creature: An Imaginative Journey Through Dance is now available for elementary schools locally, nationally, and internationally. To develop age- and interest-appropriate movement activities for 3rd – 5th grade students, this curriculum-based initiative, created in conjunction with arts in education experts, uses dance to strengthen students' learning in other academic areas while offering educators suggestions in making connections to classroom studies.

Night Creature Curriculum

As with *Revelations*, *Night Creature: An Imaginative Journey Through Dance* provides in-depth study of age-appropriate subject matter woven together through and with dance. Throughout the curriculum, students will explore the history of jazz music and jazz dance, the basic elements of movement analysis, strategies for group collaboration and peer assessment as well as experience embodied learning through dance-making opportunities. The *Night Creature* curriculum uses imaginative thinking to provide connections to music, visual arts, socials studies, science and literacy through discussion, analysis, reflective response, and writing. Students will be encouraged to explore their own "night creatures" through learning excerpts of *Night Creature*, writing poems, drawing, and creating their own original choreography.

The *Night Creature* curriculum was designed by dance educator Catherine Gallant and guided by The New York City Department of Education's Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Dance, the New York State Standards for the Arts, and the National Core Arts Standards.

Each residency is led by the National Director of AileyCamp/Spokesperson & Master Teacher for Arts In Education, Nasha Thomas, formerly a leading member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and her team of teaching artists. On the first day of the residency, the program instructors meet with the school teachers to actively walk them through the curriculum and demonstrate how to most effectively use the curriculum throughout the residency and then integrate it within their everyday school instruction. Participating teachers come from a range of backgrounds, including Art, English, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Special Education.

Night Creature: An Imaginative Journey Through Dance (cont'd)



Nasha Thomas at Notre Dame Residency.
Photo by Kirk Richard Smith

Student Enrichment through **Night Creature: An Imaginative Journey Through Dance**

During the *Night Creature* residencies, students participate in a variety of activities which help them to not only learn the history of jazz music and jazz dance, but also the accomplishments of Alvin Ailey and the creation of his masterwork, *Night Creature*, a ballet that lives on in the Ailey repertory and continues to delight audiences year after year. Each day of the program begins with a physical warm-up, which then progresses to lessons in poetry, rhythm and music, and movement/choreography. The daily lessons conclude with a creative writing activity, allowing each student to actively analyze and reflect on his or her experiences in student journals. Through this residency, students learn discipline, self-esteem, creativity and how to imaginatively express their uniqueness. Each of the week-long residencies culminates with the students attending a special school-time performance of *Night Creature* by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. After seeing the dance elements and concepts that the students practiced in their classrooms demonstrated for them on the concert stage by the Ailey company, students and teachers alike leave the performances in awe and truly inspired.

Your imagination costs you nothing but can cost you everything if you don't use it.

Robert Battle
Artistic Director, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Comments about the **Night Creature** Curriculum

What an amazing way for my dance students to explore their imaginations. This experience has opened up a wonderful way for my students to see their core subjects in a creative and imaginable way.

Rashamella Cumbo,
Dance Educator, Museum Magnet School at P.S. 191M

This residency exposes young students to the wonderful world of jazz music and allows them to stretch their creative minds while exploring a variety of movement styles and rhythms. It's fun and playful and challenges them to develop new concepts and ideas about dance, art and life around them.

Nasha Thomas
National Director of AileyCamp/ Spokesperson & Master Teacher for Ailey Arts In Education