



The Story of The Nutcracker

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

Ballet tells a story through movement. Most movements are exaggerated. As you watch the ballet, look for exaggerated movement.

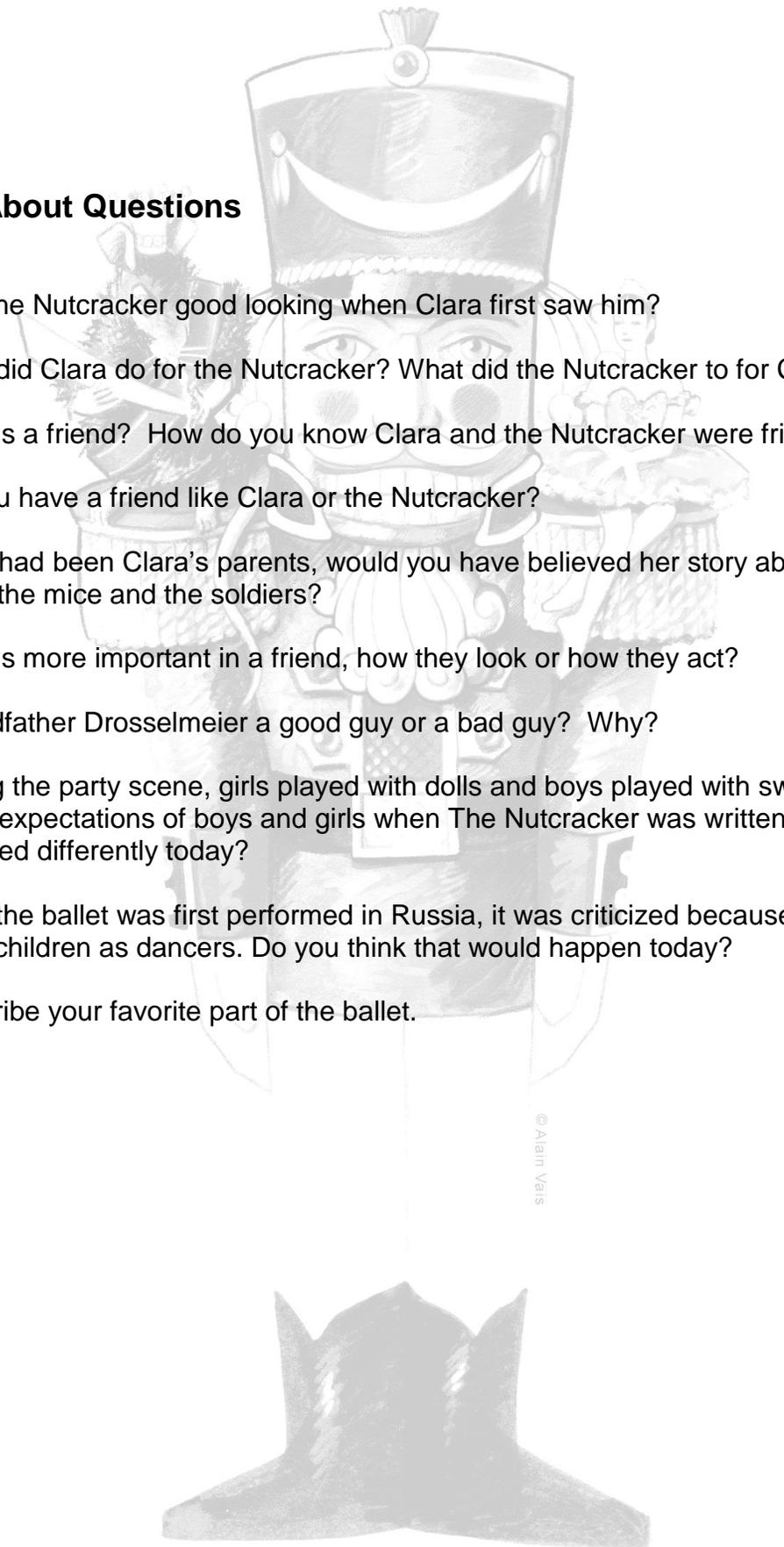
It is Christmas Eve as friends and family gather at the Stahlbaum's home for a party. Clara and Fritz Stahlbaum dance and play as they welcome their friends and anxiously await the arrival of their godfather, the magical toy maker Drosselmeyer. He enters the party with a bag full of gifts, including 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.



Think About Questions

1. Was the Nutcracker good looking when Clara first saw him?
2. What did Clara do for the Nutcracker? What did the Nutcracker do for Clara?
3. What is a friend? How do you know Clara and the Nutcracker were friends?
4. Do you have a friend like Clara or the Nutcracker?
5. If you had been Clara's parents, would you have believed her story about the battle between the mice and the soldiers?
6. What is more important in a friend, how they look or how they act?
7. Is Godfather Drosselmeier a good guy or a bad guy? Why?
8. During the party scene, girls played with dolls and boys played with swords. Those were the expectations of boys and girls when The Nutcracker was written. Are boys and girls treated differently today?
9. When the ballet was first performed in Russia, it was criticized because the ballet featured children as dancers. Do you think that would happen today?
10. Describe your favorite part of the ballet.

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