



Matthew Bourne's **Nutcracker!**

Behind the Scenes Resource
for KS1 and KS2

1. WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? WHY?

*Find out more about the dance company behind this resource pack and their latest show, **Nutcracker!***

[Sir Matthew Bourne OBE](#) is widely thought of as the UK's most popular and successful choreographer and director. His company – [New Adventures](#) – is celebrated for creating unique adaptations of some of our best-loved classical fictional stories – such as *Cinderella*, *Romeo & Juliet* and *Swan Lake*.

New Adventures' latest production is a brand-new tour of one of their most popular shows, *Nutcracker!* that Matthew first brought to the stage in 1992.

To put on a show like *Nutcracker!* New Adventures relies on the skills of lots of people who think creatively and enjoy using their imagination. A team of 'creatives' work closely together to determine what the show will look, feel and sound like, including...

- [Matthew Bourne](#)
Director and Choreographer
- [Anthony Ward](#)
Designer (Set and Costumes)
- [Howard Harrison](#)
Lighting Designer
- [Paul Groothuis](#)
Sound Designer
- [Duncan McLean](#)
Projection Designer

Click on the above links to find out more about them and their contribution to the show.



Nutcracker! is performed by a cast of more than 30 dancers. They are supported by a team of staff – including electricians, a stage manager and people to look after the wigs and costumes that are worn by the performers.

Taking a production such as *Nutcracker!* out on the road is very complicated. A big team of people travels with the show and are responsible for moving the costumes and the scenery. Others are responsible for the general day to day management of New Adventures and the show in general, looking after the finances, the staffing and the welfare of everyone in the team.

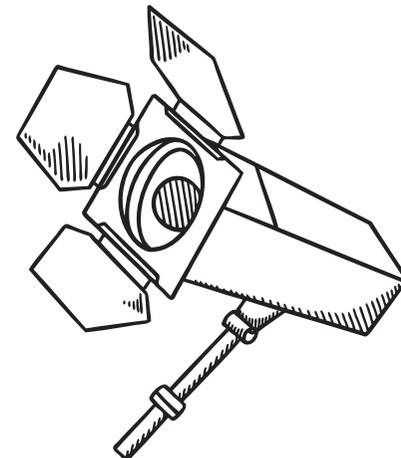
Here is a list of some of the different jobs that people working on *Nutcracker!* are responsible for:

- **General Manager** – Oversees the smooth operational management of the show from planning to finances and administration.
- **Creative Content Producer** – Responsible for marketing the live show through photography and film for use on social media and online.
- **Company Manager** – The most senior Stage Manager, who makes sure all of the technical aspects of the show happen smoothly. Also responsible for the welfare of the dancers and backstage team on tour.
- **Head of Wardrobe** – Oversees the team responsible for the making, sourcing (buying/hiring) and maintenance/upkeep of the costumes.
- **Wigs Supervisor** – Responsible for the preparation and maintenance/upkeep of the wigs, making sure they are clean and in good condition.
- **Stage Manager** – Supports the trouble-free and safe running of the show, with responsibility for ensuring props are in place and scene changes are smooth



Research Activity

Using the above list, can you think of any other jobs associated with staging a show? If so, what are they and what do they do?



The Plot

In *Nutcracker!* the story is set in several different locations, including an orphanage, a frozen lake and a kingdom full of candy, called 'Sweetieland'. The main character is an orphan named Clara and the story begins on Christmas Eve at the orphanage where she lives. After a party attended by the Governors of the orphanage, all orphans go to bed, but Clara cannot sleep. The toy nutcracker soldier she was given as a present has come to life and appears to want to help Clara and the other orphans escape.

Suddenly the walls of the orphanage crack open, revealing a large Christmas tree outside, behind which is a beautiful, sparkling frozen lake. Clara, Nutcracker and the orphans begin skating together, before being led to Sweetieland by two twins from the orphanage who have become a pair of Cupids.



In this fantastical land full of sweets, overseen by Queen Candy and King Sherbet, Clara sees all kinds of different dances take place. Then a giant wedding cake appears and Clara begins dancing with the Nutcracker. She eventually falls asleep and when she awakes she is disappointed to find she is back in the orphanage. She then realises Nutcracker is still there and together they escape through the orphanage window.

MEET THE TEAM: To hear from the creative team behind *Nutcracker!* and meet some of the dancers, click on this [link](#).



Writing Activity

Think of another fairy-tale, or well-known story, that would make a great dance show. Write down the main characters and a brief plot for the storyline. Can you then write or draw a storyboard that outlines what happens, like chapters of a book? Think about why this particular story could work well when told through dance? What twist might you add to the story, characters or design?



2. THE ORPHANAGE

This resource focusses on Act One of *Nutcracker!* which is set in an orphanage. This resource includes activities to help with the following skills:

- Art & Design
- History
- Physical Education

The curtains rise to reveal the inside of Dr Dross's Orphanage for Waifs and Strays. This scene is set in the Victorian times and is 'Dickensian' – which means it is influenced by the books of Charles Dickens, which are often suggestive of poor living conditions.



Research Activity

As a class, research what life was like in Victorian times for young people like the orphans in *Nutcracker!* You could look at the books of Charles Dickens for inspiration. Imagine who the children might be that are staying with Dr Dross – where have they come from, how old are they, what are their names and why are they orphans?

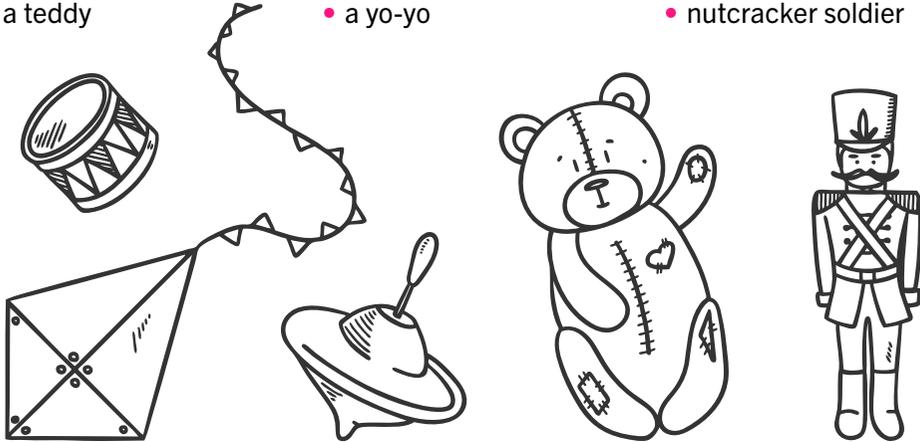


Art & Design Activity

Using images from the production as inspiration, draw your own version of what the stage might look like if you had designed the opening scene of *Nutcracker!*

The orphans are all hard at work, preparing for an inspection by the Governors and are being told what to do by Dr Dross's wife, Mrs Dross. They decorate the orphanage for Christmas and are clearly very excited. The Governors bring a basket of toys for the children and they each choose one. The toys are old-fashioned and include:

- a kite
- a spinning-top
- a drum
- a teddy
- a yo-yo
- nutcracker soldier



Creative Movement Activity – Task A

Can you imagine you are one of these toys? Start experimenting and exploring how this toy moves. You could describe these movements and how they make you feel...for example, *“when I move like a spinning top, I go round and round in circles and it makes me feel very dizzy”*.

Now choose another of the toys and see what different movements you can make and how they make you feel. Finally, choose one of your own toys that you play with at home and imagine you are that toy. How would you move then?

Once you have movements for 3 different toys, use them to create a phrase (a series of movements joined together in a sequence), changing from one toy to the other. Feel free to practice this phrase and add some music to dance to. You might try adding noises that match with your movements.



Creative Movement Activity – Task B

Create your own movement for each of the following exercises, then put them together to create a phrase.

- **Lifting weights** – explore how you would LIFT differently with a LIGHT weight and a HEAVY weight. First imagine using a light weight and then increasingly heavy ones.
- **Skipping with a rope** – explore SWINGING movements and BOUNCING movements
- **Stretching** – first STRETCH your arms and legs, then other body parts.
- **Using a hula-hoop** – start by making circles with your hips and explore different DIRECTIONS and SPEEDS. Then imagine you are using the hula hoop on different parts of your body – such as around your knees or elbows or wrists.

Now create some other keep-fit/exercise-based movements of your own. For example, running on the spot, doing star-jumps etc. Choose the three you like best and mix them up into a short phrase. Try performing them for a specific number of counts – such as 8 or 16 counts for each phrase.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT:

With a partner, teach one another your sequence of movements so that you now have a duet (performed by two people) that has a total of 6 different keep fit/exercise-based movements or actions.



3. DREAMS

This resource focusses on one of the main themes of the story of *Nutcracker!* – that of dreams, fantasy worlds, escapism and imagination. This resource includes activities to help with the following skills:

- Art & Design
- Literacy
- Physical Education

Throughout *Nutcracker!* the orphans that live at Dr Dross's Orphanage for Waifs and Strays use their imaginations to help them escape the reality of their day to day lives. When watching the show, we aren't quite sure whether the children from the orphanage have actually escaped into the fantasy worlds of the Frozen Lake and Sweetieland, or if it is all imagined.



Writing Activity – Task A

Imagine you are one of the children living in the orphanage and dreaming of a different imaginary/fantasy world. Now, write answers to the following questions...

- What is your imagined/fantasy world called?
- What does it look like?
- What does it smell like?
- What does it feel like, being there?
- What can you hear?
- Are other people/creatures/lifeforms living there? If so, describe them.
- What are you going to do in your imagined/fantasy world?

One of the things that is really exciting about using our imaginations is that they are limitless – there is no end to the different possibilities we can create in our mind. In our imagination anything is possible... cats can fly, houses can be made of cake and aliens can sit beside us at school!

There are many different ways that the creative team behind *Nutcracker!* help to explain the storyline, the characters and the themes of the show to the audience. This includes the kind of music that is played at each particular point in the show and the way the lighting changes – for example, getting darker when something frightening or more sinister is happening. The choreography of the performers and the way they use their bodies and their facial expressions also helps the audience to understand what is happening.

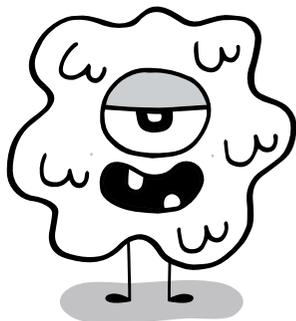
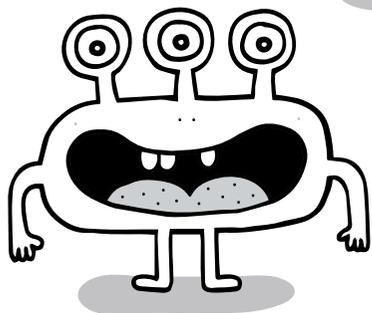
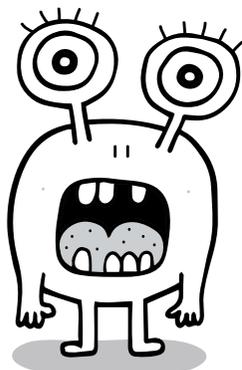
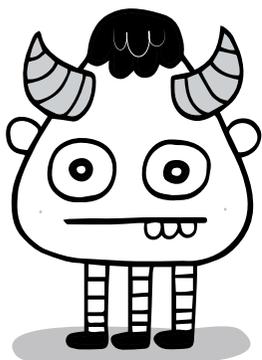




Writing Activity – Task B

Using the answers you provided in your writing task as a starting point, have a more in-depth think about the kinds of people/creatures/lifeforms that are living in your imagined/fantasy world. Describe 2 or 3 characters in detail including the following pieces of information:

- What are they wearing?
- What is their personality like?
- What do their physical features look like?
- Who are their family and friends?
- What are their likes and dislikes?



Creative Movement Activity

Create some movements to be performed by one or more of the people/creatures/lifeforms that you described in Writing task B. Use the following suggestions to help create those movements:

- Think about how your person/creature/life form stands when it is at rest
- Think about how they would travel from one side of the room to the other
- Think about how they would move if they were in a rush
- Think about how they would move if they were frightened
- Create 2 or 3 moves or ‘gestures’ to show your character’s personality
- Create 2 or 3 moves or ‘gestures’ to show what your character is wearing

Now blend all of these moves and ideas into a single phrase, adding in at least 4 creative devices from the list below:

- Bounce
- Turn
- Floorwork
- Change directions
- Slow motion
- Speed up
- Pause
- Repetition



Next, use the descriptions from Writing Task A and choose a piece of music you feel reflects the overall feeling of the imaginary world you created. For example, if the world is stark, mountainous, hot and scary perhaps the music would be dramatic and dark, full of percussion and low bass instruments. Or, if it is a magical glittering fairyland, then perhaps you would choose the high-pitched sound of bells, or tinkling, light, floaty sounding music.

Finally, try to perform your movement phrase to your chosen music. For a further challenge, you could try and make the movement fit with the tempo and phrasing of the music if you wish.

4. SNOW

At the end of Act One of *Nutcracker!* the wall of the dormitory at Dr Dross's Orphanage for Waifs and Strays begins to crack open to reveal a giant Christmas tree. As Dr Dross, Mrs Dross and their two children – Sugar and Fritz – appear to see what all the commotion is, the orphans seize their opportunity to escape and tie them up. After running away Clara and the other orphans find themselves in a winter wonderland, with a beautiful frozen lake. This resource includes activities to help with the following skills:

- Art & Design
- Literacy
- Physical Education



Creative Movement Activity – Task A

Create some movements to express these snow-themed objects, activities and feelings. Do try and add some more of your own to the list below, too.

Objects (nouns)

- Sledge
- Snowball
- Mittens
- Snowman
- Snow shovel

Activities (verbs)

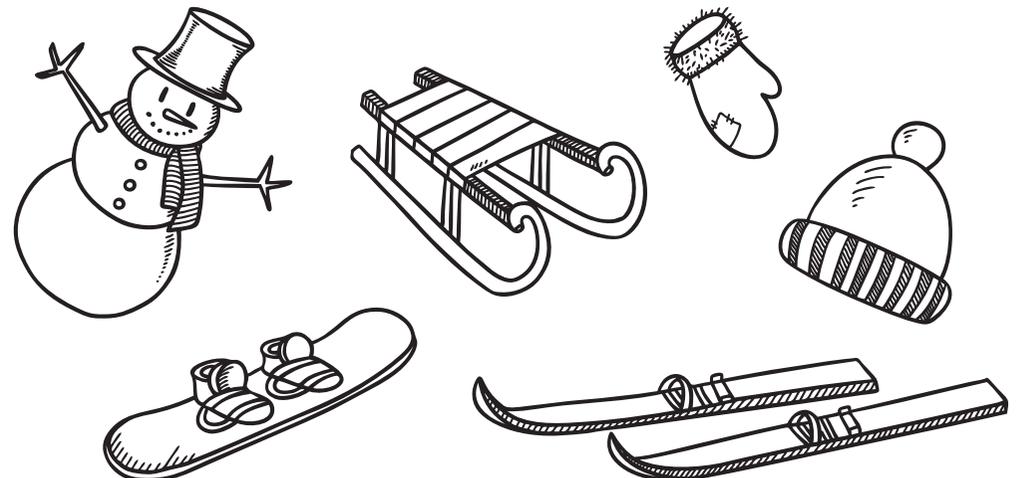
- Skiing
- Drinking hot chocolate
- Snowboarding
- Shivering
- Making a snow angel

Describing words (adjectives)

- Excited
- Frozen
- Icy
- Sparkling
- Soggy

Pay particular attention to the describing words and use those to inform the way you perform those actions and movements. Think about the way your body and your facial expressions change if you are excited or feeling freezing cold, for example.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT: Once you have created a short sequence work with a partner and teach each other your movements. Now build this into a duet to be performed by both of you at the same time. You should also choose some music to accompany your movement phrase.



When the orphans leave the orphanage and find themselves at the Frozen Lake, we can see that this environment is incredibly different. Not only does it look very different from the dark and gloomy orphanage but it feels different too. It is lighter, brighter and more magical and optimistic.

Although they are not wearing ice-skates, nor are they on ice, the audience are given the impression that they are skating on the frozen pond. The performers use swift, smooth, sweeping, movements to give the impression that they are on ice.



Creative Movement Activity – Task B

Firstly, find four pictures of people ice-skating. You might want to use some photos of professional ice-skaters as inspiration. Recreate these pictures with your bodies, creating four different positions that you can freeze in, or hold. Experiment with different ways that you can ‘skate’ or ‘glide’ across the ice. Think about the quality of your movements and their speed.

Once you have experimented with different options choose one of your original four positions as a starting point. Then link this with the three remaining positions by using some of the different ways of travelling across the ice, to link each of the four positions together.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT: add a creative device listed below to either the four ice-skating positions themselves, or the ways you travel between them, or both:

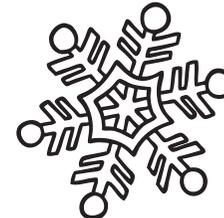
- Turn
- Roll
- Elevation
- Slow motion
- Repetition

FURTHER LEARNING: What is snow?! How is it made? Look at [this BBC Bitesize resource](#) to find out more



Art & Design Activity

Look at images of snowflakes. Did you know that, although every snowflake is different, they all have 6 sides. Have a go at creating your own snowflakes. You could create an electronic image using a computer or tablet or draw or paint it. Or, use scissors and cut it out of paper.



Creative Movement Activity – Task C

Research different types of cold weather and their associated weather phenomena such as blizzards, snow flurries, hail, avalanches and whiteouts. Write down their key features and a series of describing words. For example:

- **Blizzards** – a severe snowstorm with high winds – freezing, blowy, white
- **Hail** – pellets of frozen rain which fall in showers – wet, slippery, hard

Now experiment with travelling across the room, from one side to the other, using different movements that are inspired by the adjectives (describing words) in your list. You can do this individually or as a group. If you are moving from A to B as a group, think about how you might interact with one another.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT: Work as a group to create a short sequence of movements, using your bodies, gestures and expressions, which combines all the different movements you have created.

5. SWEETIELAND

This resource focusses on Act Two of *Nutcracker!* – which is set in the imaginary world of Sweetieland. This resource includes activities to help with the following skills:

- Art & Design
- Literacy
- Physical Education

Clara, finds herself in Sweetieland, where everything is edible and made of sweets. The different characters Clara meets are based on different sweets. She meets the Humbug Bouncer, an Allsorts Trio, the Knickerbocker Glory, the Marshmallow Girls and the Gobstoppers as well as Queen Candy, King Sherbet, Princess Sugar and Prince Bon-Bon.

Each character has a very distinct personality and appearance, and a costume inspired by how the real-life version of each sweet looks and tastes. The Humbug bouncer is strong and hard and wears an oversized black and white stripy costume. The Gobstoppers are shiny, hard, round, swirly and tough whereas the Marshmallow Girls are pink, light and fluffy!



Art & Design Activity

Imagine you have arrived in Sweetieland... what sort of sweets would you hope to see there?! Try designing your own Sweetieland character and their costume.

Firstly, pick your favourite sweet or dessert such as a stick of rock, a lollipop or a banana split. Note down some adjectives (describing words) that come to mind when you think about your chosen sweet or dessert. Describe what it looks like, tastes like, smells like and feels like.

Now bring your Sweetieland character to life using art and crafts materials. You could draw your character using colouring pencils or crayons, use paint or perhaps make a collage with fabric or cut-outs from newspapers or magazines. You could even build your Sweetieland out of items you can find in the recycling bin.



WATCH New Adventures' Resident Artist design the costume for their own sweetie character using strawberry laces [here](#).

WATCH the Designer, Anthony Ward, talk more about the inspiration for his amazing costume creations [here](#).



Creative Movement Activity

Now we're going to bring the Sweetie characters to life through movement.

Look at pictures of the Humbug Bouncer, the Allsorts Trio, the Knickerbocker Glory, the Marshmallow Girls and the Gobstoppers and decide what you think these characters are like. Write down 3 words to describe their physical appearance i.e. their shape, size, weight or colour. Then find 3 words to describe their taste and texture, such as 'fruity' and 'goeey'.

Now, create one or two really extreme and exaggerated movements to represent each word. Once you have actions for each of your 6 words mix them together in a different order to create a phrase of movement.

Work in small groups and learn the movements you have each created to build a longer sequence to be performed in unison (at the same time). You might wish to count aloud or use an instrument such as a drum or triangle, or a piece of music to help you keep the same tempo.

WATCH New Adventures' Resident Artist teach you how to become a bouncing biker Gobstopper by learning this fun and energetic phrase from *Nutcracker!* [here](#).



GLOSSARY

Adaptation – a live performance (whether dance, ballet, a play or a musical) that has been adapted from a written work

Choreographer – the person who creates the dance steps and movement for a performance

Choreography – the sequence of steps and movements that form a dance

Creative device – a method or technique used in a rehearsal or a performance that has a creative aim or purpose

Designer – a person who works with other scenic design elements to create the stage setting for a piece of performance. Designers usually specialise in Set, Costume, Lighting, Sound or Projection

Director – a person with primary responsibility for the creative vision behind a performance on stage

Production – a live performance (whether dance, ballet, a play or a musical) that is performed on stage. Also known as a ‘performance’ or ‘show’

Repertoire – any dance or part of a dance that is taken outside of the piece in which it exists. It can also describe the list of productions that a company (such as New Adventures) performs

Sequence – a piece of dance with set movements that happen in a particular order

Phrase – a sequence of movements, often with a beginning, middle and an end

Duet – a dance performed by two people

Tempo – the speed of the beats to the movements in a dance – usually fast, medium or slow

Phrasing – the matching of the movements of a dance to the phrases of the music (a phrase in music is a single unit of music that makes complete musical sense when heard on its own)

Turn – a vertical rotation of the body

Roll – a movement in which the body is turned heels over head with the back of the neck resting on the ground

Elevation – a jump

Slow Motion – performing a movement very slowly so it appears as if time has slowed down

Repetition – when a dance move is repeated for effect

In Unison – when a dance move is performed at the same time as someone else

Rehearsal – when all the people involved in the staging of a live performance practise in order to prepare for the presentation of the work in front of the audience

Resource Pack written by [Hannah Osmond](#)
Contributions from and with thanks to the
entire Creative Team on *Nutcracker!*
Original designs by Anthony Ward
Nutcracker! production shots: Johan Persson
Design: [Matt Hodges](#)

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