



# EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



## CONTRA-TIEMPO *joyUS justUS*

This guide is geared toward teachers of grades 3 - 8

Supported by:



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## About This Guide

Use this guide to help your students anticipate, investigate, and reflect upon your live performance experience. This guide is geared toward teachers of grades 3 - 8.

### IN THIS GUIDE

|           |                                    |
|-----------|------------------------------------|
| <b>3</b>  | Introducing the Performance        |
| <b>4</b>  | What To Expect                     |
| <b>5</b>  | Being an Audience Member           |
| <b>6</b>  | Essential Questions                |
| <b>9</b>  | Pre-Performance Lesson Activities  |
| <b>11</b> | Post-Performance Lesson Activities |
| <b>13</b> | Additional Resources               |
| <b>14</b> | About Portland Ovation             |
| <b>15</b> | Student Response Form              |
| <b>17</b> | Teacher Response Form              |

The great thing about the arts is that they can often evolve to meet their context. That means that many of the activities shared are flexible to a lot of different contexts depending on how you choose to frame them in your class. We know you all are experts on your classroom and students, so we invite you to use these lessons and activities as guideposts and adapt them to fit your classroom management style, range of student ability, and time constraints.

#### LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Social Studies: Latine art and culture, civic responsibility

Social-Emotional Learning: Taking others' perspectives, Understanding and expressing gratitude

Dance: Latine Social Dance, Contemporary Dance

#### LEARNING STANDARDS ICON KEY



DANCE



21ST CENTURY  
SKILLS

**Educators**, we invite you to share with us what you did in your classroom around this guide or the production. You can email [eschildkret@portlandovations.org](mailto:eschildkret@portlandovations.org) or reach us via [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

We want to hear and see what great learning is happening in your classrooms.



## Introducing the Performance

It is often helpful to share some context with your students before they attend a live performance. Read below for more information on the performance you're coming to see.

### About the Performance

*joyUS justUS* is a participatory Activist Dance Theater experience that takes on joy as the ultimate expression of resistance. Whenever humans have survived immense hardship and injustice, prevailing with their humanity intact, the presence of joy or, the knowingness and celebration of our true beauty and power has always been at the root. *joyUS justUS* reclaims the dominant deficit-based narrative of people of color in this country being underprivileged, voiceless, powerless, and victimized, and flips it on its head by embodying stories of joy collected from communities of color in South Los Angeles. The stories shared in this work are personal truths about the power of hope, faith, and family, the strength of the villages that have raised our children and the wealth that lives in our collective histories of struggle and resistance.

These truths are embodied through the technically rigorous social dance forms that were born out of these experiences, that are at the root CONTRA-TIEMPO's Urban Latin Dance technique, and that are the physical embodiment of that most powerful, healing joy. Through the conversations with South LA communities, retelling stories through movement on the concert stage, inviting audiences locally and nationally to actively participate in what they're experiencing on the stage, and continuing to engage broader audiences in the telling of their own truths, CONTRA-TIEMPO creates spaces of joy and healing, allowing the collective "us" to feel more connected, loved, powerful, and alive.

### About the Company

CONTRA-TIEMPO is a multilingual, L.A.-based dance-theatre company that combines physical virtuosity and political analysis. Bringing together salsa, Afro-Cuban, hip hop, and contemporary dance with theatre, text, and original music, CONTRA-TIEMPO embodies multiplicity and multi-disciplinarity. The company believes that our power comes from our relationships as human beings, and that art, engagement, and education are ways that we connect, build, and grow.

CONTRA-TIEMPO's vision: To create, through the transformative power of dance, communities where all people are awakened to a sense of themselves as artists and social change agents who move through the world with compassion and confidence.

CONTRA-TIEMPO's mission: To create physically intense and politically astute Urban Latin Dance Theatre work that moves audiences to reimagine what is possible, and to engage communities as active participants and witnesses of arts experiences tied to their humanity

## What To Expect

### The Performance

- The performance is 60 minutes long
- The performance uses different styles of dance like salsa, hip-hop, Afro-Cuban dance and contemporary dance to tell stories collected from people in South Los Angeles.
- Dancers perform solo, in groups, and as a full company. They dance and speak poetry.

### The Sound

- The music includes original compositions of drumming, salsa, and hip-hop.
- Dancers perform to live drumming, recorded music, and to recorded interviews with community members.
- You'll hear both Spanish and English.
- Sometimes the dancers will speak out loud.

### The Lights

- The production uses dramatic theatrical lighting to enhance the tone of each piece.
- Dance lighting may seem darker than other types of theatrical lighting. You'll often see the dancers illuminated from the side. These lights help you to see their movements in different ways.
- The stage may go fully dark at times.

### Resources

- Plan your visit to Merrill Auditorium: <https://portlandovations.org/about/accessibility-merrill-auditorium/>
- Learn more about accessibility at Portland Ovation: [portlandovations.org/about/accessibility/](https://portlandovations.org/about/accessibility/)



*Photos by Steve Wylie*

## Being an Audience Member

An audience member is a part of a larger community – an audience - and you all work together to create your theater experience. Audience members play a special and important role in the performance. The performers are very aware of the audience while they perform. Sharing their hard work and joy with you is one of the best parts of being a performer. Each performance calls for different audience responses. Lively bands, musicians and dancers may desire audience members to clap and move to the beat. Other performers require silent focus on the stage and talking from the audience can be distracting. A theater is designed to magnify sound and even the smallest whispers can be heard throughout the auditorium. CONTRA-TIEMPO highly encourage audience participation, and may invite you to clap and move along with them from your seat.

As you enjoy the show, think about being a part of the performance.

- What are the differences between attending a live performance and going to a movie or watching television?
- What are some different types of live performances? How many can you name?
- What kind of responses might an audience give to different types of performances?
- What are the different cues that a performer will give you so that you know how to respond? For example, might they bow or pause for applause?



*The interior of Merrill Auditorium*



## Essential Questions

### How did CONTRA-TIEMPO create *joyUS justUS*?

CONTRA-TIEMPO has deep connections to their community in South Los Angeles, and follow a unique creative process that involves collaboration between dancers and community members. The initial idea for *joyUS justUS* came from choreographer and artistic director, Ana Maria Alvarez. In describing her goal for the piece, Alvarez said:

*I had a dream about creating an epic piece that centered around joy — and not just joy as in happiness, but as this profound birthright — the thing we are all really fighting for! I had no idea what it would look like, I just knew that the next piece we created needed to center around joy, radical joy! We began a partnership with a community coalition, a 30-year-old advocacy organization in southern Los Angeles, and began a weekly practice of community “Get Downs,” or “Sabor Sessions,” where we practiced joy like a muscle — even when it felt hard. Out of these sessions came the journey of questions: What is radical joy? How can joy be a powerful tool, or even a weapon, to build a more loving and just society? What can be done with a culture that treats joy as a commodity or a privilege and how can we reclaim joy as a birthright? How can that image reframe and reimagine our future?*

- Interview with Ana Maria Alvarez and Arizona State University News, February 2020



To create *joyUS justUS*, CONTRA-TIEMPO engaged in conversations with South L.A. communities, gathering stories of joy and resistance, shared their own stories and then embodied those stories through choreography and performance. They used a process called “devising”—a creative technique that relies on equitable collaboration between artists rather than following a single director or choreographer—to create a piece about reframing our relationship with nature and therefore with ourselves. The dance-theatre company collaborated with each other, with community members (including a group of teenagers), and with a team of brilliant artists to create a truly participatory, interdisciplinary work.



**WATCH:** Learn more about CONTRA-TIEMPO’s creative process in this video about *joyUS justUS*

## Why use the term Latine or Latinx?

In Spanish, nouns are gendered male and female. Nouns ending in “o” are usually (though not always) gendered male, and nouns ending in “a” are usually (though not always) gendered female. Latinx and Latine are both gender neutral ways to refer collectively to Latino/Latina people. They allow for the possibility to refer collectively to a group of people without assuming gender, and without imposing a gender binary. While Latinx has been in use for many years in the United States, many now prefer the term “Latine,” as “Latinx” is not easily pronounced in Spanish and “e” is a more common gender neutral ending for Spanish speakers.

## What are the key elements of dance?

Dance is the movement of the human body through space in time using energy. Dancers use movement to express emotions, ideas, relationships, stories, and beliefs. There are five key elements to look for as you watch the performance. You can remember these elements using the acronym, B.A.S.T.E:

**Body:** the awareness of specific body parts and how they can be moved in isolation and combination.

*Body Shape:* curving, angling, twisting

*Body Parts:* arms, legs, head, feet, hands, torso

**Action:** Movement that either travels across the floor (locomotor) or stays in place (non-locomotor). When more than one dancer is involved, actions can be leading or following.

*Locomotor:* walk, run, leap, hop, skip, slide, etc. (anything that moves from one point to another)

*Non-locomotor:* bend, twist, gesture (anything that does not move from one point to another)

**Space:** the physical space the body moves through, the direction of movements, and the shapes, levels, and patterns of a group of dancers.

*Levels:* low, medium, high

*Direction:* forward, backward, diagonal, sideways

*Focus:* straight, curved, open, closed, peripheral

**Time:** An element of music and dance. It includes beat, tempo, accent, and duration

*Beat:* patterned, counted

*Tempo:* fast, medium, slow

*Accent:* sharp, smooth

*Duration:* long, short

**Energy:** The force applied to dance to accentuate the weight, attack, strength, and flow of a dancer’s movement

*Quality:* strong, light, soft, sudden, sustained, free, bound



## PRE-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Here are some ideas for lesson activities that expand on the essential questions, topics, and themes of *joyUS justUS*.

### Glossary

Here are some ideas for lesson activities that expand on the essential questions, topics, and themes of *joyUS justUS*.

**Abstract:** not depicting something in its original or literal form, but showing the essence of the idea or object.

**Axial Movement:** A way of moving the body without traveling or moving through space; staying in one spot. Also called non-locomotor movement.

**Choreography:** The arrangement of movement in space and time. A series of pre-planned movements set to music, poetry, text, or sometimes silence.

**Contemporary Dance:** A style of expressive dance that combines elements of several dance genres including, but not limited to modern, jazz, and hip-hop.

**Duet:** a dance for two people, also sometimes called a pas de deux.

**Dynamics:** Similar to the way the term is used in music, the style or manner by which dancers execute movement. (i.e. big, small, jagged, smooth.)

**Ensemble:** A group of dancers performing together.

**Excerpt:** A part of a choreographed dance, not the whole dance.

**Levels:** Utilizing different height ranges such as low, medium, and high movement.

**Repertory:** Choreographed dances actively performed together by a company.

**Solo:** A dance performed alone (one dancer) or set apart from the other dancers on stage.

**Spatial pattern:** The way dancers move through the dance space and the group designs dancers make onstage.

**Technique:** A set of skills which dancers develop to perform a certain dance form or style.

**Tempo:** As in music, the speed or pace of the movement.

**Trio:** A dance for three people.

**Unison:** The same movement or series of movements performed at the same time by more than one dancer.

## ACTIVITY: Partner Images

Practice using the elements of dance (BASTE) in this simple activity.

*Note: this activity can be combined with the post-show activity 'Flocking' (pg 12) for a deeper exploration of dance elements.*

### Materials:

Room for students to create shapes in pairs or small groups.

### Procedure:

1. Divide the class into pairs. Decide who will be Partner A and who will be Partner B.
2. Invite Partner A to create a shape with their body. The shape should be non-locomotor (ie: it stays in one place).
3. Once Partner A has created their shape and frozen, give Partner 1 a moment to observe the shape, noting the space their partner's body uses.
4. Invite Partner 1 to add to the shape by connecting with the space around their partner's body.
5. Once Partner 1 has joined the shape and frozen, invite partner A to step away, observe the new shape, and connect to the space around Partner 1's body in a new way.
6. This activity can continue in pairs, or pairs can combine with other groups to create larger shapes. Remind students to consider levels, direction, and focus as they create their shapes. Afterwards, reflect on how students used the elements of BASTE to create new shapes with their bodies and their partners.

### Reflection

- What was it like to create shapes together? What kinds of shapes did we create?
- How did you incorporate the elements of BASTE in your shapes?
- Where do you think we might see these elements in the performance?



## POST-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

### Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. How did you feel when you were watching the dancers move? What parts of the performance stood out to you the most?
2. How would you describe the performance to someone who hasn't seen it?
3. What themes or symbols did you notice in the performance? What did you see that specifically led you to that conclusion? Did any of those themes repeat in different ways throughout the show?
4. Did any of the movement or music remind you of something you have experienced before? If so, what did they remind you of?





## ACTIVITY: Flocking

Flocking is an expansion of the mirror exercise, where one partner leads and the other follows. Using similar strategies, flocking allows for larger groups to explore movement together with their full bodies. It requires cooperation and creativity from participants, making it an excellent way to explore the elements of dance with students with a wide range of experience in movement. It can be done in groups of 4 or more. You can even involve the whole class in a single “flock.” As with mirroring, the object of this activity is to cooperate with leading and following so it looks like everyone is moving as one.



*Note: this activity can be combined with the pre-show activity ‘Partner Images’ (pg 10) for a deeper exploration of dance elements*

### Materials:

None

### Procedure:

1. Invite students to stand in a group, all facing the same direction. They should have enough room to move without touching one another. If working in groups of 4, students should stand in a diamond shape, with one at the front, two at the sides, and one at the back (all facing the same direction).
2. The individual at the front of the group is the first leader of the movement. Remind the leader to move slowly and deliberately so that their motions are easy to follow, and to move in ways the whole group can participate in.
3. After students have had an opportunity to follow the leader, invite the group to shift direction to the right, left or back (the whole group should move together so that they are still all facing the same direction). Now the group has a new leader. Invite the new leader to continue moving slowly and deliberately in their own way.
4. Shift direction 2 more times until all four group members have had a chance to be the leader. Invite students to practice shifting direction and movement fluidly. Consider the elements of dance (BASTE), and find ways to vary Body, Action (can you flock with both locomotor and non-locomotor movements?), Space (levels are particularly fun to play with), Time, and Energy.

### Reflection

- What did you notice about yourself in this activity? What did you notice about us together as a group?
- How did we work together as a group in this activity?
- What did you notice about being the leader of the group? What were some of the characteristics of being a good leader?
- What did you notice about being a follower? What were some of the skills you had to use to be a good follower?
- Where did you see these skills in the dancers of CONTRA-TIEMPO? Where might we use them in our work together as a class?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Learn more about CONTRA-TIEMPO and *joyUs justUS*:  
[www.contra-tiempo.org/joyusjustus](http://www.contra-tiempo.org/joyusjustus)
- Read a blog post about CONTRA TIEMPO'S creative process by Director/Choreographer Ana Maria Alvarez  
[www.contra-tiempo.org/blog/2019/2/26/the-creative-process-is-a-mess-by-ana-maria-alvarez](http://www.contra-tiempo.org/blog/2019/2/26/the-creative-process-is-a-mess-by-ana-maria-alvarez)
- Watch an hour-long conversation with Ana Maria Alvarez about CONTRA-TIEMPO, filmed at Jacob's Pillow:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRmsbvMasDg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRmsbvMasDg)
- Read an interview with Ana Maria Alvarez about joyUs justUS:  
[news.asu.edu/20200206-conversation-contra-tiempo%E2%80%99s-founding-artistic-director-ana-maria-alvarez](http://news.asu.edu/20200206-conversation-contra-tiempo%E2%80%99s-founding-artistic-director-ana-maria-alvarez)
- Watch four minutes of excerpts from *joyUS justUS*:  
<https://youtu.be/PXUb45p3npQ>
- Read an article on CONTRA-TIEMPO:  
<https://stanceondance.com/2024/04/01/ana-maria-alvarez-contra-tiempo/>
- Watch the Portland Ovation interview with CONTRA-TIEMPO led by Brian J. Evans  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOMM5xIYC08](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOMM5xIYC08)

## ABOUT PORTLAND OVATIONS

**Portland Oventions**, founded in 1931, produces dynamic performing arts events including classical music, jazz, opera, dance, theater, and Broadway. We believe that cultural enrichment should be high quality and accessible to all. Oventions collaborates with other nonprofit organizations, education systems, and the business sector to promote lifelong learning while celebrating the power and virtuosity of the performing arts. We bring the exhilaration of the performing arts into our communities with free events as part of Oventions Offstage, connecting artists and audiences. Join us at unexpected “art happenings,” classroom workshops, masterclasses, community discussions, and pre-performance lectures to explore together the relevance and connection of the performing arts to our lives.

### Land Acknowledgment

Portland Oventions’ programs are presented on Wabanaki land, home of the Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Abenaki and Penobscot Nations, their elders past and present, and future generations.

We encourage you to learn more and take action in support of Maine’s Indigenous communities through the following organizations

#### [Abbe Museum](#)

*Maine’s premier museum dedicated to indigenous history and culture. Their mission is to inspire new learning about the Wabanaki Nations with every visit.*

#### [Maine-Wabanaki Reach](#)

*A Native-led non-profit that supports the self-determination of Wabanaki people through education, truth-telling, restorative justice, and restorative practices in Wabanaki and Maine communities.*

Created and written by Dr. Liz Schildkret

Designed by Katie Day

© Portland Oventions 2025



---

We want to know what  thought about the performance. You can write your answers below or draw a picture on the back of this page. Thank you!

PERFORMANCE  : *joyUS justUS*

SCHOOL NAME

May we use your name  share your comments

---

What did you  *joyUS justUS*  did you like that part

---

---

---

---

It was something that you learned during the performance?

---

---

---

---

What would you like to tell other kids about *joyUS justUS*

---

---

---

What types of performance would you like Portland Oventions to offer in the future? (Feel free to share what type of art you are interested in (theater, dance, music), what cultures you might like to see, what topics the art might connect with, or specific artists.)

---

---

MAIL RESPONSES TO: Portland Oventions 120 Exchange St Portland, ME 04101  
EMAIL SCANNED RESPONSES TO: [offstage@portlandovations.org](mailto:offstage@portlandovations.org)

We want to know what thought about the performance.

Draw a picture of a part of

*joyUS justUS* that you liked. Thank you!



---

Please scan and email to [offstage@portlandovations.org](mailto:offstage@portlandovations.org) or mail to Portland Ovations 120 Exchange St Portland, ME 04101

Please take a few moments to fill out this survey after you attend the performance. You can also [online here](#). Your response provides valuable insight on the impact, accessibility, and relevancy of the School Time Performance Series and will allow us to improve and strengthen the program. Thank you.

PERFORMANCE *joyUS justUS* February 6, 2025

TEACHER NAME \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE(S) OF STUDENTS \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ CITY/TOWN: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

From your perspective as a teacher, how would you rate *joyUS justUS*

- 

. What made this a valuable experience for your students? (If it wasn't, what can we do

\_\_\_\_\_ was your primary reason for choosing to bring your students to *joyUS justUS*

- wanted my students to experience the performing arts.
- he performance \_\_\_\_\_ with my curriculum goals.
- date and time \_\_\_\_\_ performance fit our schedule.
- he ticket price \_\_\_\_\_
- ther (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

How did this live performance connect to or enhance your curriculum?

Did you use the Educators Guide provided by Portland Ovation before or after the performance

Why or why not?



. How would you rate the following components of attending the School Time Performance?

|                                |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                                |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Reserving & paying for tickets | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Communication performance      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Arrival at the                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Departure from                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

What types of performances would you like to bring your students to in the future?  
free to share art forms, topics/themes, specific artists, etc

A number of individuals and organizations make it possible for Portland Oventions these School Time Performance tickets at extremely discounted rates. Is there anything you'd like them to know in terms of your experiences or its impact on your students?