

Dance the Virginia Reel

Learn this fun dance that was popular during the mid-19th century. If you can, gather at least six people to dance. The more the merrier! The folk tune “Turkey in the Straw” is a perfect accompaniment to the Virginia Reel. Visit notgrass.com/ablinks for further instructions and for music to accompany your dance. (Never use the Internet without a parent’s permission.)



This illustration from Harper’s Weekly shows dancers in Huntsville, Alabama, doing the Virginia Reel in 1864.

Instructions

1. Choose partners. Divide into two lines facing each other, as seen in the drawing above, everyone directly across from his or her partner. Hold hands with the people beside you in two long lines.
2. (Music count: 1-2-3-4) Each line takes four small steps forward.
3. (1-2-3-4) Each line takes four small steps backward.
4. (1-2-3-4) Each line takes four small steps forward.
5. (1-2-3-4) Each line takes four small steps backward.
6. (1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8) Drop hands with the people beside you. Join right hands with your partner and walk in a circle back to place.
7. (1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8) Join left hands with your partner and walk in a circle back to place.
8. (1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8) Join both hands with your partner and walk in a circle back to place.
9. (1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8) Do-si-do with your partner (make a circle around each other without turning around, passing right shoulders and then left shoulders, ending where you started).
10. (1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16) The couple at one end of the lines (the head couple) joins both hands and gallops between the other couples eight counts down and eight counts back to place. The couple in the center of the drawing above is galloping.
11. (1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16) The head couple makes an arch with their hands. The other couples join both hands and in turn walk under the arch, drop hands, walk around the back of the arch on their side, and get back in line. After all the couples have passed under the arch, the head couple walks along the back of the lines to the bottom.
12. The dance begins again. The couple now at the top of the line will be the new head couple.