

presents

The Nutcracker – Act I

Performed by

Texas Ballet Theater

For Third Grade Students

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Introduction

Dear Teachers,

We are thrilled to bring Texas Ballet Theater's magical performance of *The Nutcracker Ballet* to third graders. So many beautiful memories are made each holiday season during performances of this immortal childhood favorite.

Because the entire performance is over 2 hours long, we will present only the first act, which is approximately 45-50 minutes in length. While the first act does not include "Waltz of the Flowers" or the "Russian Trepak," there are still many special moments in store for them. We encourage you to introduce your students to all the music found in the *Nutcracker Suite*, encouraging them to imagine what the ballet dancers would do during these sections. This is some of the world's most favorite music and we are excited to bring to your student's repertoire of music! Please remember that there is no dialogue for this performance, so we encourage you to familiarize your students with a synopsis of the story before attending the performance. We have included a short synopsis here for your use, as well as a link to a short-animated film version that includes dialogue and music. If you find a resource that you feel is more suited for your class, please feel free to use!

Many TEKS objectives can be met with the material covered in this study guide. We have listed them collectively so that you may choose those that fit the needs of your students. Please remember that there is no dialogue for this performance, so we encourage you to familiarize your students with a synopsis of the story before attending the performance. We have included a short synopsis here for your use.

Children's Education Program
Performing Arts Fort Worth

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

English Language Arts and Reading:

The student recognizes and analyzes genre-specific characteristics, structures, and purposes within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse texts.

- 3.9(C) discuss elements of drama such as characters, dialogue, setting and acts.
- 3.10(A) explain the Authors purpose and message within a text
- 3.8(C) analyze plot elements, including the sequence of events, the conflict, and the resolution
- 3.8(B) explain the relationship among the major and minor characters
- 3.6(E) make connections to personal experiences, ideas in other texts and society

Social Studies:

The student understands common characteristics of communities, past and present.

- 3.2(A) Identify reasons people have formed communities
- 3.9(A) identify characteristics of good citizenship, including truthfulness, justice, equality, respect for oneself and others, responsibility in daily life, etc.
- 3.10(A) explain the significance or various ethnic and/or cultural celebrations in the local community and other communities
- 3.10(B) compare ethnic and/or cultural celebrations in the local community with other communities
- 3.12(A) identify how various writers and artists contribute to the cultural heritage of communities

Music:

The student listens to, responds to, and evaluates music and musical performances. The student examines music in relation to history and culture.

- 3.5(B) identify music from diverse genres, styles, periods and cultures
- 3.6(A) exhibit audience etiquette during live and recorded performances

Theater:

The student relates theatre to history, society and culture

- 3.3(A) identify technical theater elements such as props, costumes, sound and visual elements that define character, environment, action and theme
- 3.4(A) explore historical and diverse cultural influences from a variety of sources through dramatic activities
- 3.4(B) illustrate similarities and differences between life and theatre, television, and film through dramatic play
- 3.5(A) apply appropriate audience behavior consistently
- 3.5(B) discuss and evaluate simple dramatic activities and performances
- 3.5(C) discuss the use of music, movement, and visual components in dramatic activities and performances



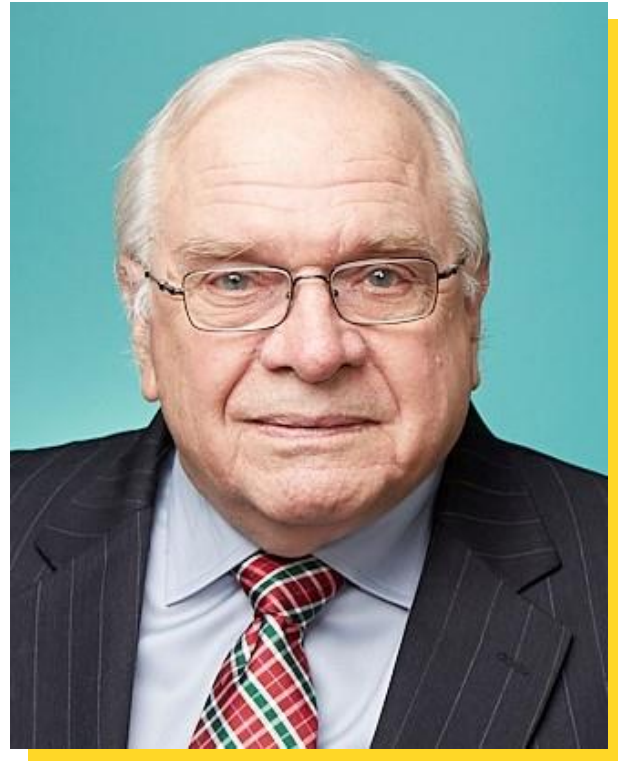
The Choreographer

Ben Stevenson, O.B.E.

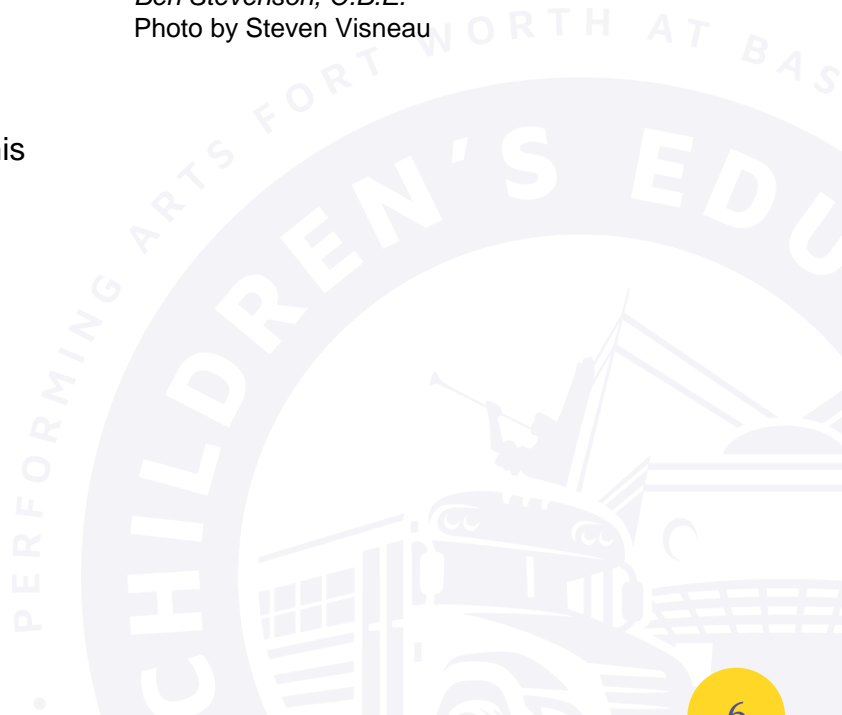
Texas Ballet Theaters, Ben Stevenson, O.B.E., a native of Portsmouth, England, received his dance training at the Arts and Educational School in London. He appeared with the Royal Ballet and English National Ballet where, as a principal dancer, he performed lead roles in all the classics.

He has received numerous awards for his choreography, including three gold medals at the International Ballet Competitions. For his contributions to international dance, Mr. Stevenson was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) by Queen Elizabeth II in December 1999. In April 2000, he was presented with the Dance Magazine Award. In 2018, Mr. Stevenson was acknowledged by the Chinese government as one of the most influential Foreign Experts in the past 40 years since China initiated its policy on Reform and Opening Up.

Mr. Stevenson assumed the artistic directorship of Texas Ballet Theater in July 2003. In 2022, Mr. Stevenson was named Artistic Director Laureate in recognition of his lengthy tenure. Previously he served as artistic director of Houston Ballet (1976-2003), elevating the company from a regional troupe to an internationally acclaimed ensemble.



Ben Stevenson, O.B.E.
Photo by Steven Visneau





The Composer

Pytor Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Peter Tchaikovsky [chai-KAAF-skee] (1840-1893), was born in the Russian town of Votkinsk. He begged for piano lessons as a young boy after hearing music by Austrian composer, Mozart. He thought that Mozart's music was the most perfect music written, but his father didn't think that music was a suitable career for a young man, so he was forced to study law. When he was away at law school, his mother died. The sadness of her death caused him to compose his first music. Soon after that he gave up the study of law and became a full-time musician.

His music was written during the **Romantic** period. Composers in the Romantic period wrote music that reflected their feelings. Romantic didn't necessarily mean it was written about feelings of love, but that they were written in ways to evoke strong emotions from the listeners. Often romantic composers wrote music about stories, poems or pictures.

Some of his most famous pieces were his ballets--*The Nutcracker Suite*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Swan Lake*.

He also wrote symphonies, the *1812 Overture*, concertos and several operas.

Tchaikovsky is considered the most famous Russian composer. He struggled with depression and anxiety and debilitating stage fright. He would even hold his head with one hand while conducting for fear that it would fall off! Yet, he composed and conducted nonetheless!

Ballets were where he could escape from the anxieties and fears of the real world, into the world of dreams. He wrote the music to *The Nutcracker Suite* in 1892. The ballet was a flop at first. Not long after the ballet's premier, Tchaikovsky died at the age of 53. Peter Tchaikovsky died, never knowing that he had composed the most popular ballet ever written!



Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky, Library of Congress
c. 1880 - 1886



The Origin Story

The Nutcracker Ballet

The Origin Story

Who wrote The Nutcracker?

That is a complicated question! German writer, composer and lawyer, **E.T.A. Hoffmann** (1776-1822) was the writer of the original story of *The Nutcracker*. He loved to write fantasies and horror stories.

Stories about enchanted nutcrackers had appeared in European folk tales for years, but it was Hoffmann's version that was adapted into the tale we know. The Nutcracker story Hoffmann wrote in 1816 was, well scary. The little girl's name is Marie and she is punished for going downstairs in the middle of the night.



E.T.A. Hoffman by an Unknown painter
c. 1822



Alexandre Dumas c. 1857
Photo by Herbert Watkins

Who made the story we know today?

The French writer **Alexandre Dumas** [doo-MAH] (1802-1870), known for his historical adventure novels such as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, rewrote the original story of *The Nutcracker*. Changing the little girl's name to Clara and making it much more cheerful.

In his version, the Nutcracker Prince takes Clara to the Land of Snow and the Kingdom of Sweets. When she awakens the next morning, Clara must decide whether it was a real adventure or nothing more than a dream.

How did it become a ballet?

In 1890 **Peter Tchaikovsky** [chai-KAAF-skee] and **Marius Petipa** [peh-tee-PAH], the famous choreographer, decided to write a ballet, based on the nutcracker story. Petipa wrote very precise directions to Tchaikovsky about what he wanted in the music.

Marius Petipa is known as the father of classical ballet. He was born into a family of dancers in France. After dancing in France, Brussels, and Madrid, he moved to Russia where he lived for more than 50 years and elevated Russian ballet to international fame. When Petipa became ill during rehearsals, his assistant, **Lev Ivanov**, designed the final dances for the ballet.



The Nutcracker Ballet

The Nutcracker Ballet

Synopsis

It was Christmas Eve at the Stahlbaum home. Clara and her brother Fritz were excited because her parents had invited all their friends to a festive party. At the house, everyone was working hard to get ready except for Fritz, who catches a mouse and teases his sister Clara with it.

"They're here, they are finally here, Fritz!" Clara cried. The living room doors flew open with a 'bang!' The children watched in awe as the lights on the tree sparkled. Guests arrived and the party began!

Clara's Godfather Drosselmeyer handed Clara her gift from under the tree. It was a wooden nutcracker with a white fluffy beard and a happy, bright smile. Clara loved this gift more than any other gift. Fritz called the nutcracker ugly because he was jealous and jammed a large nut in the nutcracker. Fritz slammed its mouth shut and a piece of the Nutcracker broke off! Clara was sad and upset, but she wrapped a ribbon around him to try to fix her special gift.



Alexander Kotelenets and Rieko Hatato in
The Nutcracker
Photo by Amitava Sarkar



Carl Coomer and Paige Nyman in *The Nutcracker*
Photo by Amitava Sarkar

That night, when the party was over and everyone was sleeping, Clara quietly went downstairs to the living room. The grandfather clock struck. All around her magic began to happen! The toys around the Holiday tree, grew! The things in the living room were all now very big. The nutcracker toy was now bigger than Clara.

Just then an army of mice ran out. They were led by their king who had seven heads! The mice lifted their swords and marched up to the toy cabinet. The Nutcracker marched out, and all the other toys rushed out, following their leader. They began to fight. Clara was sad to see that the army of mice was beating the nutcracker's army.

Clara cried, "Oh my poor nutcracker!" Then she threw her shoe at the Mouse King and the mice disappeared.

Clara turned to look at the Nutcracker. He had turned into a handsome prince.

"My beautiful lady," the Prince said, kneeling in front of Clara. "You saved my life. Now I shall take you to the Land of Sweets!"

The Prince led Clara by the hand into Christmas Wood Forest. All around them was snow and ice. Lovely snow fairies waltzed all around them.

A beautiful lady dressed in white met them. "She is the Sugar Plum Fairy," said the prince. The Sugar Plum Fairy knew that Clara had saved the prince from the Mouse King and was happy to meet her.



Andre Silva and Nicole Von Enck in *The Nutcracker*
Photo by Amitava Sarkar



Andre Silva in *The Nutcracker*
Photo by Amitava Sarkar

"We shall have a party!" she said. The handsome prince took Clara through the beautiful candy kingdom and sat her on a golden throne. Clara and the prince watched as all the people from the Land of Sweets came out to dance for them. All of them were made of candy and spices—chocolate and peppermint, lemon drop and gingerbread!

It was time to go and so Clara and her nutcracker prince climbed into the magic sleigh. They were surrounded by the candy people who all waved goodbye. The Land of Sweets disappeared!

Clara soon woke up in her own bed. She never spoke a word about the Land of Sweets to anyone. She knew her memories and love for the nutcracker would stay with her always.

The End



Ballet

Tell me about Ballet

What is ballet?

Ballet is **dance and music** that tells a story, idea or feelings.

When and where did ballet begin?

The first ballet was performed in France in 1581. There were elaborate celebrations in the palaces and courts of kings and queens. Along with dances, there were parades, processions, and music. Dance, and especially ballet, developed in this atmosphere.

Who started the first ballet school?

In 1661, King Louis XIV of France founded the first ballet school called the Royal Academy of Dance. This is why we use so many French words in ballet, such as *pointe*, *corps de ballet* and *reverence*.

Read on to discover the meaning of these words and more—

How do dancers tell the story?

Because there are no speaking parts in ballet, dancers must tell the story through their dance movements and through actions called **mime**.

You probably have practiced or seen mime before.

What movements do you know?

Can you tell a story to your class using mime?

Make up a simple situation and tell it through mime.

It does not need to be long.

Practice the mime movements below that many dancers use.

Look for these when you watch a story ballet.



La Ballet de la Nuit (The Ballet of the Night)
King Louis XIV, as the Sun God, Apollo. C.1653

What kind of shoes are worn in ballet?

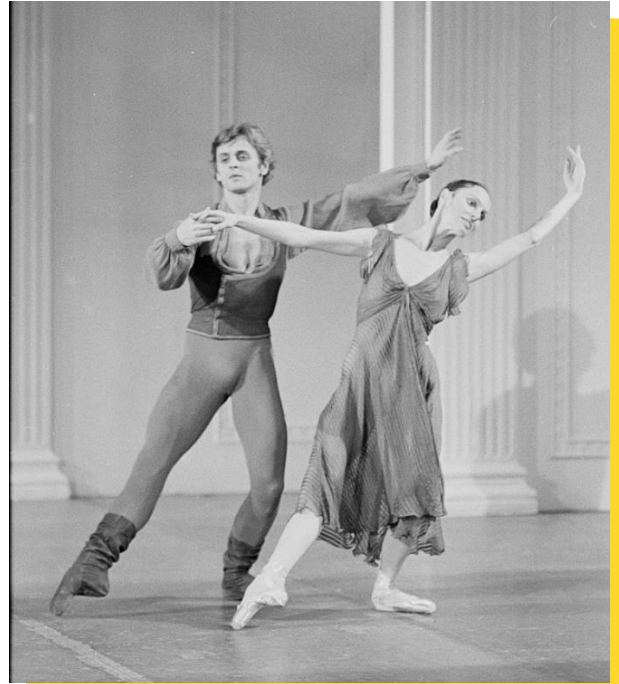
Ballet shoes are made of soft leather (or maybe satin). Pointe shoes are needed only when the teacher feels that a student has developed her strength and skill and is ready to dance on pointe.

What keeps dancers from slipping?

A box of rosin is always in class or on the stage for dancers. Rosin is a white powder made from tree sap that sticks to ballet shoes and prevents slipping.

Why don't dancers get dizzy?

When dancers spin around and around, they use a trick called spotting, so that they do not become dizzy. They fix their eyes on one spot in the room or theatre. Then, each time they turn, they must return their eyes to the spot as quickly as possible.



*Ballet dancers Mikhail Baryshnikov and Patricia McBride of the New York City Ballet Company
Photo by Marion S. Trikosko, c.1979*

Tell me about going to the Ballet**Who writes the music and the dance steps?**

A **composer** writes the music. It is called a score. A **choreographer** creates the dance by selecting ballet steps to go with the music. These steps are called the **choreography**. A famous choreographer in America is George Balanchine.

Who plays the music at the ballet?

Usually, an **orchestra** plays the music for the ballet. You cannot see them very well because they are in the **orchestra pit**. Sometimes the music is played by a pianist, or it is previously recorded music. In this performance the music will be pre-recorded.

Do you know what to call the person with the baton who leads the orchestra? (conductor)

What types of dancers should I look for at the ballet?

The **corps de ballet** is the large group of dancers. These dancers perform together. In *The Nutcracker* they are the mice or the fairies.

Soloists are on the level above the *corps*. They may or may not become principals.

Principals dance the leading roles in the ballet. In *The Nutcracker*, both Clara and the Prince are principal dancers. The female principal is also called **prima ballerina**. The male can be called a **premier danseur**. Very few dancers are good enough to become principal dancers.

Why do men and women wear make up on stage?

Make up helps the dancers' faces and eyes be seen by the audience. Otherwise, the bright stage lights would wash out the faces of the dancers. Make up also helps create characters such as an old person or a creature.

Are scenery and lighting part of the story?

The scenery and lighting help to give clues about the story and the mood—whether it is cheery and happy, or sad and spooky. A spotlight follows the principal dancers, highlighting their moves for the audience. The lights are called a rig and are either at the side or hung over the stage. Stagehands must hang the lights for each separate show, based on what the lighting designer has requested.

Why do the women wear tutus?

A tutu is a special kind of skirt that the dancers wear. Originally, in the 15th and 16th century, they floor length and were thick and heavy with decorations. That made it hard for dancers to move. In the early 1800's, as ballet began to truly take form, the Romantic tutu began to take form. The Romantic tutu, comes to the dancer's knees and looks dreamy and delicate. It also is much easy to dance in!

Why do the men wear tights?

In competitive sports all around the world, the best athletes wear tight clothing. Think of cyclists, wrestlers, swimmers and gymnasts, and so do dancers. Muscles work better when they are kept warm, and tights help keep the warmth in. Wearing tights also make is to the audience can see the intricate leg and foot movements that make up a performers craft. Unlike loose clothing, tight clothing will not get in the way when a dancer performs.

Did you know that tights originated in men's clothing? If we go back to the middle ages, most men wore long tunics and tight-fitting leggings. Since there was no bulky clothing around their torso, this made it easier to put on and remove armor.



Post-show Discussion

Post-Show Discussion

Taken from Lincoln Center Institute Guide

When you watch a work of art on the stage, there are many ways that you can respond. Watching a dance can change a person, causing them to see the world in a different way.

Use some of the questions below as your guide after seeing the dance. What other questions could you ask as you go deeper into your memories of what you saw?

DESCRIPTION

- Describe the piece in as much detail as possible. What did you see? What did you hear?
- Did the dancers move as a group, or as individuals? Did they move fast with the fast music? Slow with the slow music?
- Describe the shapes that the dancers made with their bodies. And the way they moved in space.
- What kind of music or sound did you hear?
How did that affect the way the dancers moved?
- What else did the dancers use to tell the story or create the mood?
Lights
Props (things they carried or danced with)
Sets

ANALYSIS

- In what ways did the dancers change their movement through the dance?
Why do you think they did that?
- What shapes or movements did the dancers make and how did it express an idea, a character, or a story? If there were emotions that you felt, what made you feel those emotions? Happy? Sad? Funny? Nervous?
- In what ways did the music help the dancing?

INTERPRETATION

- What ideas was the artist trying to tell you?
- What have you seen in everyday life that reminds you of this dance?
- If you were to create a dance to the same music, what would yours look like? What feelings or story would you try to tell?



Resources

- Texas Ballet Theater:
 - Overview of the Ballet and what to expect at Bass Performance Hall: <https://texasballettheater.org/the-ballet-experience/>
- National Concert Hall:
 - Bullet point Biography of Tchaikovsky: https://www.nch.ie/Online/default.asp?BOparam::WScontent::loadArticle::permalink=Behind-the-Music-Ten-Facts-about-Tchaikovsky&BOparam::WScontent::loadArticle::context_id=
- YouTube: The Nutcracker: Christmas Story for Kids
 - Animated and Narrated Storybook Video (13 minutes in length): <https://youtu.be/3lpdG2MckQg>
- YouTube: Selections from “The Nutcracker Suite” in Disney’s 1940’s film, *Fantasia*:
 - Tchaikovsky’s Sugar Plum Fairy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60I5XuA57Kc&list=PL7DYdvohvJQsANO66Ob3kCP1G3SODgkef&index=1>
 - Tchaikovsky’s Chinese Dance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yocpvl4pno&list=PL7DYdvohvJQsANO66Ob3kCP1G3SODgkef&index=2>
 - Tchaikovsky’s Dance of Mirlitons: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StvbtZfm-Jw&list=PL7DYdvohvJQsANO66Ob3kCP1G3SODgkef&index=3>
- YouTube: Ballet Lesson for Kids:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Fz27G6WwWw>
- DK Findout:
 - Romantic Period: <https://www.dkfindout.com/us/music-art-and-literature/types-music/romantic-period/>
- Russian School of Ballet: <https://russianschoolofballet.com/did-ballet-originate-in-russia/>
- YMCA of Central Texas:
 - Benefits of Ballet for Kids: <https://ymcactx.org/blog/the-benefits-of-dance-classes-for-kids/>
- National ballet of Canada:
 - History and Information regarding ballet: <https://national.ballet.ca/Explore/Education-and-Community-Engagement/Ballet-Fun-for-Kids/What-is-Ballet#:~:text=Ballet%20has%20been%20around%20for,called%20it%20Paris%20Op%C3%A9ra%20Ballet.>

[Click here](#) to visit your local Fort Worth public library for more resources.



Angels In The Wings

Angels in the Wings

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