



Cinderella Study Guide

For Teachers and Students



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Attending a Ballet Performance

Going to the theater for ballet is similar to going to a movie:

- The lights will dim before the performance begins, and the theater is dark during the ballet.
- Audience members are expected to sit still and quietly in their seats.
- Photography and video recording are strictly prohibited. In addition to being distracting to the dancers and other audience members, Cinderella is copyrighted.
- Cell phones and electronics should be turned off when you enter the theater.

However, unlike the movies:

- Ballet is performed live. There are no second takes and dancers can react to the audience!
- There is no talking in ballet. The story is told through movements, music, costumes, and sets.
- Clap when you enjoy something, laugh if something is funny, and give a standing ovation at the end if it was amazing. Let the dancers know you appreciate their hard work!
- At the end of the performance, the dancers and musicians take a bow. This is a curtain call.
- Some people make their visit to the ballet a dress-up occasion; others dress casually. Wear something you are comfortable in so you can enjoy the performance.

About the Fairy Tale



Cinderella is perhaps the most universally loved of all fairy tales. It is estimated that there are more than 1500 versions of the Cinderella story existing around the world. The earliest-known version is from China in the ninth century: entitled Yu Yang Ts Tsu, the young heroine's name is Yeh-shen. Versions of this story have also been found in the folklore Indonesia, among the tribes of South Africa and in the mountains of South America.

The best-known version, especially in Western cultures, appeared in a collection of tales written in 1697 by a retired French civil servant named Charles Perrault. His "Contes de ma mere l'oye" or "Tales of Mother Goose" brought us not only Cinderella, but also Little Red Riding Hood, The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, and Puss in Boots, among others. This collection was later translated into English in 1729.

The story according to Perrault concerns a poor, neglected girl who is forced by her cruel stepmother and stepsisters to be their servant. They give her the name Cinderella, meaning "little cinder girl." She is rescued by her Fairy Godmother who sends her to a ball in a pumpkin that has been magically transformed into a coach. At the ball she meets a prince who falls in love with her. Fleeing at midnight before the magic ends, she loses one of her tiny glass slippers. With the slipper as his clue, the prince finds Cinderella and marries her.

Although the many versions vary, the basic elements are the same: a youngest daughter who is mistreated by her jealous stepmother and stepsisters, or a cruel father; the intervention of a supernatural helper on her behalf; and the reversal of fortune brought about by a prince who falls in love

with her and marries her. In other versions, Cinderella is called Cenerentola (Italian), Angkat (Cambodian) and Aschenputtel (German). She is often assisted by her late mother who appears in the form of a cow or goat. In other versions, she is helped by a fish or a bird. The test of recognition is often a golden or silver slipper, golden hair, or a ring. Perrault's version was the first to introduce the Fairy Godmother and the glass slipper.

This lucky folk heroine who exemplifies the concept of inner beauty and purity of spirit overcoming loneliness, cruel mistreatment and vanity, has a universal appeal that has lasted over the centuries. Cinderella has inspired pantomimes, operas, ballets, musicals, films, and television programs.

The earliest known Cinderella ballet was performed in 1813. Numerous choreographers and composers have created Cinderella ballets in England, Russia, France, Scandinavia, Canada and United States.



What is Ballet

The very first ballets, which were created almost 500 years ago, do not look anything at all like the ballet we see performed by ballet companies today.

The word “ballet” comes from the Italian word ballare, which means to dance. The first ballets were court dances (called balleti in Italian), which were danced by the men and women of the Italian Court. These ballets were not performed in theaters, but usually in court palaces for the rich and famous.

The steps in these ballets were very simple because the costumes were made with very heavy fabrics and ornaments. Some costumes weighted as much as 150 pounds. Nonetheless the movements were very graceful, emphasizing the head, arms and upper body, while the dancers created very elaborate circles, lines and other shapes known as floor patterns.

Left image: “It went on very easily” from a 1901 version of Perrault’s The Tales of Mother Goose. By D.J. Munro after the original drawing by Gustave Dore. [Image Source](#). Right: Aschenputtel by Alexander Zick. [Image source](#).

See a listing of multicultural Cinderella stories from the [American Library Association](#). Read Ila Lane Gross’ Cinderella Tales Around The World: CLP: GR75.C4G76 2001 Learn about the Chinese culture’s [Cinderella story, Yeh-Shen](#).

ACT I

A room in the house of Cinderella's father.

Cinderella sits alone by the fire. Her stepmother is present and near her Cinderella's two ugly stepsisters are sewing a scarf, excited about preparations for a ball. The two sisters soon are bickering about who will wear the scarf and it ends up torn in two. When left alone, Cinderella recalls the happy days when her father was still alive. An old haggard woman comes to the house begging for money and Cinderella is the only one who takes pity and offers her some bread. As the old woman leaves purveyors arrive to offer the sisters their goods and services. A dancing master comes to teach them the *gavotte*, but Cinderella is excluded from the lesson and must keep to her chores.

The sisters hurry with their preparations and depart for the ball. In the back, we see the shadow of the beggar woman who now materializes as Cinderella's fairy godmother. The room disappears and Cinderella is transported into the fairy godmother's realm where she meets fairies of spring, summer,

autumn, and winter. Each of them dances a short solo where they offer Cinderella their seasonal gifts. Cinderella's rags are transformed into a beautiful gown and a pumpkin turn into a splendid carriage.

Cinderella sets off for the ball under instructions of the fairy godmother that she must leave before midnight when the magic will wear off.



ACT II

The ballroom at the Prince's palace

The major domo is entertaining the guests at the palace. As the stepsisters arrive, they dance inelegantly. The Prince arrives just before we hear a mysterious music which heralds the approach of Cinderella's carriage. She makes a grand entrance as she slowly descends the main staircase *en pointe*, her gaze lost as if in a dream. Everyone is captivated by her beauty; especially the Prince, with whom she dances a very regal *Pas de Deux*. Cinderella is dizzy with happiness, which she expresses in her variation full of turns and fast chaînés. The clock strikes midnight and Cinderella tries to flee but the guests and Prince try to prevent her from

leaving. In the rush she leaves behind her slipper.



ACT III

Cinderella is back in her kitchen, dressed in rags. She recalls the ball and wonders whether it was all a dream, but when she finds a sparkling shoe in her apron she is convinced that it all must have happened.

The Prince comes searching for the owner of the slipper. The Ugly Sisters try to squeeze their rather large feet into it. As she assists the elder sister in pulling the shoe, which has become stuck, Cinderella's other slipper falls from her apron. The Prince, realizing she is the one, asks her to try on the shoes and they are a perfect

fit! The stepsisters now try to atone for their bad behavior towards Cinderella, who forgives them and touches them lovingly.



The Composer — Sergei Prokofiev



When composer Sergei Prokofiev asked famed ballerina Galina Ulanova in 1940 what new ballet she'd like for him to create, her answer was Cinderella. A Kirov Ballet commission followed and Prokofiev was already hard at work when fearful news reached him in Moscow – Hitler's German army had invaded the USSR. Prokofiev abruptly put the new ballet aside to concentrate his efforts on an even larger work: his new opera *War & Peace*. Despite the chaos of the war, these years marked a tremendous creative period in his artistic life, including such achievements as the monumental Fifth Symphony, the film score *Ivan the Terrible* and some of his finest piano and chamber music.

When he finally returned to *Cinderella* in 1943, he was dispatched to the regional industrial city of Perm, where the entire uprooted personnel of the Kirov had been relocated for the duration. Acutely aware of both the resistance which had met his score for *Romeo and Juliet* in 1936 (declared "undanceable" by many) and the restrictive Soviet political climate concerning the arts, Prokofiev set out with *Cinderella* to return to the Russian ballet traditions of the great Tchaikovsky scores. He composed *Cinderella* exclusively in dance forms and "set pieces" in contrast to the almost cinematic breadth of *Romeo*. Though far from the extremes of his early satirical ballets, for the comic absurdities of the stepsisters in *Cinderella* he drew on Russian folk traditions. Setting the libretto in the 18th century, he also indulged his affection for the new-classical spirit of such earlier, lighter works as his youthful *Classical Symphony* of the film score *Lt. Kije*.

As failing health and political hostility increasingly took its toll on Prokofiev's creative life, *Cinderella* was to become his last great work for the theater. Despite its humor and the lightness of the subject matter, the music gives these traditional dance forms an unusual emotional weight. Two of the ballet's famous waltzes and many of its other dances are in minor keys, and *Cinderella*'s desires and eventual apotheosis with the prince are painted not with the broader strokes of fairy tale color but with the deeper hues of almost melancholic longing. Prokofiev wrote of his attempt to "convey the poetic love between *Cinderella* and the Prince – the birth and flowing of feeling, the obstacles thrown in its path, the realization of the dream."

Prokofiev himself understood such obstacles. Just before the war, he had fallen in love with a young Russian woman named Mira Mendelsohn, who remained his constant companion from this chaotic wartime period until his death in 1953. Long-time friends quickly noticed a transformation in Prokofiev from his usual aloofness and cynicism into what one friend called "a sort of amazing affectionate and kind attitude toward all those around him," even during nearly three years of nomadic evacuation from Moscow. Perhaps it was this deep new feeling in the 50-year-old Prokofiev's heart which illuminates his intensely expressive music for this timeless fairy tale.

Image: Unknown photographer, 1918. PD-US. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. [Source](#).

More information about Prokofiev: [San Francisco Classical Voice](#) website; [Classical.net](#).

Discussion Topics

Movement:

Pre-performance Discussion:

Describe ballet to students as a way to communicate stories, ideas, and feelings without using words. Ask them how they can tell if someone is angry, happy, sad, or frightened just by walking into a room. Share a little about the history of Cinderella and the time period in which it was originally created.

Pre-performance Questions:

What kinds of movements and facial expressions correspond to happiness? Anger?

Would these movements be fast or slow? Sharp or smooth?

What steps would you do, or expect to see, when a character is celebrating? Do you expect to see steps and movements that are classical or contemporary?

Post-performance Questions:

Did the choreography fit the mood of each scene?

Were there any parts of the choreography that were confusing to you? Why? Would you have made any changes?

What movements could you use to make Cinderella a modern ballet?

Dancing is a dialogue or expression of emotion through movement rather than words. Choose a section of a story that you are reading in class and communicate it through movement or expression rather than words. Ask the students to laugh if the character finds something funny, to frown if the character becomes sad, or to show fearful faces if the character is scared.

The corps de ballet consists of dancers who dance together in one group. They must work together to create the beautiful patterns that we see on stage. Students can also work together to create a simple dance. Here would be an example:

Holding hands in one big circle, everyone walks 8 steps to the right and stops. Walk 4 steps into the middle of the circle. Then, walk four steps out of the circle.

Everybody let go of each other's hands. Bend to touch the ground and then reach up high into the sky.

Hold hands once again and repeat to the left. Variations of this movement can be used.

Costumes:

Pre-performance Discussion:

Costumes are important because they help to identify the characters in the story. Without words, audience members can rely on costuming to distinguish characters before they even begin dancing. There are over 50 costumes used in Cinderella—ranging from dresses, tutus, jackets, boots, wings, and headpieces. Each piece helps create a character and adds to the fairy tale setting.

Pre-performance Questions:

What kinds of costumes do you expect to see in Cinderella?

How long do you think it would take to make so many costumes? (over one year) What kinds of materials/considerations are important for dance clothing?

Why do you think it is important for dancers to wear tights?

Post-performance Questions:

What kinds of costumes did you see?

Think about Cinderella's different costumes. How did her costumes help tell the story? Which costumes were your favorites? Why?

Which costumes would it be easiest to dance in? The most difficult?

Music:

Pre-performance Discussion:

Remind students that music is all they will hear at the ballet. Dancers tell the story with movements, not words, so ballet relies heavily on musical cues. Dancers also use the music to remember their choreography and stay together while performing. In addition to a discussion, you can also play music from Cinderella for students.

Pre-performance Questions:

What kind of music tells you when something scary or exciting is happening in a movie?

What kind of music do you expect to hear during Cinderella?

Does anyone in your class play a musical instrument? Which ones? Why do you think live music is important for a live ballet performance?

Post-performance Questions:

How was the music different in each scene? The same?

Do you think the music was effective in portraying the emotions of the characters?

If you were creating a ballet, would you prefer to pick a piece of music that was already composed, or one that was created specifically for your choreography?

Set:

Pre-performance Discussion:

The set for Cinderella is elaborate and ornate, fitting with the fairy tale setting. Comprised of intricately painted backdrops, large set pieces, dramatic lighting, and props, the design took over one year to create.

Pre-performance Questions:

What kinds of things would you build for the set to show a ballroom? Cinderella home?

What kinds of considerations do scenic designers have to make for ballet versus a play? How could the lights change the mood without changing anything else?

Post-performance Questions:

What did the sets look like?

How and why were the sets and lights different for each scene? Did the set design coordinate with the costume design?

Additional Post-performance Questions:

Did all of the elements work together to create a successful performance? If you were the choreographer or artistic director, how would you do it? What elements would you keep the same? What would you change?

- 1) Help students become familiar with vocabulary terms by pointing out terms as you read the story to them.
- 2) Read a version of The Cinderella story.
- 3) Discuss some of the following with your students to help them to prepare their 'story map' listing the main characters, the setting, and the events of the story:
 - Where does the story take place?
 - When does it take place?
 - Who is the main character of the story?
 - What is she like/how would you describe her?
 - Who are some of the other characters?
 - What is each like/how would you describe him/her?
 - What do they do in the story?
 - What strange things happen at midnight?
 - How does the story end?
- 4) Provide a prompt for illustrating or writing a reaction to the story. Some sample prompts include:
 - "My favorite part of the Cinderella story is . . ."
 - "The scariest part of the Cinderella story is .."
 - "The saddest part of the Cinderella story is ."
 - "The happiest part of the Cinderella story is.."

Ballet Performance Language:

A whole language describes the different steps in ballet. Because people first began writing down the steps of the dances in France, French is used for the language of ballet.

ADAGIO A slow movement in dance.

ALLEGRO A dance performed to a lively and fast tempo (as opposed to adagio)

BALLERINA Female ballet dancer.

CHOREOGRAPHY Derived from the Greek words choria (dance) and graphes (writer), movements arranged and planned within a dance.

ELEVATION A term used to indicate the height of the jump attained by the dancer.

DANSEUR A male dancer.

PAS DE DEUX A dance involving two people, usually involving a danseur and a ballerina.

PIROUETTE To whirl or spin on one foot.

PLIE A bending of the knees

POINTE SHOES Satin slippers that have a 'box' which is made of tightly glued paper and fabric which encloses and supports the dancer's toes. Pointe shoes have a glue hardened toe and a strongly reinforced sole to support the arch of the foot when the dancer is standing on the tips of the toes.