

Dance About Study Guide

Dance About
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The National Ballet of Canada's **Dance About** is a one-hour presentation specially designed to introduce students to ballet. Through an interactive discussion, your students will learn about basic ballet exercises, pointe shoes, partnering, ballet mime and theatrical makeup. In addition, the presentation includes short excerpts from ballets in the National Ballet's repertoire.

This package has been prepared to familiarize you with the **Dance About** and answer any questions you may have. To help you get the very most out of our presentation we highly recommend that you set aside some time to introduce your students to what they are going to see.

What Is Ballet

Most of us are acquainted with some form of dancing. Anyone can dance — all you have to do is turn on the radio and make up movements to the beat of the music.

Ballet is a theatrical art, since it is performed on stage for live

audiences. It is stylized dancing, meaning that in order to perform it, dancers must learn a very specific technique. This technique, established centuries ago, involves steps and body movements that are unique to this discipline.

Dancers apply their technique to perform dances created by a choreographer — a word derived from the Greek khoros, meaning dance, and graphem, to write. Dances are made up of many steps selected and linked together by the choreographer. The dance is accompanied by music and the dancers wear costumes and make-up appropriate to the ballet being performed. Scenery is used to set a ballet in a certain period and give it atmosphere and authenticity. We can create a formula for traditional classical ballets:

Dancing + Drama + Décor + Music = Classical Ballet

However, many modern ballets don't use special costumes or scenery. Dancers might wear simple leotards and tights, and instead of pointe shoes, they might dance in bare feet or soft slippers. In ballets where there is no story to follow, the audience's attention is drawn to the shapes of the dancers' movements and the music. Some choreographers don't even use music, and the dancers are accompanied only by their breathing.



Guillaume Côté and Heather Ogden in *Swan Lake*

For more information please
contact:

Address

Attention: Education

The Walter Carsen Centre for
The National Ballet of Canada
470 Queens Quay West
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5V 3K4

Phone

416 345 9686 x377

Email

lrobinson@national.ballet.ca

Some Of The Things You Will See

In the short ballet warm-up, you will see our dancers executing ballet technique. Just as you have to learn your ABCs in order to read and write, dancers have to learn the basic exercises and positions of ballet in order to perform the choreography. They practice these exercises every day in order to keep their bodies limber and in top performing shape.

The language of ballet is French. The terminology was originally developed in the court of Louis XIV during the 17th century. Today, wherever in the world a ballet class is given, the names of the steps are taught in their original French.

Barre exercises

All dancers begin their day with class where they warm up and perfect technical exercises. They start with approximately thirty minutes of barre exercises. The barre – a horizontal rail fixed to the wall of a dance studio or free-standing on two parallel bars – is used as a balance-check. All ballet exercises begin and end with one of the five basic positions of the feet. There are also complementary arm positions. The positions are executed with the legs and feet turned out from the hip socket. They allow for greater flexibility, range of movement and also for a beautiful and long line of the body.

Plié

Pliés at the barre are the introductory exercises of any ballet class. These are essentially knee bends that warm up the legs and ankles and improve elasticity. They assist the dancer in turns, pointe work and landing jumps.

Tendu

Tendus are leg and foot stretches that help elongate and strengthen the muscles of the legs and torso. They are executed to the front, side and back with the foot brushing along the floor through half-pointe to a full extension. While executing numerous variations of tendu

exercises, the dancer is continually working on the proper turn-out of the legs and feet.

Dégagé

Dégagés are the same brushing movement as tendus, but in dégagés the working leg leaves the floor slightly when extended.

Rond de jambe

This exercise increases the turn-out of the legs. The toe traces a semi-circle on the floor around the body. The working leg moves steadily with the toe on the ground from the front to side, side to back and then past the stationary heel.

Frappé

Frappés prepare the legs for jumping. The raised foot touches the other ankle and from the knee down, the leg is thrown strongly out to the side.

Petit battement

This exercise prepares the legs for more complicated and intricate steps. The heel of one foot touches the other ankle. The lower part of the leg moves out and in very quickly. This is made more difficult when the dancer rises on the supporting leg.



Artists of the Ballet in Ballet Class

Grand battement

High kicks of the leg are called grand battements. The leg is thrown in the air and then brought down to a tendu position with great control and with as little movement as possible in the upper body. These exercises loosen the hip joints and keep the legs flexible.

Arabesque

At the end of the barre exercises, dancers test their balance by letting go of the barre and rising on their toes. One of the most common positions for dancers to test their balance is the arabesque. In an arabesque, one leg is stretched behind the body. The leg can be on the ground or in the air at a 90-degree angle or higher. The weight of the body is on the supporting leg. The arabesque shows off the body at its longest and most extended line from the fingers to the toes.

Centre work



Artists of the Ballet in Ballet Class

The barre exercises are always followed by centre work. Many exercises at the barre are performed during centre work without the support of the barre. These exercises include pliés, tendus and fondus. New exercises are also introduced including pirouettes, adage exercises and allegro exercises.

Adage exercises

Adage means slow, soft, lyrical and sustained movements. A series of steps are combined in adage exercises to develop these special qualities in the dancer's body. Adage creates the illusion that the positions flow into one another.

Allegro

As in music, allegro in ballet involves brisk and lively movements, usually jumping steps and sequences. Jumps begin and end with a plié. The plié serves many purposes, most importantly, it prevents injury and allows for height in the jump.

Stretching

Dancers must be extremely flexible to execute many of the difficult movements without hurting themselves. To increase and maintain their flexibility, dancers stretch their muscles every day, during class and between rehearsals.

Pirouette

Pirouette is the name given to the many kinds of turning steps in ballet. To execute proper turns, a dancer must begin with a strong preparation, a plié and a pulled-up body. During the turn, the dancer's head must quickly snap to the front so they can focus on one spot at all times. This spotting technique prevents dizziness. The arms are positioned in front of the body at waist level to keep the body balanced and assist with the turn.

Grand pirouette

Grand pirouettes are very complicated turns. In some ballets the dancer performs a grand pirouette called a fouetté. During this series of turns, the working leg whips out to the side and then into the knee as the dancer turns on the supporting leg, rising on pointe at each revolution. Male dancers perform an equally challenging turn called a pirouette à la second. The dancer starts the pirouette and extends his leg directly to the side of his body and maintains his momentum by rising at each or every other revolution.

Behind The Scenes

Before a ballet is ready to be performed on stage hundreds of hours of work take place behind the scenes.

Ballet dancers are an elite group of athletes. They train for many years before becoming professional dancers and once they join a company their training does not end. Dancers' bodies need to be extremely strong and flexible to execute the demanding technique of ballet so they must practice and rehearse every day to keep their bodies in top physical condition. For every minute of dancing you see on the stage, there has been one hour of rehearsal.



Sets being refurbished for *The Sleeping Beauty*

The setting of the stage helps to evoke the time, place or atmosphere. All of the sets, scenery and props used by the National Ballet are made at the company's production workshop, a large building the size of an airplane hanger. Scenic artists, carpenters and electricians work together, from the drawings made by the set designer, to bring the setting to the stage. Lighting design is added to enhance the production.

What Lies Beneath?

In daily ballet class, rehearsals and performances, a dancer's body is pulled and stretched in many different directions. When executing grand leaps and jumps, their feet, knees and backs are subject to further abuse by landing on very hard concrete floors. As a remedy, most dancers dance on specially constructed dance floors to absorb the impact of jumping. This floor is called a "sprung floor".

Often the same person who designs the set of a production designs the costumes. The designer creates a drawing of the costume and then the National Ballet's wardrobe department makes a pattern, chooses material, sews it together, decorates the costume and finally fits it on the dancers. Ballet costumes have to be carefully reinforced so the dancers can move easily and not worry about them coming apart while they are dancing. Female ballet dancers are able to stand on the tips of their toes by wearing a pointe shoe. When dancing, sweat and body heat soften the shoe to a point where it can no longer hold the dancer's foot. Dancers can go through one pair of pointe shoes each performance. Male dancers typically do not wear pointe shoes. They wear ballet slippers or special ballet boots that are flexible enough for them to move in.

When dancers rehearse in the studio a pianist plays the music for them. It is usually at the dress rehearsal that the dancers hear the orchestra for the first time. It is also at the dress rehearsal that they have their final opportunity to try on their costumes, work with the props and scenery, and practice the steps on the stage. Everyone's hard work is rewarded the moment the curtain rises and the ballet begins.



Members of The National Ballet Orchestra

Karen Kain
Artistic Director



A Pointe Shoe

Pointe Shoes

Developed in the early 19th century, pointe shoes are worn by female dancers to enable them to dance on the tips of their toes. Though they look just like a slipper, pointe shoes are made of hard leather to help support the foot and the outside of the shoe is covered with pink satin that is sometimes dyed to match the dancer's costume. To keep the shoe on tightly, dancers sew satin ribbons to the sides and tie them securely around their ankles. When dancing, sweat and body heat soften the shoe quickly and it can no longer hold the dancer's foot. Typically, dancers can go through one pair of pointe shoes each performance.

Male dancers typically do not wear pointe shoes. They wear ballet slippers or special ballet boots that are flexible enough for them to move in.

Makeup For The Stage

If you stood onstage without any makeup on your face, the audience would probably see a blur instead of your face because the strong lights would wash out all your facial features. To highlight and accentuate their eyes, cheeks, noses and other features, all dancers, male and female, wear makeup when they are onstage.

Sometimes stage makeup is exaggerated so that the dancer will look like a specific character or creature for a particular production. False noses, eyelashes and moustaches can all be used to enhance the effect. Very complicated makeup can take up to 2 hours to apply.

What Is A Tutu?

A tutu is a special kind of skirt worn by dancers in many ballets. When the first ballets were performed in the 15th and 16th centuries, female dancers performed in the courts of royalty wearing floor length gowns with heavy decorations. These cumbersome outfits greatly restricted their movements.

In the early 1800s, with the development of the pointe shoe and the many stories about fairies and nymphs, the Romantic tutu became popular. This skirt came below the dancers' knees, and gave them a dreamy, ethereal look, while allowing them to move more freely. As ballet technique developed becoming more and more complicated, the tutu was shortened to a length above the knee. This bell shaped tutu is known as a Classical tutu. It was much easier to dance in and the audience could see the positions of the legs and the dazzling footwork.

Choreographers and costume designers in the 21st century now choose costumes which best suit the purpose of their ballet. This means that depending on the ballet, you may see a Romantic tutu, a Classical tutu or no tutu at all.



Avinoam Silverman in *The Nutcracker*



Greta Hodgkinson in *Swan Lake*

A Guide To Mime

In a ballet performance there are typically no words spoken from the stage. The dancers must tell the audience the story (if there is a story) using only their body movements and gestures, which they execute to the accompaniment of music. Often mime is used to relay specific elements of the story.

Here is a sample of some of the mime gestures you may see on a ballet stage.

Baby

Make a cradle with arms and rock them to and fro



Stop

Hold up hand, palm out



Sad

Let fingers trace tears as they fall down the face



Come

Arms are stretched out and the palms are facing up, with the hands gesturing a warm welcome



Dance

Circle the hands around each other above the head



Die

Bring arms up to the side of the head, then bring them down quickly so that the hands, fists clenched, are crossed in front of the body



Vicki

Beg Mercy

Hold arms out, palms together, as if praying



I

Marry

Point to wedding-ring finger with index finger of right hand



Love

Thank You

Make a deep bow, with arms raised, palms to face



You



Vicki

Brief History Of The National Ballet Of Canada

With more than 70 dancers and its own orchestra, The National Ballet of Canada ranks as one of the world's top international dance companies. It was established as a classical company and is still the only Canadian company to present a full range of traditional full-length classics. In addition to its classical repertoire, the company also embraces contemporary works and encourages the creation of new ballets and the development of Canadian choreographers.

The National Ballet was created in 1951 when English dancer Celia Franca was asked, by a group of determined volunteers, to come to Toronto to establish a ballet company for Canada. Within the year Miss Franca had founded The National Ballet of Canada and the company presented its first performance at Eaton Auditorium in Toronto on November 12, 1951.

The premiere performance by the National Ballet included *Les Sylphides* and the *Polovetsian Dances* from *Prince Igor*. This young company featured Principal Dancers Celia Franca, Irene Apiné, Lois Smith, David Adams and Jury Gotshalks in its early repertoire with George Crum as their Music Director.

With its first rehearsal studios in historic St. Lawrence Hall the company continued to grow and flourish under Miss Franca's direction. New repertoire, guest artists, television appearances and extensive touring gave the company international recognition.

In 1964 the National Ballet moved to the newly opened O'Keefe Centre (now the Sony Centre). In 2006 the company began a new era in the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. The company has toured extensively across Canada, the United States and throughout the world including performances in Germany, The Netherlands, Israel, Hong Kong, Japan, Italy and Mexico.

Karen Kain, C.C., Artistic Director

An international dance artist of the first rank, an ambassador for her art form and her country's cultural presence, Karen Kain has, for over three decades, personified and distilled the essence of classical ballet for audiences in Canada and abroad. Born in Hamilton, Ontario, Ms. Kain joined The National Ballet of Canada in 1969 and was promoted to Principal Dancer in 1971 following her debut as the Swan Queen in *Swan Lake*. She subsequently embarked on an extraordinary international career that saw her dance many of ballet's greatest roles with some of the foremost dance companies in the world and work with some of contemporary ballet's most important choreographers. Upon her retirement from the stage in 1997, she assumed the role of Artist in Residence, and then Artistic Associate, with the National Ballet. She was named the company's Artistic Director in 2005.



Karen Kain

Curriculum Connections

Dance About assists teachers in addressing the following elements of the Dance and Drama Curriculum:

- Grade One** Overall Expectations
- > Demonstrate an understanding of some basic elements of drama and dance.
- Specific Expectations
- Knowledge of Elements:
- > Identify and correctly use drama and dance vocabulary.
 - > Describe some basic ways in which the body can be used in space and time.
- Creative Work:
- > Create dance phrases, showing the beginning and the end of their work in appropriate ways.
- Grade Two** Overall Expectations
- > Describe some of the basic elements of drama and dance.
 - > Create short dance pieces, using techniques used in this grade.
- Specific Expectations
- Knowledge of Elements:
- > Describe their own and others' work, using drama and dance vocabulary.
 - > Identify parts of the body and describe the variety of movements that can be done by each of them.
- Creative Work:
- > Demonstrate the ability to move and control their bodies in space and time.
- Grade Three** Overall Expectations
- > Describe basic elements of drama and dance.
 - > Create short dance pieces, using techniques used in this grade.
- Specific Expectations
- Knowledge of Elements:
- > Demonstrate the ability to concentrate while in a role in drama and dance.
 - > Distinguish between a variety of dance forms, using specific criteria.
- Creative Work:
- > Create works of drama and dance using appropriate elements.

- Grade Four** Overall Expectations
- > Demonstrate understanding of some of the principles involved in the structuring of works in drama and dance.
 - > Create dance pieces using a variety of techniques
 - >
- Specific Expectations
- Knowledge of Elements:
- > Demonstrate awareness of the need to do warm-up exercises before engaging in activities in dance.
- Creative Work:
- > Demonstrate the ability to maintain concentration while in a role.
- Grade Five** Overall Expectations
- > Demonstrate understanding of some of the principles involved in the structuring of works in drama and dance.
 - > Create dance pieces using a variety of techniques.
- Specific Expectations
- Knowledge of Elements:
- > Explain drama and dance techniques and use them to convey information and feelings.
 - > Describe various dance forms.
- Grade Six** Overall Expectations
- > Demonstrate an understanding of the principles involved in the structuring of works in drama and dance.
 - > Create dance pieces using a variety of techniques.
- Specific Expectations
- Knowledge of Elements:
- > Recognize when it is necessary to sustain concentration in drama and dance.
 - > Distinguish between different dance forms and different theatrical genres.
- Creative Work:
- > Interpret and perform several types of dances and forms of drama.
 - > Create dances, using steps and positions borrowed from a variety of dance forms.

Many other Educational Resources are available on our website. Please visit us at national.ballet.ca

Activities for Primary Levels

There are several ways to explore the ideas presented in the National Ballet's **Dance About** program. The following activities connect to many areas of the curriculum and deepen the impact of **Dance About**.

Pre-performance Activities

As an audience, you and your students are an integral part of the performance. Please discuss audience etiquette with your students.

Here are some reminders to share:

- > Listen and watch attentively
- > Stay seated so others can see
- > During discussion time, wait for your turn to speak and listen to others
- > Relax and enjoy the show – it's entertaining for both children and teachers

To prepare for writing about the performance after they have seen it, tell your students what you want them to look for. You may have some students in your class who take dance lessons. They can be a great resource. Ask them to share their experiences and discuss what their training involves.

1. Talk about what your students are going to see. Put these words on the board:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------|
| > tutu | > costume |
| > pointe shoes | > dancer |
| > barre | > make-up |

Hold up a picture from a library book of each item and ask children to match it to the word.

2. Discuss how a ballet is made:

- > Choreographer: Makes up the dance and chooses the music.
- > Musicians: Play music for the dancers.
- > Costumes: Special clothes for the dancers.
- > Set: The stage is decorated to show where the dancers are.
- > Mime: Dancers use mime to speak instead of words.

3. Use the "Guide to Mime" to teach your students mime vocabulary:

- > Have your students guess what you are miming.
- > Have students create their own mimes. Try single words.
- > In partners or small groups, have students share their mimes.

4. Brainstorm with your class and make predictions about the performance. Here are some things to consider:

- > What do you think the performance will be about?
- > What type of movement do you think you will see?

- > What might the costumes look like? (e.g. wigs, makeup, etc.) Illustrate what you think some of the dancers will look like in their costumes.

Post-performance Activities

1. As a group, discuss what was seen. Think about the following:
 - > How were the various parts of the performance different?
 - > How were they similar?
 - > How do costumes and make-up help to portray a character?
 - > Do a survey to see which part was the favourite. Discuss why. Graph your findings.
 - > Describe the movements of the dancers.
2. Create a Character: Use mime to convey a mood or emotion. Work in small groups to make a short skit using mime and gestures the students have created. Have students draw what they imagine their character to look like.
3. Write a reflection about the presentation and draw a picture. Use the information above to help describe what was seen. Afterwards, discuss and compare responses. Here are some more questions to ask your students:
 - > Compare your predictions, what you thought the costumes, dance, etc., would look like, to what you really saw.
 - > What was your favourite part of the performance?
4. Write a letter to a favourite dancer from the performance.

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Activities for Junior Levels

There are several ways to explore the ideas presented in the National Ballet's **Dance About** program. The following activities connect to many areas of the curriculum and deepen the impact of **Dance About**.

Pre-performance Activities

As an audience, you and your students are an integral part of the performance. Please discuss audience etiquette with your students.

Here are some reminders to share:

- > Listen and watch attentively
- > Stay seated so others can see
- > During discussion time, wait for your turn to speak and listen to others
- > Relax and enjoy the show – it's entertaining for both children and teachers

To prepare for writing about the performance after they have seen it, tell your students what you want them to look for. You may have some students in your class who take dance lessons. They can be a great resource. Ask them to share their experiences and discuss what their training involves.

1. Talk about what your students are going to see. As a group, define what makes up a ballet. Here are some topics to consider:
 - > Training: Dancers train for many years to reach a level of proficiency. How does this differ from social dancing?
 - > Music: How does it influence dance? Would you play classical music at a school dance?
 - > Scenery (decor) and Costumes: These are used in many theatrical performances. How do they enhance the performance?
 - > Drama: Mime and "silent acting" are often used in dance to portray emotions and to convey a message. Why would these techniques be used in a ballet? Refer to "A Guide to Mime" for examples of mime used in ballets.
 - > Styles / Technique: Compare different styles of dance (e.g. tap dancing vs. ballet). How are the styles similar? How are they different?

2. Brainstorm as a class: What goes into making a ballet? Who works to create a ballet besides the dancers? Here is a list to help you:
 - > Choreographer: Makes up the dance and chooses the music. What training might the choreographer need to do this job?
 - > Musicians / Orchestra: Play music for the dancers. Sometimes taped music is used. What would be the benefits of having live music? (e.g. the musicians can adjust their speed of playing to better accompany the dancers)
 - > Set and Costume Designer: Person or people who design the scenery and costumes for the ballet. What knowledge would the designer need to do his or her job?
 - > Wardrobe staff: People who make the costumes. What expertise would these people need? (e.g. a knowledge of fabric, how to sew)
 - > Set Builders, Painters, Prop Makers: Where else could they work other than the theatre?
 - > Wig Maker: Makes and maintains the wigs throughout a show. What different styles of wigs may be used?
3. Use the “Guide to Mime” to teach your students mime vocabulary:
 - > Have your students guess what you are miming.
 - > Have students create their own mimes. Try single words.
 - > In partners or small groups, students share their mimes.
4. Brainstorm with your class and make predictions about the performance. Here are some things to consider:
 - > What do you think the performance will be about?
 - > What type of movement do you think you will see?
 - > What might the costumes look like? (e.g. wigs, makeup) Illustrate what you think some of the dancers will look like in their costumes.

Post-performance Activities

1. As a group, discuss what was seen. Think about the following:
 - > How were the various parts of the performance different?
 - > How were they similar?
 - > How do costumes, makeup or props help to portray a character?
 - > Do a survey to see which part was the favourite. Discuss why. Chart your findings. This could be done as a group or individually in math books.
 - > Describe the movements of the dancers.
 - > Extend the discussion from pre-performance activities: social dance vs. formal dance.
2. Write a reflection about the performance and draw a picture. Use the information above to help describe what was seen. Afterwards, discuss and compare responses. Here are some more questions to ask your students:
 - > Compare your predictions, what you thought the costumes, dance, etc., would look like, to what you really saw.
 - > What was your favourite part of the performance?
 - > List and illustrate four things that are used in creating a dance (e.g. dancers, music, scenery, costumes etc.). Describe their contributions to creating a ballet.
3. Visit The National Ballet of Canada's website and find information on a favourite dancer from the performance. Draw a picture and record information about the dancer such as where they were born and where they studied ballet.
4. Write a short essay about how professional dancers are similar to professional athletes. For example, compare Aleksandar Antonijevic (ballet dancer) to Mats Sundin (hockey player.)
5. Read professional reviews of ballets and write a review of the performance for the school newspaper.

6. Let your students become the creators and be responsible for creating a character or designing a wig, mask, costume or prop. This can be done in class or as a homework assignment.

Create a Character

- > Discuss how to create a character. (age? gender? personality?) Select a role the character will play in the performance. (minor or major? antagonist or protagonist?)
- > Draw the face of their character. Use “makeup” (pastels or pencil crayons) to help create the character’s personality, mood, etc.
- > Jot some notes about your character. Use specific words that will describe the character.
- > Compare the character you have designed with your own personality. How do they differ? How are they similar? Think about how you would solve a problem compared to how your character would.

Create a Wig or Mask

- > Design a wig and/or mask for the character.
- > Describe the colours you would use and why. What materials would you use? (e.g. velvet, papier maché, wool) Describe how you would assemble the mask or wig.
- > Extensions: After students have designed their mask, ask them to create the mask using regular classroom supplies (papier mache, construction paper, etc.). They can then create mimes or short plays using their masks.

Create a Costume

- > What kind of movement will the character do? Is a heavy, cumbersome costume made out of thick fabrics wanted? Or is a light, airy costume made out of silk more appropriate? Think about colours and the mood the character will portray.
- > Are extra items needed like a hat or cloak?
- > Labeling designs can be helpful for the designer and people who are looking at the picture. Your students can label all their designs to indicate colours, materials, etc.

Create a Props

- > This section could have many designs. Your students may decide that their character may need several props. Think about some popular characters today, for example, Harry Potter. Brainstorm about props his character would need. (e.g. broomstick, book of spells, wand)
- > Again, labeling designs provides important information for both the designer and the reader. Have students label their creations.
- > Have the students explain the use of their props. Do they symbolize something? How would they be used in a dramatic production?

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