

Alice
by MOMIX

Flynn Student Matinee Study Guide



Table of Contents:

About the Creators
The Inspiration: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
Decoding the Show
What is Dance Theatre?
Reflection Questions
Resources

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About the Creators

"[MOMIX is] imagery in motion."
– Artistic Director Moses Pendleton

This show was created by MOMIX, a dance company which was founded in 1980 by Moses Pendleton. Pendleton is a director and choreographer who has worked in the worlds of dance, film, TV, and opera. As he puts it, "I continue to be interested in using the human body to investigate non-human worlds."



An image from the MOMIX show "Millennium Skiva"

MOMIX has performed across the world, creating works that are both physical and visual, drawing on imagery from nature and exploring how to translate those images through the human body. The performers of MOMIX are called "dancer-illusionists" because of the way they create seemingly impossible

or magical images and movements through the combination of dance, acrobatics, costuming, and imaginative props that extend imagery beyond the human body. MOMIX has a movement style that spans ballet, modern dance, and athleticism – for example, one of their past shows called "Millennium Skiva" is performed entirely on skis!

Pendleton first made a name for himself in 1971 when he co-founded the dance theatre company Pilobolus, which incorporates acrobatics and abstract theater into the world of contemporary dance.

Though Pendleton left Pilobolus in 1980, the company is still touring and performing – you can get a sense for their style in [this video here!](#)

And – fun local fact! – Pendleton was born and raised on a dairy farm in Lyndonville, Vermont. The name "MOMIX" means, as Pendleton puts it, "a mix by Moses," but it was also the name of a high-protein supplement he fed to calves on the farm when he was growing up.



You'll spot Alice in the show by her flowy white dress!

The Inspiration: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*



An illustration from the first edition of the novel in 1865

In 1865, Charles Lutwidge Dodson – under the pen name Lewis Carroll – published the children’s book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* which became one of the most well-known works of Victorian literature (literature from England during the reign of Queen Victoria, 1837-1901). In the story, a young girl named Alice drifts into a daydream while sitting by a river-bank one day, and follows a talking white rabbit down a rabbit-hole and into the whimsical, fantastical world of Wonderland where she meets all sorts of speaking animals, animated playing cards, and odd people who don’t operate under the rules of formal, polite society with which she is familiar.

The book has been translated into 174 languages and the story has been adapted into films, radio, opera, ballet, musicals, theme parks, board games, video games, and more. Lewis Carroll published a sequel in 1871 titled

Through the Looking-Glass, and both books serve as inspirational source material for MOMIX’s *Alice*.

MOMIX’s artistic director Moses Pendleton has been fascinated with Alice and the world of Wonderland ever since he first saw the 1951 Disney animated film.

Decoding the Show

In the MOMIX show, you’ll meet many characters from the original story – including the White Rabbit, the Caterpillar, the Queen of Hearts, Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, and the Mad Hatter – though they might not all look the way you’d expect!

For example, the character of Alice is played not by one performer, but by all five of the female dancers at different points in the show. You’ll always be able to spot the character



This is what the Caterpillar looks like in the show! Can you see it?

based on her costume – no matter who’s playing her, she’ll be wearing a flowy white dress! The show is made up of 22 dance pieces, and only eight performers create all this magic, changing characters and costumes throughout the show.

You also won’t hear any spoken language in the show – the story of Alice entering Wonderland, encountering different characters, and trying to find her way home, will all be communicated through movement, music, video projection, costumes, and props.

What is Dance Theatre?

As a genre of performance, dance theatre is not easy to define. It can be thought of as a movement-based performance style that creates worlds and tells stories through the physical bodies of the performers as well as their relationship to each other and the audience. Sometimes dance theatre includes spoken text (but not always), sometimes it includes music (but not always), sometimes it tells a narrative story... and sometimes, it is more abstract.

Different artists who work in the medium of dance theatre explain and define it differently. Annie-B Parson, the Artistic Director of Big Dance Theater in NYC, says, “I don’t know why dance and theater ever separated in the first place. Since the ancient Greeks, they’ve been united.”

The evolution of contemporary dance theater is often traced to German artists in the early 1900s who developed a form of expressionist dance which was interested in expressing the emotion and spirit of the dancers. This came in response to traditional ballet and other art forms which were perceived as formal and rigid.

[Isadora Duncan](#), an American dancer and choreographer working in the early 1900s, was an enormous influence on forming the expressionist kind of modern dance that led to dance theatre. She wrote, “let them come forth with great strides, leaps and bounds, with lifted forehead and far-spread arms, to dance.” She was interested in natural, free, expressive movement that existed outside of the formality of ballet technique, and in connecting emotions with movement.

After World War I, Expressionist movements emerged across many art forms in response to the global upheaval caused by the war. Artists were interested in exploring raw human emotion and personal experience, rather than sticking to traditional styles that were formal, rigid, or naturalistic.



Isadora Duncan in 1899



[Pina Bausch](#), a German dancer and choreographer working primarily in the 1960s and 1970s, was a prominent figure in the world of dance theatre. As a choreographer her work was known for her stylized and theatrical pieces that were bursting with emotion. She said of her dancers, “I’m not so interested in how they move as in what moves them.”

Dancers performing Pina Bausch's piece "Vollmond"

Reflection Questions

Here are some example questions to prompt deeper engagement from your students, both before and after the show:

Before the Show:

- Have you ever been to a theater before? What are some ways an audience is expected to behave in a theater that are different from how you behave in other places you go for entertainment, like a movie theater?
- When you think about dance theatre, what comes to mind?
- What do you know or remember of the story *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*? What are some images or characters you expect you might see?

After the Show:

- How did the show meet or break your expectations of dance theatre?
- How did the show make you feel? Was there a specific moment when it caused an emotional reaction in you? How did it do that? What did the show make you think about?
- In theatre, symbolism is the use of one or more objects to represent something else. The object may represent an idea, a feeling, or a physical entity. Symbols allow theater makers to convey messages to audiences that would be difficult to communicate through dialogue or action alone. Did you see any symbolism in the show?
- If you were to write a review of the show, what would you say? What stood out to you? Would you recommend it to other people? Why?
- What was a moment that seemed magical or impossible? What surprised you in the show? How did the show make you feel at a few different moments?
- What costume or use of props was most surprising or exciting to you?

Resources

- Momix *Alice* Trailer
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwqNyozwG0o>
- Pilobolus Trailer
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6pucQ9jNT8>
- Pina Bausch “Vollmond” Clip
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnUesmL-1CQ&t=87s>
- Isadora Duncan Dancers Clip
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kq2GgIMM060>
- Article in Dance Magazine “What is Dance Theater?”
<https://www.dancemagazine.com/dance-theater/>