

## River City Youth Ballet Teaching Aids



**(304) 925-3262**

### ***Going to the Ballet***

When you go to a live performance, it is extremely important to be respectful of your surroundings. Look for all of the emergency exits as you enter the theater. Once you are seated, make sure that your cell phones or anything that might disturb your neighbors are turned off. When the house lights (the lights where you are sitting) go down, it will get dark. This means that the show is about to begin. During the performance everyone should remain quiet. If you must go to the rest room, try to wait until the lights on the stage go out. This is called a black out and is done when the sets on stage need to be changed and before a new scene or piece begins. Did you know that taking flash photographs during a show is dangerous? Not only is it disturbing to your neighbors, but it can distract the dancers on stage and cause an accident! Performers love applause, but if it occurs during a piece the performers on stage may get distracted. Try to hold your applause to the end of a dance or scene. At the end of a performance, the dancers will take a curtain call. This is when the dancers all come out and bow. Have you heard an excited audience member yell Bravo? Bravo is a way to tell a male performer that you think he did an amazing job! Brava is what is yelled for a wonderful female performance. After the performance is over, stay seated until the house lights come up again.

### ***Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and the Poor Prince***



Everyone but the poor Prince lives happily ever after when the River City Youth Ballet Ensemble, the West Virginia Youth Symphony, and the Appalachian Children's Chorus re-tell the stories of the three princesses, with endings that may surprise you.

## **River City Youth Ballet Ensemble** **Suggested Pre and Post Show Activities**

The following activities are based on the New York City Ballet's *Nutcracker* Education Department's activity sheet at <http://www.nycballet.com/nutresource.htm>. They are a way to acquaint students with the individual ballets as well as the idea of ballet itself as movement without words. Activities incorporate writing, drawing and/or class discussion. As in this production, let student's imagination be the key to these activities!

### **Pre-Show Activities**

1. Many students have never been to a live theater performance before. It will be helpful to explain what sort of behavior is expected from them. Once the lights dim and the music starts, everyone should sit quietly and remain in his or her seat. The audience should be ready to react to the performance and enjoy the program. Performers appreciate it when you let them know that you liked something by applauding.
2. Review various elements of the performance: the story itself, the sets, the costumes, and the music. For example: how would you dress if you were this character?
3. Pick out things that your class discussed to watch for during the show. Encourage students to be alert for transitions between real world and the dream world.

### **Create Your Own Story:**

To promote originality, do not mention the production you are attending to your students.

Below is a list of the five ingredients from which students will create their own stories.

**Your Bedroom**—when, describe the setting

**Who or What is There**—people, animals, or things

**A Very Special Person or Thing**—describe what makes this person or thing special

**A Magical Gift**—what is it, from whom, for whom, what are its magical properties

**Everything Changes**—describe how everything changes and its effect on all the other story elements

Ask the students to use their imaginations to create original stories using these five story elements. These can be independently written stories, or a story in-the-round, in which each student contributes different elements to a class-created story. If the stories are written independently, ask students to share their stories with the rest of the class.

Prior to attending the performance, review with the students the five elements that they should look for at the performance.

### **Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and the Poor Prince** **Some Approaches in the Classroom by: Dr. James Hissom**

1. The story line of the show consists of three parts, each of which begins the story of "Cinderella," "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty" in the traditional way and then reverses the expected "happy ending" in which the heroine marries the handsome prince. A good pre-show activity, then, would be to read some form of the original or have students retell the story in class, citing different versions that have appeared in recent films, TV shows, etc. Discussion could involve students' reactions to the basic story lines with their marrying-the-prince conclusions, and the major and minor characters. (Some students tend to identify with the mice, the stepsisters, the dwarves, and the good and bad fairies more readily than with the "stars," which can make for an interesting discussion.)

2. The same approach can be taken post-show, of course, incorporating the changed story lines. Do students find them funny, confusing, satisfying, etc.? What are their feelings about the negative characters and the "poor prince"? Do the retellings seem more true to experience than the traditional narratives? Do they change the way in which we identify with particular characters?

3. Depending on the grade level, interpretive approaches to the original stories can get fairly

sophisticated. Not having taught in public schools, I'm only generally aware of teacher supplements at the primary level, but a lot of material is available on websites like edHelper, teachingheart, edsitement, and readwritethink. (The last has exercises on writing "fractured fairy tales" like ours.) Older books include Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (now out of print but available at most bigger libraries), which remains a standard psychological reading of many classic fairy tales; though it would be a challenge to most readers below high school level, it's easy to summarize, and its basic theme on the place of fairy tales in the process of maturation should be immediately interesting to anyone from middle school upwards. Madonna Kolbenschlag's *Don't Bet On the Prince* (possibly harder to locate) presents interesting feminist readings of the major tales and would probably spark discussions in the same age group.

4. The music in this production will be a fairly mixed bag. See if students can identify the different songs and other pieces listed in the program and discuss the ways in which they contribute to establishing character and setting, advancing the story line, etc. Have they come away from the show interested in new types of music? It might be interesting to discuss the ballets, films, TV shows, and other sources from which the music is drawn.

5. Finally, discuss student reactions to the types of dance employed in the program: favorite dancers and pieces, the role of dance in establishing character and mood and in advancing the story line, etc. Given time, a search through Google will turn up a number of beginner-level introductions to ballet, and there are a number of books (*Ballet for Dummies* may be the most readily available) that would be useful in a pre-show, visually oriented discussion of the art form. If you have any students who take dance, you could invite them to demonstrate basic positions and stances for the class. Some students with limited exposure to ballet have trouble appreciating its method of story-telling and the very different technique involved, but many others don't - they "know what they like" by instinct and may be able to explain it to others in a valuable, intuitive fashion. Also, a good bit of the dance is deliberately comic, so it might be interesting to talk about the effects of the contrasts in style.

### ***Music and Imagination***

Explain to the students that music is a powerful inspiration of their imagination. Play selected pieces of music and let the music inspire moods, imagery, and stories.

Tell the students that you are going to play music that can take them on a journey. They are to sit quietly, close their eyes, listen to the music and let what they hear become colors, places and people in their mind's eye. While the students are listening to the music with eyes closed, ask the following: What if the walls of the school would open up and you could fly out into the sky? Where would you go? What colors would you see? Are there people and/or buildings? Have you found a new land? What is your newly discovered world? Students can write, draw the places, people and other things they see on their imaginary journey, or even make a collage from magazine pictures.

Before the show, ask students to observe the tempo of the music and how the dancers' movements and moods change with the music. This can help introduce or reinforce the concepts of allegro (fast tempo) and adagio (slow tempo).

### ***Math and Science***

Ask students to observe the dancers use of space and time during the production. Also ask students to relate the dancer's movements to physics. Examples would be: torque and centripetal force (used in turns), how does gravity play a role in the dancer's movements especially jumps. Introduce or reinforce 3<sup>rd</sup> law of motion using jumping as an example. The harder a dancer pushes against the floor, the higher she/he will jump. In what direction(s) is force applied when a dancer jumps? What does gravitational force depend on? Does a dancer's momentum also depend on his or her mass? When a dancer runs and jumps what is the trajectory? Is it a parabola? How do you think that the center of gravity changes when a dancer is en pointe? Static Balance (forces on a balanced dancer, gravity pulling down and the support of the floor pushing up). Are these forces equal to zero? What does this do to the torque? Is it also zero? What forces act on a dancer as he/she turns in the air? What about the dancers change in speed or direction of motion?

## **Physics by: Dr. James Hissom**

[Applications would vary from middle-school general science to the quantified formulae of high school classes; the example here could serve as a starting-point with a minimum of technical language.]

### **The *grand jete* and “floating”** [Photo and/or line drawing]

How can we explain the illusion of “floating” that dancers achieve in the middle of an extended jump (*jete*)? How would you describe the shape of the dancer’s path/trajectory? [a parabola/arc]

**Assume:** once dancers push off, their center of gravity *has* to follow a trajectory *totally determined* by the conditions of motion at the beginning of the push. [Which ones? Constant horizontal velocity and vertical thrust] Although dancers can change their body configurations to produce other effects, *nothing* can change the trajectory of the center of gravity until they hit the stage again.

**Assume:** the speed of their motion decreases to zero at its height, then increases negatively as the center of gravity descends. [Clue: To simplify the problem a bit, a standard vertical jump will exhibit the following proportions:

T (seconds)	1/4	1/3	1/2	1
H	3”	5.5”	1’	4’]

**Thus:** half of the total time that the body is in the air occurs within  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the highest point. Scaling this down to more typical *jete* proportions [do the math], if the center of gravity rises 2’, total air time will be about 0.7 second, with 0.35 within 6” of highest point.

How do dancers exploit this proportion? The center of gravity can’t vary from the initial trajectory, but the center of gravity *relative to the body* can. Notice that their legs and arms are relatively low at liftoff, centering gravity in the abdominal area. Now notice the ascent: part way through the arc, they raise and extend their arms and legs (often doing a “split”) so the center rises to the stomach or maybe even higher. With perfect timing, the center follows the arc, but the head and torso continue to move horizontally! [line drawing]

**Thus:** since our eyes tend to track the head and torso, the whole dancer seems to float during this tiny window of time.

### **Post-Show Activities**

Have students write a review of the performance. Did the performance hold your interest? Describe how the story was presented, the structure of the story, how different storylines converged, the plot, the sets, the costumes, the lighting, the music, the skill of the performers.

Ask the students to select their favorite dance or dancer in the production and explain why they chose that particular dance or dancer.

Have a discussion in which the students describe the journey taken by a dancer or dancers and compare and contrast that journey to their own imaginary journeys.

Ask students to discuss how each dancer dances in the production. The choreographed movements executed by the dancers are what bring places or things to life. This enables students to describe how the characters in the production were revealed through movement.

Ask each student to identify three qualities of an object brought from home or found in the classroom, and let them imagine themselves as the object. Have them write and perform movements conveying the look, feel, and purpose of the object. They should explore the following: What does it look like? Is it hard or soft? Is it functional? Is it a toy? Is it pliable? Is it colorful? What would the furniture in the student’s homes move like? What about the clothes in their closets? What would happen if two or more objects danced together (i.e., sun and moon)? This activity introduces the idea of personification, giving objects movement qualities. It also reinforces the students’ understanding of how dancers in the production become “other people places or things”.

**River City Youth Ballet**  
**Word Search**  
(304) 925-3262 [www.rcyb.org](http://www.rcyb.org)

*Find the following words backwards or forwards: diagonally, horizontally, or vertically.*

<b>Snow White</b>	<b>Cinderella</b>
<b>Prince</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
<b>Imagination</b>	<b>Dance</b>
<b>Chorus</b>	<b>Ballet</b>
<b>Orchestra</b>	<b>Sleeping Beauty</b>
<b>Costume</b>	<b>Stage</b>
<b>Fairytale</b>	<b>Twist</b>

*Cinderella, Snow  
Beauty, and the*

S A S B A L L E T C A  
T N L I M L G E U O R  
A Q E M L O R F E N T  
G M E P R I N C E D S  
E K P F E Z Y R O U E  
K E I Q T U B K S C H  
A T N L K P U N R T C  
L I G C H O R U S O R O  
L H B R D A E E K R O  
E W E W Y K C D N L D  
R W A E T W I S T D A  
E O U K C U K K A Y N  
D N T J O U R N E Y C  
N S Y R C O S T U M E  
I M A G I N A T I O N  
C H F A I R Y T A L E

*White, Sleeping  
Poor Prince*

# What is Ballet?

By: ML Raider, River City Youth Ballet Ensemble

Like many other art forms, ballet is a discipline that uses the entire body to interpret feelings, music, and beliefs. To quote modern dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, "To me, the body says what words can not...Dancing is very like poetic lyricism, sometimes it's like the rawness of dramatic poetry, it is like the terror, or it can be a terrible revelation of meaning." Dance has been an integral part of our history. As far back as Egyptian hieroglyphics, dance has been used to tell stories and to represent the culture of the people. Dance varies within each society. It mimics the daily routine of the people. To see dance is to see how one culture evolves. Ballet, a form of dance, can be traced back as far as 1400 to the courts of Italy, where Dominique Ferrara coined the term ballet. Dominique's creations led to the term balleti. The costumes for the balleti were long heavy gowns. In the mid 1500's, ballet as we know it today was adopted by the French. To this day, all ballet steps are described in French. Ballet class can be shared by anyone in the world even if they do not share the same language or nationality because of its shared terminology. Ballets were originally staged in the 1500's to entertain the King and his court. In 1661 Louis the 14<sup>th</sup> established ballet as an independent theater art. He also established the Academy Royal de Dance, which was an academy of dance held in a room of the Louvre Palace. Here dance masters gathered to perfect ballet, using all-male casts. It was at this time that Pierre Beauchamp was given credit for the five basic ballet positions known today. These positions are used to begin and end all ballet movements.

**First Position**



**Second Position**



**Third Position**



**Fourth Position**



**Fifth Position**



*Figures were obtained on the New York City Ballet's Web Page at:  
<http://www.nycballet.com/nutresource.htm>*

In 1681 the first female dancer graced the stage in the normally all-male cast. By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, women dancers were more common but did not supersede the male dancers. The term choreography (which literally means dance writing) was coined, and the Paris Opera established a school of dance. As ballet became a more tuned art form, and stage presence became more important. For instance, turned out feet and legs were established to be more pleasing to the eye of the audience. Women's floor-length gowns grew shorter to allow for better movement on stage.

By the 1800's the romantique ballet was born, and the ballet blanc (which referred to the long, white tutu) was created. The costumes for these ballets were white, tiered skirts that fell from a tight bodice to the ankle. *La Sylphide*, a ballet blanc, is an example of a romantique ballet. From the romantique era came dancing en pointe. Ballet also established a strong presence in Russia.



*Romantic Tutu*

By 1862 Marius Petipa was making a large impact on ballet in St. Petersburg. He produced single act and multiple act ballets like *Don Quiote* and *La Bayadere*. By the 1890's Petipa changed the romantic ballet to what is known as classical ballet. An example of a classical ballet is Petipa's creation of *The Nutcracker*. During this classical period short tutus (classical tutus) were born. The word tutu is said to have derived from the French baby talk *cul-cul*, which means bottom. Divertissements were also created. A divertissement is a dance that has no real meaning to a story in a ballet, such as the Russian, Chinese, and Arabian dances in *The Nutcracker*.



*Classical Tutu*

(Photo By: Michael Keller)

From the classic era the stage was being set for dancers and choreographers like Diaghilev, Folkine, and Balanchine to excel. After the 1930's, ballet made its way to America through the genius of George Balanchine. He introduced this European art form to America and made a new home for it. He also introduced a different type of ballet called the contemporary ballet. Contemporary ballets have no story and have a broader interpretation of ballet steps, giving the choreographer total control. Today ballet dancers must work very hard and have physical and mental talent in order to pursue careers as professional or paid ballerinas and premier danseurs. They must work in a structured class 6 days a week for many hours a day in order to train their bodies for performance. A normal ballet class takes the five basic positions referred to earlier and links them to a series of stretches, strengthening exercises and stamina-building repetitions.

Today there are several teaching methods in ballet. There is Vaganova or Russian, Cecchetti or Italian, French, and RAD or Royal Academy of Dance, to name a few.

## **THE CLASS**

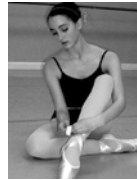


(Photo By: Jim Hissom)

Before the class starts, dancers should have on the proper attire consisting of: leotards, tights, and technique shoes; hair should be pulled off the face in a bun or French twist, and no jewelry should be worn to prevent injuries. Dancers begin a normal hour and a half class by slowly getting their joints warm.

Once that is done, class can begin. Ballet class is usually broken into two main sections which consist of several smaller sections. Section 1 is at the barre. Section 2 is in the center. All classes consist of adagios (slow movements), pirouettes (turns), allegros (quick steps usually with small and large jumps), and a reverence to end the class. Generally, the student thanks the teacher before leaving as a sign of respect. Dance classes are repeated each day with the same basic steps. The dancer continually tries to perfect his or her body and each step. A separate class is given to girls who are en pointe.

### **POINTE SHOES**



The pointe shoe was first made by darning the tips of simple satin slippers. Today, the pointe shoe box is prepared with special glues and burlap or cardboard to make a stiff box to support a dancer's weight. Shoes should fit snugly on the feet. The toes should not curl in the boxes, and the dancers should stand squarely over the box. This reduces strain on the feet and tendons.

Dancers also have classes in partnering. This class teaches boys how to lift girls properly. It also teaches girls how to hold themselves en pointe while being partnered. Variations classes are also given to dancers so that they can learn a company's repertoire and the set choreography to ballets like *The Nutcracker*, and *Swan Lake*, to name a few. Dancers are expected to learn and perfect each dance.