



Teaching with *Maria Tallchief:* *Native America's Prima Ballerina*

CONNECTION TO STANDARDS

Students will identify the main topic of a text and retell key details.
(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.2)

DIFFERENTIATION FOR ESL

- Review these additional vocabulary words in context: *tribe, background, customs, traditional, focus, strict, adopt, heritage, retired, discrimination.*
- Allow students to complete word maps for any term for which they have limited understanding. Have students say or write the definition in their own words, think of words related to the term, and draw a picture illustrating its meaning.
- Have students sit with a partner while reading. After each page, have students discuss words and ideas they found confusing. They can refer to their word maps to try to clarify meanings. Allow partners to raise their hands for assistance.



Lexile: 830 GRL: N
Words: 502

BEFORE READING

Build Background Knowledge: Explain that ballet is a very difficult and competitive form of dance, and that it takes many years of hard work and training to become a successful ballet dancer. Tell students that the best ballet dancers today come from many different countries, but that in the first half of the 20th century, all of the great ballet dancers were Russian. Many American dancers adopted Russian stage names to help them get into the best ballet companies and be given the best roles. Lead a discussion in which students:

- share a sport or activity they take part in that requires a lot of hard work and practice.
- think about how they would feel if people assumed they'd be less successful at their sport or activity because of their background.
- consider whether they'd be willing to change their name or another important part of their identity in order to get ahead in this sport or activity.

Preview

- Show the cover of the book. Explore the cover illustration. Ask students to describe what they see and to guess who the women in the picture are. Ask students to predict the setting of the book.
- Lead students in a brief picture walk of the book, exploring the illustrations on each page. Have students identify one or two details in each illustration. Point out the text features.

Predict: Ask students to predict what the story will be about. Have students support their predictions with evidence they discovered while previewing the book.

Vocabulary: Turn to page 23 (“Words to Know”). Review each vocabulary word and the provided definition. For each word, have students:

- give a thumbs-up if they know the word well.
- give a thumbs-sideways if they don’t know the word well.
- give a thumbs-down if they don’t know the word at all.

Strengthen understanding of words students do not know well by modeling how to use the word in a sentence. Create sentences with rich context clues, then review how the context clues help students understand the meaning. Have students come up with their own sentences for each word.

Skill Introduction: Tell students an activity you enjoy. Ask students what they know about that activity, allowing them to make guesses. Explain that students don’t know anything about that activity because you didn’t give them any details about it. Explain that details are small pieces of information that tell us about a topic. We use details to summarize or describe the main topic of a text. Ask students to think about the details about Maria’s life while they read.

DURING READING

Check for Understanding: Ask students the following questions as they read.

- p. 4, *Where did Maria live as a young girl?* (on an Osage Indian reservation in Fairfax, Oklahoma)
- p. 6, *How were Maria and her sister different from other Native American girls and women?* (They danced, and they practiced ballet for hours each day.)
- p. 8, *What did Maria begin doing at age 12?* (She began to study ballet under Bronislava Nijinska, a well-known Russian ballerina.)
- p. 12, *What dream came true for Maria at age 17?* (She joined Ballet Russe, a group that included the very best Russian ballet dancers.) *What did Maria do differently from many American dancers, and why?* (She refused to adopt a Russian stage name because she was proud of her American Indian heritage.)
- p. 14, *Who did Maria marry in 1946?* (George Balanchine, a famous choreographer)
- p. 17, *What famous roles did George Balanchine create for Maria?* (the Swan Queen in “Swan Lake” and the Sugar Plum Fairy in “The Nutcracker”)
- p. 18, *What honors did Maria receive in 1996?* (She was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame, and she received a Kennedy Center Honor.)
- p. 20, *In what way was Maria a trailblazer for Native Americans?* (She was America’s first prima ballerina and one of the greatest ballerinas of the 20th century.)

Reinforce Vocabulary

- p. 14, Review the definition of *technique*. Allow students to share their technique for a sport they play or activity they do.
- p. 16, Review the term *prima ballerina*. Break down the term into its two parts: *prima* and *ballerina*. Define *prima* as “first” or “leading”. Have students identify people who are prima in various sports or activities. Review what a *ballerina* is (a female ballet dancer).
- p. 18, Have students think about other types of things a person can be inducted into, such as a club or the National Honor Society.
- p. 20, Review the definition of *trailblazer*. Allow students to share a time that they were trailblazers.

AFTER READING

Theme: Explain that one theme of the book is *hard work*. Have students identify all the ways in which Maria worked hard to become a successful ballerina. Then, allow students to use words and pictures to describe something they work hard at.

Skill: Have students complete the graphic organizer, answering the questions to summarize the text.



Name _____

Graphic Organizer:

Details and Summary

Directions: Use words or pictures to answer the questions. Then use the details you wrote or drew to summarize the book to a partner.

Who is the story about?	When and where was she born?
What did she begin doing when she was a kid?	What are some things she did during her career?
What honors did she receive?	What made her success so special?