

Teacher Guide

Cue Sheet

Shanghai Ballet *Giselle*

Monday, October 26, 2026
10:15am

Questions to ask students **BEFORE** the performance

- What makes ballet different from other types of dance? If you have not seen ballet before, what do you think makes it different?
- Do you know the story of *Giselle*?
- Just like tales from many cultures, *Giselle* includes supernatural spirits in its story. Why do you think ghost stories and mystical tales are so popular?

Questions to ask students **AFTER** the performance

- Why do you think Giselle chose to forgive Albrecht in the end?
- If you could change one part of the story, what would you change and why?
- How is storytelling through ballet different from storytelling in movies or books?



About the Performance

The ballet begins in a small village during a joyful harvest festival, where a young woman, Giselle, falls in love with Albrecht, a nobleman disguised as a peasant. Although he promises to marry her, Hilarion, a jealous gamekeeper, reveals that Albrecht is already engaged to Princess Bathilde. Overcome with heartbreak and betrayal, Giselle loses her mind and dies from a broken heart. Giselle's spirit joins the Wilis, the ghosts of young women abandoned by their lovers before their wedding days. Led by their queen, Myrtha, the Wilis seek revenge by forcing men who enter the forest to dance until they die from exhaustion.

When Hilarion and Albrecht each visit Giselle's grave, the Wilis surround them. Hilarion cannot escape their wrath, but Giselle's enduring love protects Albrecht from the same fate. As dawn breaks, the Wilis vanish, leaving Albrecht alone with sorrow and grief.

Shanghai Ballet performs *Giselle*, one of the most beloved ballets in the classical ballet repertoire, captivating audiences worldwide for generations. First performed in 1841, this romantic-era masterpiece tells a haunting story of love, betrayal, heartbreak, and forgiveness through breathtaking choreography, music, and emotional storytelling. Shanghai Ballet's *Giselle* invites audiences into a magical world where love and redemption endure beyond life itself.



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Vocabulary

balance (BAL-uhns) - steadiness and control while holding a pose or moving gracefully during a performance

betrayal (bih-TRAY-uhl) - breaking someone's trust or being disloyal

choreography (kor-ee-OG-ruh-fee) - the design and arrangement of dance movements

corps de ballet (kor duh bal-LAY) - a group of dancers who perform together as an ensemble in a ballet

deception (dee-SEP-shuhn) - the act of misleading or tricking someone

ensemble (AHN-sahm-buhl) - a group performing together in music, theater, or dance

ethereal (ih-THEER-ee-uhl) - delicate, light, or heavenly in appearance

harvest festival (HAR-vist FES-tuh-vuhl) - a celebration connected to gathering crops on farms

heartbreak (HART-brayk) - deep sadness caused by loss or disappointment, especially in love

maiden (MAY-duhn) - a young, unmarried woman or girl

mourning (MOR-ning) - expressing sadness after someone dies

nobility (noh-BIL-uh-tee) - people belonging to a high social class, such as princes or duchesses

peasant (PEZ-uhnt) - a poor farmer or worker from a lower social class

phantom (FAN-tuhm) - a ghost or spirit

pointe (point) - a ballet technique where dancers balance on the tips of their toes

revelation (rev-uh-LAY-shuhn) - an important truth or discovery becoming known

rhythm (RITH-uhm) - a repeated pattern of movement or sound, especially in music or dance

spirit (SPEER-it) - the soul, ghost, or inner feeling of a person

supernatural (soo-per-NACH-er-uhl) - beyond what can be explained by nature or science

tempo (TEM-poh) - the speed or pace of music

tragedy (TRAJ-uh-dee) - a very sad and serious event or story

vengeful (VENJ-fuhl) - wanting revenge or punishment against someone

willis (WIL-lees) - ghostly spirits of jilted brides in ballet folklore, who dance men to death at night



Additional Resources

Click here to learn more about Ballet Positions & Movements from the Kennedy Center.

Interactive PDF
Click here to visit link.

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Beyond the Show

Emotional Storytelling

Play the music from a classical ballet piece (The Battle from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* or Appalachian Spring by Aaron Copeland) and ask students to close their eyes and imagine what might be happening in the story. Encourage them to think about the setting, characters, emotions, and actions they hear in the music. Then place students in small groups and have them collaborate to create a short story inspired by the piece. Students may continue listening to the music as they write to help guide their ideas and creativity. After each group shares its story, discuss how tempo, rhythm, and dynamics create different moods and emotions in ballet. Did faster music suggest excitement, celebration, or danger? Did slower music create feelings of sadness, suspense, or anticipation?

Ballet Position Practice

Teach students a few simple ballet arm and foot positions using the slides and videos below. As students practice the movements, encourage them to focus on posture, balance, and graceful motion. After learning the positions, discuss how ballet dancers use movement, body language, and facial expressions to tell stories without speaking. Ask students to experiment with changing their movements to show different emotions such as happiness, fear, sadness, or excitement. How can a simple pose or movement help communicate a character's feelings or tell part of the story? The movement itself can actually help performers feel the emotions. Did any students begin to feel emotions during this exercise?

Click here for YouTube video

Dance the Story

Put students in small groups and assign each a scene from *Giselle*, such as the harvest festival, *Giselle* discovering Albrecht's secret, the Wilis dancing in the forest, or *Giselle* protecting Albrecht. Using only movement, gestures, and facial expressions, students work together to recreate their scene without speaking. Each group shows the others what they devised, and after each performance, the others guess which scene was performed and explain which clues helped them identify it.