

Swan Lake



Supplemental Guide

Created By:



**EDUCATION
& COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**

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How long will it be?

Act 1 & 2 - 65 min **Act 3** - 32 min **Act 4** - 21 min **Total Run Time** - 2 hours, 15 min*

*Times are approximate

Behind the Ballet

Swan Lake was Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s first ballet composition. It was written on the demand of The Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow for one practical reason—Russian aristocracy loved ballet. Some think that Swan Lake is based on the German fairytale The Stolen Veil, while others argue that it is derived from the Russian folktale The White Duck. There are several endings to Swan Lake, but in Petipa’s version, Odette and Siegfried throw themselves into the lake to be together forever.

Swan Lake was first performed on March 4, 1877, and was regarded as a failure. Critics dismissed Tchaikovsky’s music as too noisy, and dancers disliked the fast-paced score. It wasn’t until after Tchaikovsky’s death that French choreographer Marius Petipa revived the iconic ballet.



The White Duck is a Russian folktale about a princess transformed into a white duck, often believed to be one of the stories that inspired Swan Lake.

Swan Lake is famous for the 32 fouettés en tournant in Act III, an incredible athletic feat. These fouettés are danced at the end of the Black Swan pas de deux by the ballerina playing Odile. The pas de deux was an afterthought of Tchaikovsky’s and was not included in the original production.

Prince Siegfried is said to be loosely based on Bavarian King Ludwig II, who was obsessed with swans. Interestingly, Ludwig’s castle, Neuschwanstein, literally translates to “New Swan-on-the-Rock Castle” and was also the inspiration for Disney’s Sleeping Beauty castle.

Pierina Legnani was the first to perform the roles of Odette and Odile in Petipa’s 1895 version of Swan Lake and is considered to have set the barre for the roles.

Jennifer Grace
and Artists of
Colorado
Ballet by
Amanda
Tipton



Synopsis of the Ballet

Swan Lake features a timeless love story that mixes magic, tragedy, and romance into four acts. It stars Prince Siegfried and a beautiful swan princess named Odette. Under the spell of the evil sorcerer Von Rothbart, Odette spends her days as a swan gliding across a lake of tears and her nights in her human form.

The couple quickly falls in love, but as in most fairy tales, things are not so simple. Von Rothbart has more tricks to play, bringing his daughter, Odile, into the story. Confusion, betrayal, forgiveness, and a final act of love bring the ballet to its dramatic conclusion.

It is important to note that one ballerina often performs both Odette and Odile. Dancing these two contrasting roles is considered one of ballet's greatest challenges, requiring exceptional artistry, acting, and technique. It is a role many ballerinas dream of performing from a young age.



Mario Labrador By Amanda Tipton

Act I

The story begins in the royal court, where Prince Siegfried, heir to the throne, celebrates his 21st birthday with an elaborate ball. During the festivities, his mother reminds him that he must soon choose a bride.

Act II

Prince Siegfried wanders into a magical forest and discovers an enchanted lake. There he sees a magnificent swan transform into a beautiful young woman named Odette, the Swan Queen. She tells him that the evil sorcerer Von Rothbart has cursed her to live as a swan by day and a woman by night. Only true love can break the spell. Siegfried falls deeply in love with Odette and vows to save her. When Von Rothbart appears, Siegfried considers attacking him, but Odette explains that if the sorcerer dies before the spell is broken, she will die as well.

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Synopsis of the Ballet (continued):

Act III

The scene shifts to the Great Hall, where princesses from across the kingdom have gathered so Prince Siegfried can choose a bride. Von Rothbart arrives with his daughter, Odile, who has been magically disguised to look exactly like Odette. Believing she is his true love, Siegfried declares his love for Odile, unknowingly breaking his promise to Odette and strengthening Von Rothbart's spell.

Act IV

A violent storm rages over the lake as Siegfried rushes to find Odette and begs for her forgiveness. Heartbroken, Odette believes she must die rather than remain cursed forever. Siegfried declares that he would rather die with her than live without her. As dawn approaches, Von Rothbart appears, but the lovers defy him by throwing themselves into the lake together. Their sacrifice breaks the sorcerer's power, freeing Odette forever and ending Von Rothbart's reign.

Jennifer Grace by Amanda Tipton



Choreographer



Marius Petipa

What is a Choreographer?

A person who creates the sequence and movements for a dance performance.



Widely considered to be the “Father of Classical Ballet,” Marius Petipa is perhaps the most influential Ballet Master and choreographer of classical ballets of all time. His works remain influential today, cited as inspiration to dancers and choreographers such as George Balanchine.

Born in 1818 into a family of artists, Petipa was destined to perform. He began his ballet training under his father at the age of seven. Reluctant at first, he grew to enjoy performing, and displayed natural talent. At age twenty, Marius was appointed Premier Danseur for Ballet de Nantes in France.

After achieving critical success by choreographing *The Pharaoh's Daughter*, Petipa became Ballet Master of the Imperial Ballet Theatre in St. Petersburg. He worked to produce spectacularly lavish ballets with Ivan Vsevolzhsky who also commissioned him for *The Nutcracker*. Petipa allowed his associate, Lev Ivanov, to choreograph much of the action, as it is said that Petipa was ill at this time. It is also suggested that he anticipated the work would not be well received and wanted to separate himself from it. He continued to work until his death at age 92.



Artists of Colorado Ballet By Amanda Tipton

Composer

Tchaikovsky was born on May 7, 1840, in Russia. His musical background began when he was five years old as he began to take piano lessons. As he grew, his parents hoped he would leave his music behind and work in the civil service. He worked with the Ministry of Justice for four years, but his interest in music only grew during this time.

At the age of twenty-one he started lessons at the Russian Musical Society and then shortly after enrolled at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

Tchaikovsky's work was first publicly performed in 1865. His first symphony was well-received after it was performed in Moscow. He established himself with his many symphonies, operas, and ballets. Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty, and The Nutcracker are classic ballet all composed by Tchaikovsky.

Ironically, Tchaikovsky considered The Nutcracker among his least favorite works. Commissioned by Ivan Vsevolohsky, Director of the Imperial Theatres of St. Petersburg, The Nutcracker was composed in response to the success of Sleeping Beauty.



Pyotr Tchaikovsky

What is a Composer?

A person who writes music, especially as a job.



Colorado Ballet Orchestra by Amanda Tipton

General Activities

LISTEN AND LEARN: Listen to music composed by Pierce. Close your eyes, if you need to. Now, answer the following questions: If this piece of music were a shape, what shape would it be? A color? An animal? A season? A place? Why? Is it fast, slow, or varied? What is the mood of the piece, or what emotions do you feel when you listen to it? Think of three more adjectives that you believe describe the music. Compare your answers with other students' answers. Are any of your answers the same? Why do you think you came up with similar or different answers?

MOVE TO THE MUSIC: Now, divide into groups and create movements that go with your team's answers from the listening activity. Try to incorporate some of everyone's answers. How do the animals move? How would you move in winter that's different from how you move in summer? How would blue move, as opposed to orange? Some movements should be high; others should be low. Some should be fast; others could be slow. Be mindful of using all of your body, not just your feet. Link your movements together into a dance and perform it for the class.

POETRY IN MOTION: After seeing the production, write a poem inspired by the performance. Now, try reversing that process! Get into groups, find a poem that you really like, and create a dance to go along with it! Identify powerful words and themes within the poem, and associate movements with them. Link the movements together to create a dance to perform for your peers. If you were to make an entire production out of your dance, what kind of sets and costumes would be fitting? Draw or make a collage of pictures representing how you would set the scene.

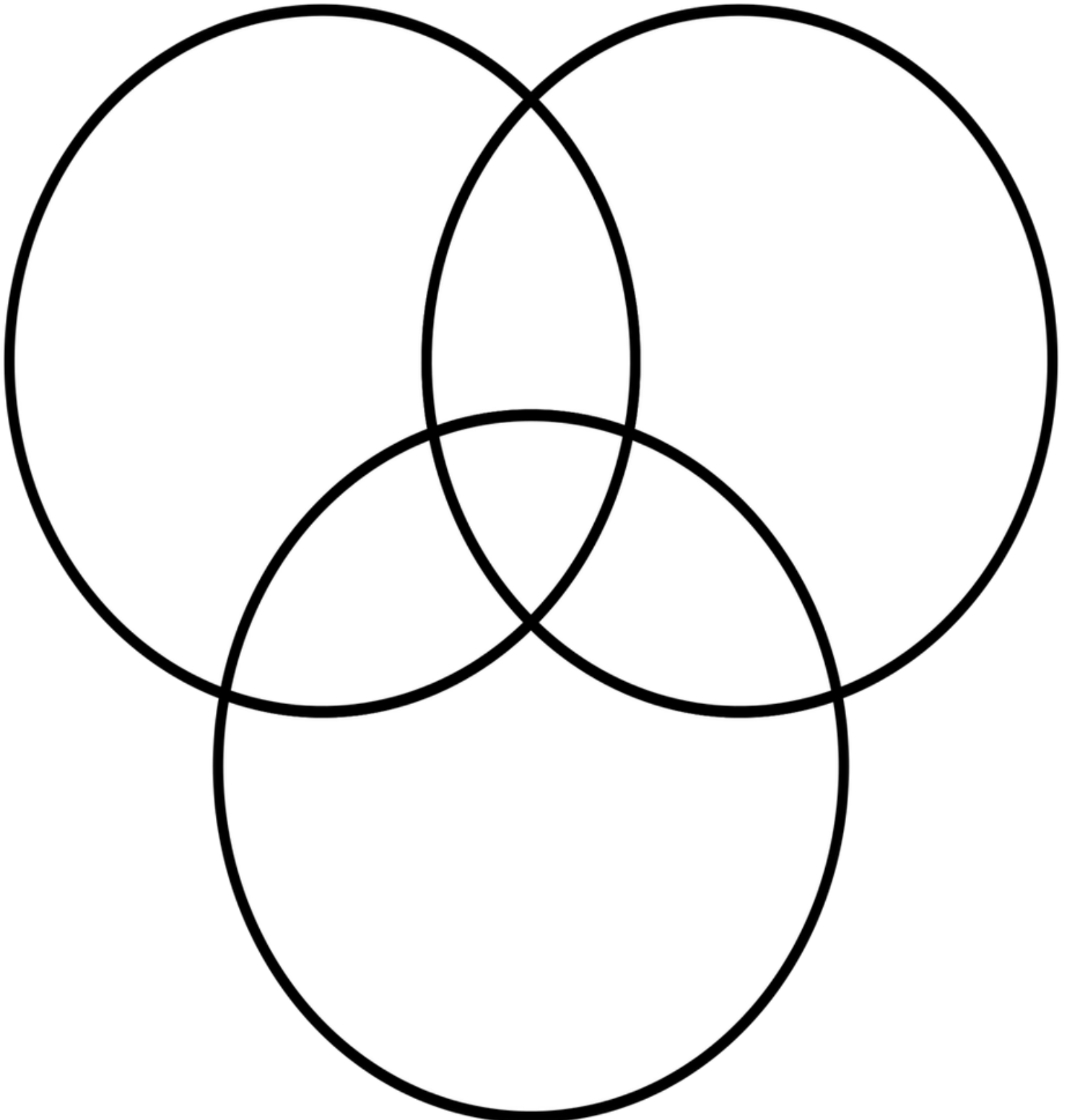
STORYTELLING THROUGH DANCE: Dance is an art form that tells a story through movement. Using a story or text your class is studying, you can recreate scenes from the story using dance. Put the students in small groups and assign different scenes from the story. Instruct the students to reinterpret the story using only movement. Invite the students to be creative in their reinterpretations, allow abstract or literal movement.



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Middle & High School Activities

COMPARE AND CONTRAST: Utilize the Venn diagram as a way to compare and contrast three different media mediums for storytelling. Try comparing the ballet to two other stories – one in literature and one in film.



Movement

Swan Lake Dance Charades

Students will use their movement skills to portray characters, scenes, and elements from Swan Lake, deepening their understanding of the story through creative movement and performance.

Materials Needed:

- Charades cards
- Timer
- Space



1. Preparation

Create a set of charades cards with characters, scenes, and elements from Swan Lake. Write each term or phrase on a separate card or slip of paper and place them in a container or hat.

- Prince Siegfried
- Odette (the Swan Queen)
- Odile (the Black Swan)
- Von Rothbart (the Sorcerer)
- The Swan Maidens
- The Swan Lake
- The Royal Ball
- The Enchanted Forest
- The Swan Transformation
- The Magic Spell
- The Prince Searching for the Swan Queen



2. Explanation

One player from each team will draw a card and dance the character, scene, or element without speaking. The rest of the team will try to guess what is being portrayed.

Each round is timed (example: 1 minute per round).

3. Playing the Game

Divide students into small teams (3–5 students per team).

Teams take turns drawing a charades card and using movement to portray the term or phrase. The opposing team guesses what is being acted out. If they guess correctly within the time limit, the dancing team earns a point.

Rotate the dancer each round so everyone has a chance to perform.

4. Discussion

After the game, discuss the characters and scenes that were danced out. Ask students which ones they found the most challenging, creative, or fun.

Encourage students to share how movement choices helped show different characters, emotions, and moments from Swan Lake.

Discuss how dancers use their bodies, facial expressions, and energy to tell a story without words.

Elementary School Activities

Make Your Own Swans



You will need:

White paper, Scissors, Glue, Markers or Crayons

Directions:

1. Cut swan head, neck and body shape out – swan shape is on the next page.
2. Glue swan to background page.
3. Going from top to bottom, cut the blank, white paper into thin strips.
4. Carefully loop strips of paper so one end meets the other. Then, glue the ends of loop together.
5. Glue loops to swan starting at the very end of the swan, layering loops forward to create the “feathers”!
6. Add any extra details to swan (eyes, crown, waves) with markers.



Surveys

Teacher/Facilitator Survey

CLICK HERE

or scan QR code below



Student/Viewer Survey

CLICK HERE

or scan QR code below

