

Celebrating LatinX Dancers at Houston Ballet

STUDY GUIDE

For use before or after
the virtual field trip



Principal Dance Karina Gonzalez
In Stanton Welch's *Sylvia*
Photo: Amitava Sarkar

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First Soloist Gian Carlo Perez

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who view the Virtual Field Trip: **Celebrating Latinx Dancers** by Houston Ballet and utilize the study guide will be able to:



First Soloist Gian Carlo Perez

- **Explore connections between dance, culture, identity, and geography** by learning about the heritage and experiences of Latinx dancers at Houston Ballet.
- **Describe or represent** dances, traditions, and artistic expressions featured in *Celebrating Latinx Dancers at Houston Ballet* through words, pictures, movement, or discussion.
- **Identify and describe** the journeys of Latinx dancers at Houston Ballet and consider how their experiences and cultural backgrounds shape their artistic expression.
- **Make connections between dance and culture** by exploring traditional dances, music, celebrations, and cultural traditions from countries represented in the virtual field trip.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Grade Band	Students will be able to...
K–2	Identify and describe Latinx dancers, dances, and cultural traditions represented in the virtual field trip.
3–5	Describe how dancers’ backgrounds, experiences, and cultural traditions influence their dance journeys and artistic expression.
6–8	Analyze connections between dance, culture, identity, and the experiences of Latinx dancers at Houston Ballet.
9–12	Analyze and discuss how Latinx dancers’ cultural backgrounds and professional experiences contribute to the art and community of Houston Ballet.

Principal Dancer Karina Gonzalez
and Artists of Houston Ballet
In Stanton Welch’s Romeo & Juliet
Photo: Amitava Sarkar



TEKS ALIGNMENT

Grade Band	TEKS Connection	Virtual Field Trip Examples & Learning Opportunities
K–2	ELA: Listening, speaking, making connections, retelling and describing stories. Social Studies: Geography and characteristics of places. Dance: Movement, audience behavior, cultural context, and expressing ideas through dance.	Students identify dancers and their countries of heritage, discuss what they notice, explore maps and flags, and respond to dances through movement, drawing, or discussion.
3–5	ELA: Summarizing, making connections, describing characters and themes. Social Studies: Geography, communities, and how people interact with places. Dance: Cultural and historical dance forms, artistic choices, and meaning.	Students explore dancers' journeys, connect dance to culture and geography, compare traditional dances, and examine how movement communicates ideas and identity.

TEKS ALIGNMENT

Grade Band	TEKS Connection	Virtual Field Trip Examples & Learning Opportunities
6–8	ELA: Making inferences, using evidence, making connections, and responding to sources. Social Studies: Geography and cultural connections. Dance: Historical and cultural dance forms, artists' contributions, performance quality, and relationships between dance and other subjects.	Students analyze dancers' experiences and cultural influences, investigate traditional dance forms, make connections between culture and artistic choices, and support observations with evidence.
9–12	ELA: Analyzing texts and sources, making connections, evaluating details, and considering historical/social context. Dance: Dance vocabulary, performance meaning, audience etiquette, and relationships between dance and other content areas.	Students critically examine representation, identity, cultural influence, and professional journeys while discussing how dancers' experiences contribute to Houston Ballet and the larger dance field.

FEATURED DANCERS

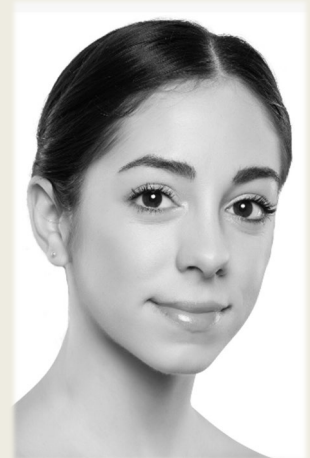
Gretel Batista



Favorite Ballets *Don Quixote*- The energy and fun characters in *Don Quixote* make it such an enjoyable ballet to perform. *Giselle*- I love the drastic dynamic between the first and second act. Going through so many different emotions as well as the technical demand makes this ballet so fulfilling.

A Defining Moment In 2018, I had the opportunity to go back to my home country, Cuba, and perform *La Bayadère* at the Gran Teatro de La Habana Alicia Alonso on the opening Gala night of the International Ballet Festival of Havana.

Mónica Gómez



Favorite Ballet *Manon, Romeo and Juliet, Giselle, and Don Quixote*

A Defining Moment While I was with National Ballet of Cuba, I was given the opportunity to dance the role of Clara in *The Nutcracker* which was the beginning of more principal and soloist roles. Other moments include dancing the same role as premier dancer Yanela Pinera in "Flora", which gave me the chance to showcase my abilities. And my most significant moment was performing the Grand Pas de Deux in *Coppélia* as Swanhilda.

Rafaella Henrique



Rafaella Henrique was born in Jundiaí, São Paulo, Brazil. She began her training in Especial Academia de Ballet. Henrique danced with Houston Ballet Academy and Houston Ballet II.

She joined the company in 2019 and was promoted to Corps de Ballet in 2020.

Her favorite ballets are *Giselle, La Bayadere, Marie, Manon, The Sleeping Beauty, Don Quixote, Le Corsaire* and *Swan Lake*.

FEATURED DANCERS

Estheysis Menendez



Estheysis Menendez began her ballet training in 1999 at the Luis Casas Romero Vocational Arts School and continued her training in the Vicentina de la Torre Academy. In 2007, Estheysis was invited to join the National Ballet School of Cuba.

In 2014, she was invited to work under Alicia Alonso's artistic-technical direction, during which time, she performed a repertoire of classical and contemporary works and danced the principal roles in classical ballets such as *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Coppélia*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. In 2017, she joined the Houston Ballet and was promoted to **Demi Soloist** in 2019.

Samuel Rodriguez

Samuel Rodriguez was born in Washington D.C. He began his ballet training at the age of 5 at the Maryland Youth Ballet where he danced lead roles in their *Nutcracker* and *Empyrean Skies*.

He was selected as a Finalist in the Kennedy Center Master Class Series from 2012-2014. In 2015 Samuel was awarded the "Be On Stage Prix" from the International Ballet Stage program in Barcelona. Rodriguez joined ABT as a Studio Company Member in 2014 before joining the Houston Ballet as an **Apprentice** in 2016.

He was promoted to **Corps de Ballet** in 2017.



Elivelton Tomazi



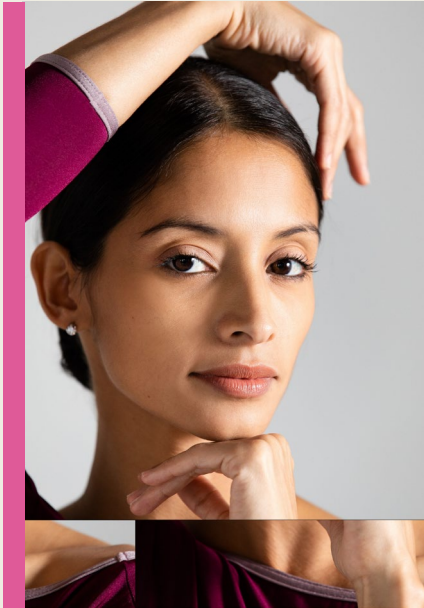
Originally from Joinville, Santa Catarina, Brazil, Elivelton Tomazi's passion for dance ignited at the young age of 9. In 2013, he achieved a significant milestone by graduating from The Bolshoi Theater School in Brazil, marking the beginning of a promising career in dance.

Following his aspirations, he ventured to the United States to become part of the prestigious Joffrey Ballet in Chicago from 2013 to 2019, where he captivated audiences with his exceptional performances.

Beyond the spotlight, Elivelton Tomazi serves as an inspiration to aspiring dancers, proving that dedication, talent, and hard work can lead to achieving one's dreams.

SPOTLIGHT ON KARINA GONZÁLEZ

HOUSTON BALLET'S FIRST FEMALE LATINX PRINCIPAL DANCER



Karina González, a native of Caracas, Venezuela, won silver at the 2007 New York International Ballet Competition. She trained at the Gustavo Franklin Ballet School and performed with Ballet National of Caracas and Tulsa Ballet, becoming a principal dancer in 2007.

She joined Houston Ballet as a soloist in 2010 and was promoted to principal dancer in 2013 after performing Nikiya in Stanton Welch's *La Bayadère*.

Her principal roles include *Cinderella*, *Dracula*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. She has also appeared on the covers of *Pointe*, *Dance*, and *A+C Houston* magazines.

Dream → Determination → Achievement → Representation

ROMEO & JULIET

Stanton Welch's *Romeo & Juliet* premiered in Houston on February 26, 2015, with Karina González and Connor Walsh in the lead roles. González returned as Juliet for the company's 2016 Australian tour.

READ MORE

Scan for HIPLATINA's feature on how Karina González gives back to Venezuela.



SCAN



Principal Dancers Karina González & Connor Walsh in Stanton Welch's *Romeo & Juliet*
Photo: Amitava Sarkar

"Karina González excels as Juliet. She flaunts her emotional range and becomes the silly, young girl playing tricks on her nurse, the wide-eyed burgeoning woman taken away by a handsome stranger, then a protective wife."

Katrician Lang
BroadwayWorld

SPOTLIGHT ON GIAN CARLO PEREZ

FROM HAVANA TO HOUSTON BALLET



Gian Carlo Perez began training in **Havana, Cuba**, and danced with Ballet Nacional de Cuba before joining The Washington Ballet. In 2023, he joined Houston Ballet as a First Soloist.

Cuban-born Carlos Acosta—also a former Houston Ballet principal dancer—was one of Perez’s greatest inspirations. Today, Perez performs on the same stage where he once watched his idol dance.

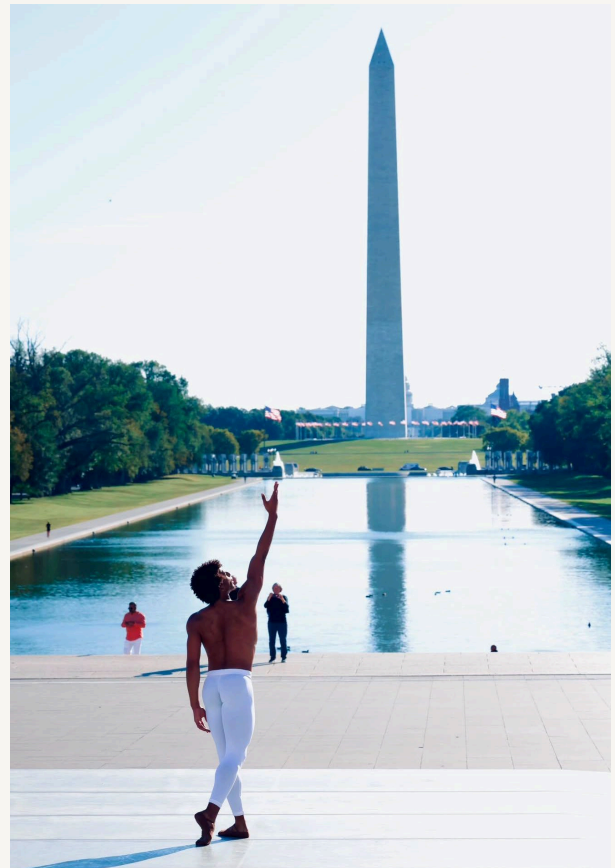
INSPIRATION → CHANGE → GROWTH → LEGACY

“The scene revealed a refined actor with a stage presence the likes of which this company hasn’t seen since the era of Carlos Acosta in the 1990s.”

Molly Glentzer | Houston Chronicle, 2023



HIS JOURNEY



Think About It

How can seeing someone else succeed shape what you imagine is possible for yourself?

CELEBRATING LATINX DANCERS

at Houston Ballet

Our dancers come from many places, bringing their cultures, traditions, and dreams to the stage.

From Latin America to Houston—
we dance together.



Mónica Gómez
Havana,
Cuba



Gian Carlo Pérez
Havana,
Cuba



Gretel Batista
Havana,
Cuba



Estheysis Mendez
Camagüey,
Cuba



HOUSTON, TEXAS

The place we now call home.
Houston Ballet is proud to bring
our many stories to one stage.



Karina González
Caracas,
Venezuela

VENEZUELA



Jessica Collado
Coral Springs,
Florida, USA

UNITED STATES (U.S.-BORN)



Samuel Rodriguez
Atlanta,
Georgia, USA

HOUSTON,
TEXAS

CUBA

BRAZIL



Elivelton Tomazi
Joinville,
Santa Catarina, Brazil



Rafaela Henrique
Jundiaí,
São Paulo, Brazil

Birthplaces listed reflect where each dancer was born.

★ Map is for educational purposes.

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
EXPOSE. EDUCATE. INTEGRATE.

REFLECTION ACTIVITIES



A DANCER'S JOURNEY

Choose one dancer featured in Celebrating Latinx Dancers at Houston Ballet.

NOTICE THE JOURNEY

- 1 Where did the dancer's journey begin?
- 2 What people, places, or experiences shaped their path?
- 3 What challenge, choice, or achievement stood out to you?

CHOOSE HOW YOU WANT TO RESPOND

TALK

Share with a partner or group.

WRITE

Use sentences or make a list.

DRAW

Sketch a path, symbol, or scene.

MOVE

Create three movements.

SENTENCE STARTERS

"I noticed..."

"Their journey changed when..."

"One connection I made was..."

You may respond alone, with a partner, or with the class.

CULTURE, TRADITION & CONNECTION

Choose a Latinx dance, musical style, food, celebration, or tradition from the film or your community.

MAKE A CONNECTION

- 1 What do you notice, remember, or want to learn more about?
- 2 How do people share or pass on this tradition?
- 3 What connection can you make to your experience or something you have learned?

CHOOSE HOW YOU WANT TO RESPOND

TALK

Share with a partner or group.

WRITE

Use sentences or make a list.

DRAW

Draw a symbol or scene from your example.

MOVE

Create movements inspired by your example.

YOU HAVE OPTIONS

You may choose an example from the film. You do not have to share personal or family information.

There is more than one way to make a meaningful connection.

FUN WITH FLAGS

A flag can use colors, shapes, and symbols to tell a story about a place.

Look at the flags of countries featured in the virtual field trip.
What do you notice?



Brazil



Colombia



Dominican Republic



Cuba



Venezuela

Notice the stripes, stars, crosses, circles, and colors. What might you use on a flag of your own?

DESIGN YOUR OWN FLAG!

Imagine a flag that celebrates things you love.

Think of home, school, favorite foods, games, music, dance, or anything else that matters to you. Choose colors, shapes, and symbols to tell your story.

Draw and color your flag in the space below.



A color or symbol I chose: _____

LEARN MORE!



EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
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DANCE TRADITIONS FROM LATIN AMERICA

Scan a code with your phone or tablet camera to watch one example of each dance. Notice the rhythm, movement, and how dancers move together.

Venezuela · Joropo



WATCH

Colombia · Cumbia



WATCH

Dominican Republic · Merengue



WATCH

Cuba · Danzón



WATCH

Brazil · Samba



WATCH

Dance traditions vary across communities. These videos show one example of each style.

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

EXPOSE. EDUCATE. INTEGRATE.

RANKS IN BALLET

Ballet companies around the world often use a ranking system to divide their dancers based on experience. At Houston Ballet, there are six ranks: Apprentice, Corps de Ballet, Demi-Soloist, Soloist, First Soloist and Principal Dancer. The company's Artistic Director promotes dancers through the levels of the company. The salary of a dancer is also tied to their level.

Principal Dancer is the highest level a dancer can reach. A dancer can be promoted to principal dancer if they have achieved a high level of technical ability combined with artistry and strong acting skills. Principal Dancers always dance leading roles.

First Soloists are dancers who have spent several years performing at the soloist level. They are frequently cast in leading roles.



Principal Dancer Karina Gonzalez & Soloist Harper Watters in *The Nutcracker*
Photo: Amitava Sarkar



First-Soloist Monica Gomez
in Ben Stevenson's *Don Quixote*
Photo: Amitava Sarkar

Soloists are dancers who already have had experience dancing soloist roles. They have proven themselves as artists and are regularly featured in classical and contemporary ballets.

Demi-soloist dancers have usually spent a few years in the Corps de Ballet and have proven themselves through hard work and performing well on stage. These dancers start to get opportunities to dance soloist roles in ballets.

Corps de Ballet is a French word that literally means "the body of the ballet." It is the largest group of dancers and the level where most professional dancers begin. These dancers are often in large group dances, working together as one unit.

Apprentices are dancers who have recently finished their training. This is a one-year position and is an opportunity for the dancer and company to see if they are a match.

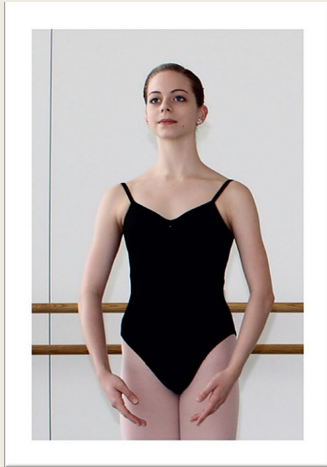


Corps de Ballet Dancers in Ben Stevenson's *Copéllia*
Photo: Amitava Sarkar

YOU TRY IT! ALL ABOUT ARMS

Ballet dancers use 5 positions of the arms when they dance. Their arms make soft, rounded shapes that help them move and balance.

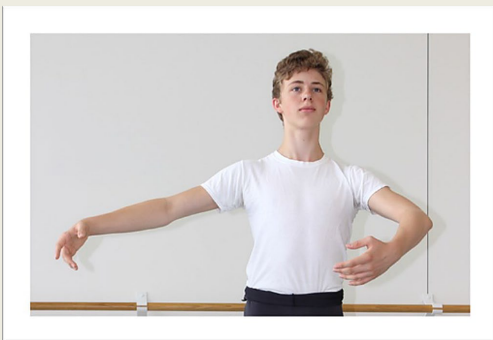
Men and women use the same positions.



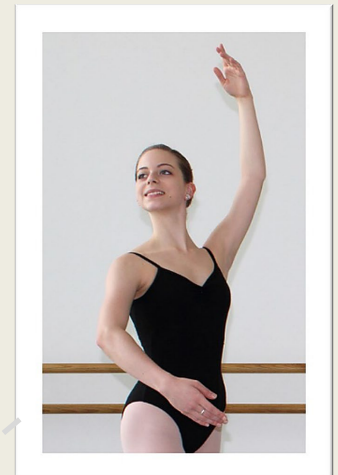
First position



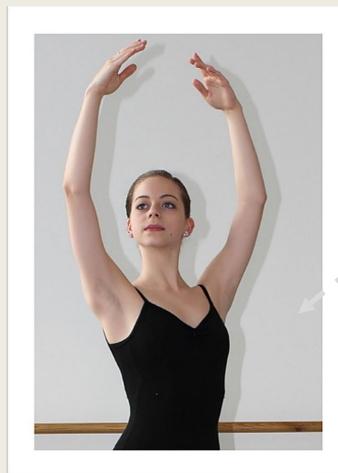
Second position



Third position



Fourth position



Fifth position

Can you make all 5 positions?

***Added Challenge: Try keeping your spine long and your body tall!**

YOU TRY IT! FANTASTIC FEET

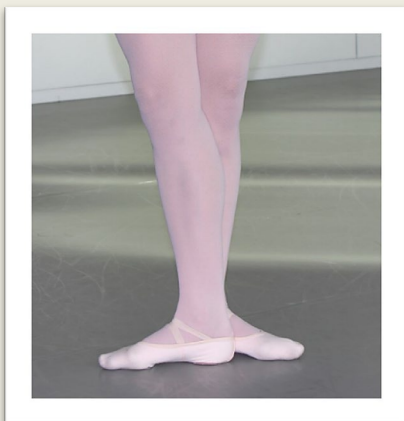
Ballet dancers use 5 positions of the feet when they dance. Their legs are turned out, meaning their toes point to the side instead of the front. Men and women use the same positions.



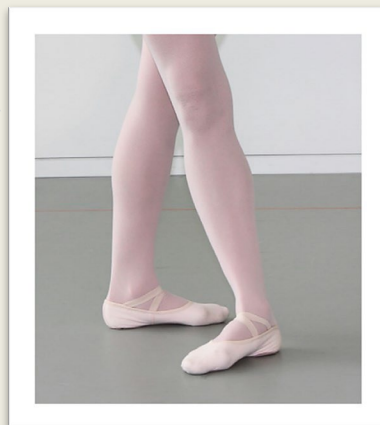
First position



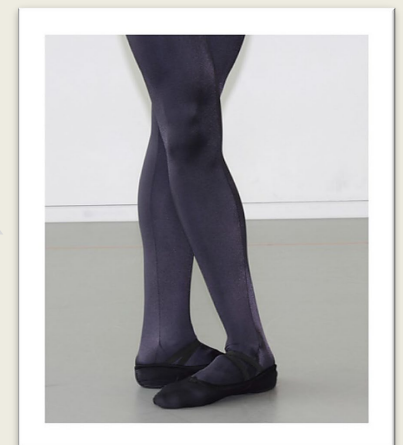
Second position



Third position



Fourth position



Fifth position

Try making all 5 positions.

***Added Challenge:** Try keeping your feet on the floor when switching positions

COSTUMES: More Than What They Wear

A dancer's clothing helps them move safely and allows the audience to see the body's movement clearly. In class and rehearsal, dancers often wear close-fitting clothing so teachers and choreographers can see their alignment and movement.

LOOK CLOSER:

What can a costume tell you about a character?



Team USA Track Outfits



Houston Ballet Academy in class
Photo: Cameron Durham



U of H football uniform

Onstage, costumes do more than dress the dancers—they help tell the story. Color, shape, fabric, and accessories can tell us about a character, place, time, or mood.



Houston Ballet Academy Dancers
Photo: Cameron Durham



Houston Ballet Academy Dancers
Photo: Cameron Durham

ABOUT HOUSTON BALLET

Houston Ballet is one of the leading ballet companies in the United States. With over 50 years of history, it has grown into the country's fourth-largest ballet company, operating on a budget of \$41.2 million with an endowment of \$110.8 million (as of July 2024).

Leadership

Houston Ballet is led by Co-Artistic Directors Julie Kent and Stanton Welch AM, along with Executive Director and CEO Sonja Kostich.

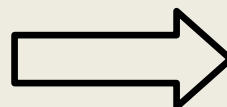
- **Stanton Welch AM** — Australian choreographer; Artistic Director since 2003; created 43 new works for the Company; commissioned 30+ more from choreographers like Aszure Barton, Trey McIntyre, and Justin Peck; expanded repertoire with works by Balanchine, Forsythe, and Kylián
- **Julie Kent** — Joined as Co-Artistic Director in 2023; previously led The Washington Ballet; former Principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre
- **Sonja Kostich** — Became Executive Director and CEO in August 2025, succeeding Jim Nelson; former professional dancer with San Francisco Ballet and Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project; background in arts administration and finance

Facilities and Reach

- Performs at the Wortham Theater Center
- Trains at the Margaret Alkek Williams Center for Dance, a \$46.6 million facility opened in 2011
- Tours internationally, including London, Paris, Tokyo, and New York City

Education and Community

- Houston Ballet Academy trains 1,000+ students annually
- Produces 60%+ of the Company's current dancers
- Education & Community Engagement program reaches 60,000+ individuals in Houston each year



GLOSSARY

Words to know as you explore the dancers, their cultures, and their art.

CULTURE & IDENTITY

Culture: Shared customs, arts, beliefs, and ways of life in a community.

Heritage: The traditions and histories people inherit from family or community.

Identity: The experiences, relationships, and traditions that help shape a person's sense of who they are.

Latinx: A gender-neutral term some people use for those with Latin American roots.

Representation: The presence of people and their experiences in the stories and art we see.

Traditional dance: A dance form shared and passed along within a community.

DANCE & PERFORMANCE

Choreographer: An artist who creates and arranges movement for a dance.

Composer: An artist who creates music.

Grand pas de deux: A formal ballet duet, often with solo sections for each dancer.

Pointe shoes: Special shoes that support trained dancers as they dance on the tips of their toes.

ONSTAGE & IN THE STUDIO

Costume: Clothing designed for a performance to help show character or setting.

Leotard and tights: Fitted clothing often worn for ballet class and rehearsal.

Tiara: A decorative headpiece sometimes worn with a ballet costume.

Tunic: A loose, shirt-like costume worn in some ballets.

Tutu: A ballet skirt that may be short and stiff or longer and soft.

HOUSTON BALLET & TRAINING

Houston Ballet Academy: Houston Ballet's school for dance training.

Houston Ballet II (HBII): A group of emerging dancers who train and perform with Houston Ballet.

Summer Intensive: A concentrated summer training program for dance students.

Prix de Lausanne: An international ballet competition for young dancers.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Your feedback helps us improve future virtual field trips.

Scan the QR code to complete our program evaluation.



Thank you for sharing your thoughts!