

9th-12th

Introduction to Ballet & The Nutcracker

- **Objective:** Introduce students to the art form of ballet and the significance of *The Nutcracker* in the ballet world.
- **Topics:**
 - History of ballet: Origins and development as a performance art.
 - *The Nutcracker* overview: Composed by Tchaikovsky, first performed in 1892.
 - Importance of *The Nutcracker* as a holiday tradition in the U.S. and globally.

Activity:

- Watch a short video clip of *The Nutcracker* (choose a key scene, like the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy) and discuss students' initial impressions.
- Classroom discussion: Why do they think *The Nutcracker* has become such a holiday tradition?

2. Storyline & Characters

- **Objective:** Help students understand the narrative of *The Nutcracker* and its major characters.
- **Topics:**
 - Overview of the story: The journey of Clara and the Nutcracker Prince, the battle with the Mouse King, and the magical Land of Sweets.
 - Key characters: Clara, The Nutcracker Prince, The Mouse King, Sugar Plum Fairy, etc.

Activity:

- Story mapping: Have students create a visual map of *The Nutcracker's* plot and characters.
- Character exploration: Divide the class into groups and assign each a character to explore and present to the class (e.g., background, personality, significance to the story).

3. Tchaikovsky's Music & Themes

- **Objective:** Explore the role of music in storytelling and emotional expression within *The Nutcracker*.
- **Topics:**
 - The importance of Tchaikovsky's score in creating mood and enhancing the narrative.
 - How music corresponds to different characters and scenes (e.g., the lightness of the Sugar Plum Fairy's theme vs. the dramatic battle music).
 - Recognizing iconic pieces like the "Waltz of the Flowers" or "Russian Dance."

Activity:

- Listening exercise: Play different sections of the score and have students describe the mood and emotions conveyed by the music. Ask them to match the music to specific parts of the story.

- Optional: Allow students to create a playlist of modern music that could fit certain scenes.

4. Choreography & Dance Styles

- **Objective:** Introduce students to the basics of ballet choreography and how dance tells a story without words.
- **Topics:**
 - Understanding ballet as a non-verbal art form that communicates through movement.
 - Overview of different dance styles featured in *The Nutcracker* (e.g., classical ballet, Spanish dance, Russian dance).
 - How choreography enhances character development and the storyline.

Activity:

- Movement workshop: Partner with a dance instructor or show videos demonstrating basic ballet moves. Have students attempt simple steps or poses inspired by the show's choreography.
- Dance analysis: Watch short clips of key dances and ask students to discuss how the movements reflect the emotions or story being conveyed.

5. Behind the Scenes: Production Elements

- **Objective:** talk about how the behind-the-scenes elements—costumes, set design, lighting—bring the ballet to life.
- **Topics:**
 - Overview of production elements: Sets, costumes, lighting, and special effects.
 - The importance of visual storytelling and how it supports the mood and themes of the ballet.
 - A look at costume designs and their historical context (e.g., why the Sugar Plum Fairy wears a tutu, or the unique design of the Nutcracker costume).

Activity:

- Design challenge: Have students sketch costume designs for one of the characters or create a set design concept for one of the scenes.
- Behind-the-scenes tour: If possible, arrange a backstage tour of your theatre or show a video of how production elements are prepared for *The Nutcracker*.

6. Artistic Interpretation & Modern Adaptations

- **Objective:** Explore how *The Nutcracker* has been interpreted differently across time and cultures.
- **Topics:**
 - Variations in choreography and set design across different ballet companies.
 - How modern adaptations (such as Hip Hop Nutcracker) reflect changes in cultural tastes and artistic trends.
 - How your theatre's production adds its own unique spin or interpretation.

Activity:

- Compare and contrast: Watch clips of traditional *Nutcracker* performances alongside modern adaptations. Discuss what has changed and why those changes might have been made.
- Artistic reflection: Have students reflect on what they would change or adapt if they were directing their own production of *The Nutcracker*.

7. Discussion & Reflection

- **Objective:** Allow students to reflect on what they've learned and how *The Nutcracker* connects to broader cultural and artistic themes.
- **Topics:**
 - What does *The Nutcracker* tell us about tradition, imagination, and the power of storytelling?
 - How has learning about ballet and this production impacted their view of the arts?

Activity:

- Written reflection: Ask students to write a short reflection or journal entry on their favorite part of the curriculum and why they found it interesting.
- Final project: Assign a creative project where students either design a poster, write a review, or give a presentation about their experience with *The Nutcracker*.

