READER'S THEATER
Grades 2–5

Objectives:

- Students will evaluate and critique key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts.
- Students will act in a scene with a written script.
- Students will interpret and evaluate live performances as an active audience member.

Materials:

- Copy of *The Nutcracker* by New York City Ballet (read aloud here)
- Printed scripts (see below)

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 is adapted to the stage, the plot, characters, and dialogue are taken from the

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

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.

Activity directions:

- Describe theater: an art form in which live performers tell stories.
- Describe the differences between tone, pitch, and pace.
    - Tone - emotion behind what you're saying
    - Pitch - high or low sound
    - Pace - fast or slow
- Experiment changing tone, pitch, and pace for the same words. For example, say, "Let the party begin," "Welcome to the land of the sweets," and "I love ballet." Try saying these slow and sad, now try saying it happy and fast.
- Describe how movement/gestures impact acting.
    - Play "I just got off the bus."
    - Example: I just got off the bus, and I am at a zoo (students strike pose that corresponds with that situation).
- Now that students are familiar with using their voices and movement to tell a story, break them into groups of five.
- Assign a script to each group, and let them practice their scenes. Remind them to hold their paper below their face so the audience can see their acting.
- Present scenes to the class. If there is extra time, have students offer compliments or questions to the presenting group.

Conclusion:
Today we brought the story of *The Nutcracker* to life through theater. When you see the performance, notice how they bring these same scenes to life through ballet.

SC Academic Standards:
ELA.AOR.1 - Evaluate and critique key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts.
Theatre Anchor Standard 3 - I can act in improvised scenes and written scripts.
Theatre Anchor Standard 5 - I can interpret and evaluate live or recorded dramatic performances as an active audience member.

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

Scene 1: The Party

CHARACTERS:

- Marie
- Fritz
- Mother
- Drosselmeyer
- Party Guest

SETTING:

A festive living room with wrapped presents.

SCRIPT

Mother: Welcome, everyone!

Party Guest: What a beautiful home! Look at all the sparkling lights!

Fritz: I hope there are toys for me.

Marie: The holidays are about sharing, Fritz.

Mother: Ah! Our special guest has arrived.

Drosselmeyer: Good evening! I have magical gifts for everyone.

Party Guest: Magical? Really?

Fritz: Did you bring me something?

Drosselmeyer: Of course. And Marie, this special Nutcracker is for you.

(Hands Marie the Nutcracker.)

Marie: He's wonderful! I'll take very good care of him.

Fritz: It's just a wooden doll.

Mother: Fritz, be polite.

Party Guest: I think he looks very brave.

Drosselmeyer: He is brave, perhaps even magical.

Scene 2: The Nutcracker Breaks

CHARACTERS:

- Marie
- Fritz
- Nutcracker
- Mother
- Drosselmeyer

SETTING:

The party room later that evening.

SCRIPT

Marie: I love my Nutcracker so much.

Nutcracker: Thank you, Marie.

Fritz: Let me see him!

(Fritz grabs the Nutcracker.)

Marie: Be careful!

Nutcracker: Ouch!

Fritz: Uh-oh.

Marie: You broke him!

Mother: Fritz! What happened?

Fritz: I didn't mean to.

Drosselmeyer: Bring him here. I may be able to fix him.

(Pretends to repair Nutcracker.)

Nutcracker: I feel much better now.

Fritz: I'm sorry, Marie.

Marie: I forgive you.

Mother: That is the true spirit of the holidays.

Scene 3: The Mouse King Battle

CHARACTERS:

- Marie
- Nutcracker
- Mouse King
- Toy Soldier
- Mouse

SETTING:

The living room magically transforms into a battlefield.

SCRIPT

Marie: Where am I? Everything looks so big!

Mouse: Squeak! The Mouse King is coming!

Mouse King: This house belongs to me now!

Toy Soldier: Never! We will defend the Nutcracker Prince!

Nutcracker: Soldiers, prepare for battle!

Marie: Be careful!

Mouse King: You cannot defeat me!

Nutcracker: Mouse King, leave this place at once!

Mouse King: Never!

Marie: I must help!

(Marie tosses a pretend shoe.)

Mouse King: Oh no! I'm defeated!

(Mouse King runs away.)

Mouse: The kingdom is saved!

Nutcracker: Marie, your bravery saved us all.

Toy Soldier: Hooray for Marie!

Scene 4: The Sugar Plum Fairy

CHARACTERS:

- Marie
- Nutcracker Prince
- Sugar Plum Fairy
- Candy Cane Dancer
- Snowflake

SETTING:

The Land of Sweets with sparkly decorations.

SCRIPT

Sugar Plum Fairy: Welcome to the Land of Sweets!

Marie: It's so beautiful here.

Nutcracker Prince: This land is so magical!

Candy Cane Dancer: We have dancing and treats for everyone!

Snowflake: And sparkling snow all year long.

Marie: I've never seen anything like this.

Sugar Plum Fairy: We heard about your bravery against the Mouse King.

Nutcracker Prince: Yes, she saved us all.

Marie: I only wanted to help my friend.

Candy Cane Dancer: Shall we celebrate?

Snowflake: Let the dancing begin!

(Simple group dance or twirling.)

Sugar Plum Fairy: Join us!

Marie: I'll never forget this magical night.

Nutcracker Prince: Me either!

Scene 5: Mother Ginger's Surprise

CHARACTERS:

- Mother Ginger
- Marie
- Nutcracker Prince
- Polichinelle Child 1
- Polichinelle Child 2

SETTING:

The Land of Sweets during a celebration.

SCRIPT

(Mother Ginger enters dramatically.)

Mother Ginger: Make way for Mother Ginger!

Nutcracker Prince: Nice to meet you, Mother Ginger.

Marie: Wow! Your dress is enormous!

(Children pop out from behind.)

Polichinelle Child 1: Ta-da!

Polichinelle Child 2: Surprise!

Nutcracker Prince: Wow, what a surprise!

Mother Ginger: My children love making grand entrances.

Polichinelle Child 1: We also love dancing.

Polichinelle Child 2: And candy! It would not be the Land of Sweets without it!

Nutcracker Prince: The Land of Sweets is the most magical place!

Marie: Everyone here is so joyful.

Mother Ginger: Then let us finish with one final dance!

Scene 6: The Farewell

CHARACTERS:

- Marie
- Nutcracker Prince
- Sugar Plum Fairy
- Mother Ginger
- Candy Cane Dancer

SETTING:

The Land of Sweets as the celebration comes to an end. Everyone gathers to say goodbye.

SCRIPT

Sugar Plum Fairy: The morning is almost here, Marie. It is time for you to go home. We will miss you!

Marie: I don’t want to leave yet.

Nutcracker Prince: You will always be welcome in the Land of Sweets.

Mother Ginger: We shall miss your smiling face!

Candy Cane Dancer: And your wonderful dancing.

Sugar Plum Fairy: You showed courage, kindness, and friendship tonight.

Nutcracker Prince: Because of you, peace returned to our kingdom.

Marie: I was nervous at first, but everyone helped me feel brave.

Mother Ginger: That is what friends do.

Candy Cane Dancer: Will you remember us when the holidays come again?

Marie: Of course! I’ll remember this magical night forever.

Sugar Plum Fairy: Then take a little bit of magic home with you.

(Pretends to hand Marie a sparkling flower.)

Marie: Thank you. I will treasure it always.

(Marie yawns and pretends to fall back asleep)