

THE NUTCRACKER

Grade Level: First Grade Music
Presented by: Sue Brownson, Elbert County Charter School
Length of Unit: Six Lessons

I. ABSTRACT

- A. This unit will focus on the ballet “The Nutcracker” by Peter Tchaikovsky. In this unit, the students will learn that a ballet is a story told in dance. They will recognize melodies that occur during the ballet and will be able to demonstrate beat and accent through body movement. The students will experience the Nutcracker by using multi media options for various learning styles.

II. OVERVIEW

A. Concept Objectives

1. Learn that stories can be told verbally, musically, and through physical movement.
2. Instill an appreciation for Ballet and Music as a pure expression of dreams and emotions.

B. Content

1. The Nutcracker Story as it is told in music and written form.
2. Elements of Music
 - a. Steady beat and accents
 - b. Move responsively to music
 - c. Discriminate between fast and slow

C. Skills Objectives

1. The students will be able to recognize various melodies from the Nutcracker.
2. The students will be able to identify stress and accent through body movement to various melodies.
3. The students will act out the drama of the Nutcracker in a one-act play.

III. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

A. For the teacher

1. *The New College Encyclopedia of Music* J. Westrup and F. Ll. Harrison
2. *A History of Western Music*. Grout
3. *The Music Teacher’s Almanac*. Mitchell

B. For the students

1. The students have discussed what a composer is at the Kindergarten level. We will build upon this knowledge as we explore the life of Tchaikovsky.

IV. RESOURCES

- A. *The New College Encyclopedia of Music*. Westrup
- B. *A History of Western Music*. Grout
- C. *Tchaikovsky , Famous Children Series* Rachlin.
- D. *The Illustrated Book of Ballet Stories*. Newman

V. LESSONS

Lesson One: Move Responsively to Music

A. Daily Objectives

1. **Lesson Content**

- a. Selections from “The Nutcracker Suite”: The Chinese Dance and the Russian Dance
 - 2. **Concept Objectives**
 - a. Learn that stories can be told verbally, musically, and through physical movement.
 - 3. **Skill Objectives**
 - a. Identify the beat and heavy accent in music.
 - b. Move responsively to music.
 - c. Identify the Chinese Dance and the Russian Dance from the Nutcracker.
- B. **Materials**
 - 1. Tape recorder
 - 2. Recording of the Nutcracker
- C. **Background Notes**
 - 1. Review the definition of composer as one who writes music. Introduce the term “ballet”. Briefly introduce the country of Russia. The teacher will show the country of Russia on a globe or map in relation to the students’ home state.
- D. **Key Vocabulary**
 - 1. Ballet- A dramatic entertainment presented by dancers in costume with musical accompaniment.
 - 2. Tchaikovsky-Russian composer of the Romance period of music.
 - 3. Beat-The unit of measurement in music.
 - 4. Accent-The special emphasis on a beat.
- E. **Procedures/Activities**
 - 1. The teacher will introduce the vocabulary at the beginning of the lecture with a brief description of each word. The teacher will play a recording of the Chinese Dance and instruct the students to listen for the “short” sounds played by the violins.
 - 2. Students will then “tip-toe” on the staccato sections in the strings. They will “freeze” on the long sections.
 - 3. The teacher will play the Russian Dance from the Nutcracker.
 - 4. The students will pretend to set up an easel and canvas. They will throw paint onto the canvas (pretending) on the strong accents. They will scrub paint into the canvas on the long sections. During the mid section of the song, the students will walk around and think how they can make their painting better. They will then resume the throws and scrubbing.
 - 5. The students will stand still and become a canvas. They will then pretend to have paint thrown on them at the accent. They will then wiggle as the paint is scrubbed into them during the long sections. They will rest in the mid section as the “painter” takes a break. They will resume the throws and wiggles.
- F. **Evaluation/Assessment**
 - 1. These activities will be repeated several times during the school year. The teacher will assess visually the student’s body response to beat and accents.

Lesson Two: Move Responsively to Music, Day 2

- A. **Daily Objectives**
 - 1. **Lesson Content**
 - a. Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy from the Nutcracker
 - 2. **Concept Objectives**

- a. Learn that stories can be told verbally, musically, and through physical movement.
 - 3. **Skill Objectives**
 - a. Move responsively to music.
 - b. Discriminate between fast and slow.
- B. **Materials**
 - 1. Tape Recorder
 - 2. Recording of the Nutcracker
 - 3. Rhythm Instruments
 - 4. Scarves
- C. **Background Notes**
 - 1. Listen to the Dance of the SugarPlum Fairy to be familiar with the musical changes.
- D. **Key Vocabulary**
 - 1. Sugar plum-A plum that has been dried and is coated in sugar.
 - 2. Fairy-A mythical small being which is able to fly.
 - 3. Tempo-“Time”. The pace of a composition.
- E. **Procedures/Activities**
 - 1. The teacher will play a recording of the Dance of the SugarPlum Fairy. The children will listen and discuss the fast and slow sections of the music. The teacher will then introduce the vocabulary word “tempo”. The teacher will then discuss the SugarPlum Fairy using the vocabulary words.
 - 2. The teacher will ask the students to choose materials from the rhythm instruments and scarves to use as they move to a portion of the Dance as it is played again.
 - 3. Students will discuss which media was best suited for the selection.
 - 4. Students will then choose the correct media for the flow of the song and will dance to the entire song.
- F. **Evaluation/Assessment**
 - 1. The teacher will observe the students for appropriate movement to the sounds which they are hearing..

Lesson Three:Tchaikovsky

- A. **Daily Objectives**
 - 1. **Lesson Content**
 - a. *Tchaikovsky, Famous Young Composer Series*
 - 2. **Concept Objectives**
 - a. Learn that stories can be told verbally, musically, and through physical movement.
 - 3. **Skill Objectives**
 - a. *Identify the definition of composer*
 - b. *Identify Tchaikovsky as the composer of the Nutcracker*
- B. **Materials**
 - 1. *Tchaikovsky, Famous Young Composer Series*
 - 2. Tape recorder
 - 3. Recording of the Nutcracker Suite
- C. **Background Notes**
 - 1. Review the definition of composer as one who writes music.

- D. **Key Vocabulary**
1. Composer-One who writes music
 2. St. Petersburg-City in Russia to which Tchaikovsky moved and composed much of his music.
 3. Keyboard-A horizontal set of keys to produce sound on the organ, harpsichord, clavichord, and similar instruments.
- E. **Procedures/Activities**
1. The teacher will read the story of Tchaikovsky as a child. Being sure to discuss that he was talented from a very young age. The vocabulary will be covered as the book is read.
 2. The teacher will quietly play the Nutcracker in the background as the story is being read.
- F. **Evaluation/Assessment**
1. Upon completion of reading the story, the students will discuss the lifestyle of the young Tchaikovsky. Questions to ask: What happened to Tchaikovsky when his family moved? What happened to Tchaikovsky in Law School? What other ballets did he write?

Lesson Four: The Nutcracker Story

- A. **Daily Objectives**
1. **Lesson Content**
 - a. The written story of the Nutcracker
 2. **Concept Objectives**
 - a. Learn that stories can be told verbally, musically, and through physical movement.
 3. **Skill Objectives**
 - a. Identify the story of the Nutcracker
 - b. Identify the use of ballet as the story is related.
- B. **Materials**
1. *The Illustrated Book of Ballet Stories*
- C. **Background Notes**
1. Review the story prior to reading to the students.
- D. **Key Vocabulary**
1. Herr-German word for mister.
 2. Scenery-The furniture and painted cloths that establish the time and place of the action.
- E. **Procedures/Activities**
1. The teacher will read the story of the Nutcracker from the Illustrated Book of Ballet Stories.
 2. The students will listen to the story and will discuss the “music notes” found to the side of the story. These “notes” discuss specific characters and ballet moves.
- F. **Evaluation/Assessment**
1. The teacher will observe the students as they discuss the story. The teacher will listen for appropriate responses in order to glean if the students have absorbed the story.

Lesson Five: The Nutcracker Play

- A. **Daily Objectives**
 - 1. **Lesson Content**
 - a. The Nutcracker Play
 - 2. **Concept Objectives**
 - a. Learn that stories can be told verbally, musically, and through physical movement.
 - 3. **Skill Objectives**
 - a. The students will be able to recreate the story of the Nutcracker.
- B. **Materials**
 - 1. Copies of the Nutcracker Play (Appendix A)
- C. **Background Notes**
 - 1. Review the play before the students enact the story. It is suggested the teacher be the narrator.
- D. **Key Vocabulary**
 - 1. Godfather-Male who is named at the time of a child's baptism to guide and direct the child through life.
 - 2. Nutcracker- A wooden carved figure used to crack nuts.
 - 3. Mouse King-Character in the Nutcracker who is the head of the fighting mice.
- E. **Procedures/Activities**
 - 1. Prior to the play, the teacher should review the vocabulary with the students. Select children from the class to enact the various characters in the play.
 - 2. Read the play to the class.
 - 3. Enact the play. It is suggested that the play be repeated several times in order to give different children the chance to be Clara, Fritz, etc.
- F. **Evaluation/Assessment**
 - 1. The teacher will observe the class as it is presenting the play. By repeating the play, this should enable the children to become familiar with the story of the Nutcracker.

Lesson Six: The Nutcracker

- A. **Daily Objectives**
 - 1. **Lesson Content**
 - a. Video of the Nutcracker
 - 2. **Concept Objectives**
 - a. Instill an appreciation for ballet and music as a pure expression of dreams and emotions.
 - 3. **Skill Objectives**
 - a. View the story of the Nutcracker
 - b. Identify melodies from the Nutcracker
 - c. Identify Tchaikovsky as the composer of the Nutcracker
- B. **Materials**
 - 1. VCR
 - 2. Video of the Nutcracker Suite
- C. **Background Notes**
 - 1. Review the tape before viewing it with the students. Be prepared to discuss the characters as they appear.

D. Key Vocabulary

1. Classical Tutu-Woman's costume, tightly fitted around the body, with a stiff frill for a skirt.
2. Ballerina-Female ballet dancer.
3. Toe Shoes-Woman's shoe with a stiffened toe on which the dancer stands.
4. Tights-Leggings worn by ballet dancers
5. Leotard-Skin tight garment, with or without sleeves, worn for class and rehearsals.

E. Procedures/Activities

1. The students will view the Nutcracker in its entirety. This may take several class periods, dependent upon length.
2. The students will discuss characters they have seen during the ballet. During these discussions, the students will review the vocabulary words.
3. The students will then discuss whether the "magical" events that happen to Clara are real or a dream.

F. Evaluation/Assessment

1. The teacher will observe the classroom as they view the video. During the tape we will review the costuming, characters, and music. The teacher will listen for appropriate responses in order to assure that the students have understood the lessons.
2. The teacher will use the following rubric in order to determine if the students have learned all the skills and objectives.
3. Rubric for The Nutcracker
Note: 4=excellent, 3=good, 2=fair, 1=poor
Can retell the story of the Nutcracker
Knows that Tchaikovsky is the composer of the Nutcracker
Knows what a ballet is
Knows what a beat is
Knows what an accent is

VI. CULMINATING ACTIVITY

- A. Suggested activity: Have the class attend a performance of the Nutcracker. There are often numerous productions over Christmas.

VI. HANDOUTS/WORKSHEETS

- A. Appendix A: Copy of the Nutcracker Play

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- B. Westrup *The New Encyclopedia of Music* New York Norton Pub., 1960. ISBN 393 00273
- C. Mitchell *The Music Teacher's Almanac*. New York Parker Publishing Co., 1992. ISBN 0-13-605601-6
- D. Rachlin *Tchaikovsky, Famous Children Series* New York Barron's Books, 1993. ISBN 0-8120-1545-2
- E. Newman *The Illustrated Book of Ballet Stories* New York DK Publishing, 1997. ISBN 0-78970225-5
- F. *Core Knowledge Sequence* Charlottesville, VA Core Knowledge Foundation, 1998.

Appendix A

THE NUTCRACKER PLAY

(Adapted from the Music Teacher's Almanac Loretta Mitchell)

Characters: Clara, Fritz, The Godfather, Cousins, Toys, Mice, The Mouse King, The Nutcracker.

Scene I Christmas Eve. The home of Clara and Fritz. A Christmas tree is in the middle of the room.

Narrator: Clara, Fritz, and their many cousins are very excited. This is a special night, it is Christmas Eve and they are waiting for a very special guest.

Clara: Oh Fritz! I do wish our dear Godfather would hurry up and get here.

Fritz: So do I! He always brings the best presents.

(There is a knock at the door and the Godfather enters.)

Godfather: Hello children and Merry Christmas!

Clara: Come in! Come in!

Fritz: I told you he'd bring us presents!

(All the children crowd around the Godfather)

Godfather: Hold on children, hold on. There's something here for everyone. Here Susie, Jane, Joseph, and Peter. Fritz, this is for you. And Clara, you sweet child, this is for you.

Narrator: The children begin to open their presents and are amazed by what they find. They sit in the floor and play with their toys, except Clara.

Godfather: What's wrong Clara? It's a special present that I made for you.

Clara: Oh Godfather, I love it. Thank you.

Narrator: Clara steps back and reveals the wonderful Nutcracker doll that the Godfather has made for her.

Fritz: That's not fair! She got a better present than I did. Give it to me!

Narrator: Fritz runs to the Nutcracker and grabs his arm. The Nutcracker falls to the ground and is broken.

Clara: Oh no! Fritz, how could you? (She cries)

Godfather: There, there. I will make him as good as new.

Narrator: The Godfather takes out his handkerchief and lovingly wraps it around the Nutcracker. He gives the doll back to Clara.

Godfather: You'll see. He'll be well soon.

Narrator: The party is ending and the cousins are getting sleepy. They yawn and begin to say goodnight.

Clara is no longer crying but she is still very sad.

Godfather: Merry Christmas everyone and goodnight. Clara, tonight your Nutcracker will give you a magical Christmas Eve. (He winks his eye and leaves)

Narrator: The house is dark and quiet. Fritz and the cousins are asleep. Clara sits by the tree and holds her Nutcracker. Suddenly, mice begin scurrying across the floor. They try to attack the toys the cousins left under the tree. The toys come to life and try to fight off the mice.

Clara: Oh my! If only the Godfather was right about the Nutcracker being magical.

Narrator: The Nutcracker springs to life. He begins a battle with the Mouse King. The Mouse King attacks the Nutcracker. The Nutcracker falls to the ground, wounded.

Clara: Oh no. You bad mouse. Take that.

Narrator: Clara takes off her slipper and throws it at the Mouse King. He falls to the floor. The Nutcracker recovers. He stands.

Nutcracker: Thank you, Clara. The Godfather was right. He gave me special magic to take you to a wonderful kingdom. It's full of sweets and candies and a beautiful SugarPlum Fairy. Let's go there now.

Narrator: Clara and the Nutcracker walk off for a beautiful, magical evening. They enjoy all the special dances that are in their honor. In the morning, Clara awakens in her own bed. Was it real or was it a wonderful dream?