

PROPER CONTRA IDEAS FOR USE IN SCHOOLS

Presented by Dottie Welch for BDPLS, Kansas City CALLERLAB, April 2009

References: Dancing for Busy People by Calvin Campbell, Ken Kernen and Bob Howell
Step Lively 2 – Canadian Dance Favourites by Marian Rose.

Music: For most of these dances any music with clear 8-count phrasing and 64-beat verses will work. Contras are usually danced at a slower tempo than modern square dancing. Aim for 116 to 124 beats per minute. Many of these dances recommend four to six couples because the figure can be completed in 64 beats with that number of dancers. They can be used for more couples but they will take longer. At least try to begin each sequence on an 8 beat phrase.

Definitions of Commonly used terms:

(Mix and match these to create your own dance designed specifically for your dancers and music.)

PROPER CONTRA LINES:

While they are seated ask students to make eye contact with one partner of either gender.
Allow a slow count of ten for them all to stand beside their partner.
To form the lines have partners line up one behind the other facing the caller.
Then have them face their partner and back away.
Spread the lines out down the hall so that each dancer can just touch the shoulder of the next dancer.
The **Top of the hall** is the end near the music and prompter.
Down the Hall describes actions moving away from the top of the hall.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS:

Solo Turn: Turn once around by walking in a small circle (usually to the right).
U-Turn Back: Turn half around to face the opposite direction (usually ending facing in).

PARTNER ACTIONS:

Dosado: Pass right-side to right-side, slide back to back, back up passing left-sides to starting spot.
Left Dosado: Pass left-side to left-side, slide back to back, back up passing right-sides to start.

Pass Thru & U-Turn Back: Pass right side to right side and turn alone to face in changing places with partner.

Forward and Back with Variations:

Forward 3 steps and touch free foot to floor on the 4th, Backup 3 steps and touch on the 4th.
Forward 3 and Clap, Back 3 and stomp
Forward and Whoop: Forward 3, raise hands palms out to partner and whoop on 4.

Turn Partner by the Right / Left: Turn partner by the designated hand or arm once around ending back in the original locations. Various hand or arm holds may be used.

Pigeon Wing: Elbows close to body, forearms raised and hands joined

Forearm Hold: Forearms adjacent with each partner's hand gently holding the other's elbow

Elbow Hook: Connect arms using hooked elbows

Turn Partner Both Hands Around: Join both hands with partner and turn once around ending back in the original locations. The direction of the turn is usually clockwise unless otherwise specified. In crowded situations dancers should pull in elbows as they pass in the center to avoid collisions.

Switch with Partner: Join both hands with partner and do a 2-hand turn half way around to exchange places with each other. For the 8 beat version use 3 steps in, 2 steps to switch, 3 steps back out on the opposite side. It is sometimes quickly danced in 4 beats.

GROUP ACTIONS:

Cast Off: Top couple Separates and leads a Single File Promenade down along the outside of their own line. All dancers turn towards the top of their line and "Follow the Leader".

Cast Down: Just the designated couple Separates and moves outside and down as directed.

Leaders Arch: Leading couple make a two-handed arch and the others duck through it and follow the new leading couple back to the top of the set.

Lead Around: The dancer at the end of one line leads their line around the other line and back to place

Long Potato Circle (or Chain Saw Circle, or Skinny Circle): Dancers join hands along each line and around the end. Maintaining the long, skinny shape dancers Circle to Left and then Circle to the Right back to their starting location.

Reel the Set (or Double Reel): (both dancers reeling) (also called Strip the Willow)

First couple turns by the right 1 1/2 then leaves their partner to go to the next person in their partner's line. Those two pairs each turn by the left. Actives come back to the center to turn partner by the right. Moving down the opposite line they turn the next dancer by the left and so on to the foot of the set.

Sashay: Top couple joins both hands and move sideways down the centre using quick side close steps. Alternately call Strut down the Center to avoid falls caused by overly energetic sashays in sneakers.

Separate: Top couple turns towards the top and each individual continues the turn to face out and go down along the outside of their own line.

DO SI DO REEL

Traditional Dance described in Step Lively 2 – Canadian Dance Favourites by Marion Rose

Formation: Contra Lines of 4 to 6 couples, partner facing each other, no gender difference

Music: Jigs, Step Lively 2 CD #2

Note: This is a simple, half-length introductory dance using only 32 beats.

---- , Top couple Sashay down

---- , -- Sashay back to top

---- , -- Others Dosado with partner

Top separate outside to foot, -- 2-Hands Turn Partner

COUPLE ARCH OVER

Idea from "No Name Contra" by Jerry Helt and "Shindig in the Barn" by Bob Howell.

Formation: Contra Lines of 4 to 6 couples, partner facing each other, no gender difference

Music: "Love in the Country" on RB 1301, or "Shindig in the Barn" on Wagon Wheel 921

Note: With six couples the Arch action will usually require 24 beats.

- - - - , - Forward 3 and Clap
- - Back up 4, - - Pass Thru
- - U-Turn Back, - Forward 3 and Clap
- - Back up 4, - - Pass Thru

- - U-Turn Back, - Top Couple Strut Down the Center to the foot
- - - - , Same couple Arch up over one line
- - - - , Arch down over the other line
- - - - , - - Join lines at the foot

BARLEY & OATS by Ken Kernen from Dancing for Busy People

Music: "14 Karot" on Ute UR9 or "Paddlin' Madelin' Home" on Blue Star 2455

Formation: Contra Lines of 4 to 6 couples, partner facing each other, no gender difference

Notes: Pass through the arch with right side to partner, dancer at bottom pretends.

- - - - , Everybody Forward and Back
- - - - , Right-Side Arch, Others Duck Thru, U-Turn Back
- - - - , Everybody Forward and Back
- - - - , New Right-Side Arch, Others Duck Thru, U-Turn Back

- - - - , Top Couple Sashay to the Foot
- - - - , Sashay back to the head of the set
- - - - , Cast Off and Promenade single file to the foot
- - - - , Actives Arch and others Duck Thru

JUNE BUG REEL by Dottie Welch, June 2008 for Cole's June Bug Barn Dance

Formation: Contra Lines of 4 to 8 couples, partner facing each other, no gender difference

Music: Reels or Hornpipes such as "St. Ann Reel" on TNT 201 or 232

Note: With longer lines activate 2 Top Couples and 2 Bottom Couples

- - - - , Lines Go Forward, 2, 3 and Stomp,
Back 2, 3, and Stomp, - - - Repeat
- - - - , Long Potato Circle Left (8)
- - - - , Long Potato Circle Right (8)

- - - - , Top Couple down the outside, Bottom Couple up the center
- - - - , - - Return inside out (Top up center, Bottom down outside)
- - - - , Top Couple down the outside to the bottom
- Others Two-Hand Turn once or twice around as time allows (8-16)

TOP TO TAIL Idea from Traditional Quebec Dance called "Reel du Castor"

This is suitable with a little guidance for primary and up.

Formation: Contra lines of 4 to 8 couples, partners facing each other, no gender difference

Music: Jigs or Reels with clear 8-beat phrasing such as "January 7th Jig" on Lloyd Shaw 318

Notes: For the Big Left Loop the Leaders lead a Promenade (hand holds whatever can be managed) to the left around to the foot, then back to the head. The lead couple then tag on behind the old tail and follow them to become the new tail.

----, - Lines Forward & Back with a Whoop

----, 2 hands Partners Switch places

----, -- Partners Switch back

----, Top Couple Walk down the Center 8 steps

----, Turn & come back and others step in behind

----, Top Couple lead a big left loop Promenade (maintain single hand hold)

----, All the way around

----, Leaders become the tail and end at the bottom

SPRING IN DUNCAN by Marian Rose, in Step Lively 2 – Canadian Dance Favourites

Formation: Contra lines of 4 to 6 couples, partners facing each other, no gender difference

Music: Jigs or Reels (Step Lively 2 CD #13)

----, Top couple sashay down the centre

----, -- Sashay Back

----, -- Others Go Forward and Back twice

While the Top Couple separate and go down the outside to the bottom

----, -- Long Potato Circle Left (8 beats)

----, -- Long Potato Circle Right (8 beats)

----, -- Turn Partner Left Arm around

----, -- Turn Partner Right Arm around

TRAFFIC JAM by Marion Rose & John Krumm

Formation: Contra lines of any number of couples, partners facing each other, no gender difference

Music: Should be a Polka with two distinct parts such as "Zaporozech" on Step Lively 2 CD #10

Clap, Clap, Clap, Stamp, Stamp, Stamp, Solo Turn

Clap, Clap, Clap, Stamp, Stamp, Stamp, Other way Solo Turn

Clap, Clap, Clap, Stamp, Stamp, Stamp, Switch with partner (in 4 beats)

Clap, Clap, Clap, Stamp, Stamp, Stamp, Switch with partner

----, Top couple begin a cascading Sashay to the foot

Others move up - , - - 2nd Couple Sashay

----, -- 3rd Couple Sashay

----, -- 4th Couple Sashay

HIGH FIVE PROPER Idea from High Five Contra by Calvin Campbell

Formation: Contra lines of 4 to 6 couples, partners facing each other, no gender difference

Music: "Waltzing Matilda" on Grenn or FTC 32054

- - - - , Forward 3 and Clap Right
- Backup 3 & Stomp, Forward 3 and Clap Left
- Backup 3 & Stomp, Forward 3 and Clap Both
- Backup 3 & Stomp, Forward 3 and Clap Both

- Backup 3 & Stomp, - - Partner Dosado
- - - - , - - Left Dosado
- - - - , Top Couple Sashay to the Foot
- - - - , Next Couple Sashay Down

KINGSTON FLYER by Ian Boyd, Described in Dancing for Busy People, page 288

Formation: Contra lines of 4 to 6 couples, partners facing each other, no gender difference

Music: "Freight Train" on Blue Star 2410, or "Wabash Cannonball" on Red Boot Star 1277

Note: To complete the lead around in the time allowed, dancers must step out briskly with big steps.

- - - - , - - Top Lady lead ladies around the men (16 steps so move it out)
- - - - , - - - -
- - - - , - - Top Gent lead gents around the ladies (16 steps)
- - - - , - - - -

- - - - , - - Top Couple strut down the middle
- - - - , - - and strut back
- - - - , - - Tops separate down the outside
- - - - , - - All Forward and Back (Originally Actives Dosado at the foot)

CALLISON HALL PROPER Idea from "Callison Hall Jig" by Don Armstrong and group

Formation: Contra lines of 6 to 12 couples, partners facing each other, no gender difference

Music: "Callison Hall Jig" on Lloyd Shaw 320

Notes: For Heel and Toe partners join both hands and begin action with the foot towards the top of the hall. Touch floor with heel, then with toe, then take three side steps toward the top of the hall (side, close, side). Repeat the whole action beginning with the foot away from the top of the hall.

- - - - , - - Heel and Toe, Up, 2, 3
- Heel Toe, Down, 2, 3; - - Do it again
- - - - , - - Dosado
- - - - , Pass Thru & Turn Alone

- - - - , Long Lines Forward and Back
- - - - , Pass Thru and Turn Alone
- - - - , Top Couple Sashay Down
- - - - , Second Couple Sashay Down

FARMER'S JIG PROPER Idea from traditional dance for 4 couples called Farmer's Jig.

Formation: Contra lines of 4 to 8 couples, partners facing each other, no gender difference

Music: Use Marching Music such as "Glory Hallelujah" on Bogan 1228

- , -- March Up Eight
- , -- March Down Eight
- , -- Slow Sashay Up in Eight (side, close, side, close, side, close, side, touch)
- , -- Slow Sashay Back in Eight

- , --- Claps (knees, knees, own hands, hands, opposite, 2, 3)
- , -- Claps again
- , -- Top Couple (or 2 or 3) March down inside to bottom
- , -- Forward and Back

BRANDY

This simple version of the traditional "Reel" figure is described by Marion Rose in Step Lively 2.

Formation: Contra lines of 5 to 6 couples, partners facing each other, no gender difference

Music: Reels or Jigs such as "Maple Leaf & Old Rocking Chair Jig" on Southerners + 2

- , Long Potato Circle Left (8)
- , Long Potato Circle Right (8)
- , Top Couple Lead down (4) and back (4)
- , Top Couple pass each other Left turn next

- Right turn partner, -- Left turn # 3
- Right turn partner, -- Left turn # 4
- Right turn partner, -- Left turn # 5
- Right turn partner, -- Left turn # 6 and finish at end of own line

VIRGINIA TUNNEL by Alex Ritchie

Formation: Contra lines of 6-8 couples, partners facing each other, no gender difference

Music: "Virginia Reel" on MacGregor 7345

Notes: For the Tunnel all couples move up their line and when at the top follow the leaders down the center with inside hands joined ready to raise them and make a tunnel. The Leaders U-Turn Back and Dive Thru the tunnel. All other couples follow the leaders and also U-Turn Back and Dive Thru the tunnel back to their original location. The leaders have a long tunnel, those at the foot have no tunnel.

- , Everybody Forward and Back
- , -- Turn Opposite Right Hand Around
- , -- Turn Opposite Left Hand Around
- , -- Turn Opposite Both Hands Around

- , -- Top Couple strut down the center 12 steps.
- Others move up and follow, -- Raise joined hands
- Leaders U-Turn Back & Dive Thru, -- all follow
- , Just the Leaders Cast Down to the foot