



STUDY GUIDE

SALT CREEK BALLET'S PRODUCTION OF *EXCERPTS FROM THE NUTCRACKER*

**SPONSORED BY THE
ADDISON CENTER FOR THE ARTS**

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS GRADES 2-5

ALIGNED WITH THE ILLINOIS STATE STANDARDS

Dear Teacher:

We know that classroom time is precious, so we thank you for taking the time to use this resource and enrich your students' experience of *The Nutcracker* ballet! The purpose of this packet is to both assist you in preparing your students for Salt Creek Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker* ballet as well as provide you with several ways in which to integrate the dance experience into your daily academic curriculum.

Although the students will only view specific portions of the ballet (the end of Act I and part of Act II), we encourage you and your students to learn more about ballet and the complete story of *The Nutcracker* ballet by using the pre-performance discussion activities provided below. After attending the performance, you may help the students "dive more deeply" by using any of the suggested post-performance writing or discussion activities provided.

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SUGGESTED PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

Basic Activities:

- **Read** aloud or have the students read the story of *The Nutcracker* ballet. (A synopsis of SCB's version of story is included in this packet.)
- **Listen** to excerpts from the Tchaikovsky score and notice the ways the music changes with each different scene in the story.
- **Discuss** behavioral expectations of students when attending a ballet, concert or play. (See the "What to expect" section below.)
- **Explore** any of the pre-performance discussion topics listed below.

General Pre-Performance Discussion Topics:

(These questions are open-ended: italics indicate possible responses and ideas for teachers to use in guiding discussions.)

About Ballet: Align with Illinois State Dance Goals 25AB, 26A, 27B

- What kinds of dancing have you done before? Have you ever made up a dance? When do you dance and why? Do you ever dance in a group?
- What is ballet? What makes it different from other kinds of dancing? How did ballet begin? *“Ballet is a way of telling a story using dance and music instead of words. It consists of patterns of movement that have developed over the centuries. The movements of the dancers tell you a story or show you a mood.” (Usborne, 1992, p. 2) (Students could do research to explore the differences between ballet and other dance styles.)*

Ballet training traces its origins to the French court dances of the 16th and 17th centuries. At that time, all royalty would be encouraged to master a certain expertise in dance forms to be able to participate in French courtly life. Gradually, formal movements were introduced into the elaborate scenarios performed by the court for the court. Arms were to be held out wide to the side, so as not to touch the full skirts worn by both sexes, and feet were to be pointed out elegantly from the body, to show off beautiful buckles and ribbons. Eventually, ballet became a specialized art form with professional dancers taking the roles once performed by kings and queens.

Today, ballet is the fundamental training for many types of dance styles. The system still utilizes the original French terminology. Many athletes, including famous football players such as Willie Gault, Lynn Swann and Herschel Walker have studied ballet to increase their agility, balance, footwork and flexibility. Increasingly, college athletes are being offered dance training as a supplement to their workouts.

- Why does ballet use French instead of English words to refer to different movements? *In the 1600’s, the French King Louis XIV founded the world’s first ballet school, the Royal Academy of Dance, where many ballet steps were first introduced.*
- What are the basic five positions and where do they come from? *Five hundred years ago, fencing was a popular sport performed for kings and queens. Many people think fencers look like they’re dancing because they’re so graceful. A fencer’s movements inspired the five ballet positions. Students can view a short video to learn more about the 5 positions: <http://video.about.com/dance/The-Five-Ballet-Positions.htm>*
- Why do you think dancers, both men and women, wear tights as part of their costumes? What activities do you do that require tights or leggings? *Ballet attire is close-fitting so the lines and shapes a dancer’s body makes can easily be seen by the teacher as well as the audience. Girls usually wear a leotard and pink tights in order to allow for plenty of freedom of movement. Boys wear black tights with white socks and a white T shirt.*

- Can any of you name any famous ballets? Has anyone seen a ballet performance? Which one was it? What was the story about? How could you tell what the story was about?
Discuss how ballet tells a story through movement and gestures.
- How do you think a story can be told onstage in a ballet without using any words?
Discuss the elements of dance (body shapes, levels, patterns, tempo, rhythm, energy), music, mime, costumes, scenery, and lighting, and how they all work together to create a story onstage.
- Have you ever expressed something to someone without using words?
Discuss how people frequently use gestures, facial expressions, and movement to express themselves without words (waving hello or goodbye, nodding yes and no, stamping in anger, jumping for joy); these actions are related to the mime and acting they will see on stage.
- When does everyday movement become dance?
Some ideas include: when music is added, when movement expresses moods or feelings, when it is arranged in sequence for performance, or when it communicates a story or an idea.
- What are some different ways dancers can move and use the space of the stage?
 - *Energy: Movements can be smooth, sharp, fluid, or syncopated.*
 - *Body Shapes: Dancers can make round or angular shapes and poses with their bodies.*
 - *Levels: Dancers can move low to the ground and other times they can jump or be lifted high in the air.*
 - *Patterns: Dancers can make patterns individually by moving in different directions around the stage (think of the way you can trace ice skaters' movement patterns by the lines their skates leave on the ice) and they can make patterns with each other when dancing in groups (circles; diamonds; pinwheels; straight lines).*
 - *Tempo: Dancers can move quickly, very slowly, or at a speed in-between.*
 - *Rhythm: Dancers can move to certain patterns of sound such as a waltz (in three's) or a march (in two's).*
- How is a ballet created? Who is involved in creating a ballet?
 - *Have students list the various jobs they think would be essential to putting on a ballet performance, and then specifically discuss the various roles listed in the section entitled "Creating a Ballet."*
 - *Select a scene from The Nutcracker ballet and have the students design the scenery and props. Have students design costumes for the various characters.*

About the Theater:

- How is a theater that is used for live performances similar to and different from a movie theater? A sports stadium?
Discuss whether each venue has seating all the way around the performance space or just on one side; whether there's a front curtain; whether there's a backstage or behind-the-scenes area; whether there's an orchestra pit; and what the seats are like.
- How do you think people act at a ballet as opposed to a movie or a sports game?

Discuss each event in terms of how audience members express their appreciation for a performer; whether or not it's appropriate to yell and cheer, applaud, move around, talk; whether you can eat while watching; what you would wear. Also explain to the students that they will be making a very special journey to a theater for a performance of a famous ballet. You may explain that the theater is a special place for people to experience amazing and beautiful things. However, in order to fully appreciate the performance, a certain kind of behavior is necessary.

About the Music:

- Play various excerpts from the Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*. For each selection, discuss the following:
 - What is the mood of the music?
 - What types of movement do you think the dancers will be doing to this music (fast, slow, sharp, smooth)?
 - What types of costumes do you think would go with this music (color, style)?
 - What kind of scenery would you imagine?
 - Does this sound like dancing music to you?
 - What instruments do you hear in the music?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR **THE NUTCRACKER BALLET**

Synopsis of the Ballet

*** Indicates the portion of the program presented at the school show. Other sections of the story will be narrated.**

It is Christmas Eve and the Von Stahlbaums are preparing to welcome their party guests, who arrive family by family, bearing gifts for the host's children, Clara and Fritz. The presents are all carefully placed under the Christmas tree. Clara's Godfather, the mysterious Herr Drosselmeyer, arrives with a marvelous group of mechanical dolls. In addition, the magical and eccentric Herr Drosselmeyer has planned a special surprise for his beloved godchild, Clara. He presents her with a wonderfully mysterious nutcracker. Clara is immediately taken with her strange gift. Fritz is jealous and steals the nutcracker from Clara. In the chaos of his teasing, Fritz accidentally breaks the nutcracker. Herr Drosselmeyer comes to the rescue and assures Clara that all will be well. The guests perform a contredanse, after which they depart and the Von Stahlbaums prepare for bed.

*Just before the stroke of midnight, Clara returns to the darkened living room to check on her nutcracker. She is frightened by large mice, but suddenly, Herr Drosselmeyer appears and the mice flee. Much to Clara's amazement, Herr Drosselmeyer commands the Christmas tree to grow to such an enormous size that it pushes away the entire room. Next, he changes her little toy into a life size Nutcracker. The mice suddenly reappear and a vicious battle ensues. Just when the soldiers seem to be winning, the great Mouse King appears and the tide turns. The Nutcracker and the Mouse King fight and just as the Mouse King is about to overpower the Nutcracker, Clara distracts him with her shoe, giving

the Nutcracker the chance to run him through with his sword. The Nutcracker, released from an enchanted spell, turns into a handsome prince. Clara becomes a Princess. The Nutcracker Prince takes Princess Clara's hand, and escorts her on a magical voyage to the Kingdom of Snow and beyond.

*Princess Clara journeys to the Kingdom of Sweets where the Sugar Plum Fairy greets her. A series of entertaining divertissements are ordered.

Princess Clara and the Nutcracker Prince dance together surrounded by radiant flowers. The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier then dance for Clara and the Prince. When the festivities are over, everyone bids goodbye to the Nutcracker and Clara, who leave together riding on a gondola.

The Origins of Classical Ballet

Starting in 1840 and continuing until the early 1900's, a succession of French choreographers went to Russia to work with the Imperial Russian Ballet in St. Petersburg. The ballets created during this time period are called *Classical* ballets. Marius Petipa (1822-1910) became the most famous of these Classical choreographers, and with his colleague, the composer Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), created *The Sleeping Beauty* in 1890. Petipa and Tchaikovsky also collaborated to create two other consummate Classical ballets, *The Nutcracker* (1892) and *Swan Lake* (1895). Their collaboration raised the status of ballet to a new level of distinction.

Classical ballets reflect the extravagance of the Russian Imperial Court. The principal function of these ballets was to display brilliant dance technique. A Classical ballet is typically made up of three or four acts and contains complex arrangements for the **corps de ballet** (a large group of dancers that perform together) and the **pas de deux** (when a boy and girl dance together). The **pas de deux** sections are usually the center-pieces of most ballets and express intense emotions such as love, grief, or joy. In the Classical ballet, the **pas de deux** is often followed by a male solo and then a female solo (called **variations**), created purely to show off the dancers' skill and technique.

The Nutcracker Story

The history of the *Nutcracker* ballet begins nearly two hundred years ago. The original story, written by E.T.A. Hoffman, was published in Germany in 1816 as part of a collection of fairy tales. In the mid-1800's, French writer Alexander Dumas (famous for writing *The Three Musketeers*) reworked Hoffman's longer and darker story, making it shorter and more appealing to children. It is now Dumas' version of the story on which the *Nutcracker* ballet is based.

In the early 1890's, a team of talented Russians, including choreographer Marius Petipa and composer Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, joined forces to turn Dumas' *Nutcracker* into a ballet. On December 17, 1892, *The Nutcracker* was performed for the first time. Interestingly, the ballet was not well-received at first, but over time it has become a seasonal favorite!

About the Composer: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, 1840 - 1893

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in Kamsko-Votinsk, Russia on May 7, 1840. He was a very bright child who showed an interest in music that was so strong for a young child that his governess worried about him. Peter began taking piano lessons when he was six years old. After attending boarding school, he studied law and mathematics and got a job as a clerk working in the Ministry of Justice. After just four years he quit his job to go to music school full time in order to study composition. He was soon invited to teach classes. Tchaikovsky was a nervous, unhappy man all his life, yet his beautiful music made him the most popular of all Russian composers.

Tchaikovsky wrote the music for the three most famous ballets of all time: *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. In his lifetime he also wrote nine operas, six symphonies, four concertos, three string quartets, and numerous songs, suites, and overtures. One of his most famous pieces is the 1812 Overture, which uses cannons and church bells; because it sounds so grand it is often chose to accompany fireworks at 4th of July celebrations. Tchaikovsky was only 53 when he died in St. Petersburg in 1893. He had just completed his sixth symphony, which he felt was the best piece of music he ever created.

Ballet & Dance Vocabulary

Ballet – A classical Western dance form that originated in the Renaissance courts of Europe. By the time of Louis XIV (mid-1600s), steps and body positions underwent codification.

Ballerina – A female ballet dancer of the highest ranking.

Barre – The place where a dancer goes to begin his/her class work. The barre is a long pole that gives the dancer support. After the dancer has done barre work to warm up, he/she will move to the center the classroom or studio to practice increasingly complex steps.

Corps de ballet – A group of dancers who work together as an ensemble. They form the background for the ballerina and her partner and are the backbone of any ballet company.

Gesture – The movement of a body part or combination of parts, with emphasis on the expressive aspects of the move. It includes all movements of the body not supporting weight.

Libretto – The text on which a ballet is choreographed; the story of a ballet.

Pantomime – The art of telling a story, expressing a mood or an emotion, or describing an action without words.

Pas de Deux – A dance for two people, traditionally between a ballerina and the male dancer of the highest ranking.

Pointe Shoes – Shoes worn by female dancers that enable them to dance on the tips of their toes. The area covering the toe is made of layers of fabric glued together in the shape of a “box” covered in satin and hardened. The sole is made of hard leather to prevent the shoe from breaking when bent. To keep

the shoes on tightly, the dancers sew satin ribbons and elastic to the sides and tie the ribbons securely around their ankles. A pair of pointe shoes may only last for 3 to 4 days of work.

Technique – The physical skills of a dancer that enable him or her to execute the steps and movements required in different dances. Different styles or genres of dance often have specific techniques.

Tempo – The speed of music or a dance.

Turnout – The ability of the dancer to turn their feet and legs outward from the hip joints to close to a 180-degree position.

Tutu – Ballet skirt, usually made of net or tulle. Tutus may be of varying lengths. While the style and mood of the ballet help to determine the preferred tutu length, the dancer's technique is most clearly visible when she wears a short tutu.

Creating a Ballet

Many different people work together to put on a ballet performance. Together they are called a **ballet company**. The company that is putting on *The Nutcracker* is called the *Salt Creek Ballet*. The entire **cast** of the ballet must attend many practice sessions or **rehearsals** in order to learn the **choreography** or specific movements for their particular character or role.

Creating the Movement

A **choreographer** chooses the music that he or she feels is appropriate for a new ballet and creates the movements to go with it. *The Nutcracker* ballet uses music created by the composer, Peter Tchaikovsky. Like other artists, such as musicians, sculptors, and painters, a choreographer uses some basic tools to create a dance. Just as paint is the **medium** or material a painter uses to create a painting, the choreographer takes the dancer's body, the **medium** of the dance, and has it make different kinds of **shapes** (e.g., bent, curved, angular) as it moves through **space** (e.g., size, direction, level) at a certain **tempo** (e.g. fast, slow) and **rhythm** (e.g. a complicated or simple pattern of sound or movement), and with a certain amount of **energy** (e.g., smooth, sharp, light, heavy).

Designing a ballet

The **artistic director** (who is often also the choreographer of the ballet) is responsible for envisioning the look and feel for the entire ballet. The **dancers** execute the choreography. The **musicians** and **conductor** perform the music. The **set designer** thinks up ideas for **scenery** and **props** (short for **properties**) and develops drawings and models depicting how the scenery and props will look. A **lighting designer** develops a lighting scheme that will both create the overall mood envisioned by the artistic director and compliment or highlight the dancers' movements. The **electricians**, **carpenters**, and **stagehands** build and set up the scenery and lighting. A **costume designer** draws ideas for costumes. A

seamstress and wardrobe team sew the costumes so they look like the drawings and keep them in good condition.

What Students Can Expect at a Ballet Performance

1. Please keep in mind that the dancers have been busy warming up their bodies and getting their hair and make-up ready for the performance. All this preparation happens in the two hours before the performance.
2. When the auditorium lights dim, please quiet down. The performance is about to begin.
3. In case you don't know anything about ballet yet, the lecture-demonstration part of the program will introduce some ballet steps to you.
4. The best time to applaud is when the dancers have finished a series of moves and there is a pause in the music. However, feel free to applaud during the dance if you see the dancers do something really spectacular, such as a series of big jumps or multiple turns in a row.
6. Always be respectful of the performers and the other members of the audience. Everyone is trying to watch the performers and hear the music.
7. Enjoy the performance!

IDEAS FOR INTEGRATING THE NUTCRACKER BALLET INTO THE ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

Language Arts: Align with Illinois State English Language Arts Goals 1ABC, 2AB, 3ABC, 4A, 5AC

- Read different versions of the story of *The Nutcracker*. Discuss the similarities and differences between the tales. Compare *The Nutcracker* with other popular tales that have been retold in many ways. Discuss the ways the various presentations of these stories are faithful to the original versions and the new dimensions they add.
- Compare and contrast the characters and events in *The Nutcracker* with characters and events found in other traditional fairy tales such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Puss in Boots*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Beauty and the Beast*.
- Write your own version of *The Nutcracker* story that begins in your neighborhood in the year 2012 (or any other time and place you choose).
- Write a friendly letter to one of the characters or dancers from the Nutcracker. Use sensory details to describe what they liked best about the character they chose.
- Write an original "fractured fairytale" of the *Nutcracker* story.
- Discuss the differences between fairy tales and myths, fables, and legends.
- Select one part of speech for students to act out every time it occurs in a read-aloud version of *The Nutcracker*. (i.e. nouns, or verbs, or adjectives, or adverbs.) Nouns and an introduction to adjectives are particularly good for Grade 2. Verbs and an introduction to adjectives and adverbs are useful for Grade 3. Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are all excellent for Grade 4.

History/Social Studies/Geography: Align with Illinois State Social Science Goals 15D, 17ACD, 18AC

- Study the customs, architecture, economic structure, attire, modes of transportation, etc. used during the time period (Romantic Period, late 19th c.) in which *The Nutcracker* ballet is set.
- The Nutcracker story takes place at Christmas and shows how Clara's family celebrates the holiday. What holiday traditions are special to your family? Use a Venn diagram or other graphic organizer to compare and contrast your holiday traditions with those of your parents or guardian. How are they different from your grandparents?
- Study the biographies of the people involved in the early development of *The Nutcracker* ballet, such as the choreographer, Marius Petipa.
- Many of the special treats presented to Clara came from what were then considered exotic places in the 19th century. Explore where chocolate, tea, cinnamon, ginger, and coffee come from and why these were such special treats during that time period.
- Locate the countries Russia, Spain, Arabia, and China on a current map and a map from the 1890's. Do their boundaries differ? Explore various aspects of each culture both now and in the 19th century.
- The musical score for *The Nutcracker* ballet and the ballet itself were first performed in 1892. What were some of the world events surrounding the creation of this ballet?

Mathematics: Align with Illinois State Mathematics Goals 6BC, 8C

- Students can do basic arithmetic computations by moving a body part or doing a simple locomotor movement such as running, walking, hopping, skipping, jumping, etc. on a particular beat. For example, pose a question such as, "If we move every two counts, and we are counting up to 16 counts, what beats are we moving on?" (2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16—multiples of two!)
- Create and solve word problems based on *The Nutcracker* story. (For example, "If there are five mice and one Mouse King, by how many are the Nutcracker and Clara outnumbered in the battle?")

Science: Align with Illinois State Science Standards 12B, 13B

- Have students consider the Dance of the Snowflakes scene in *The Nutcracker*. Discuss what animals they might find living in this kind of habitat? What else would you likely find living in this habitat (plants, trees, insects, etc.)? Have students record their ideas on a graphic organizer and draw pictures to go along with it.
- Study the science involved in stagecraft. For example, how does the electricity in the stage lights work? How does the pulley system for scenery work?
- Study the concepts of physics involved in ballet dancing and partnering. (e.g., learn how gravity affects ballet dancers' jumps or how a dancer can effectively balance *en pointe*.)

Resources on this topic include *The Physics of Dance* by Kenneth Laws and *Physics, Dance, and the Pas de Deux* by Kenneth Laws, Martha Swope, and Cynthia Harvey.

Physical Education and Sports: Align with Illinois State Physical Education Goals 19A, 20A, 23A

- Every step in ballet is based on one of seven dance movements: plier (to bend), glisser (to glide), tourner (to turn), etendre (to stretch), sauter (to jump), relever (to rise), elancer (to dart). List different sports activities that use these basic movements and then perform sport movements that use these same basic ballet movements.
- Explore how a ballet dancer must develop the various components of fitness such as cardiovascular endurance, speed, strength, and flexibility.
- Discuss the many athletes who have performed in ballets (i.e., Herschel Walker, Willie Gault, and Lynn Swann). Many coaches require their football players to take ballet classes. What benefits might ballet training have for athletes in different sports? Explain.

Music: Align with Illinois State Music Goals 25AB, 27AB

- Study orchestral instruments and listen for them in a recording of Tchaikovsky's score. Discuss the ways that the different instruments help to characterize the different moods of each scene.
- Discuss the ways that the different instruments help to characterize the various characters such as the Mouse King, the Russian dance, the Chinese dance, etc.
- Study different rhythms used in the music for *The Nutcracker*, such as the waltz and the march. Identify these sections in a recording of the music—listen and clap along!
- Study Tchaikovsky's biography and his role in music history. Learn which other composers influenced him, and how he became an important ballet composer. Listen to music from his other ballets, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*, as well as his concert music. Compare and contrast these works to *The Nutcracker*.
- Listen to several different versions of *The Nutcracker* score, including:
 - Brian Setzer's *Nutcracker Suite*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP94EYlcqko>
 - Emerson, Lake and Palmer's *Nut Rocker* (Rock)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX0vOYwHj30>
 - The Nutcracker Rap instrumental (Rap)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CM-QS0V2m1U>

Visual Art: Align with Illinois State Visual Arts Goals 25A, 27AB

- Compare and contrast various storybook illustrations of *The Nutcracker* with the actual sets used in the ballet. Which do you think are more effective and why?
- Imagine you could create your own production of *The Nutcracker* ballet that would take place in any time period you choose—past, present, or future. What type of scenery and costumes would you use for your production of the ballet? Draw pictures or create dioramas and paper dolls of your designs.
- Imagine you are a designer: draw or paint your own costumes and scenery for any section of the ballet you choose.

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About Salt Creek Ballet

Since 1985, Salt Creek Ballet has produced performances for more than 220,000 people in Cook, DuPage and Kane Counties while earning a national reputation for excellence in dance. Founded by Patricia Sigurdson, Salt Creek Ballet is dedicated to its mission to (1) present professional-quality dance performances to diverse area audiences, (2) provide high-level performing opportunities for area dancers and (3) encourage appreciation and awareness of dance in the community at large. The company's first production of *The Nutcracker* was sold out and it has been performed every year since to full houses. A spring program was added to the company's regular performance schedule in 1987. Artistic Directors since 1998, Sergey Kozadayev and Zhanna Dubrovskaya have enriched Salt Creek Ballet's repertoire with evening-length productions of *La Sylphide*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Giselle*, and with excerpts from *La Bayadere*, *Le Corsaire* and *Paquita*. Salt Creek Ballet now alternates these great classics with mixed repertory bills featuring new ballet, jazz and contemporary works by local choreographers and family favorites, such as *Alice in Wonderland*. www.saltcreekballet.org. Call (630) 769-1199 for more information.

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