

Study Guide



ST. LUCIE BALLET PRESENTS

The Nutcracker

Student and Teacher information for The Nutcracker

History of the Nutcracker Ballet

(Written by Lydia Oquendo, director of St. Lucie Ballet)

The Nutcracker ballet was first performed December 17, 1892. The ballet is based on a book by E.T.A. Hoffmann called The Nutcracker and the King of Mice written in Germany in 1816. When we say “the story is based” this means there were slight changes made to the story so that it would better suit the stage and dancers and make for better entertainment.

That first performance of the Nutcracker ballet in 1892 was choreographed by Marius Petipa & Lev Ikonov. The composer of the music was Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky. The performers were dancers from The Imperial Russian Ballet.

The first performance in the United States was on October 17, 1940. It was choreographed after Lev Ikonov and staged by Alexandra Fedorova. This means Mrs. Fedorova learned it from Mr. Ikonov and set it on the dancers from Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo (a dance company).

Today the Nutcracker ballet has become a big part of celebrating the holidays. This ballet is danced all over the U.S. by many great companies as well as smaller local ballet schools. Some of these great companies are The New York City Ballet, The San Francisco Ballet, and Miami City Ballet. The show you will see at the Sunrise Theatre is produced and rehearsed locally. St. Lucie Ballet teaches classical ballet training among other styles of dance.

Definition of Ballet:

Ballet is a highly skilled art form that has been passed down from professional to student for over 300 years. It is characterized by grace and precision of movement and by elaborate formal gestures, steps, and poses.

Theater behavior: Teachers, read to students before going to the theater.

Students, you will be making a very special journey. You will be going to a theater for a performance of a famous ballet. The theater is a special place for people to experience amazing and beautiful things. However, in order to fully appreciate the performance, a certain kind of behavior is necessary. The following discussion with your teacher might be helpful in preparing you for the performance.

Appropriate Audience Behavior

How many of you have been to a theater?

How many of you have been to a ballet performance?

What was the performance, and where was it?

How did people behave during the performance?

Is going to the theater like going to a football game? Is it like going to a symphony performance?

Why or why not?

How do people express themselves at a ballet? (Do people talk loudly, eat, move around, or jump up and down during a dance concert? Do people pay close attention? Are they quiet? When do they applaud?)

Why do we behave differently at a ballet performance than at a baseball game?

How do you intend to behave when you go to the ballet performance?

Discussion about today's performance.

Today you will be seeing Act I of the famous Nutcracker ballet. This ballet is almost 200 years old. The Nutcracker takes place in Germany and begins with a party on Christmas Eve. The main character of the story is Clara, a young girl whose parents host a big party for friends and relatives.

A Celebration or Party

*What kinds of parties have you had?
What are the reasons and occasions that you celebrate with a party ?
Who comes to these celebrations and parties?
Why do we invite these guests to our parties?
What do you do at these parties? Do people dance? Listen to music?*

There are many friends and relatives at Clara and her family's Christmas party, but not everyone is fun to be with. Clara's brother, Fritz, is an annoyance. He and his friends constantly taunt and tease Clara and her friends.

Family and Conflict

*Do you have disagreements with your brothers and sisters?
Do you have disagreements with other members of your family?
What do you argue about?
How do you resolve these conflicts?
How can you prevent them from happening in the future?*

Luckily, Clara has her friends and other family members to keep her in the holiday spirit. Her Uncle, Herr Drosselmeier, arrives with gifts for all the children. He also magically brings special toys to life. His gift to Clara is a nutcracker.

A Special Gift

*What special gifts have you received?
What makes a gift special?
Have you given a special gift to someone?
What was it? To whom did you give a special gift?
What is the most special gift one can give or receive?*

The party ends and all the guests depart. Clara falls asleep in the living room by the Christmas tree and has a magical dream. In her dream there is a terrific battle between larger-than-life mice and toy soldiers. The mice are defeated, and the Nutcracker turns into a real Prince.

Dreams and Fantasies

*What kind of dreams do you have?
Where did you go in your dream?
What did you do in your dream?
Why do some dreams feel real to you?
What do you think dreams mean?*

After the victory over the mice, the Nutcracker Prince brings Clara through the Kingdom of Snow to the magical Land of Sweets.

(For the morning performance only Act I will be shown. To see the exciting Act II you should come to this evening's performance).

