NUTCRACKER
AMERICAN REPERTORY BALLET
ABOUT THE SHOW

AMERICAN REPERTORY BALLET’S NUTCRACKER

American Repertory Ballet’s Nutcracker has been a holiday tradition since 1964, making it the longest-running Nutcracker in New Jersey and one of the longest consecutively-running in the U.S. The current production, directed by the company’s Artistic Director, Douglas Martin, features a cast of over 100 performers, including dancers from American Repertory Ballet’s professional company and select students from Princeton Ballet School, the official school of ARB.

“Nutcracker is more than just a ballet—it is a holiday tradition celebrated around the world. When we created our Nutcracker, we wanted a performance that reminds the audience of home, family, and of childhood fantasies.”

—Douglas Martin
Artistic Director, American Repertory Ballet

CONTENTS
About the Show .......................................................... 2
Background on the Ballet ......................................... 3
The Story ................................................................. 4
Delicious Dancing .................................................... 5
The Music ............................................................... 6
Ballet Vocabulary .................................................... 7
Ballet Positions ....................................................... 8
Mime Time ............................................................. 9
Amazing Athletes .................................................. 10
Reviewing the Performance .................................... 11
Dancing the Weather ............................................. 12
Going to the Theater .............................................. 13
Resources ............................................................. 14
In 1816, the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann published *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, a frightening story involving a bloody battle between a nutcracker and a seven-headed mouse. He wrote it for adults, and did not intend it for children. In 1844 Alexandre Dumas (author of *The Three Musketeers*) adapted Hoffmann’s story for younger audiences.

It was Dumas’ version of the story that sparked the interest of Marius Petipa, the senior ballet master of the Russian Imperial Ballet. He hired the Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to write a score for the production. The choreography was created by Petipa and Lev Ivanov. The first performance of their new *Nutcracker* ballet was on December 18, 1892 in St. Petersburg, Russia. The audience and critics did not like it very much at first.

*Nutcracker* was not performed outside of Russia until 1934. It was first presented in the U.S. in 1944, by the San Francisco Opera Ballet, with new choreography by William Christensen. Since then, *Nutcracker* has become one of the best-loved shows of the Christmas season. Hundreds of ballet and theater companies all over the world perform it every year.

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**ADAPTATION**

*The Nutcracker* was changed from a book into a ballet. This process is called **ADAPTATION**—changing something so it can be used in a different way. Think of a book you really liked that was adapted into a movie (such as *Harry Potter* or *Twilight*). Make a list: in one column, list all the things in the movie that were the same as in the book. In the second column, list the things in the movie that were different. Did you like or dislike any of the changes? Why do you think the changes were made?

**LOVE IT OR HATE IT?**

Though it is one of the most popular ballets today, *Nutcracker* was not very successful when it was first performed in 1892. One critic wrote:

> For dancers there is little in it, for art absolutely nothing, and for the artistic fate of our ballet, one more step downward.

The critic did not seem to think *Nutcracker* had much of a future, though history has proved him wrong! After you’ve seen the performance, discuss with your class: Why has this ballet been so successful for so long?
THE STORY

ACT I
At the annual Christmas Eve party at the home of the Silverhaus family, Clara and Fritz anxiously await the lighting of the tree. To Clara's horror and Fritz's delight, the maid runs in, chasing a mouse through the hall. Father calls in the children, and the tree is lighted. The guests arrive: the Elegant Family, the Widow, her daughter and the Dapper Gent, and the Big Family with their nine children.

After the children perform a festive dance, the mysterious Uncle Drosselmeyer and his Nephew arrive. To everyone's delight, Drosselmeyer presents wonderful mechanical dolls: the Sugar Plum, the Cavalier, and the Soldier. He gives Clara, his favorite niece, a beautifully-carved Nutcracker. Fritz is jealous that Clara received such a marvelous gift. Grabbing the Nutcracker away from Clara, he drops it and breaks it. Drosselmeyer bandages the Nutcracker and gives it back to Clara. The party winds down: the guests depart, and the Silverhaus family goes to bed.

Unable to sleep, Clara sneaks downstairs to the parlor. She picks up her Nutcracker and begins to dance with it. Strange shadows and the scurrying of little mice come to disturb her fun. Drosselmeyer reappears. To Clara's amazement, he magically transforms the parlor into a battleground. Now grown life sized, Nutcracker and his Toy Soldiers defend the Christmas tree from the army of Rats and Mice. When her beloved Nutcracker is wounded, Clara defends him by throwing her shoe at the Rat King, vanquishing him and his awful troops. Drosselmeyer transforms the Nutcracker into the Nutcracker Prince. Angels appear as the parlor becomes the enchanted Land of Snow. Clara and the Nutcracker Prince meet the beautiful Snow Queen and King and are dazzled by the whirling of dancing Snowflakes.

—Intermission—

ACT II
In the Land of Sweets, Clara and the Nutcracker Prince are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The Prince tells the story of the great battle for the Christmas tree and how Clara saved the day. To reward Clara for her heroic deeds, the Sugar Plum Fairy presents dances from all the different Lands of the Sweets: Chocolate from Spain, Coffee from Arabia, Tea from China, Candy Canes from Russia, Marzipan from Germany, and Mother Ginger and her many children. A bouquet of Flowers performs a beautiful waltz, then the Sugar Plum Fairy dances with her Cavalier. After the grand finale, a very happy but tired Clara returns home to the comfort of the family parlor and dreams of her wonderful journey.
DELICIOUS DANCING

The second act of *Nutcracker* begins in the Land of Sweets, where Clara and the Prince are welcomed by the Sugar Plum Fairy. She entertains them with a celebration of dances, beginning with dances representing sweet delicacies from different countries. Though these foods and beverages may seem pretty ordinary today, when the ballet was created, they were considered rare delicacies—something that Clara would dream about as being special treats. The dancers’ costumes resemble the treats they bring from their countries.

Here are the dances you will see in the Land of Sweets:

**CHOCOLATE FROM SPAIN**

**COFFEE FROM ARABIA**

**TEA FROM CHINA**

**CANDY CANES FROM RUSSIA**

**MARZIPAN FROM GERMANY** - Marzipan is a soft candy made from sugar and ground almonds.

**MOTHER GINGER AND HER 12 CHILDREN**

**WALTZ OF THE FLOWERS** - Dancers costumed as a bouquet of flowers and the Dew Drop Fairy dance for Clara and the Prince.

**GRAND PAS DE DEUX** - The Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier dance a beautiful classical grand pas de deux (dance for two people).

**FINALE** - The big Finale is danced by all of the Sweets.

**VISIONS OF SUGAR PLUMS**

The Sugar Plum Fairy gets her name from a traditional Christmas treat from England. Despite the name, there are no plums in sugar plums. They are candies made from a seed, nut, or piece of spice coated with layers of hard sugar—like the crunchy outer shell of an M&M.

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DANCES OF MANY LANDS

While you are watching the different dances in the Land of Sweets, pay attention to the costumes, the music, and the choreography. How are the dances the same? How are they different?

What kinds of dances have been passed down in your family? What countries do they come from? What do these dances look like? When do you dance them? Are there special shoes or costumes? What kind of music is played?

On a map, find the countries represented by the dances in the Land of Sweets. What do you know about each one?

Create a travel poster for the Land of Sweets. If you went there, what foods would you like to find?

Have you ever been away on a trip? Where did you go?

Where would you go if you could choose any fantasy or real place to visit?
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) was a Russian composer and conductor. Born in Votkinsk, Russia, into a wealthy family, he began composing music at age 14. As his family wished, he went to law school, but gave up this career to study music at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In 1866, he was hired as a professor at the Moscow Conservatory. From the time he was a child, Tchaikovsky suffered from anxiety and depression, which was made worse by having to hide the fact that he was a homosexual. After a brief, unhappy marriage to a mentally unstable young woman, he attempted suicide. In 1877, a wealthy widow, Nadezhda von Meck, began supporting Tchaikovsky financially, which enabled him to devote all of his time to composing. She and Tchaikovsky wrote to each other nearly every day during their 15-year relationship, but she insisted that they never meet face-to-face.

Celebrated for his sweeping melodies and intense, emotional style, Tchaikovsky is also known for occasionally using traditional Russian folksongs and dances in his music. He composed works in many different genres, including operas, symphonies, piano and violin concertos. He is considered by many to be the greatest composer of music for ballet; in addition to Nutcracker, he wrote the music for the ballets Swan Lake and The Sleeping Beauty. Outside of ballet, Tchaikovsky’s best-known works are the 1812 Overture, Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture, Violin Concerto, Piano Concerto No. 1, Symphony No. 6 (the “Pathétique” Symphony), and the operas Eugene Onegin and The Queen of Spades. During his lifetime, Tchaikovsky was enormously popular throughout Europe and abroad. On a concert tour of America in 1891, he conducted some of his music at the very first performance at New York’s Carnegie Hall.

The cause of Tchaikovsky’s death, in 1893, is one of the great mysteries of music history. For many years it was believed he contracted cholera from drinking contaminated water, though these days there are any number of explanations and conspiracy theories—including arsenic poisoning, suicide, and even murder!

**LISTENING TO THE MUSIC**

Listen to different parts of the music from Nutcracker. For each selection:

- Describe the music: loud/soft, fast/slow, high/low, instruments, mood/emotion, etc.
- What kinds of feelings do you get from the music?
- What part of the story do you think goes with this music?
- What do you think the dancing will look like for this music? What kinds of movements? Can you show some of these movements using your body?

**HEAVENLY MUSIC**

During the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, listen closely for a musical instrument called a celesta (pronounced ‘suh-LESS-tuh’). The name comes from a French word that means ‘heavenly.’ The instrument looks like a piano and sounds like fairy bells or a music box.

**A SWEET SUITE**

Many people confuse the Nutcracker ballet with the Nutcracker Suite. A suite (pronounced ‘sweet’) is made up of portions of music from a ballet, opera, play, or film that are rearranged for an orchestra to play. For the Nutcracker Suite, Tchaikovsky took favorite sections of the music from the ballet and joined them together into a piece of music to be performed in concert—without the dancing. And so, you WATCH the Nutcracker ballet, but you LISTEN to the Nutcracker Suite!
Ballet began in France more than 300 years ago. For this reason, most of the vocabulary used in ballet today is French. Here are some common ballet terms:

**ARABESQUE** (are-ah-BESK) - a position where the dancer stands on one leg with the other leg stretched straight out behind, parallel to the floor

**ATTITUDE** (ah-tee-TUDE) - a position where the dancer stands on one leg with the other leg curved to the back

**BARRE** (bar) - a horizontal wooden bar fastened to the walls of the ballet studio. The dancer holds onto it for support while practicing. Every ballet class begins with exercises at the barre.

**CHÂINÉS** (sheh-NAY) - a series of quick turns done moving forward in a straight line or circle

**CHASSÉ** (shah-SAY) - a series of steps where one foot “chases” the other across the floor

**CORPS DE BALLET** (CORE duh ba-LAY) - the dancers in a ballet who do not perform a solo part

**DÉVELOPPÉ** (day-vlaw-PAY) - a move in which one leg is raised with the knee bent, then slowly extended into an open position

**EN POINTE** (ahn PWAHNT) - dancing on the tips of the toes. Dancing en pointe gives the impression of floating on the air. In ballet, only women dance en pointe.

**FOUETTÉ** (fweh-TAY) - a quick “whipping” movement of the raised leg, usually as part of a pirouette

**GRAND JETÉ** (GRON zhuh-TAY) - a broad, high leap with one leg stretched forward and the other back like a “split” in the air

**PAS DE DEUX** (PAH de DUH) - a dance for two people, usually a male and female. The pas de deux sections of a ballet usually express intense emotion, such as love, sadness, or joy.

**PORT DE BRAS** (por duh brah) - the way the arms are held and moved

**PIROUETTE** (peer-oo-WET) - a whirl or spin done on one foot

**PLIÉ** (plee-AY) - lowering the body by bending the knees

**TOUR JETÉ** (TOOR zhuh-TAY) - a jump from one foot to the other while making a half turn

**TURNOUT** - a basic ballet position where the feet and legs turn outward from the hips in a 90-degree angle

**TUTU** (too-too) - a costume worn by ballerinas. The skirt has many layers and can either be long and bell-shaped, or very short and stiff.

**VARIATION** - a solo dance
Ballet is a highly technical type of dance that takes years of study and practice to perform well. Dancers learn special techniques for executing the movements beautifully and with perfect precision—and for making it all look effortless! Besides training their bodies, ballet dancers have to learn a complicated movement vocabulary: the different body positions, movements, and patterns. One of the first things dancers are taught are the five basic foot and arm positions that are the building blocks of ballet.

**STAYING ON YOUR TOES!**
In the performance, you'll see some of the female dancers performing en pointe—on the tips of their toes. With this technique, the dancers appear to be floating. It takes years of special training for a dancer to be able to do all those steps and turns while balanced on the ends of her toes. Girls usually begin to dance en pointe when they are 11 or 12, when their bones are hard enough and their muscles in their feet and legs are strong enough to support their full weight en pointe.

Ballerinas wear special shoes—pointe shoes—that are designed to help them dance en pointe. The parts of a pointe shoe are:

**RIBBONS** - Hold the shoe on the foot. They are made of cloth and tied with a special flat knot. The ribbons are crossed over the ankle to help give support—just the way athletes strap up their ankles with tape.

**SHANK** - The “backbone” of the shoe. This stiff inner sole is made of heavy leather. The shank helps transfer the dancer’s weight from the toes into the arch, which is the strongest part of the foot.

**BOX** — Made of layers of cloth hardened with glue. The front end of the box is flattened to help the dancer balance. The stiff inner shell protects the dancer’s toes, softening the impact of steps and jumps.
Ballet tells stories using just the body—the performers do not speak. In some ballets, you will occasionally see the dancers stop their leaps and twirls to act out parts of the story with gestures and facial expressions. This is called MIME. Mime helps the audience understand what is happening and what characters are thinking and feeling. Ballet has a whole vocabulary of mime gestures that help dancers tell the story.

In Nutcracker, one place to look for mime is at the beginning of Act II when the Prince tells the story of the battle between the rat-and-mouse army and the toy soldiers. Without using words, only through pantomime, he describes how Clara saved his life by throwing her shoe at the Rat King.

**MIME VOCABULARY**

**AFRAID:** Hold out arms with palms facing forward.

**ANGER:** Shake fist strongly.

**BEAUTIFUL:** Hand circles face.

**DANCING:** Roll hands from front of body to overhead.

**DEATH:** Arms straight in front, crossed at wrists with hands in fists.

**I/ME/MINE:** Hand points to chest to indicate oneself.

**I PROMISE:** Place one hand on chest and raise the other arm in the air with three fingers pointing up.

**LOVE:** Hands over heart.

**MARRIAGE:** Index finger points to ring finger of left hand.

**MONEY:** Rub thumb and fingers of one hand together.

**NO/NEVER:** Palms down, hands wave over each other, crossing at wrist.

**OBEY:** Point strongly to floor with index finger.

**PLEADING:** Clasp hands together in begging gesture.

**READING:** Open hands with palms up like an open book.

**SAD:** Fingers trace tears down cheek or wipe away tears.

**SLEEP:** Rest cheek on hand with palms together.

**THINK:** Touch or point to temple.

**WHY?** Hold out arms with palms facing up.

**EXPLORING PANTOMIME**

How is pantomime different from dance? How can you use gestures and facial expressions to create different characters?

Explore ways of communicating without talking. Without speaking, can you say ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ ‘I don’t know,’ ‘hello,’ ‘goodbye’?

Try saying ‘yes’ using different body parts. Experiment with changing the speed and the energy (tense, relaxed, heavy, light, smooth, choppy, etc.) of your movements.

Without speaking, perform one of the gestures from the mime vocabulary for the rest of your class and see if they can guess the meaning. Then create a brief “sentence” using pantomime and perform it for your class.

Listen to selections of Tchaikovsky’s music for Nutcracker. Create a pantomime that expresses how the music makes you feel.
Dancers are not just performers—they are elite athletes. They have amazing flexibility, muscular strength and both physical and mental endurance. They are able to leap, land, and turn with grace.

To stay in top condition, professional ballet dancers follow a rigorous training routine. A typical day starts early with a 90-minute class to warm up and work on their technique. Class is followed by four to six hours of rehearsals, sometimes followed by an evening performance.

Training to become a professional ballet dancer starts at about seven. Dancers can usually perform into their early to late 30s—sometimes a little longer. After retiring from performing, some dancers continue their career in ballet as teachers or choreographers.

**FUN FACTS**

The average NBA player can jump 2½ feet in the air. Ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov was said to have jumped 5-6 feet in the air.

Based on a U.S. Department of Labor database, the most physically demanding job is professional dancer. It ranked higher than fitness trainer and aerobics instructor (#2), forest firefighter (#5), and competitive athlete (#7).

To keep from getting dizzy when they do all those amazingly fast spins, ballet dancers are taught a trick called “spotting.” Before they begin turning, they find a fixed object to look at—a clock, a door, a light. Then they try to keep looking at it as they spin around and around. Ice skaters use the same trick.

**MEN IN BALLET**

When a lot of people think of ballet, they think of women in frilly tutus, dancing gracefully on the tips of their toes. But ballet dancing is not just for women and girls. As a matter of fact, for part of ballet's history, women were not even allowed to appear on stage!

Ballet was born in the 15th century in the royal courts of Italy and France. Up until about 1680, all the dancers were male—female roles were danced by men wearing masks and women’s clothing. By the 19th century, however, women dancers dominated the ballet stage. In the early 1900s, Vaslav Nijinsky—one of the greatest dancers of all time—set the stage for other male dancers, including Rudolf Nureyev, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Edward Villella, and Carlos Acosta. They showed that men could be ballet superstars, too!
REVIEWING THE PERFORMANCE

Part of a critic’s or reviewer’s job is to give someone who was not at the performance an idea of what it was like, whether the reviewer liked it, and whether someone else should see it. On a personal level, writing about a performance also helps us reflect in a thoughtful way about what we’ve seen.

DURING THE PERFORMANCE

While you are watching the Nutcracker performance, pay close attention so you can give a detailed account of the show in your review. Keep these questions in mind:

- What do you see? Observe the entire visual environment—not only the choreography and the dancers’ performances, but also the sets, costumes, lighting, and the theater space.
- What do you hear? This includes the music as well as any sounds you hear as the audience reacts to the performance.
- What does the performance make me think of? Is there anything I see or hear that reminds me of something else (for example, sports, animals, movies, personal experiences)?

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Write your review, using the following questions as a guide:

- Did I like the performance? Why or why not? Were there specific parts I especially liked or disliked? What were they?
- How did the performance make me feel?
- Would I send a friend to see this show?
- Was I tired or hungry at the show, or was I having a bad day? Did it affect the way I reacted to the show?
- What about the show made the strongest impression? What do I think I will remember about the performance a month from now?
- How can I communicate what I saw and heard so anyone reading my review will have a clear picture of the performance? What are some adjectives that come to mind when I think about the show? What words from the ballet vocabulary can I use in my description?

Soldiers
photo: Leighton Chen
In *Nutcracker*, you will see the Dance of the Snowflakes. What do you think a dancing snowflake would look like? What about a dancing raindrop, dancing lightning, or dancing wind?

**Work in groups to create a weather ballet.**

1. Working in a group of 3-6 people, start by deciding what type of weather you want to be (for example, a blizzard, thunderstorm, heat wave, etc.).

2. Together, brainstorm about the weather you have chosen. What happens during this kind of weather? What does it feel like? What does it look like? Do some research if you need to find out more about this weather.

3. Decide what “characters” you will need in your weather ballet, such as wind, rain, sunshine, etc. Together, decide which character each person will dance. It’s okay to have more than one person dance the same character.

4. Have each person in the group create a dance movement for their character. Make it short enough and simple enough that you will remember it and be able to do it the same way each time.

5. In your group, discuss how your weather characters interact (for example, the wind blowing the rain or lightning following the thunder). How can you take your individual dance movements and put them together to show this interaction?

6. With your group take all your characters’ movements and put them together to create your weather ballet. Keep it short so it’s easy to remember. Practice it over and over to make sure you can do it the same way each time.

7. Perform your group’s weather ballet for the rest of the class. Can they guess what kind of weather you are?

**EXTRA CREDIT:**

- Create costumes for your weather characters.
- Find some music to accompany your ballet that you think matches your weather.
- Create a narration for your weather ballet describing what is happening in your ballet. Have someone read it as you perform your ballet.
GOING TO THE THEATER

BE A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER

Going to see a show at the theater is not the same as going to a movie or watching TV. The performers will be right there with you and the rest of the audience, which makes it very exciting! It also means you have a special responsibility to respect the performers and the rest of the audience so that everyone can enjoy the show. Make sure to follow these rules:

- If you have a phone, make sure to turn it off before the show starts. Keep it off until the show is over.
- During the show, give the performers all your attention. Stay in your seat and don’t talk.
- Taking pictures or recording the show is not allowed.
- Don’t eat or drink in the theater. And no chewing gum, please!

WATCH AND LISTEN

During the performance, pay attention to the different theater elements used in the show. These include:

- **MUSIC** - Pay attention to the music, and the way it helps set the mood for what’s happening in the show. When does it sound exciting? Sad? Funny?
- **COSTUMES** - Do the actors’ costumes look the same or different from the way the characters look in the TV show? Do the costumes help you recognize the characters in the play?
- **LIGHTING** - Notice how the lights onstage change during the show. They get brighter and darker, change colors, move around, and do other things.
- **SETS/SCENERY** - Pay attention to the scenery. Does it look like the TV show? Notice how the actors move the scenery around during the show.
RESOURCES

BOOKS


VIDEO


MUSIC


WEBSITES


American Repertory Ballet www.arballer.org

Nutcracker ballet website www.nutcrackerballet.net


https://soundcloud.com/statetheatrenj/douglas-martin-director-of-nutcracker-stnj-episode-149

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