

## Shag Dance Lesson Plan

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The Carolina Shag is a social partner dance that originated on the Carolina coast during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and began to be famous during WWII. It never went out of style, and continues to be popular today.



The Official State Dance of South Carolina, and now North Carolina as well, the Shag evolved from the 6 count Swing, and is in the family of American Swing dances which all started with the Charleston, including the Lindy Hop, Jitterbug, and basic Swing.

“Carolina Beach Music” is the type of music to which Shaggers traditionally dance.

Not unlike a folk dance, the Shag basic step varies in different parts of the Carolinas, but the common factors are that the basic is completed in 6 musical counts, and that partners move toward, then away from their partners, and stay away on the last two counts.

The style of the Shag is smooth and connected to the floor, feet sliding more than stepping. After mastering the leading/following technique, dancers hold only one hand (gentlemen’s left, lady’s right).



Unlike the swing, and other social dances, the Shag employs a unique improvisational aspect in that each partner may change his/her basic or steps while dancing, yet still be “in step” with a partner.

Currently, tens of thousands of teens and adults belong to Shag Clubs in North and South Carolina, facilitating championships and social gatherings, such as SOS (Society of Stranders) on Ocean Drive in North Myrtle Beach, the official “Home of the Shag”.

### Resources

Some Shag Clubs promote the traditional social dance aspect, socializing and having fun, and some clubs concentrate on a competitive aspect, adding Jazz

dance steps and working in a particular style in order to succeed at a competitive level, not unlike the difference between social ballroom dance and competitive ballroom dance. [www.shagdance.com](http://www.shagdance.com) has links to many of these things.

this lesson plan is excerpted from *Carolina Shag: the Spirit of Southern Social Dance* by Caroline Hoadley, available at her website, [www.carolinadancing.com](http://www.carolinadancing.com).

## Instruction

**Engage & Build Knowledge:** All over the world, for hundreds of years, people have danced to socialize and for fun and celebration. Knowledge of universal Social Dance manners and skills make it possible for people to participate in this sort of activity at any age, wherever they are. Whether in a formal or casual setting, **the basic rules** are the same for all social dances.

- Gentlemen start on the Left foot, Ladies on the Right foot
- Gentlemen lead, and ladies follow
- It is rude to dance with the same person repeatedly. The well mannered person will ask as many people to dance as possible, changing partners as often as possible. In a social dance class, the rule should be for each person to ask a different partner until one has asked everyone of a different gender in the room. Traditionally, the last dance of the evening is saved for someone special. In keeping with that tradition, there is even a song by the Drifters called "Save the Last Dance for Me".



- At the end of each dance, both partners should look each other in the eye, shake hands, and thank each other

verbally for the dance.

- Whether a Gentleman asks a lady to dance, or the Lady asks him, the Gentleman should lead the Lady to the dance floor by the hand and off the dance floor in the same manner.



build knowledge continued:

### **"Walking" Basics in Social Dance**

- The term "Basic" refers to a step that is repeated over and over that defines a social or ballroom dance.
- The term "Walking" refers to a basic in which the dancer is stepping from one foot to the other repeatedly in a pattern.
- A step is putting one's entire weight on a foot, which requires using the other foot next.
- Many dances have Walking Basics, either because the main basic just happens to be in a walking pattern, or because the widely used basic for that dance requires music of a slow tempo (in order to have the time to execute the basic), so that an alternate, simpler basic will facilitate dancing to faster music.
- Many Walking Basics have evolved from the desire of the dancers to dance to the faster music.
- In the Carolina Shag, all basics are Variations on the Walking Basic.

### **Apply**

Shag and Social Dance Lesson Progressions

### **Part One: Dancing with a Partner and Social Skills**

- In Social Dance, body language is very important. Messages are sent by the way one's body is held and facial expressions.
- Dancers should stand up straight, arms by their sides, with a smile on their faces as they approach another person to ask for a dance. First impressions are everything.
- It is helpful to arrange students in two lines facing each other (one for Ladies, one for Gentlemen) and have them practice posture and facial expression as the technical lesson proceeds.
- In asking someone to dance, there should be eye contact, a hand reaching out with the palm up (Left for Gentlemen, Right for Ladies) and the words "May I have this dance?" spoken clearly.
- In accepting an offer, there should be eye contact, the corresponding hand (Left for Gentlemen, Right for Ladies) should be placed in the palm offered, and the words "Yes, you may" spoken clearly.
- Sometimes Gentlemen ask Ladies to dance, and sometimes Ladies ask Gentlemen, but once there has been a request and an acceptance, it is the Gentlemen's responsibility to lead the Lady to the dance floor and face his partner, holding her hands.
- In social dance lessons with unequal numbers of Ladies and Gentlemen, students "left over" should dance with an imaginary partner (not someone of their own gender, as the steps will not work for that), practicing everything the students with partners are doing. In this way, their muscles will memorize everything the other students doing. Let students dancing with imaginary

partners have a head start asking a partner the next time, so that the students dancing with imaginary partners will rotate.

### - **Leading note for the Gentleman:**

In order to find the down beat and tempo of the music, the Gentlemen should bend his knees 3 times (6 musical counts) before beginning the first basic.

### **Part 2: Holding Hands**

- In Social Dance, hands are held in a certain fashion. This facilitates good leading skills, and ability of the Gentleman to turn the Lady. Practice holding your own hand first:

Hold the hands up with fingers together, thumb apart.

Place palm against palm

Bend the fingers around the other hand.

Hold firmly (not too tight)

When dancing with a partner, Gentlemen are responsible for holding the Lady's hand. In Shag, dancers hold only one hand (Lady's right, Gentleman's left.) However, it is helpful for beginners to hold both hands.

### **Part 3: The Walking Shag Basic**

All Shag basics are variations on the Walking Basic. The first Shag basic to learn is almost like walking, a constant weight shift from one foot to the other. Instead of stepping, the feet slide on the floor to change position on the first 4 counts. The feet do step on the last 2 counts. As in all Shag basics, this basic is completed in 6 musical counts.

The leading foot for the gentlemen is the left.

The leading foot for the ladies is the right.

Count 1 - leading foot slides forward toward your partner.

Count 2 - Other foot slides forward to join the leading foot (feet are now together.)

Count 3 - leading foot slides back away from your partner.

Count 4 - Other foot slides back to join the leading foot (feet are now together.)

Count 5 - leading foot steps in place (going nowhere.)

Count 6 - Other foot steps in place (going nowhere.)

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*"When we dance we do steps, both feet together and bend."* - Aleshia, 3rd grader in the Lowcountry Arts Integration Project

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## Style notes

Bending knees allows for sliding more smoothly. On counts 5 6, knees should bend even more. Dancers whose knees appear to move fluidly in a lateral manner are said to have "rubberknees"!

## Leading Notes for the Gentlemen

In the Shag, the hand that is holding your partner's hand never reaches out to the side, as it does in other swing dances. It collapses between the partners.

At this point in the lessons, the Gentlemen should lift their hands slightly and bring their elbows forward to touch their partner's elbows during every basic on Count 2. This creates the right space dynamic in the slot for the Gentleman to control.

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## Reflection

### Here's what 3rd graders in the Lowcountry Arts Integration Project in Beaufort had to say about their Shag & Social Dance lessons:

*"We keep our mouths shut so our muscles can learn."* - Shamar

*"First I was nervous, then I felt good."* - Markham

*"I feel great. It gives me an opportunity to know everybody and learn how to do the state dance. It's a dance everyone can learn. I memorized the dance in my head."* - Michael



*"She told us to take turns, and we had to hold out our hands, it was separate hands to hold out for the girls and the boys. It was fun, it was actually my first time learning to shag. We had talked about it in social studies, our teacher told us about it. It's the state dance because of the beach and the beach music. I'm going to keep on shag dancing when it gets hot, on the beach. This will help me know what to do when I go to a prom. I'll already know and be polite when I do it. I like to do all the moves, Ms. Hoadley taught us three parts— up together and back with the six steps, the set up, and the turn."* - Deonte

*"I thought no one would pick me, but then when I did get to dance, I felt good. I hope to dance more with my baby brother."* - Genesis

*"People kept telling me I can't dance. When I tried, it felt right. It's good exercise."* – Millennia

*"I feel good when I'm dancing, I get to move."* - Jenia

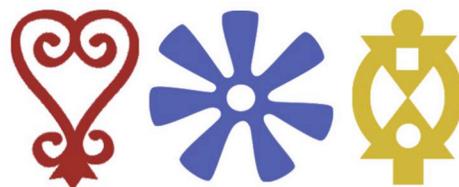
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*"First I felt shy, and said I wasn't going to do it. When I went for it, when I first asked him, he said no, but finally we danced."* - Shamiya

*"What I like about Shag is that you can choose anyone you want."* - Telayah

*"Social dance makes me want to dance all the time."* - David

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