

Israeli Dance, *Specialty Track 1*

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| AUTHOR: | Erica Goldman |
| SUMMARY: | A session on learning some classic and modern Israeli dances, how to teach them, and how to teach aspects of Jewish and Israeli culture and history through Israeli dance. Additional emphasis on helping groups feel comfortable and included regardless of experience or skill will be included. - <i>Submitted by Erica Goldman</i> |
| TOPICS: | Camp-wide/Large Group Programs, Community Building, Dance and Movement, Global Jewish Community, Group Dynamics, Israel Programming, Jewish Culture, Jewish Values, Music and Rhythm |
| LEARNING OBJECTIVE: | Participants will learn some Israeli dances (both classics and modern ones), learn tips on how to teach them, ideas on how Israeli dance can be used as a ritualistic bonding activity for a camp group, and ideas on how Israeli dance can be used to teach aspects of Jewish and Israeli culture and history. |
| AUDIENCE: | Groups of more than six people, ages older than ten years old. All roles. |
| LENGTH: | 90-120 Minutes |
| APPENDICES: | Israeli dance specialty 1 handout.doc |
| MATERIALS NEEDED: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound system (speakers with ability to plug in ipod or computer). • Microphone if large crowd or large room. • <i>optional</i> - One copy of "Israeli dance specialty 1 handout.doc" for each participant |
| SETTING SUGGESTED: | Space free of tables or chairs. |

Session Description:

1. Simon Says Warm Up

Invite everyone to spread out in the room and face you for a quick game of Simon Says (with no “outs”; everyone keeps playing even after mistakes.) The idea is to get everyone moving a little bit and feeling comfortable moving. After a few minutes, ask if it really felt terrible when someone accidentally did the wrong movement or moved when they weren’t supposed to, and hopefully participants will say No, or it’s just a game, or it doesn’t really matter. Explain that Israeli dancing should feel the same way: there is no “cost” to doing the wrong step or using the wrong foot, it’s ok to make mistakes, and teach people the mantra: “You don’t have to know a dance to do a dance” – the communal idea of all folk dancing, including Israeli dance, is just to participate and learn as you go by following the leader (everyone around you) and having fun, more than focusing on getting it right or wrong. The idea is to play the game.

2. A few classic dances

Introduce the format of all three Israeli dance sessions: learning/doing a few Israeli dances followed by an activity and conversation, then some more dances, then another activity, and so on.

Teach: mayim step, with mention or eliciting that the word mayim means “water” and that the step flows continuously and smoothly in one direction like water. Teach “correct” way to hold hands at some point, with left hand over and right hand under, but no explanation yet of why. (Trick: where are the leftovers? They’re right under the bread!). Teach the dance Mayim Mayim and then do it with the music. Without stopping or teaching, lead the dance Nigun Atik, calling out instructions as necessary but during the dance, while the music is already playing. Stop after this one, teach the tzerchessia step, pointing out that it comes from the Caucasus Mountains in Russia (as does the word Caucasian) and that Circassians are a minority group living in Israel today, and teach and do the dance Od Lo Ahavti Dai.

3. You don’t have to know a dance to do a dance

Lead a short conversation about the experience of doing Nigun Atik without being taught it and how that felt, pointing out that anyone who didn’t know it at all at the beginning slowly learned it over the course of the dance and had mastered it by the end. Discuss what about these dances make them good “folk dances” and what folk dances are, including a) circle formation allows any number of people to join in b) holding hands help people who don’t know the steps to go in the right direction and learn what to do c) repetition makes it easier to learn, remember, practice d) simple steps so teaching in advance not necessary d) social aspect of circle allows everyone to see each other, feel physical connection to entire community, make eye contact with anyone else at any time, etc.

4. Two more easy circle dances

Teach and do Niguno Shel Yossi and Debka Kafrit, including the noises (like “shhhhh-tch-tch” in Debka Kafrit) and using “Cornerstone” and individual camp names during chanting parts.

5. Conversation about rituals and comfort [Fifteen Minutes]

Invite every one to sit down in a circle and will find out whose birthday is closest to that day. Declare today to be that person’s Cornerstone birthday and invite a few different people to explain how birthdays are celebrated at their camp, if they have particular rituals that every one knows. Lead a discussion on the ritualistic elements of birthdays and point out how campers find comfort in those rituals: they know exactly what to expect and what they need to do to participate. Ask participants to think of other ritualized moments at camp and how the “always the same” aspect makes the activity more enjoyable or comfortable (for example, maybe their Friday night services always start with Lecha Dodi and end with Adon Olam, or perhaps the order of meals from Monday-Friday is always the same...) Make the connection to dancing and how it may be scary the first time but it is very repetitive and therefore becomes comforting. Introduce concept of “division dances” or specific dances “owned” by different age groups or bunks or however it might work for a particular camp.

Key points are that that group should always start with that same dance, every single time, and that calling out words or making noises must be included. Explain how not everyone may get the steps right but everyone can say “Cornerstone” or “Yeah!” at the correct time and therefore they have opportunities to be included and have success (just like people who are bad at or uncomfortable singing can find success in clapping, for example, during a song session), mixing up relevant abilities, learning styles, etc. Invite participants to think of times at camp when doing their “bunk dance” might be a good way to warm up the group for another activity and help them feel comfortable, or energize them, or otherwise add a ritualistic moment to the course of a day at camp.

Do Debka Kafrit again, if there is time and group wants to, with ritualized aspects and vocal aspects now explicitly understood.

6. Two modern line dances

Teach the line dances Shemesh (aka Le’olam Be’ikvot Hashemesh, aka the Penguin Dance) and Or. Be sure to point out “Shemesh” means sun and “Or” means light and that the movement matches the movement on the word “Koach” (which means strength/power) in Or.

7. A mixer

Point out that there are three formations of dances in Israeli dance: circles, lines, and partners. Participants have already done some circles and lines and now they’ll learn a special kind of partner dance, one in which dancers switch partners every repetition – dances of this type are called “mixers”.

Teach and do Bim Bam Bom.

Additional Notes for Bringing it Back to Camp:

Israeli dancing can be used as a staff activity to introduce, teach, or reinforce the lesson of role modeling how to learn and how to act in community with others. Staff should be encouraged to go ahead and make mistakes in front of campers, so that campers see that mistakes don’t hurt and that they don’t stop the counselors from participating – it’s a great lesson for a camper to see a role model try something, make a mistake, try again, fail, laugh, improve, try again, succeed, etc. This process, and feeling comfortable with it, can be a more valuable lesson than the specific content.



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