Ragamala Dance Company

*Written in Water*

Tue • September 18 • 10 am
Welcome to the Hop

A performance needs an audience, so be prepared to play your part!

Theater Etiquette

When entering the Hopkins Center, show consideration for all those sharing the building by remaining quiet and respectful in common areas.

Be aware and use quiet voices. Remember that live theater differs greatly from watching television or movies or attending a sporting event. Live performers can hear and see you and are easily distracted by any talking or moving around in the audience. Even the smallest sounds can be heard throughout the theater, so it’s best to be quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance. Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation!

Important to remember: Backpacks, food, drink, and gum are not allowed in the theater. Please turn off all cell phones and note that recording the performance or taking any photos is strictly prohibited. Hats off! It is respectful to remove hats during your time in the theater.

Information for Teachers

Prepare—review this study guide for context that will help your students engage with the performance. Check in with the Hop if you have any questions or concerns about content. Read the email that accompanies this guide—Hop staff often request details about your visit including how many buses you’ll be bringing and what accommodations you need.

Arrive—arrive 30 minutes prior to start time to allow time for Hop staff to check you in and escort the students to their seats. Hop staff will ask you for a head count of students. Please review our bus policy before arrival: hop.dartmouth.edu/online/plan_a_successful_visit

Lunch—sometimes we are able to offer a space for schools to eat bag lunches following the show. Check the email that accompanies this guide to confirm. If staying for lunch, please confirm with Hop staff one week prior to show. The day of the show, please bring lunches in boxes or tubs labeled with school’s name. Hop staff will take lunches to the lunch space and escort school group there following the show. Schools are responsible for calling their own bus back to the Hop when they are ready to leave.

Ticketing Policy—no tickets are issued for school matinee performances. Seating placement for each school group is determined by Hop staff. Please let them know if you have a seating request or accommodation; we do our best to keep each school group seated together. Payment is required 30 days before the performance regardless of whether all students are able to attend on the day of the show—please feel free to bring extra chaperones or school staff to fill any empty seats.

Photography—though photography by the audience is prohibited, the Hopkins Center may take photographs during the performance for use on our website or other promotional materials. If you or your students do not wish to be photographed, please let Hop staff know.

The Show Must Go On!—we do not cancel events due to school closings for inclement weather. Performances will only be cancelled if the artist is unable to reach the theater. Schools will be notified by phone if this occurs. We do not issue refunds for performances missed due to school closure. Please contact Hop staff if you find your school unable to attend for this reason.

This study guide was created by the Hop’s Outreach and Arts Education team. To download copies of this and other guides, visit hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach

Special thanks to the University Music Society at University of Michigan for use of its learning guide.

Enjoy the Show!

Hopkins Center Outreach Department: Stephanie Pacheco, Outreach Manager
Mary Gaetz, Outreach Coordinator

The Hopkins Center Outreach and Arts Education department embodies the Hop’s mission to “ignite and sustain a passion for the arts.” It provides Dartmouth, the community and beyond rare personal contact with artists and a broad context for the performing arts. Unveiling the creative process of extraordinarily diverse artists, Outreach programs touch more than 14,000 lives each year.

Did You Know?

• The Hopkins Center opened in 1962.
• The Hopkins Center was designed by Wallace Harrison, architect of Lincoln Center and the United Nations Building in New York City.
• In The Moore Theater, the area over the stage, called the “fly loft,” is 63 feet tall.
About the Show

In *Written in Water*, classically trained *Bharatanatyam* (bah-RAT-a-nat-ee-um) dancers explore the heights of joy and depths of longing in Hindu and Sufi thought. With *choreography* by the mother-and-daughter team of Ranee Ramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy—also the artistic directors of Ragamala Dance Company—the performance unfolds in three parts:

- the first part draws on the ancient Indian board game *paramapadam* to explore life’s ups and downs;
- the second part looks at the fight between good and evil through the Hindu *myth* Ksheerabthi Madanam, a piece of classic Indian poetry which tells of the churning of the seven seas;
- the third part expresses the *divine* and ideas of *transcendence*, through the epic Sufi poem “The Conference of the Birds,” which tells of birds who travel through seven valleys to achieve *immortality*.

During the transitions between each piece, Aparna and Ranee perform brief dances that connect the three larger parts of this spiritual journey and story.

An important part of this performance is the *stage design*. The entire floor of the stage is covered in large, colorful projections that represent the *paramapadam* game board. The choreography often positions the dancers as if they are pieces in the game. In addition to projections on the floor, large images of traditional and *abstract motifs* related to the stories are projected on the back wall of the theater, slowly changing as the performance progresses. The dancers are dressed in colorful *saris* and bedecked in the traditional jewelry and makeup of classical Indian dance.

Led by Iraqi American musician and composer Amir ElSaffar, five musicians accompany the dancers. The music is a unique mix of American jazz, traditional Iraqi *maqam*, and Indian Carnatic music played on both Western and Indian instruments. Vocalist Preethy Mahesh tells parts of the stories through song and chant. The music for *Written in Water* was written by Amir and Prema Ramamurthy.

See a trailer video of *Written in Water* at ragamaladance.org/gallery/
About the Artists

RAGAMALA DANCE COMPANY: Ranee Ramaswamy founded Ragamala Dance Company in 1992 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Now under the direction of Ranee and her daughter Aparna Ramaswamy, the company is in its 25th season of creating intercultural, collaborative performance works that forge together ancestry and continuity. The two generations work together to merge the classical language of Indian dance with a contemporary Western aesthetic, creating timeless pieces that freely move between the past and present. They approach Bharatanatyam as an ancient but living, breathing language that communicates contemporary human experience in an accessible way. The company has been recognized with awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the National Dance Project and many more.

AMIR ELSAFFAR: Raised in Chicago to the sounds of Ella Fitzgerald and the Blues Brothers, Iraqi American trumpeter, santur player (see later in this guide for more about the santur), vocalist and composer Amir ElSaffar has extended the boundaries of American jazz and Middle Eastern music by creating new sounds that combine both traditions. He performs actively in the US, Europe and the Middle East. As a composer he has established himself as an important voice in an age of cross-cultural music making. He has released five albums of his own and played on countless others. He also composes for theater. In addition to his busy performance schedule, ElSaffar curates a weekly concert series at Alwan for the Arts, New York City’s premier center for Middle Eastern arts and culture. He is on the faculty of Columbia University.
Contextual Background

The Stories

THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS
Composed in the 12th century in northeastern Iran, Farīd ud-Din Attar’s great mystical poem is among the most significant of all works of Persian literature. An allegorical interpretation of the Islamic doctrine of Sufism—an esoteric system concerned with the search for truth through God—it describes the consequences when the birds of the world meet to search for their ideal king, the Simorgh bird. Upon hearing that to find him they must undertake an arduous journey, the birds express reservations to their leader, the hoopoe bird. With eloquence and insight, the hoopoe calms their fears using a series of riddling parables that provide guidance in the search for spiritual truth.

SANGAM POETRY
The Tamil Sangam poets (300 BCE–300 CE) of South India saw divinity in the physical world. Recognizing that human activities are linked with all of creation, they drew parallels between the inner world of love and relationships, and the outer world of heroics, courage and ethics. Their writings use the natural world as a metaphor to examine these complexities of human emotion. The tinais—five specific worlds in which Sangram poetry is set—provide rich geographical detail: flora and fauna, climate and seasons, music and culture, people and daily life. All of these elements are woven together to create a distinct mood and setting. Characters in Sangam literature are never named; instead they represent ideals—paradigms of the human condition.

PARAMAPADAM
The board game we know as Chutes and Ladders originated in ancient India, where it was known by many names, among them Mokshapat or Paramapadam. It’s not exactly known who invented it or when, though it’s believed the game was played as early as the 2nd century BCE. The game was used as a type of moral instruction for children. It takes players on an allegorical journey along which they encounter twelve vices and five virtues on a search for ultimate wisdom. On the 100-square grid of the gameboard, virtues are depicted as ladders that carry a player forward, and vices as snakes that slide him or her backward. The game was transported to England by the colonial rulers in the latter part of the 19th century where it was re-named Snakes and Ladders and the game was altered for Western aesthetics. In 1943, the game was introduced in the United States under the name Chutes and Ladders.

The Dance
Bharatanatyam refers to a form of dance in which the elements of bhava, raga, and tala are expressed. The word is a mnemonic:

Bharata –
   Bha – from “bhava” meaning feelings and emotions
   Ra – from “raga” meaning melody and melodic structure in Carnatic music, associated with southern India
   Ta – from “tala” meaning rhythm

Natyam – Sanskrit for “dance”

ORIGINS OF BHARATANATYA
The Bharatanatyam style originated in South India in the Tamil Nadu region and is part of the wider Natyashastra dance style. The Natyashastra is the overarching umbrella from which originated all other classical Indian dance forms: Odissi, Kathakali, Kathak, Manipuri, Kuchipudi, Mohiniyattam, Bharatanatyam and Sattriya. Bharatanatyam was regularly practiced by devadasis—women who were dedicated in service of religious temples in South India. These devadasis, or servants (dasi) of divinity (deva), worked with nattuvanars (dance masters) to pass down the dance traditions of Bharatanatyam from generation to generation. The dance form spread from the temples to the royal courts. Repeated foreign invasions in northern India prevented Bharatanatyam from developing in that region, but the form and music continued to evolve in the south.
The four sons of the nattuvanar Subbarayan—Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Vadivelu and Sivanandam—are primarily responsible for the evolution of the form. They refined the music of Bharatanatyam, under the influence of the composer Muthuswami Dikshitar, shaping a precursor of what we call Bharatanatyam today. British rule and propaganda in India in the 17th and 18th centuries threatened to end the performance of Bharatanatyam. Rejected by temples and royal courts, dancers sought patronage from wealthy people which led to the decline of the devadasi community. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, social reformers sought to eradicate the art form, and the classical dance of South India almost died out. Fortunately, a few families preserved the knowledge of Bharatanatyam, and the form was revived with the help of Indian freedom fighters and Westerners interested in Indian arts, as well as people outside the devadasi class who learned the dance form, and from the devadasis themselves. Over the years, increasing awareness and appreciation of classical Indian traditions allowed nattuvanars and dancers to resume practicing Bharatanatyam, and it became one of the most widespread and popular of all the classical Indian dance forms.

THE PARTS OF BHARATANATYAM
Three Kinds of Performance:

_Nritya_ – performance focusing on spiritual themes, messages or feelings through expressive gestures and slower body movements.

_Nritta_ – a technical performance emphasizing speed, form, pattern and rhythm over emotion; emphasis on making elaborate shapes with body

_Natyam_ – dramatic or thematic dance that tells a story

Each dance also begins with namaskar. This is a movement sequence in which the dancer gives thanks to the elements that make the dance possible—the musicians, the _guru_ (teacher), God, the stage and the audience.

Dancers from Ragamala Dance Company rehearse in their studio.
MUDRAS
Hand gestures are important in Bharatanatyam. They are called mudras (MOO-druhs). There are 28 single-handed gestures and 24 double-handed mudras. Each one can mean many different things, depending on how it is held around the body, the way the dancer moves and what facial expressions are used with it. Each mudra represents an event, object or activity.

NAVARASAS
Navarasas (na-va-RAH-sahs) are facial expressions used during traditional Bharatanatyam dance. There are nine face positions that communicate basic emotions.

- Shringar (Delight—looking shyly or passionately at beloved)
- Hasya (Laughter and Happiness)
- Karuna (Empathy—character wants to help when something bad has happened)
- Raudra (Anger)
- Veera (Strength and Bravery)
- Bhayanaka (Fear)
- Bibhatsa (Disgust)
- Adbhuta (Awe and Surprise)
- Shanta (Calmness and Serenity)

Navarasas are used to communicate what the character is feeling as well as elicit similar feelings in the audience.
COSTUME
A classical Indian dance costume reflects the history and tradition of the region that is home to the dance. Tamil Nadu, the region where Bharatanatyam originated, features a costume made of colorful silk fabric with borders embroidered in fine gold thread. There are two styles of Bharatanatyam costumes: the pant-style costume (pant costume) and the saree costume (skirt costume).

The pant-style costume includes:
- Blouse
- Davani (wraps around the blouse)
- Pants
- Pleats (fan-like piece attached to both pant legs)
- Seat (hugs the pants and the fan at the hip area)

The saree costume includes:
- Blouse
- Davani
- Skirt
- Pleats
- Fan (a small fan that is tied around the waist)

JEWELRY AND ACCESSORIES
South Indian dance jewelry is called “temple jewelry.” It is traditionally made of rubies, gold and pearls. These days, many dancers wear artificial “costume” jewelry.

The jewelry includes:
- Chutti (head piece)
- Sun and Moon (jewels attached on the top of the head on each side of the chutti)
- Necklaces
- Mattal (jewels attached to the earrings and arrayed over the ears)
- Earrings
- Jimiki (dangling jewels of the earrings)
- Mukuthi (side nose ring)
- Bullaku (center nose ring)
- Bangles (gold bracelets)
- Ghungroos (rows of brass bells that tie around the ankles to accentuate the stomping of feet)
- Flowers (used to decorate the hair, often in colors of orange and white)

MAKEUP
- Eyes: To accentuate and elongate the eyes, a dancer uses black eyeliner and applies it in thick layers around the curves of the eyes
- Cheek bones: To define the facial features, red blush is used to accentuate the cheeks
- Lips: Dark-colored shades of lipstick such as maroon complete the overall facial appearance of the dancer
- Pottu or bindi: an ornamental dot or shape painted on the forehead
- Painted feet and fingers: Red dye known as alta is used to paint the fingertips of the hands and toes to resemble henna. The red color accentuates the hand gestures and feet movements of the dancer.
The Music

IRAQI MAQAM

Maqam is the classical vocal tradition of Iraq. In Iraq, the term *maqam* refers to highly structured, partly improvised songs that take years of study under a master to fully learn. Often rhythmically free and meditative, they are sung to classical Arabic and colloquial Iraqi poetry, and are followed by light-hearted, rhythmic songs known as *pestaat*. Found primarily in the urban areas of Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk and Basra, the maqam repertoire draws upon musical styles of the many populations in Iraq, including the Bedouins, rural Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen as well as other peoples that have had extensive contact with Iraq throughout history. Listen to an example of maqam at youtube.com/watch?v=hJsITxQP7ww

CARNATIC MUSIC

Carnatic music is commonly associated with the southern part of the Indian subcontinent. Although there are stylistic differences, the basic elements of śruti (the relative musical pitch), swara (the musical sound of a single note), rāga (the mode or melodic formula) and tāla (the rhythmic cycles) form the foundation of improvisation and composition in Carnatic music. Carnatic instrumentation typically consists of a principal performer (usually a vocalist), a melodic accompaniment (like a violin), a rhythm accompaniment (often a mridangam) and a tambura, which acts as a drone throughout the performance. Watch a Carnatic music performance at youtube.com/watch?v=oeGSAHQ_XS8

JAZZ

Jazz is a music genre that originated in the African American communities of New Orleans, Louisiana, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It has roots in blues and ragtime, West African music and military band music. Since the 1920s Jazz Age, jazz has become recognized as a major form of musical expression. Almost any Western instrument can be used to play jazz, but typically it is played on horns, piano, guitar and drums, often accompanied by vocals. Listen to Amir ElSaffar and his band play jazz at youtube.com/watch?v=qqQERQYYpWs

Instruments

MRIDANGAM

This double-sided drum is made out of a hollowed piece of jackfruit wood. The two mouths, or apertures, of the drum are covered with goatskin and laced to each other with leather straps around the circumference of the drum. The wider aperture around the edge produces bass (lower) sounds, and the smaller aperture in the middle (covered by a black disk made of rice flour, ferric oxide powder and starch) produces treble (higher) sounds, punctuated with a metallic resonance.

SANTUR

The santur is a hammered dulcimer of Mesopotamic origins. The name means “100 strings” and it was originally made with tree bark, stones and strung with goat intestines; now the strings are made of steel or bronze. This instrument is the mother of the harp, the Chinese *yangqin*, the harpsichord and the American and European hammered dulcimers.

VIOLIN

Known informally as a fiddle, the violin is a wooden string instrument. Most violins have a hollow wooden body. The violin typically has four strings and is most commonly played by drawing a bow across its strings, though it can also be played by plucking the strings with the fingers (*pizzicato*) and by striking the strings with the wooden side of the bow (*col legno*). Violins are important instruments in a wide variety of musical genres.

Did You Know?

The concept of raga is very important to Indian music. A raga consists of at least five notes, and each raga provides the musician with a musical framework within which to improvise. In the Indian tradition, each raga is considered to have the ability to “color the mind” and affect the emotions of the audience.
TRUMPET
Trumpets are constructed of brass tubing bent twice into a rounded oblong shape that opens up into a cone shape. As with all brass instruments, sound is produced by blowing air through closed lips, producing a “buzzing” sound into the mouthpiece, which vibrates the air inside the trumpet.

Visual Art of India
RAGAMALA PAINTINGS
The word *ragamala* means a “garland of musical melodies.” In India, there is a rich tradition of *ragamala* painting, visual art meant to evoke the same affective responses of a musical mode or *raga*. These paintings visualize specific moods, emotions and qualities such as love, anguish, valor, weakness and strength. Specific *ragas* are associated with specific times of the day, seasons and emotions. In the *ragamala* on the right, two women worship Shiva in a lotus-filled lake.

DANCING STATUES
As early as the Vedic period (1600–550 BCE), the visual arts were used to depict characters and stories from Indian literature and mythological narrative. In some artwork, these characters—often gods and goddesses—are depicted in dance poses, showcasing the importance of dance in day to day life.

Dancing Ganesha (marble, 5th–6th century)
Like his father, Shiva (SHEE-vah), the well-loved god Ganesha (guh-NESH-uh) loves to dance. One of his roles is to entertain his father and mother, Parvati (PAR-vah-tee), which he does by dancing. Ganesha dances with his axe in the crook of his right elbow and a plate of *laddu*, his favorite sweets, in his left hand.

Shiva, the lord of dance (jade, 10th–11th century)
This statue shows Shiva, god of destruction and creation, demolishing and re-creating the cosmos through dance. Shiva also creates with music (using the *damaru* drum he carries in his upper right hand) and destroys with fire, seen in the ring of flames around him.

Dancing Krishna (bronze, 19th century)
*Bala* (baby) Krishna (CRISH-nuh) stands on his left foot while rising and bending the opposite leg. He stretches his right arm in order to keep his balance, holding in one hand a sweet butter ball, his favorite treat.
About India

India is the world’s second most populous nation at 1.3 billion people. It contains 29 states and seven territories, and each region has its own language and culture. Over 20 recognized languages are spoken throughout the country including Hindi, English, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil and Urdu.

POLITICS

India is a country whose residents have struggled and are still struggling with maintaining ownership of their lands. India was taken by Great Britain in the early 18th century, and a strong British military presence kept the Indians from revolt. In 1947, Britain relinquished power after a nonviolent protest led by Mahatma Gandhi empowered Indian citizens to take back their country. Today, there are still parts of India in dispute, claimed by both India and either the People’s Republic of China or Pakistan. There is no resolution to these conflicts on the horizon, but a fragile peace is kept among the people who live in these areas.

ECONOMICS

India is a top exporter of gems, oil, clothing and machinery, including computers. The country also exports basmati rice, cotton and refined sugar. The country has recently started a trend towards more organic agriculture, avoiding chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Tourism is also a thriving industry, treating almost 9 million visitors to the beauty of their architecture, beaches, forests and animals (including tigers!) each year. Another attraction is the many Hindu and Buddhist temples, as well as religious festivals like Holi.

Holi, the festival of colors, commemorates the divine love of Radha for the god Krishna.

Remains of the Konark Sun Temple in Odisha, India
GEOGRAPHY
India is bordered by the Indian Ocean to the south and the Himalayan Mountains to the north. Though India is near the equator and is considered to be a tropical country, the country includes many ecosystems, including deciduous forests, tundra and desert. India contains the Ganges River, a river sacred to those that practice the Hindu religion. The river is believed to be the goddess Ganga and many Hindus ritually bathe in it as a sign of faith. It is also one of the most polluted rivers in the entire world, though it used for everything from drinking water and clothes-washing to dumping chemical factory waste water and raw sewage.

RELIGION
Many Indians practice Hinduism. Hinduism is a polytheistic religion and the third largest in the world after Christianity and Islam. Hinduism's three major deities are Brahma, the creator; Shiva, the destroyer; and Vishnu, the preserver of universal order. The supreme goddess is Devi or Parvati. As one of its many practices, Hinduism focuses on living by the Purushartha, or proper goals for life. These include dharma (ethics), artha (work), kama (emotions) and moksha (freedom).
Pre-performance discussion questions

• In what ways can dance tell a story? How is it different from other storytelling mediums (books, movies, music, etc.)?

• When you think of a story told through dance, what comes to mind? Are there any tales from your culture that are told through dance?

• This performance combines the ancient with the modern, the past with the present. What things around you have roots in long ago but are still useful today? What makes something endure over centuries? How do great ideas evolve to keep up with present times?

• What board games do you think would work as live performance? Why?

• The dancers and musicians of Written in Water have been perfecting their craft for years, working hard to be the best at what they do. What do you aspire to do really well? What are you currently doing to realize this goal? What are you not doing but hope to do in the future? How can we make plans and stay inspired to achieve our goals? When it takes a lot of work, how do we keep at it?

Post-performance discussion questions


• What themes of the show stood out? Why?

• Is there a moment in the performance that specifically resonated with you either intellectually or emotionally? If so, why do you think it affected you?

• Describe the pace and tempo of the performance (e.g., slow, fast, varied). Did the pace of the production maintain your interest?

• Describe the visual world of the performance—lights, set design, costumes, makeup. Were any of the visual elements particularly compelling? Confusing?

• Describe the sounds of the performance. How did the music work with the dance to tell a story? How did the Indian instruments and Western instruments work together?

• How do these three stories from other cultures relate to you and where you live?
Learning Activities

Mudra Making (Grades 4–6)

Mudras are gestures with the hands that create symbolic, abstract representation of events, objects and activities, allowing a Bharatanatyam dancer to communicate stories to the audience. Have students work with a partner to create a series of hand movements and shapes that represent a familiar tale like *Hansel and Gretel*. Repeat shapes as necessary and arrange them into chronological order. Have each pair share their sequence of gestures with another. Can they guess each other’s story? What movements stand out? Why? Does the size of the gesture make a difference in terms of comprehension? EXTEND: Add in whole-body movement and facial expressions that complement the gestures you have already created. Retell the story and discuss how bigger movements changed the story. EXTEND AGAIN: Have students who are watching draw the movement they see. Is it big and swooping or is it short and staccato? Share interpretive drawings with performers.

Only a Game (Grades 5–7)

Ask students to research the origins of a classic board or card game—Monopoly, Sorry, Trouble, Life, Othello, Candy Land, Clue, Risk, Checkers, Chess, Scrabble, Mah Jong, bridge, canasta, etc. Who invented it? Why? Has the content of the game changed over the years? Where and in what culture did it originate? What was its purpose? Why do they think this game become popular? Is there a spin-off version inspired by this game? Have students write the answers to these questions in a short essay. Next, arrange for students to play the games in class. After playing, ask them to write a second part to the essay. What was their experience playing the game? Had they played it before or was this the first time? What do they think the appeal of the game is? In what ways did they have to work with classmates to get to the end of the game? Reflect on the playing and identify what lessons or ideas are found in the game. Are these lessons or ideas part of why this game has endured? EXTENSION: Working alone or in pairs, design a new board or card game. Research the structure of board and card games by breaking down the components of a game with which you are already familiar.

Consider:

- How many players?
- How long does it take to play?
- What choices does the player make? When do they make them? How does the player make these choices? How does one player’s choice impact the other players?
- How do the players interact with each other?
- How does the game progress? Is it turn-based, or is it in rounds with phases?
- What actions can the player take? How is the outcome of an action determined?
- What is the player’s goal? How does the player win?

Also consider:

- What is the theme?
- How is this game the same or different from other games on the market?

Students decide which of these elements belong in the new game and develop an outline for the new game, including a pitch to sell the new game to a hypothetical buyer. What makes this game unique and fun? Why is this going to be the game everyone will want to play? Present to the class for feedback.
Write a Ragamala Review (Grades 6–8)

Ask students to write a review of the performance. Things to consider when writing a review:

**A strong review answers these three questions:**
1. What is the artist trying to do?
2. How well are they doing it?
3. Was it worth doing it?

**A critic’s job is to:**
1. *Share an experience* – What did it feel, sound, look like?
2. *Provide context* – Build a broader frame of reference around what happened to help readers understand the importance or significance of the experience
3. *Evaluate* – Was it any good? Why or why not?

**Critics typically use two modes of thought when writing a review:**
1. *Analytical* – describes the grammar of the art, its execution and interpretation by the performers, and its historical, cultural and social relevance; uses concrete language, terminology and facts
2. *Impressionistic* – describes the overall experience; uses abstract language, feelings and emotions

Encourage students to take a strong stance on aspects of the performance and back up their position with evidence.

**BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE**
Have students, in groups or as individuals, conduct background research on elements of the *Written in Water* performance. Students should research and take notes on the following:
- The art forms
- History of the art forms including the culture(s) in which they developed
- Terminology
- The artists
- Comparisons to similar artists and art forms

Some of this information can be found in this Guide, including links in the references and resources section at the end.

Before the performance begins, consider the following questions:
- What expectations do I have for the performance?
- Do I already have an opinion about what I will experience at the performance? If so, what is it?

**DURING THE PERFORMANCE**
Ask students to take mental notes during the performance. As soon as the performance ends, have students write down thoughts and words that come to mind related to the performance.

Encourage students to consider these prompts:
- What is striking to me?
- Is it vastly different from what I thought it would be?
- Has the venue transformed into something else during the performance? If so, how?
- What images or ideas are popping into my head?
- Is there something about the performance I may remember forever? What made it so memorable?
- Is there part of the performance I want to forget?
- Is the audience quiet and drawn in to what is happening? Are they loud? Are they interacting directly with the performers? Are the performers directly interacting with the audience?

**AFTER THE PERFORMANCE**
Instruct students to compare their pre-performance notes to their post-performance observations and write a 2–3 page review.
**Vocabulary**

**Abstract:** existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence

**Aesthetic:** concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty

**Allegorical:** containing allegory, a story, poem or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically of a moral or political nature

**Ancestry:** one’s family or ethnic descent

**Apertures:** openings, holes or gaps

**Arduous:** difficult

**Bedouins:** nomadic Arabs, who historically lived in deserts

**Choreography:** the sequence of steps and movements in a dance

**Circumference:** measurement of the outer rim of a circle; the distance around something

**Co-commission:** when two or more organizations provide support and resources for the creation of a new work of dance, art or music

**Collaborative:** produced or conducted by two or more parties working together

**Colloquial:** ordinary or informal

**Colonial:** referring to the extension of a large, powerful country’s wealth and influence over other, smaller countries, establishing settlements and exploiting resources for the benefit of the larger country

**Composition:** a work of music; the process of creating a piece of music

**Continuity:** the unbroken existence of something over a period of time; absence of disruption

**Divine:** devoted to a god; sacred

**Divinity:** the state or quality of being divine

**Elicit:** evoke or draw out a response or reaction to an action

**Epic:** a long poem, typically derived from an ancient oral tradition narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures, or the history of a nation

**Eradicate:** destroy completely

**Esoteric:** intended to be understood by only a small number of people with specialized knowledge

**Evolve:** develop gradually over time, especially from a simple to a more complex form

**Exporter:** business or person that ships goods to other countries

**Expressive:** conveying thought or feeling

**Ferric oxide:** iron oxide, an inorganic compound that occurs naturally as rust; used in manufacturing for a variety of purposes

**Generations:** sets of members of a family regarded as a single step or stage in a lineage, generally separated by 30 years

**Genres:** different styles

**Gouache:** type of paint that uses opaque pigments mixed with water and a gluelike thickener

**Henna:** the powdered leaves of a tropical shrub, used as a dye to color the hair and decorate the body with red accents

**Hindu:** person who practices Hinduism; referring to Hinduism

**Hoopoe:** colorful bird found across Afro-Eurasia, notable for its distinctive “crown” of feathers

**Hybridity:** refers to two or more parts coming together to form something different

**Immortality:** the state of being unable to die, living forever

**Improvisation:** creating something without a fixed plan or pre-arranged form

**Intercultural:** a mix of multiple cultures
Vocabulary

**Jackfruit**: a fast-growing Asian tree related to breadfruit

**Jazz Age**: period in the 1920s and 1930s in which jazz music and dance styles rapidly gained nationwide popularity

**Kurds**: members of a mainly Islamic people living in parts of eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, western Iran and eastern Syria

**Meditative**: absorbed in meditation or considered thought

**Mnemonic**: a device such as a pattern of letters, ideas or associations that assist in remembering something

**Mode**: a set of musical notes forming a scale and from which melodies and harmonies are constructed

**Motifs**: distinctive features or dominant ideas in artistic compositions

**Mystical**: symbolic, transcending human understanding; often related to religious mysteries

**Myth**: traditional story often concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural phenomenon; often contains supernatural beings or events

**Parable**: simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson

**Paradigms**: typical examples or models

**Persian**: relating to ancient Persia or modern Iran, or its people or language

**Pesticides**: chemicals used to kill insects and other pests, usually for agricultural applications

**Pitch**: the highness or lowness of a musical tone

**Polytheistic**: worshipping more than one god

**Precursor**: a thing that comes before another of its kind; a forerunner

**Propaganda**: information of a biased or misleading nature used to promote or publicize a political cause or point of view

**Radha**: goddess of Hinduism; she is a milkmaid, Chief Queen and spouse of the Hindu god Krishna

**Repertoire**: a stock of musical pieces that a company or a performer knows or is prepared to perform

**Sangam**: refers to period of history in ancient Tamil Nadu, India, between 3rd century BCE and 3rd century CE

**Sanskrit**: ancient language of India

**Saris**: plural of sari, a garment consisting of a length of cotton or silk draped over and around the body, traditionally worn by women from South Asia

**Simorgh**: a benevolent, mythical bird in Iranian mythology and literature, sometimes equated with other mythological birds such as a phoenix

**Spiritual**: relating to the human soul or spirit as opposed to material or physical things

**Sufi**: relating to the Islamic doctrine of Sufism, an esoteric system concerned with the search for truth through God

**Suite**: in music, a set of instrumental compositions written to be played in succession

**Tambura**: a long-necked string instrument similar to a lute

**Tamil**: an ethnic group native to India and Sri Lanka

**Temples**: buildings devoted to the worship of or regarded as the dwelling place of a god or gods

**Transcendence**: the height of existence or an experience beyond the normal or physical level

**Turkmen**: Turkic people inhabiting the region east of the Caspian Sea and south of the Aral Sea

**Urban**: from or referring to a large city or populated area

**Vices**: bad habits or behavior

**Virtues**: high moral behavior
Resources

Ragamala Dance Company: ragamaladance.org/
More about Bharatanatyam: culturalindia.net/indian-dance/classical/bharatnatyam.html
Read more about India: lonelyplanet.com/india
See and hear more from Amir ElShaffar: npr.org/artists/17897504/amir-elsaffar
To see more ragamala paintings, search for “ragamala” at britishmuseum.org

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