

The Nutcracker Doll

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The Nutcracker Doll is the story of a young ballet student who has a goal. She auditions and gets a very small part in a professional performance of the Nutcracker ballet. It is a true story, and students will identify with the main character's hopes and accomplishments.

Pre-Reading activities

Goals for Active Participation

In *The Nutcracker Doll*, Kepley was able to do something very exciting. Do you participate on a team or have you acted in a play? Do you sing in a choir? Do you play an instrument? Cook dinner? Do you have a special skill? Would you like to try something new? What are your goals? How did Kepley achieve her goal?

Here is a list of things that are helpful to do if you would like to achieve a goal. Can you find examples in the story of Kepley doing these things?

- **Decide** what you want to do
- **Prepare:** Learn about the activity. Take a class, gather information, observe skilled practitioners, imitate them, imagine yourself doing well.
- **Stick with it!** practice, practice, practice. Learn from your mistakes. Try to understand the specific ways in which the skills of more advanced students are different than yours. Have a conversation with a friend about what you are learning.
- **Audition:** try out, be brave! Show your skills. Stretch to do the best you can.
- **More Preparation:** observe teachers carefully. Practice. Bring your own special personality to the task. Read current books or magazines about the subject.
- **Perform!** Do your very best, be reliable. You're ready!

Social/Emotional

Kepley experiences many emotions during the story. As you read the book, name the emotions when

- the girls are 'bouncing, fidgeting, and giggling'
- Kepley's insides 'felt funny' as she lined up for the audition
- Kepley's heart was thumping
- She sat in the cocoon of the wings

Drama/Movement/Music

Encourage students to think about dance:

- How do you think dance is different from walking?

Ballet is a specific kind of dance

- Have you seen a ballet performance in the theatre or on TV? Have you taken a ballet class?
- What kind of movements did you see the dancers do?
- How do you think ballet is similar to/different than other kinds of dance you have seen?
- Ballet dancers are always rehearsing and training. Their muscles need to be strong. What other kind of activities require training and practicing?

Some dances tell a story

- The Nutcracker ballet tells a story, but the dancers do not speak.
- How do you think a story is told without using words?
- Use your face and body (no words!) to tell a classmate a story, for example, you've lost your shoe.

- Remember to show your feelings in the story--you are sad you've lost your shoe.
- Can you think of simple gestures/pantomime that we use everyday? (hello, come here, be quiet)

Listen to/move to ballet music

- Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky wrote the music for The Nutcracker
- Listen and describe the mood, and tempo
- In what ways does the music complement the action in the story ballet The Nutcracker?

Some roles in a ballet are small, like Kepley's doll role. But all are necessary.

A live theatre performance requires a team of people behind the scenes and onstage: dancers, musicians, lighting technicians, costume designers, set designers, ushers, box office workers...all of whom are indispensable.

- Look at a ballet playbill and see the jobs listed: creative director, stage manager, composer, choreographer ...
- What are the skills needed for all of these different kinds of work?