

Valley Performing Arts Council

Presents:

The Little Mermaid

Featuring State Street Ballet



February 20-23, 9:30am & 10:50am

Warnors Theatre | Fresno, CA

Artistic Director
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The Little Mermaid Study Guide



Notes for this Study Guide:

Please use any or all of the following lesson plans with your students. These lesson plans are based on the California Arts Standards for Dance. The goal of the curriculum is to aid students in preparing for State Street Ballet's performances of *The Little Mermaid** at the Warnors Theatre on February 20-23, 2025.

**Both performances will include a question-and-answer session. Please send any student questions to meredith@statestreetballet.com.*

About Ballet

Ballet originated in the Italian Renaissance in the 15th century and became widely popular in France soon after that. To this day, the teaching language of ballet is French, a universal language understood by all dancers. Dancers can learn from teachers and choreographers, even though they might not speak the same language, because the steps' names are the same no matter where they are used.

Ballet is an art of movement. Movement is vertical and horizontal on stage; movement is organized in space and follows time in rhythmical patterns as indicated by the music. Movement sequences can convey a story without using words or even mime. Movement can establish mood, make statements, and develop a storyline. A good ballet does not need an explanation; it visually illustrates a piece of music, a story, or an idea. As a performing art, ballet combines several elements to create an overall theatrical spectacle: music, lights, costumes, and scenery all help to convey the story.

All ballet steps and movements have a common denominator: everything begins or ends in one of five basic foot positions. Steps can be linked together in movement, phases, or combinations. Ballet dancers are athletes and professionals who spend long hours training to perform. This training usually starts at an early age, 8-11 years old. Training hours increase with a dancer's physical development ability. Professional dancers train 7 hours daily, 6 days a week, and even longer on performance days.

General Activities for All Ages

- **Art Activity:** Create a sea-themed art project, such as drawing a scene from the ballet, crafting a jellyfish, or making a paper lighthouse.
- **Movement Activity:** Explore basic ballet movements in the classroom. Students can act out different sea creatures or mimic the Little Mermaid's graceful swimming.
- **Music Activity:** Listen to different types of music used in the ballet (magical, dramatic, calming). Discuss how each type of music made them feel and how it helped tell the story.

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Synopsis of *The Little Mermaid*

ACT ONE

Scene I: The Shoreline

A fiddler and his daughter walk along the shore, accompanied by a haunting Irish melody. In the background, a lighthouse stands tall. Suddenly, the water seems to lift, revealing a world filled with sea creatures like fish, jellyfish, and merpeople. Among them is the Little Mermaid and her family. The music changes to a magical, lively tune. The Little Mermaid swims to the surface and sees a handsome prince for the first time. She instantly falls in love with him, but a sudden storm hits. The prince is tossed overboard, unconscious, and the Little Mermaid saves him, bringing him safely to shore before disappearing into the sea.

Discussion Points and Activities:

- **Younger Students (K-5):** What sea creatures can you imagine living in the ocean? Draw a picture of what the Little Mermaid might have seen.
- **Older Students (6-12):** Discuss how the music helps set the mood in the ballet. What emotions did you feel during the storm scene?

Scene II: Back Under the Sea

The Little Mermaid returns home, excitedly sharing her adventure. Her father forbids her from going to the surface again, fearing for her safety. Her sisters realize she is in love with the human prince. The Little Mermaid learns from her sisters about a mysterious siren who can help her become human. Although warned of the risks, she is determined to pursue her love.

Discussion Points and Activities:

- **Younger Students (K-5):** Why do you think the Little Mermaid wants to return to the land? Draw a picture of what she might look like if she were human.
- **Older Students (6-12):** Do you think the Little Mermaid should take the risk to become human? Why or why not? How does love influence our decisions?

Scene III: The Siren's Deal

The Little Mermaid travels to the siren's lair, where she makes a deal: in exchange for her voice, she will get legs and a chance to live on land. However, she will dissolve into sea foam if she doesn't win the prince's love. Despite her fear, she accepts and drinks the potion. She struggles to breathe as she transforms and washes up on the shore.

Discussion Points and Activities:

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- **Younger Students (K-5):** What would it be like to give up your voice? Act out how you would communicate without words.
- **Older Students (6-12):** Discuss the concept of sacrifice. What does the Little Mermaid give up for her dream, and is it worth it?

Scene IV: The Shoreline Reunion

The prince, fishing nearby, finds the Little Mermaid on the shore. He helps her and takes her to his friend's house to recover, unaware that she cannot speak.

Discussion Points and Activities:

- **Younger Students (K-5):** If you met someone who couldn't speak, how could you be kind and help them?
 - **Older Students (6-12):** How does the ballet show the Little Mermaid's struggle to adapt to human life?
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ACT TWO

Scene I: The Fiddler's House and Village

The Little Mermaid learns to live on land, spending time with the fiddler, his daughter, and the villagers. She even learns some sign language to communicate. The prince invites her and the fiddler to a gathering at the castle. The Little Mermaid is excited about experiencing life on land but still longs to be close to the prince.

Discussion Points and Activities:

- **Younger Students (K-5):** Practice some simple sign language words like "hello" and "thank you."
- **Older Students (6-12):** Discuss how communication goes beyond words. How do people who cannot speak communicate in other ways?

Scene II: The Dress Shop

The Little Mermaid is fitted for a beautiful dress at the shop, then returns to the fiddler's house, where she learns to dance. The fiddler starts to develop romantic feelings for the Little Mermaid.

Discussion Points and Activities:

- **Younger Students (K-5):** Imagine you are at a dance class. What kind of dance would you like to learn?
- **Older Students (6-12):** Discuss how relationships change and evolve. How might the fiddler feel watching the Little Mermaid try to fit in?

Scene III: The Gathering at the Castle

At the prince's gathering, the Little Mermaid is mesmerized by the celebrations. She sees the prince speaking to another woman and feels very sad. The mysterious siren appears to remind her that time is running out. Heartbroken, the Little Mermaid realizes the prince is in love with someone else. She returns to the fiddler's house, where she and the fiddler's daughter communicate through sign language about her need to return to the sea.

Discussion Points and Activities:

- **Younger Students (K-5):** How do you think the Little Mermaid feels when she sees the prince with someone else? Draw a picture showing her emotions.
- **Older Students (6-12):** What does it mean to let go of a dream? Can you think of a time when you had to give up on something you wanted?

Scene IV: Returning to the Sea

The fiddler searches for the Little Mermaid but arrives at the shore too late. She disappears into the waves, indicating for him to return the next day.

Discussion Points and Activities:

- **Younger Students (K-5):** Imagine you are the fiddler searching for the Little Mermaid. What would you say to her if you found her?
- **Older Students (6-12):** Discuss the idea of saying goodbye. How does this scene show the power of friendship and love?

Epilogue: A New Beginning

The fiddler plays a sad tune on the shore when he hears the Little Mermaid singing. She appears, and the fiddler's daughter communicates with her through sign language. The Little Mermaid promises to visit them daily, creating a new bond that brings them joy and hope.

Discussion Points and Activities:

- **Younger Students (K-5):** How does this story end? Draw a picture of the Little Mermaid singing with the fiddler on the rock.
- **Older Students (6-12):** What themes do you see in this story? How does the ending reflect growth and acceptance?

Grade 1 Lesson Plan: Exploring Storytelling Through Dance

Duration: 45 minutes

Focus: Storytelling, movement exploration, and response to a professional ballet performance

Standards Addressed: California Arts Standards – Dance (Grade 1)

- *Responding:* 7.1 – Select movements in a dance that suggest ideas and explain how the movement captures the idea.
- *Creating:* 1.1 – Explore movement inspired by the environment, animals, and characters.
- *Performing:* 4.1 – Demonstrate understanding of how movement communicates an idea.

Objective: Students will engage with the story and themes of *The Little Mermaid* through movement exploration, creative expression, and discussion of a professional ballet performance.

Materials Needed

- Video clips or photos from the ballet company's performance of *The Little Mermaid* (if available).
- A large open space for movement.
- Instrumental music. Here is a sample playlist of ocean-inspired music:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/22uFmM6Urq1hEYULN34R5u?si=96811a4078df40fe>
- Visual aids (images of underwater creatures, a mermaid, ocean waves, etc.).

Lesson Sequence

1. Introduction (5-10 minutes):

- **Hook:** Begin with a discussion: "What do you know about mermaids and the ocean? Have you ever heard of *The Little Mermaid*?"
- Briefly explain how the professional ballet company uses dance and music to tell the story of *The Little Mermaid* without words.

2. Warm-Up (10 minutes):

- Lead a movement warm-up inspired by the ocean:
 - **Wave Arms:** Sway arms side to side like waves.
 - **Dolphin Swim:** Use sweeping motions as if diving and gliding underwater.
 - **Jellyfish Drift:** Slowly float and wiggle arms and legs.
 - **Octopus Stretch:** Stretch arms in multiple directions to mimic tentacles.
- Encourage students to imagine they are under the sea while moving.

3. Movement Exploration (15 minutes):

- **Activity 1: Character Movement Exploration**
 - Discuss how the ballet uses movement to represent characters.

- Prompt students: "How would you move if you were a mermaid? How about a crab, a seahorse, or an evil sea witch?"
- Play music and guide students through improvisation to embody these characters.
- **Activity 2: Story Moments in Motion**
 - Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a moment from the story (e.g., swimming through the ocean, meeting the prince, facing the sea witch).
 - Groups create a short movement phrase to show their moment.
 - Each group share their phrase with the class.

4. Reflection and Discussion (10 minutes):

- Students draw or describe their favorite character or moment from the lesson, incorporating how they moved during the activity.

Assessment

- Participation in movement activities and warm-up.
- Creativity in movement exploration and group work.
- Responses in the discussion and reflection demonstrate an understanding of how movement communicates ideas.

Extensions

- **Discussion:** After the performances of State Street Ballet's *The Little Mermaid*, ask the students to describe a key moment they noticed in the ballet. Ask: "What movements stood out to you? How did the dancers show emotion or tell the story?"
- Have students create a short "underwater dance" to perform for another class or parents.
- Incorporate a cross-disciplinary activity: Write a short story or create art inspired by the ballet.

Grade 2 Lesson Plan: Exploring Storytelling Through Dance

Duration: 45 minutes

Focus: Storytelling, movement exploration, collaboration, and response to a professional ballet performance

Standards Addressed: California Arts Standards – Dance (Grade 2)

- *Responding:* 7.1 – Demonstrate and explain how specific movements or patterns express an idea or emotion.
- *Creating:* 1.1 – Improvise dance movements inspired by themes, characters, and ideas.
- *Performing:* 4.1 – Develop short dance sequences communicating a story or idea.

Objective: Students will engage with the story and themes of *The Little Mermaid* through independent and collaborative movement exploration, creative expression, and reflective discussion about how movement tells a story.

Materials Needed

- Video clips or photos from the ballet company's performance of *The Little Mermaid* (if available).
- A large open space for movement.
- Instrumental music. Here is a sample playlist of ocean-inspired music:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/22uFmM6Urq1hEYULN34R5u?si=96811a4078df40fe>
- Visual aids (images of underwater creatures, mermaids, ocean waves, etc.).
- Paper and crayons for reflective drawing or written responses.

Lesson Sequence

1. Introduction (5-10 minutes):

- **Hook:** Begin with a discussion:
 - "What do you know about mermaids and the ocean? Have you ever heard of *The Little Mermaid*?"
- Briefly explain how the professional ballet company uses dance and music to tell the story of *The Little Mermaid* without words.
- **Discussion Prompt:** "What movements or expressions do you notice in the dancers? How do they show their feelings or actions?"

2. Warm-Up (10 minutes):

Ocean-Inspired Movement Warm-Up:

- Lead a movement warm-up inspired by the ocean:
 - **Wave Arms:** Sway arms side to side like waves.
 - **Dolphin Swim:** Use sweeping motions as if diving and gliding underwater.
 - **Jellyfish Drift:** Slowly float and wiggle arms and legs.

- **Octopus Stretch:** Stretch arms in multiple directions to mimic tentacles.
- Encourage students to imagine they are under the sea while moving.
- Encourage students to explore dynamics (fast vs. slow, strong vs. soft) as they warm up.

3. Movement Exploration (15 minutes):

- **Activity 1: Character Movement Exploration**
 - Discuss how the ballet uses movement to represent characters.
 - Prompt students: "How would you move if you were a mermaid? How about a crab, a seahorse, or an evil sea witch?"
 - Play music and guide students through improvisation to embody these characters.
- **Activity 2: Story Moments in Motion**
 - Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a moment from the story (e.g., swimming through the ocean, meeting the prince, facing the sea witch).
 - Groups create a short movement phrase to show their moment.
 - Share each group's phrase with the class.
- **Sharing/Reflection:** Groups perform their sequences for the class. Encourage students to watch for details and think about how each group uses movement to tell their part of the story.

4. Reflection and Discussion (10 minutes):

- Individual Reflection: Students draw or write about their favorite character or moment, describing the movements they observed.
- Sample Class Discussion Questions: "What movements stood out to you today? Why?" "How did the dancers in your group or others' groups show emotions or actions?"

Assessment

- Active participation in the warm-up and group activities.
- Creativity and effort in movement exploration and storytelling.
- Contributions to discussions and reflections that show an understanding of how movement communicates ideas.

Extensions

- **Discussion:** After the performances of State Street Ballet's *The Little Mermaid*, ask the students to describe a key moment they noticed in the ballet. Ask: "What movements stood out to you? How did the dancers show emotion or tell the story?"
- **Performance Project:** Have students refine and perform their group sequences for another class or family members.
- **Cross-Disciplinary Activity:** Students write their own underwater story or create visual art inspired by their movements and themes from *The Little Mermaid*.

Grade 3 Lesson Plan: Exploring Storytelling Through Dance

Duration: 60 minutes

Focus: Storytelling, creating choreography, and analyzing a professional ballet performance

Standards Addressed: California Arts Standards – Dance (Grade 3)

- *Creating:* 2.1 – Create movement patterns and sequences inspired by an idea or story.
- *Performing:* 5.1 – Demonstrate kinesthetic awareness and use movement to communicate meaning.
- *Responding:* 8.1 – Identify the elements of dance and explain how they are used in a performance to communicate ideas.

Objective: Students will explore how movement conveys story and emotion in *The Little Mermaid*, create their own short dance sequences, and reflect on the elements of a professional ballet performance.

Materials Needed

- Video clips or photos from the ballet company's performance of *The Little Mermaid* (if available).
- Instrumental music. Here is a sample playlist of ocean-inspired music:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/22uFmM6Urq1hEYULN34R5u?si=96811a4078df40fe>
- A large open space for movement.
- Paper and pencils for reflection.

Lesson Sequence

1. Introduction (10 minutes):

- **Hook:** Ask: "How can a story be told without words? What does dance add to a story like *The Little Mermaid*?"
- Briefly explain how a ballet uses movement, music, and costumes to tell a story.
- Show a video clip or photos from the ballet.
 - Ask: "What movements stood out? How did the dancers show who they were (e.g., a mermaid or sea witch)?"

2. Warm-Up (10 minutes):

- Lead a structured warm-up that introduces elements of dance:
 - **Locomotor Movements:** Practice traveling movements like skipping (playful fish), leaping (jumping dolphins), and slithering (eels).
 - **Shape Exploration:** Hold strong shapes for powerful characters (sea witch) or fluidshapes for gentle characters (mermaid).

- **Levels and Directions:** Move at high (swimming fish), medium (mermaid swimming), and low levels (crabs on the ocean floor).
- Encourage students to think about how their movement can tell a story.

3. Movement Exploration and Creation (20 minutes):

- **Activity 1: Story-Based Movement Sequences**
 - Divide the class into groups. Each group selects or is assigned a moment from *The Little Mermaid* (e.g., swimming through a storm, meeting the prince, battling the sea witch).
 - Groups create a short dance sequence (8-16 counts) representing their moment, focusing on how movement shows emotion, character, and action.
- **Activity 2: Connect the Sequences**
 - Each group performs their sequence, and the class discusses how their movements tell the story.
 - Optionally, combine the sequences to create a class "ballet" summarizing the story.

4. Reflection and Discussion (10 minutes):

- Students draw or describe their favorite character or moment from the lesson, incorporating how they moved during the activity.

Assessment

- Creativity and effort in creating group dance sequences.
- Understanding of storytelling through movement demonstrated in group work and discussion.
- Reflection that identifies and explains the elements of dance.

Extensions

- **Discussion:** After the performances of State Street Ballet's *The Little Mermaid*, guide students in identifying elements of dance (body, energy, space, and time) used in the performance. Ask: "How do the dancers use space to show the ocean? What kinds of energy do they use to represent different characters?"
- **Cross-Disciplinary Activities:** Have students write a short narrative about an underwater adventure and create movements to match their story or draw their favorite character or moment from the professional ballet, explaining how the dancer's movements made it memorable.
- **Choreography Practice:** Students create solo dances inspired by one character or theme from *The Little Mermaid*.

Grade 4 Lesson Plan: Exploring Storytelling Through Dance

Duration: 60 minutes

Focus: Storytelling, choreography, and interpreting elements of dance in a professional performance

Standards Addressed: California Arts Standards – Dance (Grade 4)

- *Creating:* 2.1 – Create a dance sequence that uses the elements of dance to communicate meaning.
- *Performing:* 5.1 – Perform a dance sequence with attention to focus, clarity, and expressiveness.
- *Responding:* 8.1 – Identify how movement and elements of dance communicate ideas and themes in a dance performance.

Objective: Students will explore how dance tells a story in *The Little Mermaid*, create and perform group choreography using the elements of dance, and interpret a professional ballet performance.

Materials Needed

- Video clips or photos from the ballet company's performance of *The Little Mermaid*.
- Instrumental music. Here is a sample playlist of ocean-inspired music:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/22uFmM6Urq1hEYULN34R5u?si=96811a4078df40fe>
- Paper and pencils for choreographic notes or reflections.
- A large open space for movement.

Lesson Sequence

1. Introduction (10 minutes):

- **Hook:** Ask students: "How can you tell a story without using words? How does a dancer show emotion or setting through movement?"
- Show a video clip or photos from *The Little Mermaid* ballet.
 - Discuss: "What did you notice about how the dancers moved? How did their movements help tell the story?"
- Introduce the **elements of dance** (body, energy, space, and time) and explain that students will use these to create their own storytelling dances.

2. Warm-Up (10 minutes):

- Lead a warm-up focusing on the elements of dance:
 - **Body:** Use arms and legs to mimic ocean creatures like swimming fish or swirling seaweed.
 - **Energy:** Alternate between flowing (gentle waves) and sharp (stormy sea) movements.
 - **Space:** Practice moving through high, medium, and low levels and explore different directions (forward, backward, diagonal).

- **Time:** Experiment with slow (calm underwater scenes) and fast (escaping a predator) tempos.

3. Movement Exploration and Choreography (25 minutes):

- **Activity 1: Exploring Character and Setting (10 minutes)**
 - Assign groups a character (e.g., mermaid, prince, sea witch) or setting (e.g., stormy ocean, underwater palace).
 - Groups brainstorm and improvise movements that represent their choice. Encourage them to think about the **elements of dance** while creating their movements.
 - Example prompts: "How does the sea witch move differently from the mermaid? What would the ocean floor feel like if you were dancing there?"
- **Activity 2: Creating a Choreographed Sequence (15 minutes)**
 - Groups create an 8-16 count dance phrase using their character or setting as inspiration.
 - Groups must incorporate at least two elements of dance (e.g., use different levels and dynamics).
 - Groups rehearse their sequence with attention to clarity and expressiveness.
 - Each group performs their sequence for the class.

4. Reflection and Analysis (15 minutes):

- After each group performs, facilitate peer feedback: "What movements stood out? How did they use the elements of dance to show their character or setting?"
- Students write a short reflection on how they used movement to tell a story and what they learned about dance as a storytelling tool.

Assessment

- Participation in warm-up and movement exploration.
- Creativity and collaboration in group choreography.
- Ability to identify and describe how elements of dance communicate ideas during discussions and reflections.

Extensions

- **Discussion:** After the performances of State Street Ballet's *The Little Mermaid*, discuss how professional dancers use the elements of dance (body, energy, space, and time) to bring *The Little Mermaid* to life. Ask: "How did the professional dancers use the elements of dance to tell the story of *The Little Mermaid*?"
- **Solo Challenge:** Have students create short solo dances inspired by their favorite underwater creature or character.
- **Creative Writing:** Students write a journal entry from the perspective of a character in *The Little Mermaid*, then create a movement sequence to represent their story.

Grade 5 Lesson Plan: Exploring Storytelling Through Dance

Duration: 60 minutes

Focus: Storytelling, choreographic tools, and analyzing a professional ballet performance

Standards Addressed: California Arts Standards – Dance (Grade 5)

- *Creating:* 2.1 – Use choreographic tools to create a dance sequence communicating an idea, feeling, or story.
- *Performing:* 5.1 – Perform a dance sequence demonstrating focus, control, and kinesthetic awareness.
- *Responding:* 7.1 – Describe and interpret how different elements of dance are used to communicate ideas in a performance.

Objective: Students will analyze how dance tells a story in *The Little Mermaid*, create and perform short choreography using choreographic tools, and reflect on the elements of a professional ballet performance.

Materials Needed

- Video clips or photos from the ballet company's performance of *The Little Mermaid* (if available).
- Instrumental music. Here is a sample playlist of ocean-inspired music:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/22uFmM6Urq1hEYULN34R5u?si=96811a4078df40fe>
- Paper and pencils for reflection or choreographic notes.
- A large open space for movement.

Lesson Sequence

1. Introduction (10 minutes):

- **Hook:** Pose the question: "What makes a performance memorable? How can dancers use movement to make us feel like we're in another world, like under the sea?"
- Show a video clip or photo from the ballet.
 - Discuss: "What do you notice about the movements, shapes, and energy of the dancers? How do they use space to show different settings or characters?"
- Introduce choreographic tools: **levels**, **pathways**, **dynamics**, and **relationships**. Explain that students will use these tools to create dances.

2. Warm-Up (10 minutes):

- Lead a warm-up emphasizing choreographic tools:
 - **Levels:** Explore movements high (jumping dolphins), medium (swimming fish), and low (crawling crabs).
 - **Pathways:** Practice straight, curved, and zigzag pathways to mimic ocean currents.
 - **Dynamics:** Experiment with quick, sharp movements (stormy seas) and slow, smooth movements (gentle waves).

- **Relationships:** Work with a partner or small group to mirror movements or create contrasting shapes.

3. Movement Exploration and Choreography (25 minutes):

- **Activity 1: Character and Setting Exploration (10 minutes)**
 - Assign students to small groups. Each group selects a character (e.g., mermaid, sea witch, prince) or setting (e.g., ocean floor, stormy sea) from *The Little Mermaid*.
 - Groups explore movement ideas inspired by their choice, using the choreographic tools introduced earlier.
 - Encourage groups to think about how their movements can convey emotion or story (e.g., flowing movements for a mermaid, sharp and angular movements for the sea witch).
- **Activity 2: Create a Choreographed Sequence (15 minutes)**
 - Each group creates a 16-count dance phrase inspired by their character or setting, incorporating at least two choreographic tools (e.g., use of levels and dynamics).
 - Groups rehearse their phrase, focusing on clarity, control, and expression.
 - Groups perform their sequences for the class.

4. Reflection and Analysis (15 minutes):

- After each group performs, have students discuss: "What did you notice about the movements? How did the group use the choreographic tools to show their character or setting?"
- Students write a brief reflection about what they learned from the ballet and their own choreography.

Assessment

- Creativity and collaboration in creating group choreography.
- Use of choreographic tools in the dance sequence.
- Ability to describe and interpret elements of dance during discussions and reflections.

Extensions

- **Discussion:** After the performances of State Street Ballet's *The Little Mermaid*, discuss how professional dancers use the elements of dance (body, energy, space, and time) to bring *The Little Mermaid* to life. Ask: "How did the dancers make you feel like you were under the sea? What choreographic tools did they use to show relationships between characters?"
- **Independent Choreography:** Have students create solo dances inspired by a favorite moment or character from the story.
- **Cross-Disciplinary Activity:** Write a script or create visual art representing an underwater scene, then choreograph a dance based on it.

Grade 6 Lesson Plan: Exploring Storytelling Through Dance

Duration: 60 minutes

Focus: Storytelling, advanced choreographic structures, and critical analysis of a professional ballet performance

Standards Addressed: California Arts Standards – Dance (Grade 6)

- *Creating:* 2.3 – Use choreographic structures (e.g., AB, ABA, canon, theme and variation) to create a dance sequence that communicates a theme.
- *Performing:* 5.3 – Perform with focus, expression, and attention to technical accuracy.
- *Responding:* 7.3 – Analyze and explain how elements of dance and choreographic structures are used to communicate meaning in a dance.

Objective: Students will analyze how a professional ballet uses dance to tell the story of *The Little Mermaid*, create and perform a group dance using choreographic structures, and critically evaluate the use of elements in both their own work and the professional performance.

Materials Needed

- Video clips or photos from the ballet company's performance of *The Little Mermaid*.
- Music from the ballet or instrumental pieces inspired by the ocean.
- Paper and pencils for choreographic notes and reflections.
- A large open space for movement.

Lesson Sequence

1. Introduction (10 minutes):

- **Hook:** Ask: "What makes a story memorable? How can movement, music, and choreography create a world like *The Little Mermaid*?"
- Show a video clip or photos from *The Little Mermaid* ballet.
 - Discuss: "What did you notice about how the dancers used space, levels, and timing to tell the story? How did the music enhance the mood?"
- Introduce basic storytelling techniques in the context of making a dance.

2. Warm-Up (10 minutes):

- Lead a warm-up focusing on choreographic tools and technical skills:
 - **Body:** Explore movements inspired by ocean creatures (e.g., swaying seaweed, leaping dolphins, sharp crab movements).
 - **Energy:** Alternate between smooth (gentle waves) and percussive (stormy sea) dynamics.
 - **Space:** Practice moving in straight, curved, and diagonal pathways.
 - **Time:** Experiment with slow, sustained movements (underwater calm) and quick, sharp movements (escaping danger).

3. Movement Exploration and Choreography (30 minutes):

- **Activity 1: Exploring Characters and Settings (10 minutes)**
 - Assign groups a character or setting from *The Little Mermaid* (e.g., sea witch, mermaid, underwater kingdom, stormy ocean).
 - Groups improvise movements inspired by their theme, focusing on how they can communicate emotion, action, or setting through dance.
 - Encourage groups to experiment with choreographic tools like levels, dynamics, and pathways.
- **Activity 2: Creating a Structured Dance (20 minutes)**
 - Each group selects a choreographic structure (AB, ABA, canon, or theme and variation) and creates a 16-count sequence based on their assigned theme.
 - Example: A group portraying the sea witch might use sharp, angular movements in a canon structure to show power and unpredictability.
 - Groups rehearse their sequences with attention to technical accuracy, expression, and storytelling and perform for the rest of the class.

4. Reflection and Analysis (10 minutes):

- After each performance, provide peer feedback: "What did the group do well? How did their choreographic structure enhance their storytelling?"
- Students write a short reflection on how they used choreographic structures and tools to convey their assigned theme or character.

Assessment

- Creativity and collaboration in group choreography.
- Effective use of choreographic structures to convey meaning.
- Clarity and expression in performance.
- Critical analysis and reflection during discussions and written responses.

Extensions

- **Discussion:** After the performances of State Street Ballet's *The Little Mermaid*, discuss how professional dancers use the elements of dance (body, energy, space, and time) to bring *The Little Mermaid* to life. Ask: "What choreographic structures or elements did you notice? How did they help tell the story?" Discuss how professional dancers use body, energy, space, and time to create an immersive experience.
- **Advanced Choreography:** Challenge students to add a narrative arc to their sequence, incorporating transitions between themes or characters.
- **Creative Writing:** Have students write a journal entry from their character's perspective and translate it into a solo dance.