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 remixes along with an electric violinist as they create hip-hop interludes throughout the show. Innovative digital remixes along with an electric violinist as they create a supercharged cast of a dozen all-star dancers. DJ Boo popular ballet.

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 a 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!

Are there any similarities from the standard Nutcracker production that remain in the hip-hop version? 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.

What can audiences expect to see from the dancers during this show? Lots of energy, style, unique movement and magic. Our dancers are experts in a wide range of classic hip hop styles including breaking, popping, locking, and waiving. They are also amazing freestylers and within the show we mix choreography and freestyle to be true to hip hop culture. You have created many diverse productions in your field. How do those previous experiences play into your vision for the Hip Hop Nutcracker?

I think the more shows you create, the more you learn. In addition to The Nutcracker, I have choreographed Stravinsky’s Firebird and Vivaldi’s Four Seasons. I’m always looking for ways to be more articulate as a storyteller.

Tell us about your creative background. How and when did you get started? I grew up dancing as a kid and then quit in high school. I went to the University of Pennsylvania and studied Communications, but while I was there, I missed dancing so much that I started a student-run dance company called “Strictly Funk.” I just sort of appointed myself director and got people to start working with me. Over the years I was at Penn, the company really took off. After I graduated, I came to NYC and pretty much did the same thing. It was a lot harder to do in NYC, but I got my first real choreography job from someone who saw me freestyling at a nightclub. I never looked back...

Who are your influences? For example, which educators had the biggest impact on you and your career? My main inspirations are Steven Hoggett and Scott Graham of the British physical theatre company “Frantic Assembly.” I was introduced to them while studying abroad 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.

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 a new twist on a holiday classic that reflects diversity of the world today...

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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 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.

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**Inspired ideas in the classroom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Focus</th>
<th>Student Activity</th>
<th>Curriculum Standards</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for the performance</td>
<td>Show students paintings, photography, images, and graffiti that depict what life was like in the Bronx in the 1970s. Play “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash &amp; The Furious Five while students study the images. 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.</td>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience the performance</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>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect, respond and read</td>
<td>Ask students to recall what stood out to them from the performance. Where did the scenes take place? Who were some of the characters they remember? What was that character’s role in the story? What are some points of conflict the characters experienced in the show?</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</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 breakdance go together well? Focus on one particular character, setting, or conflict from the show that successfully shows a blending of ballet and breakdance.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Originate</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>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearse</td>
<td>Give students time and space to rehearse their solutions. Talk to students about the importance of improvising in the process of art making. Remind them that there is no right or wrong when it comes to creating. Everything is useful. Keep what you like the most and forget the rest. Practice that on purpose!</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make magic</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>
<td>National Arts Standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher Focus**
- Engage Your Senses
  - 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?

**Student Activity**
- Chain Reaction
  - 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?

**Curriculum Standards**
- English Language Arts
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1.2
  - Social Studies
    - NCSS.II.c
    - NCSS.I.c
    - English Language Arts
      - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1
      - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1
### National Core Arts Anchor Standards

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
2. Refine and complete artistic work.
3. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
4. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
5. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
6. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
7. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

### Social Studies Standards

NCSS.III.A
- Provide multiple perspectives on issues important to individuals, communities, and societies.
- Understand the role of the arts in cultural diversity, including artistic contributions of African Americans.

NCSS.II.C
- Select, use, and evaluate a variety of print and nonprint sources, and other media, to gain multiple perspectives on issues important to individuals, communities, and societies.
- Identify how these contributions have and continue to influence American society.

### Language Arts Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.R.1
- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.R.3
- Analyze and integrate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

### Common Core State Standards

English Language Arts

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCR.A.R.1**
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCR.A.R.3**
Analyze and integrate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCR.A.R.9**
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.CCR.A.W.4**
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCR.A.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.CCR.A.SL.2**
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, and orally.

**NCSS.II.C**
Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity, so that the learner can describe ways in which language, stories, folklore, music, and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture and influence behavior of people living in a particular culture.

**NCSS.III.C**
Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time, so that the learner can compare and contrast different stories or accounts about past events, people, places, or situations, identifying how they contribute to our understanding of the past.

### Cultural Connections

**Breaking Barriers in the Arts**
Throughout the 20th century until today, artists of color have infused their work with their unique experiences and perspectives in order to give it equal footing to the larger cultural hegemony in the United States. Using the arts as a medium to bridge greater cultural understanding, artists of color have used art as a form of activism, enlightening American society about the cultural and historic contributions of African Americans and creating a pathway for other artists of color to succeed.

*James Baldwin*, born on August 2, 1924, in Harlem, New York, is considered of the 20th century’s greatest writers and cultural critics. He is known for writing about the injustices faced by African Americans when confronting and living with institutional white supremacy. Baldwin wrote, “The role of the artist is exactly the same as the role of the lover. If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don’t see.” Baldwin broke new literary ground with the exploration of racial and social issues in his literary works such as *If Beale Street Could Talk.*

*Alvin Ailey*, born on January 5, 1931, in Rogers, Texas, was one of the leading figures in 20th-century modern dance. As an African-American choreographer and activist, he had essentially the same artistic goals as Baldwin. He founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the hugely popular, multi-racial modern dance ensemble that popularized modern dance around the world thanks to extensive world tours. Ailey took *Go Tell it on the Mountain* and *If Beale Street Could Talk.* Disillusioned by American prejudice against African Americans, he desired to free himself of the boundaries of being “merely a Negro; or, even, merely a Negro writer.”

Baldwin left the U.S. in 1948, at the age of 24, to settle in Paris. Over the next forty years, he would travel back and forth from Europe to the U.S. to continue to be a force in the Civil Rights movement and influence other writers and artists of color to push the boundaries of cultural norms. He wrote, “I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”

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influences from western styles of dance including modern dance, ballet, and jazz, and blended them with his memories of celebration and worship in the African American Baptist church.

Alley envisioned a company where African American dancers could display their talents and skills, but also express their heritage. His first performance was at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. He debuted Blues Suite, a piece that drew on the music and characters of the Texas communities he had traveled through as a child. Blues Suite was widely praised by critics, and gave Alley the confidence and support needed to continue developing and staging his own works.

In his third production at the 92nd Street Y, Alley premiered Revelations. With graceful modern dance movements set to gospel music, spirituals and the blues, this piece secured Alley’s position as one of the foremost choreographers in America. Since its premiere, more than 20 million people in 71 countries have seen Revelations—more than any other modern dance work in history.

In its original form, the company was comprised of eight African American dancers. However, with its immediate popularity and demanding performance schedule, the company quickly grew to include Caucasian and Asian dancers by the mid-1960s. By the 1970s Alvin Alley’s American Dance Theater was one of the most sought after companies in the world.

A precursor and early mentor to Alley was Katherine Dunham, a choreographer and anthropologist who had one of the most successful dance careers in African-American and European theater of the 20th century. Dunham was known for melding ballet and African-American and European theater of the 20th century. Dunham was known for melding ballet and American Dance Theater was one of the most sought after companies in the world.

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**vocabulary**

**Krumpling**  
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 A French dance term borrowed from ballet; Nutcracker for reuse as a part of a composition or song.

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

**Plie** (pronounced ple - ay)  
A French dance term borrowed from ballet; most of hip hop is performed in plie, 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.

**Relevé** (pronounced reh - leh - vay)  
A French dance term borrowed from ballet; according to German folklore, they were given as keepsakes to bring good luck and protect the home.

**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**  
Dance move combinations done upright involving inventive and intricate foot shuffles, robotic movements, tuttin’, waving and other hip-hop dance elements.

**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 brake-dance move where a dancer pivots on the floor in a circle using their hands and torsos on the ground while sweeping their legs in the air like a windmill.

**resources**

**Websites**

- learnedance.com/hip-hop-dance-videos-online
- hiphopnutcracker.com/history/hip-hop-history-timeline
- bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/gJQWqW8KZapYw7hVwDqG
- Small History of Hip Hop
danced.com/history/hip-hop-history.html
- E.T.A Hoffmann’s fairy tale The Nutcracker and the Mouse King (audio)
classpop.com/musings/the_nutcracker_and_the_mouse_king
- Holiday Rap Songs & Videos
  - “Christmas Rap” by Kurtis Blow
  - “Christmas in Hollis” by RUN DMC
  - “All The Ladies Say”
- Rapoetics: Elements Of Poetry In Eminem’s Lyrics
- Poetrymachina.com/rapoetics-elements-of-poetry-in-eminem’s-lyrics/
- ‘The Anthology Of Rap’: Lyrics As Poetry
- American’s 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:
  - youtu.be/vQkZJwK0qWs
- The History of Hip Hop Dancing:
  - youtu.be/wz8nevBIzvs
- Street Performers, Downtown Manhattan, New York:
  - youtu.be/ujREEgxEP7g
- Best of Bboy Kaku’s crazy headspin and power 2015-2016
  - youtu.be/TbBqtuYvags
- This is Tutting
  - youtu.be/watch?v=t7Bbq6Vrapp

**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’Girlz, powerHouse Books, September 1, 2005
- Huntington, Carla Stalling. Hip-Hop Culture in New York, Oxford University Press, March 27, 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

This Guide was written and produced by NJPAC Arts Education

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