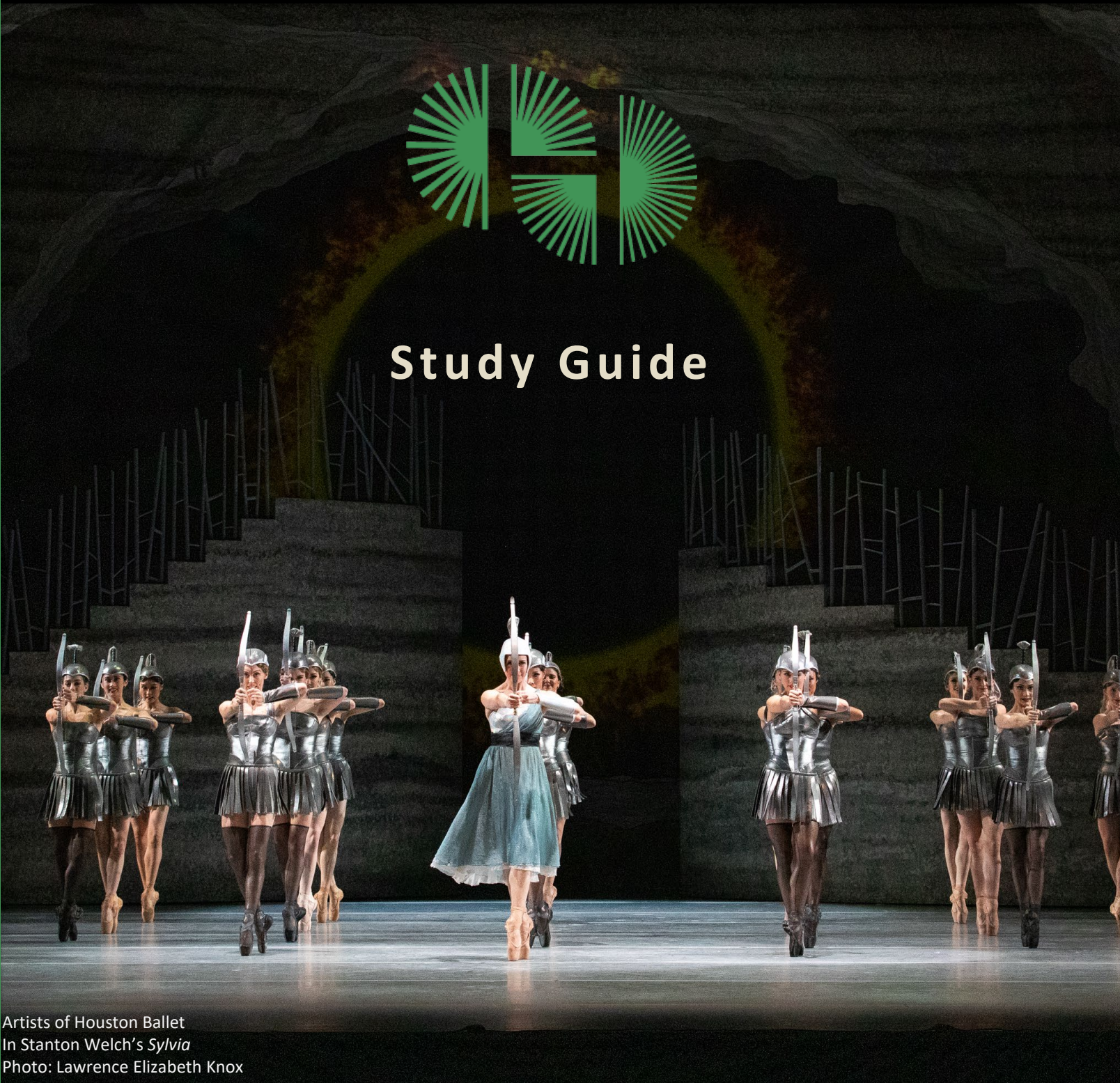


Myths, Legends, Folk & Fairy Tales



Study Guide



Artists of Houston Ballet
In Stanton Welch's *Sylvia*
Photo: Lawrence Elizabeth Knox

Myths, Legends, Folk & Fairy Tales

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Welcome to **Studio Series: *Myths, Legends, Folk & Fairy Tales***, an interactive educational performance presented by Houston Ballet II and the Houston Ballet Academy Professional Program at Houston Ballet Center for Dance.

This performance invites students into a library of **myths, legends, folk & and fairy tales**, where stories are brought to life through movement, music, costumes, and theatrical design.

This Study Guide helps students prepare for the performance and extend their learning through dance, storytelling, and culture.



Every great story begins by opening a book—and every performance begins with curiosity.



Attending a Ballet Performance

Going to see a ballet performance is the SAME as going to a movie:

- The lights dim before the performance begins and the theater stays dark during the ballet.
- Audience members are expected to quietly sit in their seats during the performance.
- Audience members may NOT take any pictures or video during the performance. This is distracting to the dancers and other audience members, AND *Myths, Legends, Folk & Fairy Tales* is copyrighted artistic material.
- All cell phones and other electronic devices should be powered OFF as soon as you enter the theater.



Williams Dance Lab: Sensory Friendly Audience
Photo by Leslie Culhane

Going to see a ballet performance is DIFFERENT than going to a movie:



Houston Ballet Academy Students
Photo by Leslie Culhane

- Ballet is performed live. The dancers can see and react to the audience!
- Audience members can show the dancers when they appreciate their performance! If something is funny, you can laugh! If the dancers are doing a great job, then you can clap!
- At the end of the show, the dancers all bow. This is called a **curtain call**. If you really loved the show, you could give the dancers a **standing ovation** to show that you appreciate their hard work!
- School clothes are appropriate, but some people like to dress up for ballet performances. Just make sure you are comfortable!

TEKS Alignment & Learning Connections

Houston Ballet Academy's production of *Myths, Legends, Folk & Fairy Tales* provide standards-aligned learning experiences that integrate English Language Arts, Dance, Music, Theatre, and Social-Emotional Learning through live performance.

The following charts highlight representative Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) connections and illustrate how students engage with the performance at each grade band.

These examples are not exhaustive but demonstrate authentic opportunities for observation, discussion, analysis, reflection, and interdisciplinary learning.

- a) K–2: Storytelling
- b) 3–5: Artistic Choices
- c) 6–8: Meaning & Cultural Analysis
- d) 9–12: Interpretation & Cultural Relevance



Houston Ballet Academy Students
In Claudio Muñoz' *Sleeping Beauty*
Photo: Alana Campbell

Learning Outcomes

Students who attend the ***Studio Series*** performance of ***Myths, Legends, Folk & Fairy Tales*** and participate in companion classroom activities engage with dance as a form of storytelling, exploring how **myths, legends, folk tales, and fairy tales** from **cultures** around the world are brought to life through movement, music, design, and performance.

Before, during, and after the performance, students **observe, interpret, discuss, create, and reflect** through scaffolded classroom and extension activities that connect the live performance to grade-level learning. These experiences encourage students to analyze **character, theme, conflict, cultural traditions, and artistic choices** while strengthening observation, creativity, communication, empathy, and cultural understanding through meaningful connections across the arts and other subjects.

Learning outcomes and activities are scaffolded by grade band, aligned with the TEKS, and designed with multiple opportunities for students to engage with, understand, and respond to the performance.



Houston Ballet Academy Students
In Stanton Welch's *Pecos Bill*
Photo: Lawrence Elizabeth Knox

TEKS Alignment & Learning Connections

Elementary (K–2): Discovering Story Through Movement

Focus: *Students discover how movement, music, costumes, and scenery help tell myths, legends, folk tales, and fairy tales. They identify characters, settings, emotions, and simple story events while making connections to stories from their own lives and cultures.*

Current TEKS Strand	Studio Series Connection	Examples & Learning Opportunities
English Language Arts	Identify story elements and retell events	Compare beginning, middle, and end of a ballet story; identify characters and settings.
Fine Arts: Dance	Observe and describe movement	Notice how dancers use body shapes, levels, tempo, and energy to communicate ideas.
Fine Arts: Music	Respond to music	Describe how music changes mood and supports the story.
Social Studies	Explore cultures and traditions	Recognize that stories come from many cultures and reflect traditions.
Theatre	Understand characters and dramatic action	Observe facial expressions, gestures, and movement that develop characters.
SEL	Build empathy and communication	Discuss character feelings and practice respectful listening and sharing.

How do movement, music, and design work together to tell a story?

TEKS Alignment & Learning Connections

Elementary (3-5): Exploring Meaning & Artistic Choices

Focus: *Students examine how choreographers transform myths, legends, folk tales, and fairy tales into dance by analyzing artistic choices, cultural influences, and storytelling techniques.*

Current TEKS	Studio Series Connection	Examples & Learning Opportunities
English Language Arts	Analyze theme, plot, and point of view	Compare a familiar story with its ballet adaptation.
Fine Arts: Dance	Interpret movement vocabulary	Explain how movement communicates character and conflict.
Fine Arts: Music	Analyze musical elements	Describe how rhythm, dynamics, and tempo support storytelling.
Social Studies	Examine cultural traditions	Identify how different cultures inspire characters, costumes, or settings.
Theatre	Analyze production elements	Discuss scenery, costumes, and lighting that contribute to meaning.
SEL	Perspective taking	Reflect on choices characters make and how they solve problems.

How do movement, music, and design work together to tell a story?

TEKS Alignment & Learning Connections

Middle School (6-8): Analyzing Performance & Production

Focus: *Students examine how choreographers transform myths, legends, folk tales, and fairy tales into dance by analyzing artistic choices, cultural influences, and storytelling techniques.*

Current TEKS	Studio Series Connection	Examples & Learning Opportunities
English Language Arts	Analyze themes and author's purpose	Compare literary stories with dance adaptations.
Fine Arts: Dance	Analyze choreography	Explain how choreographic choices communicate meaning.
Fine Arts: Music	Evaluate expressive intent	Analyze how musical structure supports dramatic moments.
Social Studies	Examine historical and cultural context	Explore how myths and legends reflect cultural values.
Theatre	Evaluate artistic choices	Analyze costume, lighting, scenery, and performance decisions.
SEL	Critical thinking & collaboration	Support ideas with evidence during discussion and reflection.

How do stories and ballets help us learn about people and cultures?

TEKS Alignment & Learning Connections

High School (9-12): Critiquing Artistry & Cultural Impact

Focus: *Students evaluate how ballet interprets myths, legends, folk tales, and fairy tales while considering artistic intent, historical context, and cultural significance.*

Current TEKS	Studio Series Connection	Examples & Learning Opportunities
English Language Arts	Evaluate interpretation across media	Critique how dance adapts literary and oral traditions.
Fine Arts: Dance	Critique choreography and performance	Evaluate artistic choices using dance vocabulary and evidence.
Fine Arts: Music	Analyze compositional intent	Examine how music shapes audience interpretation.
Social Studies	Analyze cultural influence	Evaluate how stories preserve or reinterpret cultural traditions.
Theatre	Critique production design	Assess how design choices support artistic intent.
SEL	Reflection & communication	Develop evidence-based interpretations and consider multiple perspectives.

How do myths, legends, folk tales, and fairy tales reflect the beliefs and values of a culture?

Learning more!

Myths, Legends, Folk & Fairy Tales



Welcome to Houston Ballet's library!

Throughout history, cultures have used stories to educate and entertain. **Ballets** also tell stories, but they do so without words.

Many **choreographers** have used myths, legends, folk and fairy tales as inspiration for their ballets. Today we will journey through the bookshelf of ballets in Houston Ballet's library.

Some of these dances have existed for over a hundred years and some were created right here inspired by our own community and history.

MYTHS

A **myth** is a story that often has a lesson embedded in it, and its main **characters** are non-humans, such as **gods**, **demigods**, and other supernatural figures.



In **Greek culture** there is a pantheon of Gods led by **Zeus** the king of **Mt. Olympus**. He has two children who are twins. **Apollo**, his son, is the god of the sun and light, and **Artemis**, his daughter, is the goddess of the hunt.

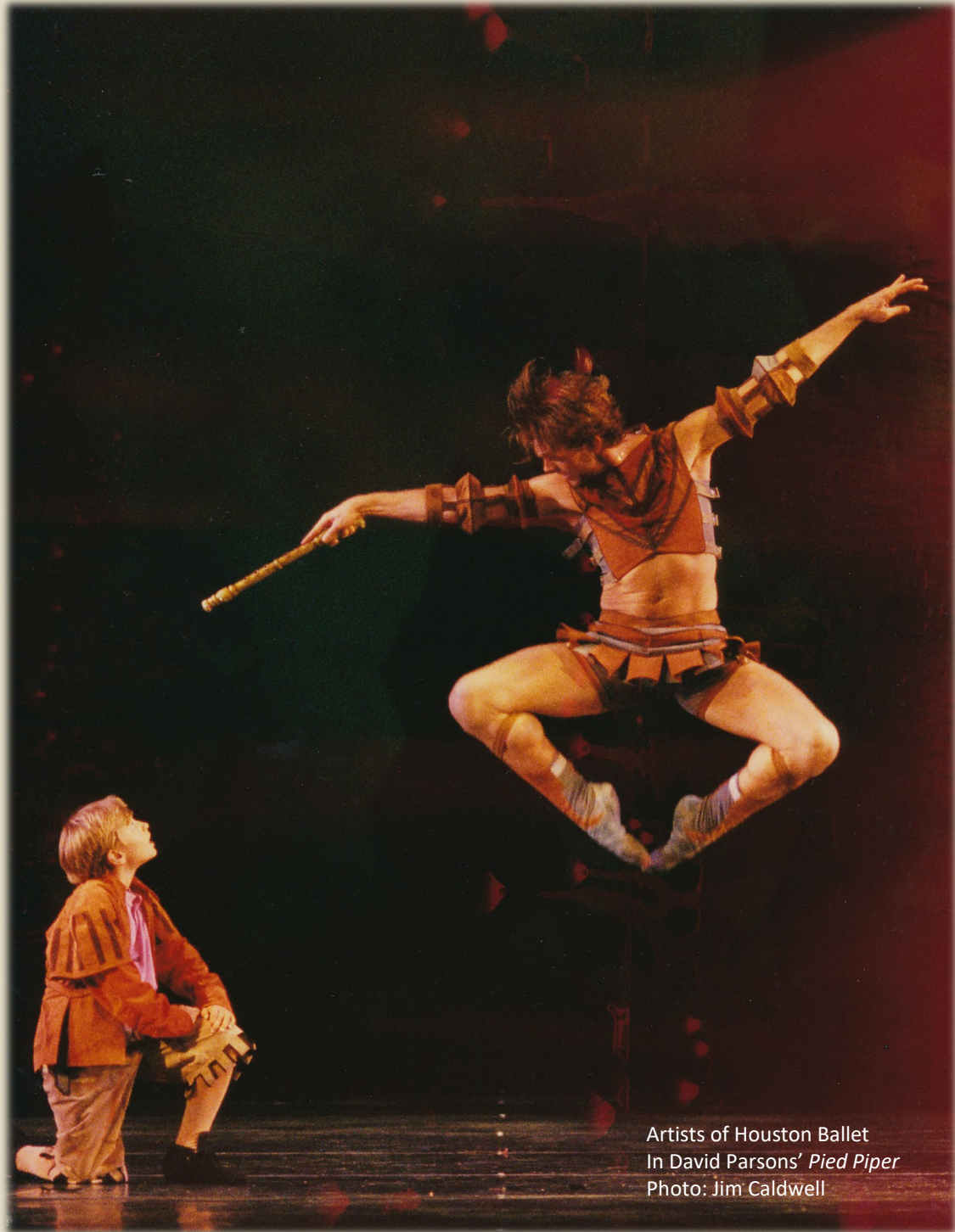
In **Roman** mythology, **Diana** is goddess of the moon and hunt. She transforms the hunter **Actaeon** into a stag after he accidentally discovers her bathing in the forest.



LEGENDS

Legends are stories from the past that many people believe and are sometimes based on superstitions. Even though they cannot prove them to be true, cultures still use **legends** to teach morals and beliefs that their community has traditionally held.

The legend of the **Pied Piper** tells the story of what happens when people don't keep their promises.



Artists of Houston Ballet
In David Parsons' *Pied Piper*
Photo: Jim Caldwell

LEGENDS

The Tarantella is a vibrant Italian folk dance from Southern Italy. According to **legend**, dancing quickly and energetically could cure the effects of a tarantula spider bite!



WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Italy is a country in Southern Europe.



IN EUROPE



FOCUS ON ITALY



FOLK TALES

Even before there were spoken or written words, stories were passed down through dances. One kind of **folk tale** is a tall tale, which uses exaggerated characters, adventures and events.

Pecos Bill tells the story of a superhuman cowboy who rode a tornado and used a rattlesnake as a whip.



Principal Dancers Jessica Collado and Ian Casady
In Stanton Welch's *Pecos Bill*
Photo: Amitava Sarkar



He was raised by a coyote mother who brought him into her pack.



FOLK TALES

...but in the story of **Red Riding Hood**, the animal is dangerous.

The lesson this story tells is to be careful of strangers



Houston Ballet Academy Dancers
In Claudio Munoz' *Sleeping Beauty*
Photo: Alana Campbell

especially

the

BIG,

BAD,

WOLF!



FAIRY TALES

Fairy Tales, like folk tales, often have a lesson or moral, but what makes them special is their use of magical elements and a focus on good vs. Evil.



First Soloist Monica Gomez
In Stanton Welch's *Cinderella*
Photo: Lawrence Elizabeth Knox

Cinderella is reunited with the love of her life when it is revealed that the magical glass slipper fits only her foot.



First Soloist Monica Gomez and Principal Dancer Connor Walsh
In Stanton Welch's *Cinderella*
Photo: Lawrence Elizabeth Knox

FAIRY TALES

In the ballet **Sleeping Beauty**, there are **good** fairies who bestow gifts upon Princess Aurora like beauty, the gift of song, and a good temperament.



But there is an **evil** fairy named **Carabosse** who isn't invited to the party celebrating the young princess' birth.



Carabosse curses the Princess to prick her finger and die.

The **Lilac Fairy** softens the curse: the Princess will sleep until awakened by true love's kiss.

GLOSSARY

STORY & TRADITION	DANCE & MOVEMENT	CHARACTERS & ROLES	THEATER & PERFORMANCE	BIG IDEAS
Myth – traditional story that explains beliefs, origins, or natural phenomena	Choreography – the planned arrangement of movement	Hero/Heroine – central character who faces a challenge	Narrative – a story communicated through performance	Culture – shared traditions, beliefs, and practices
Legend – traditional story based on a person, place, or event, often with imaginative elements	Gesture – a movement that communicates an idea or feeling	Villain – character who creates conflict or opposition	Characterization – how a performer communicates a character	Tradition – ideas or practices passed from one generation to another
Folktale – story passed through generations, often by word of mouth	Motif – repeated movement, image, or idea	Trickster – character who uses cleverness to solve problems or cause mischief	Props – objects used by performers to help tell a story	Symbolism – when something represents a larger idea
Fairy Tale – imaginative story often featuring magic, transformation, or fantastical characters	Mime – movement used to communicate without words	Archetype – recognizable character type or pattern	Setting – time and place in which a story occurs	Conflict – a struggle or problem that drives a story
Oral Tradition – stories and knowledge shared through speaking and listening	Pantomime – storytelling through expressive movement and gesture	Ensemble – performers working together as a group	Scenery – visual elements that establish the world of the story	Theme – the central idea or message of a story
Cultural Story – story connected to the history, beliefs, or identity of a community	Expression – using the body and face to communicate emotion or ideas	Chorus – group that may represent a community, narrate, or respond to the action	Costume – clothing that helps communicate character, culture, or setting	Transformation – a significant change in a character or story

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before or after the performance to explore how movement, music, character, culture, and theatrical design bring **myths, legends, folk & fairy tales** to life.

Activities may be adapted by grade level and completed through movement, discussion, writing, drawing, or collaborative exploration.

Missions from the Library

Students become “Story Explorers” and search for clues in the movement, characters, music, setting, and production design. Four mini missions guide their observations before, during, or after the performance.

Bonus Mission: The Tarantella

Students jump from legend to science as they investigate the story behind the Tarantella, listen for the tambourine and cymbals, observe its energetic movement, and compare the legend with what we know about real tarantulas.

You Try It! Sleeping Beauty Pantomime

Students learn and perform the classical ballet pantomime used by Carabosse and the Lilac Fairy to tell two different versions of Aurora’s fate—without using spoken words.

Feelings Cards

Students identify emotions connected to characters or moments in the performance and explain which movement, musical, facial, or design clues communicated those feelings. They may respond through words, a frozen shape, or a short movement phrase.

Décor: Set and Costume Design

Students explore how scenery, color, shape, fabric, and costume details establish setting, mood, culture, and character. They then create an original set or costume inspired by one of the stories.

Tell the Story and Show What You Know

Students organize the beginning, middle, and end of a story from the performance through writing, drawing, sequencing, movement, or discussion.

Review and Reflect

Students consider what they noticed, learned, and experienced while connecting their observations to storytelling, movement, music, character, culture, and design.

***Activities are designed to offer multiple ways to participate and respond; students do not need previous ballet or dance experience.**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Grade Band	Students Will Be Able To...
K–2	Identify characters, emotions, and story events and describe how movement, music, and design help tell a story.
3–5	Explain how artistic choices communicate character, theme, and story, and explore how storytelling traditions reflect culture.
6–8	Analyze how choreography and production elements transform traditional stories into performance and communicate meaning.
9–12	Evaluate how artistic choices, cultural context, and adaptation influence the meaning and impact of a performance.



Be a Story Explorer

Missions from the Library

Every book in the library holds a different adventure. As you watch the performance, imagine you're exploring a magical library where each story leaves behind clues. Your mission is to discover how **dancers, musicians and designers** bring **myths, legends, folk & fairy tales**.

Complete each mission as you unlock the secrets hidden inside every story.

Mission 1: Unlock the Story

Think Like a Choreographer

Stories don't always need words. Watch for movements that reveal what is happening, how characters feel, and what might happen next.

Search for These Clues

- ☐ A movement that shows courage
- ☐ A movement that shows fear
- ☐ A movement that shows joy
- ☐ A movement that repeats throughout the story

Library Question

Which movement helped you understand the story best?

Mission 2: Meet the Characters

Think Like a Performer

Every great story has unforgettable characters. Watch how dancers use facial expressions, posture, and body language to transform into heroes, villains, magical creatures, or ordinary people.

Search for These Clues

- ☐ A character who changes
- ☐ A friendship
- ☐ A conflict
- ☐ A powerful emotion

Library Question

If the character could speak one sentence, what would they say?

Mission 3: Explore the World

Think Like a Designer

Every book creates a new world. Look for costumes, scenery, lighting, and props that help transport the audience to another place or time.

Search for These Clues

- ☐ A magical place
- ☐ A real place
- ☐ A costume that tells you about a character
- ☐ A prop with an important job

Library Question

What clues helped you understand where the story took place?

Mission 4: Listen Between the Pages

Think Like a Composer

Every story has its own soundtrack. Listen carefully for how music creates excitement, mystery, celebration, danger, or wonder.

Search for These Clues

- ☐ Fast music
- ☐ Slow music
- ☐ Quiet music
- ☐ Powerful music

Library Question

How did the music change the way you felt about the story?

Bonus Mission: The Tarantella

Dance, Legend & Science

Students investigate:

- ✓ What do you remember about the Tarantella?
- ✓ What made this dance feel energetic and lively?
- ✓ How did the tambourines and cymbals contribute to the music and movement of the dance?
- ✓ How do spiders move, and how might their movements inspire dance?
- ✓ How do movement, rhythm, and energy help tell the story of the Tarantella?
- ✓ What is the legend behind the Tarantella?
- ✓ How is the real science of tarantulas different from the legend?



[Click here to Look and Listen!](#)



You Try It! Pantomime

Pantomime is a way of telling a story **without words**, using movement, gestures, and facial expressions. In classical ballet, pantomime is a vocabulary of specific movements that communicate ideas, emotions, or actions.

In Ben Stevenson's *The Sleeping Beauty*, the evil fairy **Carabosse** foretells that Aurora will prick her finger and **die**. The Lilac Fairy changes the prophecy: Aurora will prick her finger and **sleep**. Notice how one pantomime gesture changes the meaning of the story!

Now it's your turn to become a storyteller without words.

- Follow steps 1–8 to perform the pantomime sequence from this scene.
- For Step 9, use picture 9.A for Carabosse or 9.B for the Lilac Fairy.



Your daughter

- 1) extend right arm and point finger out to side



will

- 2) move right arm outwards at hip-height



grow

- 3) move upward to shoulder-height



up

- 4) move above your head



to become

- 5) Start with right hand at the left side of your face



beautiful.

- 6) circle hand counter-clockwise around face to the right ear



Then she will prick

- 7) extend left arm in front, pinch right thumb and index together



her finger

- 8) pull right hand and arm straight upwards

and die!

9. A) with hands in fists, cross right arm over the left and extend head backwards



Carabosse

PPhotos by Dancy Lukeman



Lilac Fairy

and sleep.

9. B) lunge with left leg, cross arms underneath the head, and lean towards right arm, as if sleeping.

FEELINGS CARDS



Fantastic
Fantástico(a)



Fearful
Miedoso(a)



Frustrated
Frustrado(a)



Happy
Feliz



Jealous
Celoso(a)



Lonely
Solitario(a)



Loved
Amado(a)/Querido(a)



Mad
Enojado(a)



Nervous
Nervioso(a)



Overwhelmed
Abrumado(a)



Proud
Orgulloso(a)



Relaxed
Relajado(a)

FEELINGS CARDS



Affectionate
Cariñoso(a)



Bored
Aburrido(a)



Brave
Valiente



Calm
Calmado(a)



Cheerful
Alegre



Comfortable
CÓmodo(a)



Creative
Creativo(a)



Curious
Curioso(a)



Disappointed
Decepcionado(a)



Disgusted
Asqueado(a)



Excited
Emocionado(a)



Embarrassed
Avergonzado(a)

FEELINGS CARDS



Sad
Triste



Safe
Seguro(a)



Satisfied
Satisfecho(a)



Scared
Asustado(a)



Sensitive
Sensible



Serious
Serio(a)



Shy
Tímido(a)



Stressed
Estresado(a)



Strong
Fuerte



Tense
Tenso(a)



Tired
Cansado(a)

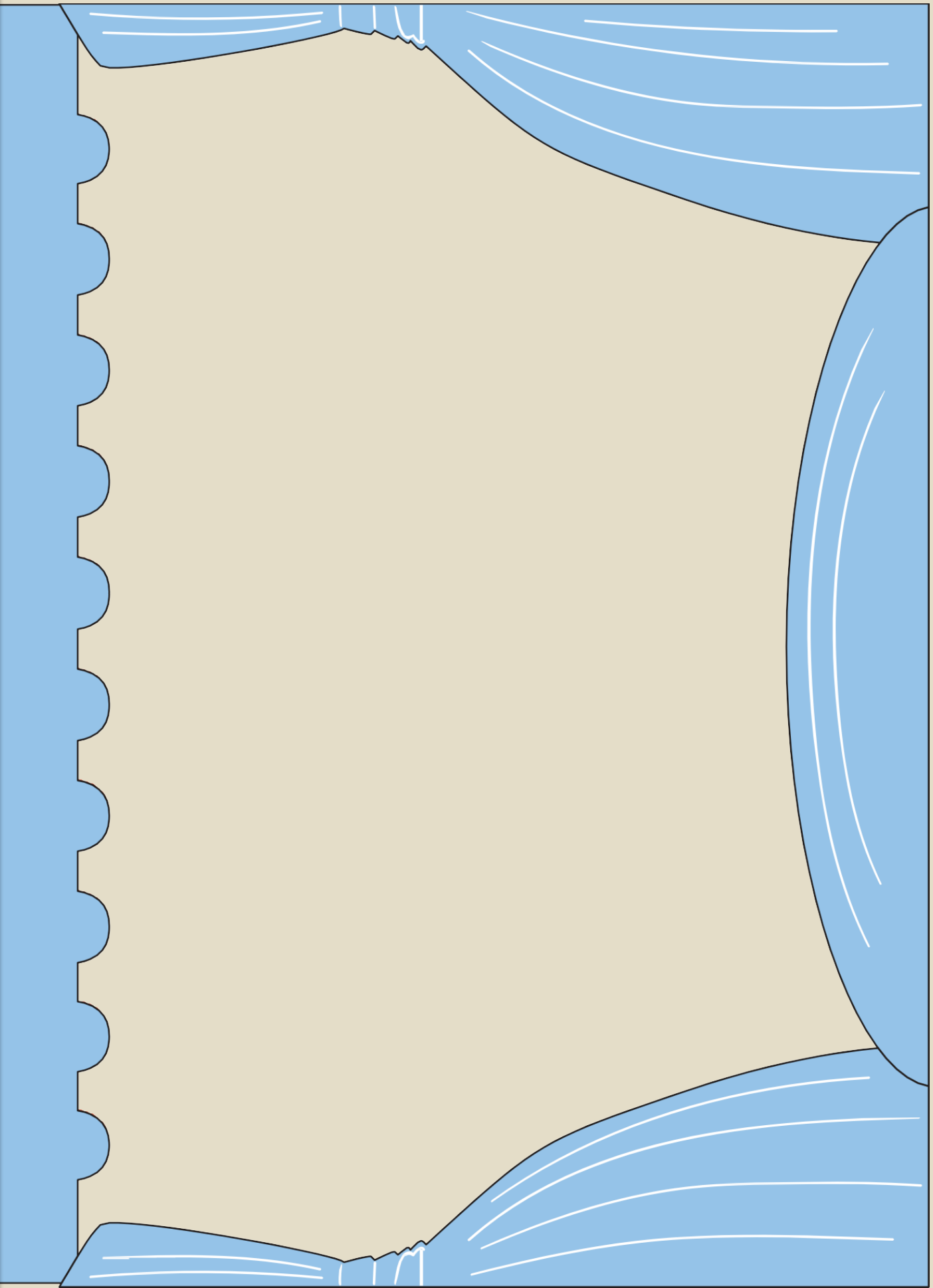


Worried
Preocupado(a)

Set Design 1: Create the Story's World

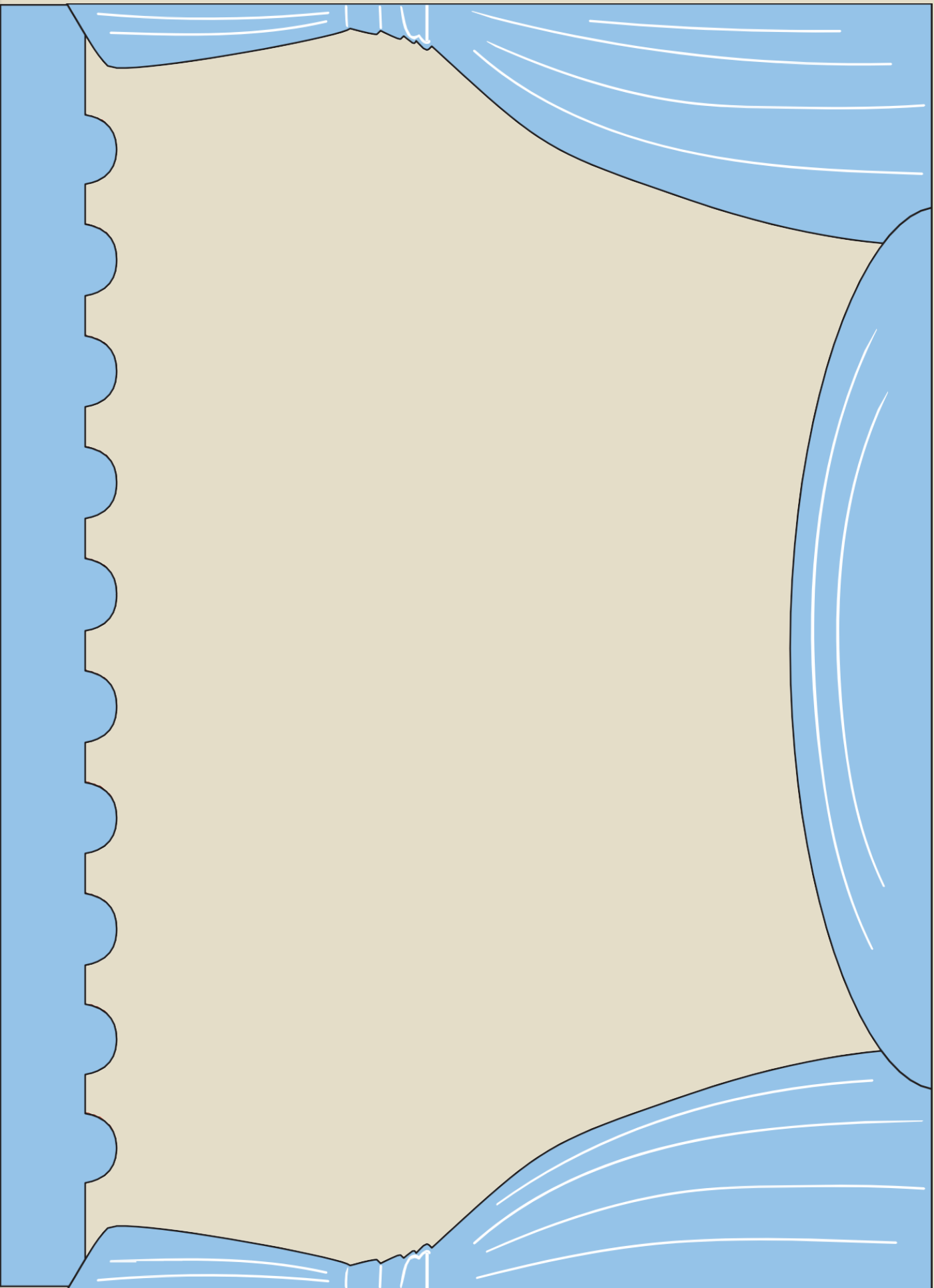
Choose one myth, legend, folk tale, or fairy tale from the performance. Where and when does the story take place?

How will your scenery show the audience what kind of world they have entered?



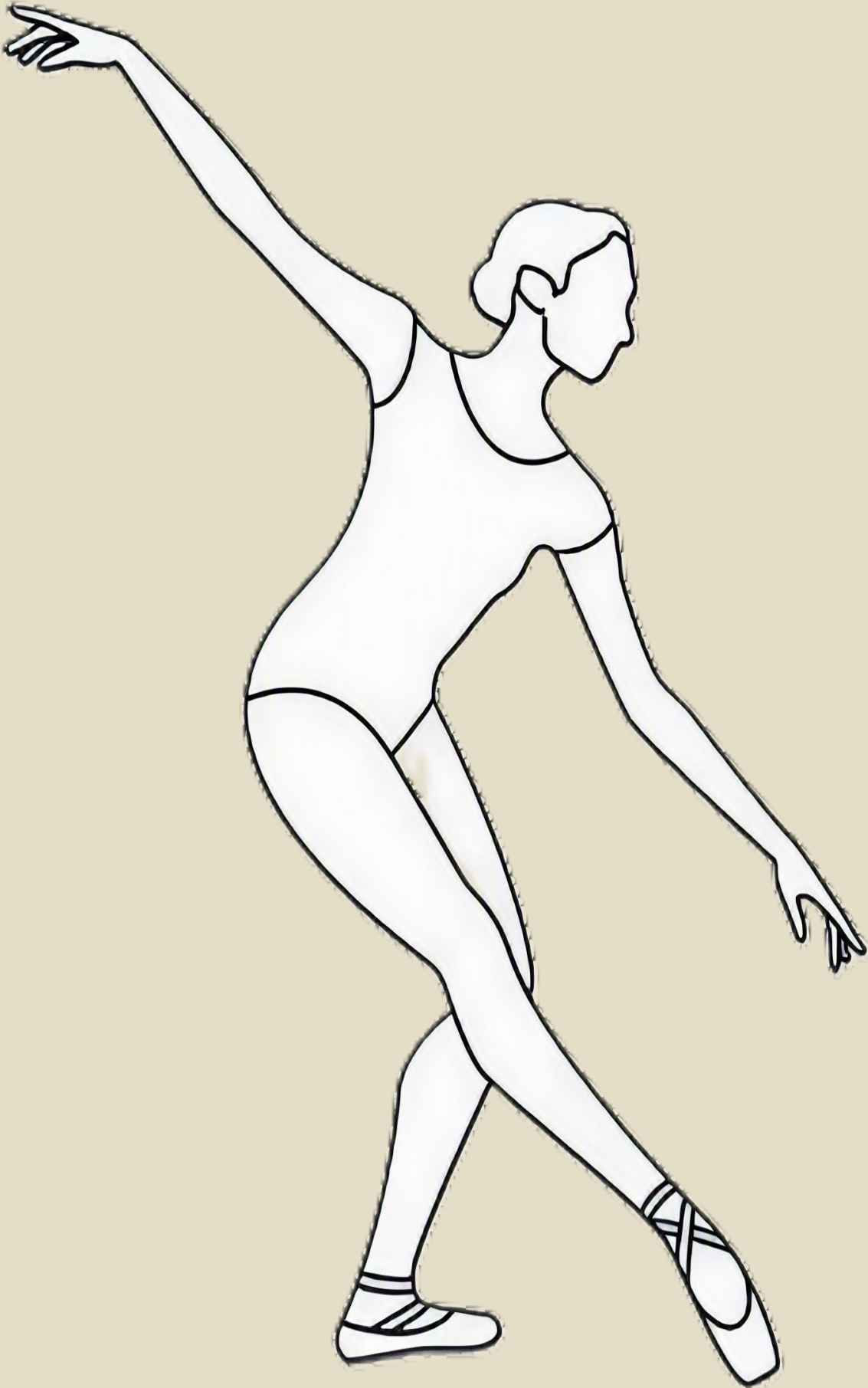
Set Design 2: Create the Mood

Choose an important moment from the story. How can color, lighting, shape, texture, and space communicate whether the moment feels magical, joyful, mysterious, peaceful, or dangerous?



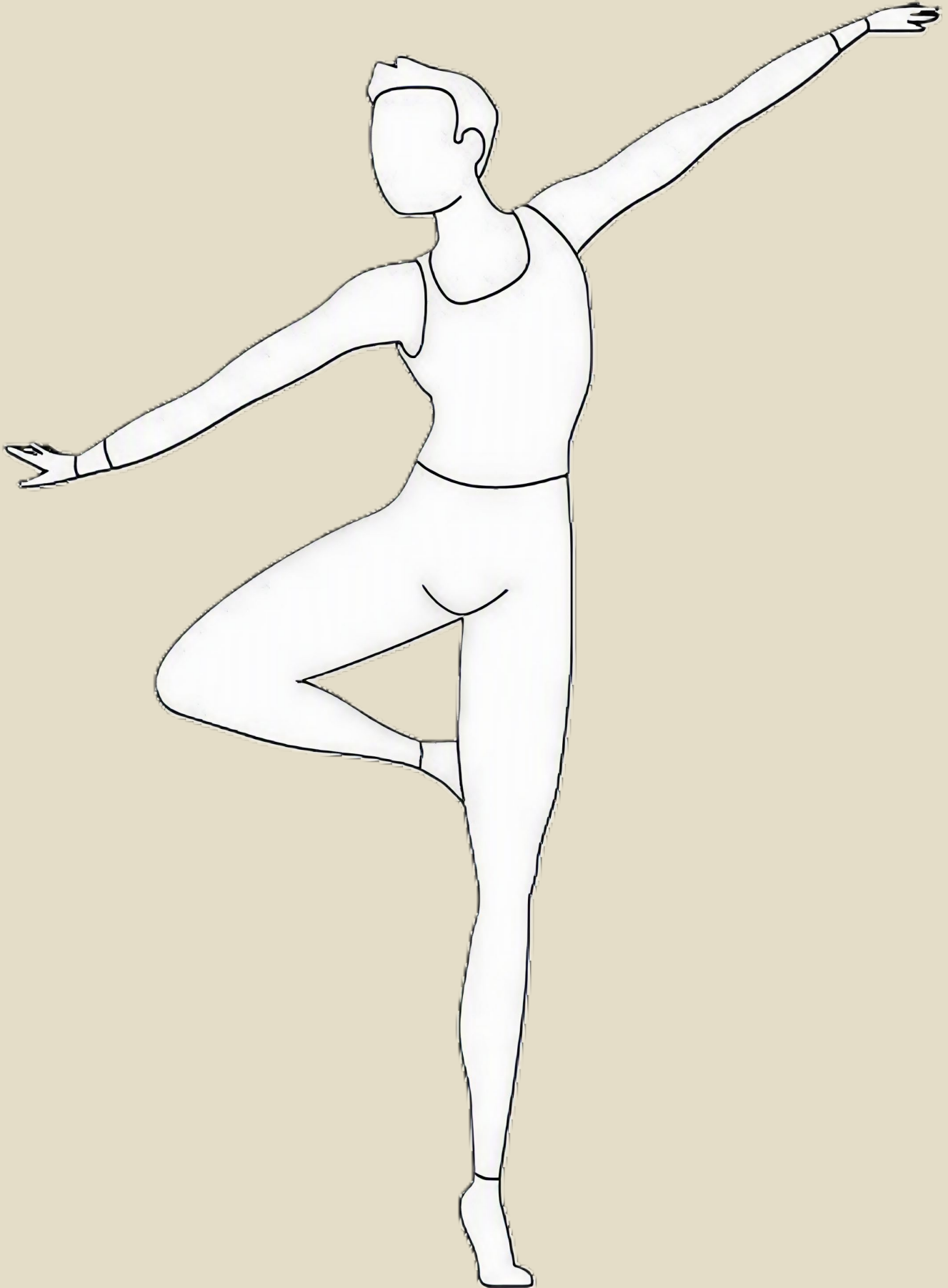
Costume Design 1: Reveal the Character

Design a costume for a hero, villain, magical being, or other character. What can the costume's color, shape, fabric, and details tell the audience about the character before they begin to dance?



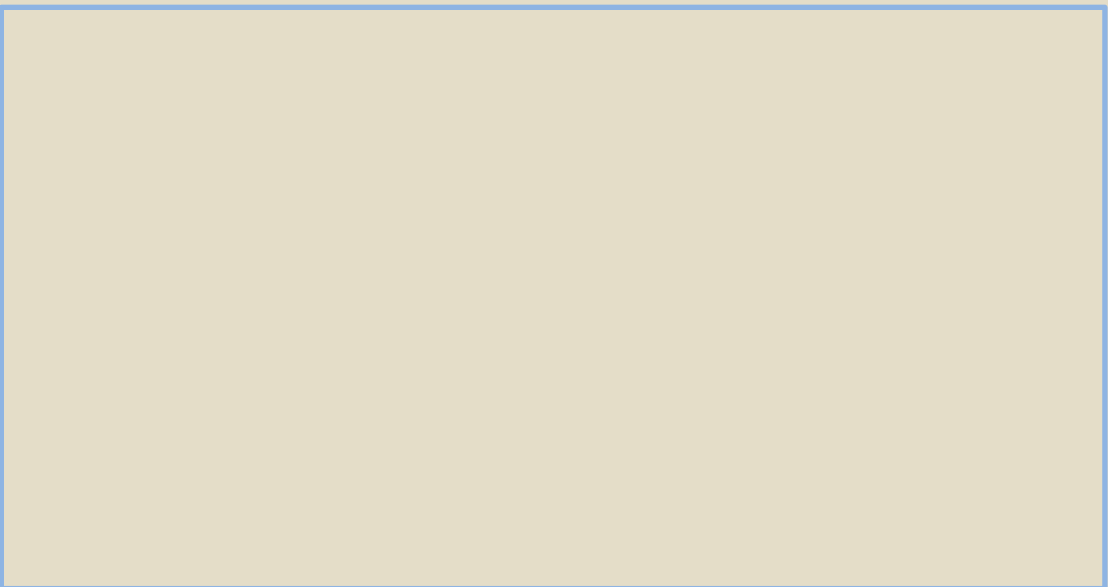
Costume Design 2: Design for Story and Movement

How does your costume connect to the story's setting or tradition? How will it help the dancer move safely and clearly while performing the character?

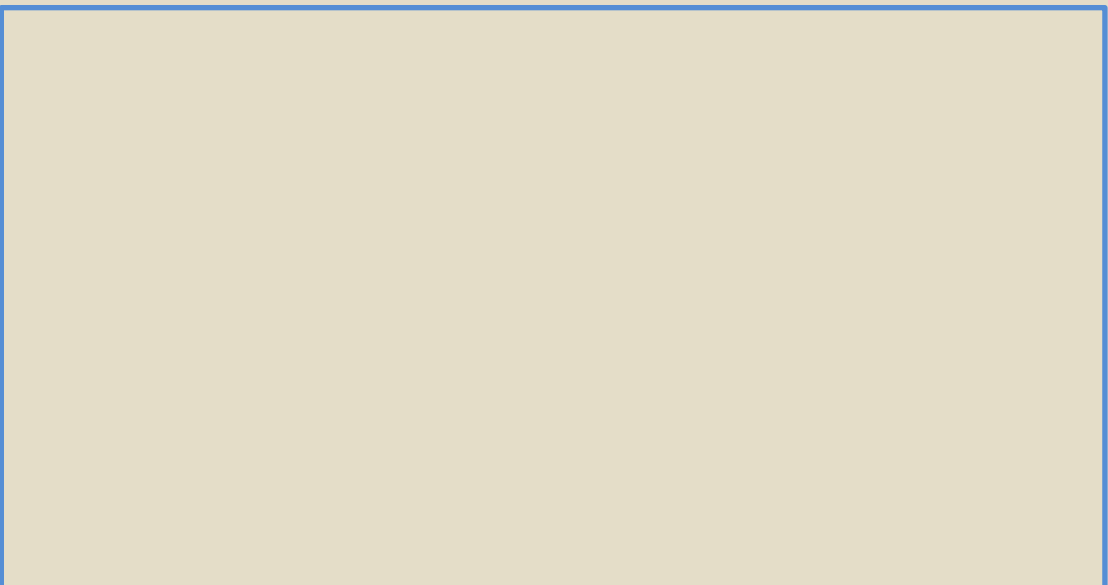


Show What You Know

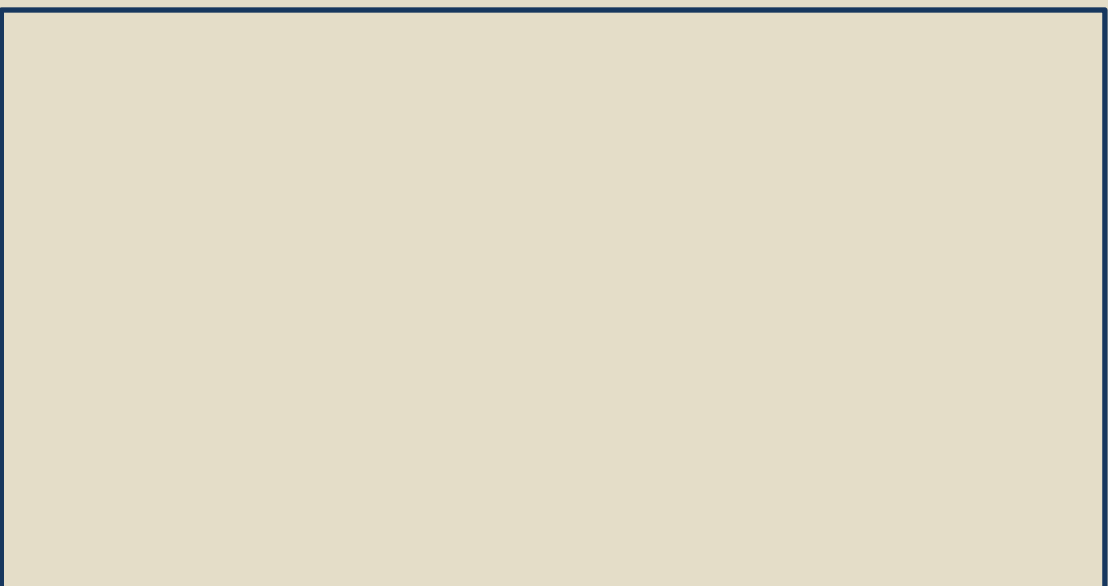
Choose your favorite story from the performance. In the three boxes, draw the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Then share your choice and explain why you chose it.



1. Beginning



2. Middle



3. End

REVIEW & REFLECT

Think about the performance of Myths, Legends, Folk & Fairy Tales you just watched.

- What was your favorite story or moment? Why?
- Who was your favorite character? What made them memorable?
- How did the dancers, music, costumes, or scenery help tell the story?
- What is one new thing you learned about ballet, storytelling, or a culture or tradition?
- What new ballet or storytelling vocabulary did you learn?

Show your thinking your way:

You can draw, write, use words or symbols, or share your ideas with a partner or the class.



LOOK CLOSER: The Art of Ballet

These pages introduce students to some of the movement, positions, and costume choices that shape the art of ballet. Students can explore the five basic positions of the feet, arms, and hands while considering how dancers use their bodies and clothing to move safely, communicate character, and help bring a story to life.

LEG AND FEET POSITIONS

Ballet dancers use five basic positions of the feet. The legs are turned out from the hips, meaning the legs rotate outward from the hip joints.

Dancers of all genders use the same five positions.



First Position
(1st)



Second Position
(2nd)



Third Position
(3rd)



Fourth Position
(4th)



Fifth Position
(5th)

You try it!

Can you make all five positions?

What shapes can you create with your body?

ARM & HAND POSITIONS

Ballet dancers use specific positions for their arms and hands. The elbows are gently rounded, and the hands are softly shaped rather than held stiffly. Dancers of all genders use the same arm and hand positions.



First Position
(1st)



Second Position
(2nd)



Third Position
(3rd)



Fourth Position
(4th)



Fifth Position
(5th)

You Try It!

Can you make all five positions?

Can you keep a tall, lifted posture as you move through each position?

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.

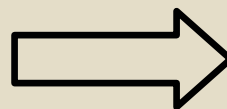
- **Stanton Welch AM** — Australian choreographer; Artistic Director since 2003; created 43 new works for the Company; commissioned 30+ more from choreographers like Aszure Barton, Trey McIntyre, and Justin Peck; expanded repertoire with works by Balanchine, Forsythe, and Kylián
- **Julie Kent** — Joined 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



EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
EXPOSE.EDUCATE.INTEGRATE.

Through *Myths, Legends, Folk, fairy tales and ballet*, stories can be told through words, music, movement, and imagination.

Keep the story moving!

Visit your library, discover a new story, and imagine how you could tell it through movement.

*What story will **you** tell?*

**Thank you for joining us at the
Margaret Alkek Williams Center for Dance!**



Principal Dancers Harper Watters and Jessica Collado
In Stanton Welch's *Sylvia*
Photo: Lawrence Elizabeth Knox