

BALLET PALM BEACH

Study Guide

The Nutcracker (ACT 1)



Friday, December 1, 2023 at 11:00 AM

Kravis Center for the Performing Arts

701 Okeechobee Blvd, West Palm Beach, FL 33401

Show lasts approximately 60 minutes

Recommended for Grades 2 – 9

THE COMPANY:

BALLET PALM BEACH

Ballet Palm Beach began in 2001 as a small civic company, under the name Florida Classical Ballet Theatre. The aim was to give dance students in Palm Beach County the opportunity to perform in full-scale classical ballets through this new organization.

From 2001 to 2012 the company underwent incredible change in becoming a professional ballet company. Professional dancers and trainees were hired and lead the ranks of students as audience support continued to grow. Invaluable staff members were added one by one, first as volunteers and then as paid employees. These changes behind the scenes gave way to thrilling development on our stage, as our productions continued to see a rise in technique, expression, and popularity.

In 2013, Florida Classical Ballet Theatre became Ballet Palm Beach, a company of fifteen dancers: six student trainees and nine professionals. The name change symbolized a new era of productivity and twelve years of finding our footing in a wonderfully supportive community.

Currently, Ballet Palm Beach performs three main stage performances each season. The company has welcomed guest choreographers including Christopher Huggins, Roger Van Fleteren, Gina Patterson, Dennis Nahat, Donna Murray, and repetiteurs from the Balanchine Trust. Artistic Director Colleen Smith has led the company in creative directions, choreographing numerous ballets throughout the years.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

The Nutcracker (Act 1)

Inspired by E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*

Artistic Direction & Choreography: Colleen Smith

Music: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Additional Staging & Choreography:

Claudia Cravey, Marshall Levin, the Company of Ballet Palm Beach

ACT ONE

It's Christmas Eve. Herr Drosselmeyer, a clockmaker and inventor, works at his bench to complete the gift for his goddaughter. Drosselmeyer's previous history with the Mouse Queen had resulted in a curse being placed on his nephew. This once comely youth, now with a large head, wide grinning mouth, and cottony beard, looks like a nutcracker and is indeed the object of Herr D's focus. Drosselmeyer knows that his responsibility for this unwanted transformation will end when someone perceives the Nutcracker's true essence and truly loves him. He wants that someone to be his goddaughter, Marie.

In the background, preparations for the traditional Christmas celebrations are in full force at the Stahlbaum home in Nuremberg. Marie and her brother, Fritz, help their parents trim the tree in excited anticipation. The parents give the children their gifts, and all greet their guests. Herr Drosselmeyer arrives and gives the Nutcracker to Marie. She immediately senses something special about her gift. Fritz looks on, jealous of the extra attention Marie is enjoying. Fighting to possess the Nutcracker, Fritz breaks its jaw. Herr D. wipes Marie's tearful eyes and binds the wounded Nutcracker.

The guests depart, and the Stahlbaum household retires for the night. Marie creeps into the parlor to take care of her Nutcracker and falls asleep. As giant mice appear and taunt the slumbering Marie, Herr D. appears and casts the mice into a trance to stop their mischief. He then enchants the room, causing the Christmas tree and Nutcracker to grow. As the mice recover their senses, the Nutcracker summons toy soldiers to help him protect Marie. A fierce battle ensues, and the Nutcracker fights with the Mouse King. Marie distracts the chief rodent, but not before he injures the Nutcracker. The soldiers prevail and the mice slink away. Victory! In the course of the struggle, Marie's love transforms the Nutcracker into his true form, a Prince. Thus, Drosselmeyer's nephew is released from the curse. Snow begins to fall in the mystical woods. Herr D. summons the Snow Angels. The Prince proclaims his love for Marie, and they embark on a journey through foreign lands on the way to the Prince's Kingdom.

PRE-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSIONS:

1. Prior to attending the performance, students should discuss audience etiquette.

Common etiquette rules include:

- a) Turning off cellphones or electronic devices
- b) No video or other recordings are allowed inside the theatre
- c) No food or drink is allowed in the theatre
- d) Audience members should remain seated and should not leave or enter the auditorium during the performance
- e) There is no talking during the performance
- f) Clapping should be polite and appropriate

Discuss why these rules exist. Consider a short role-playing exercise during which students can experience what it is like if an audience is disruptive during class time.

2. Through discussion or written response, reflect on the following:

- What are some plays or live theatre productions you have seen?
- Have you seen ballet performed before?
- How is a story told through dance?
- What is a ballet? What makes it different from other dancing?

- Compare and contrast: How is telling a story through ballet the same/different from a live theatre play? A movie in a theatre? A television show at home? A book? Which do you prefer? Why?
- Who decides how the dancers tell the story?
- How do the dancers learn their parts?

3. Through discussion or written response, reflect on the following:
The Nutcracker, by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, is an adaptation of E.T.A. Hoffman's 1816 short story entitled "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King."

- Are you familiar with the literature that this ballet is based upon?
- Have you seen a play or other artistic presentation based on this short story?
- What is your favorite book and how would you present it as a dance?

4. Introduce the class to a small sample of commonly seen ballet steps. Familiarity with basic ballet technique will provide students reference points to help students enjoy the performance.

Plie: From the French *plier*, to bend. In the classic dance, this is a bending of the knees, with the knees wide open and the feet turned outward. The function of the plie in the dancer's body is like the function of the springs in an automobile, and is necessary for the development of flexibility.

Releve: From the French *relever*, to raise. To raise the body on one or two feet, either on pointe (on the tips of her toes) or demi-pointe (on the ball of the foot). There are two styles of releve : a dancer rises with a smooth articulation of the foot, or the dancer can a little jump or spring to get on pointe or demi-pointe.

Sauté: A jump from two feet to two feet. When a turn is added to the jump the step is called a *Tour en l'air*. The dancer can make 1, 2 or 3 revolutions in the air before landing.

Pas de deux: A dance for two dancers, usually one female and one male

Bourrées: Tiny rapid steps performed by female dancers while on pointe, giving the illusion of floating above the ground

Arabesque: One leg is stretched behind the body either on the ground or in the air at a 90-degree angle or higher.



POST-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSIONS:

1. *But ballet is just for girls...*

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.

Are you able to lift a person above your head and have it appear effortless? Are you able to perform several gravity-defying leaps?

Compare and contrast the qualities of professional dancers to those of professional athletes. Make a list of qualities that are similar between a ballet dancer and any of the following types of athletes: football player, hockey player, basketball player, figure skater.

2. Write a response to *The Nutcracker* commenting on various elements in the ballet (e.g. the dancers, music, costumes, special effects)

- What did you like and dislike about the performance?
- How does the ballet compare to what you had pictured before the performance?
- How was it different or like other ballets or shows you have seen?
- How did the choreographer use dance to show emotions or tell the story?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

1. Read "From Head to Toe" by Eric Carle with the students. Group the students and have them come up with their own dance, song or one act play based on the story.
2. Ballets tell stories using music and movement. Create original movements to correspond with emotions and themes that you might find in a piece of literature (ie. love, friendship, loyalty, jealousy, anger, playfulness)

Divide students into groups of two or more. Using gestures, students can create their own stories using mime and perform them for the rest of the class. Can the audience follow the story?

3. After watching Ballet Palm Beach and their performance of *The Nutcracker* (Act 1), write a letter to Ballet Palm Beach. The letter can be to your favorite dancer or character, or to all the dancers. If you'd like, include an illustration of the performance.

Letters can be mailed to: Ballet Palm Beach
10357 Ironwood Road,
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33410

4. Looking for more activities? Check out this website for more great ideas!
<https://www.yearroundhomeschooling.com/the-nutcracker-unit-studies-activities/>

LINKS:

Ballet Palm Beach
www.balletpalmbeach.org

Ballet terms defined.
<http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html>

The Classical Ballet and Opera House presents The Nutcracker ballet performed by Astrakhan Ballet and Opera Theatre. Music by Pyotr Tchaikovsky – to familiarize the students with what they will see in performance
<https://youtu.be/hJ9t28D4E1>

Anaheim Ballet shows you how to stretch!
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8D7R8QxJL4&feature=share&list=PL22EC1314013611CC&index=4>

FLORIDA STANDARDS:

GRADES 2-8

GRADE 2

DANCE	LANGUAGE ARTS	MUSIC
DA.2.F.1	ELA 2.F.1.4	MU 2.C.1.1
DA.2.H.1	ELA 2.R.1.1	MU 2.C.1.2
DA.2.O	ELA 2.R.1.2	MU 2.C.1.3

GRADE 3

DANCE	LANGUAGE ARTS	MUSIC
DA 3.C.1.1	ELA 3.F.1.4	MU 3 C.1.1
DA 3.C.1.2	ELA 3.R.1.2	MU 3 C.1.2
DA 3.C.3.1	ELA 3.R.1.3	MU 3 C.1.3

GRADE 4

DANCE	LANGUAGE ARTS	MUSIC
DA 4.C.1.1	ELA R.1.1	MU 4 C.1.1
DA 4.C.1.2	ELA 4.R.1.2	MU 4 C.1.2
DA 4.C.1.3	ELA 4 R.1.3	MU 4 C.1.3

GRADE 5

DANCE	LANGUAGE ARTS	MUSIC
DA 5 C.1.1	ELA 5 R.1.1	MU 5 C.1.1
DA 5 C.1.2	ELA 5 R.1.2	MU 5 C.1.2
DA 5 C.1.3	ELA 5 R.1.3	MU 5 C.1.3

GRADE 6-8

DANCE	LANGUAGE ARTS	MUSIC
DA 68 C.3.1	ELA 68 R.1.1	MU 68 C.1.1
DA 68 C.3.2	ELA 68 R.1.2	MU 68 C.1.2
DA 68 C.3.3	ELA 68 R.1.3	MU 68 C.1.3

CHILDREN'S BOOKS ABOUT BALLET:

Barton, Chris: *The Nutcrackers Comes to America: How Three Ballet-loving Brothers Created a Holiday Tradition*. Millbrook Picture Books

Copeland, Misty: *Firebird*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers Group

Kent, Allegra: *Ballerina Gets Ready*. Holiday House

Miles, Lisa: *Ballet Spectacular: A Young Ballet Lover's Guide and an Insight into a Magical World*. Barron's Educational Series

Stringer, Lauren: *When Stravinsky met Nijinsky: Two Artists, Their Ballet, and One Extraordinary Riot*. Harcourt Children's Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.