



CANADA'S ROYAL
WINNIPEG BALLET

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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

THE HANDMAID'S TALE

STUDENT MATINEE
Study Guide

PRESENTED BY THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE
JANUARY 22, 2015



David Moroni & Christine Hennessy PHOTO: Martha Swope



PHOTO: Harold K. White

About Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet

Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farrally founded Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet School nearly 75 years ago. The two women met when Lloyd was running a dance school in Leeds, England and Farrally was her student. They both immigrated to Canada in 1938, and settled in Winnipeg. There they offered dance classes to the community – starting out with only six students in their first year. Word quickly spread, however, and by year two their enrolment had grown and they were able to establish the "Winnipeg Ballet Club." By 1943, The Winnipeg Ballet was formed with all of its dancers coming from the Club. Six years later, the Company officially became a not-for-profit cultural institution. In 1951, the Company was invited to perform for then Princess Elizabeth during her visit to Winnipeg, just prior to her becoming Queen of England. Following her coronation in 1953, she bestowed The Winnipeg Ballet's "Royal" designation.

Between the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (RWB) School's two divisions of study, there is a place for virtually every type of dance student: from preschoolers to adults, those new to dance and those aspiring to become professional dancers.



PHOTO: Michelle Blais

Preparing to see the ballet

This booklet is designed to enhance the experience of attending Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet performance of *The Handmaid's Tale*, based on the novel by Margaret Atwood. The activities and information included are organized in a sequence to help students prepare, understand, enjoy, and respond to their experience with the performance.

DURING THE PERFORMANCE: Enjoy the ballet! As part of the audience, your attendance is as essential to the ballet performance as the dancers themselves. Prior to arriving at the theatre, discuss proper audience etiquette using the keywords below. These steps will help students handle their feelings and enthusiasm appropriately. It is also very important to arrive on time or even early for the performance in order to allow enough time to settle in and focus on the performance.

CONCENTRATION: Always sit still and watch in a quiet, concentrated way. This supports the dancers so that they can do their best work on stage.

QUIET: Auditoriums are designed to carry sound so that the performers can be heard, which also means that any sound in the audience (whispering, laughing, rustling papers or speaking) can be heard by dancers and other audience members. Your movement or checking your phone and texting disrupts the performance for everyone, so always ensure that phones and other electronic devices are turned off during the entire performance.

RESPECT: By watching quietly and attentively you show respect for the dancers. The dancers show respect for you (the audience) and for the art of dance by doing their very best work.

APPRECIATION: Do clap at the end of a dance (when there is a pause in the music) if you feel like showing your appreciation.

At Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet, our mandate is:

"To enrich the human experience by teaching, creating and performing outstanding dance."

Whether touring the world's stages, visiting schools, offering rigorous dance classes for all experience levels, or performing at Ballet in the Park each summer, the RWB consistently delivers world class dance and instruction to the citizens of Winnipeg and far beyond. Find out more about us at rwb.org.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE: Process and respond to the performance by engaging in class discussions or writing a letter to the RWB. We love to get feedback from our student groups. Write to:

Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet School: 380 Graham Avenue Winnipeg MB Canada R3C 4K2
rwb.org |  @RWBallet |  @RWBallet |  /RWBallet

About ballet

The First Ballet

In 16th century France and Italy, royalty competed to have the most splendid court. Monarchs would search for and employ the best poets, musicians and artists. It was also during this time that dancing became increasingly theatrical. This form of entertainment, also called the ballet de court (court ballet), featured elaborate scenery and lavish costumes, plus a series of processions, poetic speeches, music and dancing. Le ballet comique de la reine, is the first known ballet. Performed in 1581 at the French court by the Queen of France (and her ladies), it was presented in honour of her sister's wedding.

The Sun King

In the 17th century, the popularity and development of ballet could be attributed to King Louis XIV of France. He took dancing very seriously and trained daily with his dance master, Pierre Beauchamp. One of the King's famous roles was "The Rising Sun" which led him to become known as the "Sun King." King Louis also set up the Académie Royale de Danse (Royal Academy of Dance) in 1661, where, for the first time, steps were arranged, systemized and recorded by Beauchamp. These are the same steps that have been handed down through centuries, and which now form the basis of today's classical ballet style.

The First Professional Dancers

Ballets were initially performed at the Royal Court, but in 1669, King Louis opened the first opera house in Paris. Ballet was first viewed publicly in the theatre as part of the opera. The first opera featuring ballet, entitled Pomone, included dances created by Beauchamp. Women participated in ballets at court, but were not seen in the theatre until 1681. Soon, as the number of performances increased,

courtiers who danced for a hobby gave way to professional dancers who trained longer and harder. The physical movement of the first professional dancers was severely hindered by their lavish and weighty costumes and headpieces. They also wore dancing shoes with tiny heels, which made it rather difficult to dance with pointed toes.

Revealing Feet and Ankles



Early in the 18th century in Paris, the ballerina Marie Camargo shocked audiences by shortening her skirts to just above the ankle. She did this to be freer in her movements and to allow the audience to see her intricate footwork and complex jumps, which often rivaled those of the men. Ballet companies were now being set up all over France to train dancers for the opera.

The first official ballet company was based at the Paris Opera and opened in 1713.

The Pointe Shoe

By 1830, ballet as a theatrical art form truly came into its own. Influenced by the Romantic era – an artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that emphasized nature and validated strong emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience - ballet took on a whole new look. The ballerina ruled supreme. Female dancers now wore calf-length, white, bell-shaped tulle skirts. To enhance the image of the ballerina as light and ethereal, the pointe shoe was introduced, enabling women to dance on the tips of their toes.



PHOTO: Marie Trickett

The life of a dancer

The career of a dancer is relatively short and it is not unusual to spend more years training than dancing professionally. As in Olympic-level sport, the movements demanded of the human body in ballet are very specific and require great precision and care. For that reason, the physique must be prepared for a professional ballet career at a young age.

The professional training period usually consists of at least seven years of intensive, precise work. Ideally, girls and boys should begin their professional training by age ten. Training is a very progressive process. The young professional student begins with daily classes, practicing the basic ballet positions and movements, learning body placement and how to move through the space with balance and artistry. As the student progresses, time spent in classes each week increases, as do the difficulty and extensiveness of the skills taught. In addition to daily class in classical technique, students also receive instruction in variation (solo) work, pointe (dancing on the toes), pas de deux (a dance for two), character (ethnic), jazz and modern dance.

Prior to the introduction of pointe work, a number of criteria must be considered. These include the amount of previous training, a dancer's strength and ability, as well as age as it relates to the bone development in the dancer's feet. Pas de deux and repertoire (the collection of different ballets a dance company performs) are introduced only when the student has adequate strength, ability and training.

Students who graduate to a professional ballet company usually begin dancing as a member of the corps de ballet (ensemble). After a few years, corps de ballet members whose artistry, technical ability, musicality and ability to communicate with the audience set them apart may be promoted to first or second soloist. Finally, the highest achievement in the company, the position of principal dancer or ballerina, is attainable by only a few select dancers.



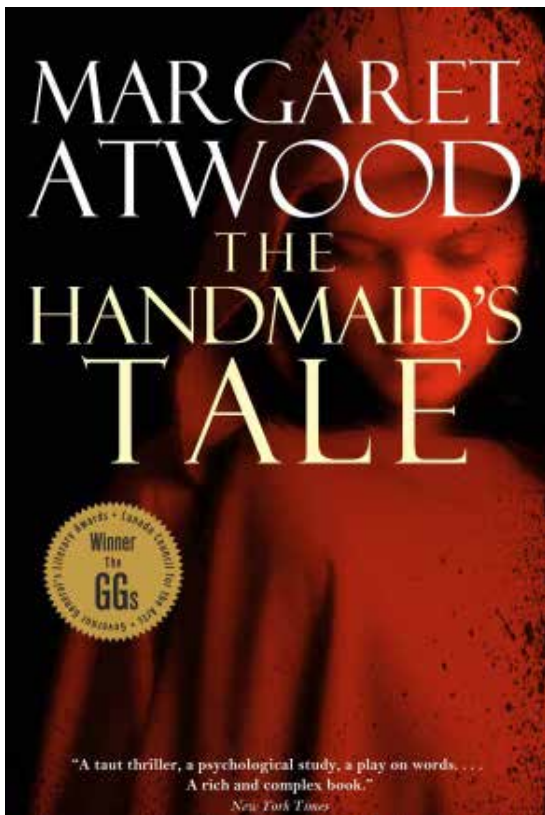
Did you know? Ballet puts a lot of wear on a dancer's shoes. Some dancers need to get new shoes every week!

Do a search for images of ballet dancers throughout the ages. Can you notice the differences in costumes over time?

What do most dancers wear today?



PHOTO: Bruce Monk



The Handmaid's Tale

Based on the novel by Margaret Atwood
 Choreography Lila York
 Music James McMillan, Arvo Pärt, and others
 Costume Design Liz Vandal
 Scenic Design Clifton Taylor
 Associate Scenic Design Anshuman Bhatia
 Lighting Design Clifton Taylor & Anshuman Bhatia
 Projections Design Sean Nieuwenhuis
 Duration: 1 hour and 50 minutes including intermission

Synopsis & characters

About the Novel

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1986 and has sold over ten million copies. In addition, it has been translated into many languages and has not been out of print since its initial publication. In Canada print and e-book editions are available from McClelland & Stewart and Seal Books. In the United States print and e-book editions are available from Anchor Books.

"The most poetically satisfying and intense of all Atwood's novels ..."

- Macleans Magazine

About the Ballet

The Handmaid's Tale is a ballet interpretation of Margaret Atwood's prophetic novel portraying a future society where human rights - and women's rights in particular - have been abolished. Following a staged terrorist attack that sees the deaths of nearly all elected officials in Washington, the United States is subject to a coup by a fundamentalist religious faction of the military. They replace the liberal democratic infrastructure of the U.S. with a theocratic dictatorship named The Republic of Gilead and institute a rigid social hierarchy. Owing to radiation poisoning and subsequent low fertility, women of childbearing age who have committed any infraction of the new laws can be enslaved to the families of the upper echelon as surrogate mothers, or Handmaids. They are sent to an indoctrination center, known informally as the Red Center for the red habits the Handmaids are compelled to wear. Here they are instructed by Aunts, the only women in Gilead who are permitted the right to read, then sent on to the homes of Commanders. Each Handmaid has three chances to produce a baby. Failure means exile to the Midwest (the colonies) to clean up nuclear waste or a life of prostitution as a Jezebel to the military elites. In Gilead, abortion is outlawed and any physician found to have performed one is hanged. As in George Orwell's *1984*, Gilead is perpetually at war, the press consists of controlled propaganda, and the young are indoctrinated into compliance. And, as in all repressive societies, there is a resistance movement in Gilead, called May Day, named for the day of the planned overthrow of the regime.

Characters

This is the story of one Handmaid, known as Offred – literally “of Fred”- for the military commander she is assigned to; her best friend, the indomitable Moira, a woman both fearless and reckless and embodying a clear counterpoint to the cautious Offred; the Commander and his wife, Serena Joy, a well-known gospel singer in “the time before” whose career was terminated after the coup; and their chauffeur, Nick, who may or may not be a member of the Resistance. Welcome to Gilead.



Characters in the ballet

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

- OFFRED: a Handmaid
- MOIRA: Offred's best friend
- COMMANDER
- SERENA JOY: The Commander's Wife
- NICK: The Chauffeur
- LUKE: Offred's Husband
- AUNT LYDIA: Head Handmaid

ENSEMBLE

- WIVES:
- HANDMAIDS
- THE EYES
- THE RESISTANCE



? Did you know?

Atwood is known for both the quality and the quantity of her writing. She has published novels, shorts stories, poems, and works of literary criticism.

? Did you know?

The word 'ballet' refers to a specific dance technique that has evolved over the last 350 years.

? Did you know?

A choreographer is a person who arranges the steps and creates dances. The word "choreography" first appeared in the American English dictionary in 1950. Previously phrases such as "dances staged by" or "dances by" were used to denote the choreographer.

Jo-Ann Sundermeier, Alexander Gamayunov, and Julian Brandt Photography

Biographies



Lila York, Choreographer for The Handmaid's Tale

Lila York danced with the Paul Taylor Dance Company for twelve years, appearing in over 60 works. Since 1990 she has choreographed works for Birmingham Royal Ballet, the Royal Danish Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, Boston Ballet, Norwegian National Ballet, Houston Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Scottish Ballet, Washington Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, Tulsa Ballet, Atlanta Ballet, Milwaukee Ballet, Ballet West, Colorado Ballet, Louisville Ballet, Ballet Memphis, Kansas City Ballet, Dayton Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, Orlando Ballet, American Repertory Ballet, Connecticut Ballet Theatre, The David Parsons Company, The Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, and The Juilliard Dance Ensemble. She is currently working on a new work for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. In addition, Ms. York has staged Paul Taylor's ballets worldwide and directed a program for the production of new choreography at Pacific Northwest Ballet. She graduated from Skidmore College with a degree in English literature.



Margaret Atwood, Author of The Handmaid's Tale

Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa and grew up in northern Ontario and Quebec, and Toronto. She received her undergraduate degree from Victoria College at the University of Toronto and her master's degree from Radcliffe College.

Margaret Atwood is the author of more than forty volumes of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction and is perhaps best known for her novels, which include *The Handmaid's Tale* (1983), *The Robber Bride* (1994), and *Alias Grace* (1996). *The Blind Assassin*, won the 2000 Booker Prize, and in April 2003, her eleventh novel, the Man Booker Prize nominated *Oryx and Crake* was released to great acclaim. More recent publications include a collection of short stories, *Moral Disorder* and the poetic collection, *The Door*, nominated for a 2007 Governor General's Literary Award. Ms. Atwood's CBC Massey Lecture Series, *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (2008) was adapted for the screen in 2012. Her new novel, *MaddAddam*, is forthcoming this fall.

Ms. Atwood's work has been published in more than thirty languages, including Farsi, Japanese, Turkish, Finnish, Korean, Icelandic and Estonian. Throughout her career, Margaret Atwood has received numerous awards and honorary degrees. Margaret Atwood lives in Toronto with writer Graeme Gibson.

Classroom Activities

Activity Finding humour in dystopia

Incorporating humour into tragic literature is a skill possessed by some of the world's greatest authors. Shakespeare could not help but to add a wry twist to desperate actions, and forced at least a small smile in the midst of heinous circumstances.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, one might think there was no cause for laughter at any point. In some sections, however, the reader can spot an instance where life adds a bit of jest in a simple turn of events with the author's sense of humor peeking through the dark story.

Find a section within the book that could be considered humorous. Using your own words, compose a limerick that would illustrate (from the narrator's point of view) the particular part in this section that made you smile or laugh.

Using words or phrases from the text is allowed. Feel free to compose more than one stanza if you are so inclined.

Activity The significance of colour

Atwood relies heavily on using certain images which appear as motifs (themes) throughout the text. One central motif is the colour **red**. References to red dominate the story and the red motif underlines how ideas are interlinked and interdependent. The colour acts as an extended metaphor throughout the novel.

1. Look carefully at the full description of Offred's uniform on page 18. What do you think is the reason for the shape of her uniform and what is the significance of the colour?

2. Make a list of the characters in the book and then identify which colour of clothes each group has to wear. Determine the role of these characters in the social order of Gilead and see if there is any significance in the colour they have been assigned. Don't forget to look at the characters seen at Jezebel's.

3. As you read the book, keep a log of any significant references to the colour red. Why does Atwood use this colour so often? How does it add to your understanding of the story?

Creating a new ballet production

How would you tell a story without using any words?

It is exciting to think that this production of *The Handmaid's Tale* is brand new. The performance you will be seeing is the World Premiere! New York-based choreographer, Lila York, created this performance specifically for dancers from Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Ms York and her team brought together all of their skills as dancers, musicians, composers, designers and technicians, then shared their ideas and created the performance you will see on stage!

What if you were part of that team?

Choose a specific moment or scene from *The Handmaid's Tale*, divide into the following groups and have each group present their ideas based on the following questions:

DANCE / MOVEMENT: Think of the different characters in the story. How might each character (or group of characters) move differently from one another? Where would you place the characters on stage? Close together? Far apart? What forms of dance might work well for this scene? Remember that the audience's eyes are drawn to movement on stage. Where should the audience members be looking during each part of the scene?

MUSIC: Often the music gives us the first clues about the scene. How should the audience feel in this scene? What kind of music might elicit that feeling? Should it be loud or soft? Fast or slow? Many instruments playing at once, or only one, or a few? Is there a specific moment that should be highlighted by music or sound? How could you draw attention to that moment using music? Music forms the basic structure of each ballet. The dancers time each of their movements to and are interpreters of the music.

COSTUME DESIGN: Keeping in mind that when you are designing for a dance performance, the clothing each performer wears needs to accommodate his/her full range of movement on stage. What silhouettes would be appropriate for each character? Think of overall shapes: should the character seem large or small? What colours and fabrics would you use for their costumes? What are important costume pieces for this specific scene? How could you show that characters are in the same or different groups?

SCENIC DESIGN: Where does the scene take place? What is the mood at this moment or how does the mood change throughout the scene? What colours and textures would help convey that mood? Do you want to make the set as realistic as possible or do you want to give a general impression or feeling of place and time? What materials might you use to make your setting? Will there be different levels (stairs, platforms, etc.) for the performers to use?



Share your ideas together as a class!

- Pair two groups together and collaborate on their ideas, finding compromises between their ideas to create one vision. Regroup with the class and share these new ideas.
- Try staging some of these ideas.
- Break off into pairs or singles and have students choose a new story or scene to work on as a more in-depth project.



PHOTO: Bruce Monk

Like all live productions, each ballet performance only happens once. It is a combination of the performers on stage and the audiences in front of them that make each performance unique.

For this reason, it is in the audience's best interest to be visibly and audibly attentive and appreciative – the better the audience, the better the performance on stage will be.

Let us know what you think!



ANDRÉ LEWIS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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