

Curriculum Guide for The Nutcracker Ballet

Goals for this lesson plan include:

1. Students will learn vocabulary for old fashioned, theater and ballet terms they may not be familiar with.
2. Students will become familiar with a book version of the Nutcracker Story (recommend *The Nutcracker* by Janet Schulman, E.T.A. Hoffman and Renee Graef. ISBN 978-0060278144).
 - a. Students will be able to describe Clara/Marie, Godfather Drosselmeier, Nutcracker prince, and the Sugar Plum Fairy relying on descriptors such as beautiful, mysterious, handsome, brave, kind, generous.
 - b. Students will be able to draw or write a reaction to the story using a prompt such as “My favorite part of the Nutcracker story is.....”
3. Students will learn what to expect at a ballet performance.
4. Students will see excerpts of the Nutcracker Ballet performed by the East Alabama Community Ballet Company (www.eacballet.com). Primarily, they will see the 2nd act of the ballet which takes place in the Magical Kingdom of Sweets. They will be able to interact with the dancers after the performance through question and answer.
 - a. Students will reflect on their experience of the ballet, using a series of discussion, drawing or writing prompts.
 - b. Students will critique the performance of the Nutcracker Ballet.
 - c. Students will compare and contrast the ballet and the book version of the Nutcracker.
5. Through music (audio cd Pytor Illych Tchaikovsky: *The Nutcracker – Complete Ballet* or Tchaikovsky: *The Nutcracker (Complete): Swan Lake Suite*), students will learn how various styles, rhythms, and instruments set the mood for the musical piece. Also how each piece can be traced to a different country.

Vocabulary

Story Vocabulary

Godfather – a man, usually a relative or close friend of the family, who is a special person in a child's life. In the past, he would help parents with a child's education. In times when people did not live as long as they do now, he might be like a grandfather if the child had no surviving grandparents. A woman who enjoyed this special relationship would be a "godmother".

Grandfather Clock – a very tall clock; the clock face sits on top of a tall, narrow case which holds the clock's pendulum, which swings back and forth to help the clock keep time. These clocks would ring or chime on the hour, with the number of chimes for the hour. For example, at eight o'clock, a grandfather clock would ring 8 times. Old-fashioned grandfather clocks would need to be wound daily to keep the correct time.

Herr – the German equivalent of Mr.

Marzipan - a type of candy made of almond paste, sugar, and egg whites. It can be molded into shapes like fruits, hearts, or stars, etc. Traditionally, it is white.

Nutcracker – a wooden tool, often in the shape of a man, used to break the shells of nuts. Nuts in their shells would be inserted into the nutcracker's "mouth", then a lever on his "back" could be turned to bring his "jaws" together to break the shells and the nut pieces removed. In the 1800's, especially in Germany, but also in other places, nutcrackers were painted bright colors and given to children to help them break the shells of the nuts they received in the Christmas stockings.

Overture - When the house lights dim, and music begins to play, this is the overture. It signals the start of a performance where music is an important part of the story. It is a sampling of the music that will be heard throughout the story. There will be no action on stage during the overture, which lasts several minutes.

Saber – a type of sword with a curved blade

Waltz – a dance which is fast moving (3/4 time). Dancers appear to glide lightly and effortlessly around the stage. At a formal ball, this would be a dance for couples.

Wind-up Toy – a mechanical toy. In the days before batteries, such toys had to be wound up usually by turning a key to set the mechanism inside the toys. Such toys make a clicking or clattering sound (similar to a clock's ticking) as they moved about; at first the clicking was fast, but as the toy "wound down", it became slower and slower until it stopped.

Theater Vocabulary

Applause – hand-clapping by audience to thank the performers for their work.

Audience – the people who come to watch a performance.

Auditorium – the area in which the seats for the audience are located.

Curtains – made of fabric. The main curtain across the front of the stage hides the stage area until the performance begins, or until the scene changes are completed. Curtains along the sides and back of the stage hide backstage areas from the audience.

Dressing rooms – the rooms where performers change their clothes. Men and women have separate dressing rooms.

Drop – large pieces of canvas that extend the width of the stage. They are hung on rods at the back of the stage. They can be painted to show different scenes. A series of drops may be used in a production, which will be raised and lowered into view when needed.

Gel (short for gelatin) – a transparent colored sheet which is inserted into a frame in front of spotlights to change the color of the light.

House Lights – the lights in the auditorium, where the audience sits. When these lights dim, the performance is about to begin.

Make-up – used by performers to help create their character's appearance. Stage make-up is much heavier than regular make-up. Make-up can help create wrinkles to make a young performer appear older. In the Nutcracker Ballet, make-up is used to give certain characters a distinctive appearance, like Godfather Drosselmeier's mechanical dolls in the party scene.

Scenery – used to help the audience imagine the setting of a story. The Nutcracker uses a kind of hanging scenery called a drop. This is a large piece of canvas, as wide as the stage, with a scene painted on it.

Spotlight – one type of lighting instrument which is used to focus audience attention on a very limited area of the stage with a concentrated beam of light; reflectors help increase its brightness.

Stage – the area of the theater, usually in front, where the performance takes place.

Stage lighting – there are three kinds of stage lighting used to illuminate the stage; 1) general lighting provides light for the entire stage, including background elements like scenery and backdrops (drops); 2) specific lighting concentrates on a particular area of the stage, usually to emphasize the acting area; 3) special effects can include the projections of patterns on the stage floor, like those used to represent light filtering through tree branches.

Wings – the areas to the side of the stage, out of sight of the audience. These areas are where performers wait to make their entrance onto the stage and into the action.

Ballet Vocabulary

Ballet – a form of theatrical dance (meant to be watched) that uses particular movements and poses. No words are spoken. The story is told through music and movements.

Ballerina – a female ballet dancer. This term once referred to the star female dancer in a company; now it means any female ballet dancer.

Corps de Ballet – ballet dancers who perform as a group. In the Nutcracker, the Waltz of the Flowers is performed by the corps de ballet.

Costumes – outfits appropriate to characters worn by performers. Sugar Plum Fairy wears a sparkling white tutu to help you imagine her as a fairy. The mice wear gray costumes and heads that look like mice. Male ballet dancers often wear leotards and tights as part of their costumes; they dress this way because of ballet's origins in the Renaissance, when men actually dressed in hose and short pants for everyday wear.

Danseur – a male ballet dancer.

Divertissement – a dance or series of dances which show a dancer's skill. These occur in many story ballets, but they may not relate to the events of the story. In the Nutcracker, the "country" dances of Act II (Spanish, Arabian, Chinese, Russian, Marzipan, Mother Ginger) are divertissement.

Entrechat – a jump in which the dancer quickly crosses the legs in front of and behind each other several times.

Jete – a kind of jump in ballet, in which the dancer jumps from one foot to the other, kicking out with one leg. A Grand Jete is a large leap forward from one foot to the other.

Leotard – tightly knit, form fitting garment worn by both men and women in a ballet.

On-Pointe – when a ballerina stands on the tips of her toe or pointe shoes, she is said to be "on pointe".

Pantomime – a form of acting in which gestures and facial expressions are used to convey the story. Ballet dancers frequently use pantomime to help tell the story of a ballet.

Pas de deux – a ballet dance for a couple. The Sugar Plum Fairy and the Nutcracker Prince perform a pas de deux near the end of Act II in the Nutcracker.

Pirouette – ballet turn in which the dancer turns around completely on one foot.

Pointe shoes – also called toe shoes. Special ballet shoes worn by ballerinas to allow them to dance on the points of their toes. These slippers have a hardened box, which is made of 7 layers of fabric glued together. This box goes around the toes to help support and protect the tips of the ballerina's toes. Ribbons help to keep the shoes on the feet. But the ballerina's feet also get support from her ankle and leg muscles. She has trained for years with special exercises to strengthen her legs, ankles and feet. Student dancers should not wear pointe shoes until age 10 or 11.

Port de bras – the arm movements of ballet. Literally it means the carriage of the arms.

Spotting – a technique in which dancers pick a spot to look at as they turn to keep from getting dizzy. As they turn, they quickly turn their head around so they are always looking at the same spot in the room. It takes a lot of practice to master this technique. Most dancers are better at spotting from one direction than the other.

Tights – tightly knit leg coverings worn by both men and women in ballet.

Tutu – a ballerina's skirt, made of several layers of fine net-like fabric called tulle (pronounced too).

Students will become familiar with a book version of the Nutcracker Story
Read to each class by a Junior League Volunteer

Note on Naming Traditions:

Why is the heroine's name "Marie" in the book and "Clara" in the ballet? In many book versions of The Nutcracker, the main character is named "Marie." This is because of twists and turns in the evolution of the Nutcracker tale. The first version of the Nutcracker story was published by the German author E.T.A. Hoffman in 1816. Hoffman's somewhat dark tale centers on a girl named Clara, who is not the cherished daughter of the ballet, but an unloved and neglected orphan living in the house of relatives. She bravely copes with the hard work she is required to do in the household and the fact that she is unappreciated. She does have a mysterious godfather, Dr. Drosselmeier, who watches out for her and gives her gifts of warm clothing and other presents to help brighten her dreary life. One Christmas, he gives Clara a Nutcracker doll. This Nutcracker is really his beloved nephew, who is under an evil spell that only true love can break. Clara's love for her Nutcracker breaks the spell and turns him back into a young man. They eventually marry.

In 1847, the French writer Alexandre Dumas, father of the more famous writer of the same name, retold Hoffman's story, removing some of its darker elements. He renamed his heroine "Marie." Marie's love for her Nutcracker frees him from the evil spell and they marry to live happily ever after. This version of the story is the one on which The Nutcracker Ballet is based.

Four decades later, Russian readers were familiar with Dumas' story. The director of the Russian Imperial Ballet decided to stage a ballet based on Dumas' telling of the Nutcracker story. His chief choreographer, Marius Petipa, directed composer Peter Tchaikovsky to write music for the "scenes" that he developed. Petipa moved on to other projects, so his assistant, Lev Ivanov, developed the choreography for that first ballet version of The Nutcracker. The ballet, with the heroine named "Clara" again, premiered at St. Petersburg's Maryinsky Theater in 1892.

Because of the way the ballet developed from not one, but two book versions, the heroine of the story can be known as either "Marie" or "Clara." Most book versions call her "Marie;" in most ballets, she is known as "Clara."

Students will be able to describe Clara/Marie, Godfather Drosselmeier, Nutcracker prince, and the Sugar Plum Fairy relying on descriptors such as beautiful, handsome, mysterious, brave, kind, generous.

Discuss some of the following with your students:

- Where does the story take place?
- When does it take place?
- Who is the main character of the story? What is she like/how would you describe her?
- Who are some of the other characters? (Students' focus should be directed to Godfather Drosselmeier, Nutcracker Prince, Sugar Plum Fairy) What is each like/how would you describe him/her? What do they do in the story?
- What is Clara's special present?
- What strange things happen at midnight? What happens to Clara's Nutcracker?
- How does Clara save the Nutcracker?
- Where does the Prince take Clara?
- How do the inhabitants of the Land of Sweets celebrate their Prince's return?
- How does the story end?

Students will be able to draw or write a reaction to the story using a prompt such as "My favorite part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."

Provide a prompt for illustrating or writing a reaction to the story. Some sample prompts include:

- "My favorite part of the Nutcracker story is . . . "
- "The scariest part of the Nutcracker story is . . . "
- "The saddest part of the Nutcracker story is . . . "
- "The happiest part of the Nutcracker story is . . . "

To help your students better understand what they will see onstage, here is a brief summary of the action on stage during the ballet. Your students will see excerpts from Act II.

The Nutcracker Ballet

Act I

Guests arrive for a Christmas party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum and their children, Clara and Fritz. Adults watch the children play and dance. Godfather Drosselmeier, godfather to Clara and Fritz, enralls the children with his magical tricks and mechanical dolls that seem almost human. All of the children receive presents. Just when it looks as if Fritz and Clara have no presents, Godfather Drosselmeyer gives Fritz a hobby horse and Clara a handsome Nutcracker. Clara falls in love with her wonderful present, but jealous Fritz breaks it. Godfather Drosselmeier repairs the Nutcracker's broken jaw with his handkerchief. The party ends with the traditional "Grandfather Dance," signaling the end of the party.

After everyone has gone, Clara is too excited to sleep. She creeps into the parlor with her Nutcracker. Perhaps she falls asleep, because a group of angels come to bid her goodnight. Then mice emerge from the shadows. Nightmarish things begin to happen: dolls and toy soldiers come to life. Clara's Nutcracker leads the toy soldiers in battle against the fierce Mouse King and his minions. At a critical moment, Clara summons the courage to throw her shoe at the Mouse King's head, and saves the Nutcracker's life. The Nutcracker is transformed into a handsome prince, awakened by the Sugar Plum Fairy. Together, they set off for the Nutcracker's home in the Kingdom of Sweets. They first pass through the Land of Snow, where the Snowflakes dance.

Act II

The Nutcracker Prince and the Sugar Plum Fairy arrive in the magical Kingdom of Sweets. Dolls from different countries welcome them with native dances. There is a Spanish Dance, an Arabian Dance, a Chinese dance, and a Russian Dance. Mother Ginger arrives with the Gingersnaps acting very silly on stage. Beautiful fairies dance the Marzipan Dance. Lovely fairies emerge to dance the Waltz of the Flowers. The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Nutcracker Prince perform the most beautiful dance of all.

Then Clara awakens in her own parlor. Godfather Drosselmeier returns her Nutcracker, now completely repaired. She is grateful and overjoyed that her Nutcracker is like new again.

In the Magical Kingdom of Sweets the different dances represent different foods or drinks and countries.

Spanish – chocolate

Marpizan – candy (see vocabulary)

Chinese – Tea

Arabian – coffee

Gingersnaps – cookies

Also the Russian culture is represented as well as France (sugar plum).

After Viewing Excerpts from the Nutcracker Ballet

Students can reflect on their experience of the ballet, using a series of discussion, drawing and/or writing prompts.

Discussion/Writing prompts:

- What did you see at the Nutcracker?
- What did you hear at the Nutcracker?
- How did the ballet make you feel?
- What did their costumes tell you about the characters? What did their dances tell you about them?
- How did the sound of the music help you understand what was happening on stage?
- What was your favorite part/character of the ballet?
- Was there any part of the ballet that you did not like? Why?

Students can critique the performance of The Nutcracker.

Describe

- What was the name of the ballet?
- What did you see during the performance?
- What did you hear?
- Recount the story of the ballet.

Analyze

- How was the story told?
- How did the dancing help you understand the action?
- Was there any use of pantomime? Did it help you understand the action?
- Who were the main characters?
- Did their costumes or dancing help you understand who they were?
- What did the characters do? How did they relate to one another?
- How did dance and/or pantomime help you understand this?

Interpret

- How did The Nutcracker make you feel?
- Did it remind you of other experiences (at the theater or movies)?

Judge

- How would you judge the Nutcracker-was it a successful or unsuccessful performance? (Was it good or bad?) Explain.
- Compare it to other successful/unsuccessful (good/bad) performances/movies. Explain what worked/didn't work.
- Which is the more satisfying story: the book or the ballet? Explain.
- Would you recommend the ballet performance to a friend or relative? Why or why not? (Should this person read the book first? Why or why not?)

**Use in the music curriculum
(audio cd of Tchaikovsky)**

Music Appreciation: Play some of the music from the The Nutcracker. There is a splendid banquet featuring many of Tchaikovsky's most familiar melodies: Tea, Coffee, Chocolate, Trepak (Russian), and the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. Note how each song at the feast is connected to a different country and how the various styles, rhythms, and instruments help to set the mood. Ask students to look for the different styles of movement and costumes when they attend the performance.

Listen and Participate:

Using a CD, play a portion of The Waltz of the Flowers from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite. Have the children close their eyes and listen carefully to the music. Then ask them to move their hands in time to the music.

Dance and Pretend:

Play portions of the music again and have the children move around the room pretending that they are flowers. Show them a basic waltz step as they move in time to the music. Encourage them to twirl and hold their arms out like ballet dancers.

The Nutcracker Composer *Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky*



Few composers are more popular with audiences than Tchaikovsky; the reasons are several and understandable. His music is extremely tuneful, luxuriously and colourfully scored, and filled with emotional fervour directed to the heart rather than to the head.

Piotr (Pyotr) Tchaikovsky was born on April 25, 1840 or in Votkinsk, a small town in Russia, the son of a mining engineer in the government mines and his wife, Alexandra, a Russian woman of French ancestry. Musically precocious, Pyotr began piano lessons at the age of five. In 1850, his father was appointed director of the St. Petersburg Technological Institute. There, the young Tchaikovsky obtained an excellent general education at the School of Jurisprudence, and furthered his instruction on the piano. When his mother died of cholera in 1854, the 14-year-old composed a waltz in her memory.

Tchaikovsky left school in 1858 and received employment as an under-secretary in the Ministry of Justice. From 1862 to 1865, Tchaikovsky studied instrumentation and composition under the director and founder of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Anton Rubinstein, who was both impressed by and envious of Tchaikovsky's talent.

Tchaikovsky visited America in 1891 in a triumphant tour to conduct performances of his works. On May 5, he conducted the New York Music Society's orchestra in a performance of *Marche Solennelle* on the opening night of New York's Carnegie Hall. The US tour also included performances of his First Piano Concerto and *Serenade for Strings*.

Just nine days after the first performance of his Sixth Symphony, *Pathétique*, in 1893, in St Petersburg, Tchaikovsky died.

Ballets

Tchaikovsky is best known for his ballets and symphonies, although it was only in his last years, with his last two ballets, that he was appreciated as a ballet music composer.

1875–1876: Swan Lake

Tchaikovsky's first ballet, it was first performed at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow in 1877. It was not until 1895, in a revival by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov that the ballet was presented in the definitive version it is still danced in today.

1888–1889: Sleeping Beauty

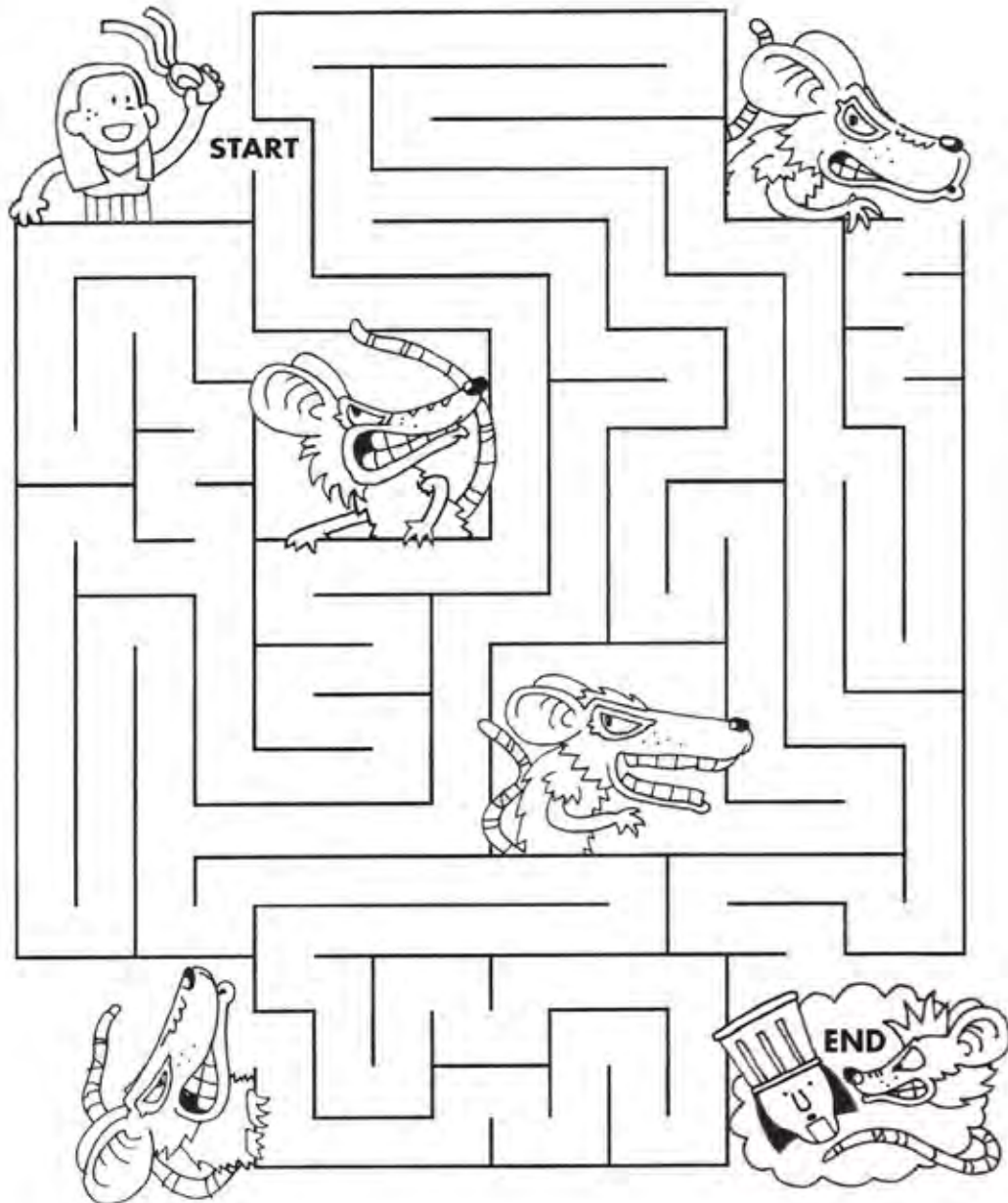
This work Tchaikovsky considered to be one of his best. Commissioned by the director of the Imperial Theatres, Ivan Vsevolozhsky, its first performance was in January, 1890 at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg.

1891–1892: The Nutcracker

Tchaikovsky accepted the commission granted by Ivan Vsevolozhsky, he did not particularly want to write it (though he did write to a friend while composing the ballet: "I am daily becoming more and more attuned to my task.") This ballet premiered on a double-bill with his last opera, *Iolanta*. Among other things, the score of Nutcracker is noted for its use of the celesta. Although well-known in Nutcracker as the featured solo instrument in the "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" from Act II, it is employed elsewhere in the same act. Note: This was the only ballet from which Tchaikovsky himself derived a suite. The Nutcracker Suite is often mistaken by novice listeners as the ballet itself, but it consists of only eight selections from the score intended for concert performance.

THE NUTCRACKER MAZE

The Nutcracker doll is locked in combat with the fearsome King Rat. Help Clara find her way across the floor to help her friend, avoiding all the other rats as you go!





NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Nutcracker Ballet

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

ANGELS
ARABIAN
BALLET
CHINESE
CLARA
DOLLS
DROSSELMEYER
FRITZ
MOUSEQUEEN
NUTCRACKER
PARTY
RUSSIAN
SNOW
SOLDIERS
SPANISH
SUGARPLUMFAIRY
TCHAIKOVSKY

Nutcracker Ballet

Lisa Kriese-Anderson

Terms used in Nutcracker Ballet and associated story

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

Arabian
Costumes
Godfather
Nutcracker
Spotlight

Audience
Dolls
Hoffman
Pantomime
Tchaikovsky

Ballet
Drop
Leotard
Russian
Tutu

Clara
Fritz
Marzipan
Snow
Waltz