

La Crosse Dance Centre's

The Nutcracker

Study Guide 2016



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SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

Scene One: The Party

It's Christmas Eve and everyone in town is on their way to the Siblehaus residence for a festive Christmas party, hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Siblehaus and their two children, Maria and Fritz. The grand hall is bedecked with a grand tree and lights while presents begin to pile underneath the tree. Everyone is dancing, playing, and having a good time, sharing in the Christmas spirit. Suddenly, in walks Maria's Godfather Drosselmeyer who has arrived with presents for all of the children. His first gift is a set of tin soldiers who execute a perfectly timed marching routine for all of the guests. His next gift is a set of dancing Harlequin dolls who twirl about the hall for all of the guests. He then begins handing out small trinkets and toys to all of the children; Fritz receives a toy sword while Maria receives a hand-crafted nutcracker doll. She marvels at the sight of her gift and imagines her nutcracker coming to life and being her handsome prince charming. That is, until Fritz breaks her doll and runs away. Godfather Drosselmeyer tends to the doll and makes it good as new for Maria. The other guests come back from dinner and everyone sings and dances until it is time to go home. As the party unwinds, the Siblehaus children place their toys back under the tree while their parents dance off to bed so that they might play with their gifts. In the morning, their maid finishes cleaning the hall and then blows out the candle so they might get some sleep before Christmas morning arrives.



Scene Two: The Battle

It is the middle of the night and Maria, still excited about her gift from her Godfather, sneaks down to play with it one last time before bed. She ends up falling asleep underneath the tree, her nutcracker doll right beside her as the clock strikes midnight. Suddenly, a little mouse scampers across the floor. Followed by another, and another. From the shadows, appears Drosselmeyer whose magic awakens Maria and she becomes transported to a world of mischief and mystery. Suddenly, an army of rats, led by the Evil Rat Queen appears. They close in on Maria when, all of a sudden, Maria's nutcracker comes to life just in the nick of time. The Nutcracker and his army of mice battle against the Evil Rat Queen and her Rat Army. All seems lost when the Rat Queen knocks the Nutcracker to the floor, but Maria takes the Nutcracker's sword and plunges it into the Rat Queen. The rat army carries their defeated leader away as Godfather Drosselmeyer brings Maria's Nutcracker to life. The two dance and celebrate their victory. The Nutcracker decides to take Maria to the Kingdom of the Sweets by way of the Snowflake Forest, ruled over by the Snow King and Snow Queen. The King and Queen create a winter wonderland to greet Maria and the Nutcracker as they continue on their journey.



ACT TWO

Scene One: The Kingdom of Sweets

Maria and the Nutcracker arrive in the Kingdom of the Sweets, the land where the Nutcracker reigns as Prince. His loyal subjects arrive to greet Maria and present her with gifts of chocolate, coffee, tea, music, dance, and even gingerbread. They are even visited by the Dew Drop Fairy and the Sugar Plum Fairy who both perform intricate dances in honor of the Nutcracker and Maria. Maria thanks the Nutcracker for all that he has done for her and for each of his gifts and the two of them share in a magical *Pas de Deux*. Sadly, it is time for Maria to return home. She waves goodbye to all of her new friends as Godfather Drosselmeyer whisks her away. Maria suddenly awakens underneath the Christmas tree, wondering if her adventures were real or if they were simply a Christmas dream.



DID YOU KNOW?

- ❖ This is **26th year** that the La Crosse Dance Centre (LDC) has performed their production of *The Nutcracker* here, in La Crosse.
- ❖ There are **80 Members in the company** that you see onstage today.
- ❖ Ronnie, who plays Maria, has been in *The Nutcracker* with LDC since she was **five years old**. She is now **17 years old**, making this her **13th** production of *The Nutcracker*. This is her **second time** playing Maria.
- ❖ Cameron, who plays the Nutcracker is dancing the role for the **fourth time**. This is also his **sixth time total** appearing in *The Nutcracker* with LDC.
- ❖ Auditions for the production are held in **June** and rehearsals begin in **August**. That's approximately **five months of rehearsals** to bring the story to life.
- ❖ The Director of the production, Nikki Balsamo, was the **original Maria** and danced the role for the **first two years**. She also played the role of the Rat Queen **three times**. This is now her **15th year directing** the production. Her **mother** also remains actively involved in the yearly production.
- ❖ Zoe, who is dancing the role of the Snow Queen this year is the daughter of the woman who started *The Nutcracker* at LDC, Kathy Gorman.
- ❖ Michael, the lighting designer, has designed the lights for the production for **22 years**.
- ❖ The rat puppet that Fritz receives has been used every year since **1990** and is the only prop that has remained the same since then. The other props have had to be altered or changed year after year just due to wear and tear.
- ❖ This year, a number of dancers from the first production production now have children dancing in the production, including the original costume designer/Arabian Dancer and the original Godfather Drosselmeyer.



THE HISTORY

The story of the Nutcracker is one that is steeped in history. It began as a story in 1816 by **E.T.A. Hoffmann** about a young girl named Marie who receives and falls in love with a nutcracker doll for Christmas. The nutcracker doll does come to life, but only when she falls asleep. The original story is much darker than what is presented in the ballet. That is because the ballet is based on an adaptation of Hoffmann's story by the French author, **Alexandre Dumas Pere**, which was toned down for children in 1844 and became known as *L'histoire d'un casse noisette* (*The Story of a Nutcracker*).

Roughly fifty years later, the Russian Imperial Theatre, at the request of choreographer and ballet master **Marius Petipa**, commissioned the famous composer **Peter Tchaikovsky** to write a score for a ballet to the story. Petipa and Tchaikovsky had previously collaborated on *Sleeping Beauty* in 1890. Rehearsals were soon underway for the production, however, Petipa fell quite ill during the rehearsal process, so the job of creating the choreography was left to his assistant, **Lev Ivanov**. The world premiere of the ballet was held on **December 17, 1892** in **St. Petersburg**. Due to the overwhelming success of *Sleeping Beauty* two years earlier, the opening night performance was sold out. Even **Czar Alexander III** was in attendance that evening. The overall consensus was that the ballet was overall foolish and too childish for adults with the music being "too symphonic" for a ballet setting.

In 1905, Russia's Revolution began and a great deal of the dancers who had danced in the original production began to flee the country, taking with them the traditions of Russian ballet, including the story and choreography of *The Nutcracker*. The first production of the ballet outside of Russia appeared in Budapest in 1927. It eventually worked its way over to London in 1934 and finally, made its way to American soil in 1940 in an abridged version performed in New York City by the **Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo**. The first complete version was performed at the San Francisco Ballet in 1944, using the original choreography from 1892.

Perhaps the most famous American production came in 1954 with **George Balanchine's** production for the **New York City Ballet**. Balanchine had learned the ballet when he was a student in Russia. It was his production that made *The Nutcracker* an annual Christmas staple for dance schools and companies across the country. Not only is the story a Christmas staple, but the score has become timeless as well, particularly *The Nutcracker Suite*, which includes a Miniature Overture, the variations from Act II, and the "Waltz of the Flowers." There have been many filmed and televised productions of *The Nutcracker* throughout the years, making the audience reach for the story even greater than Tchaikovsky and Petipa could have ever imagined.

What makes the story of *The Nutcracker* so special is the fact that no two productions are *exactly* the same; some productions may utilize similar choreography or scenic and costume designs. While there are a number of productions that follow the original story from 1892, many choose to implement their own adaptation of the story

and create their own choreography. For example, in the original story, the little girl is named Marie Silberhaus, but some productions refer to her as Maria or even Clara. It all depends on the version of the story that a particular company has elected to tell. Nevertheless, audiences are still whisked away year after year to the magical Snow Forest and the decadent Kingdom of the Sweets, allowing the tradition of *The Nutcracker* to carry on, generation after generation.



THE AUTHORS



E.T.A. Hoffmann (*Original Story*) was born on January 1, 1776 in a small college town on the Baltic Sea in what is now Germany. He had a troubled upbringing and found solace in many different things, particularly music, art, writing, and even law. Hoffman was an accomplished musician, having studied the piano, violin, harp and guitar. Hoffman studied law at the Koenigsberg Law University from 1792-1800 and eventually worked in the Koenigsberg Supreme court. Although, he was accomplished in the field of law, it is his stories and artistic endeavors, particularly his story of *The Nutcracker*, that have given him lasting success. He died in 1822 in Germany.



Alexandre Dumas (*Story Adaptation*) was born on July 24, 1802 in France. He is, perhaps, one of the most celebrated authors in France. He moved to Paris in 1822 and began to write both comedic and dramatic plays in the Romantic style. He also wrote a great deal of essays, short stories, and novels, including *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*. While many people do not think of Dumas immediately when they think of *The Nutcracker*, it is his adaptation of the story from the original ballet that was adapted. In effect, he is responsible for the tale of *The Nutcracker* that many know and love, today. He died in 1870 in France.



Marius Petipa (*Original Librettist/Choreographer*) was born in France on March 11, 1818. Many consider him to be the “father of classical ballet.” Despite the fact that he did not enjoy dancing early on, he made his professional debut in 1831. After finding success throughout North America and Europe (primarily in Paris), he made his way to Russia in 1847 where he began working as a principal dancer with the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg and eventually became their Ballet Master in 1869. It is particularly his work on the ballets of *Tchaikovsky* (*The Nutcracker*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Swan Lake*) that have given him lasting fame. He died on July 14, 1910 in Russia.



Peter Tchaikovsky (Composer) was born on May 7, 1840. He studied piano as a young child but did not get seriously into music until the age of twenty. Upon completing his studies at the St. Petersburg conservatory, he went on to teach at the Moscow Conservatory at the age of twenty-six. While he was an accomplished conductor and composed many symphonies, operas, and concert pieces throughout his life, he is known especially for his three ballets: *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Swan Lake*, all three becoming classical repertory pieces for ballet companies around the world. He died in 1893 in Russia.



THE CHOREOGRAPHY

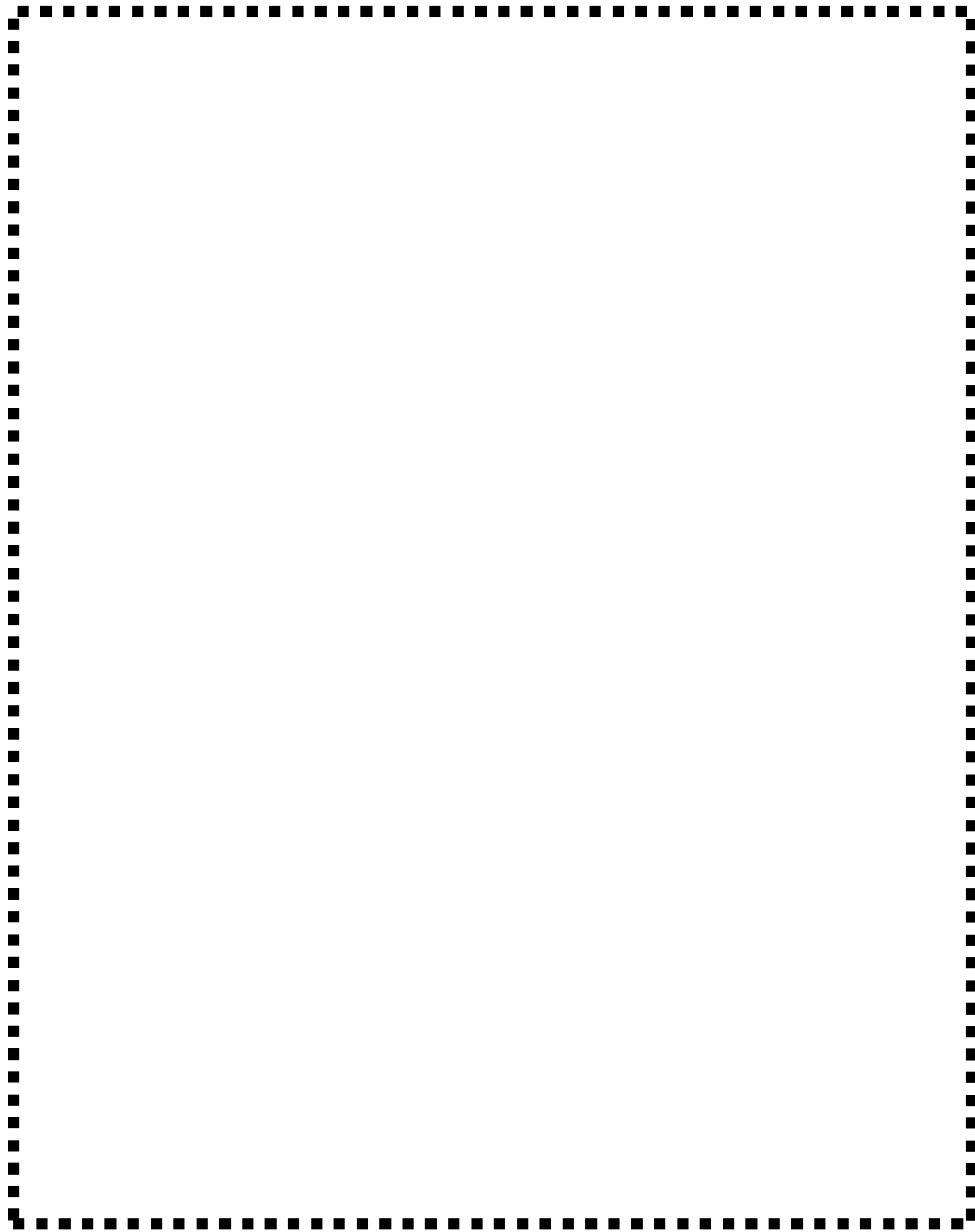
Nikki Balsamo (Director/Choreographer) has her BFA in Dance from the University of Minnesota and the MA in Servant Leadership from Viterbo University. Nikki has performed as a guest dancer with “JAZZDANCE!” by Danny Buraczeski, works by Christine Maginnins, Cyndi and Brad Garner, and Emily Johnson. Nikki served as Dance Coordinator in the Theatre & Music Theatre Department at Viterbo University from 2004-2014. Nikki currently serves as the Artistic Director and Owner of La Crosse Dance Centre. Recent choreographic credits include La Crosse Dance Centre's *Nutcracker Ballet*, *The Seasons: A Collaboration* between La Crosse Dance Centre and La Crosse Symphony Orchestra, and La Crosse Dance Centre's *The Velveteen Rabbit*.

A choreographer is the person who makes the dances. He or she takes their ideas and puts them together in movement and patterns to the music creating a total piece of art from start to finish. There have been many different choreographers of *The Nutcracker* over the years. You could even choreograph your own ballet! One of the best and most-loved parts of *The Nutcracker* is the snow scene. Nikki had to think about what it would be like to make dancers look and dance like snow. Let's try this:

Can you think of 20 words to describe snow?

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1. | 11. |
| 2. | 12. |
| 3. | 13. |
| 4. | 14. |
| 5. | 15. |
| 6. | 16. |
| 7. | 17. |
| 8. | 18. |
| 9. | 19. |
| 10. | 20. |

Now, draw how you would make the snowflake costumes look.



WORD SEARCH

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

BALLET

DANCE

DROSSELMEYER

FLOWERS

FRITZ

MARIA

NUTCRACKER

RAT

RUSSIAN

SILBERHAUS

SOLDIER

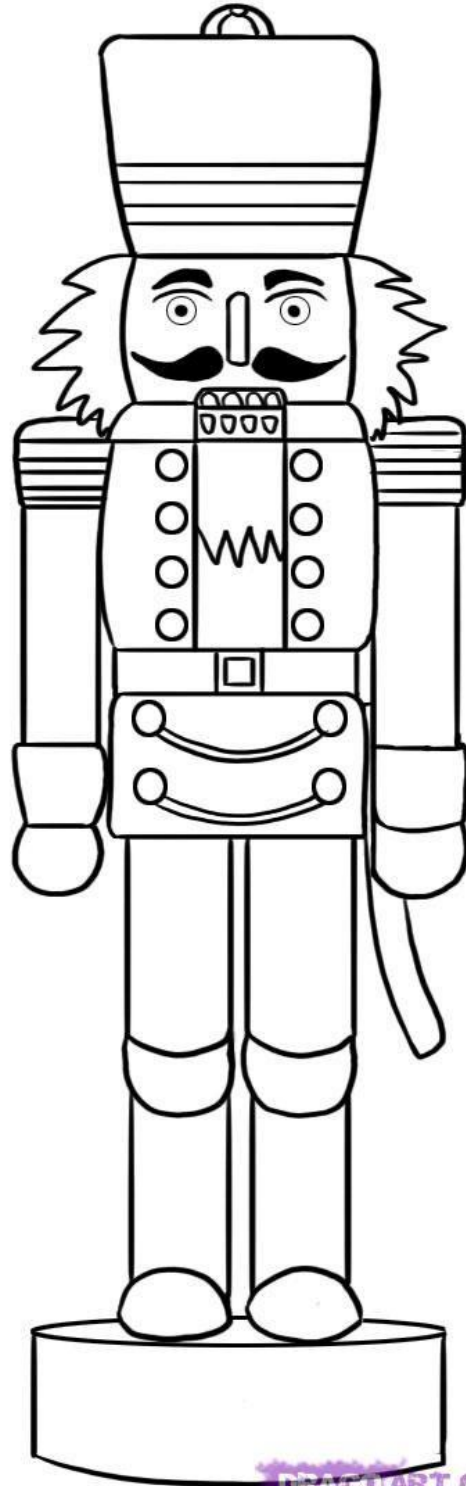
SUGARPLUM

SWEETS

TCHAIKOVSKY

COLORING ACTIVITY

Color in your own version of the Nutcracker doll that you would go on magical adventures with.



BEING A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER

Unlike actors on television, performers on the stage are aware of their audience and want very much to communicate their art to you, and feel your appreciation in turn. In fact, by the time you arrive at a theatre for a scheduled performance, many people (choreographers, composers, dancers, technicians, costume and lighting designers, etc.) have worked very hard to bring you their best efforts. In order to show respect for those efforts, every audience member must give the performance their full attention and avoid any behavior that interferes with anyone else doing the same. We have rules that help us accomplish this goal, and you should do your best to understand and follow them:

- 1. Always arrive at the theatre with plenty of time to find your seats and settle down into them. Late arrivals mean disruption for everyone else, including the performers.**
- 2. No shoving or running in the lobby.**
- 3. No cameras or video recorders. Flashes are dangerous for dancers and unapproved photos and videos violate copyright laws.**
- 4. No hooting, whistling or yelling during the performance. The performance has begun when anyone on stage starts talking or dancing, or when the music starts playing. You are welcome to show your appreciation for the performance with applause at the end of the ballet or sometimes at the end of a section or solo. You are also welcome to laugh if someone on stage is being intentionally funny.**
- 5. No talking or whispering during the performance. You will have plenty of time to discuss your impressions at intermission or after the show.**
- 6. No gum, candy or food in the theatre (it makes noise and sticky messes).**
- 7. Use the bathroom before the show begins or at intermission, not during the performance.**

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