

# ***The Nutcracker Ballet***

**Presented by**

**VPAC**  
Valley Performing Arts Council



**Curriculum Written by Janet Kelly  
Educational Outreach, VPAC**

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**MEMO:**

**TO:** Educators presenting *The Nutcracker* to students

**FROM:** Janet Kelly, Educational Outreach Director for VPAC

*The Nutcracker* presented by Valley Performing Arts Council, featuring State Street Ballet of Santa Barbara and the Spokane Symphony

VPAC is so pleased that your students will be watching parts of The Nutcracker Ballet through the four virtual segments created for distance learning. The curriculum guide, based on the California State Standards, presents a variety of directions that teachers can take when presenting production information and follow-up activities. There is one issue however, that is not addressed in the curriculum guide. That is the reason for this memo.

When students view a ballet, there are several elements, unique to ballet that students will experience for the first time. One is that the story is told through music, dance, and movement. Another is the figurative quality of ballet, where, for example, a fire can be represented by costumed dancers rather than a literal fire. The other is the revealing nature of the adult male dancers' costumes. If students are not prepared ahead of time for the costuming, it can distract from the performance. This is usually not an issue with younger students, but it can be with older students. I would like to share how I approach this issue as a suggestion. It is not the only approach; still I have found it to be effective. Perhaps you may find it helpful as well.

I am a believer in presenting the arts to students. When I was teaching I took my students to museums, Broadway musicals, ballets, orchestra performances and opera. What I discovered in preparing students for all these experiences is that students are resilient and adaptable, especially if new elements of the experience are presented to them directly and honestly. For example, when I took a group of students to the Norton-Simon Museum in Pasadena, and I knew they would see a large Matisse nude, I explained what a nude was, didn't make a big issue over the fact that the model was nude, and taught them to view any nudity they would see in a matter-of-fact manner. Our trip went without a hitch, and both chaperones and bystanders were impressed with the maturity our students displayed. They reaped the

full benefit of the trip because they had been prepared for what could have been a distraction.

Adult male ballet costuming can be a distraction too. Here is the way I address this issue with 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

We discuss uniforms for various sporting events. (Pads for football players, leotards for gymnasts, spiked shoes for runners, etc.) We discuss how uniforms are meant to enhance movement and enable the athletes to do the best possible job in their respective events. Then we talk about how dancers, like athletes, have uniforms/costumes that enable them to do their best. Women dancers are trained to dance on point. Male dancers are trained to leap and jump, and lift the female dancers. All the costumes are designed for movement and flexibility. Adult male costumes are revealing by their nature and function. I explain to the students that when male dancers wear leotards, it is like swimmers who wear Speedos, or wrestlers who wear form-fitting suits. It is simply what they wear.

Years ago, I had a particularly “worldly-wise” class of 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys. I had a special meeting with them before taking them to see *The Nutcracker* and *Cinderella*. I used the above discussion with them. Suddenly, one of the boys said, “You know, Mrs. Kelly, that must be embarrassing for the dancers. I know how I feel embarrassed when I wrestle.” “Yeah,” said another, “I feel the same way.” Most of the boys in the group had either been on a swim or wrestling team, and empathized with the dancers. They were as good as gold during the performance. The costumes were not an issue at all.

By being matter-of-fact about the costumes, and letting students know “That is just what dancers wear,” the immature twittering that sometimes takes place when an adult male dancer first comes out on stage is minimized.

I hope this information helps you prepare your students to fully enjoy the rich experience ballet brings to their lives.

Janet Kelly  
VPAC Educational Director

# Vocabulary

(Taken from California Dance Standards)

1. **Axial Movement:** Movement anchored to one spot by a body part. Only the available space in any direction is used while the initial body contact is maintained. Movement is organized around the axis of the body and is not designed for travel from one location to another. It is also known as nonlocomotor movement. Examples include stretching, bending, turning in place, gesturing.
2. **Ballet:** A classical Western dance form that originated in the Renaissance courts of Europe. By the time of Louis XIV (mid-1600's), steps and body positions underwent codification.
3. **Choreography:** ("Dance Writing") the creation and composition of dances by arranging or inventing steps, movement, and patterns of movements.
4. **Contrast:** To set side by side to emphasize differences. In dance two contrasting movements might differ in energy: space (size, direction, level); design (symmetrical/asymmetrical, open/close); timing (fast/slow, even/uneven); or two or more different themes or patterns.
5. **Locomotor:** Movement progressing through space from one spot to another. Basic locomotor movements involve walking, running, galloping, jumping, hopping, skipping, sliding, leaping.
6. **Variety in Dance Composition:** A quality or range of different things. To maintain audience interest, the choreographer must provide variety within the development of the dance. Contrasts in the use of space, force, and spatial designs as well as some repetition of movement and motifs provide variety.
7. **Pas de Deux:** The single focused, relatively simple, dance solo, or variation, can be redesigned for two complementary figures, thus becoming a *pas de Deux* and introducing contrasts inherent in a male-female partnership. Traditionally, the man supports or lifts his partner at emphatic or accented moments. He raises her in a broad trajectory, enabling her to give an impression of height and balance she couldn't attain alone. If he is an able partner, he unobtrusively enhances her presence; as a personality, he disappears. In a more complex arrangement, the *pas de Deux* may be framed by a group of dancers, or *corps de ballet*, whose members dance in unison or contrapuntally, undifferentiated as personalities. Visibility, or legible plasticity, must be maintained however numerous the *corps* or complex its maneuvers. The contrast in movement that soloists provide against the *corps* engages an additional plastic richness.

*Four Centuries of Ballet*, by Lincoln Kirstein

# History of Ballet

## Pre-Eighteenth Century Dance

- Fifteenth Century books about dance show that dance was considered an important aspect of polite and aristocratic behavior.
- Dance began to emerge as theatrical performance in Court Spectacles. Beginning with families like the Medici family in Florence, dance moved into the French court in the middle of the sixteenth century. The *ballet de cour*, which emerged at this time, was meant to entertain as well as instruct on political terms in society in which it was performed. (Example: celebration of the nomination of Henri d'Anjou as King of Poland.)
- The *Academie Royale de Danse* appeared in 1669, under the rule of Louis XIV, and proved to be the seed-bed from which the most significant professional dancing was to emerge.
- The preparation of dancers was disorganized, so a permanent dance school for the Paris Opera was established in 1713.

## Eighteenth-Century Dance

- The opera-ballet, as an art form, was performed.
- Maria Camargo (1710-1770), a brilliant dancer, shortened her skirts so the audience could see her feet “twinkle”.
- Marie Salle (1707-1756) perfected a dramatic style of dance called the *ballet d'action*, or narrative dance. This form was the preparation for the next development in ballet.

## Nineteenth-Century Dance

- Romanticism emerges on the ballet stage.
- Marie Taglioni (1804-1884) signaled the arrival of the Romantic era in ballet, and the domination of the stage by the ballerina.
- Pointe work, dancing on the tips of the toes, became the norm for the ballerina. Taglioni used pointe work to stress her “lightness and rejection of the ground.”
- Pointe dancing was difficult because dance shoes were too light and unsubstantial. An Italian shoemaker produced blocked shoes that provided greater support for the foot, and the sustained pointe work we see today became possible.

- August Bournonville (an Italian dancer known as the “god of Dance” in Paris), and Carlo Blasis (from Milan), introduced innovations in ballet training that provided a foundation for later technical training in ballet.
- Marius Petipa, master of the Imperial Russian Ballet in St. Petersburg, brought his French training and skill to contribute to the magnificence of the Russian style of ballet.
- “Petipa’s great ballets were complex theatrical machines whose motor force was the ballerina.” (Clarke/Crisp) Italian ballerinas came to dance at St. Petersburg: Pierina Legnani, Carlotta Brianza, and Virginia Vucchi, added fire and passion to ballet performances that re-awoke an audience interest in ballet as an art form.

## Twentieth-Century Dance

- This century began with the Imperial Russian Ballet in the doldrums, a predictable and uninspired group of dancers.
- Mikhail Fokine was the voice of change. He urged “the need for dramatic truth, for a correspondence between music and design in the service of dance narrative, and greater stylish truth in performance.”
- Serge Diaghilev provided an essential showcase for Fokine’s work. Dancers like Adolph Bolm, Nijinsky, Anna Pavlova, and Tamara Karsavina, revealed a standard of dance artistry undreamed of before.
- The 1909 season in St. Petersburg became a gigantic artistic and social success, and marked the reawakening of ballet as an art form in Western Europe.
- Diaghilev’s *Ballet Russes* began to tour extensively, but the touring ended with the onset of WWI, and most of the dancers went home. Later, Monte Carlo became the home to the *Ballet Russes*. George Balanchine was a choreographer for *Ballet Russes* for a short time.
- The American Ballet Theatre, founded by Richard Pleasant and Lucia Chase in 1939, was intended to rival the *Ballet Russes*. Jerome Robbins was choreographer for a time, and produced his wildly successful *Fancy Free* ballet. The American Ballet Theatre couldn’t retain Jerome Robbins, and never had “one central positive creative identity, but a conglomeration of stars with an eclectic repertory.” (Clark/Crisp)
- George Balanchine created ballets throughout Europe. Lincoln Kirstein, a young American dancer, realized that Balanchine was the man that could help him realize his dream of founding a dance school dedicated to classical dance in America.
- In 1946 Kirstein and Balanchine founded the Ballet Society in New York, which eventually developed into the New York City Ballet. “Part

of City Ballet's international reputation inevitably resides in the high musical standards demanded by Balanchine and the intense musical alertness instilled in the dancers, who are unafraid when faced with the most arduous contemporary music but who respond with entire sympathy to the wide-ranging choice of traditional concert music used by Balanchine, and also his affection for and understanding of popular music." (Clarke/Crisp)

- In 1946, Ninette de Valois (Vic-Wells Ballet) was invited to take her company to Covent Garden to reopen the Royal Opera House. The next four decades saw her company acknowledged as a national treasure. A parallel second company, Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, became the touring section and traveled throughout Britain, and made some foreign visits as well.
- A variety of ballet companies in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia have emerged in the Twentieth-Century. From its beginnings as a way for the French court to entertain and teach, ballet has developed into an art form recognized throughout the world.

# Basic Understandings about Ballet

1. Ballet involves specific and scripted movements.
  - a. There are 5 positions for the arms
  - b. There are 5 positions for the feet
  - c. The positions are as follows
    - i. First position – Heels together, toes turned out as far as they can go
    - ii. Second position – from first position the right foot slides to the side leaving room for a practice shoe and a half between the feet. The weight is balanced evenly on both feet.
    - iii. Third position – the right foot is pulled back to the left instep. Legs and feet are well turned out.
    - iv. Fourth position – the right foot slides forward in front of the left foot until the space of the practice shoe and a half separates them. The heel of the front foot must be in line with the toes of the back foot, and both are well turned out.
    - v. Fifth position – The right foot slides straight backward until the toes of the right foot touch the heel of the left. This position is the one most often used in dancing. Many great steps are started from this position.
      - d. There are other scripted positions or movements in ballet
  - i. *Ronds de Jambe* (RON duh zham) – These are half circles drawn with one leg while standing on the supporting leg. Starting from the first position, the working foot slides forward and points straight out, then swings outward and around until the toe points back. The feet return to first position. In this exercise, only the working foot must move, and the knee must never bend.
  - ii. *Releve* (Ruh-luh-VAY) – This means rising. Starting from second position, facing the *barre*, the dancer jumps onto the balls of her feet, tightens her legs, then springs back into second position.
  - iii. *Echappe* (ay-shap-PAY) – This is done facing the *barre*, holding it with both hands. The feet are in fifth position, *demi-plie*. Then there is a jump into second position *releve* and a jump back into fifth position *plie*.
  - iv. *Glissade* (glee-SAHHD) – Starting with feet in fifth position, the back foot slides out through second position until it just clears the floor. The weight shifts to the foot that is out, then goes back to fifth position, *plie*. Repeat with the other foot, and so on in a smooth series of motions.

- v. *Pas de Chat* (PAH duh SHAH) – From fifth position, the toe of the back foot is raised to the knee of the front foot, and lifts the toe of the other foot to that knee. For an instant, both feet are off the floor. The dancer returns to the fifth position *plie* and repeats the steps as often as directed.
2. Ballet is usually danced to classical music, but can be dance to any kind of music.
    - a. No matter what the music sounds like, the positions in ballet are always the same.
    - b. There is no such thing as “my way” in ballet dancing; there is only “ballet’s way”.
  3. Ballet Dancers are professionals.
    - a. For professional dancers, dancing is their job, not just a hobby.
    - b. Professional dancers often dance with a company.
    - c. A company has a hierarchy
      - i. Artistic Director, who plans the performances the company will dance
      - ii. Choreographer, who creates the dances themselves
      - iii. Principle Dancers, who often dance solo roles
  4. There are other kinds of dancing that professional dancers dance. A few are:
    - a. Tap dancing
    - b. Jazz dancing
    - c. Folk dancing
    - d. Swing dancing
    - e. Ballroom dancing
  5. No one talks in ballet. The dancers’ bodies do all the “speaking” by moving.

# Introduction

## To the History of *The Nutcracker Ballet*

In 1891, Tchaikovsky was asked to produce music for the Marinsky Theater in Russia. The music was for a ballet based on the E.T.A. Hoffman story, “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King”, which had been adapted by Alexander Dumas. Marius Petipa, a respected choreographer, drafted the original performance plans, but he was taken ill and the ballet was eventually choreographed by his assistant, Lev Ivanov. When the ballet was first performed in 1892, it was thought to be a failure. Critics bashed it for, among other things, having children play an integral role in the ballet.

On January 30, 1944, The Royal Ballet (then known as the Vic Wells Ballet) staged *The Nutcracker* at the Sadlers Wells Theater. This production was produced by Nikolay Serguyev, formerly of the Marinsky Theater.

The San Francisco Ballet mounted the first full length production of *The Nutcracker* in the United States, and it has been an annual Christmas extravaganza ever since 1944.

Many choreographers have made their own versions of *The Nutcracker*. The original Ivanov choreography is no longer widely performed.

# **The Story of *The Nutcracker***

**(The synopsis of the story by E.T.A. Hoffman  
that The Nutcracker ballet is based upon)**

It is Christmas Eve as friends and family gather at the Stahlbaum's home for a party. Clara and Fritz Stahlbaum dance and play as they welcome their friends and anxiously await the arrival of their godfather, the magical toy maker Drosselmeyer. He enters the party with a bag full of gifts, including two life-sized dolls to entertain the guests. The children receive the many gifts in the toy maker's bag, and Clara is given a special surprise: a beautiful Nutcracker, in the full-parade uniform of a soldier.

The Nutcracker quickly becomes the favorite of all children, and Clara is delighted with her special gift. In a moment of childish rivalry, Fritz grabs Clara's Nutcracker and breaks it, but Drosselmeyer works his magic once more and it is quickly repaired.

As the evening grows late, the guests depart, and the Stahlbaum's go off to bed, Drosselmeyer casts his magic spell on the silent household and disappears into the night. When all is quiet, Clara quietly creeps back to see her Nutcracker and falls asleep next to him under the Christmas tree. As the clock strikes midnight, Clara is awakened by the rats. She tries to run away, but the evil rats led by their queen stop her. Then the Christmas tree suddenly begins to grow, and the Nutcracker comes to life, leading a band of toy soldiers into battle against the Rat Queen and her forces.

The battle rages, until Clara strikes out at the Rat Queen – but not in time to save her Nutcracker, who lies lifeless. Clara weeps for him and then rejoices as the Nutcracker transforms into a Prince. Together they travel to a world where snowflakes dance and fairies and queens welcome them to their magic kingdom.

Clara and the Prince arrive at the Land of the Sugar Plum Fairy. In the Land of Sweets they are entertained by the dances of the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier; the Spanish dancers; the Chinese dancers; the Mirlitons; the exotic Arabian couple; the lively Russians; Mother Ginger and her children; and a beautiful waltz. As the festivities draw to a close, the Land of Sweets and its exotic inhabitants began to fade away, Clara awakens to find her beloved Nutcracker toy beside her.

# Introducing and Discussing *The Nutcracker Ballet*

## **Building Background for Students:**

1. Show a variety of real nutcrackers for the students to experience.
2. Listen to a few key pieces of music from *The Nutcracker Suite* such as *Arabian Coffee*, *Chinese Tea*, *Russian Trepak*, *Spanish Chocolate*, *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*, *The Battle*, etc. Listen over and over until the students recognize the melody. When they see the dance that goes with those selections, they will be more involved because they recognize the melody. (Note: The selections I listed have been favorites of my students over the years.)
3. Listen to the music from *The Nutcracker Suite* while doing seatwork, art, any kind of activity that lends itself to background music.
4. Using the notes about specific actions that go with specific sections of *The Nutcracker Suite*, act out the ballet with students taking the parts of The Mouse King, The Nutcracker, the soldiers, the mice, Masha, etc. My personal favorite selections to act out are: The Battle Scenes, The Party Scene, where Fritz breaks Clara's nutcracker and Godfather Drosselmeier giving gifts to the children. These scenes have proven my students' favorites over the years. (Mother Ginger, though not included in the Russian ballet version, has always been one of my students' favorite as well.)

## **Study Questions about the Story**

1. Was the Nutcracker good looking when Clara first saw him?
2. What did Clara do for the Nutcracker?
3. What did the Nutcracker do for Clara?
4. What is a friend? How do you know Clara and the Nutcracker were friends?
5. Do you have a friend like Clara or the Nutcracker?

6. How could you be a good friend to others?
7. If you had been Clara's parents, would you have believed her story about the battle between the mice and the soldiers?
8. What is more important in a friend, how they look or how they act? Why?

### **Study Questions about *The Nutcracker***

1. Is Godfather Drosselmeier a good guy or a bad guy? Why? (It may vary from production to production, or story part to story part)
2. During the party scene, girls played with dolls and boys played with swords. What were the expectations of boys and girls when *The Nutcracker* was written? Are those expectations the same today? Are boys and girls treated differently today?
3. Why would mice be the enemy of the Nutcracker? (For centuries, mice have carried disease, ruined crops, and damaged property. It would be natural for city dwellers to think of mice as enemies.)
4. Why do dancers need to be strong? Why? (Ballet takes incredible strength, agility, stamina, flexibility. Have students try some of the moves they see on the videos. It may also be interesting to note that some pro athletes take ballet to improve their athletic performance.)
5. Why would ballet be a good form of entertainment in the years before movies, television and radio? (Ballet is a story told through movement. The movements and facial expressions are exaggerated, so the audience can tell what is happening in the story, even though they are sitting at a distance.)
6. When *The Nutcracker* first opened, critics trashed it because, among other reasons, it featured children. Do you think views of children have changed since the late 1800's?
8. In the story of the Nutcracker, he is judged by how he looks. Everyone thinks the Nutcracker is ugly, except Clara. No one else seems to see his good heart. Does this happen today? Are people judged by how they look, not how they act? Explain your answer.

# Follow-up

## Discussion/Activity Ideas for

### *The Nutcracker Ballet*

1. Do a shared story about *The Nutcracker* Ballet performance. Have the students illustrate. Re-write the text to create a class book about this special day.

2. Have each student illustrate their favorite part of the ballet performance. Put the illustration in chronological order. Then write text to go along with the illustrations.

3. Pretend Godfather Drosselmeier gave you a beautifully wrapped present. What would be in it? What would you do with it? Write or illustrate.

Or-

Pretend Godfather Drosselmeier gave you a magical gift to share with the world. It could be anything (cure for anthrax, complete peace on earth, etc.) What gift would you hope to receive? How would the gift benefit mankind? How would you present it to the world? Illustrate if desired.

4. Clara's family had a big Christmas party in *The Nutcracker*. Write about the best Christmas celebration you can remember. Use enough description and detail so the reader can feel like he or she was actually with you celebrating.

5. In your opinion, was Godfather Drosselmeier a protagonist or an antagonist? Write your opinion and cite evidence to support your opinion.

6. Create invitations for Clara's family Christmas party that include all the important information: where, when, what will happen, what to wear, etc. (Use actual invitations as a model)

7. Plan your own party. Be creative (Example: A cheese tasting party for the mice.) Create your own invitations that include all the important information.

8. Pretend there was a modern version of *The Nutcracker* where Clara and the Nutcracker go to the Land of Pizza, or The Land of Salad Bar, instead of Land of Sweets. What kinds of dancers and dances would occur in such a place? Write who would dance and what they would dance. (Example: Tomatoes tangoing or Sausage doing the Harlem Shuffle). Discuss or write the possibilities.

9. Write a friendly letter to someone from *The Nutcracker*.

10. Write thank you notes to your favorite dancer. Tell them what you liked about their performance. Thank them for the hard work that went into preparing their dance for you. Include illustrations.

Or-

Write a thank you note to VPAC for sponsoring the ballet. Tell them what you enjoyed about the performance and tell them if you would like to see the performance again. Include illustrations.

**Mailing address is:**

VPAC/Kingsburg Youth Ballet  
1301 Marion St.  
Kingsburg, CA. 93631

11. *The Nutcracker* is a fairy tale with adventure in an imaginary place. Write your own adventure story selecting an imaginary or real setting. The story should include enough sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings so the reader can imagine the excitement of your adventure.

12. Write a summary of *The Nutcracker*. Be sure to include the main idea and the most significant or important details.

13. In the E.T.A. Hoffman fairy tale, there is conflict between the mouse family and humans. The conflict was resolved by violence. Is this a valid resolution? Discuss your opinions and cite evidence from the story, history, or current events to support your opinions.

14. Select 2 or 3 characters from *The Nutcracker*. Compare and contrast the characters. Use Venn diagram to illustrate the similarities and differences. Write or discuss your observations.

15. Write a detailed description of a character in *The Nutcracker*. Is this someone you would want to get to know personally? Explain your reasoning using clear ideas and citing information from your study of the ballet.

16. Write an advertisement or newspaper article about *The Nutcracker*. You could even create an entire newspaper. Illustrate using only black, whites and grays so the illustrations will look like black and white photos.

17. Write a composition about the historic conflict between the mice and humans.

**Paragraph 1:** State the problem and explain the circumstances.

**Paragraph 2:** Discuss the choices the mice and humans have for resolving their conflict. Discuss the pros and cons of each resolution idea.

**Paragraph 3:** Explain the best choices for the resolution of the conflict. Use persuasive argument to convince the reader that this is the best choice.

**Paragraph 4:** Reflect on how this conflict developed. Could the situation have been avoided? If so, how? How could future conflicts be handled?

18. Think about how boys and girls are portrayed in *The Nutcracker*. Is this fair portrayal? Discuss or write your opinions.

19. Write paragraphs about characters, sets, costumes, etc. from *The Nutcracker*. Each paragraph needs a topic sentence and supporting sentences. If desired, create a five paragraph report using the paragraphs.

20. Research and write a short biography of Peter Tchaikovsky, or E.T.A. Hoffman.

# Bibliography

## **Books about the Nutcracker**

1. Chappell, Warren, 1958.

*The Nutcracker.*

New York: Alfred A. Knopf

(L.C. # 58-11075)

Adaptation of the E.T.A. Hoffman original story. Includes excerpts from Tchaikovsky's music and color illustrations (1958 style). Good for resources and read aloud. 2<sup>nd</sup> or above.

2 Hautzig, Deborah, 1992.

*The Nutcracker Ballet.*

New York: Random House.

(ISBN # 0-679-82385-9)

A "Step into Reading, Level 2" book. Tells the story of the ballet itself. Simple text, large print, great illustrations. A great book for students to read themselves. K-4<sup>th</sup> and possibly older 2<sup>nd</sup> language students.

3. Hautzig, Deborah, 1983

*The Story of the Nutcracker Ballet.*

New York: Random House.

(ISBN # 0-394-88178-8)

Picture book that tells the story of The Nutcracker Ballet. Similar to The Nutcracker Ballet, but without simplified or enlarged text. Great read aloud for younger students. Most 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade could read on their own. Pictures support the text, which provides support for 2<sup>nd</sup> language students, or students with limited vocabulary.

4. Hoffman, E.T.A., adapted by Bob Blaisdell. 1996.

*The Story of the Nutcracker.*

New York: Dover Publications.

(ISBN # 0-486-29153-7)

Chapter book with easy to read type (not text). This is a simplified version of the Hoffman story for more proficient readers. The story is complex, and the vocabulary is advanced, so this story is best suited for older students, or students that have broad vocabulary and background experience. Could be good read aloud for younger students who are very familiar with the story already.

5. Hoffman, E.T.A., adapted by Janet Schulman. 1979.

*The Nutcracker.*

New York: Random House, Inc.

(ISBN # 0-394-82018-5)

Chapter book with simplified text that tells Hoffman's original story. The story is still complex and the vocabulary is still advanced, but there is good black and white picture support. Best suited to more proficient 3<sup>rd</sup> or above readers. Possibly as a good read aloud or read along for less proficient readers.

# Pre-Unit Ideas

1. **Introduce students to what ballet is.** Find someone on campus that is currently in ballet or has taken ballet in the past. If no one is available, use the description of the ballet positions and exercises in the study guide.
  - a. Ask them to show the students the five positions in ballet, and some of the common dance moves used in most ballet dances. (1.0)
  - b. Have the whole class practice the five positions, and some of the common ballet moves. (1.0)
  - c. Watch a video of a ballet to see if students can recognize the dance positions or moves they practiced. (1.0)
  - d. Remind students that they should be able to recognize the basic positions or moves in *The Nutcracker* performance, as the basic moves are incorporated into all the dances, no matter what music is used. (1.0)
  
2. **Learn the vocabulary of ballet.** Use the vocabulary listed on page 8 and 9.
  - a. Practice what locomotor and axial movement (nonlocomotor) moves are. Watch for them in the ballet performance. (1.0)
  - b. Think about the possible use of contrast within the *Pas de Deux*, as explained on the vocabulary page. (1.0, 4.0)
  - c. Discuss the appropriateness of the use of ballet with the context of the musical choices selected by the choreographer. (Example: Discuss how the choreography of *Chinese Tea* or *Russian Trepak* fit the country of origin) (4.0)
  - d. Predict what kinds of dance moves the choreographer might have choreographed using what you have learned about the musical selections in *The Nutcracker*. Check your prediction with the actual performance. (1.0, 3.0, 4.0)
  - e. Watch dance moves on music video, musicals, or other visual media. Do you see any of the ballet basics, axial movements, locomotor movements, or contrast? Explain. (1.0, 4.0, 5.0)
  - f. Create a dance, or movement of your own that uses one or more of the dance moves learned: ballet basic positions or movements, axial movement, locomotor movement. Create a dance for two that demonstrates contrast. (2.0)
  
3. **Learn the History of Ballet.** Use the history on pages 6-8 to give students a view of when and where ballet emerged as an art form.
  - a. What is your opinion of the French court using ballet to instruct politically, as well as entertain? Does dance continue to instruct today? Can you think of musicals, or artists, that use dance to convey political

- messages? Is that an appropriate or inappropriate use of the arts? (Be sure to qualify your opinion with facts.) (3.0, 4.0, 5.0)
- b. If you were a choreographer who was going to create a ballet based on a social issue, what issue would you select? Why? What kind of music would you use? What kind of setting? What would you want the audience to get out of the performance? (3.0, 4.0)
  - c. Why do you think Europe was the place ballet began, and not the Americas? What was happening in the Americas in the 1600's? Ballet came to America centuries after Europe; does that diminish the quality of American ballet? (3.0, 5.0)
    - a. Do you think dance should qualify as a P.E. subject? Many schools don't allow private dance lessons to qualify as a P.E. elective, even if the dancer practices multiple times a week. Should they? Why or why not? (4.0, 5.0)
  - d. Visual and Performing Arts Standards in Dance covered by this section.
    - a. **1.0 Analyze: Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work.** Students perceive and analyze, using the elements of dance to comprehend its meaning.
    - b. **2.0 Interpret: Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work.** Students interpret intent, meaning and artistic expression as communicated through the use of the body, elements of dance, dance technique, dance structure and context.
    - c. **3.0 Synthesize: Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art.** Students recognize all personal experiences, knowledge and contexts are integrated and synthesized to interpret meaning.
    - d. **4.0 Relate: Relate Artistic Ideas and Works with Societal, Cultural and Historical Context to Deepen Understanding.** Students understand dance literacy that includes deep knowledge and perspectives about societal, cultural, historical and community contexts.
    - e. **5.0 Evaluate: Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work.** Students apply what they learned in dance to learning across other subject areas. The personal evaluation of music work(s) and performance(s) is informed by analysis, interpretation and established criteria.

**NOTE TO TEACHERS:**

Many of these activity suggestions cover specific dance standards, as well as language arts standards. They are suggestions that can be appropriately adapted to the developmental level of your students.

# During the Virtual Performance

1. Watch for the basic ballet moves in each specific dance. Are the moves easy to detect, or are they subtle?
2. Watch for contrast between the way male dances and female dances are choreographed in each dance.
3. Watch for exaggeration in movement. Dance exaggerates movement for greater affect.
4. Remember good Audience Manners.
  - a. No talking.
  - b. No food or drinks allowed.
  - c. Show your appreciation with applause instead of yells and whistles.
  - d. Pretend you are in a theater and maintain good audience manners.

# After the Virtual Performance

The following activities are simply ideas to select from that cover a variety of standards. They can be used, modified, and/or disregarded according to your best judgment.

## Theater Standards (Visual and Performing Arts)

**1.0 Analyze – Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work.** Students perceive and analyze, using the elements of dance to comprehend its meaning.

1. Discussion and/or writing ideas
  - a. Students list the 5 W's of each performance
    - i. Who
    - ii. What
    - iii. Where
    - iv. When
    - v. Why
2. Students use the vocabulary of the theater (find the parallel between literature, dance, and theater)
  - a. **Character** – Person or personality the actor re-creates (main character or supporting character) (or dancers)
  - b. **Setting** – Where the story takes place
  - c. **Conflict** – The opposition of persons or forces giving rise to the dramatic action in a play
  - d. **Audience** – Who is watching the performance?
  - e. **Motivation** – A character's reason for doing or saying things in a play.
  - f. **Props** – Items carried on stage by actors (dancers); small items on the set used by characters (actors)
  - g. **Blocking** – The planning or working out of the movements of the actors on stage (like choreography)
3. Students discuss, VENN, and contrast 2 or 3 of the 4 dances in *The Nutcracker*, comparing elements such as the 5 W's as well as comparing the music, costumes, style, energy of the dancers, how well the basic ballet elements could be observed, etc.

## Connecting to Language Arts Standards

1. Interpret Intent and Meaning of Artistic Work (DA:Re8)
  - a. How is *The Nutcracker* interpreted, in your own words?
  - b. Select movements from *The Nutcracker* that suggest ideas and plain how the movement captures the idea.
  - c. Discuss how the artistic expression of a dance from *The Nutcracker* is achieved through the elements of dance.
  - d. Discuss what literary genre *The Nutcracker* could be based on.
  - e. Discuss literature that involves contrast between a male lead and a female lead. Why do you think this is a common element in literature as well as dance?
  - f. Compare/contrast literature and dance. Does all literature have to have a message for the reader? What about all dance performance? What message does the choreographer of music videos want to portray?
  - g. Explain how the movements in *The Nutcracker* communicate the main idea of the story.
2. Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work (DA:Re9)
  - a. Demonstrate a movement a character in *The Nutcracker* would make to express joy.
  - b. Discuss the characteristics that make a dance artistic and meaningful.
  - c. Analyze the artistic expression of *The Nutcracker*. Discuss insights using evaluation criteria.
  - d. Define personal artistic preferences to critique *The Nutcracker* and discuss your perspectives with your peers.
  - e. Describe your experiences at the ballet. What did you see? Hear? Feel? What were your honest thoughts and feelings as you watched the performance.
    - g. Deliver an oral summary of the ballet in front of the class. Tell the main idea or purpose of the performance, and specific details about the performance.
    - h. Write a detailed description of one dancer or character. Include a physical description of the dancer, as well as a description of the dancer's personality as ascertained by the choreography.
    - i. Write your opinion about the ballet performance. Be sure to justify your opinion with supporting details that describe what you liked or disliked about the performance. Support your opinions through references to the performance, and prior experience.

# Ideas for E.L.L. Students

Ballet is a natural experience for E.L.L. students. Because it is totally non-lingual, it is easy to enjoy, analyze, and interpret because it is not English dependant. Most of the pre-performance activities are kinesthetic, so they are whole body experiences. Most writing can be done in the student's native language and translated into English as needed.

Other ideas are...

1. Do a shared story, where the whole class takes part in describing the experience at the ballet.
2. Draw a picture that shows something you enjoyed about the performance. Write several simple sentences that explain your experience.
3. Do you like to dance? Tell the class about your dancing experiences.
4. Do an interactive journal with the E.L.L. teacher, or another E.L.L. student (perhaps one that is more advanced). Tell about your experiences at the ballet, questions you may have, opinions, prior experience.
5. Many worldwide cultures have indigenous dances. Share your cultures dance with the class through pictures, or actually teaching the other students a dance you know. Use as much oral English as possible in your explanation.
6. Use the experience of learning how to dance as a parallel with the experience of learning another language. Everyone starts out like a child, learning basic steps. They progress, over the years, to become experts. It takes practice and time.

Note from Janet: I have assembled some generic activities based on the standards for each grade level going to see the performance. Please skim through all of them for ideas. As professionals, you can read through all of these and get ideas that can be adapted to your own grade level. Thanks.

# Grade Level Specific Notes on How to Connect to the Language Arts Standards

## KINDERGARTEN

1. **Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work (K.DA:Re8)**
  - a. Observe movement in *The Nutcracker*.
    - i. Describe a movement using simple dance terminology.
    - ii. Connect the dance movements to your favorite movements.
      1. What is your favorite dance movement?
      2. How would you describe your dance movement to explain it to your peers?
2. **Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work (K.MA:Re9)**
  - a. Share appealing qualities and possible changes in media artworks. How would you change the story of *The Nutcracker*?
  - b. Explain why you would change it.
3. **Synthesize and Relate Knowledge to Personal Experiences to Make Art (K.DA:Cn10)**
  - a. Recognize and name an emotion that is experienced when watching *The Nutcracker* through dance.
  - b. Relate this emotion to a personal experience.

## FIRST GRADE

1. **Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work (1.DA:Re8)**
  - a. Select movements from *The Nutcracker* that suggest what your favorite character is feeling.
  - b. Explain how the movements capture the idea using simple dance terminology.
2. **Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work (1.MA:Re9)**
  - a. Identify the effective components and possible changes to media artworks, considering viewers.
  - b. Why or why not would the story of *The Nutcracker* change for its' audiences?
3. **Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art (1.DA:Cn10)**
  - a. Find an experience expressed or portrayed in *The Nutcracker* that relates to a familiar experience.
  - b. Identify movements that communicate this experience you related to from *The Nutcracker*.

## **SECOND GRADE**

### **1. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work (2.DA:Re8)**

- a. Use context clues from movements in *The Nutcracker* to identify meaning and intent of your favorite scene.
- b. Discuss what movements and their meaning stood out to you the most.

### **2. Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work (2.MA:Re9)**

- a. Discuss the effectiveness of components and possible improvements for *The Nutcracker* considering its context.
- b. In your opinion, why might these improvements work?

### **3. Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art (2.DA:Cn10)**

- a. Describe, create and/or perform a dance that stood out to you from *The Nutcracker* that expresses personal meaning.
- b. Explain how certain movements express this personal meaning to you.

## **THIRD GRADE**

### **1. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work (3.DA:Re8)**

- a. Select specific context clues from movements in *The Nutcracker* and explain how those movements relate to main idea of the dance.
- b. What emotion is Clara expressing when Fritz breaks Clara's *Nutcracker*?
- c. How are the different character's emotions or feelings expressed in their movements? What do their movements tell you?

### **2. Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work (3.DA:Re9)**

- a. Select movements from specific genres, styles or cultures. Identify characteristic movements from these dances and describe how these movements are similar or different to movements in *The Nutcracker*.
- b. Are there any movements from *The Nutcracker* that stood out to you because you thought you knew what emotion they were expressing? Explain.

### **3. Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art (3.DA:Cn10)**

- a. Compare the relationships expressed in a dance from *The Nutcracker* to relationships with your friends or family.
- b. Explain how they are the same or different.

## **FOURTH GRADE**

### **1. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work (4.DA:Re8)**

- a. How does the Sugar Plum Fairy express her meaning through her movements? What is her meaning or emotion?
- b. What movement did Clara's pillows make when she found the Christmas tree coming to life and realized *The Nutcracker* had grown?
- c. Compare the meanings of your favorite movements to the movements in *The Nutcracker* and discuss how they compare. Are they similar? Do they have meaning?

**2. Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work (4.DA:Re9)**

- a. Define and discuss the characteristics that make a dance artistic and apply those characteristics to dances observed in *The Nutcracker*.
- b. What does the term “artistic” mean to you?
- c. Name an artistic scene from *The Nutcracker* and explain how art is used to tell the story of this scene.

**3. Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art**

(4.DA:Cn10)

- a. Relate the main idea or content in a dance from *The Nutcracker* to your personal experiences.
- b. Explain how the main idea of the dance you chose from *The Nutcracker* is similar to or different from one’s own personal experiences, relationships, ideas or perspectives.

**FIFTH GRADE**

**1. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work (5.DA:Re8)**

- a. Interpret meaning of a scene in *The Nutcracker* based on its movements and explain how the movements communicate the main idea of the dance.
- d. Discuss how the authors and choreographers of *The Nutcracker* use various techniques to build empathy for Masha and build dislike for Mouse King and the mice. The techniques employed could be pictures in picture books, descriptions of the characters, dialogue, dance moves etc. How effective are the techniques?

**2. Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work (5.DA:Re9)**

- a. Demonstrate and discuss the characteristics of a dance from *The Nutcracker* that make that dance artistic and meaningful.
- b. Relate your characteristics from *The Nutcracker* to the elements of dance in genres, styles or cultural movement practices.
- c. What dance or movement in *The Nutcracker* was most meaningful to you? Why?

**3. Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art**

(5.DA:Cn10)

- a. Compare two dances from *The Nutcracker* with contrasting themes.
- b. Discuss feelings and ideas evoked by each theme.
- c. Describe how the themes and movements relate to points of view and experiences.

**SIXTH GRADE**

**1. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work (6.DA:Re8)**

1. Explain how the artistic expression of a dance in *The Nutcracker* is achieved through the elements of dance, use of body, dance technique, dance structure, and context.

- a. Explain how these communicate the intent of the dance you chose using genre-specific dance terminology.
- b. Which character in *The Nutcracker* has the most artistic expression, in your opinion?

**2. Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work (6.DA:Re9)**

- a. Discuss the characteristics and artistic intent of a dance from *The Nutcracker*.
- b. Develop artistic criteria to critique the dance you chose from *The Nutcracker* using genre-specific dance terminology.
- c. What dance terminology would you use to critique the dance from *The Nutcracker*?

**3. Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art (6.DA:Cn10)**

- a. Observe the movement characteristics or qualities observed in *The Nutcracker*.
- b. Describe the differences and similarities about what was observed to one's attitudes and movement preferences.

