

Teacher Guide

Cue Sheet

Highlights of the Nutcracker Ballet

Wednesday, December 2, 2026

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?
- Do you know 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?
- What was something you didn't expect to happen?



About the Performance

The first performance of *The Nutcracker Ballet* took place in Russia in 1892. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (pYO-ter ILL-yitch chai-KOFF-skee) adapted the ballet from a literary fairy tale called *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, written by German author E.T.A. Hoffmann. Marius Petipa (PEH-tih-pah) and his assistant Lev Ivanov (EYE-vuh-nawv) created the original choreography. Although the ballet remains an audience favorite today, its premiere was far from a success. In fact, it took 25 years before the ballet was performed outside of Russia.

The San Francisco Ballet introduced the complete version of *The Nutcracker* to the United States in 1944 with choreography by William Christensen, beginning an annual tradition. In America, the dance has become a holiday staple. This abbreviated version of *The Nutcracker Ballet* highlights key moments and features on-stage narration that serves as an introduction to ballet and classical music.



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Vocabulary

ballerina (*bal-er-EE-nuh*) - a female ballet dancer

choreography (*cohr-ee-AH-gruh-fee*) - the art of composing dances; planning the movements, steps, and patterns of dancers

danseur (*dohn-SUR*) - a male ballet dancer

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

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

pas de deux (*pah-day-DOOH*) - dances done by two people together

pirouette (*peer-oo-ETT*) - a whirling about on one foot or on the points of the toes

plié (*plee-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 (*sill-oo-ETT*) - a likeness cut from dark materials and mounted on a light background; a shadow

solos (*SOH-lohs*) - dances done by one person

spotting (*SPAH-ting*) - dancers focus their eyes on one point as they turn their bodies, helping them avoid dizziness

tempos (*TEM-pohs*) - the speeds at which music is played

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

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



Additional Resources

Click here to learn more about *The Nutcracker* from the North Central Ballet.

Interactive PDF
Click here to visit link.

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Beyond the Show

Use these activities before or after the performance to extend the production's themes and concepts into the classroom.

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*, such as "March" or "No. 12 Divertissement Tea (Chinese dance)." 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 will make for each beat. For example, students may step forward on beat one, lift their right arm on beat two, lift their left arm on beat three, and step backward on beat four. Can the students repeat their movements to an 8-count and repeat the sequence throughout the to one of the songs in the previous activity?