

Guidelines for Teachers

Curriculum Connections:

- Dance
- Writing
- Media Literacy

Learning Goals:

- Experiencing, responding to, and analyzing classical ballet through reflective and critical writing
- Recognizing different characteristics of classical ballet movement and choreography in Act I Scene II of Erik Bruhn's *Swan Lake*
- Understanding how dancers tell stories in classical ballet

Big Ideas:

- *Swan Lake* is an example of a ballet from the Classical period
- Classical ballet choreography achieves a satisfying visual effect through balance, structure and harmony
- Classical ballet choreography often showcases virtuosic technique separately from storytelling

Big Questions:

- What kind of visual effect does the choreographer achieve through geometric formations?
- How do Classical ballet choreographers tell stories?
- How are Classical ballets collaborative productions?
- How does choreography evolve over time?
- Why do ballet companies still perform *Swan Lake*?

Getting Started:

- Assign the whole guide to your students as an extended project or pick and choose sections to assign at different times.

Watch *Swan Lake*, Act 1 Scene II: www.nbs-enb.ca/loveballet

Student Viewing Guide

Swan Lake, Act 1 Scene II

Choreography: Erik Bruhn

Music: Pyotr Tchaikovsky

Pianist: Marina Surgan

Synopsis:

Erik Bruhn's *Swan Lake* is one of the most beloved versions of this magical classical ballet. It demands both technical skill and artistry of all its dancers. In Act I, Scene II of Erik Bruhn's *Swan Lake*, Prince Siegfried has just been informed by his mother that he must soon take a bride. Nervous about marrying without being in love, he sets out to wander the woods near his village. While there, he meets Odette, a beautiful white Swan Queen. They speak, and she tells him that the evil black Swan Queen has cast a spell on her and her handmaidens, forcing them to be swans by day and humans by night. The only way to break the spell is for a good man to pledge his love to Odette. Siegfried, realizing he is in love with Odette, begins to declare his love for her when the black Swan Queen appears, and prevents him from breaking the spell.

About Erik Bruhn:

Born in Copenhagen, Denmark, Bruhn entered the Royal Danish Ballet School and graduated in 1947. That same year, he made his professional debut in London, England with the Metropolitan Ballet. Bruhn soon rose to become the greatest classical dancer of his generation and established a dazzling international career. The companies with which he performed include England's Royal Ballet, the Paris, Rome and Milan Opera Ballets, New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, the Stuttgart Ballet and The Royal Danish Ballet.

In 1964, Bruhn began his association with the National Ballet of Canada, staging such works as *La Sylphide*, *Swan Lake* and *Les Sylphides*. During these years, Bruhn was also a visiting teacher for both the National Ballet and for students at Canada's National Ballet School. From 1967 to 1971, Bruhn was Artistic Director of the Royal Swedish Ballet. In 1972, he retired from dancing but in 1974 returned to the stage as a character dancer.

He became Artistic Director of the National Ballet of Canada in 1983, a culmination of his 20-year association with the company as choreographer, producer, coach and dancer. Bruhn held the position until his sudden death in 1986.

Before watching *Swan Lake*:

Some movement characteristics of classical ballet to look for while you watch:

- Geometric shapes
- Symmetry
- Highly technical choreography
- Harmonious dancing
- Balanced movement phrases
- Precise movement
- Repetition
- Spectacular displays of technique

Dancer's roles in classical ballet productions:

- Principal dancers:
 - Play the lead roles
 - Showcase spectacular technique and partnering throughout
- Character dancers:
 - Play supporting characters
 - Use mime and gesture to move the story forward
- Soloists:
 - Perform solo and small group sequences
 - Showcase technique often separate from the plot
- Corps the ballet:
 - Support storytelling by setting the scene
 - Dancing in unison with precision
 - Act as a backdrop for the principal dancers and soloists
 - In many Classical ballets, there is a “ballet blanc” act traditionally performed by female dancers wearing white and playing some kind of mythical or ethereal being

Who are Marius Petipa, Lev Ivanov and Piotr Ilyitch Tchaikovsky?

- Do an internet search to find out about who both of these people are, and what their impact has been on the world of classical ballet.
- Write a paragraph or point form notes, highlighting their contributions to *Swan Lake*, and their contributions to the evolution of ballet.

Watch *Swan Lake*:

Because this is a recorded performance, you can watch it once through to fully experience it, and then again to take notes.

Graphic Organizer for Note-Taking:

Use the following graphic organizer to take notes before, during, and after watching *Swan Lake*.

Before		
Title:		
Performance Date:		
Choreographer:	Composer(s):	Design Team Members:
Describe the cast of performers:		
Story/Theme (in your own words):		

During				
Elements of Dance: While you are watching, describe one example of each element of dance applied in <i>Swan Lake</i> .				
Time	Space	Energy	Body	Relationship

After	
A memorable moment:	
A dancer who stood out to me:	
Something I liked:	
Something I felt was missing:	

<p>Three images that stick with me:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.
<p>Describe the design:</p>	<p>Costumes:</p> <p>Lighting:</p> <p>Music:</p>
<p>Three examples of of the theme in the choreography:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.

Short Answer Questions:

After watching *Swan Lake* Act 1, answer the following questions in approximately 1-2 paragraphs each.

1. How much storytelling happens in this act? Describe one example of storytelling through movement, and one example of movement that stands on its own.
2. How does the choreographer use geometric shapes throughout the act? What kind of visual effect do the geometric shapes create? Give at least five examples.
3. How do the dancers use shape and energy to appear swan-like?
4. Describe the dance partnership between Siegfried and Odette. How do they relate to each other through movement? What are their roles in the partnership?
5. After watching this excerpt, would you want to watch all of *Swan Lake*? Why or why not?
6. Do you think this scene from *Swan Lake* stands on its own? Do you think we need to know the whole story to appreciate the dancing? Why or why not?
7. Which was the most memorable moment of the choreography for you? Describe the movement. Why was it memorable?

8. How might this online viewing platform inform your experience of watching *Swan Lake*? What do you think would be different about watching this piece live? What would be the same?
9. Think about the following words. How does the meaning of each word apply to the choreography?
 - a. Balance
 - b. Symmetry
 - c. Harmony

Creative Activity Options:

After watching *Swan Lake*, choose **one** of the following research activities. All of these activities can be done in small groups, pairs or individually.

1. Think about how you would live-tweet or make an Instagram story while watching Act 1 Scene II of *Swan Lake*. Respond to at least 10 screen grabs or mini clips, using a social media platform approved by your teacher. You could also create a similar response using google slides, power point, prezzi, or another software you have available to you at school. You can focus on movement, visual effects or story. Use different social features available to you like captions, hashtags, emojis, gifs, etc.
2. How have choreographers and dance companies reinvisioned gender roles and gender representation in *Swan Lake*? Consider Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo's adaptations, Matthew Bourne's adaptation, or another one of your choice. Record a podcast to discuss your findings, include a title, brief description, and graphic with your audio recording.
3. How might *Swan Lake* be represented and referenced in pop culture today? Consider movies, tv, music, fashion, advertising, social media, etc. Create a pinterest board where you feature your findings.

Journal:

After watching Swan Lake, respond informally to the following journaling prompts. Choose how long you would like your responses to be. Responses can be oral, written or graphic.

1. How did you feel watching *Swan Lake*? What emotions did the performance evoke?
2. Did watching the choreography bring up any memories for you? Why do you think that memory came up?
3. Did you feel a personal connection to this piece? Why or why not?
4. If you could tell the story of *Swan Lake* from a different perspective, who's perspective would you choose?
5. How would you describe this excerpt of *Swan Lake* to someone who has never seen it?