

Center Dance Ensemble
Presents

Frances Smith Cohen's
SNOW QUEEN

Study Guide



THE COMPANY

Center Dance Ensemble was created in 1988 by Frances Smith Cohen and the Herberger Theater Center as its resident modern dance company. Forty dancers auditioned and nine were given salary positions with the company. The company is responsible for 4 major performance runs at Herberger during the season as well as 30 weeks of rehearsal. CDE's purpose is to bring highly-skilled professional modern dance to its audiences and to create exciting and accessible programs.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

Hans Christian Andersen, author of **THE SNOW QUEEN**, was born on April 2, 1805, in Odense, a small town in Denmark. His father, a shoemaker spent many evenings reading to his son from his favorite books. He also made toys, paper cutouts, and a puppet theatre for him. As a boy, Andersen spent most of his time dreaming, reading and making up plays for his puppet stage. At age fourteen, he traveled to Copenhagen to pursue a career in acting after a fortuneteller predicted that he would become famous and that Odense would one day be illuminated in his honor.

After three bleak years, several rejections, and a brief stint with the Royal Theatre, Andersen decided he needed an education and returned to grammar school at age seventeen. He eventually gained admission to Copenhagen University where he developed a love of writing and after a time was able to publish some of his stories. After completing his education, he began to travel. He continued his writing and remained an untiring world traveler until he died at age seventy. Andersen became famous for his fairy tales and stories and in 1867 he was made honorary citizen of Odense, and the town was illuminated in his honor, just as the fortune teller had predicted.



THE STORY

(TO BE READ PRIOR TO DANCE PERFORMANCE)

In a country far away there lives a Snow Queen whose heart is frozen with evil. One day while admiring herself in the mirror she realizes she is getting older. The woman smashes the mirror and thousands of tiny ice slivers cascade towards a faraway village.

Meanwhile in the village, all the dancers are having a wonderful time at the Autumn Festival. Among them are Kai and Gerta. Kai gives Gerta a beautiful rose and they declare their love and friendship to one another. At that moment, the ice slivers from the Snow Queen's mirror fill the air. One sliver lodges in Kai's eye and one in his heart.

Kai does not know what has happened to him for all of his love is gone and his heart feels frozen. Suddenly the Snow Queen appears and entices Kai to go with her to the Ice Palace. She promises she will be his friend forever.

Everyone searches for Kai. Gerta worries because she feels the chill of the Snow Queen's presence. She sets off to find him and wanders deep into the forest. Out of the mists of the trees a beautiful spirit appears to Gerta. It is the Spirit of the Rose. She tells Gerta the only way to defeat the Snow Queen is with the power of love and the rose that Kai gave her at the Festival has that power and when the time is right she will know how to use it. Gerta continues her search.

Suddenly she comes upon a wondrous place – a summer cottage filled with flowers unaffected by the wintry air all around it. It is the home of the Enchantress, a lonely witch, who invites Gerta into her garden. Wanting Gerta to stay, the Enchantress combs her hair and all memories of Kai, her friends, her home vanish. Gerta has no memory of her former life. One night, Gerta dreams of Kai and the Spirit of the Rose. She remembers her quest and runs back into the forest to continue her search.

Wandering deeper and deeper into the dark forest, Gerta becomes lost. The snow animals try to comfort her, but to no avail. Suddenly from out of the depths of the trees, robbers appear. Confronting Gerta they demand her valuables including the pouch she is wearing. The pouch has the rose petals in it and she refuses to give it up. She cries and tells them of her search. The robbers are so moved by her devotion to Kai they agree to help for they know exactly where the Ice Palace is and their hatred for the Snow Queen is strong.



The Snow Queen decides to keep Kai forever in her icy kingdom even though he begs to go home. She pretends to let him go but she knows the Snow Beastie will stop him from escaping.

Inside the palace, the Snow Queen has frozen Kai to keep him young forever. Gerta and the robbers interrupt the Snow Queen as she dances with her Icicle Guards. Gerta melts the evil guards by throwing her rose petals, but she uses them all and has none left to release Kai from his frozen cage. Not knowing what to do, she starts to cry. Her tears miraculously melt the ice slivers, returning Kai to his real self. Their love is saved and all dance happily ever after.

PERFORMANCE GUIDELINES

Review with students the appropriate behavior for attending a live performance.

The program you are about to is live. Those are real people you will see on stage, and they depend on you for success. Unlike a film or television audience, the performers are very aware of the audience and they play off the energy the audience sends out. Your attention, laughter, and your applause inspire the dancers to give a good performance. While it is true that a “good” audience cannot turn a bad show into an excellent one, it is true that a “rude” audience or even just a few rude audience members may ruin a good show for everyone.

Listening is very important. If you talk to each other during the performance or say things to the dancers, others in the audience will not be able to enjoy the show or the dancers may lose their concentration. There is no instant replay in dance theatre. If you don't hear or see something the first time, there will be no second chance.



Applause is the way a theatre audience shows appreciation, along with careful listening and viewing. You applaud or laugh whenever something happens on stage that you like. You applaud the dancers at the end of each dance and when they take their “Curtain Call” (when the dancers come out on stage and bow).

It is normal theatre practice for the lights to dim and then go out when the performance is about to begin and sometimes between scenes. This is your signal to remain quiet and focus your attention on the stage.

If dance theatre is a new experience for you and you enjoy it, remember that there are many dance groups in your city who would love to have you attend their performances.

MODERN DANCE

Over 100 years old, modern dance is an American phenomenon. It is not surprising that it is nurtured in the United States where freedom of expression is cherished. Modern dance was a revolution against the traditions of classical ballet, which was an expression of European nobility. While ballet vocabulary is based on prescribed steps and positions, the individual choreographer creates the modern dance vocabulary. Early pioneers who experimented with new moves not only explored political and social issues but delved into the human emotional experiences. Today's modern choreographers struggle to bring audiences into their space – the stage, and communicate their ideas through their movement techniques.

Defining modern dance is very difficult because it encompasses freedom of expression with no boundaries. “Good” modern dance creates an environment of movement that communicates the choreographer’s intent. It becomes an art form when it has a beginning, middle and an end. It is created” it is not an accidental happening. Modern dance choreographers’ works are as varied and different from each other as humans are varied and different. This difference creates the magic and the mystery of modern dance.

QUESTIONS:

1. Where did modern dance originate?
2. What prompted the creation of a new form of dance?
3. Who creates the modern dance vocabulary?
4. What themes does modern dance address?
5. What makes modern dance an art form?



TRAINING OF MODERN DANCERS

When the body becomes the instrument for performance, as in any professional physical activity, it must be trained in a very vigorous way. Dancers spend at least ten years stretching and strengthening their muscles before they reach high efficiency. They are called upon to leap, turn, fall, jump and run in all sorts of ways. They must have incredible stamina. A professional modern dancer takes at least a 1 ½ hour class every day, usually alternating a modern class and ballet class.

No matter what style of class the dancer takes, the work emphasizes the same things – slow beginning, large muscle warm-ups, back, thighs, legs, reaching and stretching and upper torso bending exercises. The modern class begins many of its warm-ups and stretches sitting on the floor, while the ballet class starts at the barre, using it for balance control. As the class progresses, quicker movements are added with more complicated sequencing and increased air and floor moves. By the end of class the dancer works into large jumps and leaps, but only after the muscles are completely warmed up.

Questions:

1. Dance requires rigorous physical training. Name some other activities or professions that require such intense training.
2. Name the benefits gained from rigorous training. (ex: stamina)
3. How are modern dance and ballet classes similar?



VOCABULARY

Ballet: Classic theatrical dance having specific prescribed movements, positions and steps.

Barre: A waist-high wooden or metal pole, well-secured, 2” to 4” in diameter, which the ballet dancers hold onto for, balance.

Choreography: The art of planning and organizing movements into a finished dance.

Creative Movement: Dance activity with emphasis on personal discovery and the original movement: with the intent to express, communicate and enjoy.

Dance Movement: Organized in time, space and energy for the purpose of expression, communication and personal satisfaction.

Flexibility: Ability of the muscles to lengthen, allowing a full range of movement without injury.

Modern Dance: Concert dance having a limitless range of styles, developed in the twentieth century.

Style: A distinctive or characteristic manner of performing.

Technique: Basic physical methods used by dancers.

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LOOKING AT DANCE

When people dance they move their bodies to express ideas or emotion, usually in **RHYTHM**. Sometimes people dance for rituals and sometimes for fun. Watch almost any dance very closely and you will see **PATTERNS** of movements.

Look and listen for the following things while you are watching **SNOW QUEEN**.

THEME

Many dancers have a specific theme, which is enhanced by the movements, accompaniment, costume and props. Sometimes the actual dance movements can tell a story, perhaps a legend, folk-tale or myth. **SNOW QUEEN** is such a dance, because it tells a well-known story by Hans Christian Andersen. The movements may be very gestural, using the hands and face to communicate information. Where you are able to follow the story by watching the dancers? Did knowing the story before attending the performance help you understand what was happening on the stage?

SPACE

Do the dancers use the whole space of the stage or stay in one place? Do they dance close together or far apart? Are they in a neat arrangement or scattered around the place?

BODY POSITIONS

Are the dancers keeping their bodies low to the ground? Do they keep one part of the body still while moving others? Do they leap in the air? Do they change their bodies to look like something else, like an animal?

BEAT or RHYTHM

Watch how the dancers start and stop exactly on the beat. Do they repeat any movements to the rhythm you hear? Look for patterns.

ACCOMPANIMENT

Accompaniment for dance usually refers to music made by playing musical instruments or song from the human voice. Generally, the accompaniment is expected to complement dance in terms of rhythm and style (energy, quality, spatial design, etc.). For music, **SNOW QUEEN** uses Prokofiev's "Stone Flower" and bits from Prokofiev's "Cinderella". Did the music fit the dance and the theme of the story? Do you feel that it complimented the dance in terms of rhythm and style?

COSTUME

Costume refers to what the dancer is wearing. Usually the costume helps to symbolize the theme of the dance. The color, texture, shape, length, type of material and size of each individual part of the costume strengthens the meaning of the dance. Another level of understanding the dance may become apparent by studying the costume. Do parts of the dancer's costumes seem to dance too? What do the costumes in **SNOW QUEEN** tell you about the story?

PROPS OR OBJECTS

Props are usually items that are held in the dancer's hands or are distinctly apart from the costume. Props can emphasize and symbolize the meaning of the dance. Do the dancers in **SNOW QUEEN** use any objects? How do they move these objects?

ENERGY

Are the dancers moving fast or slow, or do they change speeds? Are they moving calmly or wildly? Are their movements controlled or very loose?

DANCE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

BE A CHOREOGRAPHER

A CHOREOGRAPHER is someone who invents dances and works with the dancers to make their ideas come to life. They are responsible for everything seen in a dance performance. With you class, try to write a list of everything the choreographer would have to do to create the dance you see.

IMAGINE A DANCE OF YOUR OWN

Play a song of your choice and close your eyes. Imagine the dance that might go along with the music. How many people would be in your dance? What story would they tell with movements? What costumes would they wear? Draw a picture or write the story of your dance.

INVENT A "MOVEMENT PHRASE"

Write down 8 different movements in a row on a piece of paper. Examples: "raise my right arm" or "stomp my left foot". Then do all 8 movements in the order you wrote them down. Hide your paper and see if you can remember and do all 8. Try to do them to the beat of music. Remember, this is what dancers do! Memorize movements and perform them onstage for you! Share your movements with your class. Can everyone else do them?

EXPLORE DANCE AS COMMUNICATION

Dance is a non-verbal language. Discuss dance as a way to communicate an idea, a theme and a plot. Pantomime movements imitating different emotions, different characters or different animals. Discuss ways we communicate non-verbally on a daily basis.

DANCE A POEM

Divide into teams of two. Read a poem or story and create movement that represents the mood, rhythm, or the style of the piece, then perform the piece for the class. Use Haiku (Japanese verse form), African proverbs or Native American folktales.

VISUALIZE

Use your imagination to visualize how you would design or create the make-up, costumes, lights, props, and sets to enhance the poem or story. Sketch your ideas as a designer would do before actually creating these things.

CREATE A DANCE

Think about your family, your school, your neighborhood, or your community. What would you like to celebrate or communicate about them? Create a dance that tells a story from your perspective about what it is like being a member of one of those groups.