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# LESSON PLANS FOR FIREBIRD

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In October of 2025, famed ballerina Misty Copeland announced her retirement from the American Ballet Theatre after 25 years as a principal dancer. Her dedication and talent have inspired hundreds to follow in her footsteps. Copeland was only the second Black female soloist in the 75-year history of the ABT. Her first role as a principal was in the ballet Firebird and inspired her to write the book.

## Music

### Stravinsky

Igor Stravinsky, a Russian composer, wrote the orchestral music for the ballet Firebird in 1910. That means this ballet has been performed for over 100 years! Luckily for us, we can find Stravinsky's music almost anywhere streaming is available.

Play a few of his pieces for your students (especially the Rite of Spring which caused a near riot when it was first performed!) and ask them some questions such as:

1. How does this song make you feel?
2. If you close your eyes, what do you see?
3. What kind of instruments do you think the orchestra used?



## Gross Motor

### Ballet moves

Ballet, a style of dance, takes an immense amount of time and energy. Ballet dancers spend hours every day stretching, learning, and rehearsing various pieces. But every dancer had to start somewhere, right? Now your class can too! Check out this Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre article: [Basic Ballet Positions with Pictures - Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre](#)





## Math

### Patterned Dance Moves

Dance is full of all kinds of math. Ballerinas have to count beats and steps and keep time with the music, all while performing complex moves with grace and dignity. Encourage your young dancers to start their own performance journey with simple patterns that are both fun and secretly teach math at the same time! Try these patterns and see if the children can follow your lead:

1. Twirl – jump – twirl – jump – twirl – jump
2. Clap – clap – spin – clap – clap – spin
3. Bounce – bounce – hop – hop – bounce – bounce – hop – hop

To extend the activity, invite a child to create their own pattern and lead the class!

## Science

### Move Your Body

After learning some of the basic ballet positions listed above, talk to your students about how bodies are truly amazing things! Ask them what parts of our bodies do we use to dance? How are we able to control our bodies?

Add a big mirror to your classroom (if you don't already have one) that allows the children to see themselves as they try the different ballet positions. Show them the skeleton images down below and ask them the following open-ended questions:

1. “Arms help us \_\_.”
2. “Legs help us \_\_.”
3. “Feet help us \_\_.”

## Literacy

### Misty Reads FIREBIRD

Here is a link to a [Netflix Jr. video](#) in which Misty Copeland reads her book, *Firebird*. You can also find it by typing “Misty Copeland reads Firebird” into the search bar.

Print off the ballet pictures (above) that feature the dancers in various beginning ballet poses. While your class practices the poses throughout the week, be sure to use the terminology in order to encourage vocabulary acquisition!

## Art

### Firebird Art

**FIREBIRD** is filled with beautiful artwork with glorious bold colors. Gather paint, paper, paintbrushes, water, glue, and feathers and allow your students to create their own version of the firebird!



# Dramatic Play and/or Blocks

## Scarves and Stage Building

This activity works for either your Dramatic Play or Blocks center, depending on which is more flexible.

Work with your students to build a small stage where they can practice their dance moves. If accessible, place a large mirror nearby so the children can see themselves, just like the ballet dancers do! Add scarves and/or bits of fabric for added dancing flair.

# Social Emotional

## Growth, Persistence, Confidence

*Firebird* by Misty Copeland isn't just about dancing! It's also about building ourselves and others up and creating an atmosphere of support and confidence. Misty had to work very hard to become a principal dancer and that drive and dedication is something to aspire to.

Here is an excellent article on ways to instill persistence in your young child, backed by research! [How to Not Give Up: On Building Persistence in Young Children - Institute of Child Psychology](#) Great for sending out to parents, this short yet informative article gives caregivers tangible ways to foster a love of trying hard things.

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