



RICHMOND BALLET

the Nutcracker

YOUTH PERFORMANCE
TEACHER'S GUIDE
AND STUDENT ACTIVITIES



RICHMOND BALLET

Richmond Ballet, The State Ballet of Virginia, is dedicated to the promotion, preservation, and continuing evolution of the art form of ballet. Richmond Ballet strives to keep meaningful works of dance alive and to produce and foster new works that remain true to these values.

Since its early days as a civic company in the 1950s through its emergence as a professional company in 1984 to today, Richmond Ballet, The State Ballet of Virginia, has flourished as a home for the past, present, and future of dance. Richmond Ballet boasts an expansive repertory that includes 19th- and 20th-century masterpieces as well as nearly 90 new ballets by contemporary choreographers. The Company made its international debut in London in 2012, followed by a tour to China in 2015, and has performed at The Joyce Theater in New York City in 2005, 2008, 2010 and, most recently, in May of 2017. The Ballet's scope also includes its acclaimed School of Richmond Ballet and Minds In Motion community engagement program.

Richmond Ballet aspires to help transform our world through the unique and special power of dance by training and presenting dancers of all ages as ultimate artist/athletes who inspire us by showing unlimited human potential. We will demonstrate the value of human life, the power of cooperation and mutual respect, the work ethic and discipline required to achieve anything truly meaningful, and the joy of an inclusive, compassionate community in everything we do.

THE MISSION OF RICHMOND BALLET IS TO AWAKEN, UPLIFT, AND UNITE HUMAN SPIRITS THROUGH THE POWER OF DANCE.

The Youth Performance is an opportunity for students to attend the ballet at the theatre with classmates and their teachers. As students arrive in the theatre the curtain is up and the crew is setting the stage for the start of the performance. Audiences will learn about the ballet and the physical demands of a professional ballet dancer. An interview onstage with one or two Company dancers will give students a chance to get to know the dancers before they see them perform. And sometimes there are a few dancers onstage having one final rehearsal before we begin. Students and teachers will be reminded that they are about to be part of a live performance and theatre etiquette is essential. Our scenery, lighting, and costumes complement our dancers and we are fortunate to perform with a full symphony orchestra. When the house lights dim and the curtain goes up our beautiful dancers will bring the story to life for all to enjoy.



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WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

ACT ONE

It's Christmas Eve and Dr. Silberhaus' family is throwing a wonderful party. Dr. and Mrs. Silberhaus greet the parents and finish decorating their Christmas tree as their children, Clara and Fritz, gather together with their friends in excitement. The party includes presents, dancing, food, and MAGIC! Dr. Drosselmeyer, Clara and Fritz's godfather, appears and changes some of the children's dolls into life-size dolls. The children are delighted!

Then Dr. Drosselmeyer presents Clara with a very special gift, a nutcracker! He shows Clara how the nutcracker works and Clara shares freshly cracked nuts with all of her friends. Her little brother Fritz becomes jealous and tries to grab the nutcracker and it breaks in half! Dr. Drosselmeyer and his nephew mend the nutcracker and the evening continues with more dancing as Clara treasures her very special gift.

Once all the guests have left and the family is in bed, Clara sneaks back down to see the beautiful Christmas tree and falls asleep with the nutcracker in her arms. Dr. Drosselmeyer appears and uses his magic to make the Christmas tree grow taller and taller until Clara finds herself the same size as all of the dolls that are underneath it. She is in the world under the Christmas tree and a great adventure awaits her!

Large mice start to appear and the dolls come to life. There is a battle between the Nutcracker and the King of the Mice! Just as the Mouse King is about to slay the Nutcracker, Clara throws her shoe at him and the Nutcracker wins the battle! The magic continues as the Nutcracker transforms into a prince and crowns Clara as his princess.





WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT? *continued*

In the world of dance, the greatest dancers in a ballet company are called principal dancers. They have worked for many, many years to become talented and masterful performers. Roles like the Snow Queen and King are created for the audience to enjoy some of the incredible talent of dancers who have practiced and performed for many years. Usually when two principal dancers share a scene they perform a *pas de deux*. In French, that means step of two or dance for two; like a duet in music when two performers play a song together. In the form of a *Grand Pas de Deux*, that happens during the snow scene in *The Nutcracker* and other ballets, the two principal dancers will dance together and then they will take turns dancing by themselves 2 or 3 times before they dance together one last time to conclude the Grand Pas. As you watch the dancers, you can appreciate the hours and hours that they have rehearsed together to bring this special dance to the audience!

ACT TWO

Clara and the Nutcracker Prince arrive in the Kingdom of Sweets. They are greeted by two other principal dancers, the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier. They welcome the children to their Kingdom and the Nutcracker Prince tells the story of the world under the Christmas tree. The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier commend them for their bravery, and they invite the sweets from many different lands to perform for them.

The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier finish the performance with a *Grand Pas de Deux*. They dance together and then take turns performing solos before dancing together for their big finish. These dancers work hard to make their complicated and intricate dance steps look effortless and stunning.





A LITTLE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

E.T.A. Hoffman published *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* in 1816. The story was a scary fairy tale not intended for children. Hoffman was known for his macabre writing; his writing influenced authors such as Edgar Allen Poe, Charles Dickens, and Alfred Hitchcock. Alexandre Dumas Pères wrote a more light-hearted version of the story that was appealing to children. It was this adaptation that was set to music by Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky.

The Nutcracker ballet was first performed at the Mariinsky Theatre in the city of St. Petersburg, Russia, on December 17, 1892. The Russian Imperial Ballet commissioned Tchaikovsky to compose the score and Marius Petipa to choreograph the ballet.

George Balanchine, a famous choreographer, was born in Russia in 1904 and danced with the Imperial Ballet. After living in Europe as a young adult, he immigrated to the United States and, in 1948, he co-founded New York City Ballet. The first production of *The Nutcracker* at New York City Ballet was in February 1954. It was not until this production gained popularity that *The Nutcracker* became a favorite holiday tradition here in the United States and throughout the world.



Ballet companies across the United States present *The Nutcracker* each winter. Every company has its own interpretation of the story and music with unique choreography. Stoner Winslett, the Artistic Director of Richmond Ballet, created her own presentation in the early 1980's when Richmond Ballet was only a student company. The version you will be enjoying was created in 2022 with a brand new and magical design set. Each year the artistic team at Richmond Ballet shares new ideas to enhance this magical production. Work begins as early as the spring for the performances in December. In 2010, a dance critic from *The New York Times* traveled the country watching and critiquing many different versions of *The Nutcracker*. He was thrilled with Ms. Winslett's production and called it "one of the country's most perfect [Nutcracker productions]" wishing that all communities in America had a performance of this caliber.



FUN FACTS

The magical on-stage Christmas tree grows to a height of 50 feet and uses more than 100 lights!

The Mother Ginger costume is so large that it requires 6 people to dress her and it must be suspended from the ceiling in the backstage area and hung there until Mother Ginger is ready for her entrance.

½ a ton of dry ice (to make fog) is used throughout the run of *The Nutcracker*. This averages to about 40 pounds of dry ice used for each performance.

100 pounds of snow confetti are used in the production! Any remaining snow not used during the run is dumped onto stage after the snow scene at the final show.

The Dancing Bear's head is designed around a traditional hard-hat construction helmet.



It takes five 52' semi-trucks to transport all of the sets, props, equipment, and costumes to the theater.

Depending on the role, company dancers wear five different kinds of shoes in each performance: ballet slippers, jazz shoes, character shoes, boots, and pointe shoes.

The Nutcracker children's cast features dancers from both School of Richmond Ballet and the *Minds In Motion* program.

The scenery hangs on 46 separate line sets. Setting the scenery and stage requires about 800 man-hours over 2.5 days. There's over 3.5 tons of scenery & lighting equipment hung overhead.

There are just over 100 spike marks on the floor that mark where performers stand, where the light gets focused, and where scenery is placed.



FUN FACTS *continued*

It takes 27 production staff members to run each performance. The run crew for each show consists of: 1 Stage Manager, 2 Assistant Stage Managers, 2 Follow spots, 1 Light Board Op, 1 Sound, 1 Technical Director, 2 Deck Electricians, 7 Fly men, 5 Stagehands, and 5 Wardrobe.

It takes about 8 hours for 7-12 people to focus the roughly 460 lights hanging in the theatre. There are 117 light cues in the show. Each performance of *The Nutcracker* uses about 346,750 watts of power for a total of over 7 million watts of power for the entire run.

This year's production of *The Nutcracker* contains 21 total performances: 17 for full and 4 youth performances.

There are six layers of netting in a snow corps tutu and 10 layers of netting in the sugarplum tutu. It takes around 40 yards of tulle and it takes around 40 hours to make a single tutu.

There are 6 loads of laundry done per show of *The Nutcracker*; the washers are always going!

All of the costumes for *The Nutcracker* require 100 feet of rack space in the back stage area.

Costume construction for *The Nutcracker* begins in August and does not stop until January, after the show closes.

The fastest costume change takes less than 30 seconds and there are around 200 costumes worn in *The Nutcracker*.

There are around 250 crystals in a snow tiara.

There are about 350 pairs of pointe shoes, including students' shoes that are used during the show's run. The average cost of shoes for the entire run is about \$40,000.

Throughout the run, we go through about 10 industrial sized boxed of hair pins; over 1,000 pins.





EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

MAKING SOL CONNECTIONS

Virginia Writing SOLs

that intersect with the suggested writing activities:

K.W.1; K.W.2; 1.W.2a; 2.W.2a; 3.W.2a

Virginia Civics SOLs

that are met by participating on this field trip:

k.10d,g; 1.10d,e; 2.11d; 3.11d

Virginia Oral Language SOLs

when students share their ideas in whole class discussion, their writing, or their performance:

k.1; k.2a,d; 1.2b,d; 2.1a; 2.2b; 3.1; 4.1; 5.16; 6.1

Virginia Reading SOLs

that intersect with the suggested activities:

k.7b; k.8b,d,e; k.9c; 1.7d; 2.7; 3.5; 4.5; 5.5



STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Before you come to the theatre

- Writing prompts
- Listen to *The Nutcracker Suite*
- Fun Facts

After you see *The Nutcracker*

- Brainstorm
- Illustrate
- Perform
- Write About It
- Several ways to say thank you
- Coloring Pages

Extending the Experience: A Teacher's Guide and the photographs and text contained herein are the property of Richmond Ballet. All Richmond Ballet production photographs herein by Sarah Ferguson except where noted. Photocopying of the study guide is permitted. Any other use of the contents must be accompanied by the phrase, "Text or photographs used with permission from Richmond Ballet - Richmond, VA." © Richmond Ballet, 2023.



BEFORE YOU COME TO THE THEATRE

The following activities can be either a group discussion or a writing activity with your students.

Describe your family's holiday traditions at this time of year.

If you were the same size as your toys and the toys came to life what adventures would you have?

Be sure to describe your toys with exciting adjectives for your reader. Many stories have a conflict that must get resolved. What will be your story's conflict and how will you and your toys resolve the problem? Don't forget—every story needs an ending.

Listen to Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, Op 71a. How does it make you feel? Where are you? What is happening? If there is space in your classroom take the time to move to the music.

AFTER YOU SEE THE NUTCRACKER

You might like to do one or more of the following group activities: Brainstorm, Illustrate, Perform, Write.

Brainstorm descriptive words for *The Nutcracker*. Then students can choose words to do a word cloud. Think of words that describe:

- setting
- details of events
- characters
- time
- weather

Illustrate: Discuss as a class the main events or moments in *The Nutcracker*. Then divide into groups of 3 or 4 to create a story mural. There should be enough moments as there are groups so each group can create a different moment for the story mural. As students work encourage them to think about descriptive words they can use in their writing. Once groups have finished each student can write a description to go with their mural panel. This can be differentiated for grade level/student ability (suggestions below). Groups can share their illustrations and writing with the class. Put the mural panels with the writing in order and display as one mural.

Kindergarten / 1st: Label or Write 1 or 2 sentences

2nd / 3rd: Write a paragraph

4th / 5th: Write two or three paragraphs

6th+: Write an appropriate length which can include what happens before and after the illustration.



AFTER YOU SEE THE NUTCRACKER

Perform: Divide students into groups of three or four. As a group they must decide which moment in the story of *The Nutcracker* they want to re-create. Students will work together to decide what details must be included in their performance, then rehearse. After students have rehearsed they will write an introduction that describes their scene. All groups will perform their re-creation of a moment from *The Nutcracker* for their classmates.

Write: Here are some examples of *The Nutcracker* writing prompts you might like to do.

Write a thank you note or letter to one of the dancers/characters, musicians or to the people who work backstage. Thank you note brainstorming worksheet on page 12.

Make a card for Richmond Ballet telling us what you liked most about *The Nutcracker*. Be sure to tell us why. We love to receive drawings, too!

Write a friendly letter telling about the performance of *The Nutcracker* that you just saw. Add details in your description to really paint a picture for your friend.

Create your own *Nutcracker* storybook; include the beginning, middle, and end in your details. Illustrate and number your pages, put your book together, then read your book to a friend or even a book buddy from another grade.

Now that you've seen *The Nutcracker* compare and contrast your adventure story to Clara's adventure with the Nutcracker Prince. How are the two stories similar? How are they different?

Compare and contrast your family's holiday traditions with Clara's.

What animals do you think would live where Clara and the Nutcracker Prince met the Snow King and Queen? What would life be like for these animals in each season?



WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Richmond Ballet believes that a performance is a gift to the audience. Often when we receive a gift we write a thank you note. Our dancers, choreographers, designers and production staff have been rehearsing and working hard to make sure today's performance was just right. Tell us what you liked best. Who was your favorite character? Have you ever been to a ballet performance? Use the thought bubbles below to brainstorm some ideas.

What did you like about seeing Richmond Ballet?



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