

# EXPLORE SPEECH & LANGUAGE AT...

## The Nutcracker Ballet

Throughout December



There are a wide variety of opportunities in the D.C. metropolitan area where you can go for a family outing to see the Nutcracker. While enjoying the cultural experience, encourage your child to work on their speech and language skills to talk about this classic holiday ballet.

### TALKING

**EXPLORE:** Expressive Grammar

**ENRICH:** Verb Tenses

**ENGAGE:** The ability to describe an action using a specific verb



Ballet is an active art form that lends itself easily to being described with distinct verbs. Before and after the performance, use the following activity to help your child improve the specificity of the verbs they use.

**PARENT PROMPT:**

- Before the show, ask your child to think of different verbs or "action words," that they think they will see the dancers do. Have him/her use each verb in a sentence. For example, "I think the dancers will LEAP" or "I think I will see dancers TWIRLING."
- If your child uses vague verbs, like "move" or "dance," give him/her two more specific choices: "How will they move? Will they PRANCE or GLIDE?" Then have him/her use his choice in a complete sentence.
- After the performance, ask your child to recount what actions he/she saw the dancers do - this way he/she can practice not only the specific verbs but also how to conjugate them into the past tense - "The ballerina SKIPPED and SLID."



### WORD PLAY

**EXPLORE:** Phonological Awareness

**ENRICH:** Syllable Segmentation

**ENGAGE:** The ability to segment a word into its component syllables



Being able to break a word into syllables is an important literacy skill. While talking about the ballet, you can teach your child about syllable segmentation by starting with the three-syllable word nutcracker.

**PARENT PROMPT:**

- Ask your child how many parts, or syllables, the word "nutcracker" has. Help him/her to figure it out by teaching him/her how to clap for each part of the word: nut-cra-cker - 3 syllables.
- Using the following list of words from the Nutcracker, have your child practice syllable segmentation by counting the number of syllables in each word:
  - Christmas (2)
  - Grandfather (3)
  - Clara (2)
  - Fritz (1)
  - Drosselmeyer (4)
  - Soldier (2)
  - Mouse (1)
  - Forest (2)



### LISTENING

**EXPLORE:** Higher Order Thinking Skills

**ENRICH:** Making Inferences

**ENGAGE:** The ability to use context clues to understand a story



Because a ballet is a performance in which plotlines are conveyed through movement, rather than words, you can teach your child to make inferences by combining his/her background knowledge with what he/she sees at the ballet to understand the story of the Nutcracker.

**PARENT PROMPT:**

- Have a conversation about the Nutcracker before going to the performance to find out what he/she knows of the story. See if he/she can answer questions about the basic elements of the story (you can find more details on the plot on Wikipedia):
  - Who are the characters? (Clara and her family)
  - What is the setting? (At Clara's family home)
  - When is the story happening? (On Christmas eve)
- At intermission or after the show, ask your child to answer the following inferential questions about the two acts:
  - ACT I:
    - Why does Clara get upset? (Because her brother broke her nutcracker)
    - Why does Clara go back to the parlor after everyone is asleep? (To check on the nutcracker)
  - ACT II:
    - Why is the Prince/Nutcracker grateful to Clara? (Because she saved him from the Mouse King)
    - Where does the Prince/Nutcracker take Clara? (To the Land of Sweets - or any other reference to desserts)



### SOCIAL LANGUAGE SKILLS

**EXPLORE:** Pragmatic Skills

**ENRICH:** Polite Social Language

**ENGAGE:** The ability to give a compliment



Giving someone a compliment can be a difficult skill if a child does not understand the value in saying something kind to someone else. Use the Nutcracker as a chance for your child to practice saying something complimentary to a performer.

**PARENT PROMPT:**

- First, review with your child that a compliment is praise that makes a person feel appreciated and important.
- Next, ask your child to think of three things they liked about the performance that they could use in a compliment to one of the performers. You can help your child formulate their idea into a sentence using a sentence starter, such as "I liked when you \_\_\_\_" or "My favorite part was when \_\_\_\_"
- If the dancers are available after the show, have your child give his/her compliment to one of them. If not, role play the situation with him/her.

**BONUS:** Check out [these ideas](https://www.autismteachingstrategies.com) from AutismTeachingStrategies.com to give your child more practice giving compliments.

