Education Support

American Dance

Creative Shortcuts for Props and Costumes

by Joyce E. Pennington

Coming up with a new prop or innovative costume is a constant challenge that requires keeping current with the latest movies, musicals and TV shows, as well as searching out the toy stores and hardware stores for prop ideas. Your budget (if you are lucky enough to have one!) may be as much as four figures or as little as $0. There are always props and costumes that can fit into your budget no matter how large or small to present your team in a creative and effective manner.

Never stifle your imagination and always remember that entertainment and a flash of color or sparkle are the key thoughts in making your selections. Also, keep in mind that your prop or costume can only be as clever as the presentation of your choreography and the execution of the routine. How many times have you seen a smashing costume or prop carried off poorly by lack of preparation on the choreography or technique of the dance?

No matter how much money that you spend, you can make it go a long way. Many things are quite effective from the field or basketball court that are very simple and inexpensive. Also, never forget that you can "recycle" or modify an old prop or costume to take on a new look, or, buy or sell your props online (American Directors Corner on FB).

Below I have listed some prop/costume suggestions along with some thematic ideas to help stimulate your creative juices.

- Sailor Routine: Mops (toy), buckets (plastic from McDonalds), Sailor hats (costume shop)
- Cube/Box Routine: Wooden cubes (built by Dads/some have hinged lid to store other props) or plastic milk crates borrowed from your local grocery.\
- Hooplas: Use PVC pipe to make a 10", 16", 24", or 36" hoop. Trim with mylar ribbon, metallic fringe or fluorescent surveyors tape/ even white or yellow shredded trash bags!
- Canes: The most visual and effective are made from old mop or broom handles and painted your desired color.

- Streamers: Are probably the least expensive, but most effective prop. Make from four 36” strips of mylar or surveyors tape; double in half, tie off with rubber band on doubled end.
- Discs: Wooden (10”, 16”) painted or glittered; cardboard pizza rounds, painted or glittered. Can also use frisbees. Shapes: hearts, stars, square, round, lollipop,guns, etc.
- Chairs: Metal folding, plastic molded, or wooden chairs. Can be painted, glittered or add motifs of stars, hearts, etc. to fit the theme of routine, or borrow from the school cafeteria.
- School Desks: Borrow from school; design theme of routine; “hide” other props in bottom storage
- Tricycles, Wagons, Cars: These are found in most homes or backyards!
- Tambourines/Maracas: Buy plain and decorate with streamers or glitter.
- Flags: Can use one or two; different colors or same; metallic streamers added; American or state flags.
- Umbrellas: All one color, alternating colors, parasols; trim with sequins on edge; or thematic animals.
- Scarf: Make from a variety of colors of chiffon including fluorescent; one to four colors.
- Metallic Streamers: This is always a great way to recycle a jazz routine on the field with sparkly metallic streamers.
- Sporting Equipment: Plastic baseball bat (w/ costume), tennis racket, basketball.
- Fans: Metallic colors, bright colors, feather fans, wooden fans.