**Purpose:** This CISM will work on critical thinking and analysis, while helping to understand the artistic “cycle” of ballet.

**Enduring Question:** Is historical preservation important to modern innovation?

**Essential Question:** Is ballet worth saving?

|  |
| --- |
| **ELACC11-12RI1:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. |
| **ELACC11-12RI2: Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.** |

**CCGPS:**

**Vocabulary: macabre, spectral, grimmer, epilogue, apogee, trivial, protean, melodramatic, junctures, dichotomizing.**

**Suggested Coding for: Is Ballet Dying? Sure, It’s died many times**

\*T- Threat \*H-Hopeful \*-Neutral (OR)

\*M=Much Impact \*L= Little Impact \*C=Cause \*E=Effect

**Materials:**

* The Article: *Is Ballet Dying? Sure, It’s died many times*
* Graphic Organizers: directed note taking guide, and writing assignment sheet.

Procedure

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Suggested Time | Teacher Will | Student will |
| 0-10 minutes | Facilitate discussion on the enduring question. | Breakup into small groups to discuss the question then come together for group discussion. |
| 10-20 | Teacher will front load the article’s vocabulary | Students will define the vocabulary terms either through context clues or searching for the words definition. This may be done via internet search, smart-phone, or dictionary. |
| 20-40 | Teacher will read the text and model the text coding through paragraph 6. After paragraph 6, teacher will read orally stopping at the bold subtitles to discuss coding.  *(Optional popcorn read with students)* | Students will take notes and mark coding. Stopping for group discussion on why they choose any given code.  *(students may practice fluency)* |
| 40-50 |  | Students will fill out their Directed- Note-Taking graphic organizer. |
| 50-55 |  | Students will create “I wonder questions” from the text. |
| 60-75 | Teacher will facilitate answering and discussion activities. \*Deposit/Withdrawal  \*The Lottery  \*Stand and Whip  \*Popcorn |  |
| 80 | Closing activity teacher will post a multiple choice question for the final group discussion | Students will choose the BEST possible answer and discuss. |
| 85 | Teacher will assign final responses | Take home for homework, or do as a warm-up next class. ` |

|  |
| --- |
| **Using the information from the text to support your answer, which of the following best describes the author’s purpose?**   1. **Ballet is an old and dead art form** 2. **The life of a ballet is dependent on a dancer who can dance it** 3. **Ballet is cyclical, with highs and lows, but will renew itself** 4. **Ballet is relevant only in the time it was created** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Extended Writing:**  RAFT Writing assignment:  Role: dance critic  Audience: producers  Format: Open Letter  Topic: How to revive interest in the classics | **Extended Writing**  **RAFT writing assignment**  **Role: dance critic**  **Audience: dancers**  **Format: Letter**  **Topic: the importance of finding new matter in classic choreography.** |
|  |  |

MAIN IDEAS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Main idea | Details |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Is Ballet Dying? Sure, It’s Died Many Times

Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Members of the Kirov performing an excerpt from “La Bayadère” at City Center in 2008.

By [ALASTAIR MACAULAY](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/m/alastair_macaulay/index.html?inline=nyt-per)

Each ballet dies with the fall of the curtain. Will it return to real life when next danced? Nobody can be sure. Some dances need occasional periods in cold storage; others — having forever passed their sell-by dates — carry on in some macabre afterlife onstage that feels spectral. For those of us who adored a work in its youth, which alternative is grimmer: never to see it again or to watch it acquire the lines of age and then become one of the dance dead or, worse, undead?

1

The famous [Shades scene](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-3uM_8Wsjg&feature=fvw) in Marius Petipa’s 1877 “Bayadère” is just one example. I loved this in many performances by the Royal Ballet in the 1970s and the Kirov Ballet in the 1980s. In the last 20 years, though, it has grown pale and gray as danced by those companies and others. I can applaud its general look, but the details that made it matter have been blurred out of recognition.

2

One of the keenest debates in dance right now has been about something larger: is ballet itself dead or dying? This we owe to the epilogue that Jennifer Homans, dance critic for The New Republic, has placed at the end of “Apollo’s Angels” (Random House), her welcome new history of ballet. (I am thanked in her acknowledgments, but I do not deserve it. Over five years ago, before we met, she sent me part of her chapter on British ballet for my comments, which were not, as I recall, generally complimentary.) “After years of trying to convince myself otherwise,” Ms. Homans writes, “I now feel sure that ballet is dying.”

3

When ballet makers retire or die, their whole repertories become endangered species. By 1992, George Balanchine’s [“Divertimento No. 15”](http://balanchine.com/content/site/ballets/22) — a ballet that had been the apogee of his purest classicism — seemed so trivial and small at City Ballet that I found it hard to recall what had moved me so greatly.

4

I have written this before, but it bears saying again: Ballet has died again and again over the centuries. The dances that Louis XIV and Voltaire and Pushkin cherished did not survive. We can smile at that now, because we know how ballet, phoenixlike, rose again from its ashes; how, protean, it changed its nature with each new era. But I did not smile when writing that 20 years ago. The deaths of Balanchine (1983) and Frederick Ashton (1988) gave my generation too much cause for mourning. Ballet had a beginning (in the Renaissance); it may well therefore have an end.

5

Ms. Homans’s epilogue is actually, for several reasons, the weakest part of her book. You can believe that the art form has died for an author who doesn’t even mention Alexei Ratmansky or Christopher Wheeldon: she’s living in the past. Yet her generalized charge that “contemporary choreography veers aimlessly from unimaginative imitation to strident innovation — usually in the form of gymnastic or melodramatic excess” sounds strangely like the complaints leveled at Balanchine (whom Ms. Homans admires at least as much as I do) in his lifetime by uncomprehending critics. That complaint, however, really doesn’t fit Mr. Ratmansky’s “Concerto DSCH” (2008) or “Seven Sonatas” (2009).

6

Very remarkably, the best parts of “Apollo’s Angels” are the most difficult areas for any dance historian — the years before 1890, from which so few dances survive in repertory. I have spent enough time in the archives researching ballet between 1670 and 1850 to be amazed by the fresh material that Ms. Homans has brought to light, and by the piercing intelligence with which she has refreshed whole topics. She writes of the past with not only thought but feeling too: you sense her heart in it, not least in her marvelous sense of how ballet at many junctures was revitalized by pioneering women.

7

There are, it should be noted, errors and omissions. (Odile in the 1895 “Swan Lake” was not dressed as a “black swan.” An account of Ashton that omits his enduring pure-dance masterpieces “Les Patineurs,” “Scènes de Ballet” and “Monotones” is simply misleading.) More problematic, however, is a tendency toward hyperbole.

8

Ms. Homans writes that “Louis XIV and Marius Petipa would have appreciated” the classical nature of Balanchine’s choreography. Would they indeed? Picture Louis XIV and Petipa watching “The Four Temperaments” and you may question Ms. Homans’s judgment. She writes that “a basic attention to form” was something in which the superlative Bolshoi dancer Vladimir Vassiliev “had no interest.” This is poppycock; it makes no sense to anyone who has seen Vassiliev dance “Don Quixote” or “Giselle,” and it misunderstands his achievement in “Spartacus.”

9a

9b

In a book that inclines to this kind of exaggeration, an epilogue arguing that ballet is dead arrives simply as one more overstatement. Yes, in the period after Balanchine, Ashton and other great choreographers, we are living through an often dark era of ballet. There were times in the 1990s when I too felt the art form was essentially dead. But since I began this job almost four years ago, I’ve seen performances of Balanchine’s “Divertimento No. 15” at City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet and (best of all) Miami City Ballet that confounded the misery I had felt about that work in 1992.

10

Ashton told me in 1988 that his “Symphonic Variations” was “dead,” a view with which I concurred. But he added that “the right dancer” might bring it back to life: this has happened in more than one company, but above all in recent performances at Covent Garden by Alina Cojocaru. I know New Yorkers who attended City Ballet in Balanchine’s lifetime for whom the young ballerina Sara Mearns exerts a compelling fascination they have not felt since Suzanne Farrell and Kyra Nichols. David Hallberg at American Ballet Theater seems to be taking male classical dancing to fresh peaks. And many, many people who lived through the Balanchine-Ashton era feel that Mr. Ratmansky’s choreography gives cause for more than hope.

11

Perhaps a later history will view all these as the final gutterings of a spent flame. This is no golden age, and several of its ballets are indeed dead. My own main alarm about ballet — not one that troubles Ms. Homans — is that its dependence on pointwork for women and partnering by men proposes a dichotomizing view of the sexes that is at best outmoded and at worst repellently sexist. Nevertheless, this balletgoer testifies that the scene feels brighter than it did 10, 15 or 20 years ago.

12