



Tchaikovsky's

# Nutcracker Ballet

BALLET THEATRE OF LANCASTER **STUDY GUIDE**

## LESSON 1 (1-2 sessions) Storybook version of **The Nutcracker**

Note: The book version referenced in this lesson plan is Deborah Hautzig's *The Nutcracker Ballet* (Step into Reading. A Step 3 book). Random House, 1992.

### *Learning Goals:*

- ❖ Students will become familiar with a book version of the Nutcracker Story.
- ❖ After hearing/reading a storybook version, students will be able to develop a story map identifying the main characters, setting, and events.
- ❖ Students will be able to describe Clara/Marie, Godfather Drosselmeier, Nutcracker prince, and the Sugar Plum Fairy relying on descriptors such as beautiful, handsome, mysterious, brave, kind, generous.
- ❖ Students will learn vocabulary for old-fashioned terms they may not be familiar with (see list below).
- ❖ Students will be able to draw or write a reaction to the story using a prompt such as "My favorite part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."

## Vocabulary List

(Page numbers refer to Deborah Hautzig's book, *The Nutcracker Ballet*)

**Godfather** (p. 9) - a man, usually a relative or close friend of the family who is a special person in a child's life. In the past, he would help parents with a child's education. In times when people did not live as long as they do now, he might be like a grandfather if the child had no surviving grandparents. A woman who enjoyed this special relationship with a child would be a "godmother."

**Wind-up toy** (pp. 10-11) - A mechanical toy. In the days before batteries, such toys had to be "wound up," usually by turning a key to set the mechanism inside the toys. Such toys made a clicking or clattering sound (similar to a clock's ticking) as they moved about; at first, the clicking was fast, but as the toy "wound down," it became slower and slower until it stopped.

**Nutcracker** (p. 12) - a wooden tool, often in the shape of a man, used to break the shells of nuts. Nuts in their shells would be inserted into the nutcracker's "mouth," then a lever on his "back" could be turned to bring his "jaws" together to break the shells so they could be removed. In the 1800s, especially in Germany, but also in other places, nutcrackers were painted in bright colors and given to children to help them break the shells of the nuts they received in the Christmas stockings.

**Grandfather clock** (p. 18) - A very tall clock; the clock face sits on top of a tall, narrow case which holds the clock's pendulum, which swings back and forth to help the clock keep time. These clocks would ring on the hour, with the number of chimes for the hour. For example, at eight o'clock, a grandfather clock would ring eight chimes. Old-fashioned grandfather clocks would need to be wound daily for them to keep the correct time.

**Waltz** (p. 46) - a dance which is fast-moving (3/4 time). Dancers appear to glide lightly and effortlessly around the stage. At a formal ball, this would be a dance for couples.

# Activities to do with students

- 1) Help students become familiar with vocabulary terms by pointing out terms as you read the story to them. See page 1.
- 2) Read a version of *The Nutcracker* story.
- 3) Discuss some of the following with your students to help them to prepare their "story map" listing the main characters, setting, and events of the story:

- Where does the story take place?
- When does it take place?
- Who is the main character of the story?
- What is she like/how would you describe her?
- Who are some of the other characters? (Students' focus should be directed to Godfather Drosselmeier, Nutcracker Prince, Sugar Plum Fairy) What is each like/how would you describe him/her? What do they do in the story?

- What is Marie's special present?
- What strange things happen at midnight?
- What happens to Marie's Nutcracker?
- How does Marie save the Nutcracker?
- Where does the Prince take Marie?
- How do the inhabitants of the Land of Sweets celebrate their Prince's return?
- How does the story end?

- 4) Provide a prompt for illustrating or writing a reaction to the story. Some sample prompts include:

- "My favorite part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."
- "The scariest part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."
- "The saddest part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."
- "The happiest part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."

## *Is it Marie or Clara?*

### A NOTE ON NAMING TRADITIONS

Why is the heroine's name "Marie" in the book and "Clara" in the ballet? In many book versions of *The Nutcracker*, the main character is named "Marie." This is because of twists and turns in the evolution of the Nutcracker tale. The first version of the Nutcracker story was published by the German author E.T.A. Hoffman in 1816. Hoffman's somewhat dark tale centers on a girl named Clara, who is not the cherished daughter of the ballet, but an unloved and neglected orphan living in the house of relatives. She bravely copes with the hard work she is required to do in the household and the fact that she is unappreciated. She does have a mysterious godfather, Dr. Drosselmeier, who watches out for

her and gives her gifts of warm clothing and other presents to help brighten her dreary life. One Christmas, he gives Clara a Nutcracker doll. This Nutcracker is really his beloved nephew, who is under an evil spell that only true love can break. Clara's love for her Nutcracker breaks the spell and turns him back into a young man. They eventually marry.

In 1847, the French writer Alexandre Dumas, father of the more famous writer of the same name, retold Hoffman's story, removing some of its darker elements. He renamed his heroine "Marie." Marie's love for her Nutcracker frees him from the evil spell and they marry to live happily ever after. This version of the story is the one on which *The Nutcracker Ballet* is based.

Four decades later, Russian readers were familiar with Dumas'

story. The director of the Russian Imperial Ballet decided to stage a ballet based on Dumas' telling of the Nutcracker story. His chief choreographer, Marius Petipa, directed composer Peter Tchaikovsky to write music for the "scenes" that he developed.

Petipa moved on to other projects, so his assistant, Lev Ivanov, developed the choreography for that first ballet version of *The Nutcracker*. The ballet, with the heroine named "Clara" again, premiered at St. Petersburg's Maryinsky Theater in 1892.

Because of the way the ballet developed from not one, but two book versions, the heroine of the story can be known as either "Marie" or "Clara." Most book versions call her "Marie;" in most ballets, she is known as "Clara."



## LESSON 2 (2-3 sessions) Preparing to see **The Nutcracker**

### *Learning Goals*

- ❖ Students will learn selected terms used in theater, ballet, and in this Nutcracker production (Study Guide p. 3-5)
- ❖ Students will learn what to expect at a ballet performance. (Study Guide p. 5)
- ❖ Students will become familiar with costuming traditions in ballet for men and women. (Study Guide p. 6)
- ❖ Students will become familiar with the narrative of Ballet Theater of Lancaster's version of THE NUTCRACKER. (Study Guide p. 6)
- ❖ Students will learn appropriate behavior for audience members at a performance. (Study Guide p. 7)

## Theater Terms and Definitions

### *Applause*

Hand-clapping by audience to thank the performers for their work.

### *Audience*

The people who come to watch a performance.

### *Auditorium*

The area in which seats for the audience are located.

### *Curtains*

The main curtain across the front of the stage hides the stage area until the performance begins, or until scene changes are completed. Curtains along the sides and back of the stage hide backstage areas from the audience.

### *Dressing rooms*

The rooms where performers change their

clothes. Those with starring roles have their own dressing rooms; those with minor roles have to share, with men and women in separate rooms.

### *House Lights*

The lights in the auditorium, where the audience sits. When these lights dim, the performance is about to begin.

### *Intermission*

A break in the middle of the performance. School performances of the Nutcracker have a very short intermission - about 2 minutes. Most intermissions last 10 to 15 minutes.

### *Make-up*

Used by performers to help create their character's appearance. Stage make-up

is much heavier than regular make-up. Make-up can help create wrinkles to make a young performer appear older.

### *Scenery*

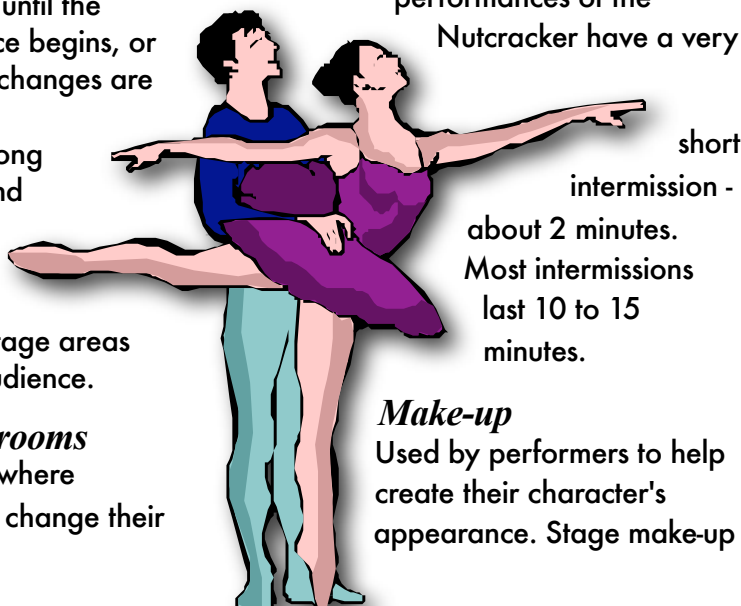
Used to help audience imagine the setting of a story. The Nutcracker uses a kind of hanging scenery called a "drop." This is a large piece of canvas, as wide as the stage, with a scene painted on. In Act I, the drop shows a Christmas tree; Act II shows a snowy scene for the "Land of Sweets"

### *Stage*

The area of the theater, usually in front, where the performance takes place.

### *Wings*

The areas to each side of the stage, out of sight of the audience. These areas are where performers wait to make their entrance onto the stage and into the action.



# Ballet Terms:

**Ballet** - a form of theatrical dance (meant to be watched) that uses particular movements and poses.

**Ballerina** - a female ballet dancer. This term once referred to the star female dancer in a company; now it means any female ballet dancer.

**Corps de Ballet** - ballet dancers who perform as a group. In the Nutcracker, the Waltz of the Flowers is performed by the corps de ballet.

**Costumes** - outfits appropriate to characters worn by performers. Sugar Plum Fairy wears a sparkling white tutu to help you imagine her as a fairy. The mice wear grey costumes and heads that look like mice. Male ballet dancers often wear leotards and tights as part of their costumes; they dress this way because of ballet's origins in the Renaissance, when men actually dressed in hose and short pants for everyday wear.

**Danseur** - a male ballet dancer.

**Divertissement** - a dance or series of dances which show a dancer's skill. These occur in many story ballets, but they may not relate to the events of the story. In the Nutcracker, the "country" dances of Act II (Spanish, Arabian, Chinese, Russian, Marzipan, Mother Ginger) are divertissement.

**Entrechat** - a jump in which the dancer quickly crosses the legs in front of and behind each other several times. Watch for spectacular entrechats by the male dancers of the Donetsk ballet.

**Jete** - a kind of jump in ballet, in which the dancer jumps from one foot to the other, kicking out with one leg. A Grand Jete is a large leap forward from one foot to the other.

**Leotard** - tightly knit, form-fitting garment worn by both men and women in ballet.

**On Pointe** - when a ballerina stands on the tips of her pointe shoes, she is said to be "on pointe."

**Pantomime** - a form of acting in which gestures and facial expressions are used instead of words to convey the story. Ballet dancers frequently use pantomime to help tell the story of a ballet.

**Pas de deux** - a ballet dance for a couple. The Sugar Plum Fairy and the Nutcracker Prince perform a pas de deux near the end of Act II of the Nutcracker.

**Pirouette** - ballet turn in which the dancer turns around completely on one foot.

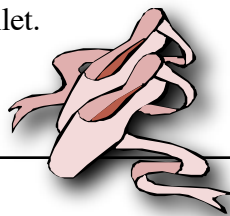
**Port de bras** - the arm movements of ballet.

**Spotting** - a technique in which dancers pick a "spot" to look at as they turn to keep from getting dizzy. As they turn, they quickly turn their head around so that they are always looking at the same spot in the room. It takes a lot of practice to master this technique. Most dancers are better at spotting from one direction than the other (some dancers spot better when turning to the left; others spot better when turning to the right).

**Tights** - tightly knit leg coverings worn by both men and women in ballet.

**Toe shoe** - special ballet shoes worn by ballerinas to allow them to dance on the points of their toes. These slippers have a hardened box, which is made of 7 layers of fabric glued together. This "box" goes around the toes to help support and protect the tips of the ballerina's toes. Ribbons help to keep the shoes on the feet. But the ballerina's feet also get support from her ankle and leg muscles. She has trained for years with special exercises to strengthen her legs, ankles, and feet. Student dancers may not wear "toe shoes" until age 10 or 11. Girls are usually a few years older before they have enough toe shoe experience to perform on stage.

**Tutu** - a ballerina's skirt, made of several layers of fine net-like fabric called "tulle" (pronounced "tool")



# What to expect at the ballet

*Some students may never have attended a ballet performance before. Some points to emphasize:*

1) The signal for the start of the ballet will be the dimming of the lights. It will seem very dark, but reassure children that this is what is supposed to happen. The curtain will not go up yet, but music will start to play; this is called the Overture. The Overture is a sampling of the music that will be heard all during the performance.

2) Once the Overture ends, dancers will emerge from the wings (offstage areas on either side of the stage). These dancers, and every dancer who follows, will help tell the story by pantomime. There are no spoken "lines" in ballet - dance, gesture, and facial expression are used to tell the story. Also, the changing sound of the music will also help set the mood for a scene and help tell the story. There will be no words spoken during the entire performance.

3) There will be a brief "pause" between Acts I and II of about 2 minutes. It is not a true intermission, which is usually 10 to 15 minutes long. This pause is not long enough for students to leave their seats. Be sure that students understand that the ballet will resume after Act I. Students often mistake the musical crescendo at the end of Act I for the finale.



## Nutcracker terminology:

**Godfather** - a man, usually a relative or close friend of the family who is a special person in a child's life. In the past, he would help parents with a child's education. In times when people did not live as long as they do now, he might be like a grandfather if the child had no surviving grandparents. A woman who enjoyed this special relationship with a child would be a "godmother."

**Nutcracker** - a wooden tool, often in the shape of a man, used to break the shells of nuts. Nuts in their shells would be inserted into the nutcracker's "mouth," then a lever on his "back" could be turned to bring his "jaws" together to break the shells so they could be removed. In the 1800s, especially in Germany, but also in other places, nutcrackers were painted in bright colors and given to children to help them break the shells of the nuts they received in the Christmas stockings.

**Marzipan** - a type of candy made of almond paste, sugar, and egg whites. It can be molded into shapes like fruits, hearts, or stars, etc. Traditionally, it is white.

**Overture** - When the house lights dim, and music begins to play, this is the overture. It signals the start of a performance where music is an important part of the story. It is a sampling of the music that will be heard throughout the story. There will be no action on stage during the overture, which lasts several minutes.

**Polichinelle** (poe LEE shee nell) is a French word that literally translated means "Punch," the Punch of the English puppet duo, Punch and Judy. They were the original comedy act, created in the 1700s. These puppets' loud arguments escalated into fights in which they hit and punched each other. Here, "polichinelles" means buffoons, or comic characters. In the Donetsk version of The Nutcracker, the Polichinelles are tiny, active characters who disrupt the more dignified dances of the dolls in the Land of Sweets. Mother Ginger has to gather them up and take them away before they get into trouble.

# Ballet Costumes

Please take some time to discuss costuming conventions in ballet; children are often surprised at the sight of men in tights. Costuming conventions in ballet are very old - they date from the way in which people "dressed up" in the Renaissance. Ballet originated at the royal courts of Italy and France during the 1500s and 1600s. At that time, women wore long, heavy skirts. As time went on, the skirts of women dancers became shorter and lighter to allow them more freedom of movement. In the Renaissance, however, men were already wearing

short pants called "doublets;" some styles of doublets reached below the knees, others ended at mid-thigh. They wore hose to cover the lower part of the leg not covered by their doublets. As time went on and the ballet dancing of men became more athletic, with leaps and turns, men needed less restrictive clothing too. Hence, they began to wear stretchy, form-fitting leotards and tights that allowed the maximum range of movement. Leotards and tights are often used in male dancers' costumes today because other kinds of costumes are too restrictive and don't allow freedom of movement. But at one time in history, men wore similar garments that exposed their legs.

## Ballet Theatre's "Nutcracker"

To help your students better understand what they will see onstage, here is a brief summary of the action on stage during the ballet:

### Act I

Guests arrive for a Christmas party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum and their children, Clara and Fritz. Adults watch the children play and dance. Dr. Drosselmeyer, godfather to Clara and Fritz, entralls the children with his magical tricks and mechanical dolls that seem almost human. All of the children receive presents. Just when it looks as if Fritz and Clara have no presents, Godfather Drosselmeyer gives Fritz a hobby horse and Clara a handsome Nutcracker. Clara falls in love with her wonderful present, but jealous Fritz breaks it. Godfather Drosselmeyer repairs the Nutcracker's broken jaw with his

handkerchief. The party ends with the traditional "Grandfather Dance," signaling the end of the party.

After everyone has gone, Clara is too excited to sleep. She creeps into the parlor with her Nutcracker. Perhaps she falls asleep, because a group of angels come to bid her goodnight. Then mice emerge from the shadows. Nightmarish things begin to happen: dolls and toy soldiers come to life. Clara's Nutcracker leads the toy soldiers in battle against the fierce Mouse King and his minions. At a critical moment, Clara summons the courage to throw her shoe at the Mouse King's head, and saves the Nutcracker's life. The Nutcracker is transformed into a handsome prince, awakened by the Sugar Plum Fairy. Together, they set off for the Nutcracker's home in the Kingdom of Sweets. They first pass through

the Land of Snow, where the Snowflakes dance.

### Act II

The Nutcracker Prince and the Sugar Plum Fairy arrive in the magical Kingdom of Sweets. Dolls from different countries welcome them with native dances. There is a Spanish Dance, an Arabian Dance, a Chinese dance, and a Russian Dance. Mother Ginger arrives with the Cooks and Polichinelles acting very silly on stage. Beautiful fairies dance the Marzipan Dance. Lovely fairies emerge to dance the Waltz of the Flowers. The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Nutcracker Prince perform the most beautiful dance of all.

Then Clara awakens in her own parlor. Godfather Drosselmeyer returns her Nutcracker, now completely repaired. She is grateful and overjoyed that her Nutcracker is like new again.

# Etiquette guidelines for enjoying the ballet

- ◆ When you arrive, ushers will guide you to your seats. If you have to step past people already sitting in your row, say "excuse me" and step quickly past to get to your seat. Don't stop in front of someone already sitting or turn around to talk to someone else in your group. Wait until you are seated to converse with other members of your group.
- ◆ Once you are seated, keep trips outside the auditorium to a minimum, even if you are seated at the end of a row. Visit the restroom and water fountain before the performance.
- ◆ Sometimes, you think you will not be able to see the stage because of a taller person sitting in front of you. The rows of seats are on an incline that slopes up toward the back, and the view of the stage is generally good. An advantage of the pew-type seating at Lancaster Mennonite High School is that you and members of your party can shift around slightly to improve your view of the stage without actually changing seats. If that doesn't work, see if someone (taller than you) in your party will switch seats with you. No matter what, do not stand up to get a better view-you will block the stage for the people seated behind you.
- ◆ Talk quietly with people on either side of you until the performance. Don't shout to someone several seats away. Once the lights go down and the music starts, do not continue talking. A darkened theater and the playing of music is your signal to watch for the start of the performance. It is traditional to play an overture before the start of The Nutcracker; it will play for a few minutes before you see dancers. Just listen and see if you recognize any of the "melodies."
- ◆ Audience reaction is important to performers, so laugh at the funny parts. Once a dancer completes an especially pretty or amazing dance, it's fine to clap for them. Applause is encouraging to performers-it lets them know you are enjoying what they are doing on stage.
- ◆ Do not shout any comments whatsoever to performers on stage.
- ◆ During the performance, please remember that you are in a theater with many other people who also want to see the stage and hear the music. Do not talk during the performance. The other people seated around you want to hear the music without the sound of your voice, even whispering (which is louder than you think), in the background.
- ◆ Please turn off all cell phones and beepers during the performance. If you must "stay connected," please set them to vibrate AND if they should go off during the performance, please exit the auditorium and make sure you are in the lobby before answering or making any calls.
- ◆ No pictures are allowed during the performance. Flash photography is dangerous for dancers while they are performing. No video or tape recording devices are allowed to operate during performances.

## LESSON 3 (1 session)

### After seeing **The Nutcracker**

#### *Learning Goals*

- ❖ Students will construct a story map of the ballet showing the main characters, setting, and events of the ballet. Older students may wish to compare this map to their story map of the book version.
- ❖ Students will reflect on their experience of the ballet, using a series of discussion, drawing and/or writing prompts.

#### *Discussion/Writing/Drawing prompts:*

What did you see at the Nutcracker?

What did you hear at the Nutcracker?

How did the ballet make you feel?

Did the costumes tell you who the characters were? How?

What did each character's dance tell you about them?

How did the sound of the music help you understand what was happening on stage?

What was your favorite part/character of the ballet?

Was there any part of the ballet that you did not like? Why?



## Great Websites for Nutcracker Activities

Boston Ballet Nutcracker Kid's Page- Crossword puzzle, word search, etc.

<http://www.bostonballet.org/nutcracker/nutcrackerkids/default.aspx>

National Ballet of Canada Nutcracker Study Guide-word searches, mazes, coloring page

[http://www.national.ballet.ca/EducationAndOutreach/pdf/Nutcracker\\_activity\\_%20book.pdf](http://www.national.ballet.ca/EducationAndOutreach/pdf/Nutcracker_activity_%20book.pdf)

Party scene to draw and color. Great for younger children

<http://www.dancealive.org/nutcracker/nutstage.pdf>

San Francisco Ballet-another study guide just brimming with lots of ballet info.

[http://www.sfballet.org/\\_download/pdf/Nutcracker\\_Study\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.sfballet.org/_download/pdf/Nutcracker_Study_Guide.pdf)

