

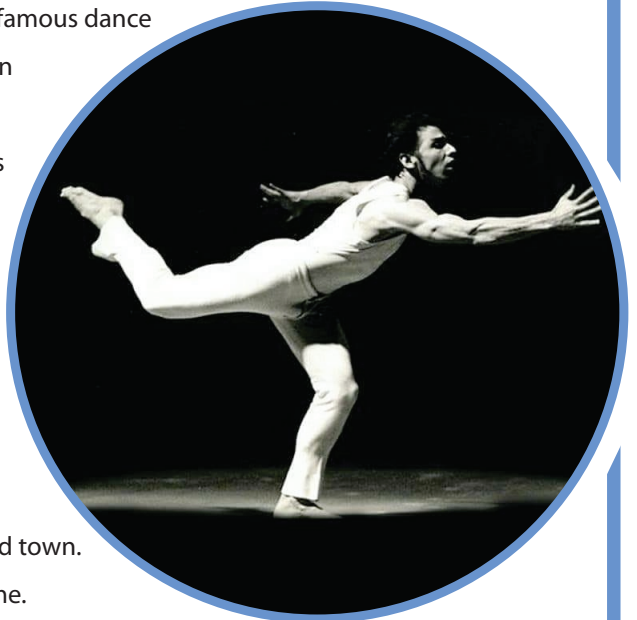
Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Alvin Ailey

**Alvin Ailey** was a dancer and choreographer. A choreographer is someone who plans the movements that will happen in a dance. He helped change modern dance and created one of the most famous dance companies in the world. Most importantly, he paved the way for African Americans in the arts.

Alvin was born in Texas in 1931. When Alvin was 11, he and his mother moved to Los Angeles. She wanted to find work and leave the South. The South was segregated at that time. In Los Angeles, Alvin became interested in dance. His friend introduced him to a dance teacher named Lester Horton. He took classes with Lester, but wasn't sure if he wanted to pursue dance or go on to college. He moved to San Francisco in 1951, where he met a woman named Marguerite Johnson. She later changed her name to Maya Angelou and became a famous writer. Marguerite was a dancer, and the two performed around town. Alvin soon moved back to Los Angeles. There, he studied dance full-time.



In 1953, he began performing with his friend Lester's dance company. He danced in many Hollywood movies. However, later that year, Lester died suddenly. Alvin became the new director of the dance company and dedicated their first piece to his friend and teacher.

The next year, he was invited to New York to perform in a Broadway show. There, he found the dance world strange and constricting. He felt it lacked the passion and freedom that he loved so much about dance. He decided to start his own dance company. He named it the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The dances he choreographed for the company were modern. They also used typical African American dance styles like jazz and blues, as well as traditional African dancing. Drawing on his experiences growing up in the South, his dances often evoked African American struggles. For the first few years, the company was made up of only African Americans. As time went on, it began to include people from all different backgrounds. Alvin prided himself on hiring dancers based on their talent, and not the color of their skin.

Alvin continued his work with his dance company, and also opened schools. He started programs that offered dance and arts classes to people from all backgrounds. He was awarded the Kennedy Center Honors in 1988. He died in 1989. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues to entertain people all around the world to this day.

**Directions:** Answer the questions below. Use text evidence to support your answers.

## Answer Sheet - Sample Answers

1. What is the main idea of Alvin Ailey? Write it in your own words.

Alvin Ailey was a dancer and choreographer who influenced modern dance  
and many artists.

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2. Choose a quote from the text that supports the following statement, and record it on the lines below.

Alvin Ailey used his background to influence the way he danced.

"Drawing on his experiences growing up in the South, his dances often evoked African American struggles."

3. What can you infer about Alvin Ailey based on his decision to include people from all different backgrounds in his dance company?

Student answers will vary, but may include: I can infer that Alvin Ailey believes that all people are important and should have the opportunity to dance at his company if they have the skill.

4. Describe what the author means when the text says, "Alvin prided himself on hiring dancers based on their talent, and not the color of their skin."

The author meant that Alvin believed that it was important to look at people, when it came to dance, based on their talents rather than the way they looked.

5. How has Alvin Ailey's work continued today after his death?

Alvin Ailey's work continues today because the dance company he started, the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, continues to entertain people all around the world.

6. When Alvin Ailey noticed that the dance world was strange and lacked freedom, what did he decide to do?

When Alvin Ailey noticed that the dance world was strange and lacked freedom, he decided to start his own dance company.

7. What are some examples of Alvin Ailey's kindness and compassion? Include two pieces of evidence from the passage.

a. Alvin Ailey showed kindness when he dedicated the first dance at Lester's dance company to his friend.

b. Alvin opened schools and started programs to provide dance and arts classes for people of all different backgrounds.