

Any Given Child program brings arts to school kids
Program gives kids an inside look at the arts

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The curtain had just gone down on the Tulsa Ballet's special Monday afternoon performance, and fifth-graders from several Tulsa schools buzzed with excitement over what they had just seen.

But as Farid Ouedraogo lined up with his class to head for a waiting school bus outside, he didn't just talk about what he had seen. He stood with his feet in fifth position.

Kerry Foxx, his teacher at Patrick Henry Elementary School, laughed as she looked down and saw what Farid was doing.

"It was amazing!" Farid said, just moments after about a half-dozen performers completed a brief, rapid-paced contemporary piece called "Match Point."

Because Tulsa Public Schools was recently selected as a new affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' Any Given Child program, every student in the district will be exposed to at least nine live arts experiences by the time they finish high school.

None of it would be possible without the participation of a full spectrum of local arts organizations, including museums, galleries, musicians and other performers. Teachers use a specially developed curriculum to prepare their students for the experiences, which often are firsts for them.

"Not many had been to a ballet before, so this is a big first exposure to the arts for most," said Linda Hale, a teacher at Grissom Elementary School. "They were anxious to get here today, and I think the program gave them really good insight into what goes on behind the scenes."

Groups of first-graders already have begun taking field trips to the Gilcrease Museum. Seventh-graders have been going to the Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art, and fourth-graders are seeing dance performances by Choregus Productions.

Later this week, sixth-graders will begin visiting the Hardesty Arts Center downtown. Participating in Any Given Child wasn't much of a leap for the Tulsa Ballet because it has long been engaged in outreach to local school children, said Managing Director Scott Black.

"This program is designed for children in second through fifth grade and gives them some behind-the-scenes views of everything from company class to warm ups. It's very interactive and engaging and covers everything from costumes to scenery to choreography and lighting," Black said.

Amber Tait, director of the Any Given Child program for its local sponsor, the Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa, said all of the live arts experiences are reinforced with pre- and post-event lessons.

"Any Given Child is true arts integration, meaning there are tie-ins to every subject, such as science, language arts and social studies," Tait said. "Part of the curriculum also includes career exploration, so today, students saw that there are more than just dancers in a ballet - there are people working in lighting, set decoration, and choreography."

All of the preparation work was not lost on students who marveled at Dracula's 35-pound cape from a recent production and especially at how stage lighting is changed with color filter sheets called "gels" and designed to set different moods.

When the stage was drenched with blood red, one boy hollered out, "Whoa! It's a murder scene."

Foxx's students from Patrick Henry said they really liked the blue lights.

"It looked like an aquarium," Farid said.

His classmate, Ian Pry, said he had never seen anything like the dancers' physical feats. "I bet it takes years just to be able to get ready and be that flexible," he said.