SPINNING BALLET DANCERS ART
Grades CD–3

Objectives:

- Students will use and combine materials, techniques, and processes to make art.
- Students will evaluate and critique key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts.
- Students will conduct an investigation to compare the effects of different strengths or different directions of pushes and pulls on the motion of an object.

Materials:

- Copy of *The Nutcracker* by New York City Ballet (read aloud here)
- Straws
- Jumbo popsicle sticks (variety of skin tone colors)
- Construction paper
- Cupcake liners (white)
- Costume sheet (below)
- Scissors
- Glue
- Markers
- Tape

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 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:

- Read *The Nutcracker*, and ask students to pay close attention to costumes. While reading, point out story elements.
- Show students a video of a spinning ballerina here. Show students a video of the Nutcracker spinning here. Explain they get to create their own spinning ballet dancer from *The Nutcracker* today.
- Show options of different characters they can get inspiration from here, or scroll to the bottom of this document.
- Hand each student a straw and a popsicle stick (pre-tape the straw to the back of the popsicle stick).
- Start cutting costume items out of construction paper or from the outlined costumes below. (Optional: pre-cut costume items.)
- Color in any costume items.
- If students would like a tutu, start decorating the cupcake liner. Make a small cut in the liner to slide over the popsicle. Add tape underneath if it needs to be secured.
- Decorate costumes with markers; add details to the face.
- Practice spinning the ballet dancer. What happens if you move your hands more quickly? What happens if you move your hand more slowly? What happens if your put more pressure in your right hand than your left hand (unbalance, will lean)? Is one hand using a pushing force and one hand using a pulling force?
- Have students present their artwork to the class and tell the class one creative choice they made.

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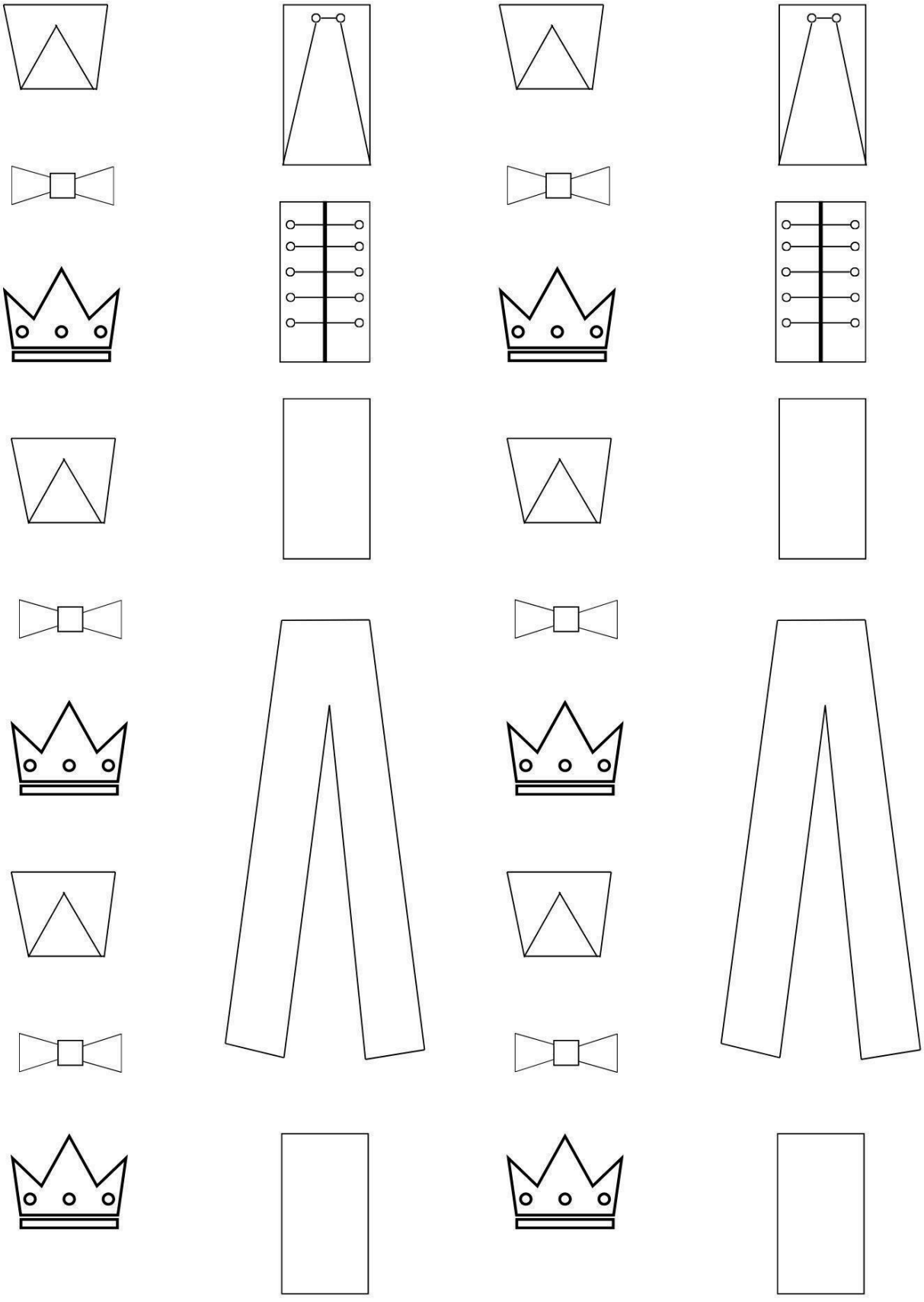
[1] "Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky," Classics for Kids, accessed June 1, 2026, https://www.classicsforkids.com/composer/piotr-ilyich-tchaikovsky/.

Conclusion:
Today we brought the story of *The Nutcracker* to life by making our own characters. When you see the performance, observe how ballet dancers spin and how that relates to the artwork you created today.

SC Academic Standards:
VA Anchor Standard 2 - I can use and combine materials, techniques, and processes to make art.
Anchor Standard 4 - I can organize work for presentation and documentation to reflect specific content, ideas, skills, and or media.
ELA.F.2 - Demonstrate knowledge of the organization and basic concepts of print.
ELA.AOR.1 - Evaluate and critique key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts.
K-PS2-1 - Plan and conduct an investigation to compare the effects of different strengths or different directions of pushes and pulls on the motion of an object.
3-PS2-1 - Plan and conduct an investigation to provide evidence of the effects of balanced and unbalanced forces on the motion of an object.
Goal CD-4 - Children demonstrate appreciation for different forms of artistic expression.
Goal CD-5 - Children demonstrate self-expression and creativity in a variety of forms and contexts, including play, visual arts, music, theater, and dance.
Goal CD-11: Children explore the world by observing, manipulating objects, asking questions, making predictions, and developing generalizations.

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