

## Dances around the World

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# The Argentine Tango

by ReadWorks



*Two dancers dancing the tango*

The Argentine Tango is not like many other dances. When the dance first formed in the mid-1800s, it focused on improvisational and interpretive movements.

This lack of strict form appealed to the lower-economic communities of Argentina's capital city, Buenos Aires. People would dance the tango in dance halls and other places where the lower class socialized.

So how was such a fun and popular dance created? There are many stories as to how the dance came to be. In the mid-1800s, Argentina was receiving many immigrants. This increase in immigrants created a melting pot of culture, music, and dance. The tango was born out of this melting pot. It is believed that the tango began to form when African rhythms met fast-paced polka dancing.

The tango eventually spread out of Argentina. As the dance grew in popularity, some of the rich began to dance it as well. These wealthy people introduced the dance to the people in Paris. Soon, the Argentine tango spread to other cities around the world. People all over the world loved the tango and wanted to hear and dance more of it.

Today, the tango is danced all around. Even in ballroom competitions!

## Gumboot Dance from South Africa



CIA World Factbook

Map of South Africa

*How did gumboot dancing come to be? The story begins in South Africa.*

In the 1900s, the government in South Africa had a system of laws that kept white and non-white people apart. This system was called apartheid. Under the laws of apartheid, most of the land in South Africa was kept for white people. Because of these laws, many black South Africans were forced to leave their land in rural areas. Some of these black South Africans ended up working in gold mines for white bosses.

The conditions in the gold mines were terrible. The work was long, hard, and often dangerous. Workers were treated poorly. Many were forced to wear ankle chains. And the floors of the mines were often flooded with water, which could cause disease. To deal with the water problem, supervisors had the workers wear tall rubber boots - gumboots.

Workers were often not allowed to talk to each other in the mines. So they used their gumboots to communicate. They would slap their boots, stomp their feet, and even rattle their chains to communicate with each other. This is how gumboot dancing was born.

Gumboot dancing involved rhythmic, percussive moves. The dancers used their bodies as the drum, making noise with their boots and hands. They drew from their traditional dances and rhythms to make new movements and songs. The songs that went along with their dances often had to do with the difficulties of their work lives.

Apartheid ended in the 1990s. Since then, gumboot dancing has thrived in South Africa and beyond. This unique rhythmic dance has inspired dancers and musicians around the world.

## China's Lion Dance



*Lion dance performed in Singapore*

If you have ever seen a celebration of the Chinese New Year, you may have seen a large, colorful creature dancing to the sounds of drums, cymbals, and gongs. Of course, this is not a real beast. It's actually skilled dancers in costume, performing a lion dance. When these dancers come together, they form the colorful dancing creature!

The lion dance is a traditional part of Chinese culture. It is often performed on the eve of the Chinese New Year (or Spring Festival). It's also performed for other special occasions, like weddings. The dance is thought to bring good luck, and prosperity, or success.

While there are many different tales of how lion dance began, one legend traces it back to a village in China hundreds of years ago. The legend says that the people of the village were attacked by a monster called a nien. A lion chased the nien away. But a year later, the nien returned, and this time the lion was unable to help. So the people of the village created a lion costume of their own. Their fake lion danced, pranced, roared, and chased the nien away. For this reason, people perform the lion dance on the night before the Chinese New Year - they chase evil away for another year.

The lion dance is performed by two dancers. One dancer performs as the lion's head and front legs, and the other performs as the body and back legs. The head of the lion costume is made out of materials like papier-mâché and bamboo. The body of the costume is a long cloth attached to the head.

There are two different styles of lion dance. In a southern lion dance, the dancers base their performance on a lion's behavior. Their lion may scratch or shake its body. The dance can even be funny.

The other style is the northern lion dance. This style is closely related to the martial art form kung fu. It can involve rolling, leaping, and jumping.

Both styles require skill and practice to perform. And both are very entertaining to watch!

# The Traditional Irish Step Dance

by ReadWorks



*Dancers performing an Irish step dance*

Irish step dancing is a unique and entertaining dance form. Known for quick and precise movements of the feet and a stiff upper body, the dance is an Irish tradition.

No one knows the exact origins of Irish step dancing. However, the earliest known Irish step dancing in Ireland was performed in the 16th and 17th centuries. By the 19th century, the dance gained popularity in Ireland and became known for its fast tempo and quick movements of the feet.

Dance masters helped the dance spread quickly across Ireland. Dance masters were teachers of Irish dance. They traveled from village to village teaching the locals the dance. These dance masters were seen as very important figures.

Irish step dancing spread this way for some time. Then, in 1893, the Gaelic League was created. The Gaelic League was created to uphold and strengthen parts of Irish culture. The Gaelic League began organizing dance competitions. In the late 1920s, the Gaelic League created the Irish Dancing Commission for regulating and promoting Irish dancing. A few years after its creation, the Commission specified qualifications for teachers of Irish dancing.

Today, the dance is celebrated amongst people of all cultures. Although the fast-paced and precise movements of the dance have lasted through the years, competitions today are very different than the competitions in the late 1800s. For instance, costumes have always been a part of Irish dance culture. But today, the dance competitions put heavy emphasis on makeup, curly wigs, tiaras, and jewelry for women. And some of the men compete wearing jeweled shoe buckles and studded ties!

# Hawaii's Traditional Hula Dance

by ReadWorks



*dancers performing hula dance*

The Hula is a traditional Hawaiian dance. It is known partly for its smooth and graceful movements of the arms, hands, and hips. Hula dancers often mimic movements from nature. Their movements may look like trees in the wind or waves in the water. The dancers also tell a story with their movements. Chants, or *mele*, go along with the movements to help tell the story.

There are many myths as to how the hula dance originated. One legend says that Pele, the volcano goddess, danced the first hula dance. According to this myth, Pele was running from her sister, the goddess of the oceans. She was trying to find a place where she couldn't be touched by the ocean waves. She finally found such a place. It was a chain of craters on the island of Hawaii. There, Pele danced the first hula to show that she had beaten her sister!

Although people today dance the hula freely, the dance was actually banned during part of the 1800s. It was banned by Christian missionaries who arrived in Hawaii in 1820. Before then, the hula was used in religious ceremonies. But the missionaries did not approve of the religious ceremonies the people of Hawaii were holding, or the dancing that went with them. After it was banned, the dance continued to be taught and danced secretly. But as more Hawaiians started becoming Christians, the dance became a dying part of Hawaiian culture.

All of this changed during the reign of Hawaii's last king, David Kalakaua. He was the king from 1874 to 1891. He encouraged hula dancing to come back out into the open. As a result, the dance resurfaced, now with new movements, costumes, and song. Today, the hula tradition lives on in Hawaii.

# India's Classical Dance: Bharatanatyam



*Bharatanatyam dancer*

India is home to many different classical dance styles. One of the oldest classical dances of India is Bharatanatyam (Ba-ra-tha-NAA-tium).

The name Bharatanatyam comes from the language Sanskrit. "Bha" is short for *bhava*, the Sanskrit word for feeling. "Ra" comes from the word *raga*, which means music or melody. "Ta" comes from *taala*, or rhythm. And finally, "natyam" is the word for dance. So the name Bharatanatyam speaks for itself! It is a dance that includes music, rhythm, and emotion.

People first began dancing Bharatanatyam in the Hindu temples of southern India many centuries ago. Only women dancers performed the dance style. The dance expressed the religious themes of Hinduism, one of India's main religions and one of the oldest religions in the world. Much later, in the 1900s, the dance style began to be performed on stages and in theaters.

Bharatanatyam dance often involves telling a religious story. The dancer uses hand movements to tell a tale. Certain hand positions and gestures have certain meanings in the dance style. But the dancer's facial expressions are important to the tale, too. Along with eye and neck movements, facial expressions can affect the meaning or mood of the story a dancer is trying to tell.

This dance style also involves complex rhythms. The dancer's feet beat out different patterns that go along with the music. Often, the dancer wears bells around his or her ankles. These bells jingle along with the beat, too.

Today, Bharatanatyam is one of the most popular Indian dance styles. It is performed all over India by both men and women. And now, this beautiful and powerful dance style is taught, learned, and performed all over the world!