

HoustonBallet

Swan Lake

Ballet Talk/Behind The Scenes

Study Guide



Artists of Houston Ballet
in Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*.
Photo by Amitava Sarkar (2023)



HoustonBallet

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
EXPOSE.EDUCATE.INTEGRATE.

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Houston Ballet Teaching Artist leading a *Ballet Talk*

What Should My Class Expect?

We Come to You

Set-Up | 10–15 minutes before the program

A Teaching Artist will arrive early to set up in your classroom or designated space.

Introduction | 5–10 minutes

The Teaching Artist will introduce themselves and engage students in a brief discussion about telling stories without words through ballet.

Ballet Talk | 25–40 minutes

Students will experience a condensed version of the ballet through storytelling, commentary, discussion, and abbreviated video clips from a Houston Ballet production.

Questions & Discussion | 5–10 minutes

Students, teachers, and accompanying adults may ask questions and discuss what they experienced.

Total program time: 50–60 minutes

You Come to Us

Arrival & Welcome | 10–15 minutes before the program

Students arrive at the Margaret Alkek Williams Center for Dance and are welcomed by Houston Ballet staff.

Introduction | 5–10 minutes

The Teaching Artist will introduce themselves and engage students in a brief discussion about telling stories without words through ballet.

Ballet Talk | 25–40 minutes

Students experience a condensed version of the ballet through storytelling, commentary, discussion, and abbreviated video clips from a Houston Ballet production.

Questions & Discussion | 5-10 minutes

Students, teachers, and accompanying adults may ask questions and reflect on their experience.

Behind-the-Scenes Tour | 30 - 40 minutes

Students typically explore areas of the Center for Dance while learning about the artists, creative teams, and spaces that bring a ballet production to life.

Questions & Discussion

Students, teachers, and accompanying adults may ask questions and reflect on their experience.

Total program time: 2 Hours



Students attending a Behind the Scenes –
Extended program on *Sleeping Beauty*

LOOK FOR THESE!

When you watch *Swan Lake*, see if you can spot:

- **The Swan Corps** moving together as one.



Artists of Houston Ballet
In Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Amitava Sarakar

- The difference between **Odette and Odile**.
- How **costumes and scenery** help tell us where we are and who the characters are.
- How **lighting** shifts the mood of a scene.
- How dancers use **pantomime and movement** to communicate without words.
- How **Tchaikovsky's music** helps tell the story.

- How a **pas de deux** can show a relationship between two characters.



Principal Dancers Yuriko Kajiya and Connor Walsh
In Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Fukuko Iiyama

Learning Outcomes

Students will explore how *Swan Lake* uses movement, music, character, and design to communicate a story about choice, consequence, love, deception, and transformation.

Students will consider how ballet can communicate **ideas and emotions without spoken words**, and how choreographers, dancers, musicians, designers, and performers work together to create meaning.



Artists of Houston Ballet
in Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*.
Photo by Amitava Sarkar (2023)

TEKS ALIGNMENT & LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Kindergarten–Grade 2

Focus: Discovering Story Through Movement

Current TEKS	Learning Connection	Examples & Learning Opportunities
ELA & Reading 110.2–110.4 Listening, speaking, discussing, and responding to stories	Students listen to and discuss the story of Swan Lake, identifying characters, setting, events, and feelings.	Retell the story using beginning, middle, and end. Identify Odette, Siegfried, Odile, and Rothbart. Describe how a character feels using words, pictures, or movement.
Fine Arts – Music 117.103, 117.106, 117.109 Responding to music through movement and identifying musical characteristics	Students experience how Tchaikovsky's music helps communicate mood, character, and action.	Move to music that sounds soft, strong, slow, or fast. Identify how the music makes them feel. Notice when music changes during the story.
Fine Arts – Theatre 117.104, 117.107, 117.110 Character, movement, expression, and dramatic play	Students observe how dancers communicate characters and emotions without spoken dialogue.	Use facial expressions, gestures, poses, or movement to show a character's feelings. Create a frozen picture of a scene from the ballet.
Fine Arts – Art 117.102, 117.105, 117.108 Responding to and creating visual representations	Students observe how costumes, scenery, and color help establish characters and setting.	Draw a swan, character, costume, or setting from the ballet. Identify colors or visual details that create a particular mood.
Fine Arts – Audience & Response	Students practice observing, responding to, and reflecting on a live performance.	Identify a favorite moment. Share what they noticed about the dancers, music, costumes, or scenery. Demonstrate respectful audience behavior.

Students discover that a story can be communicated through **movement, music, expression, and design—even without words.**

TEKS ALIGNMENT & LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Grades 3–5

Focus: Exploring Meaning & Artistic Choices

Current TEKS	Learning Connection	Examples & Learning Opportunities
ELA & Reading §110.5–§110.7 Comprehension, response, characterization, theme, and text evidence	Students analyze Swan Lake as a story and use details from the performance to explain characters, events, and themes.	Sequence major events. Describe character motivations and relationships. Identify themes such as trust, deception, love, and choice. Support an idea with an example from the performance.
Fine Arts – Music §117.112, §117.115, §117.118 Musical elements, expression, and response	Students explore how music contributes to the emotional world of the ballet.	Compare musical moments that feel joyful, mysterious, threatening, or sad. Describe how tempo, dynamics, or instrumentation affect a scene.
Fine Arts – Theatre §117.113, §117.116, §117.119 Characterization, dramatic action, and expressive movement	Students examine how dancers communicate character, relationships, and conflict without dialogue.	Compare Odette and Odile. Identify how gesture, posture, facial expression, or movement quality reveals character.
Fine Arts – Art §117.111, §117.114, §117.117 Visual elements, design, and artistic response	Students investigate how costumes, scenery, lighting, and visual design establish setting, mood, and character.	Observe light/dark, color, shape, line, and costume. Explain how a design choice changes the feeling of a scene.
Social Studies / Culture §113.14–§113.16 Culture, historical context, and the ways people create and share traditions	Students consider ballet as a cultural art form and explore how stories can be interpreted and retold through different artistic traditions.	Discuss how Swan Lake has been performed, adapted, and reinterpreted. Explore how artists from different times and places can tell a familiar story in new ways.

Students explore how **artistic choices** help an audience understand characters, emotions, relationships, and story.

TEKS ALIGNMENT & LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Grades 6–8

Focus: Analyzing Performance & Production

Current TEKS	Learning Connection	Examples & Learning Opportunities
Dance – §117.205–§117.207 Perception, creative expression, historical/cultural relevance, and critical evaluation	Students analyze how dancers use movement elements, choreographic structure, and performance choices to communicate meaning.	Identify movement qualities, patterns, formations, levels, and spatial relationships. Analyze how choreography communicates character, emotion, conflict, or relationships.
ELA & Reading §110.22–§110.24 Analysis, interpretation, evidence, and response	Students interpret Swan Lake as a complex narrative and support their ideas with evidence from the performance.	Analyze character motivations. Explain how a specific scene develops a theme. Compare interpretations of Odette and Odile using evidence.
Fine Arts – Music §117.208–§117.210 Musical elements, performance, response, and connections	Students examine how Tchaikovsky's score interacts with choreography to create mood, tension, and meaning.	Identify moments where music and movement reinforce or contrast one another. Explain how changes in musical qualities affect interpretation.
Fine Arts – Theatre §117.211–§117.213 Characterization, dramatic structure, and theatrical elements	Students examine how dancers communicate conflict, relationships, and character without spoken language.	Analyze gesture, pantomime, expression, and physical relationships between characters. Identify how conflict is communicated through performance.
Fine Arts – Production / Design	Students investigate how production elements work together to create the world of Swan Lake.	Examine how costume, scenery, lighting, and props establish setting, distinguish characters, and create mood.
Social Studies / Culture §113.18–§113.20 Culture, historical context, and connections across societies	Students consider ballet within its cultural and historical context and explore how artistic works change across time.	Research the origins of Swan Lake. Discuss how different productions may emphasize different themes, characters, or cultural perspectives.

Students analyze how **choreography, performance, music, and production design work together** to communicate character, conflict, and meaning.

TEKS ALIGNMENT & LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Grades 9–12

FOCUS: Critiquing Artistry & Cultural Impact

Current TEKS	Learning Connection	Examples & Learning Opportunities
Dance – §117.306–§117.309 Creative expression, choreography, historical/cultural relevance, and critical evaluation	Students critically evaluate how choreographic and performance choices construct meaning and influence audience interpretation.	Analyze choreographic structure, movement vocabulary, dynamics, spatial relationships, and performance quality. Evaluate how effectively movement communicates an artistic intention.
ELA & Reading §110.36–§110.39 Analysis, interpretation, argument, and evidence	Students develop and defend interpretations of Swan Lake using specific evidence from the performance.	Construct a critical response or argument about a character, theme, choreographic choice, or interpretation. Compare different interpretations of the ballet.
Fine Arts – Music §117.302–§117.305 / Music course TEKS Musical analysis, interpretation, and artistic response	Students analyze how Tchaikovsky's score functions as an essential storytelling partner to choreography.	Evaluate how tempo, dynamics, orchestration, recurring musical ideas, and contrast shape the audience's understanding of a scene or character.
Fine Arts – Theatre §117.302–§117.305 / Theatre course TEKS Characterization, dramatic structure, design, and critique	Students examine Swan Lake as a theatrical work in which movement, performance, and design construct a narrative world.	Evaluate how characterization, conflict, symbolism, staging, and design contribute to the overall interpretation.
Cultural / Historical Context	Students investigate how Swan Lake reflects its historical origins while continuing to be reinterpreted by artists and companies today.	Explore the ballet's historical context, adaptations, and evolving interpretations. Consider how changing artistic choices can alter the meaning of a familiar story.
Artistic Critique & Response	Students develop informed opinions about artistic effectiveness and communicate those opinions using evidence and appropriate vocabulary.	Write or discuss a critical response evaluating choreography, performance, music, design, or interpretation. Defend an artistic judgment with specific observations.

Students critically examine how **artistic choices, historical context, and interpretation** shape the meaning and impact of a ballet.

Origins & Evolving Interpretations

Grades 9–12 Spotlight

How It Began

- Swan Lake premiered in **1877** at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, choreographed by Julius Reisinger. Critics and audiences found the original production disappointing, and it never became part of the standard repertoire.
- After Tchaikovsky's death in 1893, choreographers **Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov** reworked the ballet for the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. Their **1895 revival** is the version nearly every company — including Houston Ballet — still builds on today.

How It Keeps Changing

- Choreographers like **George Balanchine** and **Rudolf Nureyev** created their own influential stagings, each shifting the balance between storytelling, technique, and design.
- **Matthew Bourne's** 1995 production replaced the traditional female corps with an all-male ensemble of swans, turning the fairy tale into a modern psychological drama. It won multiple Tony and Olivier Awards and became one of the longest-running dance productions in Broadway and West End history.
- **Stanton Welch's** version for Houston Ballet is its own interpretation — built on the same Tchaikovsky score and 1895 story structure but shaped by his own choreographic voice.

***Think About It:** Why do choreographers keep returning to this same story? What might each new version reveal about the time, place, or culture that created it?*

The Story of *Swan Lake*

Act I

Scene I:

Deep in the Heart of a Dark Wood

Odette, a young maiden, is alone in the forest when the **evil wizard** von Rothbart appears and captures her. He casts a spell that transforms her into a white swan. Odette is cursed to remain a swan during the day and return to her human form at night.

Scene II:

A Royal Hunt at the Edge of the Wilderness

Later, Prince Siegfried and his entourage arrive in the forest and set up camp to celebrate the day's hunt. The Queen calls her son aside and reminds him that tomorrow is an important day. She introduces him to four eligible young princesses, but Siegfried is distant and uninterested.

The Queen sternly reminds him that he must soon leave his carefree youth behind and take on the responsibilities of adulthood. Upset, Siegfried leaves the camp and ventures into the forest alone.



Principal Dancers Yuriko Kajiya and Connor Walsh
In Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Fukuko Iiyama

Scene III: In the Forest

That evening, deep in the forest near the lake, Siegfried encounters a beautiful young maiden. It is Odette. Frightened, she begs him to leave her, but Siegfried remains. As they spend time together, Odette begins to fall in love with him, and he with her.

As the sun begins to rise, von Rothbart summons Odette. She returns to him and is transformed back into a swan before flying away.

Soon afterward, a large flock of swans arrives at the lake. Siegfried's friend and several hunters from the royal party see the flock and prepare to shoot, but the Prince intervenes and orders them to leave. Siegfried realizes that one of the swans is Odette and declares his love for her.



Principal Dancers Yuriko Kajiya and Connor Walsh and Chris Coomer
In Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Yuki Horiguchi

Act II



Artists of Houston Ballet
In Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Yuki Horiguchi

The Ballroom of the Castle

The following night, the Queen hosts a ball and presents several eligible princesses to Siegfried. However, the Prince pays little attention to them.

Suddenly, Rothbart arrives with a mysterious maiden dressed in black. She is Odile, who looks exactly like Odette. Siegfried is captivated by her and asks his mother to consider this mysterious new arrival.

Siegfried and Odile dance together, and the Prince declares his love for her. He tells his mother that he wishes to marry Odile.

Then, Siegfried sees Odette in the crowd. Horrified by his betrayal, Odette runs from the ballroom. Siegfried realizes that he has been deceived and that Odile is one of Rothbart's swans.

Devastated, Siegfried chases Rothbart as he flees the court.



Principal Dancer Yuriko Kajiya and Dun Wai Chan
In Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Amitava Sarkar

Act II

By the Lake in the Forest

Siegfried returns to the lake and begs Odette for forgiveness. As the sun rises, the maidens are transformed back into swans in the morning mist.

Soon, Rothbart and his black swans appear. Rothbart summons all the swans, including Odette. Desperate to save Odette, Siegfried takes his crossbow and attempts to shoot Rothbart. But the arrow misses Rothbart and strikes Odette instead. Rothbart catches Odette as she falls. As she dies, she returns to her human form, breaking the spell Rothbart placed upon her.

Siegfried runs to Odette, but she dies in his arms. He carries her body into the lake and follows her, drowning himself. With the spell broken, the swans fly away, forever changed by the tragedy they have witnessed.



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Photo: Amitava Sarakar

Love, Magic, and Deception

At the heart of **Swan Lake** is a battle between love and deception.

Odette, a princess transformed into a swan, represents truth, hope, and the desire for freedom. **Prince Siegfried**'s promise of faithful love offers the possibility of breaking the spell.

But the **evil wizard Rothbart** uses magic and deception to keep **Odette** under his control. He disguises his daughter, **Odile**, to look like Odette and tricks Siegfried into making his promise to the wrong person.

As the story unfolds, the characters must face an important question:



Can true love overcome powerful magic and deception?

Artists of Houston Ballet
In Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Amitava Sarakar

Two lives meet at the lake

Odette



THE WHITE SWAN / ENCHANTED MAIDEN

A princess trapped by a spell. By day, she must live as a swan; at night, she becomes human again.

Principal Dancers Yuriko Kajiya and Connor Walsh
In Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Fukuko Iiyama

Siegfried



THE PRINCE

A young prince expected to choose a bride. At the lake, he meets Odette and promises to be true to her.

A dangerous deception enters the ballroom

Odile



THE BLACK SWAN ENCHANTRESS

Rothbart's daughter, disguised to look like Odette. Her confident dancing helps trick Siegfried at the ball.

Von Rothbart



THE EVIL WIZARD

The powerful villain who placed the spell on Odette. He uses magic and deception to keep control.

Glossary of Terms

Swan Lake — One-Page Vocabulary Reference

Story & Language		Theatre & Design	
Adaptation	A new version or interpretation of an existing story.	Characterization	How a performer shows a character's personality.
Archetype	A recognizable character or story pattern (e.g. the hero, the villain).	Costume	Clothing that helps establish a character.
Character	A person, animal, or being in a story.	Design Concept	The artistic vision guiding a production's look.
Conflict	A problem or struggle a character faces.	Dramatic Arc	The rise and fall of conflict across a story.
Motif	A recurring idea, image, or movement that builds meaning.	Pantomime	Using gesture and movement to tell a story without words.
Narrative	A story made up of connected events.	Production Design	The costumes, scenery, lighting, and props of a show.
Plot	The sequence of events that make up a story.	Scenery	The background and objects that create a place onstage.
Point of View	The perspective from which a story is told.	Stagecraft	The technical and artistic skills used to build a production.
Setting	Where and when a story takes place.	Dance	
Subtext	The deeper meaning beneath what's directly shown or said.	Alignment	The proper positioning of the body for balance and control.
Symbolism	When something represents an idea beyond its literal meaning.	Ballet	A style of dance that tells a story through movement.
Theme	The central idea or message of a story.	Choreographer	The person who creates a dance.
Music		Choreography	The planned movement and structure of a dance.
Composer	A person who writes music.	Choreographic Style	The distinctive movement qualities of a choreographer's work.
Dynamics	Changes in the volume or intensity of music.	Corps de Ballet	A group of dancers performing together.
Leitmotif	A recurring musical idea tied to a character or idea.	Ensemble	A group of dancers performing as one unit.
Mood	The feeling created by music or a scene.	Musicality	How a dancer responds to and expresses the music.
Orchestra	A group of musicians who play instruments together.	Partnering	Two dancers working together through support and coordination.
Orchestration	How music is arranged for different instruments.	Pas de Deux	A dance for two dancers, often showing a relationship.
Score	The complete music written for a performance.	Turnout	The outward rotation of the legs from the hips.
Tchaikovsky	Composer of Swan Lake's original score (1840–1893).	Variation	A solo dance performed by one dancer.

Extension Activities

These activities help students explore how **Swan Lake** tells a story through movement, music, characters, emotions, costumes, scenery, and lighting.

They may be completed before or after the Ballet Talk and can be adapted for different grade levels, learning needs, available time, and classroom settings.

Teachers may select one activity, combine several activities, or allow students to choose how they demonstrate their understanding through discussion, writing, drawing, design, or movement.

Missions of Swan Lake

Students become “Swan Lake Detectives” and look for clues in the story, music, movement, characters, and production design.

Feeling Cards

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

Décor: Set and Costume Design

Students examine how scenery, lighting, color, shape, fabric, and costume details establish setting, mood, and character. They then create their own design inspired by the ballet.

Tell the Story and Show What You Know

Students organize the beginning, middle, and end of Swan Lake through writing, drawing, sequencing, or discussion.

Review and Reflect

Students consider what they noticed, learned, and experienced while connecting their observations to movement, music, character, 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 key events in Swan Lake and describe how movement, music, costumes, and scenery help tell the story.
3–5	Explain how choreography, music, and production choices communicate character, emotion, and theme, and explore how Swan Lake has been adapted over time.
6–8	Analyze how choreography and production elements transform the traditional Swan Lake story into a theatrical experience and interpret how artistic choices communicate meaning.
9–12	Evaluate how choreography, music, design, and cultural context shape the interpretation of Swan Lake , and analyze how Stanton Welch’s adaptation creates new meaning within a familiar story.

Missions of Swan Lake

Enter the enchanted world of **Swan Lake**, where a mysterious spell transforms a princess, good and evil face one another, and love must find a way to break the curse.

As you learn about the performance, become a **Swan Lake Detective**. Look for clues hidden in the **music, movement, characters, costumes, and scenery**. Listen for how composer **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** uses music to help tell the story, and watch how dancers bring characters, emotions, magic, and conflict to life without words.

Complete each mission to unlock the secrets of Swan Lake!

Mission 1: Unlock the Spell

The World of Swan Lake

Discover the mysterious world of the ballet. Meet **Odette, Prince Siegfried, Odile, and the evil wizard Rothbart** and uncover the spell that connects them.

Look for clues:

- ✨ Who is under the spell?
- ✨ Who is good? Who is evil?
- ✨ How do costumes, scenery, and movement help you recognize the characters?

Mission 2: Good vs. Evil

The Battle for the Swan

Watch for the struggle between good and evil. Notice how dancers use **movement, expression, and choreography** to show love, fear, deception, power, and hope.

Look for clues:

- ✨ How can you tell when a character is being truthful—or deceptive?
- ✨ How does the movement of the swans differ from the movement of the villain?
- ✨ Can you see the conflict without anyone saying a word?

Mission 3: Follow Tchaikovsky's Clues

When Music Tells the Story

Listen closely! **Tchaikovsky's music** helps create the magical, mysterious, dramatic, and emotional world of *Swan Lake*.

Look for clues:

- ✨ Does the music sound happy, sad, mysterious, powerful, or frightening?
- ✨ How does the music change when the story changes?
- ✨ Can you connect something you **hear** to something you **see**?

Mission 4: Break the Curse

Storytelling Through Ballet

Unlock the Power of Storytelling

Put the clues together!

How do movement, music, characters, and design work together to bring *Swan Lake* to life?

Mission complete!

Feeling Detective

Choose a Feeling Card that matches a character or moment in **Swan Lake**.

- What character or scene did you choose?
- What movement, facial expression, music, costume, or lighting gave you that feeling?
- Show the feeling using a frozen shape or short movement phrase.
- Choose a second card: How did the feeling change as the story continued?

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)



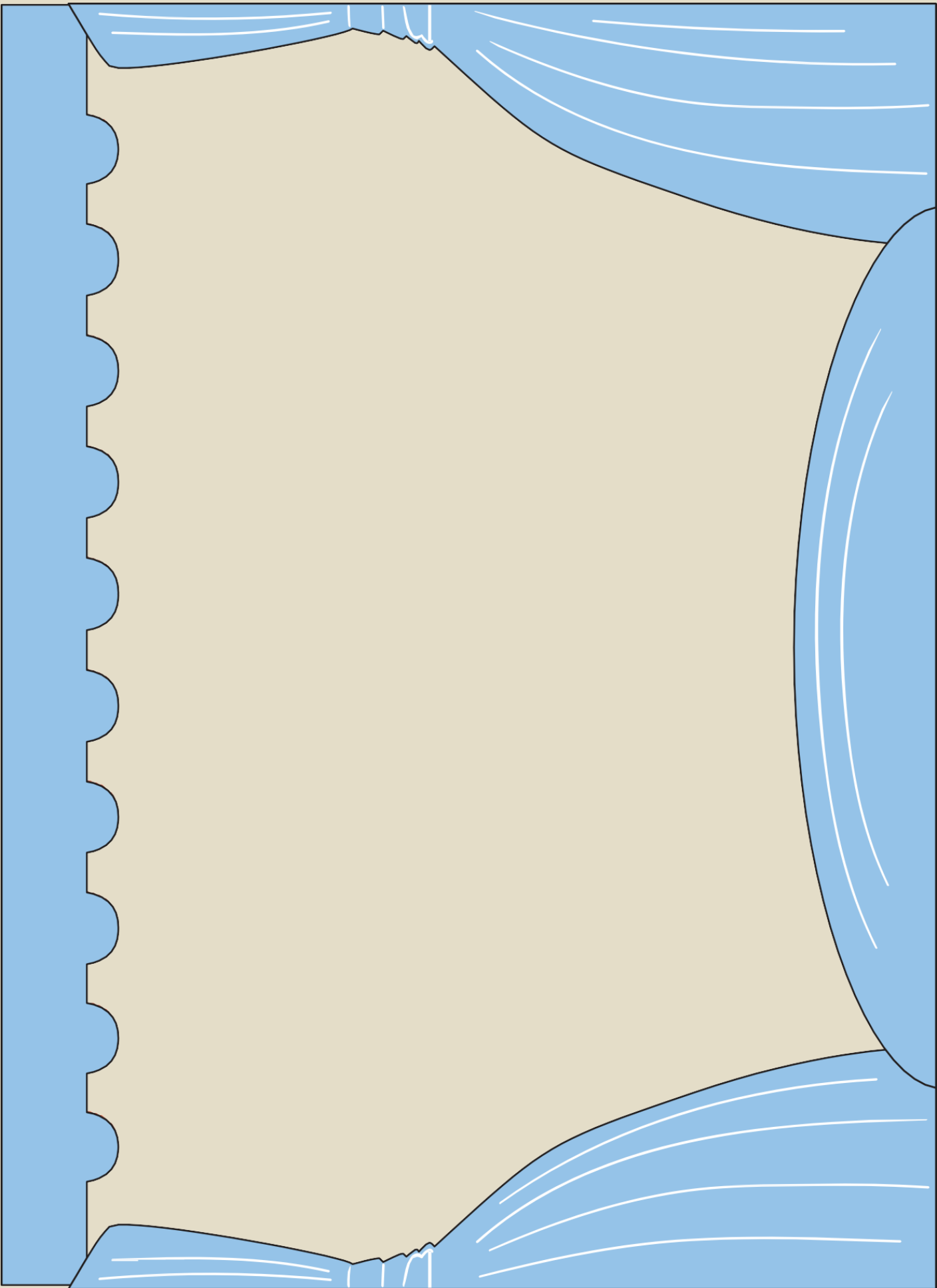
Tired
Cansado(a)



Worried
Preocupado(a)

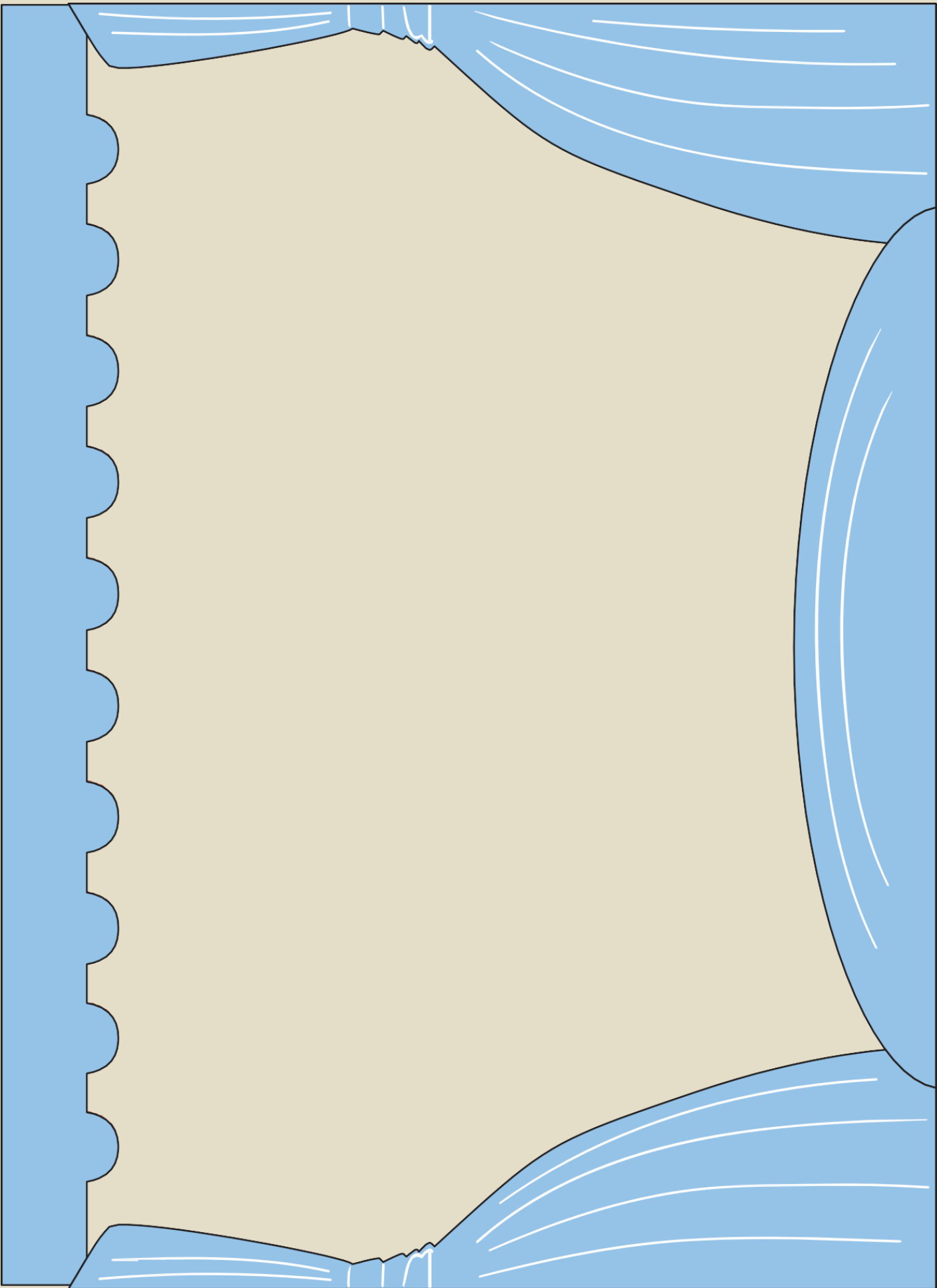
Décor: Set Design

Set Design 1: What does the forest/lake look like vs. the castle ballroom? How does scenery tell you where you are?

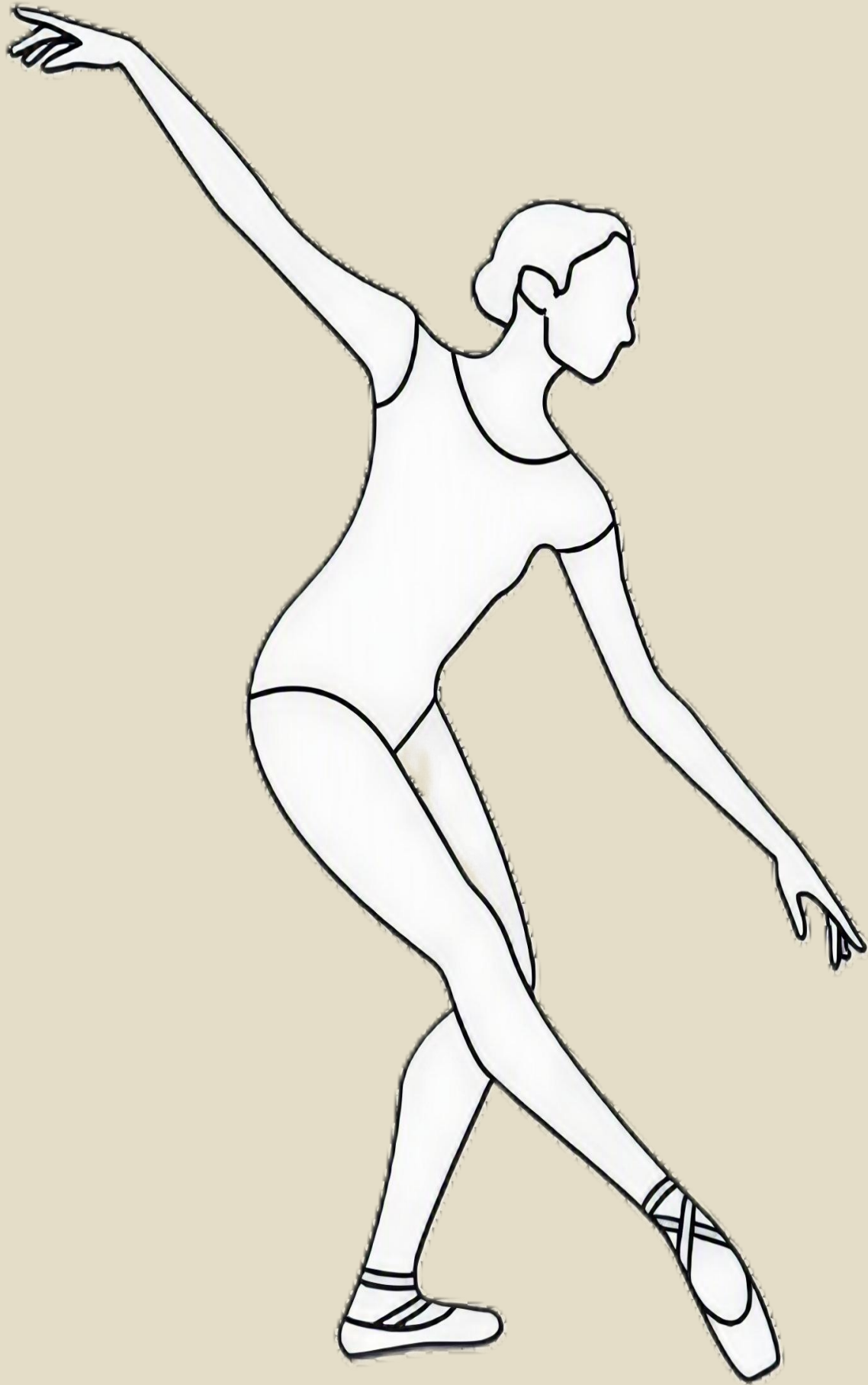


Décor: Set Design

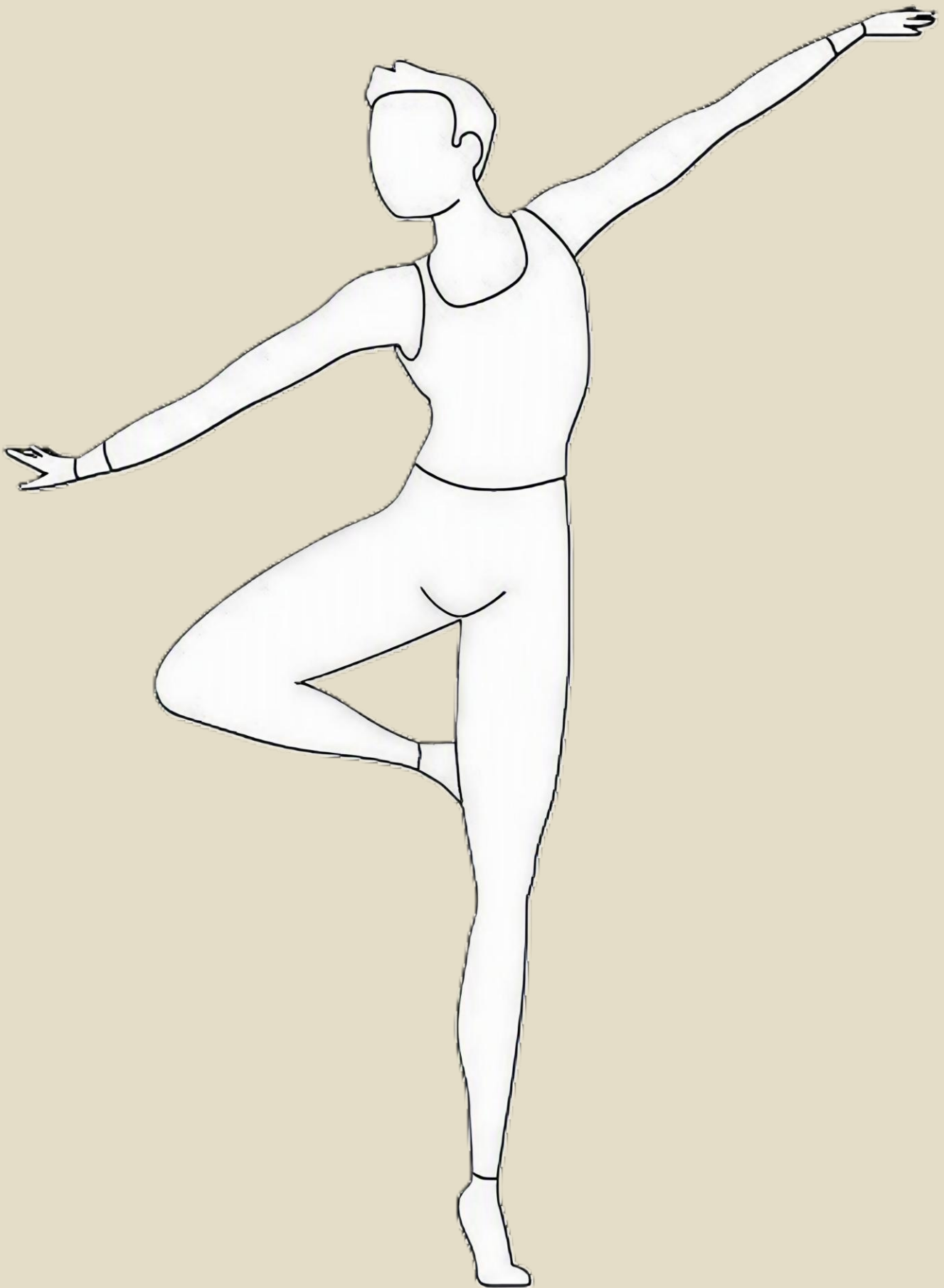
Set Design 2: How does lighting shift the mood between the enchanted lake and the royal ball?



Costume Design 1: Draw Odette's white feathers or Odile's black ones — can you show how they move when she dances?



Costume Design 2: How does Rothbart's costume mark him as the villain?



SWAN LAKE – Tell the Story

WORD BANK

forest • lake • castle • swan • magic • curse • love • hunt • ball • spell • betrayal • tragedy

CHARACTERS

Who is in the story?

Odette: _____

Siegfried: _____

Rothbart: _____

Odile: _____

SETTING

Where does the story take place?

WHAT HAPPENS?

Write or draw a short summary of *Swan Lake*.

Beginning:

Middle:

End:

ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THE STORY:

Show What You Know

Use the frames below to draw and/or write the beginning, middle and end of *Swan Lake*.

--	--	--

A. Beginning

B. Middle

C. End

REFLECT: What Did You Discover?

Think about **Swan Lake**.

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

Be specific! Think about the **movement, music, costumes, lighting, and scenery** that helped bring the story to life.

Choose how you want to show what you noticed:

 **Write** about it.  **Draw** a picture.  **Share** with someone.  **Show** it with movement.

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

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.

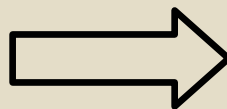
- **Stanton Welch AM** — Australian choreographer; Artistic Director since 2003; created 43 new works for the Company; commissioned 30+ more from choreographers like Aszure Barton, Trey McIntyre, and Justin Peck; expanded repertoire with works by Balanchine, Forsythe, and Kylián
- **Julie Kent** — Joined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

KEEP THE STORY MOVING!

Through ballet, stories can be told through music, movement, costumes, scenery, and imagination.

Visit your **library** to discover a new story.

Visit an **art museum** to find inspiration in a painting, sculpture, or work of art.

Then, come see **Houston Ballet** bring a story to life on stage at the **Wortham Theater Center**.

Look closely at the **dancers, costumes, scenery, music, and movement** to see how all the pieces come together to tell a story.

Then, use what you discover to **create a story of your own**.

*What story will **YOU** tell through movement?*

Thank you for joining us!

