MUSIC LISTENING ABSTRACT ART
Grades K–5

Objectives:

- Students will evaluate and key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts.
- Students will evaluate and relate music to visual arts and dance.
- Students will use the elements and principles of art to create artwork.

Materials:

- Copy of *The Nutcracker* by New York City Ballet (read aloud here)
- Oil Pastels or crayons
- Paper
- Line type guide (see below)
- Audio system

Background information:

- Begin the lesson by discussing how there are multiple variations of *The Nutcracker*, but the original one was called *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* and was written by E.T.A. Hoffmann in 1816. Today we are going to read an adaptation called *The Nutcracker* by the New York City Ballet.
- Ilyich Tchaikovsky was the composer for the original two-part ballet adapted from the original Nutcracker story.
- Say, "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 eight 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."[1]
- Today we are going to read *The Nutcracker*, and when you see the performance at the Gaillard, you are going to notice some slight changes. The performance you are going to see is called an adaptation. When a book

[1] "Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky," Classics for Kids, accessed June 1, 2026, https://www.classicsforkids.com/composer/piotr-ilyich-tchaikovsky/.

is adapted to the stage, the plot, characters, and dialogue are taken from the book, but they are rewritten into a script for actors. Scenes may be shortened, combined, or changed so they work better on stage. Costumes, sets, music, and lighting help bring the story to life for the audience.

Directions:

- Read *The Nutcracker* by New York City Ballet (read aloud here).
- Ask students to share how they believe music influences storytelling and movement.
- Have you ever heard of synesthesia? "Synesthesia is a phenomenon that causes sensory crossovers, such as tasting colors or feeling sounds."[2] Many musicians believe that they have sound color synesthesia, in which they attribute colors to sounds that they hear. This is called chromesthesia.
- Distribute paper to each student, and have a bowl of oil pastels in various colors and a few line type sheets (below) on each table.
- Have students draw a line down the middle of their paper.
- As a class, listen to "Trepak" here. After listening, instruct students to pick colors that reflect that song.
    - What instruments were important?
    - What was the tempo like?
    - What accents did you hear in the music?
- Next, listen to the song again, and this time, have students draw abstract lines and shapes with their oil pastel, in a way that the music inspires them to, on one half of their paper.
- Repeat for the second song (first three minutes of "Waltz of the Flowers") here.
- Encourage students to draw on the second half of their paper.
- When you are finished, ask the students to share and justify one choice that they made in their artwork. For example:
    - "I chose this color because…"
    - "I drew in this way because…"
    - "I chose this line because…"
- Watch videos of the two songs being performed by ballet dancers to see how movement is influenced by music (for example, gentle, elegant movement versus powerful, big movement). See "Waltz of the Flowers" video here. See "Trepak" video here.

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[2] "Synesthesia," Cleveland Clinic, updated May 3, 2023, https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/24995-synesthesia.

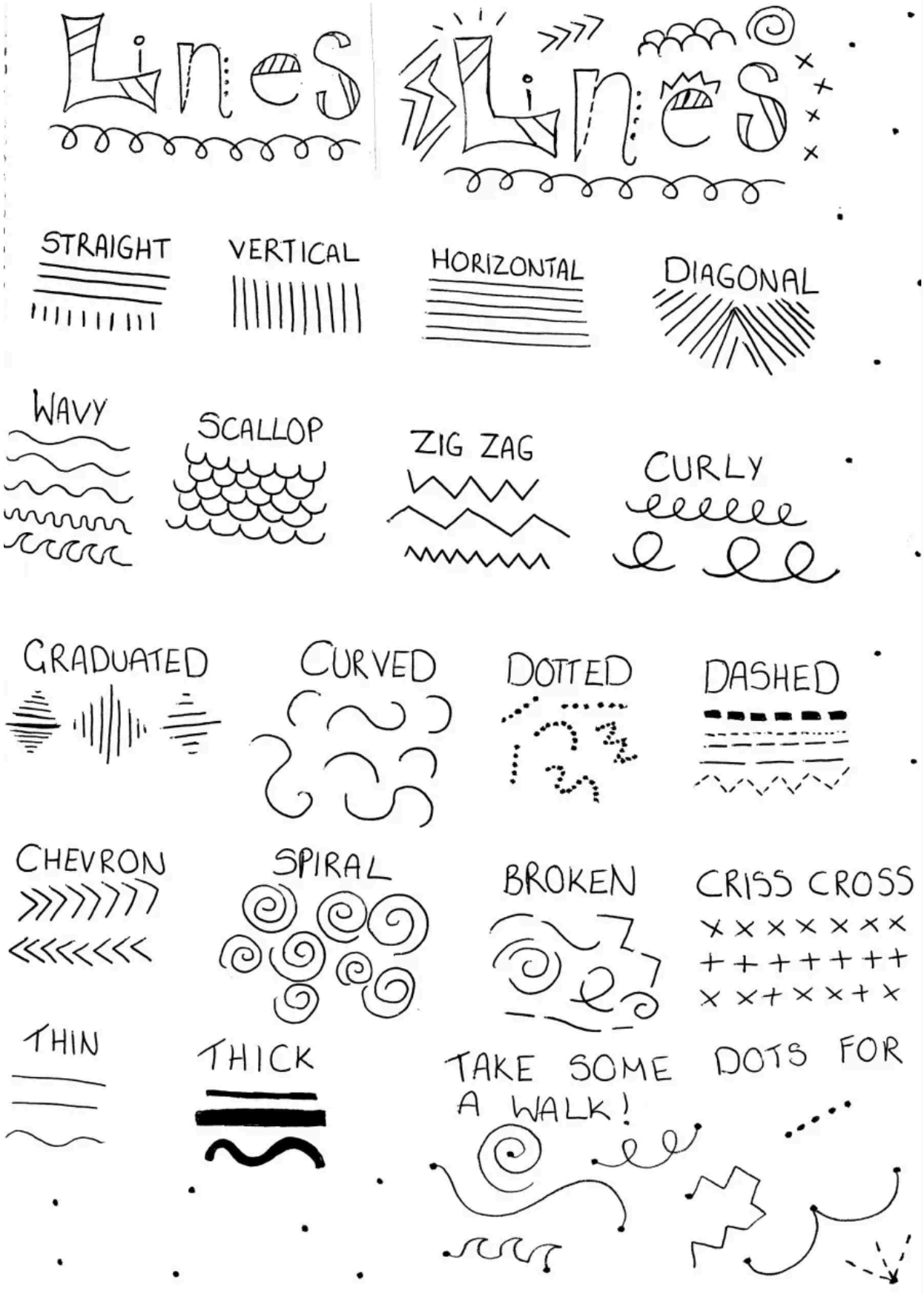
Conclusion:
Today we learned about how music can shape the art that we create. The music from *The Nutcracker* is full of exciting accents that help to shape dancing and storytelling. During the performance, look to see how the movement aligns with the music.

SC Academic Standards:
ELA.AOR.1 - Evaluate and critique key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts.
Instrumental Music Anchor Standard 7 - I can evaluate music.
Instrumental Music Anchor Standard 9 - I can relate music to other arts disciplines, other content areas, and career path choices.
Visual Arts Anchor Standard 1 - I can use the elements and principles of art to create artwork.
Visual Arts Anchor Standard 7 - I can relate visual arts ideas to other arts disciplines, content areas, and careers.

Bibliography:
Classics for Kids. “Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.” Accessed June 1, 2026. https://www.classicsforkids.com/composer/piotr-ilyich-tchaikovsky/.

Cleveland Clinic. “Synesthesia.” Updated May 3, 2023. https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/24995-synesthesia.

Miss Perks Art. “Line.” Accessed June 1, 2026. https://missperksart.wordpress.com/line/.


Lines
Lines
STRAIGHT
VERTICAL
HORIZONTAL
DIAGONAL
WAVY
SCALLOP
ZIG ZAG
CURLY
GRADUATED
CURVED
DOTTED
DASHED
CHEVRON
SPIRAL
BROKEN
CRISS CROSS
THIN
THICK
TAKE SOME DOTS FOR A WALK!