

Ballet Revolution: The Influence of the Ballet Russes

1. Question & Research Task

When you think of ballet, do you think only of women in pink tutus, dancing on their toes? If so, prepared to be shocked by the Ballet Russes!

Founded in 1909 by Russian [impresario](#) Sergei Diaghilev, the Ballet Russes revolutionized the art of ballet. The company focused on collaboration between artists, dancers, composers, and choreographers to create spectacular works of art. The resulting performances were ground-breaking, exciting, and sometimes scandalous. In 1913, one ballet, [The Rite of Spring](#), shocked audience members so deeply, it [may](#) even have caused a [riot](#).

The Ballet Russes contributed to the prestige and popularity of ballet and helped to shape the modern art form. In this lesson, you will learn more about the Ballet Russes, and major figures from this movement, so you can understand its impact on today's ballet.



Click above to watch a scene from a 1987 revival of *The Rite of Spring*, using original costumes, sets, and choreography. Why might 1913 Parisians have been shocked by this performance?

Image Source: YouTube

In this Slam Dunk, you will conduct brief, focused research to respond to the inquiry question:

How did the development of the Ballet Russes influence the progression of ballet as an art form?

2. Information Sources

Learn more about the Ballet Russes by exploring the resources on this page.

- [Ballet Russes: Who made the Russian ballet world-famous?](#)
- [The Era of the Ballets Russes](#)
- [Timeline of the Ballet Russes](#)
- [Library of Congress: Ballets Russes Online Exhibit](#)
- [Modern Movement: How the Ballets Russes Revolutionized Dance](#) (with audio)
- [History of Ballet](#)

Major Figures and Artists from the Ballet Russes (more can be found [here](#)):

- [George Balanchine](#)
- [Sergei Diaghilev](#)
- [Michel Fokine](#)
- [Vaslav Nijinsky](#)
- [Bronislava Nijinska](#)
- [Igor Stravinsky](#)
- [Anna Pavlova](#)
- [Pablo Picasso](#)



Click above to watch “The Ballets Russes Inspires New Choreography in 21st Century” and learn more about how the Ballet Russes has influenced modern ballet.

Image Source: PBS NewsHour

* Digital Content can be access via the [Apps Portal](#). If you are prompted to log in to access a database or digital content links, your teacher/librarian can provide login information.

3. Student Activity

Step 1: Do your research

You will choose or be assigned a major figure/artist from the Ballet Russes. Research this artist's life, using the guiding questions on the attached [notes sheet](#). Pay special attention to this figure's role at the Ballet Russes.

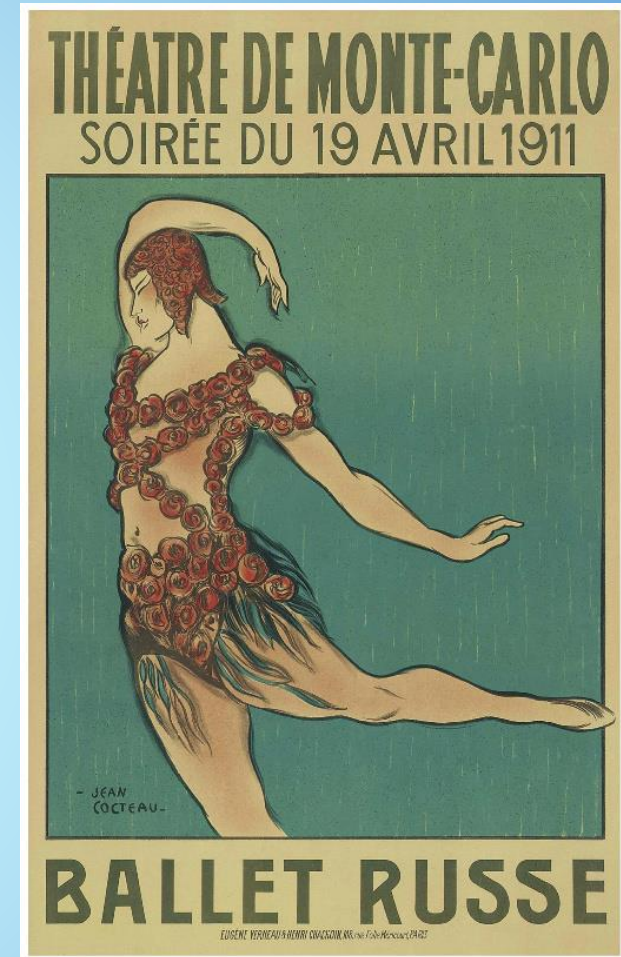
In addition to the sources listed on [Slide 2](#), you may use resources from the [BCPS Digital Content](#) or reputable online sources, such as periodicals, museums, or other educational sites.

Step 2: Time to Jigsaw

Join forces with your assigned group and share your findings. As you learn about additional figures from the Ballet Russes, add new information to your notes sheet.

By the end of this activity, you should have information on at least three collaborators from the Ballet Russes.

You will want to make note of the sources you have used in your research. Your teacher may ask you to use [MLA format](#).



A 1911 poster by Jean Cocteau, featuring Vaslav Nijinsky. The success of the Ballet Russes depended upon its many collaborators.

4. Assessment Activity

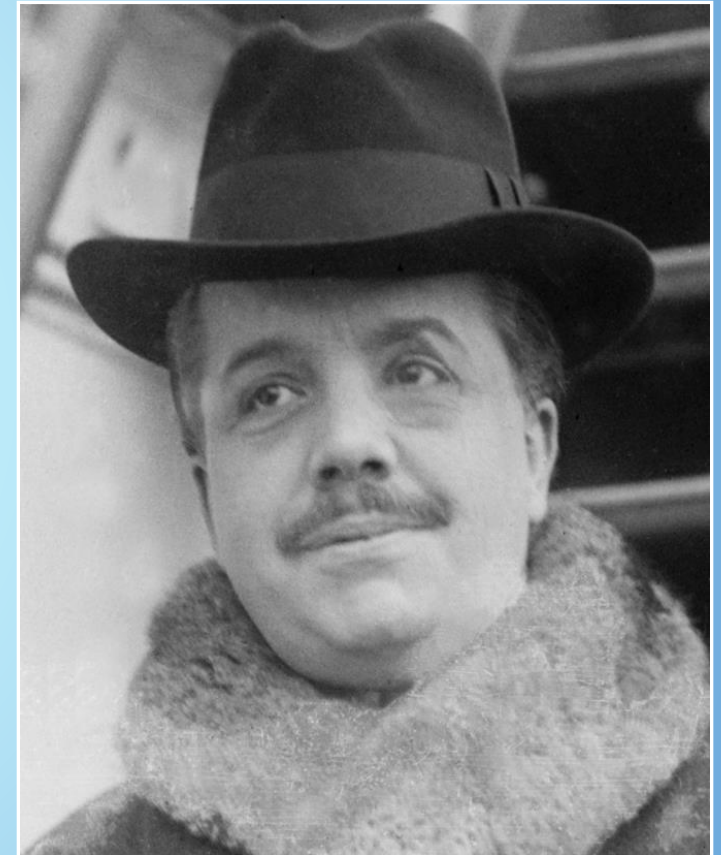
How did the development of the Ballet Russes influence the progression of ballet as an art form?

As a student of dance, you have been influenced by the progress and ideas of the Ballet Russes. Write a letter to Sergei Diaghilev (yes, he died in 1929--use your imagination), the founder of the Ballet Russes, thanking him for the impact his company has had on modern ballet. Use information from your research today and examples from class and your own life.

- [How to write a thank you note](#)
- [Thoughtful wording for a thank you note](#)
- [Personal Letters](#)

An effective response will:

- Be written in letter format and be at least three paragraphs long
- Make a strong claim about how the Ballet Russes influenced modern ballet
- Use evidence from your research and personal experience to support your claim
- Be well organized, with a clear beginning, middle, and end
- Follow proper CUPS (capitalization, usage, punctuation, and spelling)



Good work with the Ballet Russes, Sergei Diaghilev! Thank you!

5. Enrichment Activities

SLIDE NAVIGATION

[1](#)

[2](#)

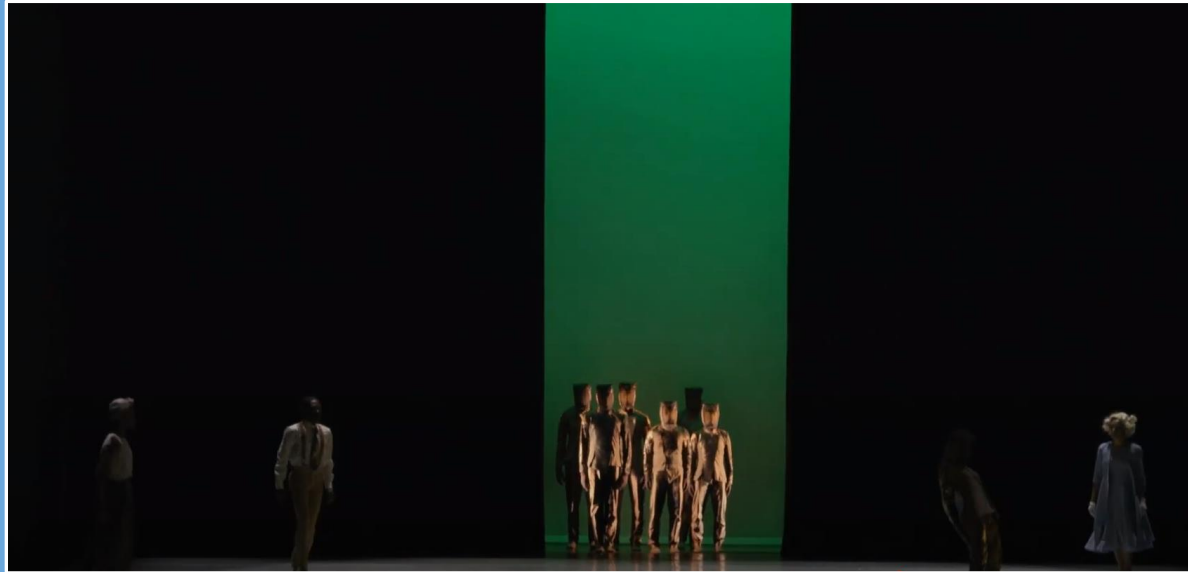
[3](#)

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Greenwood, choreographed by Donald Byrd, depicts the 1921 [Tulsa Race Massacre](#).

Image Source: [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre](#)

The direct influence of the Ballet Russes can be seen in the work of choreographers, dancers, and artists today. Many of these artists also use dance to explore social issues, create opportunities for [activism](#), and/or break [traditional](#) boundaries.

Use the links on this page to explore modern performances. Consider how these performances incorporate the revolutionary work of the Ballet Russes while taking their own groundbreaking steps. Take notes on what you observe and prepare to discuss with your class or post a discussion post on Schoology.

- [Urban Unrest](#) (Tommie-Waheed Evans)
- [Broken Wings](#) (Annabelle Lopez Ochoa)
- [City of Rain](#) (Camille A Brown)
- [Heatscape](#) (Justin Peck)
- [The Statement](#) (Crystal Pite) [trailer](#)

6. Teacher Resources

SLIDE NAVIGATION

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Learning Standards Alignment

Content Learning Standards

Maryland Fine Arts Standards for Dance

CREATING 2 – Organize and develop artistic ideas and work

CREATING 3 – Refine and complete artistic work.

PRESENTING 6 – Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy

Reading: 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Writing: 7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

AASL Standards Framework for Learners - Inquire: Build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems.

Think: Learners display curiosity and initiative by: I.A.2 Recalling prior and background knowledge as context for new meaning.

Create: Learners engage with new knowledge by following a process that includes: I.B.1 Using evidence to investigate questions. I.B.3 Generating products that illustrate learning.

Share: Learners adapt, communicate, and exchange learning products with others in a cycle that includes: I.C.1 Interacting with content presented by others.

Grow: Learners participate in an ongoing inquiry-based process by: I.D.2 Engaging in sustained inquiry.

ISTE Standards for Students:

3. Knowledge Constructor – 3d. Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.

Grade 9-12, Dance Unit 9: Ballet

Objective: Students will analyze information from multiple sources in order to evaluate the influence of the Ballet Russes on ballet.

Time Frame: 2-3 45 minute class periods

Notes to the teacher:

- Collaborate with your school library media specialist to plan and implement this lesson.
- Have students use learning supports provided in any BCPS-licensed Digital Content in the [Apps Portal](#) included in this lesson. Refer to [Digital Content Snapshots & Support resources](#) for guidance as needed.
- Consider [using the Schoology Assignment Apps feature](#) to assign Microsoft and Google documents and files for students to access, edit, and submit through Schoology.
- **Consider assigning figures and groups ahead of time so that each group has collaborators from different categories (ex: Composer, Choreographer, Dancer, Artist in each group). This could be particularly effective if groups were centered around a ballet that the different figures worked on together. Each group should have a person assigned to Sergei Diaghilev.**

Last updated: August 2022 Use this [form to report broken links](#) to BCPS Library Media Programs & Digital Resources 443-809-4035

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