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Nutcracker and Mouse-King

E. T. A. Hoffmann · *1816* · *Mrs. St. Simon*

During the long, long day of the twenty-fourth of December, the children of Doctor Stahlbaum are not permitted to enter the parlor, much less the adjoining drawing-room. Frederic and Maria sit nestled in a corner as dusk comes on. The hosted text is Mrs. St. Simon's English. This is Hoffmann's tale, not the later ballet. For grades 3–8.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What happens on Christmas Eve in the Stahlbaum house, and how should a school read Hoffmann's Nutcracker without putting the ballet's Clara in Maria's place?

"During the long, long day of the twenty-fourth of December, the children of Doctor Stahlbaum were not permitted to enter the parlor, much less the adjoining drawing-room. Frederic and Maria sat nestled together in a"

The opening

It is Christmas Eve. Godfather Drosselmeier brings a nutcracker. In the night a battle is fought with the Mouse-King, and Maria is braver than a toy story is expected to be. This is Hoffmann, in Mrs. St. Simon's English: the girl is Maria, not the ballet's Clara. Teach the wonder and the darker edges, for grades 3–8. Do not import the ballet's plot or names.

KEY CHARACTERS

Maria Stahlbaum
The girl at the center of Hoffmann's tale; not the ballet's Clara

Frederic
Her brother, waiting with her through the long day

Godfather Drosselmeier
The maker of gifts, and of the nutcracker

The Nutcracker and the Mouse-King
The combatants of the night battle

A LONG CHRISTMAS EVE

> *"During the long, long day of the twenty-fourth of December, the children of Doctor Stahlbaum were not permitted to enter the parlor, much less the adjoining drawing-room. Frederic and Maria sat nestled together in a"*
>
> The opening

Grades 3–8
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Twenty-Fourth of December

THE OPENING

The day is long. The parlor and the drawing-room are shut to the children. Frederic and Maria sit together in a back chamber as twilight comes, and they feel quite gloomy.

- The first sentence is exact, including "Doctor Stahlbaum."
- The children are Frederic and Maria. This is not the ballet; do not call her Clara.
- Translator: Mrs. St. Simon.
- For grades 3–8.

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>
> The opening

02

Godfather Drosselmeier

THE CHRISTMAS GIFTS

When the doors are opened, the godfather's gift is not only pretty. A nutcracker stands among the presents, and a story will be required to explain his face.

- Keep "Drosselmeier" as this file prints it.
- The gifts belong to a family Christmas, not to a stage spectacle.
- Teach the evening as Hoffmann writes it, before the night battle.
- Wonder first; then the darker edges.

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>
> The opening

03

Maria, not Clara

THE CHILD AT THE CENTER

The girl who will go with the nutcracker into danger is Maria. A school that knows the ballet must unlearn a name. Hoffmann's tale is older, and it is stranger.

- Do not import the ballet's Clara, or its later plot.
- Frederic is her brother in this tale.
- The story is for 3–8, and it is not only sweet.
- Quote St. Simon, not a picture-book retelling.

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>
> The opening

04

The Mouse-King

THE NIGHT BATTLE

In the night the house is no longer only a parlor. A king of mice makes war, and a nutcracker must be helped. The battle is the test of Maria's courage.

- Keep the title's "Mouse-King."
- The tale is darker than the famous ballet. Say so, without making it frightening for its own sake.
- Courage and loyalty are the virtues to name.
- Do not linger on injury.

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> The opening

05

This Translation

THE EDITION

The hosted English is Mrs. St. Simon's. It is Hoffmann's story of 1816, not a program note to a later performance.

- Catalogue 3–8.
- Quote this file, not a Disney or ballet libretto.
- The opening day of waiting is the right first quotation.
- The darker edges belong to the tale; do not cut them all away, and do not sensationalize them.

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>
> The opening

Waiting | A Christmas Gift | Courage | A Darker Fairy Tale | Loyalty

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 3–8

1. The tale opens: "During the long, long day of the twenty-fourth of December, the children of Doctor Stahlbaum were not permitted to enter the parlor, much less the adjoining drawing-room."
2. This is Hoffmann, in Mrs. St. Simon's English. The girl is Maria, not the ballet's Clara. Do not import the ballet's plot or names.
3. The children are Frederic and Maria. Godfather Drosselmeier brings the nutcracker.
4. For grades 3–8. The tale is darker than the famous ballet; teach the wonder and the edges, without sensation.
5. Quote this file, not a later picture-book or a stage libretto.

Quotations are verbatim from the Mrs. St. Simon, Wikisource: Nutcracker and Mouse-King (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1853), validated transcription, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/hoffmann-nutcracker-and-mouse-king/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.