

thewashingtonballet
Julie Kent, artistic director

Classical Ballet

Learning Guide



The Sleeping Beauty, Washington Ballet's Katherine Barkman and Rolando Sarabia,
xmbphotography

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Community Engagement Mission

Intrinsic to The Washington Ballet's mission to bring the joy and artistry of dance to the nation's capital, our community engagement programs provide a variety of opportunities to connect children and adults of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to the art of dance. Through live performances, audience enrichment programs, the highest caliber of dance training and educational events, we aspire to spark and enhance a love for dance, celebrate our history and cultural diversity and enrich the lives of our community members.

To learn more visit: <https://www.washingtonballet.org/about>

Table of Contents

This guide is designed to help people of all ages explore the art and history of classical ballet in a fun and engaging way.

About The Washington Ballet	3
History of Ballet.....	4
What is Classical Ballet?	5
Stepanov Notation.....	6
What's the point of pointe shoes?	7
What is a tutu?	8
Ballet Vocabulary Coloring Sheets.....	9-13
Movement Activity Classical Pantomime	14

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About The Washington Ballet

Celebrating its 74th year as an organization, The Washington Ballet grew out of the success of The Washington School of Ballet, founded and directed for years by legendary dance pioneer Mary Day. The School opened in 1944 and the Company was established in 1976 with Ms. Day's singular vision clearly illuminated: to create a stellar institution of teaching, creating, and enlightenment through dance.

Artistic Director Julie Kent's long-term vision is to elevate the prominence of The Washington Ballet to a world-class ballet company by expanding the size of the company and broadening its repertoire. She has introduced into the repertoire seminal works by George Balanchine, Frederick Ashton, Jerome Robbins, Antony Tudor, Justin Peck and Alexei Ratmansky while embracing the work of emerging choreographers including Clifton Brown, Gemma Bond, and Ethan Stiefel, among others. Her commitment to the development of both the dancer and the art form is fulfilled through presentation of beloved classic 19th-century ballets and landmark 20th-century works while reaffirming a commitment to commissioned works that will contribute to the evolution of ballet and its relevance in our times.



Julie Kent, Artistic Director

In addition to being an iconic ballerina, Kent has the distinction as the longest-serving dancer at American Ballet Theatre, having danced with the company for 29 years. Her extensive roles encompass the breadth of the ballet repertoire and as a muse to choreographers who created works on her. Her continued devotion to serving the art form, to promoting arts education and to using her experience to nurture, train and develop the next generation of dancers are the tenets by which she will further elevate TWB and its Company, school and community engagement programs and initiatives.

Victor Barbee, Associate Artistic Director

Elaine Kudo, *Ballet Master*

Rubén Martín Cintas, *Ballet Master*

The Company Dancers

Victoria Arrea, Katherine Barkman, Nardia Boodoo, Adelaide Clauss, Jessie Dick, Kateryna Derechyna, Nicole Graniero, Sona Kharatian, Ayano Kimura, Alex Kramer, Tamás Krizsa, Corey Landolt, Eun Won Lee, Olivia Lipnick, Ariel Martinez, Tamako Miyazaki, Javier Morera, Ashley Murphy-Wilson, Andile Ndlovu, Lucy Nevin, Maki Onuki, Alexandros Pappajohn, Gian Carlo Perez, Daniel Roberge, Oscar Sanchez, Rolando Sarabia, Stephanie Sorota, Sarah Steele, Brittany Stone, Masanori Takiguchi

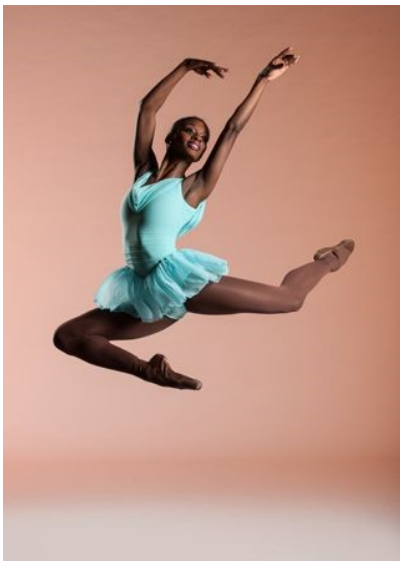
Apprentices: Kimberly Cilento, Gilles Delellio, Lope Lim, Stephen Nakagawa, Samara Rittinger, Alexa Torres

The Studio Company Dancers

Andrea Allmon, Peyton Anderson, Rafael Bejarano,

Nicholas Cowden, Abigail Granlund, Audrey Malek,

Aurora Mostacci, Helga Paris— Morales, Rench Soriano



*The Washington Ballet's
Ashley Murphy-Wilson*

History of Ballet

15th Century - Ballet originated in the Italian Renaissance courts of the 15th century. Noblemen and women were treated to lavish events, especially wedding celebrations, where dancing and music created an elaborate spectacle. Dancing masters taught the steps to the nobility and the court participated in the performances.

16th century - **Catherine de Medici**, an Italian noblewoman, wife of King Henry II of France, and a great patron of the arts, began to fund ballet in the French court. Her elaborate festivals encouraged the growth of ballet de cour, a program that included dance, decor, costume, song, music, and poetry.

17th century - **King Louis XIV** helped to popularize and standardize the art form. A passionate dancer, he danced many roles himself, including that of the Sun King in Ballet de la nuit. His love of ballet fostered its elevation from a past time for amateurs to an endeavor requiring professional training. By 1661 a dance academy had opened in Paris and in 1681 ballet moved from the courts to the stage. The French opera *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* incorporated ballet elements in its performance, creating a long-standing opera-ballet tradition in France.



King Louis XIV of France in the Costume of the Sun King in the Ballet 'La Nuit', 1653 Giclee

18th century - In the mid-1700s French ballet master **Jean Georges Noverre** rebelled against the artifice of opera-ballet, believing that ballet could stand on its own as an art form. His vision—that ballet should contain expressive, dramatic movement, and that movement should reveal the relationships between characters—introduced the ballet d'action, a dramatic style of ballet that tells a story. Noverre's work is considered the precursor to the story ballets of the 19th century. During this time period, ballerinas removed the heels from their dancing shoes to better articulate their feet in jumps.



Maria Taglioni in *The Sylphide*, 1832

19th century - Ushered in by the Romantic Movement which influenced art, music and ballet, this century becomes known as the **Classical Era** of ballet because so many classical ballets such as *Giselle* and *The Sleeping Beauty* were created. Classical Ballet's themes were focused on expressing emotions and passions and often included a supernatural world of spirits and magic. **Marius Petipa**, often referred to as "the father of classical ballet" for his influence, creates most of the world's most famous classical ballets during this era including: *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, *Don Quixote* and many more. It's also during this period that ballerinas begin wearing tutus and dancing on the tips of their toes, known as pointe work. Maria Taglioni was the first ballerina to dance a full-length ballet on pointe in 1832. The tutu at this time, was a calf-length, full skirt made of tulle.

20th century - Russian choreographers **Sergei Diaghilev** and **Michel Fokine** began to experiment, moving beyond the confines of classical ballet form and story. Diaghilev collaborated with composer Igor Stravinsky on the ballet *The Rite of Spring*, a work so different—with dissonant music, a story of human sacrifice, and unfamiliar movements—that it caused the audience to riot. Choreographer and New York City Ballet founder **George Balanchine**, a Russian who emigrated to America, would change ballet even further. He introduced what is now known as **neoclassical ballet**. He also is considered by many to be the greatest innovator of the contemporary "plotless" ballet. With no definite story line, its purpose is to use movement to express the music and to illuminate human emotion and endeavor. Today, ballet is multi-faceted combining classical forms, traditional stories and contemporary choreography.

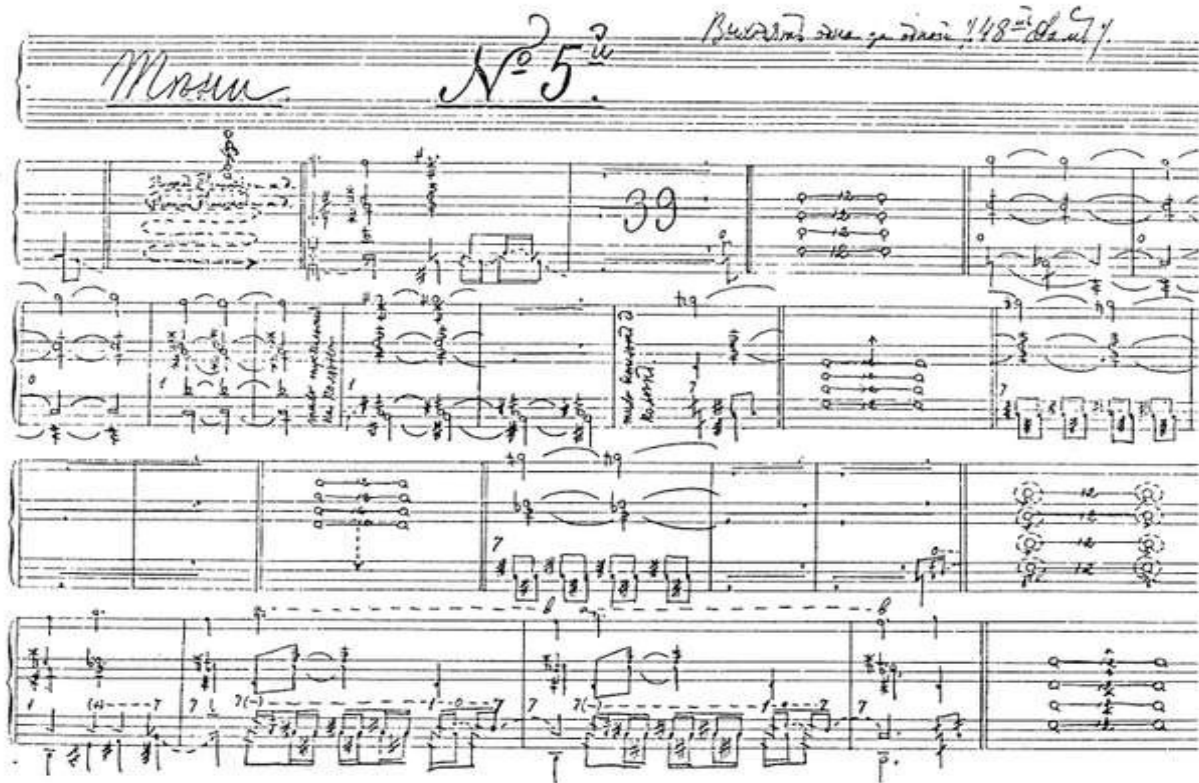
Stepanov Dance Notation

Classical ballet is a system of dance based on codified movements and positions of the arms, feet, and body designed to enable the dancer to move with the greatest possible agility, control, speed, lightness, and grace.

In the 1890's **Vladimir Stepanov**, a dancer at the Imperial Ballet devised a new movement notation system which could allow the preservation of classical ballets by documenting the choreography. The Stepanov notation system is based on the musical staff and uses markings that look like notes, organized in measures that correspond to the score. Separated into three horizontal tracks, the markings indicate the movements of the torso and head, the arms, and the legs. The notations indicate when the leg is bent or straightened, the height of the foot, which way the dancer is facing and traveling, whether she is on pointe and how she is using her wrists. Arm movements are written as symbols similar in appearance to music notes with streaks around them. The streaks indicate how the dancer is supposed to move his/her arms and the notes indicate on which beat each arm movement is to occur. A space on the paper specifies the audience's location. After Stepanov's death in 1896, Alexander Gorsky took over the notation project and perfected Stepanov's system.



A page from *Alphabet des mouvements du corps humain* (1892), by Vladimir Ivanovich Stepanov, illustrating his dance notation system.








What is Classical Ballet?

Classical ballet is a system of dance based on formally specified movements and positions of the arms, feet, and body designed to enable the dancer to move with the greatest possible agility, control, speed, lightness, and grace. Movements are generally graceful and flowing and dancers create defined lines and shapes with their bodies. Elements of classical ballet technique include dancing from a turned-out position of the legs, pointe work, high leg extensions, dynamic turns and intricate footwork. Classical ballets usually tell a story and have themes focused on expressing emotions and passions. They often include a supernatural world of spirits and magic.



The Washington Ballet's Swan Lake Misty Copeland and Brooklyn Mack. Photo: Theo Kossenias

The Five Positions of the feet and arms

				
FIRST Position	SECOND Position	THIRD Position	FOURTH Position	FIFTH Position
Feet pointed in opposite directions with heels touching.	Feet pointed in opposite directions and approximately 12" apart.	One foot placed in front of the other. The heel of the front foot should be near arch of back foot.	One foot is placed approx. 12" in front of the other. In Open Fourth Position heels are aligned, and Closed heel of the front foot is aligned with the toe of the back foot.	One foot is placed in front of the other, with the heel of one foot aligned with the toe of the other foot.

What's the point of pointe shoes?

Ballerinas dance on **pointe shoes** to create an illusion of lightness and a sense of floating on air.

Before pointe shoes were invented, ballerinas were sometimes suspended on wires to allow them to skim the floor on their toes or rise into the air. In the early 1800s, dancers began rising to their toes on their own. The first pointe shoes were simply flat slippers, lightly reinforced by the dancer with darning around the toes. With such light support, the earliest pointe work consisted merely of brief rises to pointe. Over the course of two centuries of ballerinas, ballet technique and shoemakers innovations have produced the more supportive shoes used today.

Pointe shoes provide support while allowing articulation of the foot. Dancer's have to develop and use their own strength to dance on pointe.

droop below a dancers waist and to hold their shape, often with 9—12 layers of tulle. There are several variations on the Classical tutu. One called the pancake tutu is supported by a hoop inside the fabric, and sits on the dancer's hip. The platter tutu is similar, but it sits on the dancer's waists instead. One more called the powderpuff tutu is light and fluffy, so it doesn't need a hoop to support itself.

Pointe-shoes

Pointes (French *pointe* – tip) is a toe dance, a basic element of women's classical ballet. The special shoes worn during the dance go by the same name



Maria Taglioni
(1804-1884)

This French ballerina was the first to successfully use the toe dance technique

Sewing pointes is a unique handicraft technique demanding professional skills

Making pointes requires about 100 operations and over 50 parts



Good pointes are supposed to stand on the toe by themselves

Ribbon string

Ballet dancers usually sew them on by themselves

Pointes' top

The top of the pointes is made of flesh-colored satin that does not glare in floodlight rays and coarse calico, which is the most hygienic cloth

Sole

The sole is made of natural leather

Firm toe area, "box"

The toe box consists of several layers of sacking and textile fabrics glued together to create the ballerina's toe rest

Toe

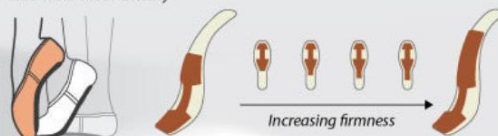
The toe is sometimes trimmed with threads or glued together with a leather onlay

Insole types:

The insoles for classical jumping techniques on pointes have a firm base, starting from the toe and passing through the demi-pointes



The insoles for rolling on foot have a cut in the area of demi-pointes to provide better lightness. The cut makes ballerina's feet move more flexibly



What is a tutu?

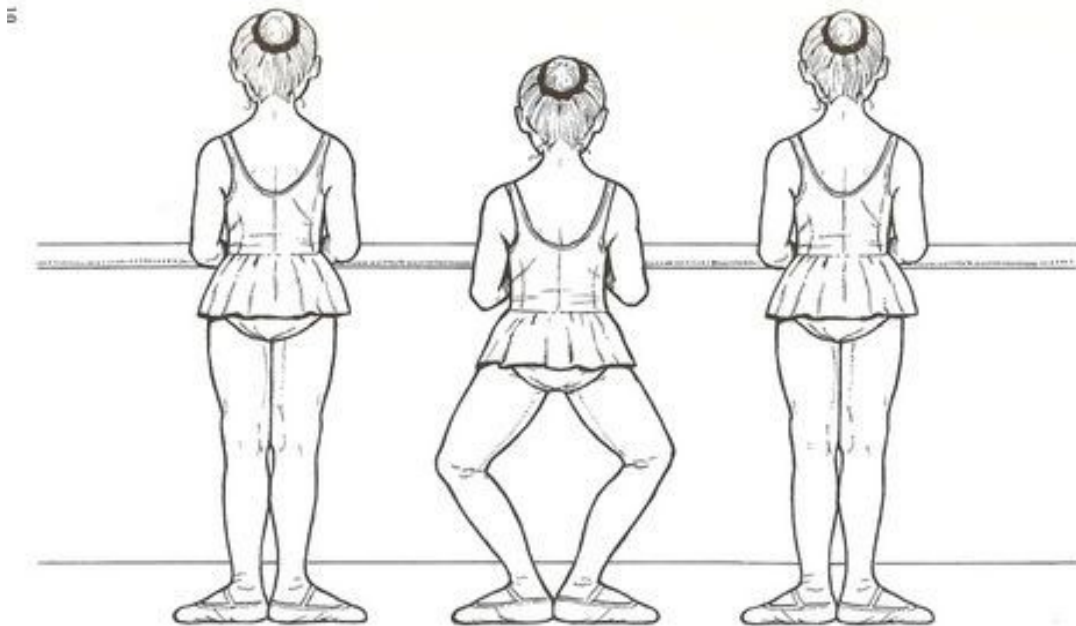
Tutus are the traditional costume of a classical ballerina. Tutus allow ballerinas to move freely and gracefully onstage, and they allow the audience to see the artistry of the choreography and the dancer's technique. Tutus are complex costumes built so they will not droop below a dancer's waist and to hold their shape, often with 9—12 layers of tulle. There are several variations on the Classical tutu. One called the pancake tutu is supported by a hoop inside the fabric, and sits on the dancer's hip. The platter tutu is similar, but it sits on the dancer's waists instead. One more called the powderpuff tutu is light and fluffy, so it doesn't need a hoop to support itself.



Ballet Vocabulary

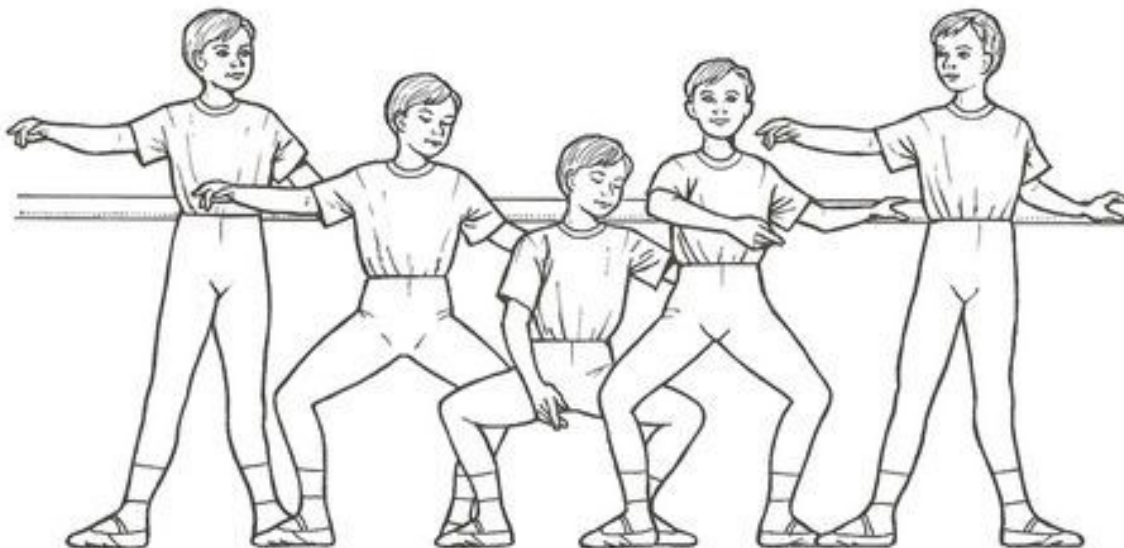
Plié: to bend

A smooth and continuous bending of the knees outward, while maintaining the ballet position with your feet, turn out of the legs, and with the upper body held upright. Heels stay on the floor in demi-plié.



Grande Plié

Is a deeper bending of the knees outward, while maintaining the ballet position with your feet, turn out of the legs, and with the upper body held upright. Heels come off the floor in grande plié.



Ballet Vocabulary

Relevé: to rise

Demi- pointe: Rising onto the balls of your feet.

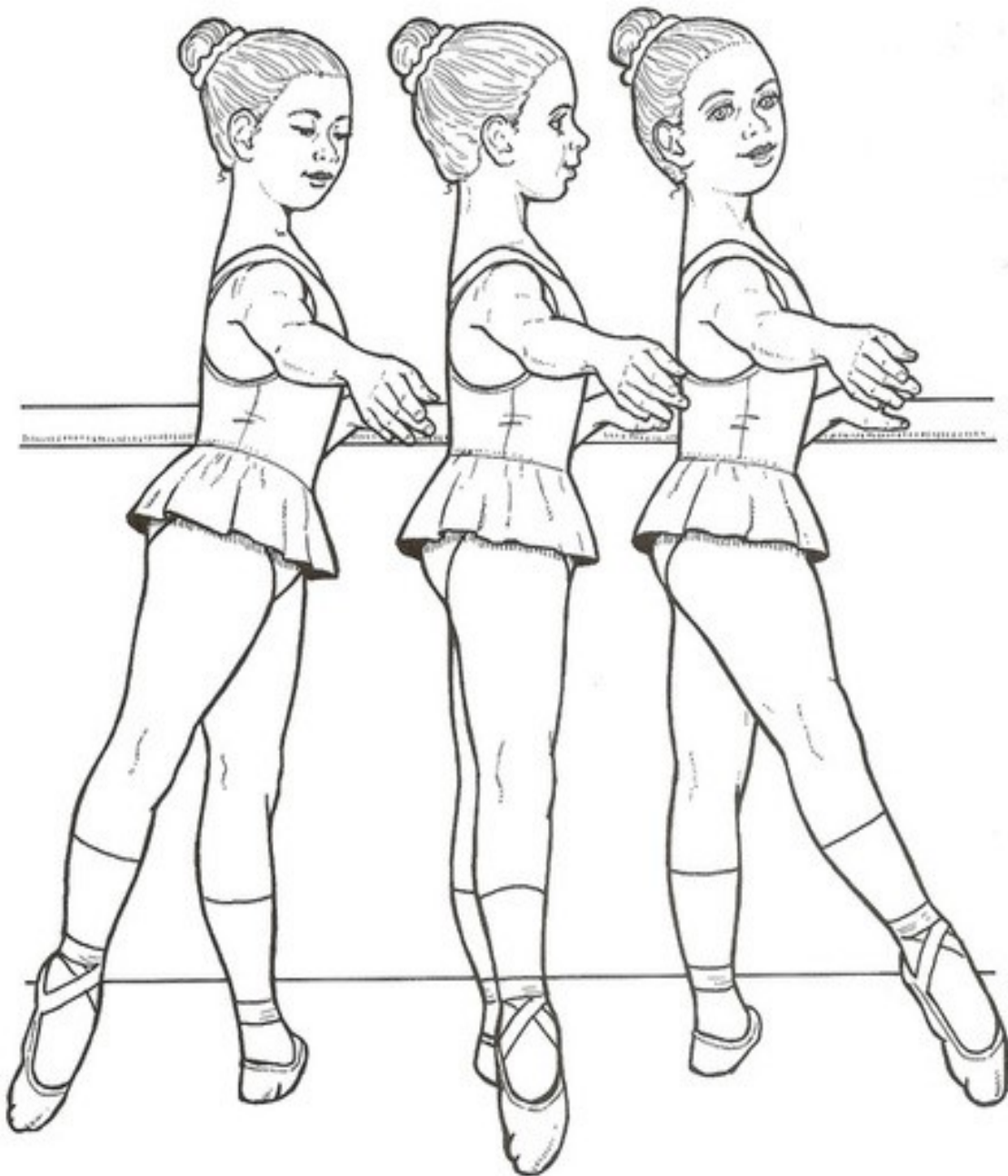
En Pointe: Rising onto your toes.



Ballet Vocabulary

Tendu : to stretch

Gradually extending the working leg to the front, side, or back, passing from flat to demi-pointe to point where only the toes are touching the floor.



Ballet Vocabulary



Arabesque

(ah-rah-besk)

*Stand on one leg with
the other leg extended
behind you.*

*Always remember to keep
your back up and stretch
your knees. It is important
to keep both legs turned
out!*

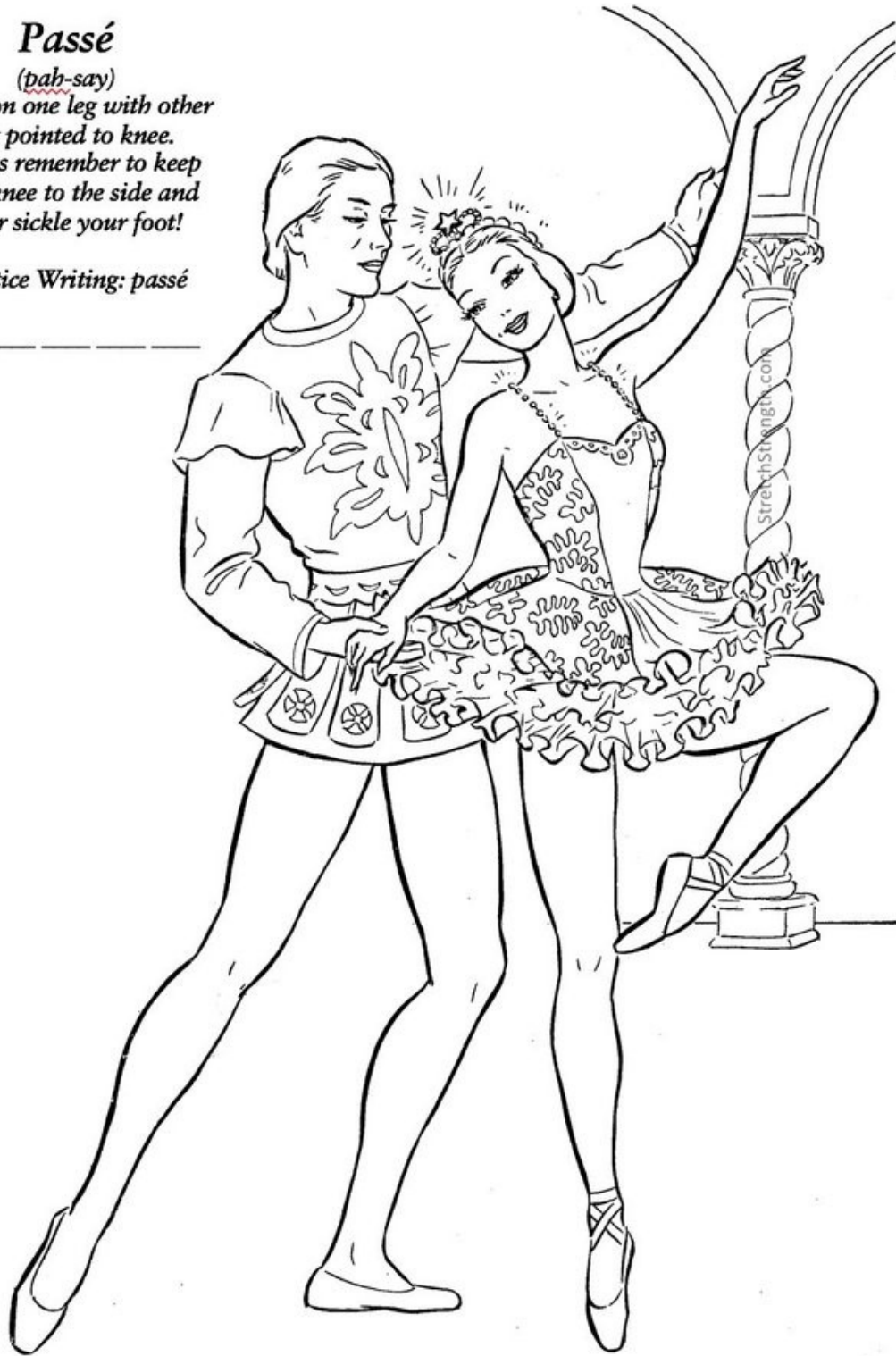
Ballet Vocabulary

Passé

(pah-say)

*Stand on one leg with other
foot pointed to knee.
Always remember to keep
your knee to the side and
never sickle your foot!*

Practice Writing: passé



Movement Activity

Classical Pantomime

In Classical ballet there is no dialogue. The story is told through dance, music and **pantomime**.

Pantomime helps convey character, and every gesture is important in the telling of the story. There is a standard mime vocabulary used by every ballet company. Here is a list of some Classical Pantomime gestures.



Ideas

I
King
Devil
Love
Knocking
Sewing
You/He/She
Think
See
Beautiful/Handsome
Crazy
Marry
True/Faithful
Dress
Hear
Someone
Enter
Cry
Mice/Rats
Dance
Die/dead
Yes
No

Movement

point to yourself
hand gestures on sides of head in form of crown
gesture with 2 fingers in shape of horns on head
2 hands on heart
tap fist in hand three times
pull needle through fabric
gesture to other person palm up
touch your temple
point to each eye
circle your face/draw hand down face
circle around your ear
point to your ring finger
hold 2 fingers high
gesture along sides of clothing
cup your ear with your hand
hold your first finger up
sweeping gesture with both arms across your body
gesture with all fingers from eyes
moving fingers as whiskers
circling hands overhead
cross arms-hands in fist
nod head
turn head or gesture with arms

Activity 1 Exploring Pantomime—Have students work in groups of 3 or 4. Give each group 3– 4 ideas & gestures. Give the group a few minutes to figure out what the movements look like and to practice them. Have each group teach their pantomime gestures to the class.

Activity 2 Charades—Now that everyone is familiar with the pantomime gestures. Have students take turns picking an idea & gesture out of a hat. They must perform their pantomime in front of the class. Their classmates get 3 chances to guess the idea.

Activity 3 Create a Pantomime Story- Divide students into groups of 3-5. The goal for the group is to create a story and perform it using only pantomime movements. The story should have a clear beginning middle and end. You should specify the number of gestures the group must use. Allow students 10—15 minutes to create their story and practice it. Then have students perform their story for the class and reflect on the performances.

Reflection Questions: What is your interpretation of this group's story? Does anyone have a different interpretation? How did different groups effectively communicate their story? What did they do with their bodies? Why is it important to speak with our bodies as well as our words?