

Holiday Lesson: The Nutcracker Ballet

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Time	Plot Point	Activity
0-2:00	Overture	<i>What's an overture?</i>
2:00	Preparing for Christmas Eve party	The tradition of decorating the Christmas tree, presents, candles, etc..
8:50	Grandparents!	Special guests of the party
10:20*	Drosselmeyer's arrival	Mysterious and kind, he is the magical toymaker and also Clara's godfather
12:20	Magic!	Drosselmeyer shows off his latest toys and dolls, including the Nutcracker made just for Clara
17:50	Fritz breaks the Nutcracker	Quick lesson in empathy: how would you feel if someone broke your new toy?
30:00*	Magic - Clara shrinks!	Cool effect that the ballet facility had the tree growing to show Clara shrinking
34:15	The Nutcracker awakes!	Now he isn't just a doll - the magic has woken him up!
34:30*	Battle with the rats	The rats came in to cause harm, so the Nutcracker and soldiers are defending Clara and the house!
37:30	The rat king is defeated	The Nutcracker destroys the Rat King, and the other rats flee. The Nutcracker gives Clara the crown.
-	Intermission	<i>This is a good halfway point to stop if you need to!</i>
39:40	Clara and Nutcracker arrive...	In the Land of the Sugar Plum Fairy, aka the Kingdom of Sweets!
41:20	Dance of the Snowflakes	I love the symbolism here, and I like showing kids how to count by fours (first four dancers, then eight, then twelve...)
48:00	The Christmas trees	They carry trees here and play instruments later - also are all children!
49:45	Introduction of Sugar Plum Fairy	You can talk about the prima ballerina, and this is also a great place to teach about ballet (point) shoes too
51:00	Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy	Here's that famous theme - I love that the Fairy looks delicate and beautiful but is actually incredibly strong (metaphor, anyone?)
53:00	Introduction of other dancers	Check out the various cultures and costumes! (And they're desserts/treats!)
54:30	The Nutcracker tells the tale	Watch the Nutcracker reenact the story of the rat battle (without using words) - can you tell what he's describing?
57:40	Hot Chocolate - Spain	Can you find who the lead dancers are? Look at their costumes and the choreography. Also listen for the castanets.
58:50	Coffee - Arabia	Bells on her ankles and hands, and watch at the very end for her finger cymbals!
1:01:00	Chinese tea	Count his jumps! (And notice that the male dancers don't wear point shoes)

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1:02:25	The Candy Canes (Peppermints) - Russia	This troupe is all males - watch the lead dancer do a double jump through his hoop at the end! This theme is also known as "Trepak".
1:03:40	Marzipan - Denmark	The lead dancer is in pink this time. Watch their point shoes and notice their lutes, hence why this dance is also called "The Dance of the Reed Pipes".
1:05:05	Mother Ginger and Her Gingerbread Children	The dress construction here is insane (and the woman is really a man in makeup!). Also look how traditionally girls wore blue and boys wore pink. No kids in point shoes, either.
1:08:30	The Dewdrops	This is the famous "Waltz of the Flowers" - who's the leader?
1:14:30	The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier	This is the dance of the queen and her prince, as it were. Their ability to go all the way across the stage with her on pointe is really difficult!
1:19:30	The famous move	The way the Cavalier pulls the SPF across the floor on her point is extremely difficult!
1:19:50	The Cavalier	This is the chance for the lead male dancer to show off - watch his jumps and spins, and notice his shoes!
1:21:15	Recap - all characters	Everyone comes back for a grand finale as the magical night comes to an end.
1:24:40	Goodbye and Merry Christmas!	It's time for Clara and the Nutcracker to go back home - after all, it's Christmas Eve and Santa is coming! Merry Christmas!

A few tips when watching this movie with your child:

- * indicates a part that might be a little intense or scary for little ones.
- Feel free to use the intermission as a halfway point, so you can break up the movie into separate sessions or days.
- Encourage your child to tell you how the scenes make them feel, or what they think of.
- We also like to do a lesson the next day where the kids get to make artwork about the Nutcracker story, using markers or paint or Playdoh.
- Listen to the soundtrack when you're cooking, letting the kids play, or driving in the car. They'll soon be able to associate the part of the story with each particular track. That's the beauty of a ballet - it's a musical tale, no words needed!
- Finally, look up any local performances of the Nutcracker to see if you could take the family to a live show. Even if it's at the community elementary school, it's really neat to see familiar characters and hear familiar themes in another rendition! Plus hooray for supporting the arts!
- For the complete article, including helpful links, search "Nutcracker" on RealSimpleMama.com!