

## 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.

### ***Fire and Ice***



Discover what happens with the “firebird” attempts to help a prince destroy evil and when a snowman falls in love with the unlikely object of a stove in River City Youth Ballet Ensemble’s *Fire and Ice*.

## ***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.

## ***Fire and Ice***

### ***Some Approaches in the Classroom by: Megan Meadows***

1. The show consists of two parts: the classical ballet, Firebird, and the Hans Christian Anderson fairytale Snowman. A good preshow activity would be to ask students if they have ever seen the ballet or read the fairytale. You could then have them read the fairytale and give them an overview about Firebird. Then have students create their own stories combining aspects of both Firebird and Snowman.
2. Post-show, you could have students discuss things they saw in the ballet that they remembered from the previous discussions of Firebird and Snowman. For example, have them give examples that involve character, storyline, and even emotions displayed through the music in the ballet.
3. Preshow, you could have students make a Venn-diagram; in one circle put facts about the ballet Firebird, and in the other circle put facts about Snowman. In the center have them put similarities between the two stories. After the show, have students revisit the diagram and add to it.
4. In a high school setting you could have your students look at other works by Hans Christian Anderson. Have your students pick out similarities among his works. You could then have them write their own ballet using another Hans Christian Anderson story including music, costumes, and stage props.
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.

## ***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 it 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**

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

|             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| Fire        | Bravo      |
| Prince      | Snowman    |
| Imagination | Dance      |
| Sun         | Ballet     |
| Apple       | Stravinsky |
| Costume     | Stage      |
| Fairytale   | Bird       |

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

*Fire and Ice*