

Ballet Class Activities

Ballet 1A, 1B, 2, and 3

Video Playlist: [Les Sylphides](#)

Orchestral Music: [Fête du Ballet](#) (Les Sylphides is tracks 11 to 18.)

White Ballet Moods

Not to be confused with the ballet La Sylphide (which is about a Scotsman who encounters a sylph), Les Sylphides is the first ballet we know of that was purely about mood and a certain quality of dance. There was no plot. Les Sylphides is a romantic “white ballet” set to music by Frédéric Chopin. This ballet is also sometimes entitled, Chopiniana.

Normally, we recommend ballet improvisation activities at the end of class. Today, however, begin your center portion of class with this activity so students can really understand the mood of the ballet for subsequent class activities.

Play music from the ballet and let your students listen to it. Next, let your students improvise (with ballet steps) to the music. Have them dance freely according to the mood they think the music embodies. Next, talk to them about how they chose to dance. What did they feel when they listened to the music? Was it happy, sad, serene? How did that impact their improvisation?

Next, tell your students Les Sylphides was the first ballet to be about a mood rather than a plot or story. Its characters are a poet and sylphs (which are similar to a spirit or fairy).

In a subsequent class, have your students repeat this activity to the same music. See if their improvisation changes based on the initial improvisation and discussion.

You can also repeat this activity with different music selections. Do the different selections evoke different moods and emotions to dance to?

Sylph Port de Bras

Continue (from The Little Mermaid, if you are going in order) to talk to your students about posture in ballet class. Do they remember how they should stand with correct ballet posture? What’s correct and what’s incorrect?

We can also use the image of a sylph as we talk about posture and port de bras in ballet. Have students stand with correct ballet posture as a sylph. Have them move through the different arm positions as a sylph. They should move smoothly and delicately like a fairy or spirit might. Go through head positions as well.

For older students who may be executing the side bend and twist exercise from Lesson 2, have them pretend their arms are the sylph wings as they place their hands on their shoulders. Have them imagine they are sylphs as they bend and twist.

Spinning Sylphs

When you work on spotting or pirouettes in your classes today, have your students hold their hands on their shoulders with their elbows to the side—as sylphs! In our port de bras, we may have imagined sylphs as moving in a fluid and ephemeral way. Now, we are going to move as spritely sylphs as we practice spotting and turning.

Note: Having your students try turning with their hands on their shoulders can help them to keep their shoulders more square and to not wind up or twist when turning. It can also help to build strength in the upper backs!

The Poet and the Sylphs

For grand allegro, the teacher plays the poet and the students are the sylphs. Choose various traveling steps for students to do across the floor for grand allegro. As the poet, tell your students what step they should be doing, and *how* they should be doing the step—what quality or mood should they convey as they dance. Are they quick, bright, and spritely sylphs for one step? How about peaceful, serene sylphs for another step?