

## BALLET BASICS



**Resources Needed:** BALLET VISUALS - examples of dancers in costume, ballet feet and arm positions, from a book, poster, video or online source

**WHAT is Ballet?** Ballet is a form of dance with unique qualities. Ballet dancers perform difficult movements with grace and style, and this requires many years of training in daily dance class. They wear leotards and tights which fit close to their body and allow them support and freedom of movement. Ballerinas (female dancers) wear pointe shoes to dance up on the tips of their toes. Danseurs (male dancers) develop the strength to lift and hold their female partners, often with only one hand. Ballet is often performed to classical orchestra music.

**Do you speak FRENCH?** France was the birthplace of ballet in the 1400s. Today, all ballet dancers learn the **French words** for movements such as *plie* (bend) *pirouette* (turn) *saute* (jump) and *pas de deux* (dance for two). Louis XIV, King of France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, loved to dance and often performed with the ballet in his royal court. When Louis became too old (and fat) to perform, he established a ballet academy and began the tradition of training professional dancers that continues today.

**CREATING a BALLET** Many people are involved in this process, and each plays an important role. **Choreographer:** chooses a story or idea, selects music for the ballet, creates the movements that the dancers will perform, and works with them in rehearsal. **Composer:** writes the music for the ballet. **Dancers:** perform on stage, bringing the story to life through expressive movement. **Backstage Crew:** includes all those who work before, during and after the performance on costumes, scenery, lighting and other special effects. **Audience:** their attention, enjoyment and applause change the ballet from a rehearsal into a performance!

### Active Learning for Students • Ballet Positions

- Show images of ballet dancers, and ask students to share what they know about ballet. Guide the discussion to focus on ballet as an art form in which dancers tell a story by moving to music, **without** using their voices.
- Ask students to think about what the dancers must do **before** the performance. Focus the discussion on how dancers must train their bodies like professional athletes, to have strength, agility, control and endurance.
- Show images of ballet dancers doing exercises at the barre. Demonstrate the FIVE BASIC POSITIONS of the FEET that are part of every ballet dancer's training. (**see Resources**) Have students stand with plenty of space around them in the classroom, and as the teacher models, students try out the basic ballet feet positions. Continue by adding the arm positions.

## Active Learning for Students • Ballet Costumes

- Show images of ballet dancers in costume, and discuss the special outfits worn by male and female dancers to provide support and allow for freedom of movement.
- Ballet clothes show the outlines of the dancer's body, and this may be compared to bathing suits, or clothes worn for sports such as gymnastics, biking, football, wrestling and cheerleading.
- It is very important to prepare second grade students to use good manners at the ballet performance: we do NOT laugh or giggle when we see the dancers in costume, because we understand how these clothes help them to dance well, and add to the drama and style of the story.
- Name a character from a fairy tale or fable, and **ask students to describe what a ballet costume for that character might look like**. How could an animal character be represented in a ballet costume? Examples: princess, knight, clown, evil magician, fairy godmother, frog, cat, mouse.

## RUMPELSTILTSKIN A FAIRY TALE BALLET



**Resources Needed:** BOOK *Rumpelstiltskin* retold and illustrated by Paul Zelinsky or another version of this fairy tale; music CD from the Orlando Philharmonic YPC, with ballet music on tracks #11-13

**What is Pantomime?** In a story ballet, the dancer is a creative artist, using their body to express events, emotions and ideas through movement instead of words. Pantomime (or mime) is the use of gestures, postures and facial expressions, and it helps dancers tell the story. **Have students experiment with simple mime actions:** goodbye, come here, I feel happy/sad, etc. Use the list of pantomime actions in the resource pages for more ideas.

## Active Learning for Students • Rumpelstiltskin

- Show students the six images on the *Picture Page* (see Resources). Ask them to identify what each picture represents. **Mill** – a place where wheat and grain is ground into flour as the river water turns the mill wheel. **Castle** – home of the king and queen. **Spinning Wheel** – used to twist and turn wool from a sheep into thread to make clothes. **Straw** – hay that is cut and dried to feed the farm animals. **Gold** – a valuable metal, used instead of paper money. **Crown and Cradle** – the bed for a baby prince or princess. Can students guess the name of the fairy tale that these pictures represent?
- Present the storybook *Rumpelstiltskin*, which is one of the fairy tales by The Brothers Grimm. Read the book aloud, or summarize the story briefly while looking at the illustrations in the book. (Refer to the story synopsis page in this teacher guide)

- Play Ballet track #11 from the music CD, titled *The Spinning Wheel* and ask students to imagine what they might see happening on stage as this music is heard. Explain that this is the music for the famous event in the story when straw is turned into gold on a spinning wheel. **Discuss how the ballet dancers onstage could perform this part of the story.**
- Play Ballet track #12, *The Sad Miller's Daughter*. Ask students to think of what this music represents, and describe how a ballerina would dance to this music. What pantomime gestures would show that Mary feels sad? Discuss how a ballet dancer might portray the King.
- Play track #13, *Dancing In The Forest* and look at a picture from the Zelinsky book, then discuss how a ballet dancer might perform Rumpelstiltskin's dance around the fire.
- Ask students to choose a character from the ballet. Play each music track again, and let a group of students **improvise movement to the music**. *King*: track 11, show his delight when he sees all the gold that has been spun from the straw. *Mary*: track 12, show her sadness as she dances around the straw and spinning wheel. *Rumpelstiltskin*: track 13, show him dancing around his cooking fire, or spinning the straw into gold.

**STAGING the BALLET** Review the story synopsis from the Resource pages. Orlando Ballet's performance will include this narration, with scenery and costumes similar to the illustrations in the Zelinsky book. The opening scene will include many dancers who represent the villagers bringing gifts to the King. Remind students that the ballet performers will *not* talk or sing, but will tell the story with dancing and mime. **Review appropriate audience manners with students.** *Sit quietly*, listen and watch the action onstage. *Do not laugh* at the dancers' costumes; they are part of the story. *Do not clap the beat* of the music or make noises that would distract others. *Applaud* to show your appreciation, but *do not whistle*, shout or stomp. It is appropriate to say "bravo" when applauding at the end of a performance.

### **ABOUT the MUSIC**



Francois Couperin is the **COMPOSER** who wrote the music students will hear on the CD and at the ballet performance. Couperin was born on November 10, 1668 in Paris, France and he died in 1773. Couperin composed music for the harpsichord (like a piano) and also many dance suites for the royal courts of France. Second grade students may recognize the names and pictures of other famous composers such as Beethoven, Mozart and Tchaikovsky.

The original title of the ballet music we will hear was *Jester in the Street*, and it has been adapted for the *Rumpelstiltskin* ballet story. As students listen to the tracks on the CD, display pictures and identify key instruments that are heard: **violin, harp** and other *strings*, **flute, clarinet** and other *woodwinds*, **trumpet, trombone** and other *brass*, **tambourine, triangle** and other *percussion*. A ballet performance may include a live orchestra performing in a pit below the stage, but students will hear recorded music on this field trip.

## Follow-Up Experiences – VOCABULARY

As preparation for the ballet, second grade students will learn many music vocabulary words in the context of their lessons. Teachers should add these to the **classroom word wall**, review them after the ballet field trip, and refer to them as appropriate later in the school year. The following words are included in the OCPS 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Music Vocabulary list: **applause, audience, ballet, bravo, duet, pas de deux, posture.**

## Follow-Up Experiences – *The Nutcracker*

In November and December, the music and story of The Nutcracker Ballet by Peter Tchaikovsky are heard and seen on television, radio, in shopping malls, and at holiday events. This is an excellent time to continue second grade students' experiences with ballet and its music.

- Check out your school's music textbook series for recordings, lesson plans, listening maps, movement experiences and background on this classic ballet.
- Share an illustrated book about the ballet, along with recordings of the music. Titles include *The Nutcracker Ballet* by Vladimir Vagin (Scholastic) and *The Nutcracker* by Carin Dewhirst & Naomi Howland (Metro Books).
- Watch a video of this holiday classic: *Tchaikovsky – The Nutcracker* (Baryshnikov & Kirkland); *George Balanchine's Nutcracker*; *The Nutcracker* - Jim Gamble Puppet video; *Nutcracker Suite* music in the original Fantasia animated by Disney

## Follow-Up Experiences – ASSESSMENT

As a result of lesson preparations and attending the live ballet performance, **students will demonstrate what they learned in a variety of ways.**

- Name one thing that makes ballet different from other forms of dance (costumes, shoes, training, movement terms, classical music).
- Demonstrate one of the basic foot or arm positions for classical ballet.
- Draw a picture or write a paragraph to describe their experience at the ballet.
- Explain why good manners are important for the audience at a ballet.

Music teachers (and classroom teachers) should model or guide students in how to write a thank-you note or other reflection on their ballet experience. Discussion may begin with, "What was your favorite part of the ballet?" but teachers should also ask questions that **help students use analytical thinking and describing words.** Examples: what was the most . . . *interesting, surprising, unusual, exciting, beautiful, shocking, funny, sad, inspiring* . . . thing that you saw or heard? If you could go to the ballet again, what would you like to see or hear next time? If you could change something about the ballet, what would it be?