



COLLAGE DANCE

FIREBIRD

2022

PERFORMANCE STUDY GUIDE

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS



HYDE FAMILY FOUNDATION

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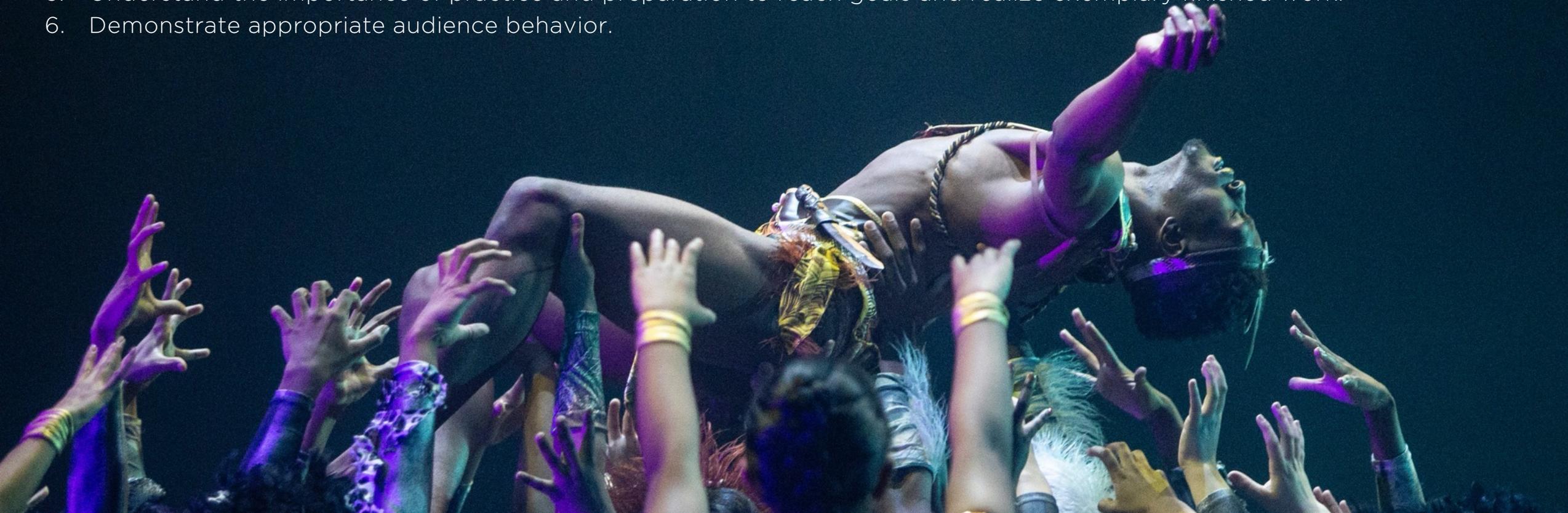
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LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of FIREBIRD, students will be able to:

1. Identify and Describe the storyline and narrative of *Firebird*.
2. Recognize how the story can be expressed and addressed through dance, scenery and costuming.
3. Summarize the moral or lesson within the story.
4. Connect and relate movements in each ballet to the words, music and mood of each piece.
5. Understand the importance of practice and preparation to reach goals and realize exemplary finished work.
6. Demonstrate appropriate audience behavior.



FIREBIRD GUIDE STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Tennessee Academic Standards for Fine Arts

RESPOND- PERCEIVE AND ANALYZE ARTISTIC WORK

Grade 5

5.D.R1.B Describe, using basic dance terminology, the qualities and characteristics of style used in a dance from one's own cultural movement practice. Compare them to the qualities and characteristics of style found in a different dance genre, style, or cultural movement practice, also using basic dance terminology.

RESPOND- INTERPRET INTENT AND MEANING IN ARTISTIC WORK

Grade 5

5.D.R2.A Interpret meaning in a dance based on its movements. Explain how the movements communicate the main idea of the dance using basic dance terminology.

Grade 7

7.D.R2.A Demonstrate and explain how the artistic expression of a dance is achieved through the elements of dance, use of body, dance technique, and context using genre-specific dance terminology from the dance as evidence to support the explanation.

CONNECT- SYNTHESIZE AND RELATE KNOWLEDGE AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES TO ARTISTIC ENDEAVORS

Grade 2

2.D.Cn1.A Describe, create, and/or perform a dance that expresses personal meaning, and explain how certain movements express this personal meaning.

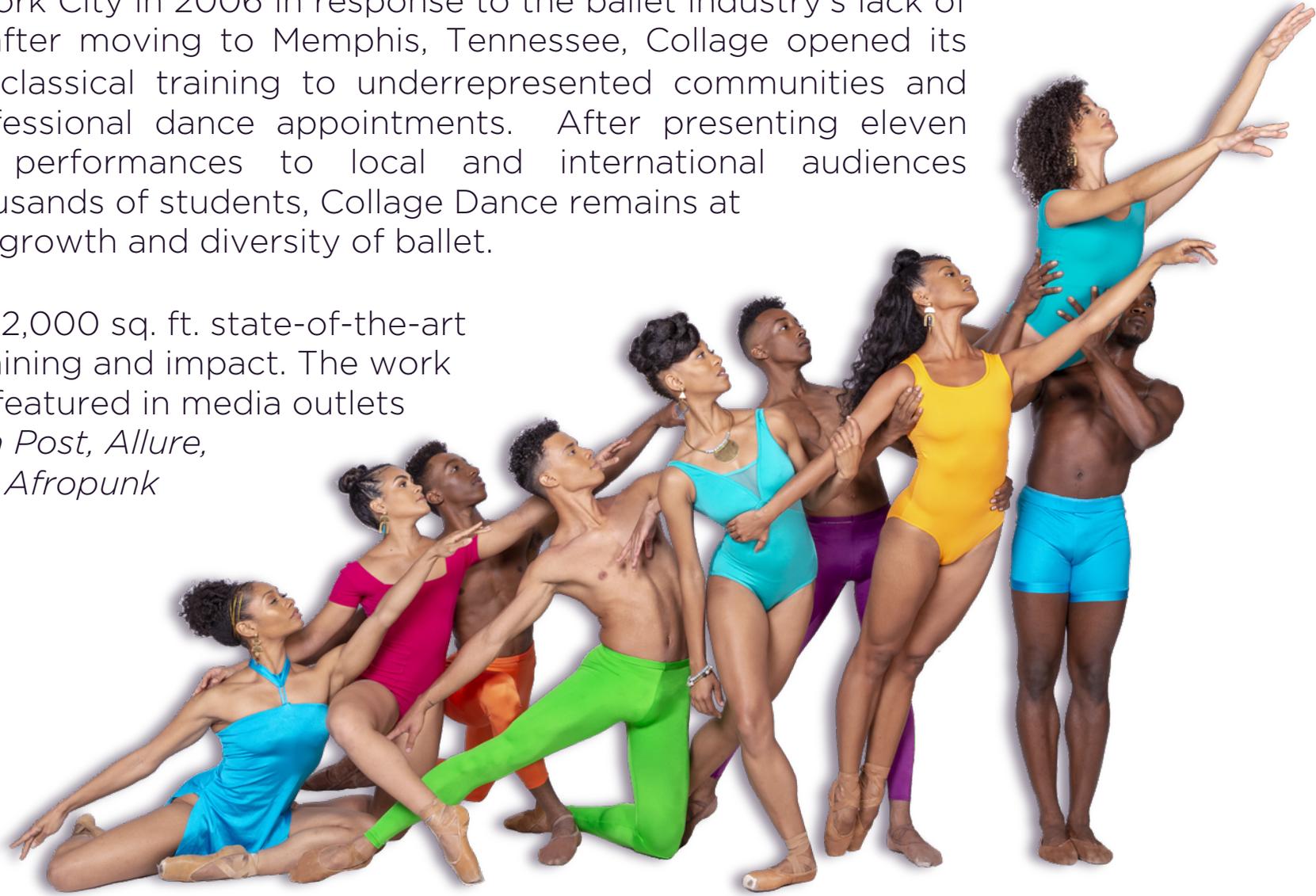
Grade HS3

HS3.D.Cn1.A Analyze a piece of original choreography that is related to content learned in other subject areas, and research its context. Synthesize information learned, and share new ideas about its relationship to one's perspective.

ABOUT COLLAGE DANCE

Collage Dance was founded in New York City in 2006 in response to the ballet industry's lack of racial diversity on stage. In 2009, after moving to Memphis, Tennessee, Collage opened its dance school to expand access to classical training to underrepresented communities and prepare them for collegial and professional dance appointments. After presenting eleven seasons of emotionally powerful performances to local and international audiences and cultivating a love of dance in thousands of students, Collage Dance remains at the national forefront of inspiring the growth and diversity of ballet.

In December 2021, Collage opened a 22,000 sq. ft. state-of-the-art facility to expand its programming, training and impact. The work of Collage Dance Collective has been featured in media outlets including *Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, *Allure*, *Yahoo!*, *The Commercial Appeal*, *Vibe*, *Afropunk* and *Pointe Magazine*.



MEET MR. THOMAS

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR • COLLAGE DANCE

Kevin Thomas was born in Trinidad and Tobago and grew up in Montreal, Canada. He received his degree in dance from the CEGEP de Vieux Montreal.

Mr. Thomas began his career as a professional dancer in Montreal with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, one of Canada's leading ballet companies. At the age of 19, he was the only Black dancer with the company. He later became a soloist with the company then moved on to Cleveland San Jose ballet as a principal dancer and then finally to the Dance Theatre of Harlem in New York as a principal dancer, where he performed internationally for 10 years.

Mr. Thomas has made guest appearances with the Royal Ballet in London, Complexions Contemporary Ballet in New York and Fleming Flindt and Peter Schaufuss in Denmark. He has also appeared on Broadway in The Phantom of the Opera and on television in Law and Order.

In 2006, Mr. Thomas and Marcellus Harper founded Collage Dance Collective to increase diversity in classical ballet and relocated the company to Memphis the following year. They established the Collage Ballet Conservatory in 2009. The organization has quickly grown to boast an international touring professional company and nationally recognized conservatory, training more students of color in a classical art form than any other nonprofit in Memphis.



MEET MR. HARPER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR • COLLAGE DANCE

Marcellus Harper has an expansive background in project management and event production. He has worked as a Program Analyst for the Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration (TSA). He was among the first seven employees of the TSA Taskforce mandated by Congress to create and develop the agency and federalize our nation's transportation security infrastructures.

Prior to his work with the TSA, Mr. Harper worked as a Project Coordinator for Marriott International's corporate marketing department, where he was directly responsible for the development and implementation of several industry events for the National Football League, the National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball and the National Hockey League. Mr. Harper has worked for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and Harvard University coordinating special projects to assist research and treatment work for HIV/AIDs patients in Africa.

Mr. Harper was a Meyerhoff Scholar at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) where he studied biology and theatre and was a double national medalist in the NAACP's ACT-SO Program in biology and oratory.

Marcellus is the 2011 recipient of the Memphis Urban League Young Professionals' Change Artist Award in recognition of his achievements as an Agent of Change. Marcellus holds a Bachelor's degree in non-profit administration and performing arts.



MEET MS. NICELEY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MANAGER • COLLAGE DANCE

Karen Niceley attended the Jones-Haywood School of Ballet and later received her BFA in Dance Education at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Karen's professional credits include work with Dance Theatre of Harlem, Michael Mao Dance Company, Metropolitan Opera, Cirque Du Soleil, Keith Lee's Dance Theatre of Lynchburg and the Broadway National Tour of The Color Purple.

Prior to relocating to Memphis in spring 2021, Karen taught dance, Vinyasa yoga and creative movement in more than 100 schools throughout the five boroughs of NYC. As a result of decades long work with The Leadership Program, Karen is recognized for her ability to utilize social emotional learning, anti-bullying best practices and restorative justice models to implement transformative youth development programs that combine academics and dance technique.

As the Community Engagement Manager for Collage Dance, Karen works to broaden the organization's in-school dance education program, Turning Pointe, by fostering relationships with Memphis area schools. She also works to cultivate a vibrant adult dance community through program development at the new Collage Dance Center and dance exposure opportunities in Memphis and beyond.

Karen is also co-founder of Gritty Cherries, Inc., a non-profit art production company that serves as a springboard for emerging artists of all types, providing venues and producing special events for charitable organizations with a variety of artists who collaborate under one roof and a specific theme while bringing high quality training in the arts to underprivileged youth through their arts education program Gritty Cherries Arts Education.



COLLAGE DANCE COLLECTIVE:

WHERE WE FLY FROM



Kendall Lockhart
Houston, Texas



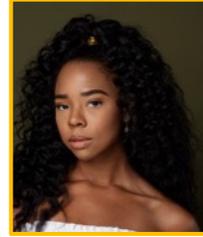
Lauren Huynh
Plano, Texas



Lauren Philson
Houston, Texas



Miyesha McGriff
Kansas City, Missouri



Nia Lyons
Chicago, Illinois



Nya Ham
Memphis, Tennessee



Maya Hawkins
Memphis, Tennessee



Sebastian Garcia
Bronx, New York



Rickey Flagg II
Windsor, Connecticut



Luisa Cardoso
Salvador, Brazil



Caio Rodrigo
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



Fábio Mariano
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



João Silva
Bahia, Brazil



Kevin Thomas
Artistic Director
Montreal, Canada



Santiago Castañeda
Medellin, Colombia



Leonard Perez
Santo Domingo,
Dominican Republic

BRIEF HISTORY OF BALLET

Ballet began 400 years ago in Italy and was brought to France by the Italian Noblewoman, Catherine De Medici when she married the French King Henry the 2nd. About 75 years later after Catherine De Medici brought ballet to France, her distant cousin, King Louis the 14th created the first Syllabus of dance, and this is why all the steps in Ballet are in French. **Believe it or not, the first ballet dancers were men and not women!** Ballet was first created on men because back in the 1600's men wore tights and loose-fitting clothes making it easy to move around and be athletic, as women wore tight fitting clothes such as corsets and huge wigs. King Louis XIV used the discipline and organization of ballet to rule his Kingdom making him the longest ruling King in Europe's history - 72 years.

King Louis XIV helped to popularize and standardize the art form. He performed many roles himself, including that of the Sun King in Ballet de la nuit, to help establish his authority as King. With his influence, ballet became a well-respected art form in its own right, requiring professional training and study. Women rose to the same stardom of men in ballet about 200 years later during the Romantic era and this happened with the invention of the Pointe Shoe. The Pointe Shoe is what makes it possible for women to rise up on their toes and dance. The Pointe Shoes made the women look like they were angels or spirits floating around. It is this invention that turned female dancers into Ballerinas. Male dancers are called Ballerinos.



King Louis XIV as The Sun King



Marie Taglioni in early pointe shoes

BRIEF HISTORY OF BALLET *CONT.*

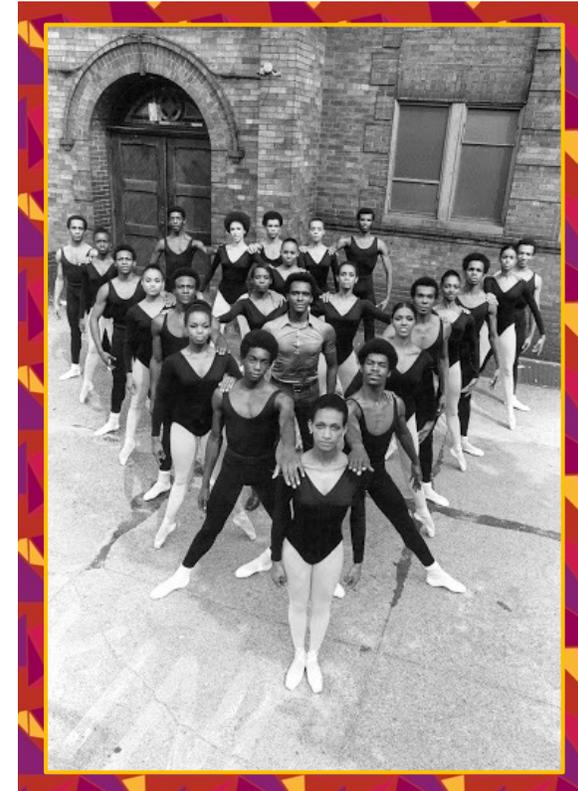
Ballet may have begun in France, but it spread throughout Europe to later make its way to the Americas in the 1930's through Russian dancers who settled in America. Many young American girls and boys were taking ballet classes but if you were someone of color then you were quickly discouraged as the art form was deemed a white art form. It was believed back then that black women lacked the grace and did not have the right physical attributes to become a ballerina.

Despite this attitude many students of color studied ballet, and some became professional ballet principal dancers, but their legacy was not added to Ballet's grand history!

Raven Wilkenson is a name to remember as she danced with the famous Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo back in the 1950's when racism and segregation were rampant. She defied the odds and became a trailblazer to many Ballerinas and Ballerinos of color! Her legacy has inspired dance stars like Misty Copeland. In 1968, Arthur Mitchell founded a ballet school in Harlem to provide classical ballet training to African-American students. By 1970, the school had developed into the Dance Theatre of Harlem, the first black classical ballet company.



Raven Wilkenson



Dance Theatre of Harlem

ACTIVITY

TEST YOUR BALLET VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE!

Match the ballet terms to their definitions.

DEFINITIONS

- A. This art form integrates dance, music, stage design and poetry to make a dramatic storyline.
- B. This French word means “to bend.”
- C. This French word means “to rise.”
- D. This French word means “a rapid whirling about of the body that is done on the toe or ball of the foot, on one leg while the other leg is lifted.”
- E. A male Ballet dancer.
- F. A female Ballet dancer.
- G. This is what makes it possible for women to rise up on their toes and dance.
- H. When these match a dancer’s skin tone, she is able to create a longer, seamless line from the fingertips to the toes.

TERMS

- ___Ballerino
- ___Ballet
- ___Pointe Shoes
- ___Ballerina
- ___Relevé
- ___Pirouette
- ___Plié
- ___Tights



DIVERSIFYING HAIR IN BALLET

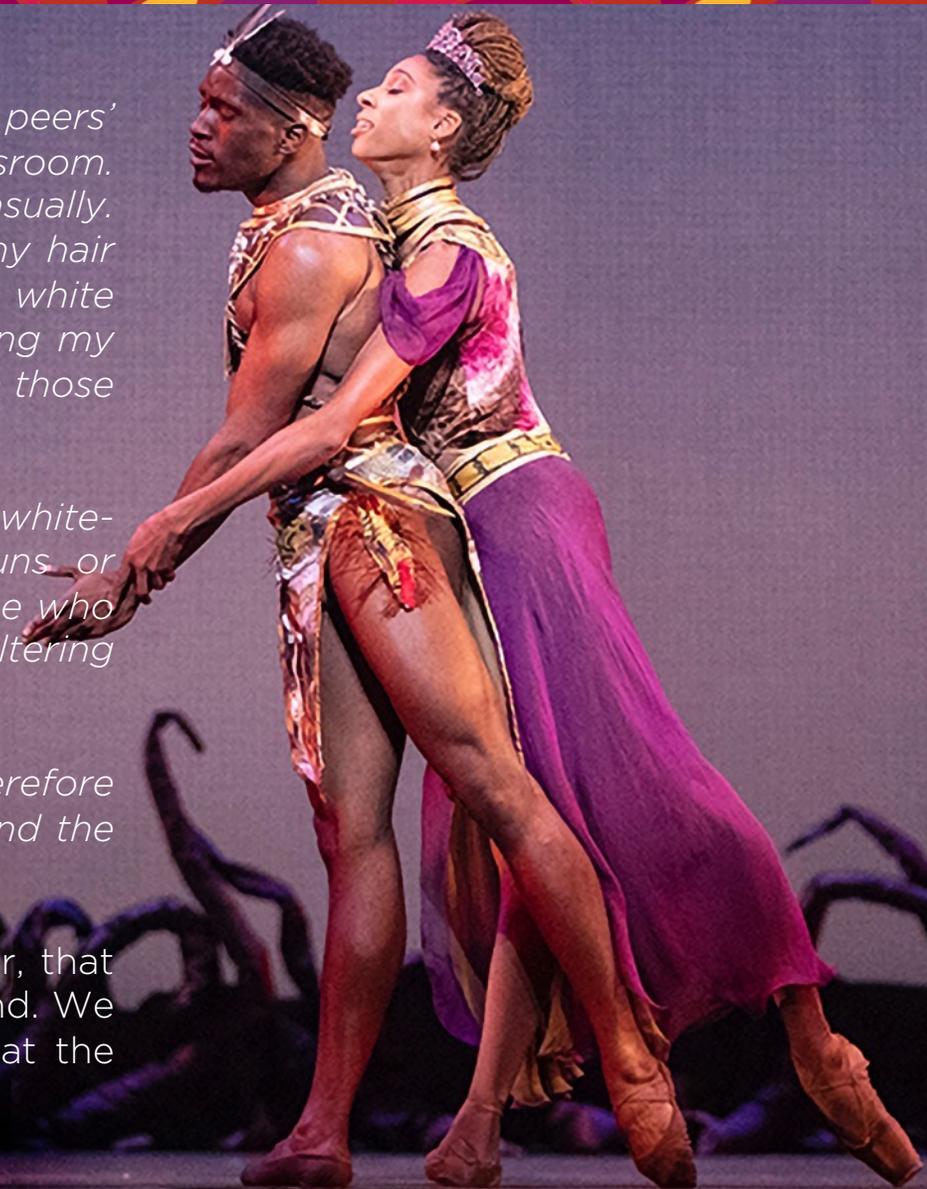
Excerpts in italics from a Pointe Magazine article, published February 2022.

Before ballet class I twisted up my braids into something reminiscent of my white peers' satin-sheened buns. However, my elation was cut short upon entering the classroom. "Your hair is beautiful, but you'll have to take it out," my ballet professor noted casually. Her assertions amplified my insecurities that braids didn't fit the ballet line, and my hair wasn't appropriate for our end-of-semester presentation. Around me, my white classmates watched as I struggled to defend the sacredness of what was crowning my head. I felt wrong, I felt like I didn't belong, and my story is merely one of many from those who don't fit ballet's aesthetic mold.

As the dance world diversifies, many Black and brown dancers feel pressure to fit white-assimilating beauty standards. We slick our curls back into sleek classical buns or manipulate our hair to create styles that were created for white hair textures. Those who do not fit the Eurocentric aesthetic that popularized ballet have to grapple with altering our appearance in order to partake in the art form.

By normalizing different hair textures, we normalize diversity in ballet, therefore normalizing "othered" bodies and destigmatizing alternative forms of beauty beyond the stage. Our focus should be on making ballet a more inclusive environment.

"As an organization, we try to impress upon students, especially students of color, that they can bring their full selves to ballet - the natural texture of their hair and beyond. We want them to embrace who they are, while showing excellence in the art form at the same time," shared Marcellus Harper, Collage Dance founding executive director.



AFRICAN AMERICANS IN BALLET

Please read the following excerpt from the *Vanity Fair* article, “*Misty Copeland on How Seeing Herself as a Black Ballerina Made Her a Better Artist*” by Erin Vanderhoof.

To write her new book, renowned ballerina Misty Copeland had to spend a few years moonlighting as a dance detective. At the heart of *Black Ballerinas* is a question that has occupied the American Ballet Theatre [ABT] principal ever since her promotion to soloist in 2007: *How is it that Black dancers have been in ballet for ages, and so many people have forgotten about their legacy?* As Copeland broke barriers in ballet, she began to learn about all of the people who broke them in the past, and more heartbreakingly, came close but were blocked by prejudice. In the book, Copeland begins to correct the record by telling the life stories of 27 Black dancers—accompanied by beautiful illustrations by Salena Barnes.

VF: How did the process of writing and researching start in the first place?

...it’s been a long journey of feeling like, as a Black ballerina, we don’t have a comprehensive documented history. I think people—just because there hasn’t been enough clarity and distinction, Black people included—confuse classical dance with modern dance and think we have [legendary African American dance company] Alvin Ailey, and we have all these Black dancers onstage, but that’s not classical dance. Modern dance has been accepting a variety of body types and skin colors from its creation.

The classical ballet world is such a particular place. Black ballerinas have been excluded, especially in terms of having their history documented, but they have been contributors in classical dance from the beginning of time. This is in no way a full comprehensive list of the Black ballerinas that have existed in the world, but it’s a beginning. Really, I wanted to show the dancers who have impacted my life and my journey in some way. Whether they’re coming up now, younger dancers just now getting into companies and out of schools, or dancers throughout our history. There’s a standard that’s set, but it’s really to spark interest for people who want to join in on the efforts of uncovering our history and want to continue to add to the list.



Misty Copeland.
Photo by Henry Leutwyler.

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN BALLET CONT.

VF: When you started this, how did you discover that there was so much out there that just isn't remembered?

Growing up, I actually only had four years of classical ballet training before I moved to New York City and joined American Ballet Theatre. Learning about Black dancers was not at all a part of my journey. It wasn't until I had spent a couple years in ABT, and as a Black woman and as someone whose mother raised me as a Black girl to be very comfortable in my skin in that way, it was shocking to realize, like, wow, I'm the only Black woman in this company, and that would go on for 10 years. That's when I kind of started to do my own research and my own digging.

My promotion to soloist was another layer, where I was being told, "Well, there has been another Black soloist with ABT." That was a dagger to my heart. How am I a part of this incredible history and lineage of American ballet and I don't know about this Black dancer that had come before me? It's been a part of that realization that I own so many history books of American Ballet Theatre, from the time they were created with Lucia Chase as the artistic director, and there's no mention of these Black dancers. It gave me a second and third and fourth wind, the more that I found out about other ballet dancers that have contributed. Though I'm alone at ABT, I'm not alone in this, and there have been people doing the work that have gotten me here. More so than being a dancer and being on the stage, I feel like I'm a vessel to be able to share these dancers' stories and give them that acknowledgment and recognition that they never received.





DIVING DEEPER

1. Why is it important to remember the people who paved your way?

2. Misty Copeland defines herself as a dancer, a writer, a woman and an African American person. What are some of the different ways you define yourself?

3. How does having different outlets help you to be a better student and a better person?

4. Can you think of a time when you were the only person like yourself in a situation? How did you feel? Were you made to feel uncomfortable or welcomed by the group?

5. How can you speak up for yourself or someone else who may be treated unfairly because they are different?

6. Why is it important for Black people and other minorities to be represented onstage?

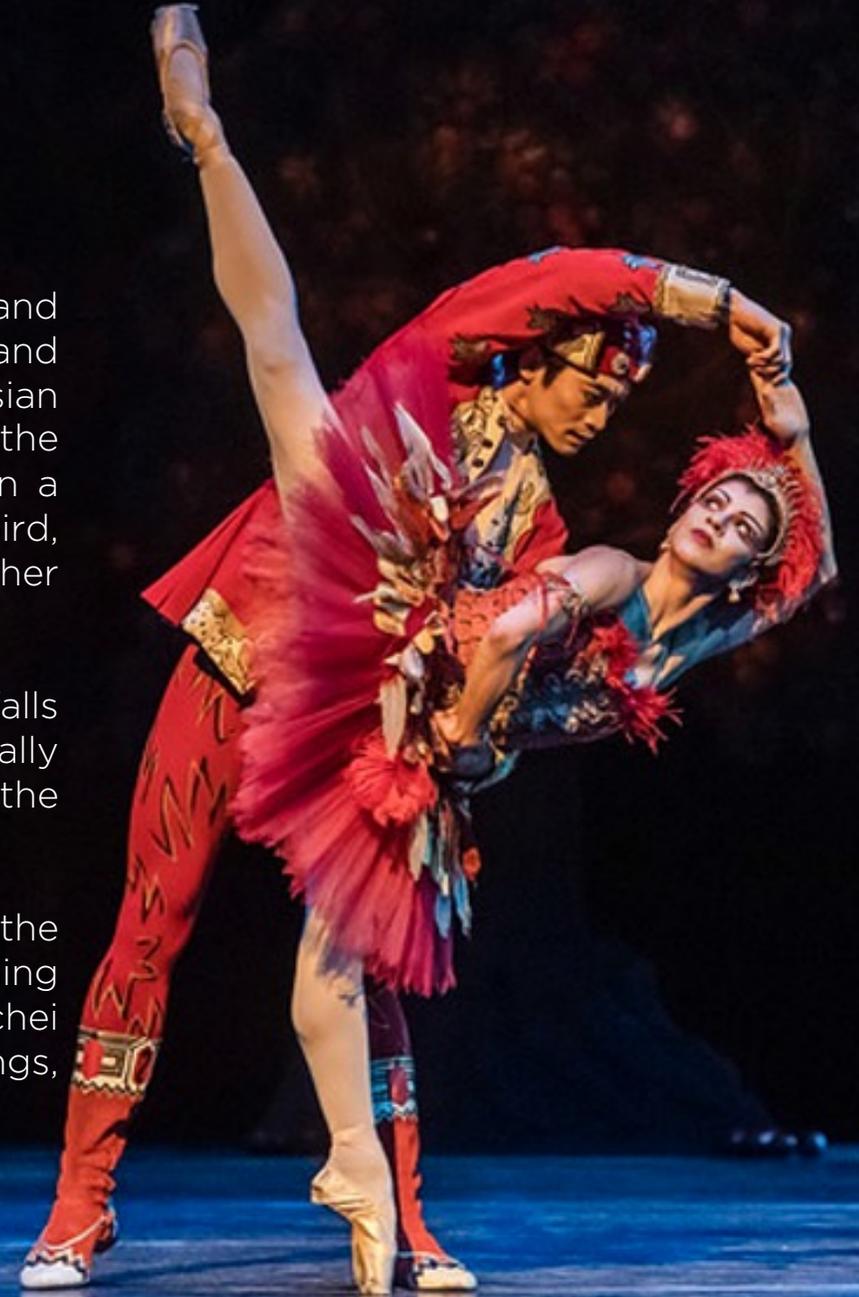
FIREBIRD

MIKHAIL FOKINE'S "THE FIREBIRD":

The Fire Bird was first commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev for the Ballets Russes and had its premiere in 1910 at the Paris Opéra with choreography by Mikhail Fokine's and music score by Igor Stravinsky. In the original ballet that was based off of old Russian folk tales, while hunting in the forest, Prince Ivan strays into the magical realm of the evil Koschei the Immortal, whose immortality is preserved by keeping his soul in a magic egg hidden in a casket. While hunting, Ivan chases and captures the Firebird, and is about to kill her when she begs for her life and offers him an enchanted feather that he can use to summon her should he be in dire need.

Prince Ivan then meets thirteen princesses who are under the spell of Koschei and falls in love with one of them. The next day, Ivan confronts the magician and eventually they begin quarrelling. When Koschei sends his minions after Ivan, he summons the Firebird. She intervenes and bewitches the monsters.

Exhausted, the creatures and Koschei then fall into a deep sleep. While they sleep, the Firebird directs Ivan to a tree stump where the casket with the egg containing Koschei's soul is hidden. Ivan destroys the egg, and with the spell broken and Koschei dead, the magical creatures that Koschei held captive are freed. All of the beings, including the princesses, awaken and with one final hint of the Firebird's music.



FIREBIRD CONT.

COLLAGE DANCE COLLECTIVE "THE FIREBIRD":

In Collage Dance Collective's version of The Firebird with choreography by Kevin Thomas, the setting of the ballet takes place in Africa in a mythical forest called Tokoloshe. The word Tokoloshe comes from the Zulu/Xhosal culture in South Africa which means evil.

It was used as inspiration for the set design, costume and movement of the ballet. Alexander Woodard who did the set design was inspired by the artist Mary Sibande who is a South African artist. The costume designer, Gabriela Moros Diaz used images of Zulu/Xhosal culture as inspiration for her costume design. Along with the inspiration and design, the storyline and characters of Collage's version are also different. Thomas explains, *"I wanted to create more lead roles for men in this version so I came up with the four wizards. Wizards of the south, north, east and west and their costumes reflected the elements of Fire, Earth, Water and Wind."*

This was a chance to create a work that was about our African ancestry where we were Kings, Queens, Princesses and Princes. I also put the maidens in pointe shoes and choreographed a dance for them that was more classical than other versions that I have seen. The monster section of this ballet was inspired by science fiction, so the monsters became Creatures of the Underworld that were controlled by the wizards' powers." Another major difference that Thomas changed from the original ballet is that instead of the Prince threatening and scaring the Firebird, he uses charm, admiration and respect to befriend this powerful creation.



ACTIVITY

THE LOOK OF FIREBIRD

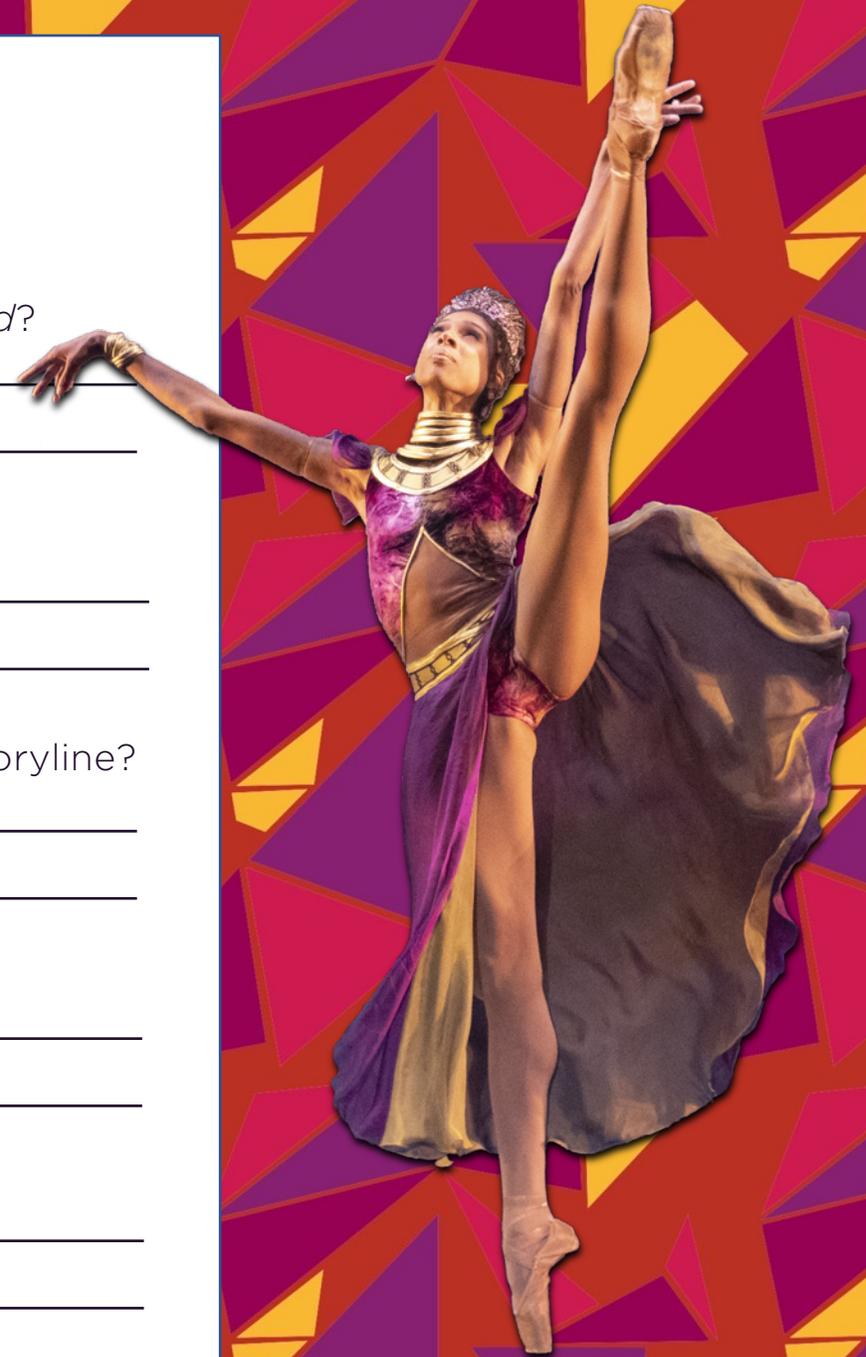
How did the scenery and lighting help to establish the setting of *Firebird*?

How did the costumes represent the various characters in the story?

Describe how the movements and gestures in the ballet illustrate the storyline?

What does the Firebird symbolize?

Which character or characters in the ballet would you want to portray?



ATTENDING THE BALLET

The first thing to know, is that ballet performances are for everyone. People of all ages and backgrounds can attend and enjoy this beautiful art form.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR?

Whatever you feel comfortable in. You can dress up and make it a fancy experience or dress in jeans and a sweater. What is most important is that you are comfortable so that you can have the best viewing experience possible.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE LIGHTS GO DOWN?

When the lights go down it's very important that all talking stops and you give the performance your undivided attention. NO cell phone use is allowed during the performance – this includes texting.

Texting and the light from the cell phone can be very distracting to your neighbors and the performers. No video or pictures may be taken either. The choreography and music is owned by the artists who created them and videotaping someone's art can only be done with permission.

The performance should be a fun experience. If you see something funny, it's ok to laugh. If you see something impressive, you may clap. At the end of each ballet the dancers will come back on stage and take a bow – feel free to clap and cheer as loud as you want. The dancers really appreciate this, and it makes them want to dance even better for you. If the performance really moves you, you are welcome to stand on your feet and applaud. This is called a standing ovation. It lets the dancers know you really loved their performance and is the highest honor you can give a performer.



*“Here, at Collage Dance, I have a purpose.
I dance for something bigger than myself.”*

Kimberley H. | Ballet Dancer

