Teaching Tips: Put the Summer Olympics into Your Program with Rhythmic Gymnastics

Add one of the latest Olympic sports to your program: rhythmic gymnastics. This sport appeared in the Olympics for the first time in the 1984 Olympics held in Los Angeles, California, but has been taught in the European countries for many years. In the United States, its popularity has been growing since the 1970s.

With a little practice you can develop basic skills that will enable you to demonstrate the sport to your students. When you feel uncomfortable demonstrating an activity, try the problem-solving or movement education approach, guided discovery, and/or use multimedia demonstrations.

Rhythmic gymnastics integrates the movements and grace of all dance styles with the use of a piece of equipment—a hoop, rope, ball, club, or ribbon. The apparatus should appear as an extension of the body and flow gracefully with the movements. In competition, the music must be that of a single instrument. However, in teaching rhythmic gymnastics you will have more success if you allow the students to select music.

Each student must have one piece of equipment with which to work. It is advisable to eliminate the use of clubs, as they can be dangerous in a large group setting. However, since hoops, ropes, and balls are part of your regular physical education equipment, it should be easy to implement rhythmic gymnastics into your curriculum. Ribbons may have to be purchased, but provide beauty that students of all ages find rewarding.

Guides to creating routines

Set a problem for each student to solve. For example, instructions for a rope routine might be: "Create a one-minute routine to music. The routine must contain at least one sagittal circle, a figure eight, a single jump over a turning rope, a double jump over a turning rope, three locomotor movements, two leaps, runs, a frontal circle, and a toss and catch." The problem must fit the skill level of the students.

Allow the students practice time to create and perfect their own routines. Afterwards, the students can pair up and create a routine together by teaching each other the movements they have created. After the two students have worked together, you can have the students create groups of four, teach the routines they have created to each other, and develop a more complex routine. Individual routines should be from one to one and a half minutes long. Group routines can be up to three minutes in length.

The routines are perfect for a PTA/Open House demonstration—they are varied, colorful, and exciting. Use every opportunity to demonstrate to the public the beautiful sport of rhythmic gymnastics.

Ideas for routines

Basic movements for rope. Swing; serpentine; skip over rope; single jumps; double jumps; circle; spiral; leap over rope; figure eight; slide while turning rope; wrap rope around self.

Basic movements and cues for hoop. Hold lightly with thumb and fingers. Never grasp the hoop. Roll on the floor or body; spin on floor; toss; swing; swing and jump through; rotate/circle around a body part; move through rolling hoop.

Basic movements and cues for ball. The ball must rest lightly in the hand. It should not rest against the wrist or be grasped by the fingers. Bounce with hand, chest, foot; drop ball intentionally after a catch; roll on floor or body; spin on floor or finger; balance on palms with arms stretched to sides and perform a 360° turn; leap over rolling ball; toss and catch.

Basic movements and cues for ribbon. The goal is to show preciseness of ribbon patterns. The end of the ribbon and the free arm should always be active. Swing; spiral; circle; figure eight; serpentine.

Fundamental movements to use in routines. Bodywave; leap; turn (180 & 360°); balancing positions; pre-acrobatic elements; roll (not side), using one-arm support positions below vertical; pass-through splits. Locomotor movements such as walk, run, gallop, slide. All movements should be performed in a clearly-defined plane (frontal, sagittal, or horizontal).

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