

Focus Question:

Who was Maria Tallchief, and why is she an important figure in ballet?

Book Summary

Text Type: Nonfiction/Biography

Ballet is very popular all around the world, but in the mid-twentieth century, the best ballerinas were only from Europe. One Native American woman changed all that. *Maria Tallchief: Prima Ballerina* tells the story of Elizabeth Marie Tall Chief, the first American ballerina to become an internationally renowned principal ballet dancer. The story of an interesting woman and beautiful photographs will keep students engaged in this biography while also giving them a chance to summarize the text and determine the authors' point of view.

The book and lesson are also available for levels O and U.



Lesson Essentials

Instructional Focus

- ☐ Summarize to understand text
- ☐ Determine the authors' point of view
- ☐ Describe information provided by the table of contents
- ☐ Recognize and use compound sentences
- ☐ Identify and use homographs in sentences

Materials

- ☐ Book: *Maria Tallchief: Prima Ballerina* (copy for each student)
- ☐ Summarize, compound sentences, homographs worksheets
- ☐ Discussion cards
- ☐ Book quiz
- ☐ Retelling rubric

Vocabulary

Boldface vocabulary words also appear in a pre-made lesson for this title on VocabularyA-Z.com.

• Words to Know

Story critical: *ballet* (n.), *choreographer* (n.), *company* (n.), *grace* (n.), *inspiration* (n.), *reservation* (n.)

Enrichment: *elegant* (adj.), *preserving* (n.), *stereotypes* (n.)

- **Academic vocabulary:** *became* (v.), *create* (v.), *lesson* (n.), *role* (n.), *source* (n.), *study* (v.)

Guiding the Reading

Before Reading

Build Background

- Show students a clip from a ballet. Ask them to share anything they know about this kind of dancing, and lead a class discussion to engage students' prior knowledge.
- Write the name Maria Tallchief on the board. Ask students what they know about this famous ballerina, and write any facts on the board. Explain that students will be reading her biography today to learn more about this important American.

Introduce the Book

- Give students their copy of *Maria Tallchief: Prima Ballerina*. Guide them to the front and back covers and read the title. Have students discuss what they see on the covers. Encourage them to offer ideas as to what type of book it is (genre, text type, and so on) and what it might be about.
- Show students the title page. Discuss the information on the page (title of book, authors' names).

Introduce the Reading Strategy: Summarize

Explain to students that engaged readers summarize, or create a brief overview, as they read. Ask students to preview the book, looking at photographs, captions, and other text features. Explain to students that when readers summarize what they read it helps them remember information in one section or the whole book. Point out that a summary often answers the questions *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why*. Write these question words on the board. Have students work with a partner to read "A National Treasure" (page 4). Invite partners to share the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* of that section. Record this information on the board under the corresponding headings.

Guiding the Reading (cont.)

Introduce the Comprehension Skill:

Author's point of view

- Explain to students that when an author writes about a topic he or she often expresses his or her attitude and opinion about the subject. Point out that this is called the *author's point of view*. Share with students that the author's point of view is often expressed through his or her purpose for writing: to inform, to persuade, or to entertain the reader. Point out that, although an author's purpose when writing a nonfiction book is usually to inform, we can often infer how the author feels about the topic from the details included in the book.
- Explain to students that as they read the book they will be looking for details that reveal the authors' point of view on the life of Maria Tallchief.

Vocabulary

Have students turn to the "Words to Know" box on the copyright page. Discuss each word with students. Then, have students turn to the glossary on page 16. Explain that the glossary provides definitions for the vocabulary words in the book. Point out the use of each content word and academic vocabulary word in the book, and then use each word in a different model sentence. Have students work in groups to create posters for these words. Have them include on each poster the word and its part of speech, the definition, the word in an example sentence, and a picture illustrating the meaning of the word.

Set the Purpose

- Have students read to find out more about Maria Tallchief and why she is an important figure in ballet. Write the Focus Question on the board. Invite students to look for evidence in the book to support their answer.
- Have students make a small question mark in their book beside any word they do not understand or cannot pronounce. These can be addressed in a future discussion.

During Reading

Text-Dependent Questions

As students read the book, monitor their understanding with the following questions. Encourage students to support their answers by citing evidence from the book.

- *Why was Maria Tallchief awarded the National Medal of Arts?* (level 1) page 4
- *Why did Maria's family move to Los Angeles?* (level 1) page 6
- *How did Bronislava Nijinska impact Maria's future ballet career?* (level 3) page 7
- *Why did Maria move to New York after she graduated?* (level 3) page 8

- *How did working with George Balanchine lead Maria to be a prima ballerina?* (level 2) pages 9–10
- *What did Maria do after she retired from ballet?* (level 2) pages 13–14
- *How did Maria leave her mark on the world of ballet?* (level 3) multiple pages
- *Why does the author think we should remember Maria?* (level 3) multiple pages

Text Features: Table of contents

Explain that the table of contents is a list of the sections in a book. Point out that it can be used to find information quickly and is located at the front of the book. Have students turn to page 3 of the book. Ask students what they can expect to learn about the life of Maria Tallchief on the basis of the table of contents. Have students work with a partner to predict what information each section might contain. Ask students: *How does the table of contents help you create a summary of the book? In which section might you learn about Maria as a star? On what page does this section begin? Which section tells you more information about Maria's teaching career?* Continue to ask students about information from the table of contents and on which pages they will find the information.

Skill Review

- Review how to summarize with students. Have students turn to page 5 and reread the section "Early Years." Have students work with a partner to list the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* from the section. Then have students create a short oral summary using this information. Invite volunteers to share their summary with the class.
- Model how to complete the [summarize worksheet](#).
- Review with students that an author of a nonfiction book often expresses his or her point of view about a topic. Have students turn to page 15 and reread the last section.
- Model identifying the authors' point of view. *Think-aloud: I know that an author includes details in his or her writing that reflect his or her beliefs or feelings about a topic. When I read, I look for details that the author includes to make a point about the topic. For example, on page 15, the authors wrote: "Her grace, talent, and achievement helped move the world of ballet forward." This sentence tells me the authors' point of view on Maria and her impact on ballet. I can tell the two authors of this book admire and respect Maria, and that they believe she is an important person to study. I will look for other phrases and key words throughout the book that indicate the authors' point of view.*
- Have students work with a partner to reread different sections of the book and look for examples of the authors' point of view. Invite partners to share their findings with the class.

Guiding the Reading (cont.)

After Reading

Ask students what words, if any, they marked in their book. Use this opportunity to model how they can read these words using decoding strategies and context clues.

Skill Review

Graphic Organizer: Summarize

Review the summarize worksheet that students completed. Have students share their work in groups. Invite volunteers to share with the rest of the class the details they chose and how they used those details to create a summary for the book.

Comprehension Extension

Discussion cards covering comprehension skills and strategies not explicitly taught with the book are provided for extension activities.

Response to Focus Question

Have students cite specific evidence from the book to answer the Focus Question. (Answers will vary. Sample: *Maria Tallchief was a famous Native American ballerina in the twentieth century. She was the first American prima ballerina, and she left a lasting impact on the world of ballet.*)

Comprehension Checks

- **Book quiz**
- **Retelling rubric**

Book Extension Activities

Build Skills

Grammar and Mechanics: Compound sentences

- Write the following sentence on the board: *Maria Tallchief was famous in the world of ballet, and she became America's first prima ballerina in 1952.* Underline the two clauses on the board and circle the conjunction.
- Point out that sometimes a sentence has two parts, called *phrases* or *clauses*. Explain that each clause has its own subject and verb, and that the clauses are joined together by a word called a *conjunction*. Point out that this type of sentence is called a *compound sentence* because each clause can stand independently as its own sentence. Provide examples of conjunctions on the board, such as *and, but, so, or*, and so on.
- Provide several example compound sentences on the board, and ask volunteers to come to the board to underline the clauses and circle the conjunctions. Point out that a comma is often used before the conjunction in compound sentences.

- **Check for understanding:** Have students work with a partner to write three example compound sentences. Have students share one sentence with the class, and have the class give a thumbs-up if the sentence is a compound sentence.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the **compound sentences worksheet**. If time allows, discuss their answers.

Word Work: Homographs

- Draw a picture of a star on the board and write the word *star* next to it. Ask students to think of a sentence about a star. Then, point out the word *star* in the section name "New York: A Star is Born". Have students think about the meaning of the word *star* in that sentence and explain to a partner what is different.
- Review or explain that *homographs* are multiple-meaning words. Point out that they are spelled the same and sound the same, but they have different meanings.
- Put students into groups, and give each group the following five words: *bow, duck, ring, jam, cool*. Have groups create two versions of each word, with pictures and sentence examples. Have groups share their work with the class.
- **Check for understanding:** Write the following words on the board: *wave, slide, bat*. Have students write two sentences for each word on a separate sheet of paper, with each sentence reflecting a different meaning of the word.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the **homographs worksheet**. If time allows, discuss their answers.

Connections

- See the back of the book for cross-curricular extension ideas.