



American Repertory Ballet

The Nutcracker

Welcome!



The State Theatre in New Brunswick, New Jersey welcomes you to the school-day performance of *The Nutcracker*. We're delighted to have you experience American Repertory Ballet's fully-staged, full-length production of this popular story ballet.

These *Keynotes* provide information and activities to help you understand and enjoy the performance. Teachers can find additional resources for introducing ballet in the classroom at the [Kennedy Center's ArtsEdge website](#).

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photo: Charles J. Devine

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Keynotes

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The State Theatre, a premier nonprofit venue for the performing arts and entertainment.

About The Nutcracker

In 1816, the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann published *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, a frightening story involving a bloody battle between a nutcracker and a seven-headed mouse. He wrote it for adults, and did not intend it for children. In 1844 Alexandre Dumas (the author of *The Three Musketeers*) **ADAPTED** Hoffmann's story for younger audiences.

It was Dumas' version of the story that sparked the interest of Marius Petipa, the senior ballet master of the Russian Imperial Ballet. He hired the Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to write a **SCORE** for the production. The choreography was created by Petipa and Lev Ivanov. The first performance of their new *Nutcracker* ballet was on December 18, 1892 in St. Petersburg, Russia. The audience and critics did not like it very much at first.

The Nutcracker was not performed outside of Russia until 1934. It was first presented in the U.S. in 1944, by the San Francisco Opera Ballet, with new choreography by Willam Christensen. One of the most famous productions of the ballet was created by the New York City Ballet in 1954, choreographed by George Balanchine. Since then, *The Nutcracker* has become one of the best-loved performances of the Christmas season. Hundreds of ballet and theater companies all over the world perform it every year. This production is by American Repertory Ballet (ARB), who are celebrating their 47th year of performing *The Nutcracker*. The show features a cast of over 100 performers: ARB's professional company of dancers as well as students from Princeton Ballet School.

ADAPT - to change something so it can be used for a specific purpose or for a specific audience, such as turning a book into a movie.

SCORE - the music written for a ballet, play, film, opera, or other performance

Adaptation

Think of a book you really liked that was adapted into a movie (such as *Harry Potter* or *Twilight*). Make a list: in one column, list all the things in the movie that were the same. In the second column, list the things in the movie that were different from the book. Did you like or dislike any of the changes? Why do you think the changes were made?

Why Do We Love The Nutcracker?

Though it is one of the most popular ballets today, *The Nutcracker* was not very successful when it was first performed in 1892. One critic wrote:

For dancers there is little in it, for art absolutely nothing, and for the artistic fate of our ballet, one more step downward.

The critic did not seem to think *The Nutcracker* had much of a future, though history has proved him wrong! After you've seen the performance, discuss with your class: Why has this ballet been so successful for so long?

Clara and guests at the Christmas party



The Story

Act I

At the annual Christmas Eve party at the home of the Silverhaus family, Clara and Fritz anxiously await the lighting of the tree. To Clara's horror and Fritz's delight, the maid runs in, chasing a mouse through the hall. Father calls in the children, and the tree is lighted. The guests arrive: the Elegant Family, the Widow, her daughter and the Dapper Gent, and the Big Family with their nine children.

After the children perform a festive dance, the mysterious Uncle Drosselmeyer and his Nephew arrive. To everyone's delight, Drosselmeyer presents wonderful mechanical dolls: the Sugar Plum, the Cavalier, and the Soldier. He gives Clara, his favorite niece, a beautifully-carved Nutcracker. Fritz is jealous that Clara received such a marvelous gift. Grabbing the Nutcracker away from Clara, he drops it and breaks it. Drosselmeyer bandages the Nutcracker and gives it back to Clara. The party winds down: the guests depart, and the Silverhaus family goes to bed.

Unable to sleep, Clara sneaks downstairs to the parlor. She picks up her Nutcracker and begins to dance with it. Strange shadows and the scurrying of little mice come to disturb her fun. Drosselmeyer reappears. To Clara's amazement, he magically transforms the parlor into a battleground. Now grown life sized, Nutcracker and his Toy Soldiers defend the Christmas tree from the army of Rats and Mice. When her beloved Nutcracker is wounded, Clara defends him by throwing her shoe at the Rat King, vanquishing him and his awful troops.

Drosselmeyer transforms the Nutcracker into the Nutcracker Prince. Angels appear as the parlor becomes the enchanted Land of Snow. Clara and the Nutcracker Prince meet the beautiful Snow Queen and King and are dazzled by the whirling of dancing Snowflakes.

—Intermission—

Act II

In the Land of Sweets, Clara and the Nutcracker Prince are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The Prince tells the story of the great battle for the Christmas tree and how Clara saved the day. To reward Clara for her heroic deeds, the Sugar Plum Fairy presents dances from all the different Lands of the Sweets: Chocolate from Spain, Coffee from Arabia, Tea from China, Candy Canes from Russia, Marzipan from Germany, and Mother Ginger and her many children. A bouquet of Flowers performs a beautiful waltz, then the Sugar Plum Fairy dances with her Cavalier. After the grand finale, a very happy but tired Clara returns home to the comfort of the family parlor and dreams of her wonderful journey.

Drosselmeyer and Clara



Questions for Discussion

What occasions do you celebrate with parties? Who attends? What do you do at these parties?

Do you ever dance at parties? What kind of dancing do you do?

Do you ever have disagreements with your brothers and sisters or other family members? What do you argue about? How do you resolve these conflicts?

What special gifts have you received and what made them special?

Have you ever been away on a trip? Where did you go?

Where would you go if you could choose any fantasy or real place to visit?

If you went to a "Land of Sweets," what foods would you like to find there?

Delicious Dancing

The second act of *The Nutcracker* begins in the Land of Sweets. Clara and the Nutcracker Prince find many beautiful flower buds. The Dew Drop Fairy opens the pods to reveal sweets from many lands. They are followed by more dances to entertain Clara and the Prince. Here are all the dances in the Land of Sweets:

Chocolate from Spain

Coffee from Arabia

Tea from China

Candy Canes from Russia

Marzipan from Germany - Marzipan is a candy made from sugar and ground almonds.

Mother Ginger - Mother Ginger's 12 children delightfully frolic about.

Waltz of the Flowers - A bouquet of flowers and the Dew Drop Fairy dance for Clara and the Prince.

Grand Pas de Deux - The Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier dance a beautiful classical *grand pas de deux* (grand dance for two people).

Finale - The big Finale is danced by all of the Sweets.

CHOREOGRAPHY - the steps, body movements, and patterns used in a dance

Dances of Many Lands

While you are watching the different dances in the Land of Sweets, pay attention to the costumes, the music, and the **CHOREOGRAPHY**. How are the dances the same? How are they different?

On a map, find the countries represented by the dances in the Land of Sweets. What do you know about each one?

Create a travel poster for the Land of Sweets.

What kinds of dances have been passed down in your family? What countries do they come from? What do these dances look like? When do you dance them? Are there special shoes or costumes? What kind of music is played?

Visions of Sugar Plums

The Sugar Plum Fairy gets her name from a traditional Christmas treat from England. They were originally plums covered in sugar. They later became small, plum-shaped candies made from dried fruit, nuts, honey, and spices coated in sugar. Here's a recipe for making your own sugar plums.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 2 cups whole almonds | 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice |
| 1 cup mixed dried fruit, such as prunes, apricots, dates, or figs | 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg |
| 2 teaspoons grated orange zest | 1/4 cup honey |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon | 1 cup powdered sugar |

Preheat the oven to 400°. Place the almonds in a single layer on a baking sheet and toast them in the oven for 10 minutes. In a food processor, chop the almonds and dried fruit. In a bowl, mix together the orange zest, spices, and honey. Add the chopped nuts and fruit and mix well.

Pinch off rounded teaspoon-sized pieces of the mixture and roll them into balls. Roll the balls in the powdered sugar and refrigerate them in single layers between sheets of waxed paper in airtight containers.

Makes about 36 sugar plums.



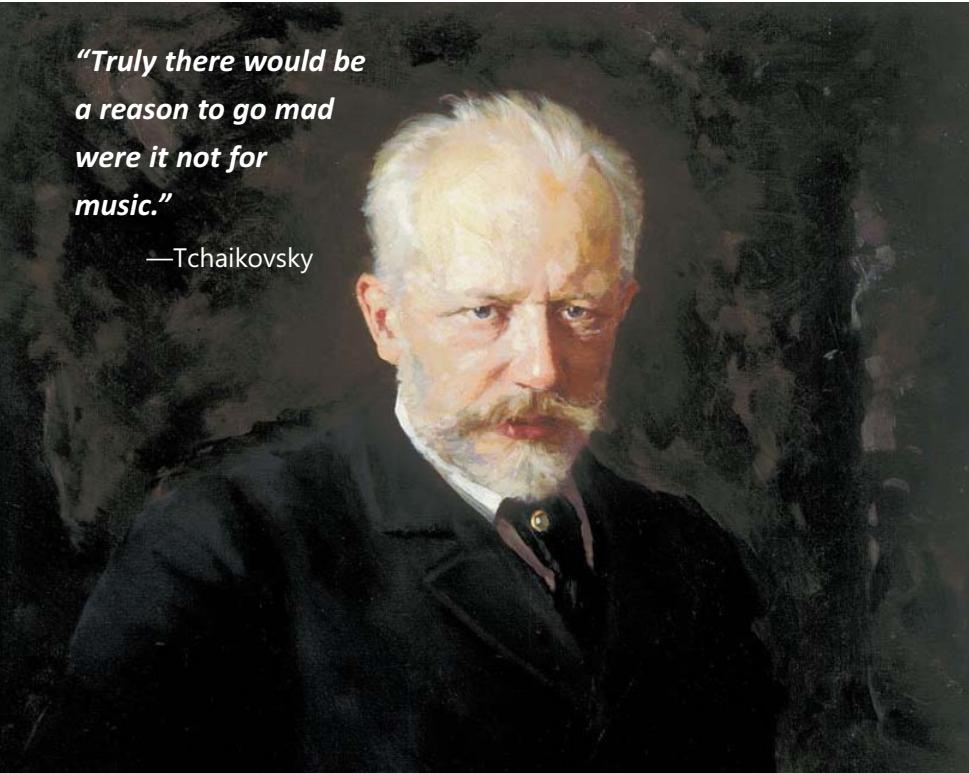
photo: George Jones

Spanish Dancers

Meet the Composer

“Truly there would be a reason to go mad were it not for music.”

—Tchaikovsky



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) was a Russian composer, conductor, and music professor. Born in Votkinsk, Russia, into a wealthy family, he began composing music at age 14. As his family wished, he went to law school, but gave up this career to study music at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In 1866, he moved to Moscow, where he was introduced to many of Russia’s most influential composers.

Tchaikovsky went on to write operas, symphonies, piano and violin concertos, and other pieces. He is considered by many to be the greatest composer of music for ballet; in addition to *The Nutcracker*, he wrote the music for the ballets *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. Outside of ballet, his best-known works are the *1812 Overture*, *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture*, Violin Concerto, Piano Concerto No. 1, Symphony No. 6 (the “Pathétique” Symphony), and the operas *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*. Tchaikovsky’s music is in the Romantic style, filled with strong emotions and lush melodies. He is notable for incorporating traditional Russian music (including folk melodies) into Western classical music.

During his lifetime, Tchaikovsky become enormously popular throughout Europe and abroad. On a concert tour of America in 1891, he conducted some of his music at the very first performance at New York’s Carnegie Hall. Despite his success, the composer suffered from anxiety and depression, suffering several nervous breakdowns. Some scholars believe that his death—he died of cholera after drinking contaminated water—was a suicide, though this is impossible to prove.

A Sweet Suite

Many people confuse *The Nutcracker* ballet with *The Nutcracker Suite*. A suite (pronounced ‘sweet’) is made up of portions of music from a ballet, opera, play, or film, rearranged for an orchestra to play. In *The Nutcracker Suite*, Tchaikovsky put together sections of music from the ballet into a piece of music to be performed in concert—without the dancers. And so, you **watch** *The Nutcracker* ballet, but you **listen** to *The Nutcracker Suite*!

Heavenly Music

During the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, listen closely for a musical instrument called the celesta. The word ‘celesta’ comes from a French word that means ‘heavenly.’ The instrument looks like a piano and sounds like fairy bells or a music box.



The Romantic Era

Tchaikovsky was one of the great composers of the Romantic Era. Romanticism was a movement in art, music, literature, dance, and theater. The focus was on expressing intense emotion—and not just about love. Recurring themes included imagination, love, nature, and the supernatural. Besides Tchaikovsky, prominent Romantics included composers Frédéric Chopin and Richard Wagner; writers Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe; and painters J.M.W. Turner and Francisco Goya.

Ballet Glossary

Ballet began in France more than 300 years ago. For this reason, most of the vocabulary used in ballet today is French. Here are some common ballet terms:

ARABESQUE (are-ah-BESK) - a position where the dancer stands on one leg with the other leg stretched straight out behind, parallel to the floor

ATTITUDE (ah-tee-TUDE) - a position where the dancer stands on one leg with the other leg curved to the back

BARRE (BAR) - a horizontal wooden bar fastened to the walls of the ballet studio. The dancer holds onto it for support while practicing. Every ballet class begins with exercises at the barre.

CHAÎNÉS (sheh-NAY) - a series of quick turns done moving forward in a straight line or circle

CHASSÉ (shah-SAY) - a series of steps where one foot "chases" the other across the floor

CORPS DE BALLET (CORE duh ba-LAY) - the dancers in a ballet who do not perform a solo part

DÉVELOPPÉ (day-vlaw-PAY) - a move in which one leg is raised with the knee bent, then slowly extended into an open position

EN POINTE (ahn PWAHNT) - dancing on the tips of the toes. Dancing *en pointe* gives the impression of floating on the air. In ballet, only women dance *en pointe*.

FOUETTÉ (fweh-TAY) - a quick "whipping" movement of the raised leg, usually as part of a pirouette

GRAND JETÉ (GRON zhuh-TAY) - a broad, high leap with one leg stretched forward and the other back like a "split" in the air

PAS DE DEUX (PAH de DUH) - a dance for two people, usually a male and female. The *pas de deux* sections of a ballet usually express intense emotion, such as love, sadness, or joy.

PORT DE BRAS (por duh brah) - the way the arms are held and moved

PIROUETTE (peer-oo-WET) - a whirl or spin done on one foot

PLIÉ (plee-AY) - lowering the body by bending the knees

TOUR JETÉ (TOOR zhuh-TAY) - a jump from one foot to the other while making a half turn

TURNOUT - a basic ballet position where the feet and legs turn outward from the hips in a 90-degree angle

VARIATION - a solo dance



ARABESQUE

Pictured: Daniil Simkin

photo: Gene Schiavone



ATTITUDE



PLIÉ WITH
TURNOUT



GRAND JETÉ

Pictured: Steven McRae

photo: © Bill Cooper

Mime Time



Pacific Northwest Ballet. Photo © Angela Sterling

The Nutcracker is a **STORY BALLET**. It tells a story using movement and dance, but the dancers do not speak. During a ballet, you will sometimes see the dancers stop their leaps and twirls to act out parts of the story with gestures and facial expressions. This is called **MIME**. Mime helps the audience understand what is happening and what characters are thinking and feeling. If you've ever played charades, then you have done mime.

Here are some common mime gestures used in story ballets, along with their meanings.

- **ANGER:** Shake fist strongly
- **ASK:** Clasp hands together in pleading gesture
- **BEAUTIFUL:** Hand circles face
- **DANCING:** Roll hands from front of body to overhead
- **DEATH:** Arms straight in front, crossed at wrists with hands in fists
- **I/ME/MINE:** Hand points to chest to indicate oneself
- **LOVE:** Hands over heart
- **MARRIAGE:** Index finger points to ring finger of left hand
- **MONEY:** Rub thumb and fingers of one hand together
- **NO/NEVER:** Palms down, hands wave over each other, crossing at wrist
- **OBEY:** Point strongly to floor with index finger
- **THINK:** Touch or point to temple
- **SAD:** Fingers trace tears down cheek or wipe away tears

In this scene from the ballet *Sleeping Beauty*, the Lilac Fairy uses pantomime gestures to show that she is preventing the evil Carabosse from harming Princess Aurora.

Pantomime Activities

How does pantomime differ from dance? How can you use gestures, facial expressions, and mannerisms to create different characters?

Explore ways of communicating without talking. Can you say 'yes' without speaking? Can you say 'no', 'I don't know', or 'hello/goodbye'?

Try saying 'yes' using different body parts. Try it again, this time changing the tempo (speed) of your movements. Then experiment with the **energy** of your movements: tense, relaxed, heavy, light, smooth, choppy, etc.

Without speaking, perform one of the gestures from the mime vocabulary for the rest of your class and see if they can guess the meaning. Then create a brief "sentence" using pantomime and perform it for your class.

Listen to selections of Tchaikovsky's music for *The Nutcracker*. Create a pantomime that expresses how the music makes you feel.

The New York City Ballet has a video demonstrating some mime vocabulary.

www.nycballet.com/nycb/flash/mime_final.htm

How Do They Do That?

Ballet is a highly technical type of dance that takes years of study and practice to perform well. Dancers learn special techniques for executing the movements beautifully and with perfect precision—and for making it all look effortless! Besides training their bodies, ballet dancers have to learn a complicated movement vocabulary: the different body positions, movements, and patterns. One of the first things dancers are taught are the five basic foot and arm positions that are the building blocks of ballet.



FIRST POSITION



SECOND POSITION



THIRD POSITION



FOURTH POSITION



FIFTH POSITION

Staying on Their Toes!



In the performance, you'll see many of the female dancers performing *en pointe*—on the tips of their toes. In this technique, the dancers appear to be floating. It takes years of special training for a dancer to be able to do all those steps and turns while balanced on the ends of her toes. It also takes special shoes—pointe shoes—that are designed to help the ballerina dance *en pointe*. Here's how they work:

RIBBONS - Hold the shoe on the foot. They are made of cloth and tied with a special flat knot. The ribbons are crossed over the ankle to help give support—just the way athletes “strap up” their ankles with tape.

SHANK - The “backbone” of the shoe. This stiff inner sole is made of heavy leather. The shank helps transfer the dancer's weight from the toes into the arch, which is the strongest part of the foot.

BOX — Made of layers of cloth hardened with glue. This stiff inner shell protects the dancer's toes, softening the impact of steps and jumps. Even with this protection, a dancer's toes can sometimes start to bleed from dancing *en pointe*.

Amazing Athletes



Pictured: Zhong-Jing Fang

Dancers are not just performers—they are elite athletes. They have amazing flexibility, muscular strength and both physical and mental endurance. They are able to leap, land, and turn with grace. To stay in top condition, they follow a rigorous training routine. Professional dancers practice an average of six hours per day.

Believe it or not, quite a few football players take ballet classes! Since the 1970s, they've used ballet and other types of dance to improve their agility, balance, and control.

Believe It or Not...

- The average NBA player can jump 2½ feet in the air. Ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov was said to have jumped 5-6 feet in the air.
- A 1975 study in the *Journal of Sports Medicine* listed the three most physically and mentally taxing sports. Ballet was #1, football was #3. In between? Bullfighting.

Men in Ballet

When a lot of people think of ballet, they think of women in frilly tutus, dancing gracefully on the tips of their toes. But ballet dancing is not just for women and girls. As a matter of fact, when ballet was first invented, women were not even allowed to appear on stage!

Ballet was born in the 15th century in the royal courts of Italy and France. At first, all the dancers were male—female roles were danced by men wearing masks. By the 1680s, dancers of both sexes were equally admired. By the 19th century, however, women dancers dominated the ballet stage. It was not until the 1960s, when Russian male dancers such as Vaslav Nijinsky, Rudolf Nureyev, and Mikhail Baryshnikov showed that men could be ballet superstars, too!



Pictured: Carlos Acosta

Becoming a Ballerina

Alexandra and Amanda Torres are two of the over 100 performers in American Repertory Ballet's *The Nutcracker*. In the show, they both play Soldiers. Alexandra, who is 13, and Amanda, who is 12, began their dance training in the company's DANCE POWER program, which introduces the basic concepts of dance to every third grader in the New Brunswick schools. They also got to see *The Nutcracker* at the State Theatre. Dance Power was their very first experience with ballet.

After third grade, both Alexandra and Amanda received scholarships to continue studying dance at the American Repertory Ballet's studio in New Brunswick. As they became more and more skilled, they were eventually chosen to perform with the company in *The Nutcracker*. The sisters discuss what it's like to be a dancer.

Q: How often/how many hours do you practice and take class each week?

A: Both of us take 3 hours of class each week. We also try to practice 20 minutes a day. During rehearsals for *The Nutcracker*, we have to rehearse every Saturday and Sunday.

Q: What's your part in the Nutcracker?

A: Last year we were Candy Cooks. *Alexandra* - This year I would love to be a Snow Ball or a Solider. *Amanda* - I would like to play those roles too. I would also love to be a party guest or a Russian.

Q: Do you get nervous performing in front of the audience?

A: We do! We try to ignore it, though. When we're on stage we try not to look at the audience. If we make a mistake we act like it's part of the role.

Q: Do you like attending dance performances?

A: We love watching ballet. Last year we saw *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*.

Q: What advice would you give a young person who is considering getting into dance?

A: Dance is fun and you get many friends from class. It's easier than we first thought it would be. When we saw *The Nutcracker* before taking class, we didn't know how we would ever be able to be in the show, but now we are!



Alexandra and
Amanda Torres

The Production Team

A movie is exactly the same every time you see it. But no two live performances are ever the same. You could see *The Nutcracker* a hundred times, and each time it would be different. The differences may be small, or they may be huge.

Every ballet company that decides to present *The Nutcracker* starts with the same music and the same story. Then they bring together their own creative team to invent the choreography, costumes, lighting, and sets and to select the dancers who will perform the roles. They might decide to create a traditional *Nutcracker*, or they may choose to go in an entirely different direction: changing the time period, location, etc. Can you imagine a *Nutcracker* that is set on Mars? How about in a shopping mall?

Each member of the production team contributes special talents, training, and ideas. Some of the people on *The Nutcracker* team include:

CHOREOGRAPHER creates the dances.

COSTUME DESIGNER researches, designs, and supervises the construction of the costumes.

SET DESIGNER creates the designs for the scenery, including the backdrops, props, and furniture.

LIGHTING DESIGNER uses the color, intensity (brightness), and placement of the lights to create a mood for each scene.

STAGE MANAGER supervises the technical crew during the performance, giving cues for lighting and when to raise and lower the curtain. The stage manager also tells the performers when to make their entrances onstage.

WARDROBE MASTER or **WARDROBE MISTRESS** takes care of the costumes, shoes, and wigs by cleaning and mending them as necessary.



Putting It All Together

After the performance, write a review. Talk about the different elements of the performance: not just the dancers, but the contributions of the entire production team: choreography, lighting, costumes, and sets. Here are some questions to help you think about what to include in your review.

What were your feelings when you first learned that you were going to see a ballet? Do you still feel the same way after seeing the performance?

What were the three things that you liked most about the performance?

What three things in the show would you like to change?

Was there anything about the show that was different than you expected?

Would you like to see another ballet?



Choreographer Mark Morris calls his version of *The Nutcracker* "The Hard Nut."

Get Ready!

Step 1: Learn Your Part.

At the theater, you join in a special partnership between the audience and the performers. As a member of the audience, you need to do your part to make the show a success. During the performance, your job is to focus all your energy and attention on what's happening onstage.

The way you respond to the show matters a great deal to the performers. Laugh at the funny parts. Applaud if you like what you see and hear!

Here are some rules of behavior for a live performance:

Turn it off!

Before the performance starts, turn off and put away all electronic devices: cellphones, iPods, games, etc. And no texting during the show!



No Photos!

The audience is not allowed to take photos or make any video or sound recording of the show.

No Food!

Do not eat, drink, or chew gum in the theater.



Quiet, Please!

No talking or whispering once the show begins. Remain quietly in your seat during the entire performance.

Step 2: Find Out More.

BOOKS

Appreciating Dance: A Guide to the World's Liveliest Art, by Harriet Lihs. Princeton Book Company, 2009. A comprehensive guide to all forms of dance. Includes questions for discussion.

Ballet School, by Naia Bray-Moffatt and David Handley. DK Children, 2003. Grades K-3

The Nutcracker, by E. T. A. Hoffmann; Ralph Manheim (translator), Maurice Sendak (illustrator). Crown Publishing, 2001

DVD

George Balanchine's The Nutcracker. New York City Ballet production featuring Darci Kistler and Damian Woetzel, narrated by Kevin Kline. Warner Home Video, 1997

The Hard Nut. A modern adaptation of *The Nutcracker* by Mark Morris. Nonesuch, 2007

The Nutcracker. American Ballet Theatre production featuring Mikhail Baryshnikov and Gelsey Kirkland. Kultur Vide, 2004

MUSIC

The Nutcracker (complete ballet music), by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Kirov Orchestra and Choir, Valery Gergiev, conductor. Polygram

The Harlem Nutcracker, by David Berger, Duke Ellington, and Billy Strayhorn. *Such Sweet Thunder*, 1999. A jazz rendering of themes from Tchaikovsky's ballet score.

WEBSITES

American Ballet Theatre's Ballet Dictionary. Features video clips illustrating the dance terms

www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html

American Repertory Ballet

www.arballet.org

The Nutcracker website

www.nutcrackerballet.net