

Once Upon A Ballet™

DANCE CURRICULUM

Once Upon A Ballet Level 2 (ages 4 to 5)

Please note that this curriculum provides a guideline for what students learn throughout the year. They should not all be expected to complete all steps at the beginning of the year. Rather, it is what they should have mastery of by the end of the academic year, before they move on to the next level. Once Upon A Ballet Level 2 is designed for pre-kindergarteners.

BASIC CONCEPTS

The attention span and communication skills of a 4 year old will be noticeably more advanced than that of a 3 year old. The same goes for a 5 year old, relative to a 4 year old. For some 4 year olds, and even 5 year olds, this may still be their first classroom experience. Four and 5 year olds are still working on concepts such as following directions, taking turns, and sharing. They are also continuing to progress in their physical coordination and self-awareness.

For 4 to 5 year old classes, we recommend 45-50 minutes once a week.

CIRCLE TIME

Flex and Pointe

In a seated position with the legs stretched straight in front of them, students should be able to flex and point their feet while moving through their ankle joint. It may be difficult for many students at this age to sit up with their backs entirely straight. Including this exercise in class each week will help them develop strength and flexibility in the backs as well as their feet and ankles. Once Upon A Ballet Level 2 students may use their arms to help them sit up straight. Going through the demi pointe should be introduced in the next level. Flex and pointe combinations may point both feet together at the same time, alternate feet, or include some fun with tickling and wiggling the toes.

Stretch Forward

Students should be able to sit with their legs stretched straight in front of them and stretch forward over their legs. Using an image such as painting a color down the legs all the way to the toes makes stretching more fun for students of this age, as well as helps with kinesthetic development (learning through feeling).

Hide and Seek

Students should begin sitting tall with their legs and feet stretched in front of them, arms in demi seconde with fingertips lightly touching the floor. They should curl into a ball, pulling their knees to their chest and wrapping their arms around their legs. They should then sit back up tall, with their legs and feet stretched in front of them and their arms in demi seconde. This exercise strengthens the abdominal muscles. It can also reinforce dynamics when done in either a slow, fluid motion or a quick, sharp motion.

Turning Out

In a seated position with the legs stretched straight in front of them with feet either flexed or pointed, students should be able to turn their legs out and back to parallel. Be sure students are turning their legs out at the hips. Once Upon A Ballet Level 2 students may use their arms to help them sit with straight backs.

Butterfly Stretch

Students should be able to sit in a butterfly position, with the soles of their feet together and knees out. This position will help to open the hips for future turnout, but should not be forced. It will also build strength and flexibility in the back as students sit up straight. It will also build strength in their torso as they rock side to side as they "fly". Please note that it bouncing is no longer an accepted method of stretching. Do not have students bounce their knees up and down to "fly".

Port de Bras

In a standing or criss-cross, seated position, dancers should be able to move their arms in both quick, sharp movements and slower, fluid movements.

Clapping and Rhythm

While sitting in a criss-cross position during circle time, is an excellent time to work on musicality and rhythm with activities that involve clapping and/or simple musical instruments (like tambourines, shakers, and rhythm sticks).

Flying Fairies/Little Swims

Students should be able to lay on their tummies, raise their arms and legs a couple of inches off the floor, and hold the position with their arms and legs stretched long. For a more advanced version, have students a “swimming” motion by alternating which arms and legs are higher and lower. Their faces should be lifted just off the floor as well, but still facing the floor.

Mermaid Stretch

For a gentle back stretch, students should be able to lay on their tummies with their legs stretched straight on the floor behind them, and raise themselves up on their elbows. They should be able to turn their head from side to side while in this position. We do not recommend a full “cobra” position at this age because students do not yet have the cognitive ability and body awareness needed to perform the full stretch correctly, with the shoulders down and the tummy engaged to protect the lower back. This version of the mermaid stretch engages the upper back, helping to develop correct ballet poise and posture.

Center Stretch with Legs in Second

In a seated position, with the legs in a wide second, students should be able to walk their fingers forward to stretch and then back to recover to a seated position. Knees should remain facing the ceiling the entire time. Students should also be able to flex and point their feet while in this position.

CENTRE BARRE

At this level, we do not recommend using an actual barre. The steps and combinations are not so difficult and complex that a barre is needed. Centre barre helps students develop better posture and balance early on. Students are also not tempted to hang on the barre like a jungle gym or gymnastics barre. In fact, if you have a classroom in which you only teach up through age 6, we recommend leaving the barres out of the room in order to take the temptation of hanging on the barre out completely.

Posture

At this age, posture will be something students work on during Centre Barre and other portions of class. Students should be able to stand tall, with their necks long and heads held high. An effective image to give students is that they are wearing beautiful tiaras and necklaces. Ask them how they would stand to show off their tiaras and necklaces and they will almost always correct their posture. Ask them to show off a beautiful pair of earrings and they will almost always drop their shoulders.

Feet Positions

For most Once Upon A Ballet Level 2 students (4 years old), most exercises will be done with “slight” turnout. This means their 1st position should make about a 45 degree angle. For older pre-ballet students (ages 5 and older), most exercises will be done in a “natural” 1st or 2nd position. For most children, this means their 1st position should make somewhere between a 45 and 90 degree angle. Students should turn out properly from the hips, keeping their knees over their toes, and retaining correct posture (for example, not swaying the lower back). They will still use parallel at times. When standing in parallel, their ankles and legs should be together. Keeping the legs together will help strengthen the inner thighs, which will help students develop the strength needed for proper turnout.

Arm Positions

Hands will be placed on the shoulders during most of centre barre at this age, but may also be placed on the hips. When placed on the shoulders, students should have good posture and the elbows should remain lifted and directly side (where the hands are placed on the shoulders and the elbows are directly side, think of the slave’s variation in Le Corsaire). Please note, keeping the hands on the shoulders with the elbows lifted does require a bit of strength. For students unused to this position, please work up to using it more and more frequently. Hands may be placed on the hips in the meantime. When standing with the hands on the hips, the thumbs should be at the back of the waist and the other four fingers should be at the front of the waist. Elbows should be directly side. This encourages the students to stand with a straight back. Demi seconde may also be used, although usually during traveling exercises. When skirts are worn, they may be held so that the arms are in a demi seconde position. Skirts should be held between the thumb and middle finger to promote the correct shape of the hands for ballet. Elbows should face directly side in this position. En bas, 1st, 2nd and 5th positions are most often used during port de bras exercises.

Demi Plié

Students should be able to do a simple demi plié in a slight-V or natural 1st and 2nd position while keeping their heels on the floor, backs straight, and elbows directly side with the hands on the shoulders, the hips, or holding the skirt.

Battement Tendu

From a slight-V or natural 1st position, students should be able to tendu with correct posture and hands on the shoulders, the hips or holding the skirt. Once Upon A Ballet Level 2 students should be able to tendu front. Once students have been introduced to tendu from the natural 1st position, they should also be introduced to varying speeds.

Relevé and Bourrée Turn

Students should be able to rise in parallel and either a slight-V 1st position. Once they have mastered this, a demi plié may be added before the rise so that students go directly from demi plié to relevé. Simple bourrée turns should be done in parallel. Spotting should be introduced at this level. Hands should be placed on the shoulders to help keep the shoulders down.

Battement Piqué

The main purpose of battement piqué for this age group is balance. This step should be performed from parallel or a slight-V or natural 1st position (depending on students' readiness), with the hands on the hips or shoulders. Introduce it as a tendu front, "tap" (piqué), and close. Progressively add "taps" throughout the year until the step would be tendu, "tap" 6 times, close. Later, say "piqué" in place of "tap".

Passé

For Once Upon A Ballet Level 2 students, passé should be done in parallel with the hands on the hips. In this age group, we recommend holding the hands on the hips and not the shoulders when performing passé to help keep the hips level. The big toe of the lifted leg should "kiss" the side of the knee of the standing leg.

Sways

Students should be able to sway from side to side and front to back with slight turnout. At this level, we introduce a chassé into the sways combination (sway, sway, chassé, sway).

CENTRE

At this level, we recommend students learn jumps with the hands on the shoulders in order to strengthen the back and torso and improve posture while jumping.

Sautés

Students should be able to do a simple sauté in parallel, keeping the legs together while in the air. They should also be able to do a simple sauté in a natural 1st and 2nd position. At this level, regardless of the position, sautés should be most often be done as plié-jump-plié-stretch, plié-jump-plié-stretch, etc. This helps the students better develop proper turnout and posture.

Échappés

Once students have been introduced to sautés, they may also be introduced to échappés in either in parallel or with slight turnout (depending on whether or not they are using turnout in pliés yet). When teaching students to échappé, we recommend doing so similar to sautés: plié / jump / land in 2nd position plié / stretch / plié / jump / land in 1st position plié / stretch.

Combination Jumps

Once students have grasped the single sauté and échappé, simple combinations may be used. Incorporating clapping and simple musical instruments (like tambourines, shakers, and rhythm sticks) to develop rhythm is encouraged.

Spring Points and Spring Heels

Once the preparation for battement soutenu has been introduced in centre barre and can be done with correct turnout and posture, spring points and spring heels may be introduced. Students should begin standing in a natural 1st position with their hands on their hips or shoulders, or holding their skirts. They should plié then spring to a tendu front en fondu (foot pointed or flexed, depending on whether spring points or spring heels are being done), then spring back to 1st position plié. Once this has been mastered, students may alternate spring points or spring heels right and left, right and left, etc.

TRAVELING STEPS

Unless otherwise noted, hands may be placed on the hips or shoulders, or arms may be in demi seconde or holding the skirt for all traveling steps.

Walks (with stretched feet)

Students should be able to walk with correct ballet posture by stretching the leg and pointing the foot before stepping on it. The student's chin should be lifted. It should not be dropped so that the student is looking at her/his feet. This exercise can be broken down to "point and step, point and step, etc."

Walks and Runs (en demi pointe)

Students should be able to walk and run high on their demi pointes (as if they are wearing mom's high heels, not as if they are wearing pointe shoes and en pointe). Arms will vary depending on the class theme. Walks and runs are also introduced on the diagonal in this level.

Passé Walks

Passé walks should be done in parallel. Students should step, passé, step, passé, etc. Passé walks help students with keeping their knees high in marches. (While passé walks are essentially the same movement as marches, the accent is placed on lifting the knee rather than stepping down). Passé walks also help with pointing the toes before stepping in walks with stretched feet. They help with skips too (because skips are basically passé walks with a hop). Passé walks may be done en demi pointe for added difficulty.

Marches

Similar to passé walks, marches should be done in parallel, going through the parallel passé position. Marches should be done with a stronger accent on the step down. They are also generally done more quickly than passé walks. Hands are usually placed on the hips for marches.

Skating

Skating serves as a preparation for chassés. Students should be able to "skate" across the floor in a similar motion they would if they were roller skating or ice skating.

Gallops (sideways)

Gallops should be done from side to side, with natural turnout. Hands may be placed on the hips or shoulders, or arms may be in demi seconde or holding the skirt. For additional help with gallops, students may step side to side (step-close, step-close, etc.) with natural turnout.

Skips (forward)

Students should be able to skip across the room. For this age group, we also introduce skipping on the diagonal. For classes/students who have difficulty with skips, we recommend giving plenty of practice with passé walks and marches. Breaking down the skip as step-passé-hop, step-passé-hop, may also be helpful to students. Holding a student's hand and slowly skipping with them while saying "step, passé, hop!" then progressing to a "step, hop!" can also be helpful to students as they can see, here and in a sense feel the step with their teacher beside them.

Pony Prances

Pony prances are parallel emboites in low attitude devant.

STORY DANCING

Story Dancing

Story dancing is important in that it helps to prepare students for performing. Each month, students should learn a short dance that incorporates the steps they are currently working on in class. The dance should tell a story. We recommend this being a dance the students show parents during parent observation time. At this age, we recommend the teacher and/or assistants transition away from performing the dance with the students.

FREE DANCING

Free Dancing

Free dancing is important for several reasons. It is important in the development of expression and creativity. Additional concepts can be incorporated into free dancing, such as musicality, dynamics, spatial awareness, and shapes. Other steps students are learning, such as skips, gallops, walks and runs, can also be incorporated into free dancing.

REVERENCE

Port de Bras

Students should be able to stand in 1st position and complete a simple 1st and 2nd port de bras. We consider 1st port de bras to be bringing the arms from en bas, to 1st position, to 2nd position, to en bas. We consider 2nd port de bras to be bringing the arms from en bas, to 1st position, to 5th position, opening to 2nd position, to en bas. At this age, the purpose of learning port de bras is to learn the arm positions and to have good posture. At this age, we begin to focus more on the quality of the hands. You can have students hold tissues or small scarves between their thumb and middle finger in each hand to help students grasp the correct shape of the hands and the quality of the arm movements.

Curtsy or Bow

For a "curtsy" at this age group, we recommend starting in a natural 1st position, pointing one foot into a tendu devant, then doing a demi pli  on the standing leg with a slight bow of the head. Arms are in demi seconde or holding the skirt. For a bow, we recommend a slight bend at the hips while standing in parallel with the hands on the hips.