



# Nutcracker Ballet

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## ACT I

It is Christmas Eve and preparations are underway for Dr. and Frau Stahlbaum's Christmas party. Clara, their young daughter, senses that something magical is going to happen on this special night. The excitement mounts as the guests begin to arrive. Aunt Marianna distributes candies to the children while Dr. Stahlbaum enchants them by magically lighting the Christmas tree.

Suddenly, a mysterious figure appears, and Clara is delighted to see her beloved, albeit enigmatic godfather, Herr Drosselmeyer has arrived. The children, led by Clara and her brother Franz, dance merrily. Drosselmeyer, assisted by his fascinating helpers Harlequin and Columbine, surprises the children and guests with his life-size Toy Dolls and Toy Soldier, who dance and perform for the delighted party-goers.

The guests depart to enjoy a Christmas feast while Drosselmeyer and Marianna watch over the children, enthralled with their Christmas presents. Drosselmeyer presents Clara with a special Nutcracker Doll, which she immediately loves. Jealous, Franz enlists his mischievous cousin to trick Clara into giving them the Nutcracker, which they accidentally break. Clara is heartbroken until Drosselmeyer, ever protective of her, magically fixes the Nutcracker Doll. Clara leads the girls in a lullaby, which Franz disrupts, assisted by his cousin and the other boys. The Housekeeper scolds them just in time for the return of the parents, who now have their turn to dance.

After a party guest imbibes too much, the evening comes to an end. Drosselmeyer and the guests depart. Reluctantly, Clara hands over her beloved Nutcracker Doll to her mother, and goes to bed. In the middle of the night, Clara sneaks out of her room to check on her Nutcracker Doll, still under the Christmas tree. She runs to it, but is overcome by sleepiness, the work of Drosselmeyer's spell, and falls asleep just as giant mice take over the great hall where the party was held.

Drosselmeyer conjures the Spirit of Christmas to bring the Nutcracker Doll to life and transform the scene. Clara awakens to find the Nutcracker, now aided by an army of life-size soldiers, battling the Mouse King and his army. The Nutcracker and the soldiers, helped in part by Clara's bravery, emerge victorious but the Nutcracker is badly wounded. Drosselmeyer reappears, and Clara implores him to help her beloved Nutcracker. Drosselmeyer then transforms the Nutcracker into a human prince and

takes him and Clara on a journey through the Land of the Snowflakes, before continuing on to the Kingdom of the Sweets.

## ACT II

Clara and the Nutcracker Prince arrive in the Kingdom of the Sweets, guarded by the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier. After hearing of their perilous journey, the Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier command all of the Sweets to dance in homage to their bravery. The ballet concludes with the Sweets bidding farewell to Clara, the Nutcracker Prince, and Drosselmeyer, as they return home.

# *Nutcracker Ballet ... The real story*

## Who wrote *The Nutcracker*?

That is a complicated question! **E.T.A. Hoffmann** was the writer of the original story of *The Nutcracker*. He was a writer, composer, painter and lawyer who was born in 1776 in **Germany**. He loved to write fantasies and horror stories. Stories about enchanted nutcrackers had appeared in European folk tales for a number of years, but it was Hoffmann's version that was adapted into the tale we know so well. The first known

**Nutcracker** in a form we recognize today was made in Germany about 1750. Nutcrackers became a part of holiday traditions because nuts painted gold were a popular tree decoration. Something decorative was needed to crack the nut so people could enjoy the meat inside.

## Enrichment Activity:

Write the word N-U-T-C-R-A-C-K-E-R on a sheet of paper.

How many words can you make out of the letters?



### Who made the story we know today?

The Nutcracker story Hoffmann wrote in 1816 was frightening. The little girl's name is Marie and she is punished for going downstairs in the middle of the night. Other bad things happen throughout the tale. The **French** writer **Alexander Dumas** rewrote the story, 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 has to decide whether it was a dream or a real adventure.

### How did it become a ballet?

In 1890, **Peter Tchaikovsky** [chae-KAWFF-skee], the great Russian composer, 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. Fun Fact: When Petipa became ill during rehearsals, his assistant, **Lev Ivanov**, designed the final dances for the 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*.



On Pointe

### What is turn-out?

In ballet, the **legs and feet must face to the side**. Turning them out from the hips is called turn-out. This is a must for every dancer! It takes years of practice. Originally, turn-out was used to show off the calves and fancy-heeled shoes of the male dancers.

### What is on pointe?

This means to dance **on the tips of the toes**. Maria Taglioni was the first dancer to dance on *pointe*. She did this in the 1800s. Ballet shoes were very soft then, so dancing on the toes were much more difficult.

### What are the five positions for a dancer's feet?

Most ballet steps begin and end in one of these five positions. This helps the dancer's weight stay evenly placed no matter what position the body is in.



<http://www.pbt.org/kids/positions.html>

*Does anyone in your class take ballet lessons? They can help you by demonstrating.*

### What kinds 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 happens in ballet class?

First dancers warm up gently at the *barre*. A *barre* is a wooden rail on the wall about waist high. The *barre* helps the dancers in keeping balance. Full-length mirrors on the wall help dancers watch themselves so they can correct their mistakes.

### What keeps dancers from slipping?

A box of **rosin** is always in ballet 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 have to return their eyes to the spot as quickly as possible.

### **Activities before going to the Ballet:**

- ❖ Tell students that *The Nutcracker* Ballet is an annual holiday event in communities across the country. Ask whether any child has ever seen the ballet performed or whether they know anyone who has danced in a performance. What other activities do the students do around the holiday season?
- ❖ Read them the story of *The Nutcracker* by E.T.A. Hoffman. Ask if anyone has ever had a dream. Can they remember their dream?
- ❖ Listen to selections of The Nutcracker Suite by P.I. Tchaikovsky. Divide children up into small groups and allow them to create their own dances with the different pieces of music. What do they imagine is going to happen during this piece? Have them write a story or draw a picture and compare it to what they actually do see.
- ❖ Discuss with your students what is necessary to put together a performance of *The Nutcracker*. Discuss the people involved and what their jobs are to create this huge production.

**Choreographer:** This person creates the steps of the dances.

**Dancer:** This person performs the choreography on stage.

**Stagehand:** This person performs a variety of backstage work, including hanging drops, moving sets on and off the stage, monitoring props, etc.

**Costume Designer:** This person designs and assembles the costumes for the dancers.

**Lighting Designer:** This person designs the lights that will set the mood of the ballet.

**Sound Technician:** This person sets up and operates the equipment for the music.

**Stage Manager:** This person directs everyone backstage to do his or her job at the correct time so that the production can run smoothly.

## Activities after seeing the Ballet

Assign the class to write a newspaper or magazine review of the performance. Discuss elements of a good review. What did you like about the ballet? and why?

Ask them how many dancers were there performing at one time? How were they interacting with each other? Were they moving in unison?

You can ask them: When was the last time you lifted a person above your head and have it appear effortless? Or performed several gravity-defying leaps?

Make emphasis on the fact that Ballet can be enjoyed by boys, girls, men and women. It is very hard work and requires great athletic ability, coordination and strength. Many dancers perform a 2 ½ hour ballet with only a few short breaks. Male ballet dancers have to jump higher and turn more times than their female counterparts.

Ask students to describe the motions of the dancers in the performance that they saw and what they thought those motions symbolized. Have students brainstorm movements from dances that they are more familiar with (break-dancing, hip-hop, jazz, etc.) and what they symbolize. Have students compare and contrast the styles.

Another idea is to have them write *Thank You* notes to the dancers ...

### **DANCERS LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

Discuss with students how the performance was different from what they expected. What parts did they like/dislike?

Would they want to go to a ballet performance in the future? What did they learn? You may want to quiz them verbally on some aspects of the performance. Have students draw, paint or color a scene that they liked best.

Discuss the similarities and differences of the ballet performance and theater to other performances students may have attended such as a movie, a sports event, a rock concert, or a school play. What are the differences between a live performance and one on television or video?

## Ballet Word Find

**BALLERINA BALLET BARRE LEOTARD LIFT**  
**MIME PAS PLIE ROSIN STAGE TURNOUT TUTU**

P	L	I	E	B	T	D	D	S	P
X	M	Y	V	L	U	T	U	T	O
B	A	L	L	E	R	I	N	A	V
A	A	D	H	C	N	L	R	G	N
L	W	R	Q	B	O	U	S	E	T
L	N	Y	R	V	U	E	A	U	I
E	A	M	Z	E	T	L	P	K	U
T	F	I	L	J	A	P	G	N	B
W	C	M	L	E	O	T	A	R	D
A	R	E	Y	R	O	S	I	N	O