

The Nutcracker

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY GUIDE for TEACHERS

Language Arts

Lesson Description:

Using *The Nutcracker* as a model, students will explore various components of Fairy Tales. Because of the worldwide ubiquity of fairy tales, their imagery and tropes have had a vast impact on many different forms of literature. The elements and echoes of fairy tales are alive in plays, movies, and books for all ages.

Students should read and learn to understand fairy tales so that they can better comprehend the structures of literature as well as for the sake of the wonder, pleasure, and human understanding these stories can provide in their own right.

Essential Questions:

This lesson will answer the questions, “What is a fairy tale? What are some special characteristics of fairy tales? What kinds of plots, characters, and settings do we expect to find in these stories? What makes each fairy tale unique? Why are fairy tales so prevalent as a form of storytelling throughout the world?”

Learning Objective:

The student will identify traits of a fairy tale, as well as know the meaning of “plot” and “character” using the *Nutcracker* story.

Materials:

- KWL chart
- Book about *The Nutcracker*- age appropriate version by E.T.A. Hoffmann
- Computer with Internet access. Website: <http://www.andersenfairytale.com/en/main>
- Chart paper
- Pencils and crayons or markers
- Vocabulary list (as needed)
- Globe or map of Germany

Lesson:

Introduce, explain and discuss vocabulary words (as needed) with students. Note that the setting of this fairy tale is in Germany and use globe or map to identify Germany and discuss its location in relation to where the U.S.A. is located.

The teacher will start a KWL chart on fairy tales.

The teacher will elicit from the students what they know about fairy tales. A fairy tale is a story that deals with fantasy. Many times there is a dream sequence or an altered state of reality used to solve a character’s problem, which will be noted as the solution of the problem in the story.

Emphasize that a fairy tale is like other stories in that it has characters, setting, problems and solutions. Discuss each of the four terms with students. The students should also be able to identify other notable fairy tales (Cinderella,

Sleeping Beauty, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, etc).

The teacher will write all that the students know under the K section of the KWL chart and write what the students want to learn under the W section of the KWL chart.

The teacher will read *The Nutcracker* by E.T.A. Hoffmann to the students or have a guest read the book to the students.

The teacher will discuss the elements of this story, identifying the setting, plot and characters with the students. With the students, the teacher will then complete as much of the L section of the KWL chart as possible.

The teacher will have students in groups of threes and have them describe the setting, plot and two main characters in the story of *The Nutcracker*. Each student in each group should be assigned to complete one section.

Review:

The teacher will ask each group to share their written summaries with the class.

Teacher will prompt other students to ask questions as students read their group summaries.

Social Studies

Learning Objective:

Students will be able to identify the origins of ballet and compare ballet to the dance styles of other cultures.

Materials:

- Book that covers history of ballet, such as *Ballet*, by Kate Castle (Kingfisher, 1996)
- Or YouTube Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mwv5rekkWDE>
- Or Slide Show: <http://bit.ly/aX1kJH>
- Video showing ballet: <http://bit.ly/9c4Muz>
- Videos showing dances from other cultures:
- China: <http://bit.ly/bCNXim>
- <http://bit.ly/cLPwTi>
- Russia: <http://bit.ly/avFXEr>
- Spain: <http://bit.ly/nrgPK>
- Palestine: <http://bit.ly/cikMyT>
- Native American: <http://bit.ly/2KlGbp>
- Argentina: <http://bit.ly/E3fPR>
- Africa: <http://bit.ly/yEnJp>
- Ireland: <http://bit.ly/4uHRfS>

Lesson:

Ballet is loved worldwide, but where did it start? Read book or show video or slide show. Discuss the information with the students to check for understanding.

Show video of ballet dancers. What words can we use to describe ballet? Write on a chart.

The Nutcracker has dances that are supposed to represent folk dances from other countries. Now we will see some actual traditional dances from those countries. Show videos for China, Russia, Spain, and Palestine. After each one, ask students for words to describe that dance.

Let's look at some dances from other countries. Follow same procedure as above.

As far back as history goes, humans have loved to dance. Why do we dance?

From the videos we saw, what was your favorite dance? Why?

Let's compare ballet and the other dances. On our chart, we wrote words to describe each dance. Which dances were most similar? How were they different?

How is ballet similar to other traditional dances? How is it different?

Students can make their own comparison charts, too. Or have students gather photos of each dance and information about the dance and the country of origin to put into a global dance booklet.

Science, Health, and Math

Learning Objectives:

Students will learn how muscles work, and how dancers use muscles, and they will measure and graph how far each student can jump when doing a ballet *grand jeté*.

Materials:

- Video on the muscular system: <http://bit.ly/bmztss>
- Video showing a grand jeté: <http://bit.ly/9vkNxG>
- Video of ballet dancer interview: <http://bit.ly/a5jfO0>
- Large, open room
- Masking tape
- Measuring tape
- Graph paper
- A diagram worksheet showing the major muscle groups
- Pencils
- Paper

Lesson:

There's more to ballet than just pretty costumes and elegant dance moves. Each step—even something as simple as pointing your toe in a tendu requires strong muscles and great control. Ballet

dancers have such well-developed muscles that they can leap into the air and seem to hang there. Their muscles allow them to balance, to twirl, to jump, and to bend. Ballet dancers' muscles are trained to be quick and agile. In fact, many other kinds of athletes, such as football players and soccer players, often take ballet lessons because it helps them become stronger and to move quicker without injury.

Show video of ballet dancer interview.

Male ballet dancers have to be especially strong in order to do all the high leaps and to lift their partners into the air. Their muscles are very strong and they learn to control every last one of them.

So let's find out how muscles work. Show muscular system video.

Have students fill out muscle worksheet. What muscles do you think the dancer in the interview was using for his jumps? To lift his partner? What do you think he does to keep his muscles strong and healthy?

Show video of the grand jeté.

We are going to try a grand jeté. (Let students practice.) What muscles did you feel working? Do you think those muscles were extending or contracting?

Let's measure and graph how far everyone can do their grand jeté.

Put the masking tape down on the floor as a jump line. Set it far enough into the room that the students can get a running start behind it. Have a student assigned to spot where each student lands. Measure the grand jeté from the masking tape to that spot and record the measurement.

Students will create a bar graph showing the length each student jumped.

Students may want to work on basic statistics, such as finding the average length (mean), or the most common length (mode), etc.

Discuss other factors other than muscle strength that might contribute to how far a person jumps, such as height, speed, etc. Did the taller students in the class jump farther? What about the ones who ran faster?

As we watch the performance of the Nutcracker, be thinking about all the muscles those dancers are using and how strong they must be. What can we do to keep our own muscles healthy and strong?

Additional Activities

- 1. Have students pretend to be journalists and write a review of the performance. Encourage them to use some of the ballet terms listed in this guide.
- 2. Practice writing friendly and thank-you letters by writing to the dancers—they'll love to hear from you.
- 3. Discuss with students how the performance was different from what they expected. What parts did they like/dislike? Would they want to go to a ballet performance in the future? What did they learn?
- 4. Have students draw, paint or color a scene that they liked best.
- 5. Discuss the similarities and differences of the ballet performance and theater to other performances students may have been to such as a movie, a sports event, a rock concert, or a school play. What are the differences between a live performance and one on television or video?