

CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR THE NUTCRACKER - GRADES 6+

Note to teachers: Students in grades 6 and up can benefit from much of the material included in the Curriculum packet for grades 4-5, particularly the terms and definitions, the brief history and summary of The Nutcracker in its ballet form, and exploration of the websites listed at the end of the packet. A copy of the Grade 4-5 packet is included for your convenience.

Older students are ready to explore several versions of the Nutcracker story and analyze the various interpretations and forms the story has taken since E.T. A. Hoffman published the first version in German in 1816. Here is a brief summary of sources for a variety of interpretations of this popular story. These are available through the Lancaster County Library.

Study/discussion of the evolution of print versions of The Nutcracker

Hoffman, E.T.A., *The Nutcracker*, a longish short story that is the origin of the story we know as The Nutcracker. Lots of potential for analysis and comparison; for students familiar only with the ballet story (based on a retelling by Alexander Dumas), Hoffman's story is hardly recognizable as a version of "The Nutcracker." See also "nutcracker" (as a tool and German folk icon) websites:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nutcracker>: nice images of nutcrackers; explanation of function of cracking nuts; links to pages on the ballet of the same name.

<http://www.kids.nutcrackermuseum.com>: from the Leavenworth Nutcracker Museum in Washington state. Lots of nutcracker images, photos of elementary-aged children working on nutcracker art projects, lesson plans on history and manufacturing of nutcrackers. A fun, off-beat site.

Vagin, Vladimir, *The Nutcracker Ballet*, Scholastic, 1995. A beautifully illustrated version of the story. An excellent starting point for comparing the versions of the story that evolved from Dumas' re-interpretation of Hoffman's story. See pp. 10-11 in the Grade 4-5 packet for discussion and critiquing activities.

Other versions are available at the library; search the catalog by subject "nutcracker."

Study/discussion/comparison of ballet/stage versions: "American" vs. "European interpretations

To fully appreciate the different forms the Nutcracker can take, students should view some of the video versions available from the Lancaster County Library, which include:

The Nutcracker, American Ballet Theater and Mikhail Baryshnikov (1977).
George Balanchine's The Nutcracker, the New York City Ballet & Warner Bros., 1994. *The Nutcracker*, Royal Ballet Covent Garden, 1985.

There are other versions as well, but these three versions (best viewed after attending the Donetsk/Ballet Theater performance) provide an excellent overview of contemporary interpretations of the more traditional versions.

One way to compare these different versions is to look at them as "American" (Balanchine and Baryshnikov) and "European" (Royal Ballet and Donetsk Ballet)

versions.

What are the similarities?

What are the differences?

How did differences between American and European versions develop?

Why did the similarities survive numerous interpretations?

Is one "better" than the other? Which is the most satisfying?

Other suggestions for discussion by older students include the following:

Critics' views

When *The Nutcracker* premiered at the Maryinsky Theater in 1892, it was not well-received by critics. Among their complaints was that Act I was "all story and no dancing;" whereas Act II was "all dancing and no story." What do you think?

If you sample some of the other versions on video (listed above), do you think this criticism applies to them? Why or why not? Is it possible that the creators of the video versions listed above were trying to correct the problems cited by critics in 1892? Do you think they succeeded?

Ballet: universal art form or one more variety of ethnic dance?

A more traditional view of ballet is as a "universal" art form, yet some contemporary (academic) writers insist that ballet is simply one more form of ethnic or regional dance, since it originated in Europe and derives from European court dances of the 17th century. Do you agree? Explain.

For an affectionate, interesting and informative discussion of the "American" *Nutcracker* phenomenon, see Jennifer Fisher's *"Nutcracker" Nation: How An Old World Ballet Became a Christmas Tradition in the New World*, Yale University Press, 2003. Based on her Ph.D. dissertation, this book is very readable by adult-level readers. Also provides a peek behind the scenes of several local productions. Caution: parents may wish to read it first; Fisher includes productions by gay/lesbian groups (pp. 107-08; do not confuse this production with the venerable San Francisco Ballet).

HELPFUL WEBSITES

NOTE ON BROWSING THE WEB:

You may wish to try browsing on your own to find sites not listed below. Yahoo provides much better results than Google when you enter either "Nutcracker" or "Ukraine."

Home Schoolers: If you allow your students to go on the web, be sure to monitor your students' browsing; Googling "Ukraine" may bring up several sites advertising women seeking marriage. Yahoo brings up some of these sites also, just not as many. Yahoo!igans.com is very kid-friendly and informative.

KENNEDY CENTER RESOURCES ON THE WEB

This rich resource deserves separate billing. For some really creative and innovative lesson plans integrating literature and the arts, check out Kennedy Center's ArtEdge website at <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/les.cfm>. Each lesson plan is complete, including resources to use in teaching. This is an incredible resource:

1. Use the search menu on the left-hand side of the screen; you can search by subject or by grade level-it makes navigating this extensive site so much easier.
2. Be sure to browse the "How-To" sections for teachers; there are lots of helpful ideas here.
3. And don't miss "Cue Sheets" at CuesheetLib@www.kc.org/education/cuesheets/home/cfm for many more ideas on using children's books and stories for arts education as well as meeting goals in language arts.

Nutcracker and ballet websites:

http://www.sfballet.org/download/pdf/Nutcracker_Study_Guide.pdf: San Francisco Ballet's informative website.

For students ready for a challenge, and for older students:

Lesson plans for 9-12 at <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/les.cfm>. Also, <http://www.balletmet.org/balletnotes.html> is an extensive website maintained by the Cleveland Ballet; extensive information on the Nutcracker ballet, its music, its creators, and history suitable for research by older students.

Websites with information on Ukraine (home of Donetsk dancers appearing in Ballet Theater of Lancaster's production):

<http://pages.prodigy.net/1.hodges/ukraine.htm>: This site is a teacher's dream, with links to pages on places to visit in Ukraine, recipes and folk arts, costumes, and the bandura, a traditional Ukrainian musical instrument. Most links are to other pages on this site with lots of illustrations and pictures. An amazing and informative site authored by Linda Hodges, who has traveled in Ukraine and assembled lots of information on the country and its people. There are even links to sites providing directions for pysanky eggs; this complicated folk art must be adapted for younger students. Nice illustrations of traditional symbols and their meanings.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donetsk>: some information on the city of Donetsk in Ukraine, home of the Donetsk Ballet, appearing with Ballet Theater of Lancaster in The Nutcracker. Links to other sites, including one on the Welsh founder of the city, John Hughes.

<http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/reference/index.html>: Yahoo's kid-friendly site with links to information on numerous countries. Enter "Ukraine" to find links to pictures of its flag, a map, and other information.

http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/Around_the_World/: Another kid-friendly page with links to various topics listed in the directory; Myth and Folklore takes you to sites on Ukrainian holiday traditions, including a discussion on the date of Christmas in Ukraine and how people celebrate this holiday.

http://www.janbrett.com/newsnotes/mitten_newsnotes2.htm: the author's website on her well-known book, based on a Ukrainian folktale. Interesting and informative, very kid-friendly.

RECIPES

Note on recipes: A search on Yahoo on "Ukrainian Recipes" brings up lots of sites; unfortunately, many are based in Canada and Europe and use metric measures for ingredients. Also, the emphasis on beets, horseradish, and blood sausages may not hold much appeal for young American palates. Lots of recipes for sweet yeast breads, which take time to complete. Pyrogies with sweet fillings (substitute other varieties of dried fruit for prunes) may be your best bet for exploring the foods of Ukraine.

[http://www2.windsorca\[BM1\]/+hlyanka/ukrecipes.html](http://www2.windsorca[BM1]/+hlyanka/ukrecipes.html) provides lots of links; "Georgia's Recipe Heaven," and #9 and #17 looked best; you may want to explore some of the other links, depending on your preferences and those of your students.

http://www.ukrainetoday.com/culture/food/food_shtml.: Scroll down to "Ukrainian Heritage Festival Feast" for descriptions of Ukrainian dishes and recipes more kid-friendly than most.

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