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Study Guide

DanceMotion USA<sup>SM</sup> Study Guide written  
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Photo: Doug Varone, by Cylla von Tiedemann



# DanceMotion USA<sup>SM</sup>

Doug Varone and Dancers with  
Brenda Angiel Aerial Dance Company

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

You and your students are invited to use this guide to build context and curricular connections both before and after the performance at BAM. Arts experiences always work best when themes, ideas, and elements from the performance can be aligned with your pre-existing classroom learning; thus the overall goal of this guide is to connect to your curriculum with Common Core Standards-based information and activities that encourage critical thinking and curious inquiry, ensuring you and your students have the tools and background information necessary for an engaging, educational, and inspiring experience at BAM.

Look for alignment to **Common Core Standards** listed in bold and **NYC Department of Education's Blueprints for the Arts** listed in italics.

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the study guide for DanceMotion USA<sup>sm</sup> by US-based Doug Varone and Dancers and Brenda Angiel Aerial Dance Company from Argentina. Under the umbrella of the DanceMotion USA<sup>sm</sup> cultural diplomacy tour of South America, these two renowned companies created an exciting artistic partnership. This performance marks the culmination of this partnership, highlighting signature works from each repertoire as well as a world premiere piece choreographed collaboratively by Doug Varone and Brenda Angiel. You and your students will explore the interplay of cultural exchange as two distinct dance languages and styles merge into one: Varone's explosive contemporary dance and Angiel's sweeping aerial invention.

## YOUR VISIT TO BAM

In addition to this study guide, the performance, and a post-show discussion in the BAM Fisher, your BAM experience includes pre- and post-performance workshops in your classroom led by a BAM teaching artist. Your teaching artist(s) will be in touch personally to discuss your classroom's specific needs, as well as any curricular connections you'd like to emphasize for your students.



## DANCE GLOSSARY

**Aesthetics:** the study of the mind and emotions in relation to the sense of beauty, especially in art

**Asymmetry:** lacking symmetry; not the same form on both sides

**Dynamics:** the energy of movement expressed with varying intensity, accent, and quality

**Ensemble:** 1. a group of dancers. 2. a feeling of continuity or togetherness that exists in performing dance

**Gesture:** a form of non-verbal communication; body actions that communicate a particular message, either in place of words or performed simultaneously with words. Gestures are movements that use the hands, head, or other body parts

**Levels:** the height of the dancer in relation to the floor. Levels in space are referred to as high, middle, and low

**Locomotor movement:** movement that travels from place to place, usually identified by weight transference. Basic locomotor movements are walk, run, leap, hop, jump, skip, slide, and gallop

**Narrative:** a choreographic structure that is representational and in the form of a story

**Rhythm:** structured pace of a dance

**Shape:** the body's organization in space; shapes in dance include curves, angles, twists, and lines

**Symmetry:** both sides are formed exactly the same way

**Tableau:** a pause during a piece when all the performers on stage freeze in position and then resume action as before

**Tempo:** the speed of a movement (fast, moderate, or slow)

**Transition:** the connections between specific movements or parts of the dance that maintain flow and continuity

**Unison:** movements which are performed simultaneously and identically by more than one dancer

**Variation:** a manipulation or adaptation of a specific movement that doesn't lose the original movement's intent and character



## DOUG VARONE AND DANCERS

Recently celebrating its 25th anniversary, *Doug Varone and Dancers* has long commanded attention for its expansive vision, versatility, and technical prowess. On the concert stage, in opera, theater, film, and fashion, choreographer and artistic director Doug Varone's kinetically thrilling dances take the complexity of human interaction as their starting point, making for a transformative yet readily accessible style.

At home in New York City, Doug Varone and Dancers is the resident company at the [92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center](#). On tour, the company has performed in more than 100 cities across the US and in Canada, Europe, Asia, and South America.

Doug Varone and Dancers is an incredibly sought after company of cultural ambassadors and educators. The company's multi-disciplinary residency programs on tour capture its concepts, imagery, and techniques across disciplines and for people of all ages and backgrounds, reaching out to audiences in ways that directly relate to their lives and interests.

## ABOUT DOUG VARONE

Doug Varone (Artistic Director) is an award-winning choreographer and director who works in dance, theater, opera, and film. Varone is known for the extraordinary emotional range, kinetic breadth, and physicality of his art, as well as for the many arenas in which he works. His New York City-based Doug Varone and Dancers has been commissioned and presented to critical acclaim by leading international venues for more than two decades. Varone received his BFA from SUNY Purchase, where he was awarded the Presidential Distinguished Alumni Award in 2007. Honors also include a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Obie Award, and two [New York Dance and Performance Awards](#) (Bessies)—one for Sustained Achievement in Choreography, the other for his 2006 *Boats Leaving*.

*At the heart of every work is pure dance making, and the creative relationship with my dancers is paramount to this process. I work within a very liberal and open atmosphere, and as a result the dancers are great allies in my dance making. They are intuitive interpreters of the work that I imagine. It's this great trust that allows the work to flourish.* —Doug Varone

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### *Boats Leaving*

*Boats Leaving* is a work for eight dancers set to composer Arvo Pärt's *Te Deum*. It was commissioned by the [American Dance Festival](#) and premiered at the Festival in 2006.

#### **Watch**

**For insight into the creation of *Boats Leaving*, watch an interview with Doug Varone and company members online or on your DVD, entitled [Uncovering the Archives: Boats Leaving](#).**

Talking about a new process for creating *Boats Leaving*, Doug Varone said the following:

*"I began the process by just simply calling the dancers into the studio, picking up The New York Times that was sitting next to me, and locating photographs that I found intriguing—for whatever reason...if they had an emotional content—if there was an architectural element that I liked. So [the photographs] were from all sections of The New York Times--the front page, the international news, the sports section, the theater section. We used advertisements...I would take the photograph and assign everyone in the company a place, or a person, or a thing that then they needed to create with their bodies. So, in essence we were trying to form the photograph in its live, living shape rather than its photographic shape."*

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY



Photos: *Boats Leaving*, Bill Hebert

## VIEW

Study the selected photos from *Boats Leaving* on the previous page and watch video excerpts of the **opening section** and **second section** online or on your DVD.

## DISCUSS

What is the overall mood or tone of the piece?

What kinds of relationships can you see in the photos or videos of the dancers?

What images and shapes do you see that convey a theme or story? Why did Doug Varone title this piece *Boats Leaving*?

## WRITE

Choose three of the performance photographs to focus on and create your own narrative based on the sequence of the photos. Share with your peers and discuss the different interpretations of each person's story.

Combine photos with your partner and create a new sequence for your photos. In collaboration with your partner, write fictional captions to accompany each image. Decide the context of your photo essay and either write a story, short article, or blurb for your intended audience (*The New York Times*, *Vogue*, *Dance Magazine*, etc.).

Submit your writing to the [DanceMotion USA<sup>sm</sup> blog](#).

## ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

### For Dancers

Go on a hunt for evocative images from any section of *The New York Times*. Order the photos and practice recreating the group shapes (tableaus) from the photos as accurately as possible. In groups of five, collaborate to design tableaus based on each member's images. Sequence the tableaus and place them in different areas of the studio space. Then connect the tableaus with traveling transitions. Think about your theme and mood.

Find a piece of music to accompany your choreography. Share your music with each other. Discuss the merits of each piece of music. Film your dances to each piece of music and decide which music works best.

Decide on a title for your dance as a group. Share your dance with the class and discuss your choreographic choices. Use specific details and concrete evidence to support your choices.

## ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

### For Non-Dancers

Find 12 images that you find interesting from a magazine and/or newspaper. Bring these images to class and discuss the following:

What is it about each image that makes it interesting? Talk about the photograph's composition, i.e. the way in which the different parts that make up a photograph or picture are arranged.

What words would you use to describe the mood of each image?

Is there a message expressed explicitly (leaving no question as to meaning or intent) or implicitly (indicating or suggesting without being explicit) in the image? If so, what is the message and how is it conveyed through its composition?

Arrange the images in front of your class in a sequence from left to right in a way that tells a story. Explain why you put each image in its position and what part the image plays in telling the story.

### Common Core Connections

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1a

Come to discussions prepared and having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3c

Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3e

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

# ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

## At-Home Listening Activity

Listen attentively to **Philip Glass's *Music in Contrary Motion*** and **Arvo Pärt's *Te Deum*** and use the questions below to initiate a discussion in your classroom.

*Music in Contrary Motion* (1969) is a piece Doug Varone might have considered using to choreograph *Boats Leaving*. According to the quote cited above, Varone said: "I could make the dance to the Philip Glass score... it would not be a great challenge to me."

What might it have been about this music that "would not be a great challenge" to create choreography to? Cite specific musical elements, tempo, repetition, rhythm, etc. to support your answer.

What instrument do you hear in this recording of Glass's *Music in Contrary Motion*? Where would you expect to hear music like this? Who might be the intended audience?

Listen to Pärt's *Te Deum*, the work that Doug Varone chose for *Boats Leaving*.

What are some differences between Glass's piece and Pärt's piece? Cite specific musical elements such as instrumentation, rhythm, pitch, dynamics, i.e. relative volume of the music, and tempo. Consider the emotional impact the music may or may not have on the listener.

What might have been the challenge Varone faced in setting dance to this music? What does Arvo Pärt's *Te Deum* offer a choreographer that Glass's piece might not?

### COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

*Blueprint Dance: Developing Dance Literacy; Working with Community and Cultural Resources*

*Blueprint Music: Developing Music Literacy*



## BRENDA ANGIEL AERIAL DANCE COMPANY

**Brenda Angiel Aerial Dance Company** is based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Since 1994, the company has explored the rich realm of aerial dance. Brenda Angiel reinvents tango, hip-hop, and modern dance styles to a soundtrack written specially for every show. The dancers break boundaries of gravity, style, and structure, dancing against the walls, on the floor, and floating through the air.

Brenda Angiel Aerial Dance Company has performed extensively in Buenos Aires and throughout Argentina, as well as Puerto Rico, the Netherlands, Austria, Brazil, Columbia, Canada, the US, Mexico, and many other countries.

## ABOUT BRENDA ANGIEL

Brenda Angiel is the company's artistic director and choreographer. She has been a choreographer in residence at the **American Dance Festival** in Durham, North Carolina, and was twice selected for the festival's International Choreographers Commissioning Program. Angiel has received commissions to create work for the Contemporary Dance Company of Caxias do Sul, Brazil, as well as Wired Aerial Theatre in Liverpool, England. She is the founder of the first aerial dance school in Buenos Aires, and has led workshops in her unique style of airborne dance while on tour with her company.

*She is the most choreographically inventive aerial dancer I have encountered...in a tango the results are spectacular: sensuous and breathtaking...* —The New York Times

## AERIAL DANCE VOCABULARY

**Learn new vocabulary and engage with a new art form by investigating Brenda Angiel's philosophy and techniques of aerial dance.**

### READ

Read the following personal statement by Brenda Angiel.

*Over the last sixteen years I have been developing a new dance technique in order to find a new dance language that I call aerial dance. Aerial dance builds a lexicon within dance language rules. It creates a spatial illusion that calls for the spectator's perception process and allows him to transcend his static vision, giving place to a new point of view. Scenic space gains new dimensions.*

*A redefinition of choreographic decisions (time, space, movement, nature and order, as well as interpretive technique) takes place in aerial dance: the suspension of dancers by means of ropes (static or elastic) and rigging.*

*The outcome of this development was the layout of a personal intuitive aesthetics, where visual and kinetic pleasure is a fundamental part as well as the artistic risk featured by body exposure.*

*Finally, the aerial dance is not about flying but about expressing through movement other sensations, dimensions and energy.*

—Brenda Angiel

## ABOUT 8CHO

Pronounced "ocho," *8cho* is named after the famous eight tango step and for the rhythms that comprise the dance. The songs and steps of Argentine tango are reshaped by modern aerial movement. *8cho* made its premiere at the **Anfiteatro Parque Centenario** in Buenos in 2010.

## ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

### *8cho*

**Watch the three video excerpts from Angiel's work *8cho*—Solo, Trio, and Quartet—online or on your DVD.**

### DISCUSS

Engage in a discussion about the meaning of each aerial dance vocabulary word or concept.

### RESEARCH

Delve deeper into these concepts by visiting Brenda Angiel's [website](#), reading dance reviews, or investigating aerial dance further on the internet.

### GENERATE

Generate a list of questions to ask the dancers at the post-performance Q&A. For those watching online, submit your questions in advance on the [DanceMotion USA<sup>sm</sup> blog](#) and you could see your question answered live at BAM.

### AERIAL DANCE

The choreography of aerial dance incorporates an apparatus often attached to the ceiling (ropes or rigging) that allows dancers to explore the space in three-dimensions and changes the dancer's balance, center, and orientation in space. The ability to move along vertical as well as horizontal pathways allows for innovations in choreography and movement vocabulary. The apparatus used has its own motion, which changes the way a dancer must move in response.

### SCENIC SPACE

The space in which the performance takes place, created both by physical elements like lights and set, and by the movements of the dancers.

### SPATIAL ILLUSION

An appearance or effect that is different from the way things really are; transcending the physical boundaries of space and creating a visual illusion.

### SUSPENSION

Movement through positions instead of stopping and balancing in them. While in most dance forms suspension just means the elongation of a particular movement, in aerial dance suspension is literally about being suspended in air (forward, backward, or upside down).



## DANCEMOTION USA<sup>SM</sup>

**DanceMotion USA<sup>SM</sup>** is a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State, produced by BAM. Since 2010, the program has been sharing America's finest contemporary dance companies with international audiences and communities through a series of cultural exchange tours.

From February to May 2013, four dance companies made month-long tours, each to a different region of the world: Spectrum Dance Theater (Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka); Hubbard Street Dance Chicago (Algeria, Morocco, Spain); Illstyle & Peace Productions (Belarus, Russia, Ukraine); and Doug Varone and Dancers (Argentina, Paraguay, Peru).

On each of these tours, the dance companies partnered with US Embassies to present unique performances and education programs engaging and exchanging with local artists and communities. Participants used dance to break through language and cultural barriers, building profound connections and cross-cultural artistic partnerships.

In Doug Varone's case, the company's touring program included a performance exchange with Paraguay's world-famous **Recycled Orchestra**, a youth orchestra that performs on instruments made from landfill trash; a performance with lines around the block at Argentina's famous **Teatro General San Martín**; a lesson in Amazonian folk dance; and much, much more.

Each dance company posted blogs, photos, and videos throughout their journeys. Students can follow the companies' travels on the **DanceMotion USA<sup>SM</sup> blog** and explore highlights from the 2013 tours here.

[DanceMotionUSA.org](http://DanceMotionUSA.org)

[dancemotionusa.tumblr.com](http://dancemotionusa.tumblr.com)

[YouTube.com/dancemotionusa](http://YouTube.com/dancemotionusa)

## ABOUT THE US DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs promotes mutual understanding between the United States and other countries through international educational and exchange programs. Through its Cultural Programs Division, the Bureau supports a variety of cultural exchange programs that support US foreign policy, foster America's artistic excellence, and demonstrate America's respect and appreciation for other cultures and traditions.

BAM is proud to partner with the Bureau to continue to promote international mutual understanding through the arts.



Photo: Doug Varone, by Julie Lemberger

Whatever our cultural differences, the language of movement is one we can all understand. Dance allows us to cross boundaries of language and social structure, discover histories and traditions passed down through generations, and learn new, physically grounded ways to collaborate and work together.

Many dancers over the years have traveled on behalf of the US State Department to share American culture and build bridges abroad. In 1955, renowned modern dancer Martha Graham was the first dancer sent on a State Department tour. She traveled to Asia on the heels of the Cold War as part of Eisenhower's Emergency Fund. Companies led by Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, and José Limon, among other famous American dance artists, have all participated in dance diplomacy with the US Department of State since Graham's inaugural tour.

## ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

### Cultural Exchange

#### RESEARCH

Have students explore the DanceMotion USA<sup>SM</sup> [website](#) and [blog](#) and choose one of the following personal narrative blog posts about Doug Varone's South American tour. Ask them to read the post, paying special attention to the instances of cultural exchange mentioned, and the personal resonance of those moments:

- [Xan's narrative of the company's visit to Landfill Harmonic](#)
- [Julia's love letter to Buenos Aires](#)
- [Xan's recounting of the dancers getting their Mayan astrological signs read](#)
- [Two girls in Paraguay's video response to taking a class with Doug Varone's company \(in Spanish\)](#)
- [Lawrence's blog post on a bus traveling through Paraguay](#)

#### DISCUSS/WRITE:

How did performing and teaching in a new country affect the dancers in Doug Varone and Dancers? Choose an excerpt from the blog post you read that describes how the dancer's experience in South America changed his or her perspective. Or, if you chose the blog post of the two girls in Paraguay, pick one portion of their video response that describes how their cultural or artistic perspectives were impacted by taking class with Doug Varone.

- Based on the blog you read, what do think are the benefits of cultural exchanges like the ones DanceMotion makes possible?
- How can this kind of cultural exchange make a difference in the world?

#### Common Core Connections

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

*Blueprint Dance: Making Connections; Working with Community and Cultural Resources; Exploring Careers and Life-long Learning*

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Pre-Performance

### DISCUSS

What is distinctive about Doug Varone's modern dance style?  
What is distinctive about Brenda Angiel's aerial dance style?

### WRITE

Using your imagination and prior knowledge, what can you infer about the unknown and yet-to-be created work? Consider the artistic vision of both Doug Varone and Brenda Angiel and imagine how working across styles and cultures would influence their choreographic collaboration. Write a description of what you think their new work might look like. **Submit your final written piece to the [DanceMotion USA<sup>sm</sup> blog](#).**

### CHOREOGRAPH

Choreograph a dance inspired by one or both of the choreographers. Borrow shapes from photos, and steps or phrases from videos you watched. If you choose to create a work fusing both choreographic styles, then choose elements from each as well as shared concepts.

### SHARE

Justify your creative decisions based on the knowledge gained and collected, and be able to describe and defend your choices when you share your dance or writing.

### Common Core Connections

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

*Blueprint Dance: Dance-Making; Developing Dance Literacy; Making Connections; Working with Community and Cultural Resources; Exploring Careers and Life-long Learning*

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Post-Performance

### DISCUSS/WRITE:

Answer the following questions to reflect on all three works you experienced: *Boats Leaving*, *8cho*, and the new collaborative work.

- Describe the changing relationships between the dancers.
- What images and shapes did you see in the choreography that conveyed a theme or story? How did those images/shapes help the choreographer(s) convey his/her original intention for the piece?
- Cite one or more moments in each dance where the mood or tone shifts. What elements (lighting, choreography, and/or music) changed that created this shift in mood?
- Based on your preview of *Boats Leaving* and *8cho*, were there moments in the full dances that were still unexpected for you? Why or why not?
- Which dance was most enjoyable for you? Which choreographic devices or concepts did you see used that support your preference?
- Was the new collaborative work what you expected, based off your understanding of *Boats Leaving* and *8cho*? Could you identify the choreographer for each section? How?

### Common Core Connections

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

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*Blueprint Dance: Developing Dance Literacy; Making Connections; Working with Community and Cultural Resources*

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### **BAM Education & Humanities**

The mission of BAM Education & Humanities is to ignite imagination and ideas. Through programs that enrich the audience experience, spark conversation, and generate creative engagement, we turn the light on for curious minds.

BAM Education connects learning with creativity, engaging imagination by encouraging self-expression through in- and after-school arts education programming, workshops for students and teachers, school-time performances, and comprehensive school-break arts programs.

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Dancing Into the Future  
Shakespeare Teaches Students  
Shakespeare Teaches Teachers  
Young Shakespeare  
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