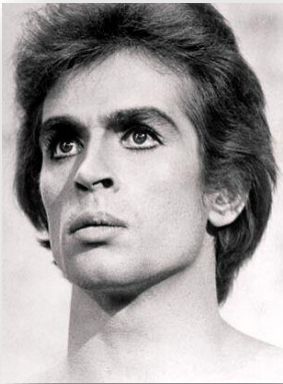


# RUDOLF NUREYEV

## Gay Russian Ballet Dancer and Choreographer (1938-1993)



The greatest male dancer of the 1960s/1970s was born on a Trans-Siberian train to poor Asiatic Mongol parents. When his mother smuggled him into a performance of the ballet 'Song of the Cranes,' Nureyev fell in love with dance. After studying ballet at the Leningrad Choreographic School, he joined the Kirov Ballet as a soloist in 1958. During the company's tour to Paris in 1961 he defected. As the first dancer to defect from the Soviet Union he became an instant celebrity. The same year, at Margot Fonteyn's invitation, Nureyev danced at the Royal Academy of Dance in London and thereafter became Fonteyn's principle dancing partner. He was a sensation – combining an intensely romantic sensibility with stunning muscularity and technique. Ever the innovator, he became the first major ballet star to begin working regularly with established modern dance choreographers. Nureyev's dance repertoire was enormous including all the classics as well as standards – and acquiring over 90 roles through appearances with over 30 major ballet and modern dance companies. He choreographed new versions of the ballets 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Manfred,' and 'The Nutcracker' – changing and expanding the roles of male dancers. Several films were made of his brilliant ballet performances including 'I Am a Dancer' (1972) and 'Don Quixote' (1972). He also acted in films, portraying the title role in Ken Russell's 'Valentino,' and even toured the U.S. with a stage revival of 'The King and I.' From 1983-1989 he was the artistic director of the Paris Opera Ballet. Nureyev died of complications from HIV in 1993 at the age of 54. He remains perhaps the most famous male ballet dancer of the 20th-century and an icon in the LGBT community.



### Lesson Plan

#### Level 1: Contributions Approach

1. Activate prior knowledge: Before today what did you know about the ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev and his rise to fame?
2. Read the biography above and additional resources at <https://legacyprojectchicago.org/person/rudolf-nureyev>.
3. View this interview with Nureyev and share your impressions <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WB7-A6L4mwQ>.
4. Group discussion: Nureyev was born and raised in the Soviet Union. He began his career in Leningrad and then defected during the Cold War to begin a new career in the West. Knowing that he was already an accomplished ballet dancer, why do you think it he decided to defect?

#### Level 2: Additive Approach

1. Divide the article below evenly among the group then find the adjectives used to describe Nureyev and share them. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/10/08/wild-thing-2>.
2. Watch at least five of these videos of Nureyev dancing and share your impressions with your group <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAQb8VzywWY&list=PL6EF09441BE67ABA8>.
3. Nureyev said: "For me, purity of movement wasn't enough. I needed expression, more intensity, more mind." What does this quote tell you about how he viewed his craft?

#### Level 3: Transformational Approach

1. Read [http://www.glbtcarchive.com/arts/nureyev\\_r\\_A.pdf](http://www.glbtcarchive.com/arts/nureyev_r_A.pdf) and describe the challenges Nureyev experienced in his lifetime.
2. How did this poor Russian ballet dancer transform himself into the "King of Dance" and "The greatest male dancer of the century"?
3. Nureyev said "There was simply from this quite early age the awareness that the only thing I wanted was to dance." After reading about his life, can you identify the character traits and experiences which led him to become an artist? In your opinion, why did he need to defect?

#### Level 4: Social Action Approach

1. Nureyev said "I'm really alive when I'm on stage." What makes you feel really alive? Who has supported you in your quest to be yourself?
2. Read [http://www.glbtcarchive.com/arts/nureyev\\_r\\_A.pdf](http://www.glbtcarchive.com/arts/nureyev_r_A.pdf). It states: "One of Nureyev's great contributions to ballet had to do with his sexual openness. Completely comfortable with his own sexuality, Nureyev expended no effort in presenting a heterosexual image on stage or off." Do you see this with other artists today? Cite some examples. Do you feel the freedom some artists have to be honest about this part of their lives is appropriate and helpful? Why or why not?