



MARK MORRIS  DANCE GROUP

Dance On! Digital Dance Lab

The Hard Nut:

Telling Stories Through Dance

Resource Guide

40th Anniversary Digital Season 20/21

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Welcome to Dance On! MMDG's Digital Dance Lab,

a 3-part series that introduces students to 3 of Mark Morris's most acclaimed works, *The Hard Nut*, *Dido and Aeneas*, and *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed il Moderato*. Utilizing MMDG's inclusive and culturally responsive arts education approach, each session includes a 20-minute movement lesson, led by an MMDG dancer and accompanied by live music, an interactive resource guide, and is designed for students with and without disabilities.

This interactive resource guide aims to provide students with deeper engagement and insight into Mark's festive holiday classic, *The Hard Nut*, and contains student-centered activities to further explore the concept of storytelling through dance.

We hope you enjoy!

Sarah Marcus, Director of Education

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Learning Objective

In this Digital Dance Lab, students will explore the role of a dance company in telling stories through Mark Morris Dance Group's *The Hard Nut*. They will learn about and embody the story through guided movement sequences, recalling choreography from *The Hard Nut*, and exploring how they might express their own stories through the medium of dance.

About the Art Form: Modern Dance

Dance is defined as: "To move rhythmically usually to music, using prescribed or improvised steps and gestures." There are many styles of dance and ways to move the body. The dance form performed by the Mark Morris Dance Group is called MODERN dance.

What Is Modern Dance?

Modern dance developed in the 20th century primarily in the United States and Germany. Along with modern art, it was a rebellious response to the traditional style of classical ballet. The earliest modern dance innovators pushed the boundaries and limitations previously set by traditional schools of dance. American pioneers include Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Ruth St. Denis.

Mark Morris creates original dances much as the pioneers of modern dance once did. His company, the Mark Morris Dance Group, is an ensemble that only performs dances that he creates. Many modern dance companies perform dances by several choreographers. Dance companies that perform dances by choreographers' other than their founders are called repertory companies.

Who is Mark Morris?



CHOREOGRAPHER

Mark Morris has been praised as the “the most successful and influential choreographer alive, and indisputably the most musical.” (*The New York Times*). In addition to creating over 150 works for the Mark Morris Dance Group, he conducts orchestras, directs opera, and choreographs for ballet companies worldwide. Morris’s work is acclaimed for its ingenuity, musicality, wit, and humanity. Named a Fellow of the MacArthur Foundation in 1991, he has received eleven honorary doctorates to date and a multitude of awards, including the Samuel H. Scripps/American Dance Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement, the Leonard Bernstein Lifetime Achievement Award for the Elevation of Music in Society, the Benjamin Franklin Laureate Prize for Creativity, the Cal Performances Award of Distinction in the Performing Arts, the Orchestra of St. Luke’s Gift of Music Award, and the 2016 Doris Duke Artist Award. In 2015, Morris was inducted into the Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney hall of Fame National Museum of Dance in Saratoga Springs, New York.

Formed in 1980, Mark Morris’s internationally-renowned **Mark Morris Dance Group** (MMDG) has received “highest praise for their technical aplomb, their musicality, and their sheer human authenticity.” (*Bloomberg News*). Live music and community engagement are vital components of the Dance Group. It has toured with its own musicians, **the MMDG Music Ensemble**, since 1996, and regularly collaborates with orchestras and opera companies around the world. MMDG’s film and television projects include *Dido and Aeneas*, *The Hard Nut*, *Falling Down Stairs*, the U.K.’s *South Bank Show*, and *Live from Lincoln Center*. In 2015 Morris’ signature work *L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* premiered on PBS’ *Great Performances*. The Mark Morris Dance Center was opened in 2001 in Brooklyn, NY to provide a home for the Dance Group, rehearsal space for the dance community, programs for local children and seniors, and dance classes for participants of all ages and abilities.

Who is Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)



COMPOSER of *The Nutcracker*, op. 71

One of the most popular composers in history, P.I. Tchaikovsky was born in Russia as the son of a mine inspector. He began to compose music at the age of 14, but it was not until he was 22 that he enrolled in the St. Petersburg Conservatory to study composition. Among his early successes was the score for *Swan Lake*, which was to become one of the most famous ballets of all time. In addition to *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*, Tchaikovsky's major works include his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the fantasy *Romeo and Juliet*, the ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, the opera *The Queen of Spades*, and two enormously popular concertos, the Piano Concerto in B Flat Minor and the Violin Concerto in D. He also composed the "1812" Overture, which you might have heard played during a fireworks display – sometimes cannons are fired during the booming finale!

Who is E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822)



AUTHOR

Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann was born in Königsberg, Germany. He attended law school but soon found himself interested in painting, writing, and composing. He even changed his third name, Wilhelm, to "Amadeus" in honor of the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. In the last ten years of his life, Hoffmann concentrated on writing stories. His tales are full of mysterious and supernatural events. He was one of the first "horror" or "fantasy" writers, influencing the American writer Edgar Allen Poe. The ballet *The Nutcracker*, with music by Tchaikovsky, is loosely based on Hoffmann's story "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." Some of Hoffmann's other stories were turned into musical works, including the ballet *Coppélia*, with music by Leó Delibes, and the opera *The Tales of Hoffmann*, with music by Jacques Offenbach.

“Fun and amazement dance in the same steps; the choreography lifts the whole audience through a crescendo of changing emotions.”

The New York Times



The Hard Nut

About *The Hard Nut*

This study guide will introduce you to *The Hard Nut*, a dance by the Mark Morris Dance Group. You will learn about the artists from the past and the present who contributed to *The Hard Nut*, the way this production was made, and the story the dance tells. You may have seen, or heard of, a ballet called *The Nutcracker*. It was created over a hundred years ago in Russia. Music was written for the ballet by a composer named Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. *The Nutcracker* became so popular that ballet companies all over the world still perform it every year during the holiday season.

Like children all over the world, Mark Morris grew up watching ballet companies perform *The Nutcracker*. In 1991, Mr. Morris decided to create a new dance using Tchaikovsky's music for *The Nutcracker*. He also went back and read the story that the ballet was based on, which was written by E.T.A. Hoffmann, a German writer who lived over two hundred years ago. Mark Morris took some of the ingredients from the famous ballet *The Nutcracker* – the story and the music – and created a new dance called *The Hard Nut*.

Synopsis

Act I

Dr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum's annual Christmas Eve Party. Their children Fritz, Marie and Louise wait in the den. Party dances: polka, hokey-pokey, hesitation, stroll, bump, waltz. Friend of the family Drosselmeier brings animated toys that he's made. He gives a Nutcracker to the children. Fritz breaks it. The children fight. Dr. Stahlbaum changes the subject. The guests go home. The family goes to bed. The housekeeper cleans up.

Marie can't sleep and comes downstairs to see if the Nutcracker is resting comfortably. At midnight she is frightened by rats. Everything in the room grows to giant size. G.I. Joes led by the Nutcracker battle rats led by the mutant Rat King. Marie kills the Rat King with her slipper. She falls unconscious. The Nutcracker is transformed into a young man. Marie is tucked in. A worried Drosselmeier makes his way through the blizzard.

–Curtain–

Act II

Marie is in a fever. Drosselmeier comes to see if Marie is resting comfortably and tells her one of his stories:

THE HARD NUT

Once upon a time a King and a Queen had a beautiful baby girl named Pirlipat. The Queen's old enemy the Rat Queen threatened to ruin little Pirlipat. The nurse and the cat were left to guard the baby at night. While the nurse and cat slept, the Rat Queen destroyed Princess Pirlipat's face. The Royal Family was horrified by the sight of their formerly beautiful daughter. The Rat Queen explained that the Princess would regain her beauty only after a young man cracked The Hard Nut, Krakatuk, with his teeth and stepped backwards seven times. The King commanded Drosselmeier to find The Hard Nut or face decapitation. Drosselmeier set off in search of The Hard Nut. He traveled the world for fifteen years before finding it back at home.

The ugly teenage Pirlipat watched as one young man after another attempted to crack The Hard Nut. The last one to try was Drosselmeier's own nephew. He succeeded. On his seventh step backward he stepped on the Rat Queen, killing her. Pirlipat became beautiful and rejected the young Drosselmeier as he started to become ugly—like a nutcracker...

At this point Marie interrupts the story and offers her love to young Drosselmeier. Mrs. Stahlbaum acknowledges her daughter's new maturity with a flower dance. Everyone in the world joins Marie and young Drosselmeier in celebrating their love. The two go away together forever.

Epilogue

Louise and Fritz are sent to bed.



About the Designers

For *The Hard Nut*, Mark worked with longtime collaborators, Adrienne Lobel: SCENIC DESIGN; Martin Pakledinaz: COSTUME DESIGN, and James F. Ingalls: LIGHTING DESIGN.

The “look” of *The Hard Nut* was based on the art of cartoonist Charles Burns (born 1955, who created the poster art below. Instead of taking place in nineteenth-century Germany, Mark Morris’s *The Hard Nut* begins in a suburban home in the United States. The furniture and costumes suggest the 1960’s or 1970’s.



[View more photos and video clips on the Mark Morris Dance Group website.](#)

Movement Lesson

Led by MMDG Dancer Nicole Sabella and accompanied on piano by Alex Perry.

Accessibility: Seated modifications are provided throughout the movement lesson.

WARM-UP

Explore BODY and SPACE

- Bodies are the instrument that dancers use to express a story, a mood, or simply to create SHAPE. Participants can explore LEVELS- low, medium, and high.
- Dancers will move in SPACE on the STAGE. Have participants form a circle and move in their shapes at the same time.
- Dancers will learn MOTIFS from the CHOREOGRAPHY of *The Hard Nut* including *Waltz of the Snowflakes* and *Waltz of the Flowers*.

INVESTIGATE

Storytelling through Dance

- Dancers will explore the concept of storytelling through dance. Stories always have a beginning, middle, and end.
- Flower: Invite dancers to make 3 shapes illustrating a flower growing - 1st seed, 2nd stem, 3rd full bloom.

EXPLORE

Snow Blizzard

- Using rep movements from "Snow"- dancers will execute a series of 3 choreographed movements illustrating the story of a blizzard.
- Using those movements dancers will incorporate LEVELS in their own way.
- Using those movements dancers will incorporate new PATHWAYS and TRANSITIONS between beginning, middle, and end movements.
- Using a CHOREOGRAPHIC DEVICE: Add on an IMPROVISATORY "B" section- making an A.B.A choreographic sentence.

ELABORATE

Story of Marie and Drosselmeier in *The Hard Nut*

- Dancers will hear about Marie being given a gift from her Uncle.
- Dancers should think about their culture and community, a celebration, or a time when they received a gift. How does your family celebrate? How did receiving a gift make you feel?
- Dancers will create their own Storytelling MOVEMENT SENTENCE. First- showing the celebration. Second- receiving the gift (what is it?). Third- how it made them feel/how they played with it.

REFLECT

Cool Down, Stretch, and Recall

- While stretching, dancers will be led through a guided reflection: Dancers learned what it means to make a story through dance. All stories having a beginning, middle, and end.
- Dancers explored shapes, levels, pathways, and ABA sequence to tell one's story.
- When watching the MMDG Hard Nut Digital Content, dancers will see different ways in which Mr. Mark Morris uses his choreography to tell the story!
- Dancers will recall they learned real moves that can be seen in the Mark Morris Dance Group's performance of *The Hard Nut*.

View photos or videos of different styles of dance (Ballet, Modern, Swing)

Please see the following links for pictures that illustrate these three styles:

- [Swing](#)
- [Ballet](#)
- [Modern](#)

Vocabulary Words

Audience	Modern Dance
Author	Motifs
Ballet	Movement Sentence
Body	Pathways
Choreographer	Repertory
Choreographic Device	Scenic Design
Composer	Shape
Costume Design	Space
Improvisatory	Stage
Levels	Swing Dance
Lighting Design	Transitions

Digital Content & Discussion Session

Explore *The Hard Nut* Digital Content:

[Waltz of the Snowflakes](#)

[Waltz of the Flowers](#)

After watching the dances, take a moment to reflect with your friends and family your thoughts and feeling of the performance material.

- How do the dancers use their bodies and facial expressions to set the mood without words?
- What was the music like? How did it help to convey the mood?
- How do the costumes help explain the story?
- What was your favorite part of the performance? Why?
- Did any parts of the dance surprise you? Why?
- How would you describe what you saw to a friend?

Further Information and Resources

markmorrisdancegroup.org

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Mark Morris Dance Group
3 Lafayette Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11217
+1 718.624.8400
mmdg.org