

Cue Sheet

Guides for
Teachers

Highlights of The Nutcracker Ballet

Tuesday, December 2, 2025
10:15am & 12:15pm

Questions to ask students **BEFORE** the performance

- Have you attended a ballet performance before or taken a ballet class?
- How does ballet differ from other types of dance?
- Have you heard the story of *The Nutcracker*?

Questions to ask students **AFTER** the performance

- How were the dancers able to tell a story without using words?
- How much did the music help in telling the story? Was any of the music familiar to you already?
- What did the dancers do with their bodies to depict different characters?



About the Performance

The first performance of *The Nutcracker Ballet* took place in Russia in 1892. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (pronounced *chai-KoFF-skee*) adapted the ballet from a story called “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” written by German author E.T.A. Hoffmann. Marius Petipa (*PEH-tee-pah*) and his assistant Lev Ivanov created the original choreography. Although it is now an audience favorite, the first performance of the ballet was not regarded as a success. In fact, 25 years passed before it was performed outside of Russia!

A complete version of *The Nutcracker* was not performed in the United States until 1944, when it was presented by the San Francisco Ballet with choreography by William Christensen. It was this company that began the tradition of presenting *The Nutcracker Ballet* on an annual basis. In America, the dance has since become a holiday tradition.

This abbreviated version of *The Nutcracker Ballet* features highlights and on-stage narration for this introduction to ballet and classical music.

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Vocabulary

ballerina - a female ballet dancer

choreography - the art of composing dances; planning the movements, steps, and patterns of dancers

danseur - a male ballet dancer

glisser (*gliss-eh*) - to glide, a traveling step executed by gliding one foot in the required direction, the other foot closing to it

march - music characterized by its two- or four-beat pattern with the first beat emphasized

pas de deux (*paa-duh-dur*) - dances done by two people together

pirouette - a whirling about on one foot or on the points of the toes

plié (*p/ee-AY*) - to bend; a position where legs bend before rising or jumping up

relevé (*reh-leh-VAY*) - to rise; dancers lift their heels keeping toes down

sauté (*soh-TAY*) - to jump; done after a plié; dancer's spring into the air stretching their legs

silhouette - a likeness cut from dark materials and mounted on a light background; a shadow

solos - dances done by one person

spotting - dancers focus their eyes on one point as they turn their bodies, helping them avoid dizziness

tempos - the speeds at which music is played

turner (*toor-neh*) - to turn; indicates that the body is to turn while executing a given step

waltz (*wa-ls*) - music characterized by its three-beat pattern with the first of the three emphasized

Beyond the Show

These short activities can be used before or after the performance.

Listening to a Story

Play a song from *The Nutcracker* soundtrack. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine a story that might be unfolding as they listen. What characters, settings, or emotions come to mind? Afterward, have them draw a picture of the scene they imagined.

Rhythm and Counting

Play short excerpts of the music from *The Nutcracker*. Discuss rhythm and tempo. Can students follow the music's rhythm and beats by tapping their feet or clapping their hands? Introduce the concept of an eight-count that dancers use to guide or choreograph their movements. Follow the rhythm and beats of the music to count to eight.

8-Count Choreography

Now that students can count to 8 with the music, can they put a movement together to match each beat? Ask them to divide up into pairs or a small group and choreograph different small movements that they'll make for each beat. For instance, one beat could be moving a foot forward, another lifting an arm, perhaps another beat involves moving both a leg and an arm at the same time. Can the students put their movements to the 8-count and repeat them over the course of the music?

Click here!

Visit the show's page on our **Schooltimes Series website** for more educational resources.

Facts about Popejoy Hall

- Popejoy Hall officially opened on October 1, 1966.
- The hall can seat up to 1985 people.
- Most walls inside the hall are not parallel or perpendicular to the stage. Curves, angles, and soft or textured surfaces scatter the sound throughout the hall so that audiences can hear performances better.
- Popejoy Hall has an orchestra pit which raises and lowers. It is the largest elevator in the building.
- The ceiling over the stage is three times the height of the curtain opening. Sets can be lowered into place by pulleys and raised high enough to be stored completely out of sight when not in use.

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