

NEOS DANCE THEATRE

*A 1940's*  
**NUTCRACKER**



**STUDY GUIDE**  
FOR K-12 TEACHERS



PREPARED BY  
NEOS DANCE THEATRE  
2018

# Neos Dance Theatre

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*Neos Dance Theatre's mission is to advance dance related education by student training, intensive summer study, and master classes; raise awareness of the dance arts; culturally enrich Northern Ohio through performance of high quality dance by obtaining and presenting the widest range of repertoire possible.*

## Meet the Creator: Robert Wesner

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Robert Wesner was born and raised in Ashland, OH where he trained as a singer, dancer, and actor. Upon graduation, he began his career as a professional dancer with Ballet Arizona where he had the opportunity to work perform the works of both emerging as well as very prominent choreographers from around the world. Independently, Mr. Wesner has traveled and performed with various companies all over the northeast region of the US and in Italy. As Director and Co-Founder of Neos Dance Theatre, Bobby leads a group of dance artists and administrative staff as he trains dancers, creates works for performances, and leads

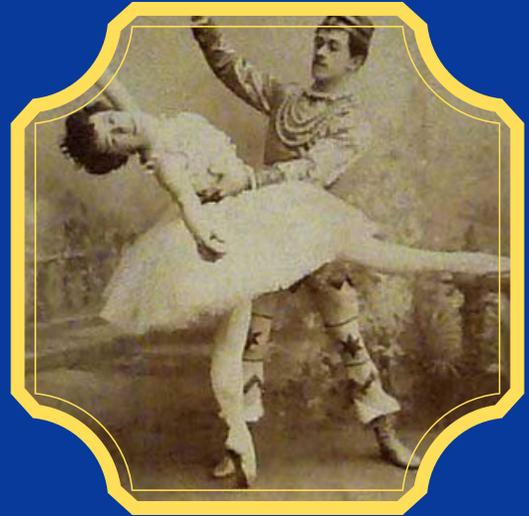


the organization's mission of sharing dance with the widest possible audience. You will also see Bobby on stage from time to time performing with the company. Bobby's wife Brooke is a co-founder of Neos Dance Theatre and also dances with the ensemble. The couple lives in Ashland, Ohio where they raise their four beautiful daughters: Genevieve, Ella, Mekah, and Arowyn.

# The History of The Nutcracker

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The origin of the Nutcracker, a classic Christmas Story, is a fairy tale ballet in two acts centered on a family's Christmas Eve celebration. Alexandre Dumas Père's adaptation of the story by E.T.A. Hoffmann was set to music by Tchaikovsky and originally choreographed by Marius Petipa. It was commissioned by the director of Moscow's Imperial Theatres, Ivan Vsevolozhsky, in 1891, and premiered a week before Christmas 1892. Since premiering in western countries in the 1940s, this ballet has become perhaps the most popular to be performed around Christmas time. The story centers on a young girl's Christmas Eve and her awakening to the wider world and romantic love. The composer made a selection of eight of the more popular pieces before the ballet's December 1892 premiere, forming what is currently known as the Nutcracker Suite, Op. 71a, as is heard in Moscow Ballet productions. The suite became instantly popular; however the complete ballet did not achieve its great popularity as a Christmas performance event until almost 100 years later.



Imperial Ballet's Original Nutcracker  
*(Photo courtesy of Moscow Ballet)*

The first performance of the Christmas ballet was held as a double premiere together with Tchaikovsky's last opera, *Iolanta*, around the Christmas holiday season on December 18 [O.S. December 6] 1892, at the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia. It is generally agreed that Lev Ivanov, Second Balletmaster to the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres, worked closely with Marius Petipa, Premier Maître de Ballet of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres and widely regarded as the Father of Russian Ballet, to create the holiday ballet. It was conducted by Riccardo Drigo, with Antoinetta Dell-Era as the Sugar Plum Fairy, Pavel Gerdt as her Prince, Stanislava Belinskaya as Clara/Masha, Sergei Legat as the Nutcracker Prince, and Timofei Stukolkin as Uncle Drosselmeyer.

# A 1940's Nutcracker

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## *Marie's Ballet Story*

ACT ONE: The setting is Christmas Eve in Lorain, Ohio, in the 1940s. Marie is a wistful young girl about 13 years old. She lives with her mother, her younger twin sisters, and her younger brother Gus, while her father is off at war. Marie has a crush on her next-door neighbor, Johnny, and they meet outside Marie's home where she and her friend are playing and dancing. Everyone is excited about Christmas Eve and there is magic in the air as Marie's puppy love for her next-door neighbor blossoms. When Mother calls Marie inside to help get ready for the party, she sneaks Johnny into the house and Mother allows him to stay. Soon party guests begin to arrive. Grandpa turns up the music on the old radio and everyone is dancing and enjoying themselves. Suddenly Marie's father walks through the door, shocking Marie's family, who immediately run to greet him. Father is overjoyed to see his family and friends and announces that he has brought gifts from his world travels to share with the children. In addition to his gifts, he has brought along a special guest: Jane Jacobs Badini, the All American Girls Professional Baseball League pitcher from Cuyahoga Falls. She signs autographs for the children and entertains them with her all-star moves. As the party leaves the living room to start dinner, Father gives Marie her special gift-- a Nutcracker doll. Marie loves her gift and dances with her Nutcracker, so happy that her father was thinking of her while he was at war. Johnny interrupts Marie's dance and teases her and as the two scuffle, the Nutcracker breaks. Marie is upset but Johnny fixes the Nutcracker and all is well. The guests return to the living room and continue dancing, and Grandma and Grandpa dance a special dance before saying goodnight to the party. The rest of the guests begin to leave, and Mother and Father put Marie and her siblings to bed. Marie realizes she has left her Nutcracker on the davenport, and she returns to the living room, scoops up her doll, and falls asleep. A strange dream begins, where small house mice become life size, and the living room grows to giant proportions. A Rat King appears to lead his army of mice to attack the Nutcracker. Suddenly, Marie's father appears and transforms her Nutcracker into a life-size doll. The Nutcracker calls an army of soldiers, and they battle with the mice and Rat King under the now-giant Christmas tree. Just as the Nutcracker and his army are about to win the battle, the Rat King stabs the Nutcracker. As he falls to the floor, Marie takes off her slipper and Strikes the Rat King on his head, killing him. Marie grieves the death of her Nutcracker. Just as she pledges her love to him, he comes back to life, magically transformed into a princely stature of her next-door neighbor, Johnny.

# ...A 1940's Nutcracker

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He and Marie dance together lovingly as the room melts away and he leads her through the window to a magical snowy land. The pair is greeted by dancing snowflakes that send them on an enchanted journey to another world.



ACT TWO: The curtain rises as Johnny takes Marie into a magical journey throughout the Lorain County area in the early 1940s. The glamorous department store ladies from Kline's offer Marie hats and jewelry; she is entertained at the movies inside the Palace Theatre. Local workers from nearby companies impress her with their hard work for the war effort. The newspaper boy from the Elyria Chronicle Telegram brings her news that the war is almost over, and the high society women from the Woman's Club grace her with a concert. The strong and faithful factory women give Marie life-size Shirley Temple dolls that they produced in Akron, with a leading industry in toy manufacturing. Johnny and Marie join the locals at an area nightclub for dancing and photographs taken by the "Lightbulb Girls". Finally they meet local Ohio celebrities Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall and enjoy watching them dance. All the folks Marie and Johnny have met throughout their journey return and in a flurry of magic, Marie is transported back to her home. When she awakens on her doorstep, she is blanketed in Johnny's coat with her Nutcracker doll at her side. She wonders...was this all a dream? Or did she indeed take a magical journey throughout all of Lorain?

# Ballet Vocabulary

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**Ballet:** A classical Western dance form that originated in the Renaissance courts of Europe. By the time of Louis XIV (mid-1600s), steps and body positions underwent codification.

**Ballerina:** A female ballet dancer of the highest ranking.

**Choreography:** The creation and composition of dances by arranging or inventing steps, movements, and patterns of movements.

**Corps de Ballet:** A group of dancers who work together as an ensemble. They form the background for the ballerina and her partner and are the backbone of any ballet company.

**Gesture:** The movement of a body part or combination of parts, with emphasis on the expressive aspects of the move. It includes all movements of the body not supporting weight.

**Pas de Deux:** A dance for two people, traditionally between a ballerina and the male dancer of the highest ranking.

**Pointe Shoes:** Shoes worn by female dancers that enable them to dance on the tips of their toes. The area covering the toe is made of layers of fabric glued together in the shape of a “box” covered in satin and hardened. The sole is made of hard leather to prevent the shoe from breaking when bent. To keep the shoes on tightly, the dancers sew satin ribbons and elastic to the sides and tie the ribbons securely around their ankles. A pair of pointe shoes may only last for 3 to 4 days of work.

**Tutu:** Ballet skirt, usually made of net or tulle. Tutus may be of varying lengths. While the style and mood of the ballet help to determine the preferred tutu length, the dancer’s technique is most clearly visible when she wears a short tutu.

**Pantomime:** The art telling a story, expressing a mood or an emotion or describing an action without words

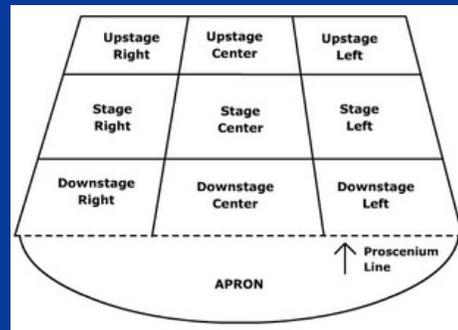
**Shape:** Positioning of the body in space (curved, straight, angular, twisted, symmetrical, or asymmetrical)

**Motif:** A distinctive and recurring gesture used to provide a theme or unifying idea

# Theatre Vocabulary

**Staging:** The method of presenting a play or other dramatic performance; All stage directions in staging are from the actor's point of view

**Wings:** Areas apart of the stage not seen by the audience, which are typically used for a performer's entrance and exit



**Orchestra Pit:** The part of the theatre where the orchestra sits and plays throughout the performance, typically located in front of the stage and lower than the audience

**Apron:** Any part of the stage that extends past the stage and into the audience or seating area

**Production:** The process of making a performance

**Design:** The plan for the construction of an element of a play {Sets, Lighting, Sound, Costume, Plots, and Make-up}

**Set(s):** An arrangement of scenery and properties to represent the place where a play is enacted

**Lighting:** The craft of lighting as it applies to the production of a performance

**Sound:** The use of different sounds to create a specific mood or atmosphere

**Costume:** Clothing worn by actors on stage

**Make-Up:** The use of cosmetics to create the appearance of the character during the play

**Props/Properties:** The objects actors interact with onstage. These can be books, dolls, and swords.

# Connecting to Ohio's Magical History

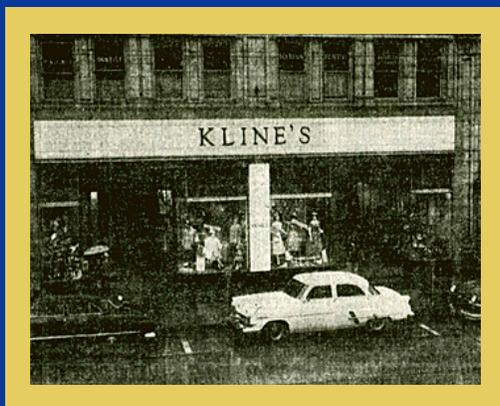
## The Palace Theater – Lorain, OH

The Palace Theater opened in Lorain on April 19th, 1928. On its opening night, the theater showed the first-ever talking film while also featuring a live orchestra and other vaudeville shows. During World War II, The Palace became an almost exclusive movie theater for the societal elite. Like many other theaters around the country, it gradually lost its appeal but not once since its opening has the theater ever closed its doors.



## Kline's Department Store – Lorain, OH

Herman Kline began the infamous department store chain in 1874, when he opened his first store in Philadelphia. It was the first chain-store to reach from the east coast to the Mississippi River. Their first western store was opened in Lorain in 1913 at 710 Broadway. It stayed there until 1928, when it moved to its popular and more spacious location - 610 Broadway. It stayed here until its closure on March 14th, 1975.



### Read All About It!

Elyria's first newspaper, the Elyria Chronicle, was founded in 1829, and is now known as The Chronicle-Telegram. The current paper formed through the merger of the two papers: The Chronicle and The Telegram. These two papers merged in 1919. In 1922, A.C. Hudnutt became partner in the paper, then owner five years later. The paper has continued in his family since.



# Classroom Activities: Grades K-2

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## Ohio Learning Standards

*Social Studies: K-5*

*English Language Arts: W.K.2 U; W.K.5; RL.K.1; RL.2.1; RL.K.2*



1. Read a traditional version of The Nutcracker as well as our synopsis of A 1940's Nutcracker. Have students discuss what is the same in the two stories? What is different?
2. Draw a map of Lorain and nearby counties, including Kline's Department Store, Palace Theatre, the Elyria Chronicle and the Akron Toy Factory. Trace Marie's journey through Lorain using straight, zig zag or curvy pathways.  
Optional movement activity: travel the pathway you drew for Marie!
3. Have students write and illustrate their own version of The Nutcracker, including details such as key characters, settings and themes. Each student is responsible for one scene of the story.
4. Design an invitation for the Christmas party, clearly describing the event and including all the details party-goers will need. Students share their invitations with a group of peers and justify their invitation design using details from A 1940's Nutcracker.

# Classroom Activities: Grades 3-5

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## Ohio Learning Standards

*Social Studies: 3.1; 3.2*

*English Language Arts: RL.3.3; RL.4.3; RL.5.3*

1. Re-write A 1940's Nutcracker from the point of view of a character of your choice (i.e. The Nutcracker, Snow Queen, Marie's Dad). Include experiences that character would have had using details and a structured event sequence.



2. Create a timeline for Lorain local history from 1900-present. Be sure to indicate clearly where Marie's journey through Lorain occurs on your timeline.

3. Identify major landmarks and features of present-day Lorain that Marie might visit. Draw a map tracing her path, including the characters she meets along the way. Include cardinal directions.



# Classroom Activities: Grades 6-8

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## Ohio Learning Standards

English Language Arts: W.6-8.1; RL.7.3; RL.6.7

1. Students read a traditional version of The Nutcracker to identify the story's setting, major characters and events. Break students up into groups to produce a theatrical version of The Nutcracker, highlighting the story's key elements. Each group will write their own original script, cast the characters, rehearse and perform the play for their classmates.



2. Write a review of Neos Dance Theatre's A 1940's Nutcracker. Students should include how production elements (lighting, costumes, staging, etc) contributed or not to the success of the ballet.

3. Compare and contrast a traditional version of The Nutcracker with Neos Dance Theatre's A 1940's Nutcracker to create venn diagram. Include themes, characters, narrative, setting, etc in both stories.

# Classroom Activities: Grades 9-12

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## Ohio Learning Standards

English Language Arts: W.9-10.1; W.11-12.3

1. Write a review of Neos Dance Theatre's A 1940's Nutcracker. Students should include how production elements (lighting, costumes, staging, etc) contributed or not to the success of the ballet.
2. What happens after Marie wakes up from her journey through Lorain? Using well-chosen details, event sequences and dialogue, students develop a narrative about the events in the Hoffman home the day after their Christmas Party.



# Additional Resources

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**Daniel Brady's Bunch of Lorain County Nostalgia** | <http://danielebrady.blogspot.com/>

**History of The Nutcracker:** Moscow Ballet keeps the tradition | <https://www.nutcracker.com/about-us/history-of-nutcracker>

**Lorain Palace Theater:** Lorain, OH's historic theater | <http://lorainpalace.org/>

**Ohio Learning Standards:** Identify what students should know and be able to do | <http://education.ohio.gov>

**TES Global:** Everything you need to support your teaching career | [www.tes.com](http://www.tes.com)

**Theatre Crafts:** Entertainment Technology and Research | [www.theatrecrafts.com](http://www.theatrecrafts.com)