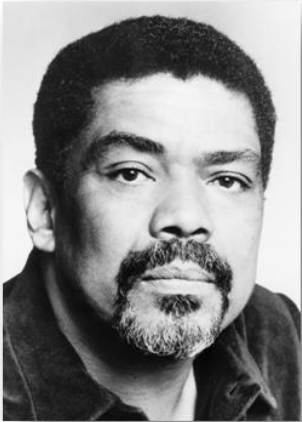


ALVIN AILEY

Gay Modern Dance Pioneer

(1931-1989)



Born in poverty in rural Texas, where racial segregation was still in full force, Alvin Ailey grew into a gifted choreographer who drew inspiration from African-American culture and went on to become an American icon. After serving as Artistic Director of his mentor Lester Horton's Dance Theater Company, and studying with Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and others, Ailey gathered together a group of black dancers and, in 1958, founded Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. In 1960 he debuted his choreographic masterpiece, *Revelations*. Inspired by his "blood memories" of Texas, the blues, spirituals and gospel, *Revelations* is believed to be one of the best-known and most often seen modern dance performances ever created. Ailey combined elements from ballet, modern, jazz, African ritual and contemporary dances. Each dancer's uniqueness was important to his choreography – a paradigm shift that brought concert dance into harmony with other forms of African-American expression. Though he sought to give black dancers opportunities they could not often find in other companies, Ailey took great pride in the multi-cultural composition of his company and quickly became a major force in modern dance, achieving worldwide popularity. Forced by the conventions of the time to be circumspect about his private life, Ailey nonetheless lived with integrity and was an inspiration to everyone who had the honor to meet and work with him. He received numerous honorary degrees, awards from the most prestigious dance organizations, NAACP's Spingarn Award, and the United Nations Peace Medal. In 1988, one year before his death from AIDS-related illness, Ailey received the Kennedy Center Honor in recognition of his extraordinary contribution to American culture. In its obituary, *The New York Times* said, "You didn't need to have known Ailey personally to have been touched by his humanity, enthusiasm and exuberance and his courageous stand for multi-racial brotherhood."

Lesson Plan

Level 1: Contributions Approach

1. Activate prior experience: Before today, what do you know about Alvin Ailey?
2. Read the biographical information.
3. Group Discussion: What is his most significant contribution Alvin Ailey has made to dance?
4. Extend knowledge: What were the challenges Ailey faced in trying to start his dance company?

Level 2: Additive Approach

1. Website Investigation: Explore the following:
<http://legacyprojectchicago.org/Dance.html>
How did these GLBT nominees contribute to the field of dance and how does this connect to your study of the arts in your education.
2. Connect your findings to the website of Alvin Ailey American Dance Site at <http://www.alvinailey.org/>
3. Prepare an historical timeline reflecting the accomplishments and society/history milestones of Alvin Ailey and his dance movement.

Level 3: Transformational Approach

1. Describe what personal challenges may have caused Alvin Ailey to become circumspect on his personal life.
2. How has society recognized his accomplishments and made him a role model for other dancers today?
3. In what ways has reading about or viewing Alvin Ailey's company (<http://vimeo.com/channels/ailey>) changed your own vision of what you can accomplish today?
4. Demonstrate your findings regarding these changes through a visual or dance interpretation for your group.

Level 4: Social Action Approach

1. Extend your personal understanding of how you can be touched by "humanity, enthusiasm and exuberance for multi-racial brotherhood."
2. Based upon your own experiences and the example of Alvin Ailey's life, what actions would you take to build a "multiracial brotherhood."