



## RISE UP! AN AMERICAN CURRICULUM INSPIRED BY HAMILTON: AN AMERICAN MUSICAL



# THE SELF AS SOCIAL GESTURE

By Mariah Rankine-Landers & Jessa Brie Moreno

THEME  
Embodiment

LENGTH  
120 min

GRADE LEVEL  
9-11

SUBJECT  
Social Studies  
History  
Humanities  
Civics

Lessons in this module support learners to better understand the complexities of themselves and others to have a fuller engagement with their voice in the world.

In this lesson students will explore the notion of self as a social gesture for society. They will analyze societal issues through the lens of social gesture to critique positionality and systems that favor oppression over liberation and belonging. Students will be invited to claim their birthright to their imaginations, becoming a social gesture for an evolving world system.

# LESSON OBJECTIVES

## CREATIVE INQUIRIES

**How is a movement created?**

**What is a social gesture?**

**How can I identify, embody, and lead through the act of a “social gesture?”**

## FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE

Students will know...

- How gestures are created to support an idea for dance, theater, and art.

## PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE

Students will be able to...

- Identify and apply physical gesture to convey meaning and social gesture as an act of democratic participation.

## CONCEPTUAL INQUIRY

Students will understand...

- Social gestures
- Democratic participation
- Movement literacy

## PERFORMANCES OF UNDERSTANDING

- Journal writings [Journaling for metacognition](#)

## OUTLINE

Session 1: Self As Social Gesture

## HAMILTON HOOKS

**How to build anticipation for learning**



### WATCH: CHOREOGRAPHER ANDY BLANKENBUEHLER

Watch the choreographer of *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Andy Blankenbuehler, explain 30 seconds of dance from the song Yorktown.

### Writing prompt or group discussion:

- How do ordinary gestures support the audience to make meaning of the music and lyrics?

## PEDAGOGICAL MOMENT

### A NOTE ON DEVELOPING GESTURE

Warm ups and movement technique-building exercises can be applied to any Hamilton Hook or Module... and repeated throughout lessons.

## EXTENSIONS

## AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE VERSIONS OF HAMILTON: AN AMERICAN MUSICAL

-  **Ham 4 Ham NY Deaf Theatre-ASL Gesture version**  
 Review ASL version of Ham for Ham before sharing with students.
-  **Student ASL Version**  
 Invite students to watch as a way to ignite the lesson or as a way to close the lesson out.  
  
 Invite students to try or test out and practice the ASL gestures.

DIFFERENTIATIONS/  
CONSIDERATIONS

## VIEWINGS OF CHOREOGRAPHY

-  **Hamilton at Tony Awards w/Obamas & Common Intro**  
 Use this video as a way to ignite learning for the lesson on Self as Social Gesture or as a way to close out the lesson.
-  **Building Broadway: Hamilton**  
 Invite students to analyze how the gestures of the choreography tell a story.
-  **Choreographer/Movement as Metaphor**  
 Invite students to consider how each character's life was a gesture towards social and political gains. Allow students to discuss.
-  **Hamilton Choreographer Breaks Down Movement**  
 Use this video to showcase the intensity of creating gestures. This can be added at any point in the lesson. It can be particularly useful to show when students are tasked to create their own gestures during the lesson.

## SESSION 1 OF 1

## THE SELF AS SOCIAL GESTURE

SESSION  
OVERVIEWLENGTH  
120 minGRADE LEVEL  
9-12SUBJECT  
Social Studies  
History  
Humanities  
Civics

## CREATIVE INQUIRIES

How is a movement created?  
 What is a social gesture?  
 How can I identify, embody, and lead through the act of a “social gesture?”

## EQUIPMENT

- Projector/ monitor to screen video
- Audio player/ computer speakers to play digital recording of Hamilton Soundtrack

## MATERIALS

- Student writing journals and utensils
- YouTube Clip: SWAGGERS
- YouTube Clip: Hamilton song *My Shot* by choreographer, Andy Blankenbuehler
- Hamilton Soundtrack: *Alexander Hamilton*

## OUTLINE

Activity #1: What is a social gesture? 15 min  
 Activity #2: Compare and contrast physical gestures 15 min  
 Activity #3: Developing gestures 20 min  
 Activity #4: Finding your social gesture through artistic research 45 min  
 Critical Reflection 25 min

SESSION 1 OF 1  
THE SELF AS SOCIAL  
GESTURE

## 1. WHAT IS A SOCIAL GESTURE? 15 MIN



*What is a social gesture and how do you build a sense of self as a social gesture?*

*Gestures are ways that we use our bodies to communicate with others. Gestures can be slight or exaggerated. They are subtle or pronounced. Gestures contain nuances that we often don't have verbal language for to communicate ideas that we need to get across.*

First, have students jot down thoughts in their journal about the word “gesture.”

Next, have students share out loud with each other to build a common definition. Cross reference with the dictionary for clarity.

Finally, have the group consider the meaning of a social gesture. In pairs, have students discuss their thinking and invite them to share out loud to create a shared definition for the term.

## 2. COMPARE AND CONTRAST PHYSICAL GESTURES 15 MIN

Compare and Contrast physical gestures from Hamilton and Paris street dancers.

### PLAY

YouTube Clip SWAGGER



**Show the video on dancers in Paris.** Have students watch the clip with an eye on what each moment communicates. Have students consider: What is the story that is meant to be communicated in the movements/gestures?

### PLAY

YouTube Clip: Hamilton song  
My Shot by choreographer,  
Andy Blankenbuehler



Now, have students **compare and contrast the SWAGGER video** with the gestures being communicated in the **Hamilton song My Shot by choreographer, Andy Blankenbuehler.**

Next, have students discuss as a large group or in pairs, or write individually in their journals, responses to the following prompt:

 ***How do we use gestures to communicate and express our daily thinking?***

Guide students in understanding that the study of stress and trauma has led to a developing science of epigenetics, which examines the effects of historical and intergenerational trauma which are carried in one's genes and DNA. At the same time, resilience is the process on how well one adapts to such trauma.

## 3. DEVELOPING GESTURES 20 MIN

### SET UP

Students should be standing in a circle or standing around the room with space to explore movement. Explain to students that they will be developing their own gestures to express thought, emotion, and who they are.

### PLAY

Hamilton Soundtrack:  
*Alexander Hamilton*



**Play the opening refrain of *Alexander Hamilton*.**

**Have students develop gestures as a group** for the opening refrain. Gestures should be age-appropriate, non-verbal expressions with associative or metaphorical meaning.

Next, **incorporate an individual practice by having students act/dance out the refrain using their own name.** Students can attempt to match the rhyme scheme to develop their own characteristic gestures.

Finally, have students "step on stage." **One at a time, have students introduce themselves to the class** using their own name, gesture, and the Alexander Hamilton rhyme scheme hook.

## 4. FINDING YOUR SOCIAL GESTURE THROUGH ARTISTIC RESEARCH 45 MIN

### SET UP

This section of the lesson is to support students in making the leap between physical gestures and social gestures using the thinking frame called: Issue, Action, Outcome.

Students should be standing in a circle or standing around the room with space to move their body for the next set of instructions.

**Issue** Invite students to think of an issue they are grappling with, either personally, in the community, or in the larger world. Support students to use their whole range of motion to find a gesture that expresses this issue symbolically.

**Action** Have students decide on a course of action to take to resolve this issue. Create a gesture that represents this action.

**Outcome** Create a symbolic gesture that represents a possible ideal or desired outcome for this issue.

### EXPLORE AND EXPAND

Have students transition physically through the three gestures until they create one complete “story.” Guide them to expand their range of motion, allow their form to evolve, and to take a risk!

Invite students to explore the elements of:

- Time (Slow Down/Speed Up)
- Spatial Relationships (Proximity/Distance/Levels)
- Repetition (Word/Gesture)
- Sound (Music/Breath)

Tell students they have just created a very short theatrical silent scene with a beginning, middle, and end. **Have students turn to a partner and take turns presenting and observing** their mini-silent scenes.

**Ask students to learn one another’s movement or share their movement score** as a whole group, call-and-response style, with the individual sharing the movement score and the whole class repeating.

**To close out the lesson, have students center in a reflective writing experience in their journals.**

 **What is a social gesture?**  
*What is your unique offering that can be understood to the world as your social gesture?*

## CRITICAL REFLECTION 25 MIN

**Set-Up** 3 min

Option to have a whole group circle process, small groups or pairs.

**Prompt** 10 min

 **How can I observe professional artists/choreographers/performers who use metaphor and meaning to build a movement in order to better understand my own social gesture?**

**Task** 5-10 min

Have students write a response to the prompt in their accordion journals for the remainder of the time.