



A Christmas Carol

STUDY GUIDE



Educational Material Prepared By

B O R D E R L A N D S

B A L L E T

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In partnership with the

LAS CRUCES

SCHOOL

OF

DANCE & MUSIC

OBJECTIVES

BORDERLANDS BALLET is proud to partner with the LAS CRUCES SCHOOL OF DANCE & MUSIC to present this educational opportunity to the Borderland community.

The objective of this outreach program is to present dance performance to young people in a way that will have a meaningful impact on their lives. In many ways, dance is the most accessible and least well understood of all the performing arts. “Accessible” because there is nothing more natural to children than to move in rhythm; “Least well understood” because opportunities for dance education and performance are few and far between. The BBC’s educational outreach program seeks to remedy this situation.

In this Study Guide, primary education instructors will find basic information concerning all aspects of dance, dance performance, and theatre etiquette that can be tailored to their students’ needs.

The guide is structured so that of some material can be presented before the students attend the show. This material is designed to give them some tools for watching the performance. Other parts of the guide emphasize material and projects that can be revisited after the students have seen the show. These projects give the students a chance to reflect on their experience of the performance in light of their preparation.

The suggested activities are merely that, suggestions. The performance can be enjoyed regardless of whether or not these activities are performed. However, BORDERLANDS BALLET strongly encourages teachers to discuss the storyline and theatre etiquette with their students before coming to the show.

If you are interested in future outreach projects or wish to provide feedback, please contact us at borderlands.ballet@gmail.com.

“Dance is the poetry of the foot.”

— John Dryden

WHY DO DANCERS BOW?

Historically, bowing was a gesture for one person to show deep respect for another person. For example, a gentleman would bow to the King or Queen to show them respect.

For performers, the bowing means something similar. When the audience claps for the performance, the dancer bows as a way of saying “Thank you” and [showing respect to the audience in return](#).

Performers do this, because the audience is also part of the performance and how the audience behaves shapes how the performance comes off.

LET’S SEE A SHOW!

ON THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Imagine that you practiced a long time to perform a magic trick for your parents. You worked really hard on it. When they came home, you had them sit on the couch and you prepared to show them what you had learned. How would you want them to act? Would you want them to talk to each other? Would you want them to get up in the middle to go to the bathroom? Probably not! The same thing is true at the theatre.

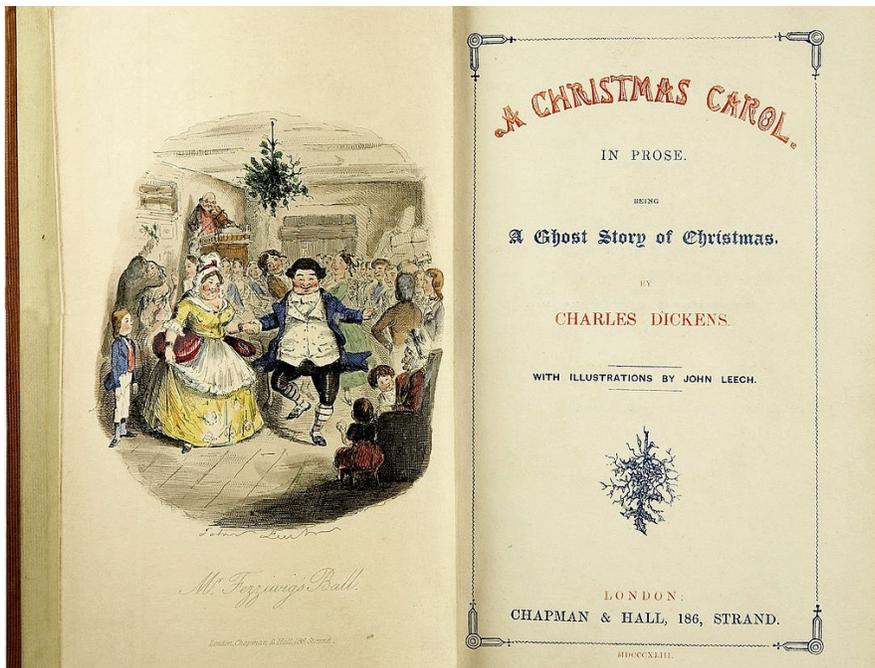
Artistic performances (like ballets) are different from other kinds of art (like movies) because once the performance is finished it is gone forever. The performers are there to perform just for you! For this reason, it is important to be respectful and pay attention, there is no instant replay at the theatre. Here are some Do’s and Don’ts:

DO:

- * Watch the dancers
- * Listen to the music
- * Look at the costumes and set designs
- * Laugh when they see the dancers doing something funny
- * Clap when the dancing has finished to show the dancers that they are enjoying the performance. It is customary to applaud when the dancers take a bow.

DON’T

- * Talk or make noise because they might miss something important.
- * Chew gum or eat because it is disruptive to others and makes a mess in the theatre.
- * Leave your seat before the lights go on because this is very disruptive to their neighbors
- * Bring cameras, ipods, or headphones to the theatre because this is disruptive to the dancers and other members of the audience.



First edition frontispiece and title page (1843)

FROM STORY TO SHOW

A Christmas Carol was originally a much loved short novel by the British author Charles Dickens in 1843 (see side bar).

A performance of the story, however, is very different from reading it. The show you are going to see is a musical (a show with singing and dancing) that is based on the story. How is the performance different?

Suggested Pre-Activity: The class should read an age appropriate version of the text.

Describing vs. Expressing

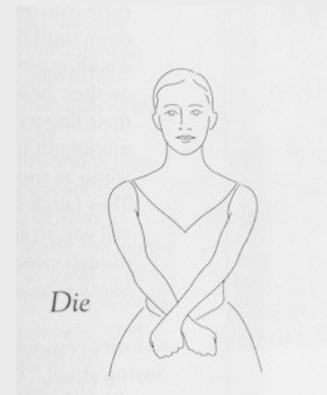
A writer can tell you all kinds of things that happen in a story that can't be seen. For instance, Dickens can tell the reader that Scrooge is frightened or grumpy. But an actor can't do that! The actor playing Scrooge has to show you that he is frightened, or show you that he is grumpy.

Suggested Pre-Activity: Let the students experiment with acting. Write some emotional states down on pieces of paper and give them to the students. Then ask the students to show those emotions without using any words, just by using their bodies. Let the other students guess what emotion is being portrayed.

This problem is even greater for dancers, who must find a way to exhibit emotions in dance. One way dancers can convey an emotion is through mime. In ballet, certain movements mean certain things. In the show, both the gesture for "Love" and for "Death" are used (see side bar). Can you find them?

Suggested Post-Activity: Talk with the students about the performance. Did they notice the mime included in dances? Did they notice other ways the performers expressed their emotions and feelings?

MIME IN BALLET



FROM STORY TO SHOW CONT'D

Limits of the Stage

In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens describes a scene in which Scrooge is looking out his window following a visit from Jacob Marley's ghost:

Scrooge followed [Marley's Ghost] to the window. He looked out. The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever. Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together; and the night became as it had been when he walked home.

This is a very important part of the story. But it is one thing to write about ghosts and another thing entirely to have them flying around on stage! So how can the director make this scene happen?

Of course, we can get actors and dress them up like ghosts at Halloween. But costuming the performers (see p. 4) is just part of task. The real challenge is trying to make them fly! We can imagine setting up a large number of strong ropes so that we could suspend the dancers in mid-air and move them around. This kind of effect would be very fun and is the sort of thing that is sometimes done in famous shows on Broadway. But it is also expensive and difficult to do. So most performances have to find some other way. In our show, for example, the performers dance as if they are flying “hither and thither”.

Suggested Pre-Activity: Ask the students to think about their favorite scene from a story (or movie or comic book). Talk about how easy or difficult it would be to reproduce that scene in a live theatre. What would be needed to make this work? If the class has already read the story, can they think of any other scenes that might be difficult to perform?

Suggested Post-Activity: Ask the students to think about the scene mentioned above (Link By Link). Did they think that choreography (see p. X) worked to make the ghosts fly? What would they have done differently?

“*An actor is a sculpture who carves in snow.*”

— Lawrence Barrett



A visit from Marley's
Ghost

STAGING: SCENERY, LIGHTING AND COSTUMES

We apologize, but this section has not yet been fully completed.

Although it is possible to perform a ballet or play without a stage or costumes or lights, most of the time the performing arts are done with all three. These elements of the theatre can help enhance the story in many ways. Let's take a look.

Scenery:

In *A Christmas Carol*, the dance company has put together a large set with many pieces used to represent a street in 19th Century London. The set pieces are large pieces of plywood painted by an artist to look like buildings. Some of the pieces, such as the house, are built on "wagons". Wagons are wooden platforms with castor wheels so that the scenery can be easily moved on and off stage as needed.

But other parts of the scenery aren't so elaborate. For instance, a graveyard (picture, left sidebar) is represented by a single grave stone. This isn't just convenient. The grave stone has a single name written on it. But only having one, the audience's attention is drawn to that name.

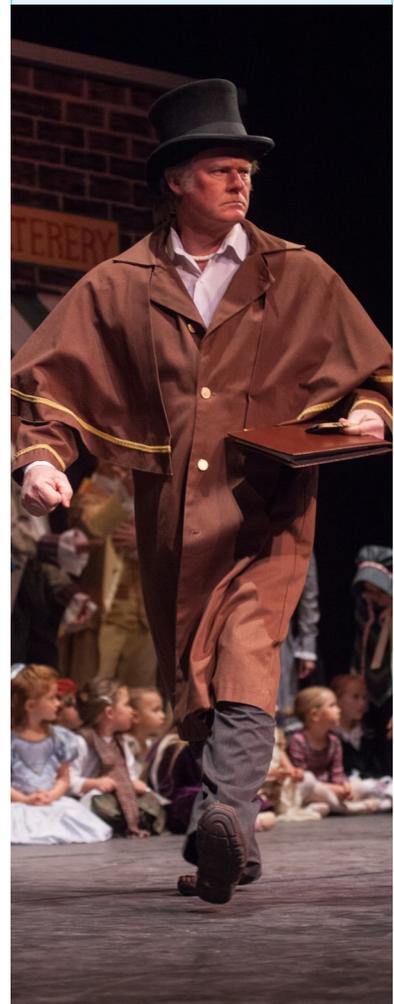
Lighting

Lights can affect our mood. Subdued lighting with a "special" light (like a spotlight) focused on a small scene can make for a dramatic or scary effect. Bright lights with lots of warm colors, suggest joy and fun. Blue and green colored lights might be used to convey a cold winter scene.

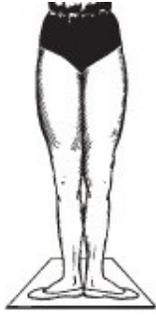
Costuming

A Christmas Carol is a story set in a particular time period. For this reason, costumes were designed specifically for the show to capture that period. The top hat and coat being worn by Scrooge (right sidebar) were common during that time period. Still, the costumes for the dancers have to be designed so that they can move freely and so that their dance moves are noticeable.

Not all performances are about stories. In those types of shows, costumes are designed to enhance the mood and movements of the dancers.



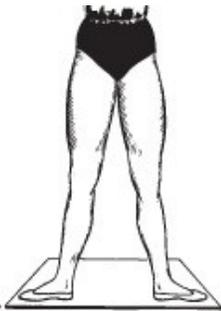
BASIC FOOT POSITIONS FOR BALLET*



first

FIRST POSITION: The balls of the feet are turned out completely. The heels touch each other and the feet face outward, trying to form a straight line.

SECOND POSITION (: The balls of both feet are turned out completely, with the heels separated by the length of one foot. Similar to first position, but the feet are spread apart.



second

THIRD POSITION: One foot is in front of the other with the front foot touching the middle of the back foot.

FOURTH POSITION (OPEN): The feet are placed in a way that is similar to third position, but one step apart. Unlike third position, in open fourth the heels align with each other.

FOURTH POSITION (CROSSED): The feet are placed in a way that is similar to open fourth position. However, in crossed fourth, the toes align with the opposite heel.

FIFTH POSITION: With both feet touching, the toes of each foot reach the heel of the other. Fifth position is like open fourth except that the feet are placed together rather than being a step apart.



fourth
croisé
(crossed)



fifth

*Dance material will be discussed at the theatre following the show



third



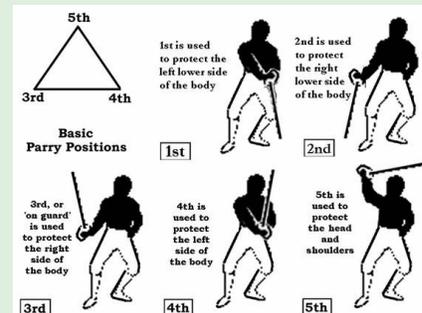
fourth
ouverte (open)

Q: Where do the ballet positions come from?

Answer: Believe it or not, these ballet positions are based on foot placement in fencing and swordfighting! Look at this picture of fencing positions. Can you see the similarity?

Q: In the pictures, the feet are at right angles to the body, but my feet don't go that far. How come the drawings are like that?

Answer: Those drawings are right! Dancers work their entire lives to develop **turnout**. Turnout is the ability of the dancer to turn his or her feet and legs out **from the hip** joints (NOT the knees!) to a 90-degree position. This turn-out is one of the essential principles of the classical dance, giving the dancer freedom of movement in every direction.



BASIC BALLET MOVEMENTS

Ballet is a very difficult activity. Like basketball or soccer, it requires great physical strength and skill in order to be able to perform the dance movements you will see on stage. In addition, however, the dancers must also make the movement look effortless — like there is nothing easier to do in the world!

In order to achieve this balance between athleticism and grace, dancers must practice, practice, practice from a very young age. All dancers, no matter how good (even Misty Copeland!) practice the simplest movements every day so that these become second nature. Those simple movements form the basis for the more difficult ones (like jumps and turns).

Here are some examples (these movements will be demonstrated after the show).

Pliés to Jumps

One of the fundamental movements in ballet is the plié.

Plié [plee-AY]: Plié means “to bend”. There are two kinds: grand plié (full bending of the knees) and demi-plié (half-bending of the knees). Pliés are done in all five positions of the feet (see previous page). When a grand plié is executed the heels always rise off the ground and are lowered again as the knees straighten. In all pliés the legs must be well turned out from the hips, the knees open and well over the toes, and the weight of the body evenly distributed on both feet, with the whole foot grasping the floor.

This may seem like an easy movement, but it is actually difficult to do it well. It is also important because the plié is the basis for all jumps in ballet, like the “tour en l’air”.

Tour en l’air [toor ahn lehr]: This means “to turn in the air”. This jump is a turn in the air in which the dancer rises straight into the air from a demi-plié, makes a complete turn and lands in the fifth position with the feet reversed. The turn may be single, double or triple according to the ability of the dancer. The arms assist and the head must spot as in pirouettes.

Retiré to Pirouette

Another example of a more basic movement being used as part of a much more difficult one occurs with turns on one foot (pirouettes).

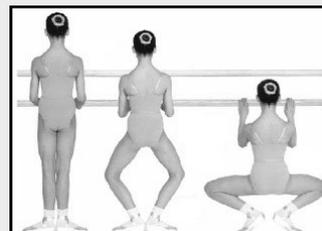
Retiré [ruh-tee-RAY]: To withdraw (retire). A position in which the thigh is raised with the knee bent so that the pointed toe rests in front of, behind or to the side of the supporting knee.

Like the plié, performing the retiré may seem easy. (Try it!). But exact position of the foot and leg is crucial. In order to bring the foot to the knee, you can’t lift the hip and the dancer must keep their hip turned out so that the knee is pointed to the side and not at an angle. This allows the dancer to be balanced (even when he or she is on their toes!) so that they can turn in a pirouette.

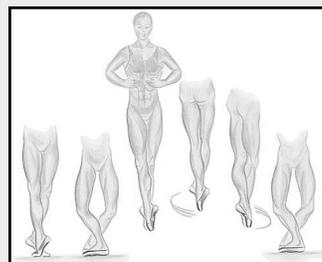
Pirouette [peer-WET]: Whirl or spin. A complete turn of the body on one foot, on point or demi-pointe. Correct body placement is essential. The body must be well centered over the supporting leg with the back held strongly and the hips and shoulders aligned. The force of momentum is furnished by the arms. The head is the last to move as the body turns away from the spectator and the first to arrive as the body comes around to the spectator, with the eyes focused at a definite point which must be at eye level. This use of the eyes while turning is called “spotting.”

In a sense, the basic movements that young children learn in class is vocabulary of dance. The complex ways those movements are put together, is the poetry of dance.

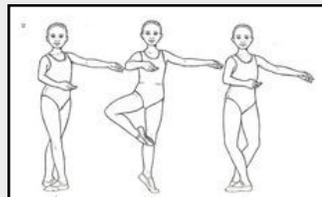
Grand plié (first position)



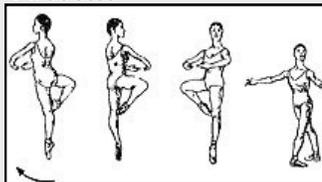
Tour en l’air



Retiré



Pirouette



PAS DE DUEX AND VARIATIONS



Arm promenade



Waist promenade



Fish lift (waist)

When most of us think about dance, we think about dancing with each other. But so far, we have only talked about what individual dancers do. But ballet does have partners dancing. It is called Pas de Deux (dance — literally “step” — of two). Informally, dancers often call this “partnering”. The performance of *A Christmas Carol* has a number of examples of this kind of dancing.

The pas de deux is usually choreographed for a male and a female dancer. Two kinds of interactions between the dancers are common.

Promenade [prawn-NAD]: In partnering, a promenade is usually performed by the ballerina on point holds. She holds her pose and is slowly turned by her partner who walks around her holding her hand or waist.

While promenades may look easy on stage, they require deal of strength and balance in order to look smooth and elegant.

One of the most spectacular parts of every show are the lifts.

Lift: A lift is exactly what you would think. The male partner literally lifts the ballerina off the ground, often as she is jumping. There are three standard heights for lifts: (1) to waist level (fish, right sidebar), (2) to the shoulder l (bluebird, right sidebar), and (3) presses, which are fully overhead (inverted press, below).

While the lifts require great strength on the part of the male dancer, they also require the ballerina to be very strong since she cannot allow her body to collapse like a sack of potatoes!

Pas de deux, is often used to display love between couples. But it can be used for many purposes, such as fighting scenes, parties, or even just town life.

Suggested Post-Activity 1: Did the students notice the pas de deux elements in the show? What was being represented by them?



Bluebird lift (shoulder)



Inverted overhead press
