

Celebrate The Big Read with salsa dancing lessons

By Lisa Britton
Go! Magazine

LA GRANDE — Amelia Diaz Ettinger's earliest memory of dancing was in Puerto Rico, when she was 4.

"A little boy asked me to dance," she said. "I've danced all my life. Dancing is such a vital part of people's health."

This month she's sharing her knowledge of salsa dancing as part of The Big Read events at Art Center East. This year's featured book is "The House on Mango Street" by Sandra Cisneros.

Ettinger has recorded four mini lessons that will be released at 1 p.m. Feb. 23, 24, 25 and 26. The videos will go live on ACE's YouTube channel, or access them at www.artcentereast.org/calendar/salsa-dancing-with-amelia-diaz-ettinger/ or fishtrap.org.



Art Center East/Contributed image
Amelia Diaz Ettinger will teach salsa dancing lessons online, Feb. 23-26, as part of The Big Read events in Union County. This year's featured book is "The House on Mango Street."

Ettinger has a history with teaching this style of dance — she introduced salsa to her classes at La Grande High School, where she taught for 21 years.

"That was part of my curriculum," she said.

Salsa, she said, is not difficult to learn.

"The steps in salsa are fairly easy," she said. "I break it down, and there's a really clear description of the count."

Salsa can be fast or slow. "The steps we use for the videos are moderately slow," she said.

Mainly, she hopes people have a good time learning a bit of cultural dancing — all in the comfort of their living room.

"I think it'll be fun," she said.

"You don't have to be excellent at it to enjoy it. It's not trying to strike perfection."

Plus, these lessons are free. "I hope people take advantage of it — salsa lessons are expensive," she said with a laugh.

Her lessons are to the music "Candela" by the Buena Vista Social Club, which was recorded in 1997 as a collection of Cuban songs played by musicians in their 60s, 70s and 80s.

"I want to pay an homage to them," Ettinger said of the band.

ABOUT THE BIG READ

"The House on Mango Street" is a 1984 novel by Mexican-American author Sandra Cisneros. Structured as a series of vignettes, it tells the story of Esperanza Cordero, a 12-year-old Chicana girl growing up in the Hispanic quarter of Chicago.

The Big Read is a way for an entire community to read and experience the same book by providing copies to libraries and schools. Organizations in Wallowa and Union counties have planned events in February and March based on the book — for the full schedule and updates, visit www.fishtrap.org or www.artcentereast.org.

FEBRUARY BIG READ EVENTS

Our Neighborhood: Writing About Home

Saturday, Feb. 19, 3 p.m.

Cook Memorial Library

Participants will doodle a neighborhood map and write stories from memories. Supplies provided. Appropriate for all ages, especially for families writing together. Youth younger than 10 should be accompanied by an adult. Masks required in buildings.

Read-Around

Tuesday, Feb. 22, 10 a.m.

EOU Library Reading Room

For EOU students, adults and children ages 10 and older. Participants will read aloud from "The House on Mango Street" or just listen. Copies will be available in English and Spanish. Masks required in campus buildings.

Book Discussion

Tuesday, Feb. 22, 3 p.m.

EOU Library Reading Room

For EOU students, teens and adults. Copies of the book are available to read in advance from the EOU Library, Cook Memorial Library, and Art Center East, but all are invited to listen, regardless of having read. Masks required in campus buildings.

Read-Around

Tuesday, Feb. 22, 6 p.m.

Art Center East, 1006 Penn Ave.

Book Discussion

Wednesday, Feb. 23, noon

Live online at fishtrap.org

For EOU events, community members can park on Sixth Street or visit the kiosk on the north side of Loso Hall to purchase a parking pass for \$2, good for visitor spaces on the east side of Badgley Hall (north of Loso Hall) and for unmarked spaces on the west side of Badgley Hall or in the lot south of Loso Hall.

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Book by Allan Knee

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