



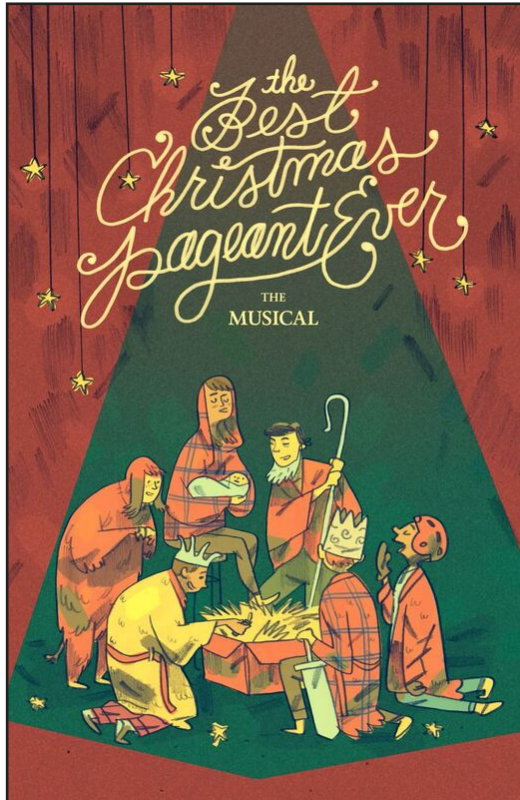
Study guide

and lesson plan activities

This study guide includes information about our production along with creative activities to help you make connections in your classroom both before and after the show. We've aligned all activities to both the Common Core Standards and North Carolina Essential Standards. Look for the symbol below throughout the guide for curriculum connections.



NCES-TheatreArts.(K-5).TA.A.1: Analyze literary texts and performances. NCES-TheatreArts.(K-5).TA.A.1.1: Recall the basic parts of a story, such as characters, setting, and events.



By Jahna Beecham and Malcolm Hillgartner
Adapted from the book by Barbara Robinson
Directed by Adam Burke

About our theatre

Founded in 1948, Children's Theatre of Charlotte has opened young minds to the wonders of live theatre for more than half a century. Today, it continues to be one of the most technically imaginative and resourceful theatres in the country. Annually, it reaches nearly 300,000 young people and their families through our Mainstage productions, Resident Touring Company and its Education Department's classes and workshops. Children's Theatre of Charlotte shares a space with the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library at **ImaginOn: The Joe and Joan Martin Center**. Learn more about Children's Theatre of Charlotte at ctcharlotte.org.

Synopsis

In Reverend Hopkins' church, everyone is looking forward to this year's Christmas pageant. Helen Armstrong, who runs it every year, has the children come forward and share their favorite thing about Sunday school. Charlie Bradley tells the congregation, "The best thing about Sunday school is there are no Herdmans here." They are the worst kids in town: Imogene, Ralph, Leroy, Claude, Ollie, and Gladys. They cuss, they lie, they cheat . . . and they bully all of the other children. Later that night, Grace is reading the church newsletter that auditions for the pageant are soon, but her husband tells her that Helen is in the hospital and it will probably be canceled. Just then, Grace receives the phone call that she has been chosen to direct the pageant this year. The next day at school, the Herdmans are stealing desserts from the other students and they go after Charlie. He tells them it's fine because he gets all the desserts he wants at Sunday school. The Herdmans arrive on the day Grace is casting the pageant, and decide they want all of the starring roles in the Nativity story. The other children are too scared to disagree. It's not long before they begin making mischief during rehearsals, even smoking cigars which causes the alarms to contact the fire department. Reverend Hopkins has had enough. He decides to cancel the pageant. Later that week, the ladies of the church are delivering baskets for the needy, but no one wants to go to the Herdman's house. Grace ends up delivering it, and she overhears the Herdmans talking about how their mom is seldom home and they frequently have nothing to eat. Grace decides she can't give up on them and talks to Reverend Hopkins with the other ladies of the church. It turns out the fire was started by someone baking in one of the kitchens, not by the Herdmans as everyone believed. The decision is made to give the Herdmans another chance. On the night of the performance, the Herdmans make it their own by burping the baby Jesus and delivering their food from the needy basket as the Wise Men. The congregation is moved by their sincere performance, and the Herdmans had so much fun, they decide to come back every year!

THEMES EXPLORED

Christmas, family, mischief, musical comedy

Discussion questions

1. The Herdman children initially join the play because of the offer of free food, but why do you think they stuck with it?
2. Is there a hero in this story? If so, who?
3. The pageant did not go as originally planned, but everyone agreed that it was the best pageant ever. Has something you planned ever not gone the way you expected it? How did this make you feel at first? How did you feel about the event when it was all over? Did you learn anything because something unexpected happened?
4. Do you know anyone in your class, school, or neighborhood who acts like the Herdman children? Without naming them, what might be some of the causes of their behaviors?
5. Musical theatre is a form of theatre that combines songs, spoken dialogue, acting, and dance. Each element helps to tell the story. Did any single song stand out to you in particular? Which song was it and why?



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.(K-5).2: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. NCES-TheatreArts.2.TA.A.1.2: Analyze the relationships between events, characters, and settings. NCES-HealthEd.4.ICR.1.1: Explain the importance of showing respect for self and respect and empathy for others.

Holidays around the world

Different countries and cultures celebrate the holidays with a variety of traditions during the winter months. As a class, make a list of winter holidays from around the world that the students may already know, and then supplement the list with the holidays listed below. Have each student pick one holiday to research and create a presentation. This presentation should include the reason for celebration, country or culture of origin, and various traditions involved with that holiday.

As a class, compare and contrast the different holiday customs. What are some differences? What are some similarities?

- Tet (Vietnamese New Year)
- Pancha Ganapati (Hindu)
- Yule (Pagan)
- Krampusnacht/St. Nicholas Day (European)
- Fiesta of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mexican)
- St. Lucia Day (Swedish)
- Hanukkah (Jewish)
- Bodhi Day (Buddhist)
- Christmas Day (Christian)
- Three Kings Day/Epiphany (Christian)
- Boxing Day (Australian, Canadian, English, Irish)
- Kwanzaa (African American)
- Las Posadas (Mexican)
- Omisoka (Japanese)
- Dongzhi Festival (Chinese)
- Saturnalia (Pagan)
- Newtonmas (Atheist)



NCES-SocialStudies.3.C.1.1: Compare languages, foods and traditions of various groups. NCES-Inf/Tech.3.TT.1.1: Use a variety of technology tools to gather data and information (e.g., Web-based resources, e-books, online communication tools, etc.).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BARBARA ROBINSON was born in Portsmouth, Ohio. She began writing stories when she was in elementary school and credits her mother, a schoolteacher, in getting her started. Her favorite thing about writing stories is creating true-to-life characters, and she believes that studying theatre in college helped her in bringing those characters to life in her books.



She wrote *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* in 1972, and followed it with two other books about the Herdmans: *The Best School Year Ever* (1994) and *The Best Halloween Ever* (2004). In addition to her children's books, Robinson wrote many short stories in publications such as *McCall's*, *Redbook* and *Ladies Home Journal*, and has some books of poetry.

Vocabulary enrichment

- congregation** *n.* the people attending a religious service
- pageant** *n.* a play made from a historical event or legend
- plague** *n.* a large number of harmful or annoying things
- evacuated** *v.* to have left a dangerous place
- inconsolable** *adj.* extremely sad and not able to be comforted
- bazaar** *n.* an event at which things are sold to raise money for people or an organization
- audition** *n.* a short performance from an actor being considered for a role in a play
- rehearsal** *n.* preparation for a public performance
- director** *n.* a person who supervises the production of a play
- cancel** *v.* to stop doing or planning to do something



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.(K-5).4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases.

Community of givers

Ask students to name some activities which they have been told they are too young to do. Write the list on the board. Ask the students if there are any activities on the list they feel they can do. Tell them you don't think they are too young to create a community-wide service project.

As a class read about successful service projects designed by children listed below in the link. Allow students to do some further research on their own about children who are making a difference.

Six Non-Profits Masterminded by Kids

After sharing these stories, ask students if they feel any of these young people are heroes, and if so, what makes them heroes? How do you think these young people succeeded in making the project work? If you could make any service project you could imagine into a success, what would it be and why?

Are any of these ideas something that the class could actually do? Plan a service project in which the entire class could engage. See if you can make it a school-wide challenge!



CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.(3-5).2: Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text. NCES-SocialStudies.3.C&G.2.3: Apply skills in civic engagement (school, community).

“There are no small parts, only small actors.”

This quote is most often attributed to Constantin Stanislavski, a Russian actor and teacher who developed a method for creating truthful and believable characters on stage. In the book *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, the children interpret it their own way. Many people use this quote to express the idea that every role is important to the story. What do you think the quote means?

Make your costume

A costume is any piece of clothing worn by an actor to during performance. The costume designer is in charge of making all decisions about how the costumes look. The designer considers many things, including: the age of the character, where he or she lives, and the time period in which the play takes place.

The designer then makes drawings for the director and design team, called renderings, to show how each costume will look. The renderings are then given to the costume shop, where the shop manager and stitchers sew the costumes. The renderings help guide them in creating each piece.

Just like the characters in the pageant had to create costumes from items they brought from home, can you design a costume? Click on the link and use the template to complete your design.

Rendering Template



NCES-TheatreArts.(K-5).TA.AE.1.2: Understand how costumes [and technical elements] enhance dramatic play. NCES-VisualArts.(K-5).VA.V.3: Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.

CHRISTMAS FACTS

- Each year, 30-35 million real Christmas trees are sold in the United States alone. There are 21,000 Christmas tree growers in the United States, and trees usually grow for about 15 years before they are sold.
- Today, in the Greek and Russian orthodox churches, Christmas is celebrated 13 days after December 25th, which is also referred to as the Epiphany or Three Kings Day. This is the day it is believed that the three wise men finally found Jesus in the manger.
- In the Middle Ages, Christmas celebrations were rowdy and raucous—a lot like today's Mardi Gras parties.
- From 1659 to 1681, the celebration of Christmas was outlawed in Boston, and law-breakers were fined five shillings.
- Christmas wasn't a national holiday in early America—in fact Congress was in session on December 25, 1789, the country's first Christmas under the new constitution.
- Poinsettia plants are named after Joel R. Poinsett, an American minister to Mexico, who brought the red and green plant from Mexico to America in 1828.
- Christmas was declared a federal holiday in the United States on June 26, 1870.
- The Salvation Army has been sending Santa Claus clad donation collectors into the streets since the 1890s.
- In New York City, construction workers started the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree tradition in 1931.
- Rudolph, “the most famous reindeer of all,” was the product of Robert L. May's imagination in 1939. The copywriter wrote a poem about the reindeer to help lure customers into the Montgomery Ward department store.

What happens next?

As a group, review the final events of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical*. Have the students get into small groups and assume the characters of the Herdmans or other children in the pageant. Each group should create a scene that occurs after the Christmas pageant is over. Give them a few moments to rehearse their scenes and then share them with the entire class. In what ways have the characters changed? What is happening in their lives now?

After the groups have shared their scenes, you may extend the project by having each student write a journal entry from the perspective of their character in the scene. The students should focus on what their character was thinking and feeling during the scene. Don't forget to include any changes your character has gone through since the beginning of the story.



NCES-TheatreArts.(K-5).TA.AC.2: Use performance to communicate ideas and feelings. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.(3-5).1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

If you enjoyed the show, travel to **ImaginOn** or your local **Charlotte Mecklenberg library branch** and check out these books. Check availability at cmlibrary.org.

Recommended for Early Readers

A Christmas Wish For Corduroy by **B. G. Hennessy**

A little stuffed bear has no name or clothes. Upon hearing that Santa grants Christmas wishes and one should wear something special when they meet the famous man in red, the little bear goes on his first journey and finds the perfect outfit for the occasion.

The Longest Christmas List Ever by **Gregg Spiridellis**

On Christmas morning, Trevor discovers the one thing he wanted most—a puppy—is the one thing he forgot to ask for. Not wanting to risk making the same mistake twice, he starts next year's Christmas list right away, and his imagination and greed know no bounds.

Recommended for Elementary

The Best School Year Ever by **Barbara Robinson**

When anything goes wrong at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, it's sure to have a Herdman behind it. Then a school project forces the students to think of compliments for all their classmates—including the Herdmans.

Christmas In Camelot by **Mary Pope Osborne**

Jack and Annie are transported to the legendary kingdom, which has been put under a spell by King Arthur's enemy Mordred. To bring joy and hope back to Camelot, they journey to the Otherworld to find the items that will break the spell.

Horrid Henry's Christmas by **Francesca Simon**

Four stories about a misbehaving boy who causes mayhem during the Christmas season. Self-centered Horrid Henry wreaks total havoc at the Nativity play, destroys the Christmas tree, and almost ruins the holiday lunch. You won't believe what he'll do next!

Every play produced by Children's Theatre of Charlotte is created by a talented team of designers, technicians, actors and a director. A play is different from a television show or a movie because it's presented live. As a class, discuss what you experienced when you saw the performance.

THEATER CORNER

1. What was the first thing you noticed on the stage?
2. Name three things you noticed about the set. Did the set help tell the story? What sort of set would you have designed?
3. What did you like about the costumes? Did they fit the story? What sort of costumes would you have designed?
4. What role did lighting play in telling the story? How did the lights enhance what you were seeing?
5. Talk about the actors. Were there moments you were so caught up in the story that you forgot you were watching a play?
6. Were there any actors who played more than one character? What are some ways that you can be the same person but play different characters?



NCES-TheatreArts.(K-5).TA.A.1: Analyze literary texts and performances. NCES-TheatreArts.(K-5).TA.AE.1.2: Understand how costumes [and technical elements] enhance dramatic play.



Write to Us!

Children's Theatre of Charlotte
300 E. Seventh St.
Charlotte, N.C. 28202



CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.(K-5).1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

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www.ncarts.org