teacher resource guide

THE NUTCRACKER

New Jersey Performing Arts Center
njpac productions
The Hip Hop Nutcracker is a modern holiday mash-up for the entire family. Writer Mike Fitelson, choreographer Jennifer Weber, and hip-hop legend Kurtis Blow have twisted the original ballet and mixed up Tchaikovsky’s timeless music to give a contemporary head-spin on the popular ballet.

This evening-length production is performed by a supercharged cast of a dozen all-star dancers. DJ Boo mixes along with an electric violinist as they create a hip-hop version of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s beloved 19th-century fairytale. Along with graffiti and visuals transform the German landscape. They are also amazing freestyles and within the show we mix choreography and freestyle to be true to hip hop culture.

The creativity of hip-hop culture, the dynamic of colorful 1980s Brooklyn. Lots of energy, style, unique movement and magic. Our dancers are experts in a wide range of classic hip hop and we use the classical Tchaikovsky score and we tell an updated translation of the famous holiday story. You will see the mice and soldiers battle, toys that come to life, a tree that grows, dancing snowflakes—all the elements are present, just with a hip-hop twist.

The idea to create The Hip Hop Nutcracker was actually brought to me by my collaborator, Mike Fitelson. He wanted to create a new twist on a holiday classic that reflects the diversity of the world today. I love creating narrative dance theatre so this was a perfect opportunity for me to explore hip hop as storytelling and what happens when music from the 1800s meets movement from today.

What message, or reaction, do you hope young audiences will come away with from this celebration?

I hope audiences understand the power of hip-hop as a language for storytelling. Somewhere between the classical score and the contemporary movement there is the celebration of the timelessness of holiday magic. I hope audiences will leave the theatre feeling inspired. I think the cast is extremely inspiring in what they can physically do with their bodies and how they can use movement to so clearly tell a story. I also hope they are especially inspired by how strong the female members of our cast are. In hip-hop, it is all too often that the boys do all the power moves, but in our show, the girls take on the floor just as often as the guys!

What should young audiences key in on?

I hope young audiences will see that at its root, The Hip Hop Nutcracker is about using dance to bring a community together. I think the idea of using art to create change is extremely important.

What was your inspiration for creating a hip-hop version of The Nutcracker?

As an artist I am always interested in the collision of two worlds that seem extremely different on the surface. Mixing hip hop dance with classical music is something I have been exploring for a long time. I was once asked “how do you make hip hop vulnerable?” After various investigations, I came up with the idea to take away the 4/4 hip hop beat in order to reveal a wider range of emotional possibilities within the language.

The Hip Hop Nutcracker celebrates love, community and the magic of New Year’s Eve. The energy of the audience is always so powerful. The idea to create The Hip Hop Nutcracker was actually brought to me by my collaborator, Mike Fitelson. He wanted to create a new twist on a holiday classic that reflects the diversity of the world today. I love creating narrative dance theatre so this was a perfect opportunity for me to explore hip hop as storytelling and what happens when music from the 1800s meets movement from today.

Tell us about your creative background.

My main inspirations are Steven Hoggett and Scott Graham of the British physical theatre company “Frantic Assembly.” I was introduced to them while studying dance in London. Their ability to use movement to tell stories is so raw and electrifying. I did a few workshops with them over the years and everything I know about choreography comes from those workshops. Other than that, I am completely self-taught. I am also inspired by anyone who doesn’t follow the rules and makes their own path to the career of their dreams.

Who are your influences? For example, which educators had the biggest impact on you and your career?

I am looking for ways to be more articulate as a storyteller. Other than that, I am completely self-taught. I am also inspired by anyone who doesn’t follow the rules and makes their own path to the career of their dreams.

What important thematic connections do you hope young audiences will make?

I hope young audiences will see that at its root, The Hip Hop Nutcracker is about using dance to bring a community together. I think the idea of using art to create change is extremely important.

Tell us about your upcoming performances.

Other than that, I am completely self-taught. I am also inspired by anyone who doesn’t follow the rules and makes their own path to the career of their dreams.

The Hip Hop Nutcracker is a new twist on a holiday classic that reflects diversity of the world today…
## Hip Hop Nutcracker Inspired Ideas in the Classroom

### Prepare for the Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Focus</th>
<th>Student Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding the Origins</strong></td>
<td>Play “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash &amp; The Furious Five while students study artifacts. Explain that Hip Hop is an example of an artistic genre that emerged from a situation of poverty and oppression, thereby using art to turn a “negative into a positive”. Ask students to turn their own negative situations into positive ones by writing affirmations. <strong>Affirmation:</strong> A statement, declaration or assertion that is encouraging and emotionally supportive like a positive message. Affirmations are written in the present tense as a desired outcome or intended result. Examples of Affirmations: I am “Nurturing”, I am brilliant &amp; so are my ideas, I am dynamic &amp; I play. Yes, Yes, Yeah!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choose a Specific Focus</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Message</strong> Study the images that reflect life in Russia in the Bronx during the 1970s. What do you observe? Listen to “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash &amp; The Furious Five while reflecting on what you see. Listen to the definition and examples of an “affirmation” to inspire positive messaging. Become the messenger by writing and sharing your own affirmative statement.</td>
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### Experience the Performance

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<td><strong>Active Audience Members</strong></td>
<td>At the performance, encourage students to pay close attention to the movement, lighting, costumes, and music. Ask them what are they hoping to see? Ask them to think about the following as they watch the performance: How does the lighting and music make you feel? What emotions do you feel as you wait for the curtain to rise and the lights to dim? What’s the vibe in the theater throughout the performance?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cypher: An informal gathering of rappers, beatboxers, and/or break-dancers in a circle, in order to jam musically together.</strong> Prepare students to participate in a cypher by showing them the following video. Watch the lighting changes! What does it say about the mood? How does that add to your experience? Notice how the music and lights play a role in telling the story. How do the two art forms (ballet and hip hop) work together in the performance?</td>
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### Reflect, respond and read

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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Your Favorites</strong></td>
<td>Based on what students learned about The Nutcracker and Hip Hop, as well as what they saw in the show, ask students to share what they thought about combining ballet and breakdancing. Do they think ballet and breakdancing go together well? Focus on one particular character, setting, or conflict from the show that successfully shows a blending of ballet and breakdance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chain Reaction</strong></td>
<td>Form a circle (or cypher) and call out a character, setting, or conflict from the show. Students start a chain reaction by making a gesture or a movement with their body based off of this word or phrase. They send this movement to the person next to them, who then mimics the move and adds on to it. That person then passes the new movement to the next person, and so on. It continues down the line causing a “chain reaction” and response. What movements were used to express specific characters and/or situations? What was the “mood” of each character and situation?</td>
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### Generate and Rehearse

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<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Agents of Change</strong></td>
<td>Have students recall how Hip Hop is an example of how art can be used to transform a negative into a positive. As a large group, brainstorm and create a list of things in the environment, society, school or neighborhood that are seen as “negatives” - obstacles and barriers for living well. How does this impact their environment, school, and neighborhood? Challenge students to become innovators and come up with a creative, “positive” solution to one of the negatives they identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“What’s the Scenario”</strong></td>
<td>As unstoppable innovators, use your imagination to create an “out of this world” solution in the spirit of giving a gift to those in need. Work together in small crews to develop your invention. You can choreograph a dance in any style, act out a commercial, create a rap/spoken word piece, design a poster, or make a beat using your mouth and objects in class.</td>
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### Create

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<td><strong>Make Magic</strong></td>
<td>Arrange students in a circle formation (a cypher) for them to share their creative solutions. Encourage them to be free and fly!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Press Play</strong></td>
<td>Time to practice and make a power move! Be bold and make sure everyone in the group plays a role. It may be writing the script, recording sounds, or reading what someone else wrote! Everyone’s ideas and expression is valuable. Practice playfully, include improvising as a part of the plan, and use your mistakes to create!</td>
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**Curriculum**

- **English Language Arts**
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4
  - Social Studies NCSS.II.c
  - NCSS.L.1

- **National Arts Standards**
  - Anchor #11
  - Anchor #7
  - Anchor #5
  - Anchor #11

- **NCSS.I.c**

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- **National Arts Standards**
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  - Anchor #6
  - Anchor #4

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**YouTube Video**

- [youtu.be/WYdb5snA1Jc](https://youtu.be/WYdb5snA1Jc)

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**Anthology**

- Anchor #3
- Anchor #6
- Anchor #8
- Anchor #11

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**National Arts Standards**

- Anchor #11
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- Anchor #5
- Anchor #11

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**National Arts Standards**

- Anchor #11
- Anchor #7
- Anchor #5
- Anchor #11
national core arts anchor standards

11:
Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work for performance.

5:
Develop and refine artistic techniques and approaches to artistic work.

7:
Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

8:
Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.3
Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of a text or a film selection, focusing on how the text reflects or affects society.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3
Analyze the meaning of a multiple-choice test as a way to evaluate the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of a text or a film selection, focusing on how the text reflects or affects society.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4
Analyze the meaning of a multiple-choice test as a way to evaluate the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

English Language Arts

Rap—Poetry Redefined

The Hip Hop Nutcracker remixes a classic tale with hip-hop flair, giving the audience new lenses to appreciate a story that has been told repeatedly. There are other examples out there that meld a classical art form and hip-hop, with rap and poetry as a prime example. On first glance, the realms of poetry and rap music seem worlds apart. Poetry’s roots began in prehistorical Africa and Mesopotamia to eventually flowering into a popular art form among the Ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. William Shakespeare wrote a collection of famous poems, 154 sonnets, that people still read aloud. Among the catalog of American writers, poets such as Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson loom large as literary giants for their deft use of poetry technique, language and rich images that evoke snowy landscapes to disquieting ideas on mortality. Most of poetry these days (other than Instagram poems) are confined to academia and the pages of literary magazines. Rap in contrast is blatantly commercial and undeniably popular, ranking these days as the dominant soundtrack of the 21st Century, according to many music critics and online streaming metrics.

But if you look a little deeper into rap music, you see poetry performed to music. Poetry redefined. The most blatant sign is of course the end rhymes that rappers spit out, with the last word of a verse rhyming with the previous verse. But it doesn’t end there. Especially skilled rappers use complex rhyme schemes that are just as rich as the finest Renaissance poetry. These include other classical poetic techniques such as internal and slant rhymes, among others. Internal rhymes are rhymes found in the middle of the verse, such as the following from Eminem in the song “Stan”:

“...I left my cell, my pager, and my home phone
I sent two letters back in autumn, you must not-a got ‘em.”

Many rappers also use a technique called slant rhyme where words have similar sounds but do not quite rhyme. It’s also called imperfect rhyme. This technique is often used to avoid the sing song effect of perfect rhyming words, but it still adds a rhythmic flavor to a line of verse. Again Eminem with the slant rhymes in “Kings Never Die”:

“...I sit in Lucifer’s den by the dutchoven just choosing to sink
Even if it means I’m selling my soul, just to be the undisputed again/
Do whatever I gotta do just to win.”

Compare that with the poet Wilfred Owen and his poem “Strange Meeting”, which is full of slant rhymes:

“It seemed that out of battle I escaped/
Down some profound dull tunnel.
Long since I thought of the fight不小的/But a vivid memory of that day/Imagined the dead not far away.”

Besides different rhyming schemes, there are numerous other classical poetic tools that rappers have used in their lyrics, from alliteration to metaphor, in order to convey their message. But going beyond a technical analysis of rap’s lyrical structure, contemporary rappers are not far off from the mold set by the earliest poets of prehistory. Poetry started as an oral tradition with stories passed around the campfire, according to scholars. Early poets used rhymes and rich imagery in their telling as techniques to remember the story and pass along these tales to other people. Many researchers believe that Homer’s epic poem, The Odyssey, started off as an oral poem, to be heard and not read. That’s not far from how rap is presented as simultaneously a musical and oral art form. And so much of ancient poetry deals with epic battles between city states (Homer’s The Iliad), or a hero trying to kill a monster (Beowulf), or a hero trying to get home (Homer’s The Odyssey). How is this any different from contemporary rap? Lil Nas X leaving the comfort of home in “Old Town Road”; Nas and Jay Z exchanging diss tracks in their epic rap battle in the late 90s and early 2000s; Drake constantly repiping Toronto or himself.

Drake: Started from the bottom, now we’re here
Dance as a way to tell stories and messages, from classical to hip-hop

Humans have always communicated through sound and movement. Even in everyday life, our “body language” has as much—if not more— to say as the words we use to speak. The ways in which we move our bodies can say a lot about us, even when we’re not trying. In storytelling, we try to control this movement to support our story. The Nutcracker ballet is a fantasy story told through music and dance. Throughout history, these art forms have been powerful ways for people to tell stories. In the same way that painting and sculpting can express a story, dance does, too.

The Nutcracker describes the Christmas Eve dream of Clara Stahlbaum. Set in Germany during the 1800s, Clara imagines an amazing world in which her toy nutcracker becomes a soldier in the battle against the Mouse King. And, after saving his life and helping him turn into a prince,
Breaking was the main urban dance style for more than neighborhoods without a formal process or teaching. With trained teachers, “B-boys” practiced in urban. Whereas most dance styles are developed in a studio and even to make a living by dancing professionally. It can also be a way to stay active in competitive dance, competitions, which are often referred to as “battles.” Hip hop dance is a very special form because it can be done in many ways - whether as a private, personal hobby or on the stage performing for an audience. It is also a great way to get some exercise both indoors and out. It can also be a way to stay active in competitive dance, and even to make a living by dancing professionally. But best of all, Hip-Hop is a personal expression of the dancer that can help to tell his or her story.

From the 1970s, block parties in the Bronx. Turning the use of record turntables as a musical instrument. Turntable techniques, such as moving a record back and forth under a record player’s needle - which is called scratching - became integral parts of early hip-hop music. DJ Kool Herc is widely acknowledged as the father of hip-hop. He developed unique turntable techniques in the 1970s while throwing block parties in the Bronx.

James Brown’s 1969 hit “Get on the Good Foot.” In film footage, James Brown does a dance called the Good Foot for the song. The Good Foot was a fast athletic and easily lent itself to dance battles between two opponents. Dancers who adapted the Good Foot style would dance in the “break” of a song.

In hip-hop, deejays are hugely important because they developed the bedrock foundation for rap music. Back in the day, deejays mixed and sampled other records to make new songs, and they also pioneered the use of record turntables as a musical instrument.

Deejay: Person who plays records for a live audience. In hip-hop, deejays are hugely important because they developed the bedrock foundation for rap music. Back in the day, deejays mixed and sampled other records to make new songs, and they also pioneered the use of record turntables as a musical instrument.

Eight Count: Each count is one beat in the rhythm of the music. Each set of eight beats is an eight count.

Freeze: A dance move that involves the dancer spinning on their head with their torso perpendicular to the floor. Dancers usually wear a knat hat to facilitate spinning. They also use their arms and legs (raised out into the air) to control or speed up the momentum.

Improvisation: A particular piece in drama or music that is being created spontaneously without preparation.
**vocabulary**

**Krumping**
Bay area dance style derived from Clowning to express rage, assert power as a tool for conflict resolution.

**Lite Feet**
Cultural dance originated in Harlem

**Lockin’**
Developed by Don Campbell trying to imitate a local dance called the “funky chicken,” added an effect of locking of the joints of his arms and body, thus creating his signature dance. The group called Lockers was established to help develop the locking dance. Lockin’ mesh combinations of steps and moves to a freeze or a sudden pause. Lock combinations can consist of a series of points done by extending the arms and pointing them in different directions.

**Mood (as a modifier, especially in music)**
Inducing or suggestive of a particular feeling or state of mind.

**Narrative**
A spoken or written account of connected events.

**Nutcracker**
A tool designed to open nuts by cracking their shells; Nutcracker 

**Oppression**
Keep someone in subjection or hardship, especially by the unjust exercise of authority.

**Pleié** (pronounced plee - oh)
A French dance term borrowed from ballet; most of hip hop is performed in plee, meaning with the knees bent.

**Poppin’**
Style of dance created by Los Angeles street dance crew Electric Boogaloo Lockers (aka Electronic Boogaloo Lockers). Poppin’ was the term used to describe the specific dance moves comprised of sudden muscle contractions done with the triceps, forearms, neck, chest, and legs. These contractions emphasized the dancer’s movement, causing a quick, jolting effect.

**Relève** (pronounced reh - leh - vay)
A French dance term borrowed from ballet; go up on the toes while dancing.

**Sampling**
To record or extract a small piece of sound or music for reuse as a part of a composition or song.

**Synchronize**
To cause to occur or operate at the same time or rate.

**Tone**
A musical or vocal sound; modulation of the voice expressing a particular feeling or mood.

**Top Rock**
Foot movement performed from a standing position, relying upon a mixture of coordination, flexibility, rhythm, and most importantly, style. It is usually the first and foremost opening display of style, and it serves as a warm-up for transitions into the more acrobatic maneuvers.

**Tuttin’**
A type of dance element that involves people moving mostly their fingers, hands and arms in intricate, angular, inventive movements. Name refers to how the dance resembles Ancient Egyptian poses in art, i.e. King Tut.

**Uprock**
A spoken or written account of connected events.

**Vulnerable**
Exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.

**Waving**
Movement that mimics the motion of a wave

**Whacking/Waacking**
Disco influenced dance moves from the West Coast LGBTQ community. Circular and twisting movements of arms and hands to disco-style rhythms

**Windmills**
Popular breakdance move where a dancer pivots on the floor in a circle using their hands and torso on the ground while sweeping their legs in the air like a windmill.

**resources**

**Websites**
- learnetdance.com/hip-hop-dance-videos-online
- hiphopdanceresources.com/history/hip-hop-history-of-the-twentieth-century
- bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/jCQWqW6Za7yp4kVtH4xq7G45
- Small History of Hip Hop
dwighted.com/history/hip-hop/history-of-the-twentieth-century
- E.T.A Hoffmann’s fairy tale The Nutcracker and the Mouse King (audio)
springnotelibrary.net/writing/the_nutcracker_and_the_mouse_king
- Holiday Rap Songs & Videos
  - “Christmas Rap” by Kurtis Blow
    youtubers/GRWWh3Q
  - “Christmas in Hollis” by RUN DMC
    youtubers/OByoOxW39W8
  - A great example of using music to express a personalized and culturally specific holiday experience
  - “Sleigh Ride” by TLC song and lyrics
    youtubers/3YOv7ZC
  - “Shake The Dust”
    youtubers/tObDUfLx9B1
  - “All The Ladies Say”
    youtubers/3ADB074bY
- Rapoetics: Elements Of Poetry In Eminem’s Lyrics
  popmarmarina.com/rapoetics-elements-of-poetry-in-eminem-s-lyrics/
- The Anthology Of Rap?: Lyrics As Poetry
  rapoetics.com/lyrics-as-poetry/
- Americans Have Never Loved Poetry More—But They Call It Rap
  thedailybeast.com/americans-have-never-loved-poetry-more-but-they-call-it-rap

**Videos**
- 3 Simple Dance Moves for Beginners:
  youtubers/3xKBE8dMjP
- The History of Hip Hop Dancing:
  youtubers/3xKBE8dMjP
- Street Performers, Downtown Manhattan, New York:
  youtubers/3xKBE8dMjP
- The Cipher, the Circle & its Wisdom:
  Toni Blackman at TED x UMass Amherst
- “My Favorite Things” by Substantial feat. Steph
  youtubers/2QY9vGnF
- A great example of a well-known work being ReUsed/RePurpose/Remixed as it combines Jazz & Hip Hop cues.
- “My Adidas” by RUN DMC
  youtubers/2QY9vGnF
- A great example of personification, descriptive storytelling and using rap music for marketing & advertising! RUN DMC raps about the significance of their footwear and has you travel the path of their prints!
- Uprock dance battle
  youtubers/3xKBE8dMjP
- Best of Bboy Kaku’s crazy headspin and power 2015-2016
  youtubers/3xKBE8dMjP
- This is Tutting
  youtubers/3xKBE8dMjP

**Books**
- Chang, Jeff, Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation, Picador, December 27, 2005
- Cooper, Martha. Kramer, Nika. Rokafella, We B’Giriz, powerHouse Books, September 1, 2005
- Schloss, Joseph G., Foundation: B-boys, B-girls and Hip-Hop Culture in New York, Oxford University Press, March 5, 2009
- Byone, Yvonne., Encyclopedia of Rap and Hip Hop Culture, Greenwood Press, 2006
Presented in association with

NEW JERSEY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

and

Executive Producer
EVA PRICE

Adapted by MIKE FITELSON

Based on
The Nutcracker
by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Originally produced by the United Palace of Cultural Arts

Mike Fitelson, Executive Director