

# ***WHAT FOREST KNOWS: DANCING A STORY***

Rayma K. Beal, EdD

University of Kentucky

[Rayma.beal@uky.edu](mailto:Rayma.beal@uky.edu)

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George Ella Lyon is a well known Kentucky writer, novelist, poet and teacher who lives in Lexington. She grew up at the headwaters of the Cumberland River in eastern Kentucky. George Ella is active in the movement to stop mountaintop removal coal mining and its devastating effect on Appalachian land, lives and water. She is informed by the Appalachian environment and writes to enlighten her readers so they respect and revere the land. She is the author of books for students of all ages and several are suitable for creating dances based on stories that stimulate creative movement: ***All the Water in the World, Weaving the Rainbow, Here and Then: A Civil War Time-Travel*** and her newest just released ***What Forest Knows***. As an artist in schools George Ella conducts workshops and residencies all over Kentucky and outside to the surrounding states. To contact her for work at your school or to review the list of her books go to her web-site: [www.georgeellealyon.com](http://www.georgeellealyon.com).

***What Forest Knows*** by George Ella Lyon explores the four seasons through the creatures of the forest. This book is a natural connection to literature, science, dance and physical education. The rhythm of the words are stimuli for creating movement phrases. Using this narrative, we can make a story come alive through dance.

Think about making a sentence. It has a beginning, middle and end. Movement phrases are similar to sentences since they have a beginning, middle and end too. From many sentences, paragraphs are developed that become an essay or story. Dance is made from phrases that connect through transitions to express the idea---the words of ***What Forest Knows*** informs the movements. The movements are student created and teacher facilitated in the development of this dance.

### **Objectives for Dance Lesson-Narrative/Story Dance**

Students should be able to express and incorporate the following skills during this lesson: (skills are based on Anne Green Gilbert's: ***Creative Dance for All Ages***.)

#### Movement Skills

- Convey storyline through movement
- Combine a series of movement to form patterns
- Increase personal movement vocabulary

#### Cognitive Skills

- Focus on a task and give positive input
- Effectively use brainstorming techniques

Recall a sequence of movement patterns

### Choreographic/Creative Process

Demonstrate innovation and creativity while exploring movement

Create movements that portray words, thoughts and ideas

Apply choreographic concepts to express ideas non-verbally through dance

### Social Skills

Demonstrate self-direction and self-discipline

Work effectively in a small group

Contribute to the group effort in an interested positive manner

### **Accompaniment:**

Say the words while moving;

Say the words before moving;

Make body percussion sounds with hands or feet;

The Four Seasons by Antonio Vivaldi: La Primavera (Spring), L'Estate (Summer), L'Autunno (Autumn), L'Inverno (Winter).

**Movements:** Locomotors-walk, grapevine, tiptoe, slide; Non-locomotors-bend, push, stretch, carve, float, rise and fall.

**Dance Elements:** **Space**-shape, directions, pathways, range; **Time**-slow, medium, fast tempos; **Force**-smooth----sharp, light----strong.

Selected words and phrases from ***What Forest Knows***

a. Forest knows waiting holding on.

Forest knows buds, soft life pushing through hard wood.

b. Forest knows waking, opening up.

Forest knows leaves held out like hands, cupping sunlight turning it to food, reaching, stretching.

c. Forest knows growing, going forth,

Forest knows fruit---berries, nuts, cones to seed new trees and feed forest folk through winter.

- d. Forest knows gathering in, letting go.

Then Forest knows snow.

- e. Make friends with a path threading through woods

Listen. Look.

Forest knows everything belongs.

Divide into four groups using each phrase to create movements that relate to the words. Decide on what kind of accompaniment and practice with the phrase.

Think about the dance elements that will clearly make the movement phrases convey the ideas, explore different elements and incorporate them.

Perform the four group phrases and all join in developing the last phrase together. Think about when and how the group should travel for the ending.

Use feedback from observers to improve phrases and make the sure movements are not pantomime!