



## *Nutcracker Educator's Guide*



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# LETTER TO THE EDUCATOR

Dear Educators,

Welcome and thank you for joining Ballet Virginia for our annual student matinee performances of “The Nutcracker”. Our dancers, directors, faculty and our team of volunteers have been working hard to create a fantastic performance and theater experience.

We appreciate that you have taken the time to plan for, organize and execute a visit to the Sandler Center to see Ballet Virginia. We also know that classroom time is precious so, we hope that this packet ensures your adventure with Ballet Virginia’s Nutcracker is enriching and educational for all. This packet allows you to choose what best meets your needs and includes background information, a variety of specifically developed activities and a list of available resources that can be used in the classroom before and after the performance. We believe an arts education is an invaluable aspect of learning, development and growth and strive daily to contribute a quality arts education for the Hampton Roads community.

We look forward to seeing you and your students at our annual Student Matinee Performances to share in this classic holiday tradition. Please let us know how we can help you engage, connect and explore the arts with your students. We appreciate your feedback.

Thank you for your commitment to incorporating the arts into your curriculum. We also thank you for your support of Ballet Virginia, Hampton Roads very own regional ballet company.

Sincerely,

Ballet Virginia

balletvirginia.org  
757-446-1401

# WHO IS BALLET VIRGINIA?

Ballet Virginia has grown tremendously in the past few years. We have become a busy place with ten professional dancers and two academy locations with students ranging in age from 18 months to adult. Whether a student dancer in our academy plans to become a professional or dances for exercise and recreation, the benefits of an arts education will carry with them through life as it develops a strong work ethic, focus, dedication, and resilience.

Ballet Virginia instructors are dedicated to bringing their students to the highest technical and artistic level possible. We specialize in a diverse ballet syllabus and this solid technical base ensures added success in classical ballet technique, pointe, modern, contemporary, partnering, tap, and character classes. Ballet Virginia is proud of our unique offerings that expand our range of instruction to our community at large. Each instructor's motivation is to nurture their students natural desire to dance, from the curious 18-month-old to the active adult. Musicality and artistry are developed joyously in our supportive environment. Like-minded students are part of a positive environment that will provide wonderful memories and life-long friendships.

In addition to Ballet Virginia's academy year classes, we offer several performing opportunities. Through auditions, students may be chosen to perform in the timeless holiday classic "The Nutcracker", and our spring classic story book ballet which changes every year.

Ballet Virginia is committed to our mission to foster a lifelong passion for dance through nurturing education, invigorating performances, and artistic excellence. In this capacity, it is our vision to enrich the lives of all Hampton Roads residents through dance. We believe that diversity, equity and inclusion allow for more meaningful experiences, and that dance provides an opportunity to bring people of all backgrounds together to create a community that is richer, stronger and more innovative.

We cherish the Hampton Roads community and are grateful for your continued support in bringing the high-quality ballet programming to the area.

# THE THEATER

Ballet Virginia is a Resident Company of the Sandler Center for The Performing Arts in Virginia Beach. Ballet Virginia has been performing *The Nutcracker* at the Sandler Center since 2009.

In 2001, local emerging and long-standing arts organizations realized there were limited facilities to meet their needs. These groups wanted access to a well-equipped facility with rehearsal and teaching spaces, reservation scheduling, and reasonable rates. Thus, the Sandler Center was born. The theatre was completed and dedicated in November 2007. It is now heralded as one of the region's most stunning structures as well as one of the nation's most acoustically sound venues for the arts.

## THEATER ETIQUETTE

To better appreciate the theater experience, students need to know the behavior expected from them. The following suggestions are offered to teachers to share with their students before they see the ballet. We've also included some links from The Kennedy Center for the Arts ArtsEdge online program about what to expect before, after and during your visit to the theater.

1. Please arrive on time so that everyone can be seated before the performance begins. This may be the first time for some students to be in a performance hall so you may want to point out special features such as the lobby, rest rooms, orchestra pit, the house or main curtain and emergency exits.
2. Have your group enter and exit in an organized manner. There will be ushers to direct you to your seats.
3. Let the students know that whispering or talking during the performance makes it harder for the performers to do a good job. At the same time, let them know that natural responses such as laughter or sadness can be a part of the story ballet experience. The artists on stage will be trying to communicate feelings as well as ideas to the audience.
4. Most performances have an intermission. Students should use this time to share comments about what they have seen, use the rest room, etc. Please be sure they are in their seats before the performance begins again.
5. NO CAMERAS. A flash from a camera may temporarily blind a performer and can cause an injury.
6. APPLAUSE! Let the artists on stage know you like what they do. If you see a movement you think is really spectacular, let them know by clapping. Clapping is the audience's way of saying, "thank you, we enjoyed it." Performers work long, hard hours to prepare for the program you see. Applause makes it all worthwhile.

## USEFUL LINKS

Ballet and Music

For Elementary School Audiences

<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/lessons-and-activities/lessons/3-5/ballet-and-classical-music/>

Dance your Feelings

For All Ages

<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/lessons-and-activities/lessons/3-5/ballet-and-classical-music/>

Storytelling through Dance

Grades 3 through 6

<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/lessons-and-activities/lessons/3-5/storytelling-through-dance/>

Butterflies Life Cycle Dance

Grades K through 2

<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/lessons-and-activities/lessons/k-2/butterfly-life-cycle-dance/>

Biography with recordings of various Tchaikovsky works

<http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/tchaikovsky.php>

Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre: A Brief History of Ballet

<http://www.pbt.org/community-engagement/brief-history-ballet>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History: Ballet

[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/balt/hd\\_balt.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/balt/hd_balt.htm)

# CHARACTERS

## Party Scene

Clara Stahlbaum - The main character who receives the magical Nutcracker doll

Fritz Stahlbaum - Clara's mischievous brother

Mr. & Mrs. Stahlbaum - Clara's parents and hosts of the party

Drosselmeyer - Clara's magical Godfather

Party Guests and Children

Ballerina Doll & Harlequin Doll - Magical entertainment for the party

## Battle Scene

Little Mice

Nutcracker Soldiers

Rat King

Rats

Nutcracker Prince

Dream Clara

## Snow Scene

Snow Queen

Snowflakes

## Journey Scene

Garden Sprites

Gardenias

## Lands

Spain - King, Queen, Princess

Arabia - Prince, Princess, Attendants

China - Emperor, Empress, Princesses, Ribbon Dancers

France - Marzipan

Russia - King, Queen, Folk Dancers

Armenia - Ginger Snaps, Cooks

South Pacific - Flowers, Gardenias, Flashback Rat King, Flashback Nutcracker, Dew Drops,

Sugar Plum Fairy, Cavalier



# HISTORY OF *THE NUTCRACKER*

## History of the Nutcracker Ballet

By Treva Bedinghaus

<http://dance.about.com/od/famousballets/a/Nutcracker.htm>

Over 100 years old, The Nutcracker Ballet was first presented at the Marinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia, on December 17, 1892. Peter Tchaikovsky, the famous Russian composer, was commissioned by mastermind choreographer Marius Petipa to compose the ballet, score based on Alexandre Dumas' s adaptation of E .T.A. Hoffman' s tale " The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." Tchaikovsky and Petipa had previously worked together on another classical ballet, "Sleeping Beauty".

The first production of The Nutcracker was a failure. Neither the critics nor the audience liked it. Even though Czar Alexander III was delighted with the ballet, The Nutcracker was not an instant success. However, the ballet gained popularity with future productions, especially in the United States.

The first performance of The Nutcracker in the United States was by the San Francisco Opera Ballet, in 1944. The production was directed by William Christensen. However, by changing a few characters, choreographer George Balanchine brought new life to The Nutcracker. His 1954 production for the New York City Ballet popularized the ballet, establishing it as a holiday tradition. Many of the versions of The Nutcracker performed today are based on the version created by George Balanchine.



# THE COMPOSER

Piotr (or Peter, as we would say in English) Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk, a town in Russia's Ural Mountains. When he was 8 years old, his family moved to the capital city of St. Petersburg. Even though Tchaikovsky was a good musician as a kid, that wasn't considered an "acceptable" profession, so his parents made him study law instead.

But even in law school, Tchaikovsky continued to study music. Eventually, he gave up his legal job and went to the St. Petersburg Conservatory. After he graduated, he moved to Moscow to teach at the new conservatory there. It's now named for him.

For years, Tchaikovsky had a patroness named Nadezhda von Meck -- a wealthy widow who was a big fan of Tchaikovsky's music. She regularly sent him money so that he could concentrate on composing without having to worry about making a living. But Nadezhda von Meck didn't want to meet Tchaikovsky. For 14 years, they only communicated by writing letters to each other. Tchaikovsky dedicated his Fourth Symphony to his patroness.

Tchaikovsky travelled all over Europe for performances of his music. In 1891, he came to America for the opening of Carnegie Hall, where he was invited to conduct his music.

SOURCE: [www.classforkids.org](http://www.classforkids.org)

# HISTORY OF BALLET

Ballet had its beginnings in Italy during the Renaissance and from there was brought to France. In its beginnings, ballet was a form of entertainment for the nobility and male dancers were more prominent. The 1800s ushered in the period of Romantic ballet, where dancing on pointe began and women became the prominent dancers.

In this period, classic story ballets, such as Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, and The Nutcracker were created. A century later, the Ballet Russes began and more emphasis was placed on expressiveness and technique. Throughout the 1900s many professional ballet companies were formed in Russia, Europe and the United States. Today, ballet is evolving and changing as it strives towards diversity, equity and inclusion.

# SYNOPSIS OF THE NUTCRACKER

## ACT I

The Stahlbaum family is hosting their annual Christmas Eve party, welcoming the arrival of their family and friends. The party grows festive with the music and dance as Godfather Drosselmeyer arrives. All of the children gather around to see the presents made especially for them. There are drums, whistles, a teddy bear, and dolls. Later, for his precious Clara, Drosselmeyer gifts her the Nutcracker doll. She loves her doll and dances with him all around the house until her brother Fritz grabs the Nutcracker and breaks it. Drosselmeyer mends the Nutcracker and through his mysterious powers, grants Clara her own magical dream.

After the guests have gone home, Clara tiptoes downstairs to dance with her Nutcracker. She falls asleep and awakens in her dream to an army of mice and rats! Drosselmeyer enters and sends them away and a strange transformation occurs. Clara seems to shrink as the beautiful Christmas tree grows larger. Suddenly, the Nutcracker comes to life leading his soldiers into battle with the rats and their fierce Rat King, who had cursed the Prince by turning him into a wooden doll.

Although now brought back to life by Drosselmeyer, the Nutcracker seems to be no match for the Rat King. He and his army are captured by the rats and their king. Clara makes a final daring charge by throwing her slipper at the Rat King, which gives the Nutcracker a chance to overcome him. Now the spell that had cursed her beloved Nutcracker is lifted and the Rat King is banished forever. Clara turns to discover that her Nutcracker has been transformed into a handsome Prince and she has grown into a beautiful Princess. They set off on a journey to the Land of Snow, an enchanted forest wonderland where they are welcomed by dancing snowflakes and the Snow Queen.

## ACT II

Drosselmeyer sends Dream Clara and the Prince around the world. The young couple are greeted by Kings and Queens and Clara is gifted a flower from each land. Their adventure leads them finally to the beautiful land of Flowers, where they meet the Sugar Plum Garden Fairy and her Cavalier as they retell the story of their bravery. Dream Clara and her Prince are given a seat on the throne and entertained by the Sugar Plum Garden Fairy and Cavalier. As her journey comes to a close, the characters join in one final celebration. Clara is then told that she has been asleep and this has all been a dream. Heartbroken, Clara bids farewell to her handsome Prince and Drosselmeyer magically transforms Dream Clara back into a young girl. He carries her to the safety of her home where she is reunited with her Nutcracker Doll and the memory of her dream that she will forever treasure.



# BASIC BALLET POSITIONS

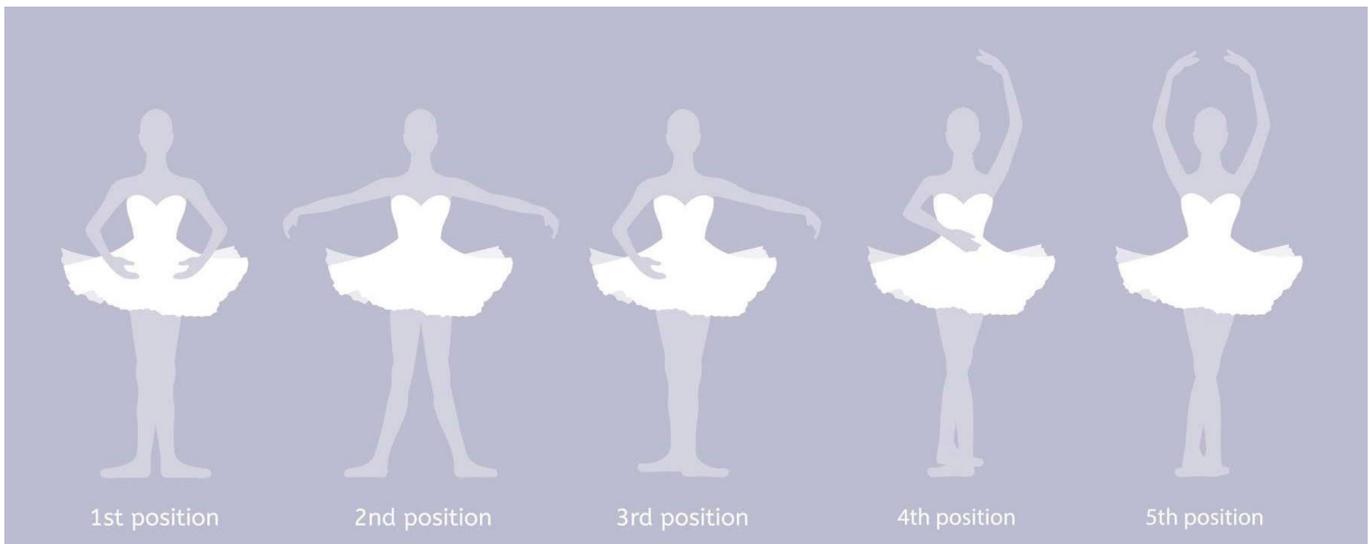
First Position - The toes are turned out away from the body. The heels touch each other and the feet face outward.

Second Position - The toes are turned out away from the body with the heels separated by the length of one foot. Similar to first position, but the feet are spread apart.

Third Position - One foot is in front of the other with the front foot touching the middle of the back foot.

Fourth Position - The feet are placed the same as third position, but one step apart.

Fifth Position - With both feet touching, the toes of each foot reach the heel of the other.



Pirouette - The pirouette, a spin around on one foot, is one of the most difficult of all dance steps. To do a pirouette, you must make a complete turn, while balancing on one foot. A pirouette may be performed en dehors (turning away from the supporting leg) or en dedans (turning toward the supporting leg). Pirouettes usually begin in fourth, fifth or second position.

Bourrée - A classical ballet movement in which the dancer glides across the floor on pointe or demi-pointe with tiny steps.

Grand Jete – This is a big leap where the dancer tries to make a split in the air.

Pas de Deux - Pas de Deux is French for “Step of Two” and is what partnering is called in ballet.

# BALLET & DANCE VOCABULARY

**Aesthetic criteria** – Standards applied in making judgments about the artistic merit of a work.

**Accent** – A strong movement or gesture.

**Balance** – A state of equilibrium referring to the balance of weight or the spatial arrangement of bodies.

**Ballet** – A classical Western dance form that originated in the Renaissance courts of Europe. By the time of Louis XIV (mid-1600s), steps and body positions underwent codification.

**Barre** – The place where a dancer goes to begin their class work. The barre is a long horizontal pole that gives the dancer support. After the dancer has done barre work to warm up, they will move to the center the classroom or studio to practice increasingly complex steps.

**Choreography** – (“dance writing”) The creation and composition of dances by arranging or inventing steps, movements, and patterns of movements.

**Composer** – one who writes music.

**Corps de ballet** – A group of dancers who work together as an ensemble. They form the background for the principal dancers and are the backbone of any ballet company.

**Dance Sequence** – The order in which a series of movements and shapes occurs.

**Divertissements** – Consist of a variety of short dances inserted in certain ballets as entertainment.

**Genre** – A particular kind or style of dance, such as ballet, jazz, modern, folk or tap.

**Gesture** – The movement of a body part or combination of parts, with emphasis on the expressive aspects of the movement. It includes all movements of the body that are not supporting weight.

**Libretto** – The text on which a ballet is choreographed; the story of a ballet.

**Motif** – A distinctive and recurring gesture used to provide a theme or unifying idea.

**Pantomime** – The art of telling a story, expressing a mood or an emotion or describing an action without words.

SOURCE: Inland Pacific Ballet

# ACTIVITIES

These activities have been chosen to align with the following Virginia Standards of Learning for English:

K.1-.3, K.5-.6, K.8-.10, K.12-.13; 1.1-.3, 1.5, 1.7-.10, 1.12-.13

2.1-.3, 2.6-.8, 2.12-.13; 3.1, 3.3-.5, 3.7, 3.9-.10, 3.12

4.1, 4.4-4.8; 5.4-.8

6.2, 6.5-6.9; 7.1, 7.5-7.9; 8.2, 8.5-8.9

## Discussion/Writing Prompts:

1. Would you rather be a Rat or a Soldier? Why?
2. Which was your favorite Land? What did you like most about that Land? Was it the costumes, the music, the dancing, the characters, or a combination of the above list? Why?
3. What so you think the next day was like for Clara?
4. Did the costumes tell you who the characters were? How?
5. How did the sound of the music help you to understand what was happening on stage?
6. What was your favorite part/character of the ballet? Why?
7. Was there any part of the ballet that you did not like? Why?

## Writing Activities

1. Choose a main character from the Party Scene or Battle Scene. Write the story of the party and/or battle from that character's point of view. Present your story to the class.
2. Research a famous choreographer. How has their work impacted American ballet? Present your research to the class. Some ideas are: Alvin Ailey, George Balanchine, Katherine Dunham, Bob Fosse, Martha Graham, Justin Peck or Alexei Ratmansky.



# READING/WRITING ACTIVITY

1. Before attending the performance, read *The Nutcracker* story with your class.

2. Discuss some of the following with your students to help them prepare a story map listing the main characters, setting, and events of the story.

- Where does the story take place?
- When does it take place?
- Who is the main character of the story?
- How would you describe the main character?
- Who are some of the other characters?
- How would you describe the other characters? 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 Clara's bravery and the Prince's return?
- How does the story end?

3. Have students respond to one or some of the following writing/discussion prompts.

- 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...

4. After attending the ballet, using a Venn diagram, have your students compare and contrast the Nutcracker story version they read and Ballet Virginia's version.

# FILL IN THE BLANK

## The Nutcracker Act I

Fill in the blanks with the words from the Word Bank shown below.

Clara's \_\_\_\_\_ begin to shake and she wakes up to see the \_\_\_\_\_  
grow. Toys have come to life and an \_\_\_\_\_ group of mice enter the room.  
The horrible \_\_\_\_\_ challenges the Nutcracker to fight, but Clara saves  
the Nutcracker by conquering the Mouse King with her \_\_\_\_\_. The  
Nutcracker is transformed into a \_\_\_\_\_ who takes Clara on a fantastic  
\_\_\_\_\_ where they encounter the Snowflakes and the \_\_\_\_\_  
with whom they dance. The Snow Queen gives them a beautiful \_\_\_\_\_  
that will carry Clara and the Nutcracker to see the \_\_\_\_\_ in the  
Land of Sweets.

## Word Bank

Mouse King   pillows   Clara   magical   evil   Snow Queen   slipper  
Sugar Plum Fairy   Nutcracker   sleigh   Prince   journey   Christmas Tree



# NUTCRACKER WORD SEARCH

See if you can find all of the words.

Words are horizontal, diagonal and backwards!

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

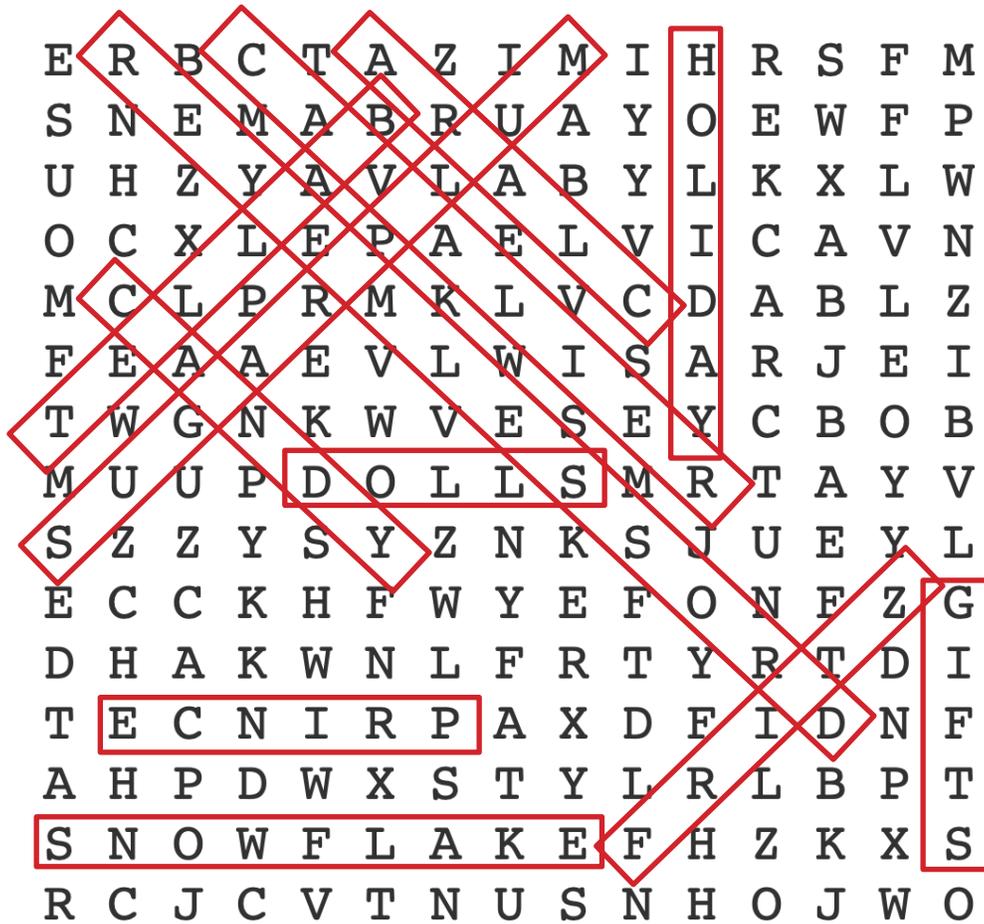
BALLET CANDY CAVALIER CLARA DOLLS DROSSELMEYER FRITZ

GIFTS HOLIDAY MOUSE NUTCRACKER PRINCE SNOWFLAKE SUGARPLUM

# NUTCRACKER WORD SEARCH KEY

Print this word search and see if you can find all of the words.

Words are horizontal, diagonal and backwards!



BALLET CANDY CAVALIER CLARA DOLLS DROSSELMAYER FRITZ

GIFTS HOLIDAY MOUSE NUTCRACKER PRINCE SNOWFLAKE SUGARPLUM

# WORD SCRAMBLE

Unscramble the list of words below. Answers are at the bottom of the page.

1. SATHMARIC

The name of the holiday celebrated in this ballet.

2. RABER

A handrail that dancers hold onto during ballet class.

3. ESSETW

Clara and the Prince travel to the Land of\_\_\_\_\_.

4. RAMSORDEYSEL

The mysterious man who gives Clara the Nutcracker.

5. ZITRF

Clara's mischievous brother.

6. RASGU MULP YFRIA

She lives in a fantasy land filled with candy.

7. TRUKARECCN

A famous ballet performed during the holiday season.

8. SMEOU NKIG

The Nutcracker has a fight with this furry animal.

9. LWFSOEkNA

They dance around Clara and the Nutcracker prince as they begin their adventures.

10. KAHVSTOYCIK

Russian Composer who wrote the music for The Nutcracker

ANSWERS:

1. CHRISTMAS 2. BARRE 3. SWEETS 4. DROSSELMEYER 5. FRITZ 6. SUGAR PLUM FAIRY

7. NUTCRACKER 8. MOUSE 9. SNOWFLAKES 10. TCHAIKOVSKY

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## Books

*Becoming a Ballerina: A Nutcracker Story Starring the Dancers of the Boston Ballet* by Lise Friedman Duke  
*Ellington's Nutcracker Suite* by Anna Harwell Celenza (includes music CD)

## Websites

Lesson: Telling a Story through Dance

[http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/lessons/grade-3-4/Telling\\_a\\_Story\\_Dance](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/lessons/grade-3-4/Telling_a_Story_Dance)

Ballet Dictionary

<https://www.abt.org/explore/learn/ballet-dictionary/>

The Kennedy Center ArtsEdge: Gear Pointe Shoes

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/students/features/gear/pointe-shoe>



# WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We would love for you to share your Ballet Virginia Nutcracker experience with us.

Here is how:

- Write a letter to one of the dancers or characters.
- Write a letter telling us what you thought of the ballet or about your favorite part of the ballet.
- Draw a picture of your favorite scene from the ballet.

Be sure to include your name, grade, and name of your school!

Please send your work to us at:

## **Ballet Virginia**

700 West 21 Street  
Norfolk, VA 23517

