GENERATION NEXT EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Ballet San Antonio®

THE NUTCRACKER (3-5) EDUCATOR GUIDE



Charline & Red McCombs ARTS EDUCATION FUND The Tobin Center

Educator Guide

Created by: Dr. Kimberly Stephenson

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NOTE

In this guide, we focus primarily on Act II of The Nutcracker. This Act may be performed without children and allows our young artists to remain in school for the day.

Ballet San Antonio®

The mission of Ballet San Antonio, a professional ballet company, is to share the splendor of dance through diverse artistic performances and outreach programs that reflect, promote, and enrich the cultural heritage of the South Texas community.
BSA holds an uncompromising commitment to continually attract and nurture exceptional professional dancers, create distinctive performances, and make dance accessible to the widest possible audiences through partnerships with local organizations.

Ballet San Antonio is one of the Resident Companies
of the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts.
Balletsanantonio.org

The Nutcracker

- Youth Performances (traditional lighting and sound, house lights lowered)
- Sensory Friendly Performance (sound adjusted, house lights not completely lowered)
- Performance: 1 hour long
- Recommended Audience: 2nd - 6th; MS / HS: Dance, Theatre, and ELA

Location:
Tobin Center for the Performing Arts
100 Auditorium Circle
San Antonio, TX 78205
www.tobincenter.org



GENERATION NEXT EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Welcome to the Show!

Welcome to the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts!

We are so happy to welcome you to the Tobin Center for Ballet San Antonio's magical production of The Nutcracker! Whether this is your first visit or a favorite tradition, we are delighted to share this special experience with you.

Get ready to enter a world filled with swirling snowflakes, dancing sweets, unforgettable characters, and Tchaikovsky's beautiful music. From the moment the curtain rises, dancers, musicians, designers, technicians, and artists work together to bring Clara's extraordinary adventure to life.

At the Tobin Center, we believe the performing arts are for everyone. We hope today's performance encourages you to wonder, imagine, ask questions, and discover something new. As you watch, notice how the dancers use movement, music, costumes, scenery, and expression to tell a story—sometimes without saying a single word!

We are grateful to our wonderful partners at Ballet San Antonio for sharing their artistry, talent, and dedication with our community. Their work gives students throughout San Antonio and the surrounding region the opportunity to experience the excitement and joy of professional ballet right here at home.

Most of all, we hope you have fun! May your visit be filled with discovery, creativity, and a little bit of Nutcracker magic.

Welcome—we're so glad you're here!

Dr. Kimberly Stephenson
Vice President of Education
Tobin Center for the Performing Arts



A Short History of The Nutcracker
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) was a famous Russian composer known for writing beautiful and emotional music. He created some of the world's most beloved ballets, including The Nutcracker, Swan Lake, and Sleeping Beauty.

Tchaikovsky started studying music seriously in his 20s and became known for blending Russian melodies with European style. His music is full of feeling—sometimes joyful, sometimes dramatic—and it is still performed all over the world today.

Although he was shy and often struggled with sadness, his music brought joy to millions. His Nutcracker Suite, with pieces like Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy and Waltz of the Flowers, is especially popular during the holiday season.

The Nutcracker is a two-act ballet composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and first performed in 1892. It is based on an 1844 adaptation by Alexandre Dumas of E.T.A. Hoffmann's 1816 story, "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." The ballet depicts a Christmas Eve celebration where a young girl's nutcracker doll comes to life and takes her on a magical journey. While the ballet was not an immediate success, the music, The Nutcracker Suite, gained popularity, and the ballet itself became a widely performed and beloved holiday tradition after a while. By the late 20th century, The Nutcracker had become a winter holiday favorite around the world.

Reference:
Unknown photographer. (c. 1880–1886). Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky [Photograph]. Library of Congress.

The Story:
The Nutcracker story revolves around Clara, a young girl who receives a nutcracker doll as a Christmas gift during a Christmas Eve party. During the party, Clara's brother damages the doll, and Clara wraps his broken arm. After the party, the doll comes to life and, with Clara's help, battles an invading Mouse King and his army. During the battle, the Nutcracker becomes overwhelmed and is knocked down. All seems lost when Clara bravely intervenes, throwing her slipper. This turns the tide, and Clara, the Nutcracker, and the toy soldiers win the battle. A spell is broken, and the Nutcracker is magically returned to his true form: a prince! The grateful prince invites Clara to see his home, the Land of Sweets. There, the Prince and Clara tell the Sugar Plum Fairy about the battle and their success, and the entire kingdom gathers to celebrate their victory, Clara's bravery, and the return of the prince. After a thrilling celebration, she returns home just before morning and wakes up, wondering if it was all a dream.

Act I: the party, the battle, the invitation, and the journey to the Land of Sweets
Act II: the celebration, the return home

The Music:
Tchaikovsky's score is famous for its beauty and is a major part of the ballet's appeal. The Nutcracker Suite, a selection of pieces from the ballet, was premiered before the full ballet and became very popular. This helps the ballet eventually become successful.

The Themes:

<u>Core Themes in The Nutcracker</u>

- Imagination and Fantasy
  – Clara's dreamworld blurs reality and imagination, taking her on a magical journey.
- Courage and Bravery
  – Clara shows courage when she helps defeat the Mouse King and protects the Nutcracker.
- Transformation and Growth
  – The Nutcracker becomes a Prince, and Clara matures through her experiences.
- Wonder and Celebration
  – The Land of the Sweets celebrates joy, beauty, and cultural variety through dance.
- Good vs. Evil
  – The battle between the Nutcracker and the Mouse King reflects classic heroism.

- **Early Productions:**

The ballet premiered in Russia in 1892 but did not achieve immediate popularity in its complete form. Audiences did not like the choreography and found it confusing. One of the reasons was the number of children on stage and the idea of a production told from a child's point of view. Over time, different choreographers adapted the dances to make them more fun and interesting. A few changed the choreography to suggest the story was a love story.

- **American Popularity:**

In the late 20th century, The Nutcracker's popularity grew in the United States. Many major ballet companies put on successful performances. The ballet's popularity was also boosted by its inclusion in Disney's "Fantasia." When George Balanchine's version began to be performed, the ballet became part of the United States' holiday traditions.

- **Nutcracker Dolls:**

The Nutcracker doll has a history as a folk art and Christmas decoration well before the ballet. Nuts were expensive, and nutcrackers were used to crack open the shells, making them a special gift for a special treat. The Nutcracker doll traditionally looked like a toy soldier with a fierce face. Lifting the bottom of the coat tail behind the toy opened the mouth. The nut was placed inside the mouth, and then the coattail was pushed back down, cracking the shell. Most nutcrackers today are made as decoration and are not sturdy enough to crack a nut, even if the parts move in the traditional way. The ballet, however, popularized the nutcracker doll as a holiday symbol in a brand-new way.

- **How Do Nutcrackers Work:**

The nutcracker doll was traditionally made of solid wood and was designed to look like a soldier with a fierce face. Lifting the lever hidden in the bottom of the coat behind the toy opened the doll's mouth. The nut was placed inside the mouth, and the coattail was pushed back down, closing the mouth and cracking the shell. Most nutcrackers today are made as decoration and are not sturdy enough to crack a nut, even if the parts move in the traditional way.

Did You Know? — The Nutcracker Edition

1. **… the original Nutcracker ballet was not an instant hit?** When The Nutcracker premiered in 1892 in St. Petersburg, Russia, audiences were not impressed. It only became a holiday favorite many years later—especially after it was introduced to American audiences in the mid-1900s.
2. **… The Nutcracker is based on a spooky fairy tale?** The ballet is adapted from a story by E.T.A. Hoffmann titled The Nutcracker and the Mouse King, which was much darker and more mysterious than the cheerful ballet most people know today.
3. **… Tchaikovsky used a brand-new instrument in the music?** The sparkling sound of the celesta—a keyboard instrument that sounds like tinkling bells—was first used by Tchaikovsky in "The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy." It was so new that he kept it a secret until the premiere!
4. **… many versions of The Nutcracker have different lands in Act II?** While most people know about the Land of Sweets, some productions feature unique lands like the Kingdom of Flowers or even modern reinterpretations like Candy Cities or Dream Realms.
5. **… children are the stars of many Nutcracker productions?** In most performances, the roles of Clara, Fritz, and many of the party and battle scene characters are played by young dancers, making The Nutcracker a special tradition for ballet students around the world.
6. **… some versions of The Nutcracker call the main girl Clara, and others call her Marie?** In E.T.A. Hoffmann's original story, her name is Marie Stahlbaum, but in Alexandre Dumas' French adaptation—the version Tchaikovsky used—she was renamed Clara. Different productions choose one name or the other, depending on the version of the story they follow.
7. **… San Antonio has about 25 performances of The Nutcracker each year!**

Ballet San Antonio®

Ballet San Antonio's (BSA) The Nutcracker – Production Highlights

Ballet San Antonio's (BSA) annual The Nutcracker, choreographed by Haley Henderson Smith and Easton Smith, unfolds each year at the Tobin Center's H-E-B Performance Hall with a stunning, multi-generational cast. Each production features the professional company (26 dancers) and a children's cast of over 100 local youth, alongside community heroes in the role of Mother Ginger.

Onstage, audiences are transported from a lavish Christmas Eve party into the Land of Snow and the Land of Sweets, enhanced by live music from the Orchestra San Antonio (TOSA), breathtaking snowfall effects, resplendent costumes, and more than 350 lights that illuminate each dance passage. Signature highlights include the Snow Pas de Deux, the vibrant national dances (Spanish, Chinese, Arabian, Russian), and a show-stopping Waltz of the Flowers, performed with precision and grace by both professional and emerging dancers.

By engaging children as both performers and audience members, Ballet San Antonio cultivates a strong community connection. Their offerings include a student-matinee featuring Act II and a sensory-friendly performance of the full ballet—designed to make dance accessible and magical for all.

BSA's Digital Backdrops & Projections

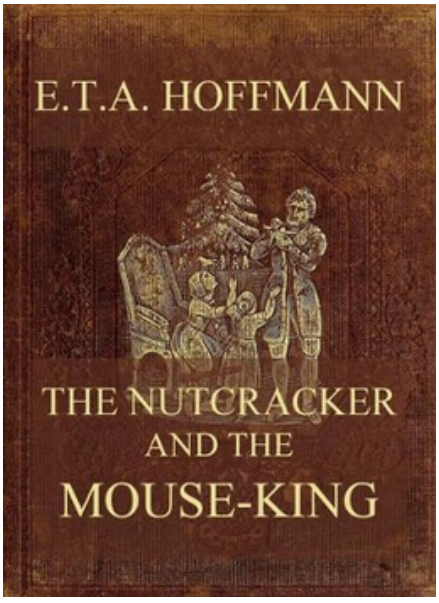
Ballet San Antonio uses high-resolution projections to transform stage settings:

- Victorian parlor for the Stahlbaum family's Christmas party.
- Snow-covered night landscapes during the Land of Snow sequence.
- The vibrant, whimsical Land of Sweets/Candy Kingdom in Act II

Effectively, these scenic projections create a magical backdrop that changes with each scene—portraying snowflakes falling, the grandeur of the palace, and the sweet delights of various cultures. It enriches the visual narrative and supports the ballet's emotional tone.

An Interpretation is when a new version of a story is created, creating new meaning from a creative work. Every ballet is a work of interpretation by the team of directors, choreographers, costumers, light and sound technicians, each working together in collaboration to go from design to finished concept. Ballet San Antonio's interpretation of The Nutcracker is unique, powerful, and a brand-new telling of a timeless fairy tale.

The Nutcracker & Tchaikovsky Timeline





1816
E.T.A. Hoffmann's story "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" (Nussknacker und Mausekönig) is published.

1840
Tchaikovsky is born in Votkinsk, Russia, on May 7.

1844
Tchaikovsky begins composing music at the age of four.
Alexandre Dumas retells Hoffmann's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" as a short story.

1865
Tchaikovsky graduates from the St. Petersburg Conservatory and begins his career as a composer. His music blended Russian folk melodies with European classical forms.

Reference:
Hoffmann, E. T. A. (1853). The Nutcracker and the Mouse King [Book cover illustration]. D. Appleton & Company. Image retrieved from Wikimedia Commons: File: Nutcracker and Mouse-king (1853) (14778830311).jpg
Hoffmann, E. T. A. (1816). Nußknacker und Mausekönig [Title vignette illustration]. In Kinder-Märchen (Vol. 1). Verlag der Realschulbuchhandlung. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Retrieved from Staatsbibliothek digital collections

1877–1876
Tchaikovsky composes two famous ballets:

- Swan Lake (1876)
- Sleeping Beauty (1890)

Both show his talent for emotional and dramatic music.

1891
Tchaikovsky begins work on The Nutcracker, based on a fairy tale by E.T.A. Hoffmann and adapted by Alexandre Dumas.

December 18, 1892
The Nutcracker ballet premieres in St. Petersburg, Russia. Audiences love the music, but the ballet itself receives mixed reviews.

1892
Tchaikovsky creates The Nutcracker Suite, a selection of eight musical pieces from the ballet. It becomes an instant hit in concerts—even more popular than the full ballet at first!

1893
Tchaikovsky dies suddenly at the age of 53, just one year after The Nutcracker premiered.

1940
Disney's Fantasia premiered in New York City, featuring segments of the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, the Tea, the Dance of the Reed Flutes, the Coffee, the Trepak, and the Waltz of the Flowers (but none of The Nutcracker characters, only the music).

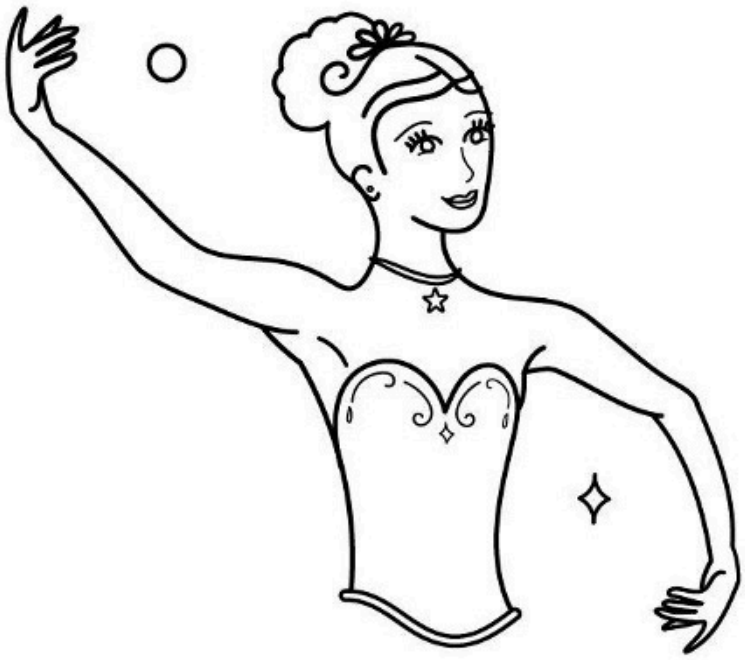
1940s–1950s
The Nutcracker gains popularity in the United States, especially after the San Francisco Ballet and New York City Ballet begin performing it every December.

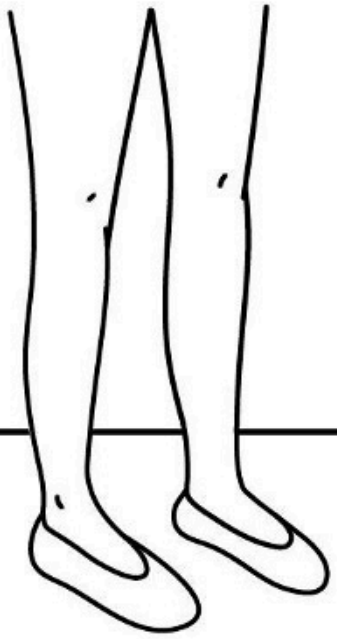
Today
The Nutcracker is one of the most performed ballets in the world, especially during the holiday season!

Vocabulary:

Term	Definition
ballet	An artistic dance form performed to music using precise and highly formalized set steps and gestures
suite	a collection of shorter, independent musical pieces designed to be played in a sequence
choreographer	a person who creates the sequence of steps and moves for a dance
choreography	the sequence of steps and movements in a dance
pas de deux	a dance for two performers, usually a male and female dancer, where they perform steps together and usually show off a high level of skill or artistry
ballerina	a female ballet dancer
cavalier	The principal male dancer who partners with the ballerina
prima ballerina	The principal female dancer in a ballet or ballet company
scene	a clear and distinct section within a performance, often defined by a mood, style, or part of a story
en pointe	a part of ballet dancing where a dancer, usually a female, supports their entire body weight on the tips of their toes
pointe shoes	A specialized type of ballet shoe designed to help a dancer balance on the tips of their toes. These shoes allow dancers to create the illusion of weightlessness and have a distinctive, stiff, box-like area at the toe. Pointe shoes are often custom-fitted to each dancer's unique foot shape, distributing weight and minimizing the risk of injury to the foot, toe, and ankle.
costume	a set of clothes worn as a disguise that makes you look and feel like someone or something else
tutu	Part of a female ballet dancer's classical costume, a skirt made of multiple layers of fabric. There are two basic forms of tutu: Classical: short, stiff, and projecting straight out from the dancer's waist Romantic: long, soft, draping in a bell shape from the dancer's waist

Fill In The Ballet Dancers Tutu!

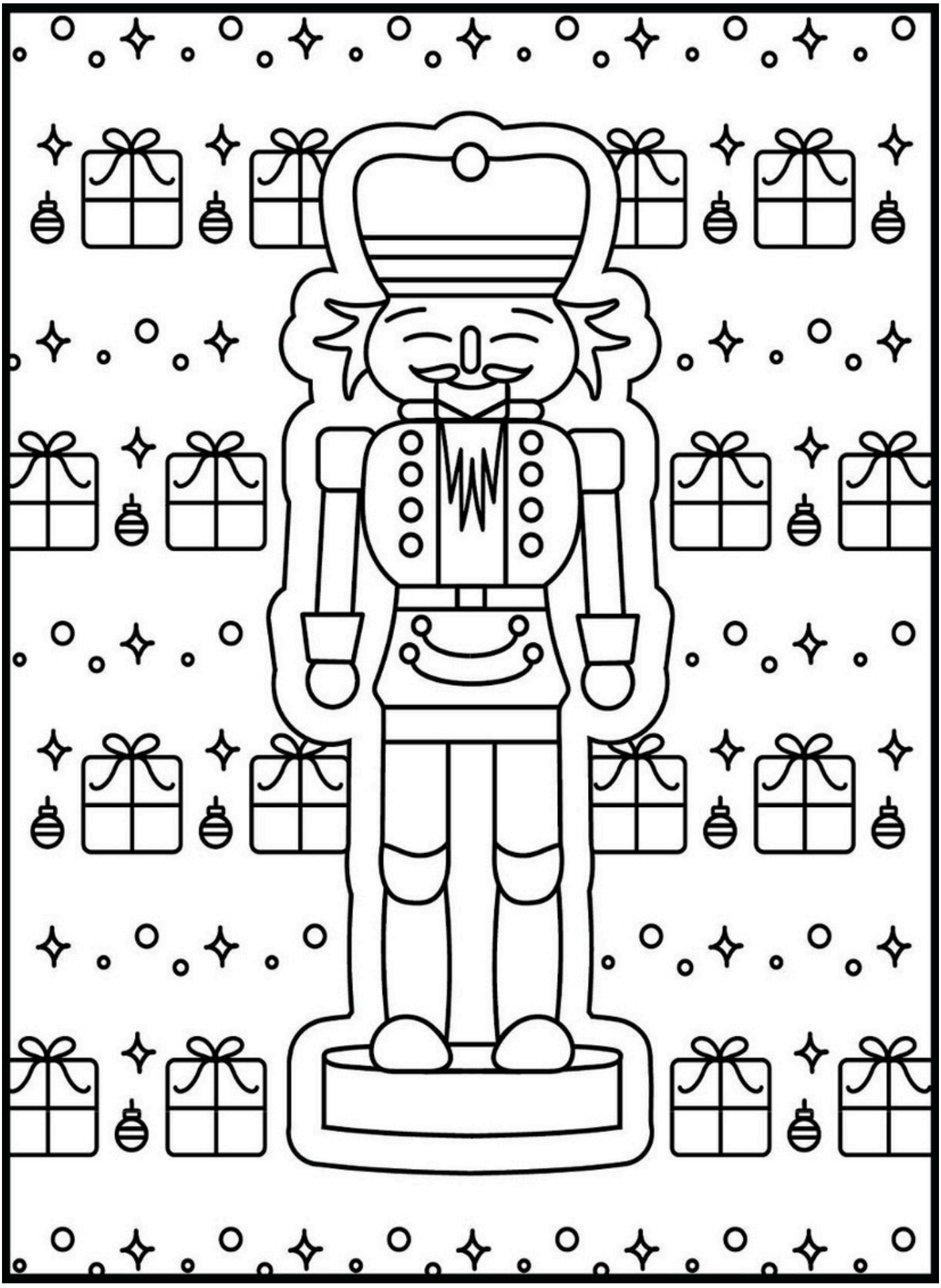




THE NUTCRACKER

THE NUTCRACKER





Main Characters:

Name	Who They Are
Drosselmeyer	a mysterious and magical man, often described as Clara's honorary uncle or godfather, and a talented toymaker
Clara (Marie)	The main character of *The Nutcracker*, a young girl who receives a magical doll and then has a fantastic journey through a battle, into the Land of Sweets, and back again
Fritz	Clara's younger brother, an energetic boy who plays with The Nutcracker doll without permission, and then accidentally breaks the toy
Nutcracker / Prince	A toy, given to Clara as a gift, which comes to life and bravely battles the Mouse King. A magic spell is broken and the toy turns into an enchanted Prince.
Mouse King	Sometimes shown as having as many as seven heads, the frightening leader of the mice cast a spell on a prince, turning him into a nutcracker doll. Upon learning Drosselmeyer has brought the doll to Clara, he arrives with a fierce army to fight The Nutcracker once and for all.
Sugar Plum Fairy	The ruler of the Land of Sweets and a symbol of magic and wonder. The Sugar Plum Fairy's music features a celesta, a keyboard instrument that plays small, tinkling bells.
Dancing Snowflakes	A group of glittering dancers who create beautiful patterns of swirling, falling snow through which Clara and the Nutcracker Prince must safely pass as they travel to the Land of Sweets. This scene often features a children's choir along with the orchestra.
Chocolate (Spain)	The Spanish dance utilizes lively trumpet music and castanets, reflecting the passion and flair of flamenco, a traditional Spanish dance form that combines guitar, vocals, and intricate footwork.
Coffee (Arabia)	The Arabian dance is inspired by Middle Eastern and Egyptian traditional dances and includes a rich, slow oboe solo. The costumes often include veils, flowing fabrics, and jewelry like ankle bells. Arabian coffee is rich and thick and is brewed with sugar, rather like the Sweet Tea of the southern United States.

Name	Who They Are
Tea (China)	When *The Nutcracker* ballet was created, Tea from China was rare and expensive. People would store tea in locked boxes called "caddies." In some performances, the tea dancer will pop out of a tea caddy when the dance begins. In others, the dance is a duet, features oil-paper umbrellas, or is a lion dance instead of a traditional ballet. The music for this scene features piccolo, bassoon, and pizzicato (plucked) strings.
Candy Cane (Russia)	The Russian dance, called "Trepak," is based on a traditional Russian and Ukrainian folk dance of the same name. The choreography features high-energy movements like stamps, claps, jumps, and knee bends, and rapid notes in the strings and woodwinds.
Marzipan (France)	The French dance, sometimes called "Reed Flutes" or "Mirlitons," draws inspiration from marzipan, a sweet treat popular in France that is sometimes eaten by itself and sometimes a filling for cakes or pastries. A mirliton is a simple, tube-shaped flute that has a delicate, airy sound.
Mother Ginger and the Polichinelles (Bon Bon babies or little cookies)	Mother Ginger represents Germany, where gingerbread comes from. She is a cookie or candy jar and is filled with a batch of cookies or candies, played by young children. In the 1890s, a popular Russian candy tin was shaped like a woman in a large skirt that opened at the bottom to reveal the candies. Because Mother Ginger does not "dance" much in the ballet, the part is sometimes "gifted" to a special or important person from the area where the ballet will be performed.
Dancing Flowers and the Dew Drop	A dancing bouquet gathered to honor Clara with a fairy-like dancer who leads the flowers in celebration. This scene sometimes features ladybugs, dragonflies, butterflies, bees, and snails.

Just like movies, books, paintings, and videos, DANCE is a way to tell stories.
Just like a picture or a painting, DANCE tells stories without words.
Just like a book, or a painting, DANCE uses symbols (movements) that can be decoded, read, and understood.

A Tale of Two Tutus

The Traditional Tutu

The tutu has been a symbol of ballet for nearly two centuries. Early Romantic-era tutus of the 1800s featured soft skirts that fell below the knee, creating an airy, otherworldly appearance. As ballet technique became increasingly athletic, skirts gradually shortened so audiences could better see a dancer's intricate footwork and leg movements. By the late 19th century, the short, structured classical tutu emerged, extending outward from the dancer's hips and showcasing the precision, strength, and technique associated with classical ballet.

The Lyrical Tutu

The lyrical tutu draws inspiration from ballet's softer Romantic traditions while allowing designers greater freedom in shape, fabric, and movement. Rather than extending stiffly from the hips, lyrical styles often use lightweight layers of tulle, chiffon, or other flowing fabrics that move with the dancer. These costumes can create a sense of softness, motion, fantasy, or emotion and are especially effective when a choreographer or designer wants the costume itself to respond visibly to the dancer's movement.

Why Choose One Over the Other?

Costume designers consider much more than appearance. A tutu can help establish a character, time period, mood, or choreographic style. A structured classical tutu emphasizes the dancer's lines and precise technique, while a flowing lyrical tutu can extend and amplify movement. Designers must also consider choreography, partnering, lighting, scenery, and how groups of costumes will look together onstage.

Look for It!

As you watch The Nutcracker, become a costume detective! Look for different tutu shapes, lengths, fabrics, and layers. Which costumes hold their shape, and which move with the dancers? Notice how each style changes the silhouette of the dancer and the way you see the choreography. Why do you think the costume designer chose that particular style for that character or dance?



Romantic Era



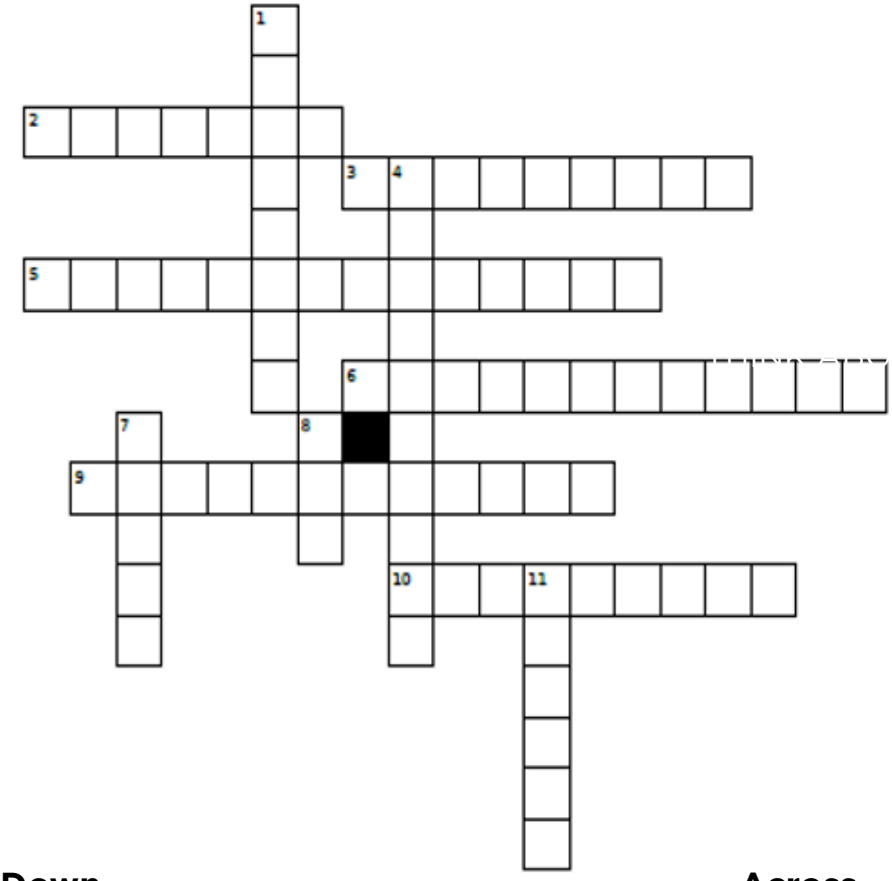
Structured



Lyrical

Cross Word *Key: Pg. 60*

Nutcracker Characters



Down

1. Country of origin for the elegant "Marzipan" shepherdess dance.
4. Brave defenders who battle the Mouse King in Act I.
7. Villain with multiple heads in some versions; enemy of The Nutcracker.
8. Country represented in the "Tea" dance with quick, delicate movements.
11. Mysterious dance from the Land of Sweets often called "Coffee."

Across

2. Featured soloist in the Waltz of the Flowers.
3. Home of the lively "Trepak" dance in Act II.
5. Whirling dancers who welcome Clara to the Land of Snow.
6. Sweet treats sometimes portrayed by dancing children.
9. Young heroine who travels with The Nutcracker Prince.
10. Country of the spirited "Chocolate" dance.

Word Search *Key: Pg. 61*

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



WORD BANK



Nutcracker
Clara
fairy
Sugar Plum Fairy
Russia
leap
pirouette
plie
tendu
releve
saute
arabesque

ballet
celesta
choreography
ballerina
pointe
shoe
dream
prince
cavalier
prima ballerina

Tchaikovsky
Suite
trumpet
oboe
castanets
mirliton
Trepak

Mouse King
Land of Sweets
pas de deux
party
candy
celebration
tradition

Spain
France
China
Arabia



How to Talk about Ballet: The B.E.S.T. Method

You don't have to be a dancer to talk about dance! But there is a difference between sharing an opinion and making an observation. "I liked it," or "It was pretty" tells us how you felt about what you saw. That matters... but it doesn't tell us what happened onstage that made you feel that way.

When we talk about dance, we begin with evidence: what we can actually see and hear. Describing movement helps us slow down, notice details, support our ideas, and understand how dancers and choreographers communicate without words. Once we describe what happened, we can use those observations to explain what we think it might mean. That's where B.E.S.T. comes in!

B — BODY
What is the body doing? Look at shapes, gestures, balance, facial expressions, and which body parts lead the movement. Is the dancer reaching, twisting, stretching, collapsing, or holding completely still?

E — ENERGY
How is the movement performed? Movement can be sharp or smooth, powerful or gentle, sudden or sustained, tense or relaxed. Does Dracula move differently from Mina or Jonathan? What might that tell you about each character?

S — SPACE
Where does the movement happen? Notice levels, directions, pathways, distance, and relationships between dancers. Who moves close together? Who stays apart? Who takes up the most space—and who seems trapped by it?

T — TIME
When and how quickly does movement happen? Look for changes in speed, rhythm, repetition, pauses, and stillness. Does a movement happen suddenly, build slowly, repeat again and again—or make you wait?

From Opinion to Observation

Instead of: “The Snowflakes were beautiful,” start with what you observed.

Try: “The Snowflakes traveled quickly across the stage using light, flowing energy and repeated turns.”

Then interpret: “Their movements filled the space and made the scene feel like swirling snow..”

OBSERVE → DESCRIBE → INTERPRET

Your interpretation can be different from someone else’s. The important part is being able to point to what you saw, heard, or noticed and explain how it shaped your thinking.

The magic isn’t just in what you see. It’s in noticing HOW the dancers create it.



Pre-Show Discussion Questions

- What does The Nutcracker, a fairy tale told through dance, make you think of?
- What do you expect to see in this performance?
- Have you ever seen a different performance of The Nutcracker?
- What questions do you have about ballet, the fairy tale, or this performance?
- Have you ever read The Nutcracker and The Mouse King?
- How could this story happen in real life?
- Where have you seen or experienced something like this story in your life?

TEKS – ELAR 6-8: 110.22(b)(1)(A–D); English II: 110.37(b)(1)(A–D), 110.37(b)(5)(A–C);
English IV: 110.39(b)(1)(A–D), 110.39(b)(5)(A–C)

Post-Show Discussion Questions

- When you watched this performance, what did it make you think of?
- What within this performance had you expected to see? (Or what was missing that you expected, and why did you expect to see it?)
- How was this performance similar to / different from another performance or show you have seen?
- Now that you have seen the show, what questions do you have?
- How close was this performance to the original material in the book (or in another version of the show you have seen)? Name some specific ways the performance was the same/different.
- Imagine a time when you experienced an event similar to this story.

TEKS - ELAR 6-8: 110.22(b)(6)(A–E); English I: 110.37(b)(5)(A–E), 110.37(b)(6)(A–E); English IV: 110.39(b)(5)(A–E), 110.39(b)(6)(A–E)

Teacher Notes

- Encourage students to use complete sentences when responding.
- Support discussion with visuals (photos, storybook pages, or costume sketches).
- Use sentence starters such as:
  - “My favorite part was…”
  - “The performance made me feel…”
  - “I noticed that…”
  - “This reminds me of…”

Writing Connections

- Create your own advertisement for the performance.
- Write a review of the performance.
    - Include a show synopsis in your own words.
    - Include at least three positive comments.
    - Include one or two critiques / suggestions for improvement /something you would have liked to have seen in the performance that was not there.
- Describe a favorite moment.
- Create a poem or story based on the show you just saw.

NOTE: Any of the pre- or post-show discussion questions could be reworded to a writing connection.

TEKS – ELAR:

Skill Area	3rd	4th	5th
Foundational Language Skills	110.5(1)ABC	110.6(b)(1)(A–D)	110.7(1)ABC
Respond to Sources	110.5(7)ABCDEF	110.6(b)(6)(A–E)	110.7(7)ABCDEFG
Literary Elements	110.5(8)ABCD	110.6(b)(7)(A–C)	110.7(8)ABCD
Recognize & Analyze Genre	110.5(9)ACD i–iii,E i–ii,F	110.6(b)(8)(A–C, E, F)	110.7(9)5ACD ii,F
Author's Purpose & Craft	110.5(10)ABCDEF	110.6(b)(9)(A–F)	110.7(10)ABCDEF
Composition: Writing Process	110.5(11)AB i–ii,CD i–ix,E	110.6(b)(10)(A–B i–ii, C–D i–ix, E)	110.7(11)AB i–ii,CD i–ix,E
Generate Questions	110.5(13)ACDEF	110.6(b)(10)(A–B i–ix, E)	110.7(13)ACDEF

Act II Dance List:

Scene	Who and What
The Land of Sweets	Clara and The Nutcracker Prince are welcomed to The Land of Sweets by the Sugar Plum Fairy.
Clara and The Nutcracker Prince	Clara and The Nutcracker Prince dance together to celebrate their victory over the Mouse King, impressing the Sugar Plum Fairy with their bravery and teamwork.
Chocolate	A lively and energetic Spanish-inspired dance.
Tea	A charming and delicate dance, often with a playful feel.
Candy Cane	A spirited and athletic dance, often with fast footwork and lots of leaping.
Dance of the Reed Pipes	A lighter, more whimsical dance.
Mother Ginger and the Polichinelles	A humorous dance with a large character and small dancers emerging from her skirts.
Waltz of the Flowers	A lush and grand waltz, featuring a larger ensemble of dancers, showing great elegance and beauty.
Pas de Deux	The Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier dance for Clara.
Final Waltz	The entire company dances then says goodbye to their special guests.
Final Scene	Clara wakes, finds her toy nutcracker beside her, and wonders if it was all a dream.

Grade 5 Activity: Mic, Music, Magic! – Create a Nutcracker Podcast

TEKS Alignment
ELAR 5.1(A)BCD), 5.6(EFGH), 5.7(BC), 5.11(BC), 5.13(ACEH)
Fine Arts 5.1(AB), 5.3(A), 5.5(ABCD), 5.6(BCD)

Objective
Students will analyze how music contributes to storytelling in The Nutcracker and collaboratively create a short podcast that uses research, evidence, musical vocabulary, organized writing, and expressive speaking to communicate ideas to an audience.

Materials
- Selected musical excerpts from Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker
- Access to Ballet San Antonio's The Nutcracker or selected performance excerpts
- Mic, Music, Magic! Podcast Planner worksheet
- Pencils
- Paper or digital writing tools
- Classroom-approved research resources
- Headphones, if available
- Tablet, computer, or other audio-recording device
- Optional microphone
- Optional simple audio-editing software or application
- Timer

Vocabulary
Podcast – A digital audio program designed to communicate information, tell stories, or entertain an audience.

Host – The person who guides a podcast episode.

Script – The written words and directions used to plan a recording or performance.

Audience – The people for whom a piece of media is created.

Tempo – The speed of music.

Dynamics – How loudly or softly music is performed.

Rhythm – Patterns of long and short sounds and silences in music.

Melody – A sequence of musical notes that forms a recognizable musical idea.

Timbre – The unique quality or character of a musical sound.

Evidence – Information used to support an idea or conclusion.

Lesson Activities

1. What's in a Podcast? | 10–15 min

- Ask students: What makes something interesting to listen to when you can't see the speaker?
- Create a class list. Possible responses might include: Interesting information Expression Humor Questions Different voices Music Sound effects A strong opening A clear story Surprising facts
- Explain that podcasts rely almost entirely on sound. Without pictures, the speakers must use their voices, words, music, and sound intentionally to keep an audience interested and communicate clearly.
- Introduce the challenge: You are becoming arts podcasters. Your job is to help your listeners hear The Nutcracker in a new way.

2. Listen Like a Music Critic | 15–20 min

- Play a selected musical excerpt from The Nutcracker without identifying the scene or dance. Possible selections include: March Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy Russian Dance/Trepak Arabian Dance Chinese Dance Waltz of the Flowers
- During the first listening, students simply listen.
- Ask: What did you notice?
- Listen a second time. This time, students record observations about: Tempo Dynamics Rhythm Melody Instruments or timbre Mood Changes they hear
- Then ask: What kind of character might move to this music? What might be happening in the story? What evidence from the music supports your prediction? Did the music change? If so, how? What words would you use to describe it to someone who has never heard it?
- Reveal or view the corresponding Nutcracker scene.
- Discuss: How did Tchaikovsky's music support what you saw onstage?

3. Find Your Story | 15–20 min

- Divide students into podcast teams of approximately 2–4 students. Each team chooses or is assigned a Nutcracker topic.
- Students generate 2–3 research questions before gathering information.
- Remind students: A podcast isn't just reading facts aloud. Your job is to explain why those facts are interesting or important.

Possible episode topics:

Meet Tchaikovsky
Who composed The Nutcracker, and what should audiences know about him?

Music That Tells a Story
How does The Nutcracker communicate story and emotion through music?

Sounds of the Land of Sweets
How are the Act II dances musically different?

The Sugar Plum Sound
What makes the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy sound so unusual and recognizable?

From Orchestra to Ballet
How do musicians and dancers work together during a ballet?

Behind the Magic
How do music, movement, costumes, scenery, and lighting work together?

Our Performance Review
What did your team notice during Ballet San Antonio's performance?

4. Build the Episode | 20–30 min

- Students use the Mic, Music, Magic! Podcast Planner to organize a 2–4 minute episode. Every podcast should contain:

INTRO/INTRODUCTION - Grab the listener's attention.
Possible approaches:

- Ask a question.
- Describe a sound.
- Share a surprising fact.
- Introduce a mystery.
- Make a bold observation.

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC
Tell listeners what the episode will explore.

EVIDENCE & EXPLANATION
Include at least three relevant facts or observations.
Explain why each matters.
When discussing music, use appropriate musical vocabulary.

PERFORMANCE CONNECTION
Connect the topic to something students heard or observed in The Nutcracker.

CONCLUSION
Leave the audience with one final idea, question, or observation.

SIGN-OFF
Create a short ending for the podcast.

5. Write for the Ear | 15 min

- Explain that podcast writing is different from writing an essay. Listeners cannot go backward and reread a confusing sentence. Podcast scripts should therefore sound natural, clear, and conversational.
- Compare - Written style:

"Tchaikovsky's composition of the ballet score incorporated a variety of musical techniques
designed to distinguish individual dances."

With - Podcast style:

"Listen closely to the Land of Sweets and you'll notice something: every dance sounds different.
Tchaikovsky gives each one its own musical personality."

- Ask: Which is easier to understand when heard aloud? Why?
- Students read their scripts aloud to their group.
- Revise places that:
  - Are difficult to say
  - Sound too formal
  - Repeat information
  - Are confusing
  - Need stronger transitions
  - Need more explanation
- Encourage students to write for a listener, not just a reader.

6. Mic Check! Rehearse & Record | 20–30 min

Before recording, students rehearse.

Practice:

- Speaking clearly
- Appropriate volume
- Pacing
- Expression
- Pronunciation
- Smooth transitions between speakers

Assign production roles when helpful:

- Host – Guides the episode.
- Music Expert – Explains musical observations.
- Researcher – Shares supporting information.
- Producer – Watches timing and manages the recording.
- Students may hold more than one role.

Record the podcast in one take or allow limited editing based on available classroom technology.

Remind students: The goal isn't a perfect recording. The goal is clear, thoughtful communication.

7. Podcast Premiere | 15–20 min

Listen to selected student podcasts.

Audience members become Podcast Critics and listen for:

- One interesting fact
- One strong musical observation
- One effective speaking choice
- One connection to The Nutcracker
- One question the episode made them wonder about

After listening, discuss: How did hearing another group's podcast change or deepen your understanding of The Nutcracker?

Assessment

Students will be assessed on their ability to:

- Generate relevant research questions.
- Gather and organize information about a focused topic.
- Use evidence and observations to support ideas.
- Apply appropriate musical vocabulary when analyzing a performance.
- Explain how musical choices contribute to mood, character, or storytelling.
- Write an organized script appropriate for an audio audience.
- Collaborate effectively and fulfill assigned responsibilities.
- Communicate orally using appropriate pacing, volume, expression, and enunciation.
- Create a clear connection between research, music, and the professional performance.

Extensions

Interview Episode

Students interview a musician, dancer, teacher, classmate, or other approved guest about music, ballet, performance, or The Nutcracker. Students develop open-ended interview questions and incorporate selected responses into their episode.

Two Dances, One Podcast

Compare two contrasting Nutcracker selections. Students use musical vocabulary and evidence to explain how Tchaikovsky creates different moods or movement possibilities.

60-Second Nutcracker

Challenge students to create an informative 60-second mini-podcast explaining one Nutcracker fact or musical idea as clearly and engagingly as possible.

Podcast Cover Art

Students design cover art for their podcast. They must identify the intended audience and explain how their visual choices communicate the subject and tone of the program.

Professional Performance Review

- After attending Ballet San Antonio's The Nutcracker, students produce a special review episode using specific evidence from the performance.
- Rather than simply rating the production, students address: What did the artists do, what effect did it have on the audience, and what evidence from the performance supports your opinion?

Mic, Music, Magic! Podcast Planner

Team member names: Date:_____

Part 1: Our Episode

Podcast title: _____

Episode title: _____

Our topic: _____

Our audience: _____

Team members: _____

Part 2: What Do We Want to Know?

Write three questions your podcast will investigate.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Part 3: Research & Evidence

Fact or Observation #1 - Why is this important or interesting?

Fact or Observation #2 - Why is this important or interesting?

Fact or Observation #3 - Why is this important or interesting?

Part 4: Listen to the Music

Music selection: _____

Tempo: _____

Dynamics: _____

Rhythm: _____

Instruments/Timbre: _____

Mood: _____

One change we heard:

What does the music communicate?

Evidence from the music:

Part 5: Build Your Script - On another paper, write out your script and include:

- Hook - How will you immediately interest your listener?
- Welcome & Introduction
- Main Idea #1
- Evidence/Example:
- Main Idea #2
- Evidence/Example:
- Main Idea #3
- Evidence/Example:
- Nutcracker Performance Connection
- Conclusion - What do you want your listeners to remember?
- Sign-Off

Part 6: Mic Check

Before recording, check each statement.

- Our podcast has a clear beginning, middle, and ending.
- We included accurate information.
- We explained our ideas instead of only listing facts.
- We included evidence or observations.
- We used musical vocabulary when appropriate.
- We connected our topic to The Nutcracker.
- Everyone knows their role.
- We practiced reading the script aloud.
- We speak clearly and at an understandable pace.
- Our episode is approximately 2–4 minutes long.

Part 7: Group Reflection

What was the strongest part of your podcast?

What did you learn about communicating through audio?

What did creating the podcast help you understand about music or The Nutcracker that you did not notice before?

Grade 3 Activity: Sugar & Nutrition Science – Investigating the Land of Sweets

TEKS Alignment
Science 3.1(ABE), 3.3 (AB), 3.5(A), 3.12(A), 3.13(A)
Health Education 3.6(ABC)

Objective
Students will investigate nutrition in the Land of Sweets by reading food labels, identifying nutrients, comparing amounts of sugar in familiar foods, and using evidence to explain how a variety of foods helps provide the body with what it needs for energy, growth, and movement.

Materials
- The Nutcracker synopsis or selected Act II excerpts
- Sugar & Nutrition Science Investigation worksheet
- Nutrition Facts labels from several foods and beverages
- Examples should include both sweet and nonsweet foods
- Measuring teaspoons
- Small clear cups or containers
- Granulated sugar for teacher demonstration
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Pencils
- Calculators, optional
- Food models or pictures, optional

Safety Note:
Foods and ingredients used for classroom investigation should be treated as learning materials rather than snacks. Teachers should follow school policies regarding food allergies and food use in the classroom.

Vocabulary
Nutrient – A substance in food that helps the body grow, function, and stay healthy.

Carbohydrate – A nutrient the body can use for energy.

Protein – A nutrient that helps the body grow and repair tissues.

Fat – A nutrient that provides energy and performs important jobs in the body.

Sugar – A type of carbohydrate found naturally in some foods and added to others.

Added Sugar – Sugar added to a food or beverage during processing or preparation.

Serving Size – The amount of food used to provide the information on a Nutrition Facts label.

Nutrition Facts Label – Information on a food package that describes its serving size and nutrient content.

Lesson Activities

1. Welcome to the Land of Sweets | 10 min

- Introduce or revisit Act II of The Nutcracker.
- Ask students to recall some of the foods and drinks represented through the dances.
- Examples may include: Chocolate Coffee Tea Candy canes Sweets
- Ask: Why do you think this part of the ballet is called the Land of Sweets?
- Then introduce a new question: What could a scientist discover about these foods that an audience cannot see from the stage?
- Show students a Nutrition Facts label.
- Explain that food contains different substances called nutrients, and labels give us information we can use to investigate what's inside different foods.
- Tell students: Today, we're becoming Nutrition Detectives in the Land of Sweets.

2. What Does Our Body Need? | 10–15 min

- Ask students: A ballet dancer needs energy to rehearse, jump, turn, and perform. Where does that energy come from?
- Introduce several important nutrients in age-appropriate language.
  Carbohydrates - One way the body gets energy.
  Protein - Helps the body grow and repair tissues.
  Fat - Provides energy and helps the body perform important functions.
- Discuss that foods can contain more than one nutrient.
- Explain that people need a variety of foods because different foods provide different nutrients.
- Ask: Would eating only one kind of food give our bodies everything they need?
- Connect the discussion to dancers and other physically active people.
  A professional dancer's body is part of their work,
  so eating a varied diet and staying hydrated help support demanding physical activity.

3. Become a Label Detective | 15–20 min

- Give pairs or small groups several Nutrition Facts labels.
- Teach students how to locate:
  Serving size
  Total carbohydrate
  Added sugars
  Protein
- Students record information from each label.
  Food Serving Size Added Sugar Protein FOR Food A Food B Food C
- Ask: Which food has the most added sugar per serving? Which has the least?
  Which contains the most protein? Do any have zero grams of added sugar?
  What surprised you?
- Emphasize that scientists use evidence rather than guesses. Students may have predicted that one food contained more sugar based on its appearance or taste. Now they can use the label to test that prediction.

4. How Much Is a Gram of Sugar? | 15 min

- Students often see numbers such as 4 g, 12 g, or 24 g of sugar without understanding what those quantities look like.
- Show students granulated sugar and a teaspoon.
- For a simple visual demonstration, explain that approximately 4 grams of granulated sugar is about one teaspoon.
- Choose a Nutrition Facts label containing added sugar.
  Example: 12 grams of added sugar
  Estimate: 12 ÷ 4 = about 3 teaspoons
- Measure approximately three teaspoons of sugar into a clear container.
- Repeat with another label.
- Ask: Which container has more? How does seeing the amount change your understanding of the number on the label? Why are measurements useful to scientists?
- Make clear that the teaspoon comparison is an approximation used to help visualize quantity.

5. Sugar: Naturally There or Added? | 15 min

- Explain that not all sugar in foods gets there in the same way.
  Some foods naturally contain sugars. Examples include: Fruit Milk
- Other foods may have sugar added during preparation or manufacturing. Examples may include: Candy Sweetened beverages Frosting Some cereals
- Ask students to sort food pictures into:
  Foods that can contain naturally occurring sugars - and -
  Foods that may contain added sugars
- Then introduce an important idea: A food can contain both naturally occurring and added sugars.
- Use labels when possible to investigate rather than relying only on the food's appearance.
- Ask: Why is the Nutrition Facts label more useful than simply guessing whether a food contains added sugar?

6. Build a Dancer's Snack | 15–20 min

- Give students a fictional challenge: A dancer has finished a long rehearsal and needs a snack. Design a snack containing a variety of foods and nutrients.
- Provide pictures or names of age-appropriate food choices.
- Students select 2–3 items.
- For each choice, they identify information such as:
  Carbohydrate
  Protein
  Added sugar
  Other information visible on the label
- Students explain: I chose _____ because _____.
- Encourage evidence-based reasoning rather than identifying a single "perfect" snack.
- Discuss how variety can provide different nutrients.

7. Professional Performance Connection

- Before attending Ballet San Antonio's The Nutcracker, remind students that dancers are athletes as well as artists.
- Ask students to watch for movements that require:
  Energy Strength Balance Endurance Coordination
- After the performance, ask: What did you see the dancers' bodies accomplish? Why might nutrition and hydration be important for someone who rehearses and performs this kind of movement?
- Connect their observations back to the investigation: The Land of Sweets may be imaginary, but the dancers performing in it have real bodies that need energy and nutrients.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on their ability to:

- Locate information on a Nutrition Facts label.
- Identify carbohydrates, protein, and added sugar.
- Compare nutrient quantities among foods.
- Use measurements and numerical information as evidence.
- Explain the difference between naturally occurring and added sugars.
- Explain why the body needs a variety of nutrients.
- Make an evidence-based food choice.
- Connect nutrition to the physical demands of professional dance.

Extensions

Sugar Bar Graph

Students use the added-sugar data from several labels to create a bar graph. Students answer: Which food contains the most added sugar per serving? How much more does it contain than another food?

Serving-Size Detective

Compare two labels with different serving sizes. Ask: Can we fairly compare the numbers without first looking at serving size? Why or why not?

Ingredient Investigator

Students examine ingredient lists and look for different names associated with added sugars. Discuss why scientists and consumers need to examine both information and evidence carefully.

Nutrition & Movement

Students perform a teacher-directed one-minute movement activity and observe changes such as breathing rate and feeling warmer. Discuss: Why does an active body need energy? Connect their observations to the demanding physical work of professional dancers.

Design a Land of Sweets Label

Students invent a fictional Land of Sweets food and create a package that includes a mock Nutrition Facts label. They then explain which parts are imaginary and which types of information would have to be determined through actual measurement before the product could have a real nutrition label.

Sugar & Nutrition Science Investigation

Name: _____ Date: _____

Part 1: Nutrition Detective

Food #1: _____

Serving size: _____

Added sugar: _____ g Protein: _____ g

Total carbohydrate: _____ g

Food #2: _____

Serving size: _____

Added sugar: _____ g Protein: _____ g

Total carbohydrate: _____ g

Food #3: _____

Serving size: _____

Added sugar: _____ g Protein: _____ g

Total carbohydrate: _____ g

Part 2: Compare the Evidence
Which food has the most added sugar per serving?

Which has the least added sugar per serving?

Which has the most protein per serving?

Write one thing the labels taught you that you could not tell by looking at the foods.

Part 3: Visualize the Sugar

Remember: About 4 grams of sugar ≈ 1 teaspoon
Choose one food label.

Food: _____

Added sugar: _____ grams

Estimate the number of teaspoons:

_____ ÷ 4 = about _____ teaspoons

Was the amount:
More than I expected / Less than I expected / About what I expected

Explain:

Part 4: Naturally Occurring or Added?
Write N for a food that can contain naturally occurring sugar.
Write A for a food that commonly has sugar added.

_____ Whole fruit _____ Plain milk _____ Candy
_____ Frosting _____ Sweetened beverage

Can a food contain both naturally occurring and added sugars? YES / NO

Part 5: Fuel the Dancer
Design a snack for a dancer after rehearsal.

Food #1
One nutrient it provides:

Food #2
One nutrient it provides:

Explain Your Choices "I chose these foods because..."

Final Reflection
The Nutcracker takes us to an imaginary Land of Sweets. On another page, describe:

- What did investigating real food labels teach you about sugar and nutrition?
- Use at least two pieces of evidence from today's investigation.

Grade 4 Activity: Crack the Story – Nutcracker Newsroom

TEKS Alignment

ELAR 4.1(ACD), 4.6(FGH), 4.7(BC), 4.9(D)(i)(ii), 4.10(A), 4.11(ABC), 4.12(B), 4.13(ACEH)
Fine Arts – Theatre 4.1(ABC), 4.2(ABC), 4.3(A), 4.5(ABC)

Objective

Students will investigate The Nutcracker as arts journalists by gathering and organizing facts, identifying the 5Ws and H, distinguishing fact from opinion, developing interview questions, and writing a clear news report that uses evidence to communicate the most important information about a professional performing arts experience.

Materials

- Grade-appropriate synopsis of The Nutcracker
- Access to Ballet San Antonio's The Nutcracker or selected performance excerpts
- Sample age-appropriate newspaper or online news article
- Crack the Story: Nutcracker Newsroom worksheet
- Pencils
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Optional clipboards
- Optional tablets/computers for composing articles
- Optional audio or video recording device for mock news reports

Vocabulary

Journalist – A person who gathers information and reports stories to an audience.

Headline – The title of a news story designed to communicate its main idea and attract the reader's attention.

Lead – The opening of a news story that gives readers the most important information.

Source – A person, document, observation, or other resource that provides information.

Fact – Information that can be checked or proven.

Opinion – A belief, judgment, or viewpoint.

Evidence – Information used to support a statement or conclusion.

Interview – A conversation in which one person asks questions to gather information.

5Ws + H – Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How.

Lesson Activities

1. Welcome to the Nutcracker Newsroom | 10–15 min

- Enter the classroom with an announcement: BREAKING NEWS: Something extraordinary happened at The Tobin Center!
- Tell students they are no longer simply audience members. Today, they are arts journalists!
- Ask: If someone missed The Nutcracker, what would they need to know about what happened? Record student responses.
- Introduce the basic questions journalists use to investigate a story:
  WHO? - Who is involved? WHAT? - What happened? WHEN? - When did it happen?
  WHERE? - Where did it happen? WHY? - Why is it important?
  HOW? - How did it happen—or how was the story communicated?
  Explain that these questions are known as the 5Ws + H. Journalists use them to make sure they have gathered the important information before they begin writing.

2. Crack the Story | 15–20 min

- Read a short synopsis or selected passage from The Nutcracker.
- Students become reporters and identify the 5Ws + H.
  For example: WHO? - Clara, the Nutcracker, Mouse King, Sugar Plum Fairy
  WHAT? - Clara experiences an extraordinary adventure.
  WHERE? - The party, battlefield, snowy forest, and Land of Sweets
- Remember: some questions may have more than one possible answer. Ask:
  What is the MOST important "what" in the story?
  Students must decide which details are essential and which are interesting but less important.
- Explain: Journalists cannot include every detail. They have to decide what their audience most needs to know.

3. Fact or Opinion? | 15 min

- Write several statements about The Nutcracker on the board. Students identify each as FACT or OPINION.
  Examples: Tchaikovsky composed the music for The Nutcracker.
  The Sugar Plum Fairy is the best character.
  Ballet dancers use movement to communicate parts of the story.
  The battle scene is the most exciting part of the ballet.
- Then ask: How could a journalist check whether a statement is a fact?
  Possible answers: Consult a book. Check a reliable website. Ask an expert. Examine a program (the book handed out at a performance). Observe the performance.
- Explain that journalists need to know the difference between what they can verify and what someone believes or feels.
- Challenge: Turn an opinion into an attributed statement.
  Instead of: "The battle scene is the most exciting part." A journalist could write:
  "One audience member said the battle scene was the most exciting part of the performance." Now the fact being reported is that someone expressed that opinion.

4. Reporter in the Audience | Performance Connection

- Before watching an excerpt or attending Ballet San Antonio's The Nutcracker, give students their reporting assignment. Tell them: Reporters notice details. Your job is to collect evidence while you watch.
- Students record observations in four areas. STORY - What happened?
  PERFORMANCE - What did the dancers do to communicate the story?
  DESIGN - What did you notice about costumes, scenery, props, or lighting?
  MUSIC - How did the music contribute to the experience?
- Remind students that they do not need to write constantly during a live performance. The priority is being a respectful audience member and experiencing the production.
- Immediately afterward, allow several minutes for students to record what they remember.

5. Ask the Right Question | 15–20 min

- Explain that journalists often learn information by interviewing people.
- Students imagine they have the opportunity to interview someone involved in The Nutcracker.
  They choose a: Dancer Choreographer Musician Costume designer Lighting designer
  Scenic designer Stage manager Audience member
- Compare two questions: Did you like performing in The Nutcracker? - and What is the most challenging part of preparing to perform The Nutcracker, and why?
- Ask: Which question is likely to produce a more interesting answer?
- Introduce open-ended questions—questions that encourage someone to explain rather than simply answer yes or no.
- Students write three interview questions.

6. Mock Interview

- Partners take turns playing Reporter and Artist.
- The reporter asks questions.
- The artist responds from the perspective of their chosen theatre professional or character.
- Reporters take brief notes rather than attempting to write every word.

7. Write the Lead | 15 min

- Explain that journalists often put the most important information near the beginning of a news story. This opening is called the "lead."
- Challenge students to summarize their story in approximately 1–2 sentences.
- A lead should answer several of the 5Ws.
  Example: Students visiting The Tobin Center entered a world of dancing snowflakes and magical characters as Ballet San Antonio brought The Nutcracker to the stage.
- Students draft their own lead.

The lead will answer:

- Who is involved?
- What happened?
- Where did it happen?
- Which information is still missing?
- Does the sentence make you want to continue reading?

7. Write the Nutcracker News | 25–30 min

Students write a short arts news article about the performance. Their report should contain:

- HEADLINE - A brief title that tells readers what the story is about.
- LEAD - The most important information appears first.
- BODY - Include:
- Important facts - Details from observation
- Information about the performance - At least one specific example or piece of evidence
- An interview response or quotation if the mock-interview activity is used
- CLOSING - End with an important final observation or idea about the experience.

Students should aim to answer as many of the 5Ws + H as are relevant.

8. Newsroom Edit | 10–15 min

Journalists rarely publish their first draft. Pair students as Reporter + Editor.

Editors check:

- Can I identify the main idea?
- Does the lead contain important information?
- Are facts presented accurately?
- Does the writer provide evidence or specific details?
- Can I distinguish facts from opinions?
- Is the information organized clearly?
- Are there words or sentences that could be clearer?
- Does the headline fit the story?

Students revise before publishing.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on their ability to:

- Identify and organize information using the 5Ws + H.
- Determine the central idea and distinguish important details from less important information.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Generate relevant, open-ended interview questions.
- Gather information through reading, observation, and discussion.
- Use evidence to support statements about a professional performance.
- Explain how theatrical elements communicate character and story.
- Compose a focused informational news report appropriate for an audience.
- Organize writing with a headline, lead, supporting details, and conclusion.
- Revise writing for clarity, organization, and word choice.
- Demonstrate appropriate audience behavior during a professional performance.

Extensions

Critic vs. Reporter

Compare two jobs:

- NEWS REPORTER: What happened?
- ARTS CRITIC: How successful was it?

Students write one factual sentence a reporter might use and one evidence-supported opinion a critic might use about the same performance. Discuss why both types of writing can be valuable but have different purposes.

Nutcracker News Broadcast

Turn the written article into a 60–90 second television news report. Students become anchors or arts correspondents and practice speaking rate, volume, eye contact, expression, and clear delivery.

Press Conference

One student assumes the role of a dancer, choreographer, designer, musician, or Nutcracker character. Classmates become reporters and ask open-ended questions during a mock press conference. Afterward, students compare which questions produced the most useful information.

Headline Challenge

Give students the same set of performance facts and challenge them to write three different accurate headlines. Discuss: How can a headline attract attention without exaggerating or changing the facts?

Front Page of the Land of Sweets

Small groups create a Nutcracker newspaper front page containing a main story, headline, illustration, caption, short interview, and one additional story from the perspective of a reporter inside the Land of Sweets.

Crack the Story: Nutcracker Newsroom
REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

Reporter: _____

Assignment: _____

Part 1: The 5Ws + H
WHO? - Who are the important people or characters?

WHAT? - What happened?

WHEN? - When did it happen?

WHERE? - Where did it happen?

WHY? - Why is this story important or interesting?

HOW? - How was the story communicated to the audience?

Part 2: Collect the Evidence
STORY - One important event:

PERFORMANCE - One movement, gesture, or expression I noticed:

What did it communicate?

MUSIC - One thing I noticed:

How did it affect the performance?

DESIGN - One costume, scenery, prop, or lighting detail:

Why was it important?

Part 3: Fact Check!
Write F for fact or O for opinion.
_____ The Nutcracker includes music composed by Tchaikovsky.
_____ My favorite character is the Sugar Plum Fairy.
_____ Ballet uses movement to communicate ideas.
_____ The fastest dances are always the best dances.

Now write:
One fact from your investigation:

How could you verify it?

One opinion:

Whose opinion is it?

Part 4: The Interview

Person I would interview:

Question #1

Question #2

Question #3

Best information I learned from my interview:

Part 5: What's the Big Story?
Before writing, decide what matters most.
Most important information:

Important supporting detail:

Another supporting detail:

Interesting—but not essential—detail:

Why doesn't every detail belong in the lead?

Part 6: Write Your Lead
Try to answer several of the 5Ws in 1–2 sentences.

Part 7: Nutcracker News
One another sheet of paper, write your news report. Include:

- HEADLINE
- LEAD
- BODY
- CLOSING

Reporter Reflection
What was the most important decision you made as a journalist?

What evidence helped you tell the story accurately?

What is one thing you noticed about The Nutcracker because you watched it like a reporter?

BOOK SUGGESTIONS

Original Texts & Ballet History

A Child's Introduction to Ballet by Laura Lee
A richly illustrated nonfiction book including a section on The Nutcracker, ballet history, and key vocabulary—great for dance-focused middle school students.

Duke Ellington's Nutcracker Suite by Anna Harwell Celenza.
It's a challenge to transform the "Nutcracker Suite's" romantic orchestra into jumpin' jazz melodies, but that's exactly what Duke Ellington and his collaborator, Billy Strayhorn, did. (Includes music CD)

STEM & Other Connection Books:

The Science of Dance & Ballet: An Anthology of 28 Graphs for Kids
This nonfiction title presents ballet movement in terms of physics and data — acceleration, velocity, trajectories, biomechanics, breathing, and muscle activity — visually represented in

Chapter Books & Cultural Exploration

The Nutcracker and the Mouse King by E.T.A. Hoffmann, adapted by Bernadette Watts or Janet Schulman
These adaptations offer a child-friendly version of the original tale with more plot detail and character depth.

Emma and the Sugar Plum Fairy (Magic Ballerina series) by Darcey Bussell
A chapter book blending ballet, magic, and character development. Encourages independent reading.

The Nutcracker Comes to America: How Three Ballet-Loving Brothers Created a Holiday Tradition by Chris Barton
A nonfiction picture book about how the ballet became popular in the U.S., integrating social studies and performing arts.

Becoming a Ballerina: A Nutcracker Story Starring the Dancers of the Boston Ballet by Lise Friedmann Duke.
Follow Fiona, a young dancer starring in Boston Ballet's The Nutcracker, as she navigates tense auditions, hours of rehearsal, and the thrill of opening night. Full color photographs.
Duke Ellington's Nutcracker Suite by Anna Harwell Celenza.

It's a challenge to transform the "Nutcracker Suite's" romantic orchestra into jumpin' jazz melodies, but that's exactly what Duke Ellington and his collaborator, Billy Strayhorn, did. (Includes music CD)

STEM & Other Connection Books:

The Science of Dance & Ballet: An Anthology of 28 Graphs for Kids

This nonfiction title presents ballet movement in terms of physics and data — acceleration, velocity, trajectories, biomechanics, breathing, and muscle activity — visually represented in graphs.

Grades: 5–8

STEM Connection: Excellent for quantitatively analyzing dance motions, linking perfectly with lessons on energy and biomechanics.

Ballerina Activity Book for Kids

Combining ballet-themed mazes, coloring, and challenging math puzzles and reasoning problems, this activity book weaves dance into math practice in a fun, age-appropriate way.

Grades: 3–5

STEM Connection: Reinforces logical reasoning, spatial thinking, and basic math through dance-themed activities.

The Magical Dance of Matter (The Science Explorers Series)

A whimsical picture book where the four elemental "queens" (Solida, Liqua, Gasa, Plasma) perform a magical dance representing the states of matter.

Grade Level: K–2 (or early 3–5)

STEM Connection: Introduces science vocabulary and basic physical concepts (solid, liquid, gas, plasma) in a dance-themed narrative.

Dance & Belonging Books:

Danbi Leads the School Parade by Anna Kim

Danbi, a newcomer, drifts into her new school feeling lost—until her creativity through movement (tap-tap with chopsticks!) brings classmates together. The parade becomes a shared moment of connection and inclusion, illustrating how dance and rhythm create belonging.

Other Books:

Search and Find The Nutcracker by Federica Frenna

An illustrated "Where's Waldo?"-style Seek & Find adventure based on the Hoffmann story. Each spread features rich, detailed scenes—from the Stahlbaum's Christmas party to the Land of Sweets—packed with hidden characters and objects to spot. Great for visual literacy and classroom engagement.

The Nutcracker Activity Book, Bk 1: 8 Favorites from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite (Alfred Music)

While focused on piano and music theory, this activity book includes puzzles, coloring, and game pages tied to The Nutcrackermelodies. Useful for music integration, pattern recognition, and reinforcing rhythm and notation skills.

4th Grade Activity - Page to Stage: Comparing Versions of *The Nutcracker*
TEKS Connections
ELA 4.6(EFGH) 7(BC) 8 (BCD) 10(A) 11(B)
Theater 4.1(BC) 2(BC) 3(A) 5(AC)

Objective: Students will compare and contrast a written version of The Nutcracker with a live ballet performance, using evidence from both to analyze how characters, setting, plot, mood, and important story moments are communicated differently through words, illustrations, movement, music, costumes, scenery, and theatrical design.

Materials Needed
- A grade-appropriate picture book or literary adaptation of The Nutcracker
- Ballet San Antonio's live production of The Nutcracker
- Page to Stage Comparison student worksheet
- Pencils
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Sticky notes, optional
- Venn diagram, optional
- Colored pencils, optional

Vocabulary

Adaptation – A version of a story that has been changed or recreated in another form.

Compare – To identify how two or more things are alike.

Contrast – To identify how two or more things are different.

Evidence – Information or details that support an idea or conclusion.

Character – A person, animal, or figure who takes part in a story.

Setting – Where and when a story takes place.

Plot – The important events that make up a story.

Mood – The feeling or atmosphere created for the audience.

Choreography – The planned movements and patterns of a dance.

Design – The visual and technical choices, such as costumes, scenery, props, and lighting, used to create the world of a performance.

Lesson Activities

1. One Story, Two Ways | 10–15 min

- Show students the Nutcracker book they will read.
- Then show an image of a ballet stage or remind students that they will see the same story performed live.
- Ask: Can the same story be told without using the same words—or without using words at all?
- Create two headings on the board:
  A BOOK CAN USE...
  Students might identify: Words Narration Dialogue Illustrations Descriptions Pages Chapters
  A BALLET CAN USE...
  Students might identify: Movement Gesture Facial expression Music Costumes Scenery Props Lighting
- Introduce the essential question: What changes when a story moves from the page to the stage?
- Explain that students will experience The Nutcracker in two different forms and investigate how each tells the story.

2. Read the Story: Become a Page Detective | 20–30 min

- Read a grade-appropriate version of The Nutcracker as a class or have students read independently or in groups.
- As students read, ask them to collect evidence about five story elements.
  CHARACTER - Who are the important characters? How do we know what they think or feel?
  SETTING - Where does the story take place? What details help us imagine each place?
  PLOT - What are the most important events?
  MOOD - How does the author make different moments feel exciting, mysterious, frightening, peaceful, or magical?
  MAGIC MOMENT - Choose one moment that you especially want to see performed onstage.
- Students record their observations on the Page side of their comparison sheet.

3. From Words to Movement | 15 min

- Before attending the performance, choose one short moment from the book.
  For example: Clara sees the Mouse King and is frightened.
- Ask: How does the book tell us that Clara is frightened?
  Students might identify: The narrator tells us. Clara says something.
  The author describes her reaction. The illustration shows her expression.

- Now remove the words.
- Ask: You're the dancer playing Clara. How could you communicate fear without speaking?
- Invite volunteers to experiment with: Facial expression Gesture Body position Levels Speed Direction Distance from another character
- Then ask: What else could the theatre add to help the audience understand the moment? Consider: Music Lighting Costume Scenery Other performers
- Explain: When a story moves to the stage, artists have to make choices about how the audience will SEE and HEAR ideas that a book can simply tell us.

4. Before the Performance: Make a Prediction

- Students return to the Magic Moment they selected while reading.
- Ask them to predict: How do you think Ballet San Antonio will bring this moment to life?
- Students predict at least two theatrical choices.
  I predict the dancers will...
  I predict the music will...
  I predict the stage might...
  Tell students not to worry about being "right."
  Their job is to think like artists:
  How could this moment be transformed from page to stage?

5. Live Performance: Become a Stage Detective

- At Ballet San Antonio's The Nutcracker, students watch for the same five elements they investigated in the book.
  CHARACTER - How do dancers show what characters are thinking or feeling?
  SETTING - How do scenery, lighting, costumes, and props establish where the story takes place?
  PLOT - Which events from the book appear onstage? Are any events different?
  MOOD - How do music, movement, lighting, and design create feelings for the audience?
  MAGIC MOMENT - Watch carefully for the moment you selected from the book.
  How did the artists actually bring it to life?
- Remind students that during a live performance, their first responsibility is to be a respectful and engaged audience member. They do not need to complete the worksheet while the dancers are performing.
- Immediately following the performance, give students time to record what they remember.

6. Page vs. Stage | 20 min

After the performance, students compare their observations.

Create a class chart:

Story Element	PAGE (book)	BOTH	STAGE (ballet)
Characters			
Setting			
Plot			
Mood			
Magic Moment			

- Encourage students to identify specific evidence.
  Instead of: "They were different." Encourage: "The book described Clara as frightened, but onstage the dancer stepped backward, raised her hands, and moved away from the Mouse King."
- Ask: Which characters appeared in both? Did any characters change? Which events happened in both versions? Did the performance leave anything out? Did the performance add anything? How did the book establish setting? How did the stage establish setting? How did the author create mood? How did the ballet create mood?
- Introduce an important idea: Different does not mean wrong. An adaptation often changes parts of a story because each art form has different ways of communicating.

7. The Magic Moment Comparison | 15–20 min

- Students return to the moment they selected before the performance.
- They compare:
  ON THE PAGE - How did the author or illustrator communicate the moment? - and -
  ON THE STAGE - How did the dancers and designers communicate the same moment?
- MY PREDICTION - How close was my prediction?
- Then students answer: Which version communicated this moment more effectively to you—the book or the live performance?
- Students must support their opinion with evidence from both versions.
- Emphasize that there is no single correct answer. The quality of the response depends on the student's evidence and reasoning.

8. Final Response: From Page to Stage | 20–25 min

- Students write a short comparison response.
- Prompt - How did the story of The Nutcracker change when it moved from the page to the stage? Compare the book and Ballet San Antonio's live performance. Use specific evidence from both versions.
- Encourage students to organize their response:
  INTRODUCTION - Identify the two versions being compared.
  SIMILARITY - Describe one important similarity and provide evidence.
  DIFFERENCE - Describe one important difference and provide evidence.
  ARTISTIC CHOICE - Explain how movement, music, costume, scenery, or another theatrical element communicated something that the book communicated with words or illustrations.
  CONCLUSION - Explain what students learned by experiencing the same story in two different forms.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on their ability to:

- Identify and describe character, setting, plot, and mood in a literary text.
- Make predictions about how a written story might be adapted for performance.
- Identify similarities and differences between a book and a live performance.
- Use specific evidence from both versions to support comparisons.
- Explain how dancers communicate character and emotion through movement and body language.
- Explain how music, costumes, scenery, props, and lighting contribute to theatrical storytelling.
- Distinguish between the storytelling tools available to authors/illustrators and performing artists.
- Form and support an opinion about an artistic choice.
- Write an organized comparison using evidence from two sources.
- Demonstrate appropriate audience behavior during a live professional performance.

Extensions

Adaptation Detective

Students identify one change Ballet San Antonio made from the book. Ask: Why do you think the artists made this change? Students develop a claim and support it with evidence from both versions.

Design It Differently

Choose a scene from the book and imagine you are the production designer. Create a new design for the scene's - Scenery - Costume - Lighting. Write a short explanation of how your choices would help communicate the setting or mood.

Choreograph a Paragraph

Select a short paragraph from the book. In small groups, students develop a movement sequence that communicates the paragraph without speaking. The audience identifies what they believe happened and what movement evidence helped them understand it.

Book Illustrator vs. Stage Designer

Compare one illustration from the book with the corresponding moment in the live production. Ask: How do an illustrator and a stage designer solve the same storytelling problem differently?

Two Versions, One Story

Create a Venn diagram comparing the book and live production. Then answer: If someone had experienced only one version of The Nutcracker, what would they understand differently from someone who experienced both?

Page to Stage Comparison Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

The Book

Book title: _____

Author/Adapter: _____

Illustrator: _____

Character

Choose one important character.

Character: _____

What do you learn about this character?

How does the book show what the character thinks or feels?

Setting

Describe one important setting.

What words or illustrations help you imagine it?

Plot

List three important events.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Mood

Choose one important scene.

Scene: _____

Mood: _____

What creates that mood in the book?

My Magic Moment – Page to Stage
In the BOOK, this moment was shown through:

On the STAGE, this moment was shown through:

Was the staged version what you predicted? YES / PARTLY / NO
What surprised you?

Compare & Contrast
PAGE ONLY - One detail unique to the book:

BOTH PAGE AND STAGE - One important similarity:

STAGE ONLY - One detail unique to the performance:

Think Like an Artist
Choose one theatrical element:
MOVEMENT / MUSIC / COSTUME / SCENERY / LIGHTING

My choice: _____
Describe how it helped tell the story.

What did the book use to communicate the same or a similar idea?

Final Comparison
Which version communicated your Magic Moment more effectively to you—the book or the live performance?

My choice: BOOK / LIVE PERFORMANCE
Evidence from the book:

Evidence from the performance:

My reasoning:

Theatre Manners – Getting Ready for the Show

"Etiquette" means showing good manners and respectful behavior. In theatre, it means knowing how to act before, during, and after a performance so that everyone can enjoy the show — the audience and the performers!
Different performances have different traditions.

· At a Gospel concert, people might clap, sing, or move to the music.
· At a Classical Orchestra concert, the audience listens quietly and waits to clap until the conductor lowers their hands.

At the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, these are the general rules to follow.

Before the Show

- Arrive early: Give yourself time to find your seat, use the restroom, and get settled before the lights dim.
- Turn off devices: Phones, watches, and electronics should be silenced and put away so no lights or sounds distract others.
- Remind students that performances are live — what they do can be seen and heard by the performers!

During the Show

- Stay seated: Remain in your seat unless there is an emergency. If you need help, raise your hand or ask an usher quietly.
- Applaud at the right times:
  - If there is an orchestra, it's polite to clap when the conductor walks on stage.
  - Clap to show appreciation at the end of scenes, songs, or the entire performance.
- Enjoy and respond appropriately: It's great to laugh when something is funny or applaud when something is amazing.

After the Show

- Stay for the curtain call. At the end, performers return to the stage to take a bow. This is your chance to clap and say "thank you" for their hard work.
- If everyone stands while clapping, it's called a standing ovation, which means the show was extra special!
- Sometimes performers may do a short extra piece afterward, called an encore (say "ON-core").
- Large crowds can get noisy fast. Walk slowly, talk softly, and follow your teacher's directions.

Additional Tips for Students

- Sit tall and stay aware: Good posture helps you see the stage and helps others see too.

Teacher Note

You can review these etiquette points before your field trip or class performance. Encourage students to compare theatre behavior with other places they visit (like a movie theatre, concert, or sporting event). This helps them understand why theatre manners are special and important.

Equitable services for the creative arts
to promote justice, inclusion, and empowerment for all.

What to Expect on the Day of the Sensory-Friendly Performance

Before the Show

- The show will last about 1 hour (shortened for young audiences).
- The theatre will open early so everyone has plenty of time to find seats and get comfortable.
- Fewer people will be in the building, making it calmer and quieter.
- Specially trained staff and volunteers will be available to help families feel supported and welcome.
- This is a judgment-free zone — everyone is free to be themselves!

During the Show

- Sound levels will be lower, and any loud or surprising sounds will be softened.
- Flashing or bright lights will be reduced, and no lights will shine into the audience.
- There will be no confetti or sudden effects.
- Lights in the theatre will stay on at a low level the whole time.
- ·Movement and talking are allowed! Students can stand, move, or make sounds as they need.
- Comfort items are welcome — such as fidgets, headphones, small snacks, or a favorite toy.
- Tablets and cell phones may be used if they help calm or engage a student.
- You can enter and exit the theatre whenever needed.

Sensory-Friendly Features

Sensory Paths

- Floor Sensory and Wheelchair-Accessible Paths – self-guided paths with fun movements to help students use extra energy before the show.

Calming Center and "Peaceful Place"

- A quiet area near the theater for anyone who needs a break.

Accessibility

- ADA Drop-Off Area – Look for the blue tent in front of the building. Companions must stay with patrons.

Bringing Comfort Items

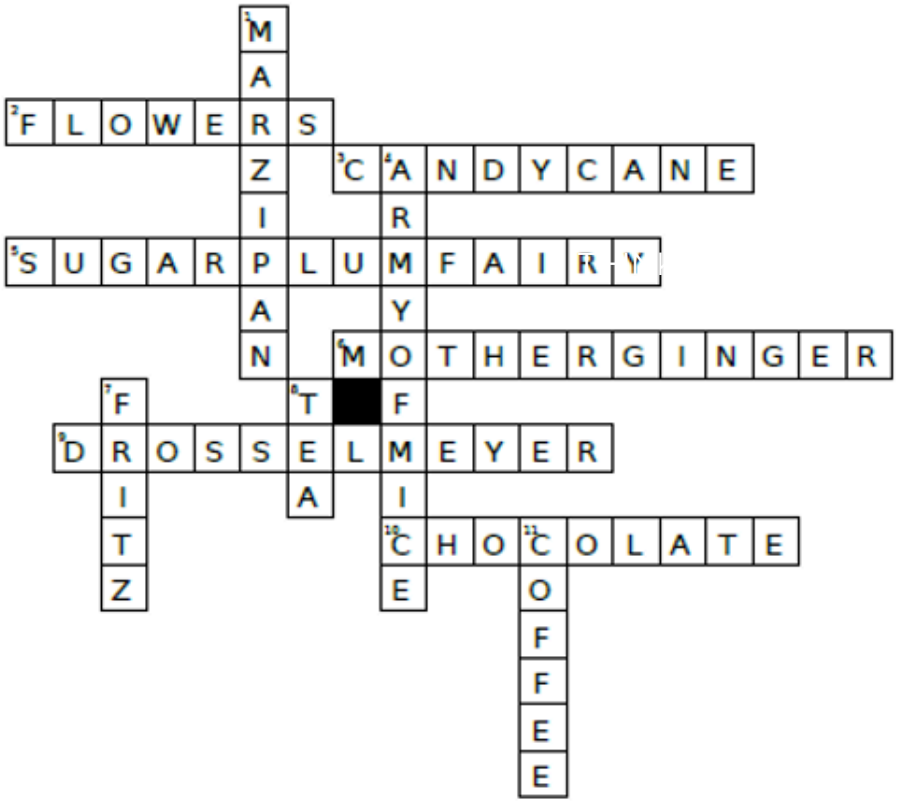
- You are welcome to bring comfort items, small snacks, and drinks.

(Please note: no full meals or lunches are allowed inside the theatre.)

Visit the Sensory-Friendly page on The Tobin Center website for more information.

Answer Key

Nutcracker Characters



Down:

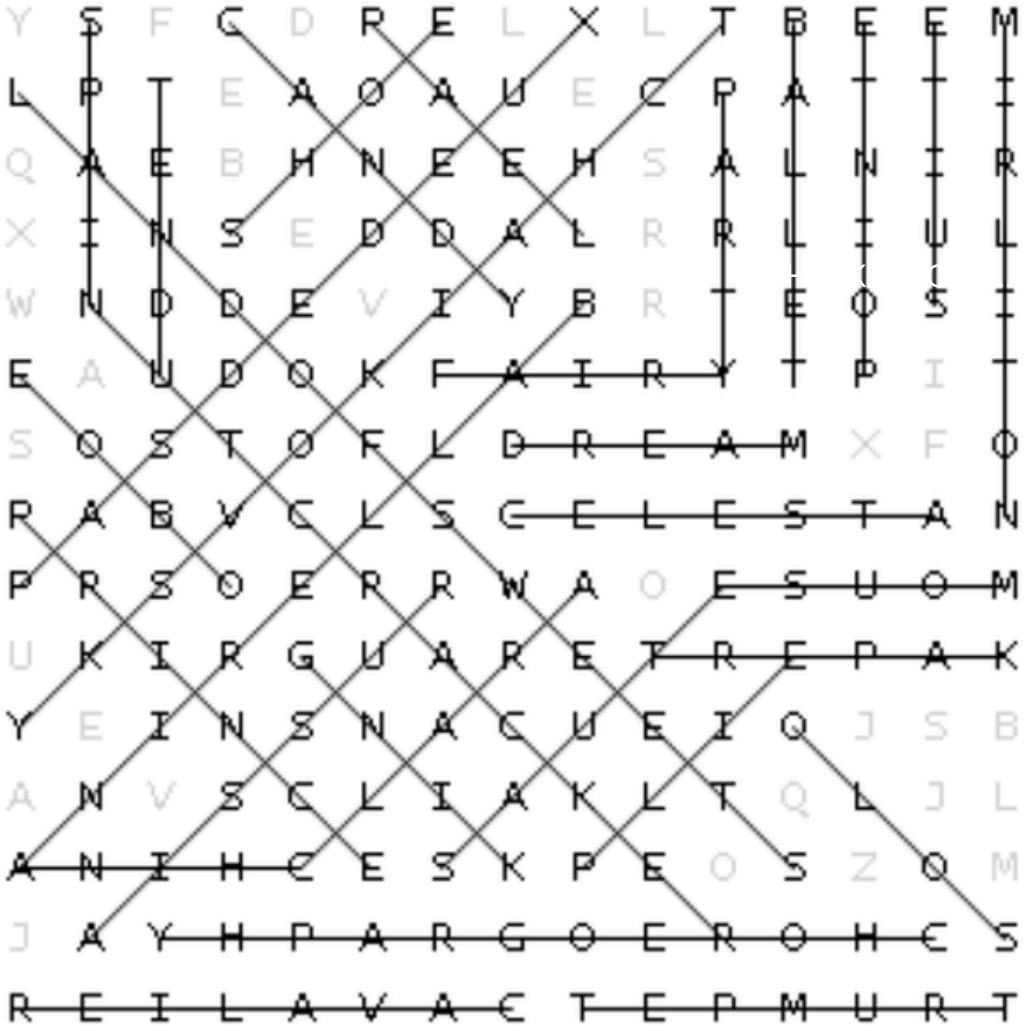
1. France
4. Toy Soldiers
7. Mouse King
8. China
11. Arabia

Across:

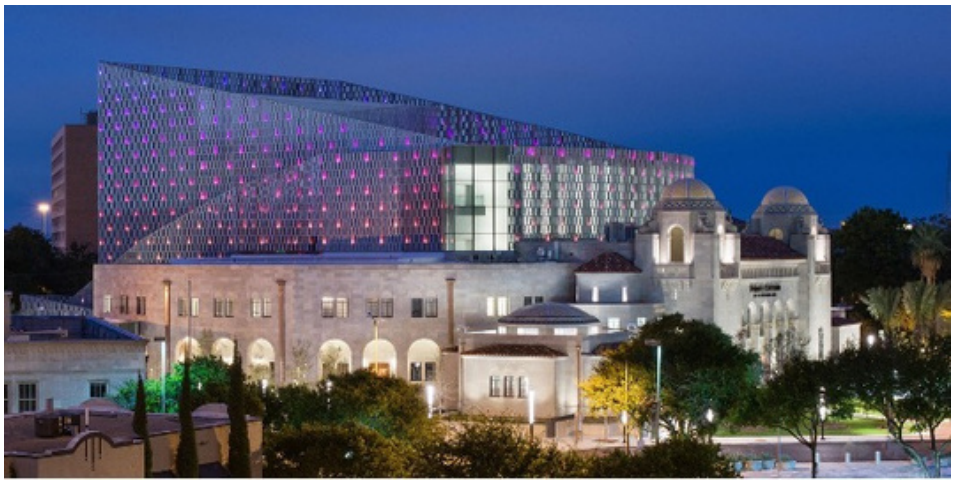
2. Dew Drop
3. Russia
5. Snowflakes
6. BonBons
9. Clara
10. Spain

Answer Key

Nutcracker Word Search



About the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts



An Incredibly Powerful Vision

Situated along the banks of the San Antonio River in the city's heart, the historic Municipal Auditorium, with its original facade preserved, has been transformed into a world-class venue. This theatrical icon is once again the pride of the river and a shining beacon of creativity, fine art, and downtown development. There is no better place — anywhere — to see and hear a live performance.

The remarkable flexibility of the 1,738-seat H-E-B Performance Hall, with its distinctive "flat floor" capability, opens the door for performances and events of almost any sort. The acoustics in the Hall can be "tuned" to fit the performance and physical set-up of the hall. The sound insulation throughout The Tobin Center enables simultaneous use of the Performance Hall, the Studio Theater, and the 600-seat River Walk Plaza.
Audiences can see and hear performers and hear performers and performances of every description at the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, WHERE THE ARTS LIVE.

www.tobincenter.org

Tobin Center Floor Flip Video

GENERATION NEXT EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Generation NEXT connects education and the arts, promoting creative classrooms and culturally relevant learning. We believe creative empowerment is central to a 21st century education.

Powerful Art. Powerful Education. Excellence in both.

Questions?

How to book a field trip or tour:
Visit the education page on our website to book directly: tobincenter.org/education

Support The Tobin Center

As a non-profit organization, The Tobin Center relies on generous donors and arts advocates like you to help us sustain and grow our diverse array of cultural, educational, and artistic experiences that ensure people of all ages and communities have access to the performing arts.

Donate directly on our site: tobincenter.org/donate

Office Hours

Monday - Friday
8:30 am - 5:00 pm

tobincenter.org

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