GENERATION NEXT EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Ballet San Antonio®

THE NUTCRACKER (K-2) EDUCATOR GUIDE



Charline & Red McCombs ARTS EDUCATION FUND The Tobin Center

Educator Guide

Created by: Dr. Kimberly Stephenson

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Table of Contents

3 Ballet San Antonio & Performance Information
5 A Short History of The Nutcracker
8 Did You Know…?
9 Ballet San Antonio's Production of The Nutcracker
10 Vocabulary
11 Coloring Pages (Nutcracker, Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier, Draw Your Own Tutu)
14 Main Characters
16 A Tale of Two Tutus
17 Crack the Code: A Nutcracker Word Game
18 How to Talk About Ballet: The B.E.S.T. Method
20 Pre- and Post-Show Discussion Questions
21 Writing Connections
22 2nd – Dancing the Words: Poetry in the Land of Sweets
31 K – Sweet Moves: Push, Pull, Go!
33 1st - Freeze the Story: Tableau from The Nutcracker
38 Book Suggestions
39 K-2 - I Can Move! Exploring "From Head to Toe"
43 2nd – Literature Lesson: Cracking the Story
49 Theatre Manners
51 Sensory Friendly information
52 Answer Key
53 Tobin Center for the Performing Arts and Generation NEXT

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



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:

Core Themes in The Nutcracker

1. Imagination and Fantasy
   - Clara's dreamworld blurs reality and imagination, taking her on a magical journey.
2. Courage and Bravery
   - Clara shows courage when she helps defeat the Mouse King and protects the Nutcracker.
3. Transformation and Growth
   – The Nutcracker becomes a Prince, and Clara matures through her experiences.
4. Wonder and Celebration
   – The Land of the Sweets celebrates joy, beauty, and cultural variety through dance.
5. 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

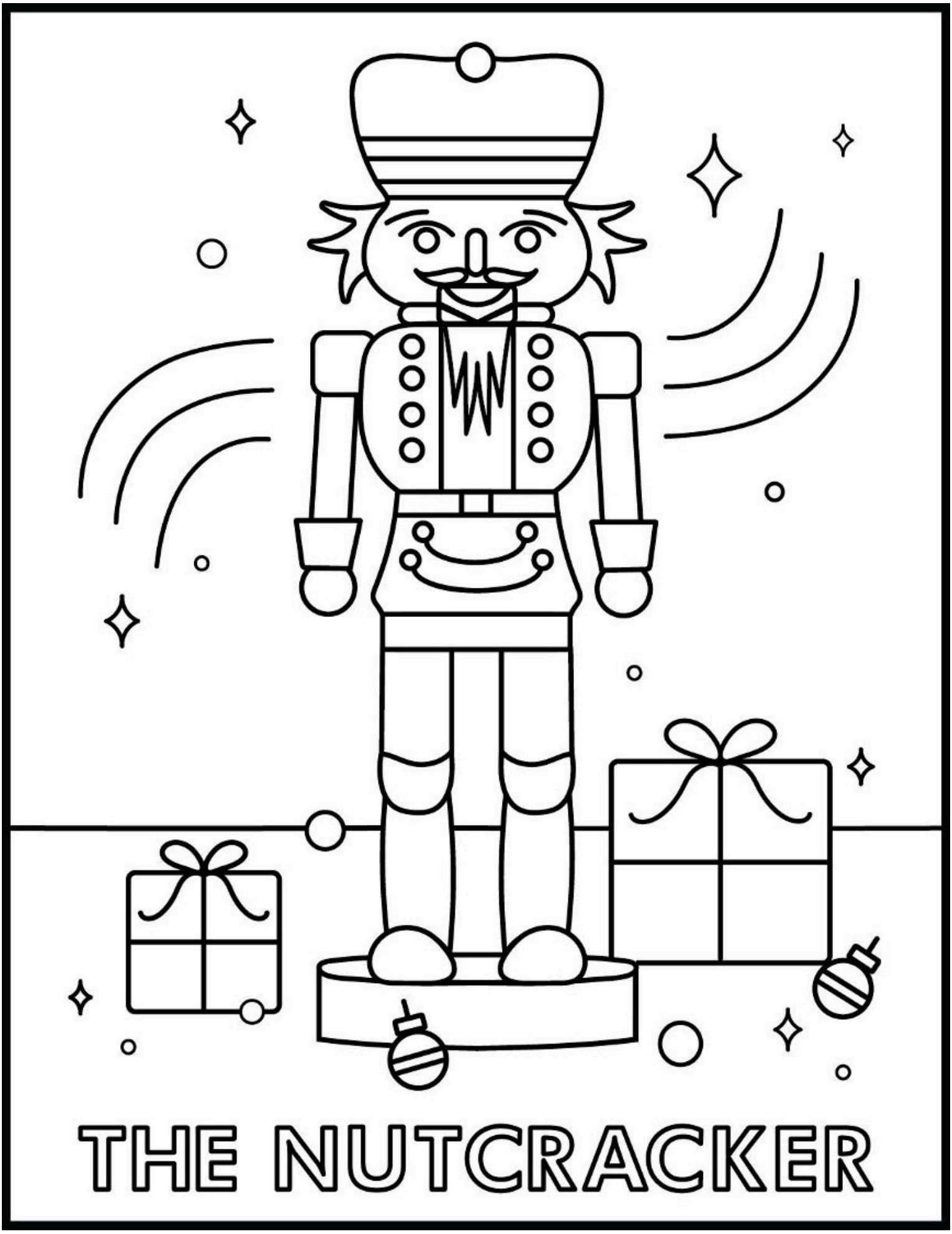
Ballet San Antonio's (BSA) annual The Nutcracker, choreographed by Haley Henderson Smith and Easton Smith, unfolds each year at the Tobin Center's H-E-B Performance Hall with a stunning, multi-generational cast. Each production features the professional company (26 dancers) and a children's cast of over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

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
solo	a dance performed by one person, alone
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 tutu: short, stiff, and projecting straight out from the dancer's waist Romantic tutu: long, soft, draping in a bell shape from the dancer's waist

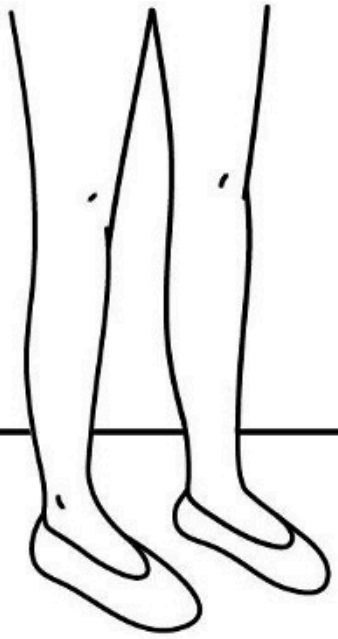

THE NUTCRACKER

THE NUTCRACKER



Fill In The Ballet Dancers Tutu!





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

Crack the Code: A Nutcracker Word Game

Key: Pg. 52

In The Nutcracker, Clara's _____ celebration becomes an unforgettable _____ when she receives a special _____ doll. After the party, _____ finds herself in a _____ world where toys come to life, _____ march into battle, and the brave Nutcracker defeats the _____ _____ and becomes a handsome prince. Clara and the _____ travel through a sparkling winter wonderland before arriving in the _____ ____ _____, where they are greeted by the _____ _____ _____ and entertained by colorful dances, including ____ , _____ , and _____ _____. After a night filled with music, _____, and wonder, Clara awakens with _____of an extraordinary adventure.

Word Bank

Christmas Mouse King nutcracker Clara toys
Prince Land of Sweets adventure Coffee Sugar Plum Fairy
Tea magical Candy Canes dancing mice toys

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

1. What do you think of when you hear the name The Nutcracker?
2. What do you think the story might be about?
3. What do you think you will see or hear in the show?
4. Have you ever seen The Nutcracker before? What do you remember?
5. What do you wonder about this story or ballet?
6. Have you ever read or heard a story about The Nutcracker?
7. Do you think something like this could happen in real life? Why or why not?
8. Have you ever had a dream or moment that felt like a story or an adventure? What happened?

TEKS - ELAR: K 1ª-C, 6AB, 7AB, 9D; 1 1.1ABE, 1.6A, 1.7A, 1.9D; 2 1A-D, 6.A, 7A-B, 9D

Post-Show Discussion Questions

1. What did this performance make you think about?
2. What was your favorite part of the show?
3. What did you see that you were expecting?
4. Was there anything that surprised you?
5. How was this show like or different from other shows or movies you've seen?
6. What questions do you still have about the story?
7. Have you read or heard The Nutcracker before? What was the same or different?
8. Did anything in the story remind you of something that has happened to you?
9. How did that part make you feel?

TEKS - ELAR: K 1A-C, 6B-C, 7AB, 9D; 1 1.1AE, 1.6C, 1.7B, 1.9D, 1.10A; 2 1A-D, 6C, 7AB, 9D

Teacher Tip

Encourage students to use sentence starters such as:

- "My favorite part was..."
- "I think this story is about..."
- "It reminded me of when..."
- "I wonder why..."

You can also have students draw a scene from the performance and share their drawings as part of the post-show discussion — reinforcing both comprehension and expression skills.

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	K	1st	2nd
Foundational Language Skills	110.2(1)ABC	110.3(b)(1)(A–E)	110.4(1)ABC
Respond to Sources	110.2(6)ABCDEF	110.3(b)(6)(A–C)	110.4(7)ABCDEF
Literary Elements	110.2(7)ABCD	110.3(b)(7)(A–B)	110.4(8)ABCD
Recognize & Analyze Genre	110.2(8)C,D i–iii,F	110.3(b)(8)(A–C, E)	110.4(92)ACD i–iii,E ii,F
Author's Purpose & Craft	110.2(9)ABCDE	110.3(b)(9)(A–C)	110.4(10)ABCDEF
Composition: Writing Process	110.2(10)ABCD i–ix,E	110.3(b)(10)(A–D i–ix, E)	110.4(11)AB iii,CD i–ix,E
Generate Questions	110.2(12)ACDE	110.3(b)(12)(A, C, D, E, F)	110.4(13)ACDEF

Grade K-2 Activities

2nd Grade Activity – Dancing Words: Poetry in the Land of Sweets

Objective: Students will explore the elements of poetry by using descriptive language, rhythm, rhyme, repetition, and movement to create and perform a short poem inspired by the music, characters, and dances of The Nutcracker.

TEKS Alignment

ELAR

- 2.1(A) – Developing and sustaining foundational language skills: listening, speaking, discussion, and thinking
- 2.1(C) – Developing and sustaining foundational language skills
- 2.6(E) – Students make connections to personal experiences, ideas in other texts, and society.
- 2.7(B) – Students write brief comments on literary or informational texts that demonstrate an understanding of the text.
- 2.9(B) – Students explain visual patterns and structures in a variety of poems.
- 2.10(D) – Students discuss the use of descriptive, literal, and figurative language.
- 2.11(A) – Students plan a first draft by generating ideas for writing, such as drawing and brainstorming.
- 2.11(B) – Students develop drafts into a focused piece of writing by organizing ideas with structure.

Music

- 2.1(A) – Students identify known rhythmic and melodic elements in musical examples.
- 2.5(A) – Students identify music from a variety of historical periods and cultures.
- 2.6(A) – Students begin to apply appropriate criteria for evaluating musical performances.

Theatre

- 2.1(B) – Students explore space using expressive and rhythmic movement.
- 2.1(C) – Students respond to sounds, music, images, and stories using movement.
- 2.2(A) – Students demonstrate safe use of movement and voice in dramatic play.
- 2.2(B) – Students role-play characters from various sources.

Materials Needed

- An age-appropriate Nutcracker picture book or brief story summary
- Images from The Nutcracker
- Recording of selections from Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Dancing Words Nutcracker Poetry Worksheet
- Pencils
- Crayons or colored pencils
- Optional scarves or ribbons for movement

Suggested musical selections include:

- "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy"
- "Trepak" or Russian Dance
- "Waltz of the Flowers"
- "March"
- "Dance of the Reed Flutes"

Vocabulary

Poetry – Writing that uses carefully chosen words and may use rhythm, rhyme, patterns, or imagery.

Line – A row of words in a poem.

Rhyme – Words that have the same or similar ending sounds.

Rhythm – The pattern or beat created by sounds and words.

Repetition – Using a word, sound, or phrase more than once.

Descriptive language – Words that help readers imagine what something looks, sounds, feels, smells, or tastes like.

Movement – The way a dancer or character moves through space.

Mood – The feeling created by a poem, piece of music, story, or performance.

Lesson

1. **Engage – Listen, Move, Imagine 5–10 minutes**

- Play a short selection from The Nutcracker without initially telling students which scene it accompanies.
- Ask:

- What does this music make you imagine? Does the music sound fast or slow?
- Does it sound light, heavy, mysterious, joyful, or exciting?
- If this music were a movement, how would you move?
- What words could describe the music?

- Invite students to safely demonstrate a movement.
- Record student words on the board.
  Possible responses:
  sparkling – floating – quick – soft – strong – magical – bouncing – swirling – mysterious
- Explain: Poets choose words that help readers imagine pictures, sounds, movements, and feelings. Today, The Nutcracker will inspire us to become poets.

2. **Explore – Visit the Land of the Sweets 10 minutes**

- Review Act II of The Nutcracker.
- Explain that Clara and the Nutcracker Prince arrive in a magical kingdom where they are welcomed with music and dancing. Depending on the production, students may encounter characters and dances associated with sweets, flowers, the Sugar Plum Fairy, and other imaginative elements.
- If students have already attended the ballet, ask them to recall details.
- Create a class Nutcracker Poetry Word Bank.
- What did you SEE?
  Possible responses:
  sparkling bright snowy colorful shimmering tiny giant golden
- What did you HEAR?
  Possible responses:
  soft loud jingling booming quick quiet smooth
- How did the dancers MOVE?
  Possible responses:
  twirl spin leap march float tiptoe sway glide
- How did it FEEL?
  Possible responses:
  magical exciting peaceful joyful mysterious surprising

Discuss how these words can help a poet create a picture in the reader's imagination.

3. Poetry Detective (10 minutes)
Read a short teacher-created poem

Example:

Land of Sweets

Sugar Plums softly twirl,
Flowers sway and spin.
Tiptoe, tiptoe, Clara—
Let the dancing begin!

Ask:

- How many lines are in the poem?
- Do you hear any words that rhyme?
- Which words describe movement?
- Is anything repeated?
- What picture do you see in your imagination?
- What mood does the poem create?

Have students clap or tap the rhythm as the class reads the poem again.

Then add simple movements
Possible choices:
twirl → turn sway → move gently side to side tiptoe about → tiptoe in place

Discuss how words and movement can communicate the same idea in different ways.

4. Create – My Nutcracker Poem (15–20 minutes)

- Students each choose one Nutcracker inspiration:

  Clara The Nutcracker Mouse King Toy Soldiers Snowflakes
  Sugar Plum Fairy Flowers Land of the Sweets
  A favorite dance A favorite moment from the performance

- Students brainstorm words before writing.
- Encourage students to include:
  - a title
  - at least four lines
  - at least two descriptive words
  - at least one movement word
  - rhyme or repetition if desired

Students do not need to force every line to rhyme.

Example:

Snowflake Dance

Snowflakes sparkle in the night,
Floating softly, shining bright.
Swirl and spin across the floor,
Then quietly dance out the door.

5. Poetry in Motion (10 minutes)

- Students choose one or two movements that match their poem.
  Possible choices:
  twirl for snowflake march for soldier move lightly for Sugar Plum Fairy
  make strong shapes for Nutcracker sway for flowers
  make quick movements for an exciting battle

- Pair students in threes. Two students will perform movements while the third reads the poem. Each trio will perform all three poems of the group.
- Allow one minute for choosing motions and one minute for practicing motions for each poem.
- Students read their poems aloud while performing their selected movements.

Remind students that professional ballet dancers also use movement to communicate ideas, characters, and feelings without relying on spoken words.

6. Performance Connection

Before Attending The Nutcracker

Ask students to become Poetry Detectives during the performance.

Look and listen for:
- a movement you could describe with an interesting word
- a costume color that catches your attention
- a sound or instrument you remember
- a moment that creates a strong feeling
- a dance that reminds you of a poem

Students can use these observations to write their poems after the performance.
After Attending The Nutcracker

Ask:
- What moment made you feel excited, peaceful, surprised, or curious?
- What movement do you remember most?
- What colors or shapes do you remember?
- If the performance were a poem, what words would have to be included?
- What words describe the music?

Students may revise their poems by adding details they observed during the live performance.

Assessment

Students demonstrate learning by:

- identifying at least one characteristic of poetry
- contributing descriptive vocabulary
- creating a poem with an understandable central idea
- including descriptive and movement language
- making a clear connection to The Nutcracker
- using movement or expressive reading to communicate meaning

Extension Activities

Poetry Dance

Partners exchange poems. Each student creates a movement inspired by the other student's words.

Music Match

Play two contrasting Nutcracker selections. Students write one or two descriptive words for each and explain why the words are different.

Class Land of the Sweets Poem

Each student contributes one line. Combine the lines into a class poem and perform it with movement.

Poetry Gallery

Display student poems and illustrations. Students walk through the "Land of the Sweets Poetry Gallery" and identify descriptive words they especially enjoy.

From Stage to Page

Students choose one moment they remember from the live performance and write a four-line poem describing only that moment.

Post-Performance Poetry Reflection

After seeing The Nutcracker, complete these sentences:

- One movement I remember was _____.
- Three words that describe the music are _____, _____, and _____.
- The performance made me feel / wonder / think _____ because I saw / I heard / I noticed _____.
- If I added one new line to my poem after seeing the ballet, I would write: _____.

Dancing Words in the Land of Sweets

My Nutcracker Poem

Name: _____ Date:_____

Step 1: Choose Your Nutcracker Inspiration

I am writing about:

_____

It could be a character, dance, setting, or special moment from The Nutcracker.

Step 2: Collect Your Dancing Words

What does it LOOK like?

_____

What does it SOUND like?

_____

How does it MOVE?

_____

What FEELING does it create?

_____

Step 3: Build Your Poem

Try to include:

- descriptive words
- a movement word
- a feeling
- rhyme or repetition if you want it

My Nutcracker Poem

Title: _____

My Nutcracker Poem Picture

Name: _____ Date:_____

Step 4: Illustrate Your Poem

Draw the Nutcracker moment your poem describes.

Step 5: Poetry in Motion

Choose a movement that matches your poem.

My movement is: _____

It matches my poem because:

_____

_____

_____

Kinder Activity: Sweet Moves — Push, Pull, Go! | Time: 15–20 minutes

Science Focus: Force and motion | TEKS Connections K.1(AE), K.2(B), K.7(AB)

Objective

Students will observe, describe, and demonstrate different types of motion inspired by the dances of The Nutcracker's Land of Sweets.

Materials

- Open movement space
- Music from Act II of The Nutcracker
- One lightweight classroom object that can safely move across the floor, such as a soft ball, toy, or beanbag

Lesson

1. Watch the Sweets Move

- Show a brief Act II excerpt or recall movements students observed during the performance. Ask: How did the dancers move?
- Help students identify movement words such as:
- fast, slow, straight, around, back and forth, up and down, zigzag
- Tell students: Scientists observe how things move. Today, we're going to investigate motion in the Land of Sweets!

2. Make It Move

- Place the classroom object on the floor.
- Ask: Can it move all by itself? What could make it start moving?
- Have a student gently push the object.
- Ask: What happened? Did it move fast or slowly? Did it travel straight or another way?
- Try again with a gentler or stronger push and compare what students observe.

3. Move Like the Land of Sweets

- Now the students become the moving objects!
- Play music from Act II and call out different kinds of motion:
- Move in a straight line! Move back and forth! Move around and around! Move up and down! Move slowly! Move quickly! Zigzag!
- Pause the music periodically. Students freeze and describe the motion they were just demonstrating.

4. Motion Detective

- Choose individual students to demonstrate a safe movement without naming it.
- The class identifies it! Use the sentence stem: "You moved _____!"
- "You moved back and forth!" "You moved around and around!" "You moved quickly in a straight line!"
- Then let a student become the Motion Leader and select a movement for everyone to copy.

5. Nutcracker Connection

- Before seeing Act II, give students a mission:
- Watch the dancers like a scientist! Can you spot three different kinds of motion in the Land of Sweets?
- After the performance, recall movements together. Ask: Which kinds of motion did you see? Did all of the Land of Sweets dances move in the same way?

Assessment

Students should be able to demonstrate at least two types of motion, use appropriate movement words such as fast, slow, straight, or back and forth, and identify a type of motion demonstrated by another person or object.

Quick Extension

Play two contrasting Act II selections, such as Arabian/Coffee and Russian/Trepak. Let students move to each and then ask: How did your motion change when the music changed? Why did you motion change? What about the music makes the motion feel like a match?

1st Grade Activity – Freeze the Story: Tableau from The Nutcracker
Subjects: Theatre, ELAR, Movement/Dance

TEKS Alignment
ELAR 4(b)(1)(AC), 4(b)(6)(EG), 4(b)(7)(C), 4(b)(8)(BC)
Theatre 108(b)(1)(ABC), 108(b)(1)(BC), 108(b)(2)(ABC)

Objective
Students will identify important characters, emotions, and events from The Nutcracker and use facial expression, gesture, body shape, levels, and spatial relationships to collaboratively create tableaux that communicate story and meaning without words.

Materials
- An age-appropriate version or summary of The Nutcracker
- Images of characters and scenes from The Nutcracker
- Nutcracker scene cards
- Emotion cards
- Open classroom space
- Optional selections from Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker
- Freeze the Story Student Reflection Sheet

Lesson

1. Engage: What Can a Frozen Picture Tell Us? (5–10 minutes)
- Explain: A tableau is a frozen picture made with our bodies. Actors can use tableaux to show a character, feeling, place, or important moment in a story without speaking.
- Ask students to stand safely in their own spaces.
- Call out an emotion and have students create an individual frozen pose:
  Excited! Frightened! Brave! Surprised! Joyful!
- After each pose, ask: What did your face do? What did your arms and hands do?
  Did you make yourself big or small? Were you high or low?
  How could someone know what you were feeling without hearing you speak?
- Introduce the idea that professional dancers also communicate feelings and story through their bodies.

Vocabulary

Tableau – A still or frozen picture created by people using their bodies.

Gesture – A movement of the body that communicates an idea or feeling.

Facial Expression – The way the face communicates an emotion.

Pose – The position in which someone holds their body.

Level – How high or low the body is positioned in space.

Character – A person, animal, or imaginary figure in a story.

Setting – Where and when a story takes place.

Emotion – A feeling such as happiness, fear, excitement, anger, or surprise.

Audience – The people who watch a performance.

2. Review the Story: Find the Important Moments (10 minutes)

- Read or review an age-appropriate version of The Nutcracker.
- Identify several important events together. For example:

1. The Christmas Party – Clara receives the Nutcracker.
2. The Nutcracker Is Broken – Clara cares for her special toy.
3. The Battle – The Nutcracker and toy soldiers confront the mice.
4. Defeating the Mouse King – Clara helps the Nutcracker.
5. The Transformation – The Nutcracker becomes a Prince.
6. The Snow Scene – Clara and the Prince travel through the magical snow.
7. The Land of the Sweets – Clara and the Prince are welcomed with dancing and celebration.

- Ask: If we could take a photograph of just ONE second from each scene, what should we see? Explain that this is exactly what students will try to create with their bodies.

3. Tableau Toolbox (10 minutes)

Introduce five tools students can use to make their frozen pictures communicate clearly.

1. **FACE** - What is your character feeling?
2. **GESTURE** - What can your hands, arms, or head communicate?
3. **BODY SHAPE** - Should your character appear strong, frightened, excited, graceful, or surprised?
4. **SPACE** - Where should each character stand so the audience understands their relationship?
5. **LEVEL** - How high or low should your character be?

Can some characters be: low – sitting, crouching, kneeling
middle – bending or leaning high – standing or reachin5

Demonstrate a weak tableau in which everyone simply stands in a straight line.Then demonstrate a stronger version using different levels, expressions, and gestures. Ask: Which tableau tells us more about the story? Why?

Groups have several minutes to plan and rehearse.

Remind students:

Enter safely
Create your tableau
FREEZE
Hold the pose
Relax when instructed

Assessment
Students demonstrate understanding when they can:

Identify an important event from The Nutcracker.
Portray a character through body position, gesture, or facial expression.
Use levels and space intentionally.
Hold a tableau safely and remain still.
Collaborate with classmates to communicate a recognizable story moment.
Explain how movement provides information about character, action, or emotion.
Make a connection between classroom tableau and storytelling in the professional ballet.

4. Create: Freeze The Nutcracker (5-10 minutes)
Divide students into groups of approximately 3–5.

Give each group a scene.

Scene 1: Clara Receives the Nutcracker
Consider:
- Where is Clara?
- How does she feel?
- Who might be watching?
- How could Clara show that the Nutcracker is important to her?

Scene 2: The Nutcracker Is Broken
Consider:
- How does Clara react?
- What expression should she use?
- What pose could show that the Nutcracker has been hurt or damaged?

Scene 3: The Battle
Consider:
- How can soldiers look strong?
- How can mice look sneaky or threatening?
- How can you show action while remaining completely frozen?

Scene 4: Clara Helps Defeat the Mouse King
Consider:
- Where should Clara be?
- How can the Mouse King react?
- What should the Nutcracker's pose communicate?

Scene 5: The Nutcracker Becomes a Prince
Consider:
- How can you show transformation?
- How might the Prince's posture differ from the toy Nutcracker's?
- How might Clara react?

Scene 6: The Snow Scene
Consider:
- How might snowflakes use different levels?
- What body shapes could suggest falling or swirling snow?
- Where should Clara and the Prince be positioned?

Scene 7: The Land of the Sweets
Consider:
- How could you show celebration?
- What kinds of shapes might dancers create?
- How can the tableau look different from the battle scene?

5. Tableau Gallery: Be a Story Detective (10 minutes)

Each group presents its tableau without announcing the scene.
The audience becomes "Story Detectives."
Ask:

- Which Nutcracker scene do you think this is?
- What evidence helped you decide?
- What emotions do you see?
- Which gestures communicate something?
- Where do you see high, middle, or low levels?
- Which character catches your attention first? Why?

After audience responses, the group reveals its assigned scene and explains one artistic choice they made.

Live Performance Connection
Before attending The Nutcracker, remind students that ballet dancers usually cannot stop and explain what their characters are thinking. Instead, dancers communicate through: movement, gesture, facial expression, body shape relationships with other dancers, music, costumes scenery and lighting.

Give students a Tableau Detective Challenge:
During The Nutcracker, find one moment that would make an amazing frozen picture.

Students should remember:

- Who was onstage?
- What was happening?
- How did the dancers' bodies communicate the story?
- What emotion did the moment communicate?

Post-Performance Extension: Freeze What You Saw

- After attending the professional performance, place students back into small groups. This time, do not assign scenes.
- Groups choose one memorable moment they actually observed during the performance and recreate it as a tableau.
- After each presentation, ask:
  - What details from the professional performance did your group include?

Students can compare their pre-performance tableaux with their post-performance tableaux.

Discuss:
Did professional dancers communicate characters differently than you expected?
What movements or poses do you remember? How did music help you understand the scene?
Did the ballet tell any part of the story differently from the book?
What did you understand from the dancers even though they weren't speaking?

BOOK SUGGESTIONS: K–2: Picture Books & Read-Alouds

The Nutcracker by Susan Jeffers
A beautifully illustrated classic retelling with elegant, accessible language. Great for introducing the story to young children.

The Story of The Nutcracker Ballet by Deborah Hautzig (Step into Reading)
A simple, early-reader adaptation perfect for developing readers and read-aloud sessions.

Dance & Belonging Books:
"**Firebird**" by Misty Copeland
A lyrical picture book featuring a young girl learning ballet who finds her confidence through dance. The mentor-mentee dialogue highlights inner strength, community support, and belonging in a ballet studio setting.

I Will Dance by Nancy Bo Flood & Julianna Swaney
Celebrates dance and inclusion, showing have every child can express themselves through movement.

Dance & Movement Books:
Everybunny Dance by Ellie Sandall
A delightful, minimal-text story filled with colorful bunnies encouraging young readers to get up and move!

Barnyard Dance! by Sandra Boynton
A fun, rhythmic board book that's perfect for classroom dance-alongs.

Song and Dance Man by Karen Ackerman
A charming tale of a grandfather sharing his vaudeville song-and-dance routines with his grandchildren.

From Head to Toe by Eric Carle (K–2)
Colorful, energetic illustrations invite students to imitate animal movements, perfect for building body awareness, confidence, and creative movement through "copy-the-motion" activities.

A Shadow of a Dream by Kathleen Estes (Grades 1-4)
This imaginative picture book pairs a shadow-puppet "DANCER" magnet with expressive artwork. The dancer transforms into animals (a raven, fish, elephant, etc.), inviting young readers to physically mimic each shadow form. Great for creative movement, dramatization, and exploring shape, line, and shadow.

Classroom Connections: Have students mimic "A Shadow of a Dream" dancer shapes to practice body awareness and shadow projection.

K-2 Activity: I Can Move! – Exploring From Head to Toe

TEKS Alignment

Science

- K.1F – Record & organize data using pictures, numbers, words, symbols, simple graphs.

Fine Arts: Theatre

- K.1(A) – Develop confidence and self-awareness through dramatic play.
- K.1(B) – Explore space using expressive movement.
- K.2(A) – Demonstrate safe use of movement and voice.
- K.2(B) – Role-play through imitation and re-creation of characters.

ELA

- K.5(E) – Make connections to personal experiences, ideas in other texts, and society with adult assistance.
- K.5(F) – Make inferences and use evidence to support understanding with adult assistance.
- K.6(A) – Describe personal connections to a variety of sources.
- K.6(C) – Use text evidence to support an appropriate response.
- K.9(C) – Discuss with adult assistance the author's use of print and graphic features to achieve specific purposes.

Objective

Students will explore body awareness, observation, imitation, and creative movement. Students will identify body parts and ways they can move, imitate animal-inspired actions, experiment with different movement qualities, and make connections between their own movement and a professional dance performance..

Materials

- From Head to Toe by Eric Carle (physical copy or projection)
- Music for movement (instrumental or ballet music)
- Open space for movement
- Large mirror (if available) or mirrored movement pairs
- "I Can Move!" student worksheet
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Optional: Access to a dance or physical theatre performance (live or recorded)

Lesson Activities

1. Read-Aloud & Discussion (10–15 min)

- Read From Head to Toe, inviting students to perform the movements along with the animals.
- As each animal appears, pause to notice what part of the body is moving and how it moves.

Ask:

- What body part is the animal moving? Can you move that body part too? Is the movement big or small? Why? Is it fast or slow? Why? What do you notice about the animal's movement? Can you do it in a different way?
- Encourage the class to respond confidently with the book's repeated idea: "I can do it!"

2. Head-to-Toe Body Exploration | 10 min
Guide students through a movement warm-up traveling from the head to the toes.

Call out different body parts and invite students to discover ways each can move:

- Turn or tilt your head. Lift, roll, or shake your shoulders. Bend or stretch your arms.
- Wiggle your fingers. Twist or bend your body. Lift or bend your knees. Stomp, tap, or rise onto your feet and toes.

Add movement vocabulary by asking students to change how they move.

- Can you move slowly? Quickly? Smoothly? Strongly? Gently? Make the movement very big. Now make it very small.

Record some of the students' movement words on chart paper.

3. Animal Movement: See It, Copy It, Change It! | 15–20 min
Choose several animals and movements from the book.
For each movement, guide students through three steps:

SEE IT: Look carefully at the illustration. What do you notice about the animal's body?
COPY IT: Try the movement shown by the animal.
CHANGE IT: Create a new version of the movement.

For example:

- Make it bigger or smaller. Make it faster or slower. Perform it high or low. Make it strong or gentle. Change one body part.

Invite individual students to become the movement leader. The rest of the class becomes the leader's "mirror" and copies the movement. Switch leaders frequently so students experience both observing and leading.

4. Create Your Own "Can You Do It?" Movement | 10–15 min
Tell students: "Now you get to invent a movement that could be in the book!"

Students choose an animal and create a movement inspired by it.
One at a time, or in small groups, students demonstrate their movement and ask:
"I am a _____, and I _____. Can you do it?"

The class copies the movement and responds: "I can do it!"

Encourage students to choose new body parts and movement qualities (rather than repeating the same action).

5. Professional Performance Connection | Live or Video

Watch an excerpt from a professional ballet, dance, circus, or physical theatre performance.

Before watching, give students a special job: Be a movement detective!

Ask students to look for:
What body parts are the performers using? Do you see big movements or small movements?
Do you see fast or slow movements? Do you see movements that remind you of an animal?
Do performers copy or mirror one another? What is one movement you would like to try?

After viewing, allow students to safely recreate one movement quality they observed.

6. Reflection & Drawing | 10–15 min
Students complete the "I Can Move!" Movement Reflection worksheet.

Students:
- Draw their favorite animal movement from the lesson.
- Identify or circle the body part(s) they used.
- Choose how their body moved: fast / slow big / small strong / gentle
- Draw or describe a movement they saw during the professional performance.

For younger students, teachers may record dictated responses.

Assessment
Observe students for their ability to:
- Participate safely in movement activities.
- Identify body parts involved in different movements.
- Observe and imitate a demonstrated movement.
- Demonstrate contrasting movement qualities such as fast/slow or big/small.
- Create an original animal-inspired movement.
- Describe or represent a movement they observed in a professional performance.
- Participate confidently as both a movement leader and follower.

Extensions
- Movement Cards: Draw animal cards and have students invent a movement for each animal.
- Movement Opposites: Explore fast/slow, high/low, big/small, strong/gentle, and still/moving.
- Animal Dance: Combine 3–5 student-created animal movements into a class dance sequence.
- Music Experiment: Perform the same movement to different pieces of music. Ask: How did the music change the way you moved?
- Body-Part Graph: Graph which body part students chose most often for their original movement.
- Class Book: Create a class version of From Head to Toe. Each student contributes an animal illustration and an "I can…" movement sentence.

I Can Move From Head to Toe!

Name: _____ Date:_____

Let's Reflect on Movement!
Draw your favorite animal movement:
(Show how you moved from head to toe!)



2. Circle one: Which body parts did you use to move?

I used _____ when I moved.

3. Circle one: How did you move?
fast or slow strong or gentle big or small

4. What did you notice in the performance we watched?
"The dancers moved like..."

_____

_____

_____

2nd Grade Literature & Movement Lesson Plan

Cracking the Story: The Nutcracker's Journey

Subjects: ELAR, Theatre, Movement/Dance **Time: 45–60 minutes**
Performance Connection: The Nutcracker ballet

Lesson Overview

In this literature and movement lesson, students explore The Nutcracker from the perspective of the Nutcracker character. After listening to an illustrated retelling, students identify important events, describe the Nutcracker's actions and feelings, sequence his journey, and use movement and frozen pictures to bring key moments to life. The lesson prepares students to recognize character, plot, emotion, and nonverbal storytelling when attending a professional performance of The Nutcracker.

TEKS Connections

ELAR 2.6(BEG), 2.7(B), 2.8(BC)
Theatre 2.1(ABC), 2.2(ABC)

Learning Objectives

- Identify the Nutcracker as an important character in the story.
- Sequence major events in the Nutcracker's journey.
- Describe the Nutcracker using character traits supported by his actions.
- Identify how the Nutcracker's feelings or situation change during the story.
- Retell story events through movement and tableau.
- Connect literary storytelling to the movement they observe in a professional ballet performance.

Materials

- An illustrated retelling of The Nutcracker
- Nutcracker character image or toy
- Beginning–Middle–End cards
- Event cards or teacher-created illustrations
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Open movement space
- Optional selections from Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker
- "The Nutcracker's Journey" student reflection sheet

Lesson Activities

1. Engage: Meet the Nutcracker — 5–10 minutes

- Show students a nutcracker figure or illustration before reading.
  Ask: What do you notice about him? What do you think his job might be? Does he look like a toy, a soldier, a person—or all three? What do you predict might happen to him?
- Record several student predictions.
- Introduce the idea that students will follow one character's journey through the story.
- Our question: How does the Nutcracker change from the beginning of the story to the end?

2. Read an age-appropriate version of The Nutcracker aloud. — 15 minutes
Pause at important moments and ask students to notice what the Nutcracker does, rather than simply what happens around him.
Possible stopping points include:

- The Gift - Clara receives the Nutcracker.
- The Nutcracker Is Broken - Students consider how this event changes the story.
- The Battle - The Nutcracker leads the toy soldiers against the mice and Mouse King.
- Clara Helps - Discuss how Clara's actions affect the Nutcracker.
- The Transformation - The Nutcracker becomes a Prince.
- The Journey - The Nutcracker/Prince accompanies Clara into the magical world that follows.

Ask throughout the reading: What happened to the Nutcracker? What did he do?
How might he be feeling? What does his action tell us about his character?
What do you think will happen next?

3. Sequence It: The Nutcracker's Journey — 10 minutes

Place four or five event cards out of order.
Students work together to arrange them in story order.

For example: Toy → Broken Nutcracker → Battle Leader → Prince → Magical Journey

Discuss the story using sequence vocabulary: first • next • then • after • finally

Ask students to identify the problem/conflict and resolution.

Conflict: The Nutcracker and the toy soldiers must face the Mouse King and his army.
Resolution: With Clara's help, the Mouse King is defeated and the Nutcracker transforms.

Emphasize that details can differ depending upon the version of The Nutcracker being read or performed.

4. Move It: From Toy to Prince — 15 minutes
Tell students: Ballet dancers tell us what characters are doing and feeling without speaking. Let's see if we can tell the Nutcracker's story with our bodies.

Guide students through four movement qualities.

- TOY — Stiff and Mechanical
  - Stand tall. Use straight arms, strong shapes, and small mechanical movements.
- SOLDIER — Strong and Brave
  - March, change direction, create strong shapes, and freeze in a protective pose.
- BATTLE — Quick and Alert
  - Use safe directional changes, defensive gestures, and different levels.
- PRINCE — Smooth and Graceful
  - Change from stiff movements to flowing arms, turns, traveling steps, or a formal bow.

Ask: How did changing the way you moved help show that the character had changed?

5. Freeze the Story: Nutcracker Tableaux — 10 minutes

Place students in small groups and assign each group one moment:

- Clara receives the Nutcracker.
- The Nutcracker is broken.
- The toys and mice prepare for battle.
- The Nutcracker confronts the Mouse King.
- The Nutcracker becomes a Prince.
- Clara and the Prince begin their magical journey.

Groups create a tableau, or frozen picture, representing their moment.

Encourage students to consider:

facial expression body shape high, middle, and low levels where characters are looking how characters relate to one another

After each tableau, ask the audience: What clues helped you figure out what was happening?

6. Professional Performance Connection

Before attending The Nutcracker, tell students to become Nutcracker Character Detectives.

During the professional performance, look for:

- How does the dancer first move when portraying the Nutcracker?
- Does he move differently during the battle?
- How can you tell when he is brave, worried, or victorious?
- What changes when the Nutcracker becomes the Prince?
- How do his costume and movements help show the transformation?
- Which events are the same as the book?
- Which events are different?

Remind students that ballet tells a story primarily through movement, music, facial expression, costume, scenery, and lighting rather than spoken dialogue.

Assessment

Students demonstrate understanding when they can:

- Sequence at least three important events from the story.
- Describe the Nutcracker using an appropriate character trait.
- Explain an important problem and resolution.
- Use body movement or facial expression to communicate a story event.
- Identify at least one similarity or difference between the book and professional ballet performance.

Post-Performance Discussion

After attending the ballet, return to the original story sequence.

Ask:

- What was the same?
- Which characters and events appeared in both versions?
- What was different?
- Did the ballet leave anything out, add something, or change an event?
- How did the dancer show the Nutcracker's character?
- What movements made him appear brave, strong, frightened, magical, or princely?
- Which told you more about the Nutcracker—the words in the book or the movement onstage?
- Why?

This comparison helps students understand that the same story can be communicated through different art forms.

Extension: Two Ways to Tell a Story

- Fold a piece of paper in half.
- Label one side: THE BOOK — I learned the story through words and pictures.
- Label the other:
- THE BALLET — I learned the story through movement, music, costumes, and scenery.

Students draw the same Nutcracker moment on both sides and identify one way the book and ballet communicated that moment differently.

This creates a strong bridge between 2nd-grade literary analysis and the experience of attending a professional movement performance.

Student Reflection: The Nutcracker's Journey

Name: _____ Date: _____

Beginning
At the beginning, the Nutcracker is _____.

Middle
One important thing that happens to him is _____.

End
At the end, the Nutcracker _____.

Character
I think the Nutcracker is:
brave • kind • strong • determined • magical • other: _____

I chose this word because:

_____

_____

_____

Draw It!

Name: _____ Date: _____

Draw the Nutcracker during your favorite moment in his journey.

Performance Connection

In the ballet, I knew how the Nutcracker felt because the dancer:

_____

_____

_____

Final Question

How did the Nutcracker change from the beginning of the story to the end?

_____

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Theatre Manners – Getting Ready for the Show

The word etiquette means good manners or kind behavior.

When we go to a theater, we show respect for the people performing and the people watching around us. We can see the performers on the stage and the performers can see everyone in the audience, too.

Different shows have different traditions for etiquette!
For example:

- At a Gospel music show, people might clap, sing, or move along with the music.
- At a Classical music concert, people usually sit quietly and wait to clap until the conductor lowers their hands.

At The Tobin Center, each performance is a little different — but here are some good general manners to remember!

Before the Show

- Arrive early so you have time to find your seat and use the restroom.
- Use quiet feet and voices when walking into the theatre.
- Turn off or put away devices so they don't make noise or shine bright lights.
- Listen to your teacher or grown-up helper for special directions before the show begins.

During the Show

- Eyes on the stage! Watch carefully — the performers can see and hear you, too!
- Quiet mouths, still bodies. Try your best to stay in your seat and listen.
- If you need to leave, raise your hand or tell your teacher quietly. Ushers (helpers in black clothing) can assist you.
- Clap when it's time! It's great to clap when something exciting, beautiful, or funny happens — and especially at the end!
- No flash photos or videos. Flashing lights can hurt the performers' eyes.
- Be respectful. Please don't unwrap noisy snacks, chew gum loudly, or play with items that make sounds.
- Enjoy yourself! Laugh when it's funny, smile when it's beautiful, and show your appreciation with applause.

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After the Show

- Stay for the curtain call. This is when the performers come back out so the audience can clap and say “thank you!”
- If everyone claps while standing, that’s called a standing ovation — it means “We loved it!”
- Sometimes, the performers might do a short extra piece called an encore (say: “ON-core”).
- Clean up your area. Throw away wrappers or trash in bins.
- Exit quietly. Use walking feet and quiet voices as you leave the theatre.

Extra Tips

- Sit tall so others can see.
- Show kindness and respect — performers work very hard to make the show special for you.
- Ask an usher for help if you need something. Ushers help people find their seats and make sure everyone enjoys the show.

Fun Fact!

- The word “theatre” (with “re”) is often used for the art form — acting, dance, and performance.
- The word “theater” (with “er”) is often used for the building where the show happens

At The Tobin Center, we celebrate both!

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.)

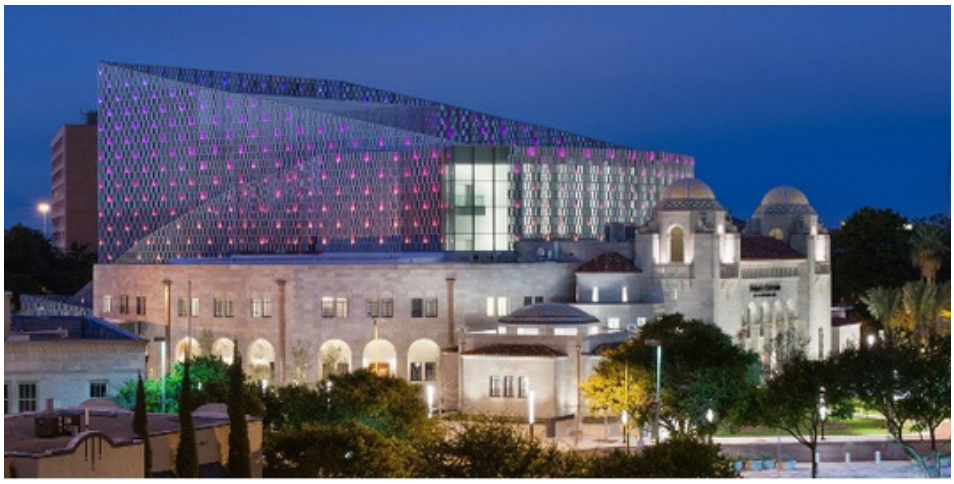
Visit the Sensory-Friendly page on The Tobin Center website for more information.

Answer Key

Crack the Code: A Nutcracker Word Game

In The Nutcracker, Clara's Christmas celebration becomes an unforgettable adventure when she receives a special nutcracker doll. After the party, Clara finds herself in a magical world where toys come to life, mice march into battle, and the brave Nutcracker defeats the Mouse King and becomes a handsome prince. Clara and the Prince ravel through a sparkling winter wonderland before arriving in the Land of Sweets, where they are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy and entertained by colorful dances, including Tea, Coffee, and Candy Canes. After a night filled with music, dancing, and wonder, Clara awakens with memories of an extraordinary adventure.

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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