Name/Title: Contra Dance (October 2011)

Purpose of Event: To introduce students to traditional American dance, traditional American music, and an original contra dance with new and old steps. (Contra dance was brought to America by the French soldiers who helped fight the Revolutionary War.)

Suggested Grade Level: 4th through high school

Materials Needed: CD player

Recommended music: Traditional blue grass music can be found on iTunes by typing in "contra music" in the music store search box. Some suggestions include: "Shandon Bells" or "The Woman Fiddler." There are also Podcast Episodes that contain contra dance music and can be downloaded for free. Any music that has an easy to follow beat played by a good string band can be used. Check with local musicians, as often there are local bands that play wonderful blue grass and have recorded a CD.

Beginning dance formation: Longways set with the leads (usually males) on the right of the caller or teacher and the follows (usually females) on the left as (s)he faces the class. See diagram below:

X=Leads	0=Follows
0	X
0	X
0	X
0	X
0	X
0	X
	Teacher/Music

Dancers are about 4 feet apart. The persons straight across from each other are partners.

Description of Idea

Leads begin with L foot and follows begin with R. Leads move forward and follows move backwards. Instructions are given for the leads. Follows are mirror images of the leads.

Counts 1-8 Moving forward: Step L, step R next to L, step forward on L, hop on L foot (1-4). Reverse stepping on R foot, together L, step R and hop on R foot (5-8).

Cue words are: step-together-step-hop.

Counts 1-8 Using the same step, reverse directions with the leads moving backwards and follows moving forward so lines end up where they started.

Counts 1-8 Leads will turn one full turn to the L with a 3 step turn LRL and touch R foot next to

L (1-4). Clap 2x, Stomp RL (5-8). Follows will turn one full turn to the R with a 3 step turn RLR and touch L foot next to R. (counts 1-4), Clap 2x, Stomp LR (counts 5-8).

Counts 1-8 Reverse the turns described above, clap and stomp and lines will end up back where they started.

Counts 1-8 Partners walk towards one another – Leads walk LRL and follows walk RLR (counts 1-3). Partners clap both hands together on count 4. Reverse the 3 walks (counts 5-7) moving back to original spots and clap on count 8.

The last movement, called “Strip the Willow,” is from the Virginia Reel, reputed to one of George Washington’s favorite dances.

There are no set counts on this. Just ask children to move to the music. When they have completed the step, begin the dance again.

Strip the Willow: The couple at the top of the line (nearest the music and teacher) turns to the outside of the lines and moves to the bottom of the line with each of the other dancers following their line leaders to the bottom of the set. When the top couple gets to the bottom of the set they face one another and hold their hands up forming an arch. Each couple goes through the arch, moves down the line, and a new couple is now closest to the music and teacher.

The dance begins again. Eventually each couple gets the chance to lead the “Strip the Willow” step.

Variations:

The turns can be taken out and the children can slide R or L, clap and stomp. The steps can also be repeated more than once instead of moving from one 8 count to another. This gives children more opportunity to perform the dance without mistakes.

Assessment Ideas:

Ask children to research a more detailed history of contra dance and its role in Colonial America.

Teaching Suggestions:

Challenge older students to cue the dance as the class performs it. They can even think of creative names to call each step to help classmates remember the sequences.

Adaptations for Students with Disabilities:

Children in wheelchairs can perform the dance doing the forward/backward movements and turns can be executed with pushes to the R or L. Children with cognitive disabilities can perform the dance at a slower pace or with more repetition of each individual step.

Submitted by **Brenda Goodwin** who teaches at Missouri State University in Springfield, MO. Thanks for contributing to PE Central! **Posted on PEC: 10/10/2011**.

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