



RICHMOND BALLET
THE STATE BALLET OF VIRGINIA



GISELLE

RICHMOND BALLET YOUTH PERFORMANCE

**EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE:
A TEACHER'S GUIDE WITH STUDENT ACTIVITIES**



RICHMOND BALLET

Richmond Ballet, The State Ballet of Virginia, is dedicated to the promotion, preservation, and continuing evolution of the art form of ballet. Richmond Ballet strives to keep meaningful works of dance alive and to produce and foster new works that remain true to these values.

Since its early days as a civic company in the 1950s through its emergence as a professional company in 1984 to today, Richmond Ballet, The State Ballet of Virginia, has flourished as a home for the past, present, and future of dance. Richmond Ballet boasts an expansive repertory that includes 19th- and 20th-century masterpieces as well as nearly 90 new ballets by contemporary choreographers. This commitment to innovation and excellence has earned Richmond Ballet appearances on renowned stages across the country and around the world—including the Charleston Gaillard Center in Charleston, Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts and The Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., The Joyce Theater in New York City, the Harris Theater in Chicago, the Royal Opera House’s Linbury Theatre in London, the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, and the Shanghai Grand Theatre in Shanghai.

Richmond Ballet aspires to help transform our world through the unique and special power of dance by training and presenting dancers of all ages as ultimate artist/athletes who inspire us by showing unlimited human potential. We will demonstrate the value of human life, the power of cooperation and mutual respect, the work ethic and discipline required to achieve anything truly meaningful, and the joy of an inclusive, compassionate community in everything we do.

THE MISSION OF RICHMOND BALLET IS TO AWAKEN, UPLIFT, AND UNITE HUMAN SPIRITS THROUGH THE POWER OF DANCE.

Youth Performances offer students the special opportunity to experience live ballet at the theatre alongside their classmates and teachers. When school groups arrive, the curtain is already raised, giving students a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the theatre in action. The production crew may be completing final preparations, and occasionally dancers can be seen onstage finishing a last rehearsal before the performance begins.

Before the ballet starts, students and teachers are reminded that they are about to take part in a live theatrical experience and that theatre etiquette plays an important role in supporting the performers. Scenery, lighting, and costumes work together to enhance the dancers’ artistry, and we are proud to perform with a full symphony orchestra. When the house lights dim and the curtain rises, our dancers bring the story to life, creating a memorable experience for everyone in the audience.

This guide is designed to support K–12 educators with activities and resources that make the performance engaging, interactive, and aligned with Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs). Inside, you’ll find background information, classroom activities, discussion prompts, and creative projects to help your students connect deeply with this timeless ballet.



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WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

ACT I: THE VILLAGE

Giselle is a classical ballet that tells the story of a kind-hearted village girl who loves to dance. Act I takes place in a joyful village during harvest season and opens with lively music, celebration, and energetic dancing.

Giselle falls in love with a young man named Albrecht, who presents himself as a villager. What she does not know is that Albrecht is actually a prince who is already promised to marry someone else. When the truth is revealed, the tone of the ballet shifts from lighthearted to more serious and emotional.

When Giselle finds out the truth, she is heartbroken. Overcome by sorrow, Giselle becomes very weak and collapses. The ballet uses expressive movement and music to convey this moment, without violence or frightening imagery. While some younger students may interpret Giselle's final moments as falling asleep or being ill, the story is meant to show the end of her life.

Please note: during Act I, a sword is visible and is part of the story and period costuming. It is a prop sword and is presented in a non-threatening, theatrical context.

While Act I begins with happiness and energy, it concludes on a quiet, emotional note, offering an opportunity for reflection and discussion with students about storytelling through movement, music, and emotion.





WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT? *continued*

ACT II – THE FOREST AT NIGHT (*students will only see Act I*)

After her life in the village ends, Giselle becomes one of the Wilis—mysterious, ghostly maidens who appear at night and are driven by the love of dance. The Wilis emerge at midnight and use their dancing to exhaust anyone who crosses their path.

Giselle, however, is different. She still carries love and compassion in her heart. When the Wilis turn their attention to Albrecht, Giselle steps in to protect him. She dances with him through the night, helping him endure until the first light of morning.

As the sun rises, the Wilis fade away. Giselle shares a final farewell with Albrecht, showing that love, forgiveness, and kindness are more powerful than anger or revenge.

CHARACTERS

- **Giselle:** Beloved village girl with a love for dancing.
- **Albrecht:** Nobleman disguised as a villager, Giselle's love interest.
- **Hilarion:** The gamekeeper who loves Giselle and seeks to protect her.
- **The Wilis:** Spirits of women betrayed in love





HISTORY OF GISELLE

Premiering in Paris in 1841, *Giselle* is a Romantic-era ballet that blends everyday village life with supernatural mystery. It tells the story of Giselle, a young peasant girl who loves to dance and falls in love with Albrecht, a nobleman disguised as a villager. When she learns of his betrayal, Giselle dies of heartbreak and joins the Wilis—ghostly women who were deceived in love. Yet, Giselle shows compassion even after death, protecting Albrecht from the vengeance of the Wilis.

ORIGINS & PREMIERE

- *Giselle* premiered on **June 28, 1841** at the Paris Opera Ballet.
- The ballet was choreographed by **Jean Coralli** and **Jules Perrot**, with music composed by Adolphe Adam.
- The story was written by **Théophile Gautier** and **Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges**, inspired by a poem by Heinrich Heine about the *Wilis*—spirits of betrayed young women who dance men to death.

CHOREOGRAPHER

Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot were the first to create the dances for *Giselle* in 1841 in Paris. They were part of the **Romantic era**, a time when artists wanted to tell emotional stories through music, dance, and poetry. Coralli was the official choreographer of the Paris Opera Ballet, while Perrot was known for his amazing ability to create dances that showed off a dancer's personality.

COMPOSER

Adolphe Adam wrote the music for *Giselle* in just a few weeks! He was a French composer who loved writing catchy melodies that made stories come alive on stage. His score for *Giselle* changes moods quickly—from happy village dances in Act I to spooky, mysterious sounds in Act II with the ghostly Wilis.

LEGACY

- Since 1841, *Giselle* has remained in the active repertoire of major ballet companies around the world.
- Many famous ballerinas—from Carlotta Grisi (the original Giselle) to modern stars like Natalia Osipova and Misty Copeland—have performed the role.
- It's often taught to students as both a technical and emotional cornerstone of ballet training.
- *Giselle* is considered the epitome of Romantic ballet:
 - It contrasts real life (Act I) with the supernatural (Act II).
 - It features themes of love, betrayal, forgiveness, and the afterlife.
- The role of Giselle is iconic for ballerinas—requiring both dramatic acting and ethereal technical dancing.
- It also highlights the use of **white tutus and corps de ballet formations**, which became a hallmark of the Romantic style.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

- A masterpiece of Romantic ballet, blending storytelling, music, and dance.
- Explores universal themes of love, betrayal, forgiveness, and redemption.
- Provides a rich entry point for cross-curricular learning in literature, history, music, and the arts.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

MAKING SOL CONNECTIONS

English / Language Arts

- K.9, 1.9, 2.9 → Story retelling & sequencing
- 3.5, 4.5 → Character, setting, and plot analysis
- 5.5, 6.5 → Compare/contrast themes and character motivations
- 7.5, 8.5 → Identifying universal themes (love, betrayal, forgiveness)
- 9.4, 10.4, 11.4, 12.4 → Analysis of literary elements in dramatic texts; symbolism

History & Social Science

- K.2, 1.2 → Past vs. present, traditions & cultures
- 2.1, 3.1 → Historical figures and cultural contributions
- World History I (WHI.7, WHI.8) → Medieval/Renaissance society (feudalism, class roles) for context of *Giselle*'s village
- World History II (WHII.6) → Romantic Era, 19th-century Europe
- Virginia & U.S. History (VUS.9) → Parallel 19th-century historical movements in arts and society

Fine Arts – Dance, Music, Theatre, Visual Arts

Dance:

- DA.1, DA.3, DA.5 (K–12 progression) → Movement, choreography, performance, critique
- DA.HS.II.4 → Analyze cultural/historical context of dance works (*Giselle* as Romantic ballet)

Music:

- MU.5, MU.7, MU.HS.II.4 → Responding to and analyzing music, connecting music to other disciplines

Theatre Arts:

- T.6, T.8, T.HS.II.3 → Character study, storytelling, emotional expression

Visual Arts:

- VA.2.12, VA.6.11, VA.HSII.5 → Design, costuming, scenery

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL, integrated through SOL connections)

- Collaboration, empathy, perspective-taking
- Reflecting on emotional choices and consequences (embedded in ELA & Fine Arts SOLs)

VOCABULARY

- **Ballet Blanc:** A style of ballet featuring white costumes and supernatural themes.
- **Pas de deux:** A duet between two dancers.
- **Corps de ballet:** The ensemble of dancers who often move in unison.
- **Romantic tutu:** A long, soft skirt typical of Romantic-era ballets.
- **Pantomime:** Expressing story and emotion through movement instead of words.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Student Activities

- *Giselle* invites students to think deeply about love, honesty, and forgiveness through movement, music, and storytelling. The following activities provide a framework for discussion and reflection before and after the performance.

Before You Come to the Theatre

- Classroom Activities
- Review Vocab, Summary & History of *Giselle*

After You Leave the Theatre

- Classroom Activities
- Send us your thoughts!

TEACHER TIPS: WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN ACT I

Encourage students to observe and discuss:

- How *Giselle* moves when she is happy or excited
- When the music sounds light and cheerful and when it feels different
- How the lights and scenery make the stage feel bright, calm, or serious



BEFORE YOU COME TO THE THEATRE

Pre-Performance Classroom Activities

GRADES K–2

Movement & Expression: Practice simple movements inspired by ballet—skipping, hopping, turning, and gentle jumps. Talk about how dancers use their bodies to show happiness, excitement, or feeling tired.

Listening Through Movement: Play instrumental music and ask students to move in ways that match the music’s mood (happy, calm, fast, or slow).

Theatre Readiness: Practice sitting quietly, watching carefully, and applauding at the end to prepare for a live performance.

GRADES 3–5

How Stories Are Told Without Words: Discuss how a story can be told through movement, facial expression, costumes, and music instead of speaking.

Character Observation: Ask students to watch how dancers show friendship, excitement, or concern using only their bodies.

Prediction Activity: Based on the setting (a village celebration) and the title *Giselle*, what kinds of characters or events might they expect to see?

GRADES 6–8

Character Choices: Discuss why someone might hide part of who they are. What problems can happen when people aren’t honest?

Live Performance Awareness: Talk about how watching a live performance is different from watching a movie or video.

GRADES 9–12

Romantic-Era Themes (No Plot Required): Introduce ideas often found in Romantic-era art—emotion, nature, imagination, and heightened feeling—and ask students to look for these elements in the performance.

Nonverbal Storytelling Analysis: How might choreography, music, lighting, and costume design guide the audience’s understanding of relationships and conflict?

SEL Connection: Discuss how strong emotions (joy, excitement, jealousy, or confusion) might be communicated without words and how audiences interpret those emotions.



AFTER YOU COME TO THE THEATRE

Post-Performance Classroom Activities

GRADES K–2

Art Response: Draw your favorite moment from the ballet.

Story Sequence: Fill in the boxes on the following page with words or drawings to show what happens in *Giselle*.

GRADES 3–5

Character Reflection:

- “Giselle seemed happiest when ____.”
- “One choice a character made that affected others was ____.”

GRADES 6–8

Character Analysis: How did Giselle, Albrecht, and Hilarion each show their emotions through movement?

Music & Mood: Choose one scene and describe how the music helped tell the story.

Writing Prompt: “If the dancers could speak during Act I, what do you think one character would say—and why?”

GRADES 9–12

Interpretive Analysis: Act I of *Giselle* centers on concealment, social roles, and truth. Examine how themes of honesty and identity are portrayed through movement rather than dialogue. How does the audience learn who holds power and who is vulnerable?

Comparative or Critical Thinking Prompts:

- Choose one character (Giselle, Albrecht, or Hilarion). How does the choreography shape the audience’s sympathy or judgment of that character? Would your interpretation change if the story were told through spoken words instead of dance? Why or why not?
- Identify a moment where the ensemble (not just the main characters) contributes to the storytelling. How does group movement reinforce social expectations, class structure, or community pressure in the village scene?

GISELLE STORY SEQUENCE

CHARACTERS	SETTING
BEGINNING	MIDDLE
END	YOUR FAVORITE PART



WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Richmond Ballet believes that a performance is a gift to the audience. Often when we receive a gift we write a thank you note. Our dancers, choreographers, designers and production staff have been rehearsing and working hard to make sure today's performance was just right. Tell us what you liked best. Who was your favorite character? Have you ever been to a ballet performance? Use the thought bubbles below to brainstorm some ideas.

What did you like about seeing Richmond Ballet?