

Edgar Degas, *Rehearsal on the Stage*, 1878, oil paint, pastels, watercolors  
Impressionism – painting & drawing



**Key Facts:**

**Artist:** Edgar Degas (1834-1917) was a French Impressionist artist. He is most known for his pictures of dancers and the ballet and romantic night-life in Paris. Degas studied and worked to portray the movement of dancers. He would capture every moment of the dancers, from the beginning of practice to the end of their performance. He would show honest moments, such as a tired dancer yawning, rather than idealized moments.

**Art period/style:** Impressionism, 1860s-1880s, Paris, France

**Key characteristics of that period:** The Impressionists often broke the traditional rules of painting. They used bright splashes of color, quick dashes of paint or chalk, and sparkling light to show scenes of everyday life. Many Impressionists painted outdoor scenes, but Degas mostly chose indoor scenes – showing the night life of modern Paris including cafes, operas, and the ballet.

**Techniques:** Degas created chalk pastel drawings and oil paintings with a sketchy quality. The Impressionists painted with short choppy brushstrokes to capture the effects of light.

**Some Background:** Degas is well known for his artwork that depicts dance scenes. He drew and painted ballerinas both in practice and in ballet performance. The development of photography influenced his compositions.

## The Five Core Habits:

Practice the *Five Core Habits of Grammar* with art - NAMES (found on pgs. 18-19 in the Foundation Guide). Part of teaching is learning to ask a student good questions. This is a great activity for looking at art! Plus, you get to sneak in a little art history and technique along with.

### 5 CORE HABITS



#### NAMING

1. What do you call this?
2. Where does this name come from?
3. Are there any other names for this?



#### ATTENDING

1. What are the parts of this?
2. Where do you usually see this?
3. What makes this special?



#### MEMORIZING

1. What would help you memorize this? An acronym, a song, a chant, a picture, etc.
2. What did you already know about this?



#### EXPRESSING

1. Could you draw a picture of this or write a song about it? Could you act it out?
2. How does this make you feel?



#### STORYTELLING

1. Can you tell me a story about this?
2. Can I tell you a story about this?

N names (name things specifically)

A attending (look and listen carefully. Also- taste, smell, touch. Compare things.)

M memorizing (soak up facts and ideas. Memorize facts and relations of things to recall, connect, and expand new ideas to older ones from past memorizations.)

E expressing (express ideas creatively- reciting, drawing, singing, dancing)

S storytelling (hear and tell stories)

This helps us grasp the basic elements, vocabulary, and rules of any subject, and helps us progress more quickly toward comprehension and creativity in future studies.

Using the image on the first page, go through these questions:

#### N – Names:

- Name the artist, era/art style, and technique
- What can you find? Name the things you see
- How many people are there?
- Who are the people? What are they doing?
- Where are they?
- What colors do you see?

#### A – Attending

- What do you see?
- What do the people in the painting see?
- What do they hear? Smell? Taste?
- What might they feel/touch?
- What emotions might the people be feeling?
- How is color used?
- What type of movement or motion do you notice?

- What is happening in the painting?
- Notice how the people are dressed. What does this tell you about them? What about the men?
- What are the two odd shapes at the bottom of the image? (hint: at the ballet, the orchestra pit is down in front of the stage)
- Who is the man in the center of the image? What is he doing?
- How about the men far off to the right?
- Does the blurry, hazy color in the background add to the mood or sense of movement?

Attending to details – here is a close-up. What else do you notice now?  
(You can find some of the answers at the end under storytelling.)



### **M – Memorize**

Memorize the artist, time period, and facts about the artwork/technique.

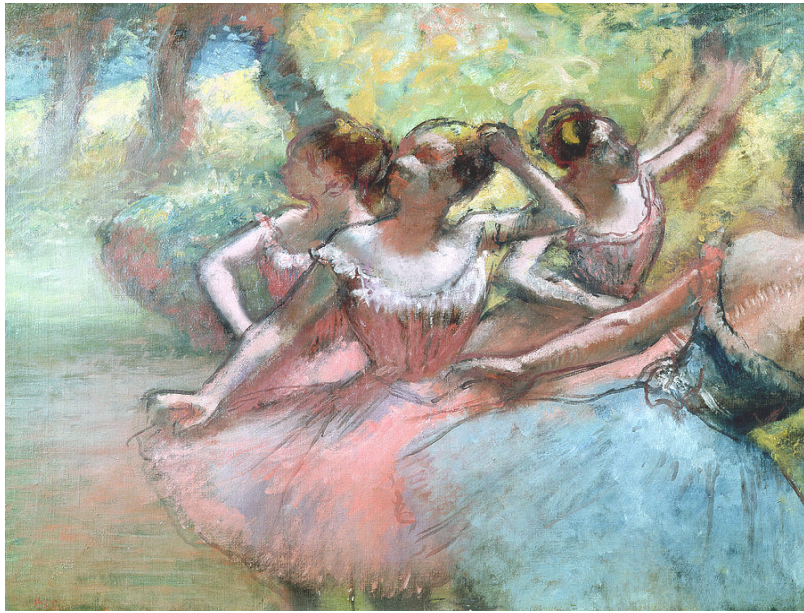
### **E – Express**

Express your thoughts and ideas about the art.

You can also express by trying the technique on your own.

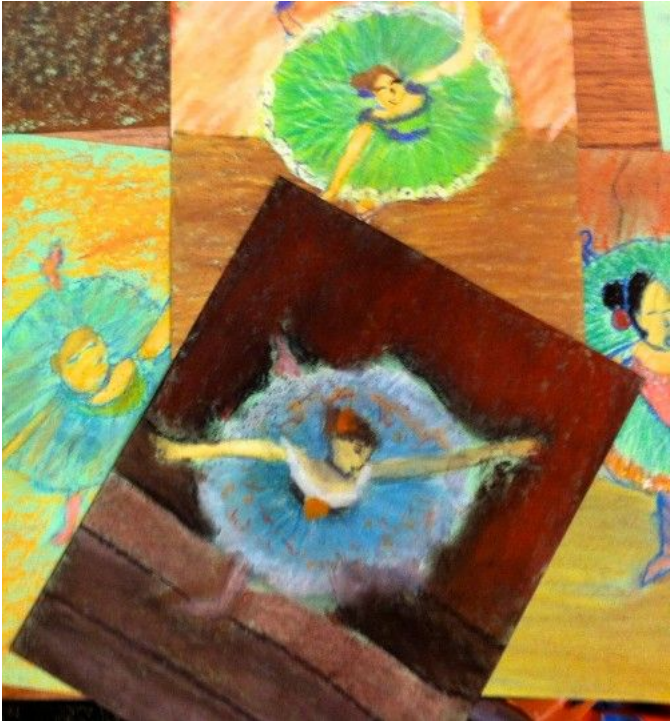
A wonderful way to dive into the style and technique of Degas is to create your own ballerina with chalk pastels on paper. In your pastel creations, try to imitate his style. Work at capturing the movement of the dancers. Draw with a quick, sketchy technique.

On the following pages you will find a few of his pastel drawings for inspiration. Notice the colors. Notice the quick, sketchy style in the figures. Also, notice how he tried to capture their movements.





Finally, here are some student examples:



Here, the pastels were drawn onto black drawing paper. You can see how it makes the colors pop!

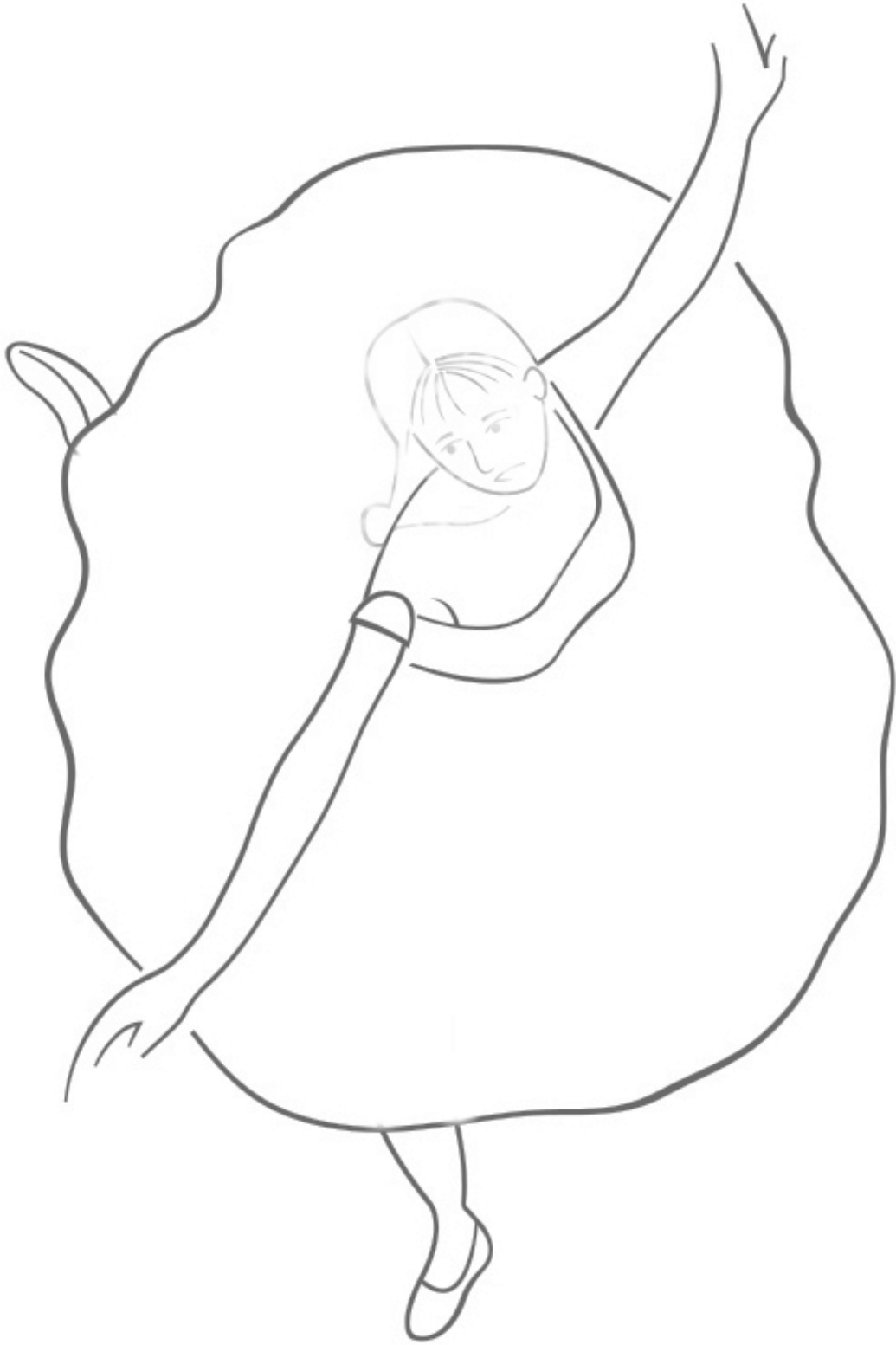




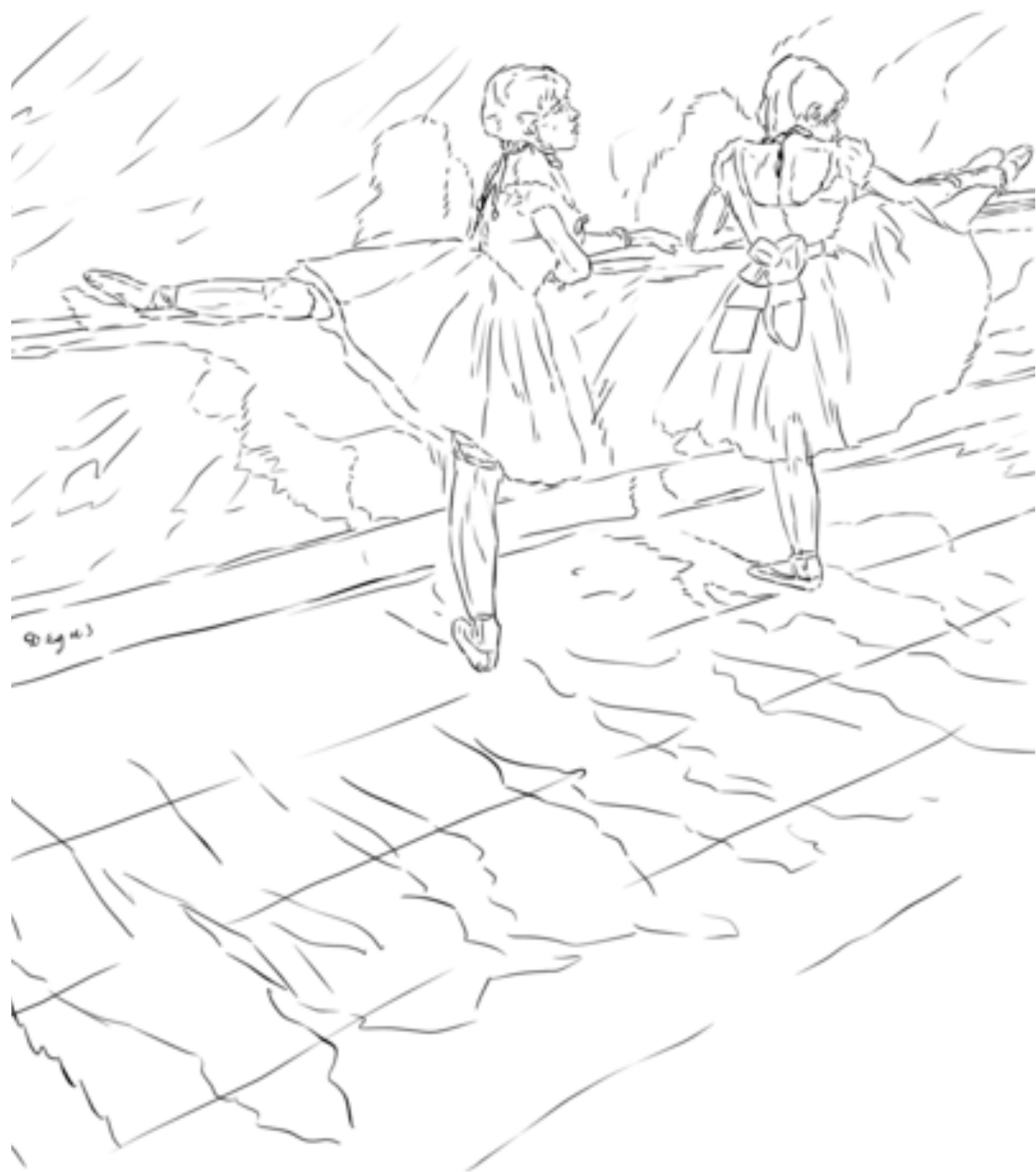


And if sketching out the figures seems to challenging for your younger students, you can print out a coloring page and have them draw on them (see following pages). This is what we did on the examples above.









## **S – Story telling**

Tell the story about this work of art.

Refer to image on first page.

This mixed-media artwork by Degas shows a ballet rehearsal on stage. He began this as a pen and ink drawing and then added in oil paint, watercolors, and pastels.

The dancers are not only dancing but they are stretching and yawning. Though all of the dancers shown are dressed uniformly, their faces are not the same. Every dancer has a different facial expression, but all of the expressions read as one mood: fatigue. One dancer obviously yawning, with both hands stretched back behind head, head raised, and mouth wide open. Degas is not trying to capture the beauty of the dancers as usually seen on stage during a performance. He captures the repetitious nature of the dancers' jobs, their movements rehearsed and re-rehearsed.

In the middle of the young women is the ballet teacher, his back towards the viewer.

On the far right are two seated men, one collapsed in a chair. These men could be fathers of some of the dancers, waiting for practice to be over. They also seem tired and bored.

The two odd shapes at the bottom of the composition, in the middle, are the tops of stand-up bass instruments in the orchestra pit below.

The off-centered and imbalanced composition show the influence of photography and the idea of a quick snap-shot.