

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever



Main Street Theater for Youth Study Guide
713-524-9196 MainStreetTheater.com

TEACHERS

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever will run approximately one hour, including a short talkback with the actors.

Have students write letters or draw pictures to the cast of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* with their thoughts and comments on the production. All correspondence should be sent to:

SCHOOL BOOKINGS

Main Street's Theater for Youth

3400 Main Street #283

Houston, Texas 77002



TEACHERS

The Best
Christmas
Pageant Ever

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE MY STUDENTS FOR A TRIP TO THE THEATER?

Read the book to your students or have them read it. The play is taken directly from the pages of the books!

Remind them that it can get very dark in the theater before the play and in between scenes.

Make sure your students use the restroom before they leave school or at the theater before the performance. It can be very dangerous to get up to use the restroom during the performance. In addition, you may miss your favorite part!

Talk about what kind of show they are coming to see. *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* is a live theatrical performance. There are five grown up actors who play all the parts and are very friendly. You should not be afraid.



Applaud! When the show finishes and the actors come on stage to take their bows, make sure to applaud for their hard work. If you like something during the show, it's OK to give a short round of applause, too. Be respectful! Everyone's attention should be on the actors on stage. To help with this, make sure not to talk to the people around you or kick the seat in front of you. Also, feel free to laugh if something is funny—the actors LOVE laughter.

After the performance, the actors will remain on stage and answer questions that the students may have. Discuss with your students what a question is. While the actors love to hear what a good time the students had or what part they like the best, they LOVE to answer questions about the show, the book or being an actor. Don't forget to raise your hand!

BACKGROUND

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever was written in 1972 by Barbara Robinson. It has received several awards, including the Georgia Children's Book Award in 1975-76 and the Young Hoosier Award in 1978. In 1982, Ms. Robinson adapted the book into a play, which then led to a popular TV movie in 1986.

THE AUTHOR

Barbara Robinson was born and raised in Portsmouth, Ohio, and had no brothers or sisters. Her father died when she was three. Robinson's mother, a schoolteacher in Portsmouth for forty-nine years, got her interested in books, and she began writing very early. Robinson attended Allegheny College, where she received a bachelor's degree in theatre. 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.

Robinson lived in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. She died July 9, 2013, at her home in Berwyn. She was 85 and had cancer. Robinson had two daughters with her husband John F. Robinson: Carolyn and Marjorie; and three grandchildren: Tomas, Marcos, and Lucas.

THE STORY

The Herdmans are the meanest kids in town. They lie, steal, smoke and cuss. Teachers pass the kids on to the next grade because inevitably another Herdman will be coming into their class. There were six Herdmans: Ralph, Imogene, Leroy, Claude, Ollie and Gladys. Their father had disappeared when Gladys was two and their mom worked double shifts at the shoe factory and was never home. The Herdmans were bullies and did whatever they wanted. So, it surprised the town when they showed up one day to Sunday school. Charlie told Leroy Herdman that they could get free food if they showed up at Sunday school—never thinking they would come. But they did, the Herdmans decided to come the day that the Christmas pageant parts were being assigned and they end up taking over the pageant. But in the end the whole Church learns the true meaning of Christmas – including the Herdmans!



CHARACTERS

The Best
Christmas
Pageant Ever

BOB BRADLEY, the Father of Charlie and Beth. Beth is the narrator for the play. He is also married to Grace who ends up taking over the pageant. He doesn't like to go to the pageant every year and it is a struggle to make him.

GRACE BRADLEY, the Mother of Charlie and Beth. She ends up taking over the Christmas pageant when Mrs. Armstrong breaks her leg.

BETH BRADLEY, the narrator. Beth leads the audience through the play.

CHARLIE BRADLEY, Beth's little brother. Charlie is the person who told the Herdmans about the food at Sunday school. He's also the person that said that his favorite thing about Sunday school was "No Herdmans!"

RALPH HERDMAN, the oldest of the Herdman children. He ended up playing the part of Joseph in the pageant.

IMOGENE HERDMAN, the oldest Herdman daughter. She ends up playing Mary in the pageant. Imogene is in the same class as Beth. She picks on anyone who speaks up in class. She is the one who sneaked into the health room and copied down all of the weights of the children in her class. Then she would blackmail the students with the information. The first time she came to Sunday school she stole money out of the collection basket.

LEROY HERDMAN, the next oldest Herdman. He ends up being one of the Wise Men in the pageant. He's the one that Charlie told about there being food at Sunday school. Charlie told him to get Leroy to leave him alone since he was always taking Charlie's food.

CLAUDE HERDMAN, another of the Herdman children. He is also one of the Wise Men in the pageant. He is the one that brought the wild cat to show-and-tell in 1st grade and scared the whole class.

OLLIE HERDMAN, another of the Herdman children. He is the final one of the Wise Men in the pageant.

GLADYS HERDMAN, the youngest Herdman. She plays the Angel of the Lord in the Christmas pageant.

ALICE WENDLEKEN, always used to be Mary in the Christmas pageant until Imogene bullied her into letting her do it. She's a friend of Beth's. She always played Mary because of how smart and neat she is.

MRS. ARMSTRONG, directed the Christmas pageant every year until she broke her leg and had to convince Grace Bradley to do it. She is very bossy, loves to give other people orders and is the head of every organization she belonged to.

ELMER HOPKINS, the Reverend's son. He always plays Joseph in the pageant because his father forces him to. This year the Herdmans bully him into letting them do it.



“Grace! Grace! What is going on? I was just attacked out there by every woman from this church. Erma said they set fire to the kitchen. Someone else said they set fire to the ladies’ room!” – Reverend Hopkins

When baking soda and vinegar mix they create a gas known as carbon dioxide. It is carbon dioxide gas that gives soda its pop. Carbon dioxide gas is also what creates the fire-dampening foam in some fire extinguishers.

MATERIALS:

- Baking soda
- Vinegar
- Ziploc bag

ACTIVITY:

1. Place students with a partner, and give each pair one Ziploc bag.
2. First, have students put two big spoonfuls of baking soda in a plastic Ziploc bag.
3. Then, students should seal their bag nearly closed, leaving only a small opening.
4. Next, have students pour about half a cup of vinegar into the bag. Right afterwards, they should quickly seal the bag closed and gently shake the mixture.
5. Have students observe what happens to the mixture in their bag. Explain to them that they have just made a gas known as carbon dioxide.
6. While observing the newly created gas in their Ziploc bags, ask students if they can explain why carbon dioxide foam would make a good fire extinguisher?

Answer: Carbon dioxide is good for putting out fires because it displaces air (oxygen) and, therefore, the fire then cannot breathe. With the “woosh” of a CO₂ extinguisher comes a cold white cloud of carbon dioxide that rushes out of the nozzle and covers the target area like a fog. It pushes air (and the oxygen the fire needs to continue to burn) out of the way. Presto! No more fire!

Use the worksheet below to compare and contrast the Herdmans and the Bradleys. Discuss as a class the differences and the similarities. What are their strengths and how can they be used to help the other characters?

THE BRADLEYS

Number of Children

Number of Parents Living at Home

How Does the Mother Handle Responsibility?

Other Impressions

THE HERDMANS

Number of Children

Number of Parents Living at Home

How Does the Mother Handle Responsibility?

Other Impressions

LITERATURE



After the students see the play, have them use the Herdmans headlines in order of events. See how much they remember from the play!

IMOGENE HERDMAN HEARS CHRISTMAS STORY FOR THE

HERDMAN CHILDREN VISIT SUNDAY SCHOOL

PAGEANT DIRECTOR FALLS AND BREAKS LEG

HERDMAN ANGEL ANNOUNCES, "HEY! UNTO YOU A CHILD IS BORN!"

HERDMANS VISIT LIBRARY TO LEARN ABOUT KING HEROD

IMOGENE HERDMAN STEALS FROM CHURCH COLLECTION BASKET

DRESS REHEARSAL ENDS WITH FIRE ALARM

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT REHEARSALS BEGIN

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT BRINGS IN A FULL HOUSE

HERDMAN CHILDREN CAST IN LEADING ROLES

NEW PAGEANT DIRECTOR NAMED

WHO SAID IT?

The Best
Christmas
Pageant Ever

Have your students see how many of the phrases they can remember.

“Mrs. Armstrong directs the pageant, she runs the potluck supper, she’s chairman of the Bazaar...I think Helen Armstrong would preach the sermon if anyone would let her.”

Mother/Mrs. Bradley

“I know what the angel said. She said... ‘His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.’”

Alice

“Our Christmas pageant isn’t exactly what you’d call four-star entertainment. Mrs. Armstrong breaking her leg was the only unexpected thing that ever happened to it.”

Beth Bradley

“Grace! Grace! What is going on? I was just attacked out there by every woman from this church. Irma said they set fire to the kitchen. Someone else said they set fire to the ladies’ room.”

Reverend Hopkins

“Hey, Leroy! You think it’s so great to steal my desserts every day and you know what? I don’t care if you steal my dessert. I’ll even give you my dessert. I get all the dessert I want in Sunday school.”

Charlie Bradley

“Well, the good news is that every kid is here, AND they all remembered their costumes. Even the Herdmans.”

Father/Mr. Bradley

“Hermans will do anything. You just watch, they’ll do something terrible and ruin the whole pageant...and it’s all your mother’s fault!”

Alice

“Hello Reverend, sorry I’m late. But I wouldn’t want to miss this for the world!”

Mrs. Armstrong

“That’s bogus! What kind of a present is oil? We get better presents from the welfare!”

Imogene Herdman

“Can you believe what she did? That was awful!! Look at her now! She’s burping the baby as if he had colic. Jesus wouldn’t have had colic.”

Alice

“Why didn’t they let Mary name her own baby? What did the angel do, just walk up and say, ‘Name him Jesus?’”

Imogene Herdman

“Hey! Hey! Unto you a child is born! It’s Jesus, and he’s in the barn...go see him! Go on, he’s over there...GO ON!”

Gladys Herdman

“They did not steal it. It came from their welfare basket. And if they want to give away their own ham, I guess they can do it.”

Beth Bradley

Have a guest speaker come to share with the class the different celebrations and rituals centered on Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. Encourage them to wear costumes (if it pertains), bring food, pictures, etc.



**USE THE WORKSHEET
ON THE NEXT PAGE
TO UNSCRAMBLE
THE WORDS THAT
DESCRIBE CHRISTMAS
AROUND THE WORLD.**

As they prepare for the Christmas pageant, Mrs. Bradley reads the Nativity Story to the Sunday school class. Have your students use the word search to see if they can find all the words that relate to the story. If there are words they do not understand then have them research them!

Place colored papers (or anything else to identify a spot as a “resting place”) on chairs. Make sure you have “resting places” identified for the number of students minus one.

Have students walk around the perimeter of the classroom and when the music stops, they must find a “resting place” to sit down. Whoever did not find a resting place is out. Take away a “resting place” after each time, until just one child remains.

Discuss with your students how it would feel to be hungry and tired and have no place to rest.

Christmas Around The World

All over the world, different countries have their own Christmas traditions. Unscramble to name of each country to learn about how they celebrate the holidays.

In _____ Father Christmas or Santa Claus delivers presents to children from a horse and cart.

I A N D I

In _____ the youngest daughter puts on a white robe with a red sash and wears a crown of evergreens on her head with long, illuminated candles attached to it.

W S N D E E

A Christmas cake called "Panettone" is eaten in _____ at Christmas dinner.

I A T L Y

On the west coast of _____ most homes have an oil palm for a Christmas tree, which is decorated with bells.

A R F A C I

On Christmas Eve or Christmas night in _____ the children carry out special programs that go on for hours and consist of songs and dramatic performances.

P A N J A

In _____ Babushka is a traditional Christmas figure who distributes presents to children. The word "Babushka" is translated to English as a grandmother!

U S R I S A

NATIVITY WORD SEARCH

C A N O I T A V L A S D N S H S
Q S H E P H E R D S R F A L L U
R A T S A M T S I R H C T E J S
N E M E S I W S H E E P I G O E
J G N I K M A R Y G I U V N S J
M O S Y I H X Q U R Q W I A E T
D O N K E Y R E G N A M T D P M
Z I L I N N K E E P E R Y O H F



angels
Christmas
donkey
innkeeper
Jesus
Joseph manger
king Mary
 nativity
 salvation
 sheep
 shepherds
 star
 wisemen

Have your students create an ad for a production of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. What kind of ad would it be? Print – newspaper? Magazine? Internet? TV? Radio? Encourage them to get into groups and work together like the Herdmans and the rest of the Sunday school students did to put on the play. Have them present their ad to the rest of the class.

STAR RELAY

Have your students do a star relay to unscramble phrases from the show!

MATERIALS:

- Envelopes (1 per team)
- Stars with one word apiece on each (see phrases below),
- Strip of construction paper or butcher paper for banner
- Glue sticks



Students sit in teams of 4-5. Each team will get an envelope with a number of stars in it, a glue stick, and a strip of construction paper or butcher paper to make a banner with. Each star has a word on it, that, when put correct order, will form a sentence. Teams must unscramble their words to decode the correct phrase and then glue the stars on the banner in the right order. Once finished, the teams must run to the front of the classroom, hold up the banner, and call out their phrase.

Suggested phrases can be taken from the Christmas story or from *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* play.

- Hey, unto you a child is born!
- The Herdmans were the worst kids
- Does that mean I have to go?
- And wrapped him in swaddling clothes
- There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus



THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

The year that the Herdmans took over the Christmas pageant has been declared the “The Best Christmas Pageant Ever” because they exemplified the “true meaning of Christmas.” Discuss with your students what that term means. The “true meaning of Christmas” refers to celebrating the Christmas holidays by centering on Christ’s birth, the reason that Christ was born and the kind of person Christ was. The “true meaning of Christmas” does not have anything to do with Santa Claus, shopping, baking cookies and seeing how many presents you get. Have your students do several activities that center on the “true meaning” during the Holiday season. Some suggestions are below and can be done as a class, individually or as a family:

TEACH THEM TO GIVE: Have them choose one of their own toys that are in good condition to give to someone who doesn’t have any. Have your class get together and buy all of the food it takes to prepare a traditional Christmas feast and give it to a family who can’t afford the food themselves. Have each student pack a bag lunch for a homeless person and have them distributed with cards attached letting them know the closest shelter to get a free meal.

TEACH THEM TO SHARE: Have them share something from their lunch with another classmate that they do not know as well. Have them make cookies and take them over to a neighbor’s house. Have them invite a friend over for an after-school snack if their parent works and is not at home with them after school.

TEACH THEM TO CARE: Have them visit a nursing home and visit with the elderly people. They could even prepare a song or dance to entertain them while they are there. Have them go to a children’s hospital and play with the children there for an afternoon. Have them take a meal to a neighbor who might be sick or elderly. Have them volunteer to serve a meal at a homeless shelter. Have them do yard work or grocery shopping for someone who is elderly or disabled.



THE CHRISTMAS STORY

The Best
Christmas
Pageant Ever

King August, who ruled Palestine, wanted to know the number of people in his kingdom. For that reason, he requested the names of all the people and everyone had to return to the birthplace of his ancestors. Mary and Joseph were of the family of David; therefore, they journeyed to Bethlehem, the birthplace of David.

Exhausted from the long journey, they arrived in Bethlehem at night. There was no available place to sleep at the inns or at any of the homes as a great number of people had gone there at the King's request. Having no place to sleep, Mary and Joseph went to the outskirts of Bethlehem and there found a stable where the shepherds of Bethlehem kept their cattle during stormy weather. It was here that they planned to spend the night. Around midnight, the stars in the heavens lit up the stable and Mary gave birth to a male child. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in straw in a manger. The little

town of Bethlehem slept peacefully, unaware of the blessed event that had taken place.

The first to hear of the birth of Christ were the shepherds of Bethlehem who were watching their sheep. An angel from heaven brought them the joyous tidings and told them to go to the town of Bethlehem where they would find the babe in a straw-filled manger. The heavens shone with a heavenly light and angles began to sing: "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth, Peace and Good will toward Men." The shepherds hastened to the stable where they truly found Jesus Christ as a babe in swaddling clothes laying in a manger of straw. They worshiped the new-born, and related to Joseph and Mary what they had seen and heard from the angels in the heavens. The shepherds then left, overjoyed, glorifying and praising God.

When Jesus Christ was born, there appeared in the Far East an unusually bright star. Seeing this star, three wise men knew that the promised Savior of the world had been born, whom they were anxiously awaiting, so they started out to find him. The star in the heavens showed them the way to Bethlehem, and then they came to the stable where Jesus lay in the manger. The wise men entered, and saw the child with his mother, and fell on their knees. Gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were laid at his feet.



KWANZAA

Kwanzaa is a non-religious African American holiday which celebrates family, community, and culture. It is celebrated for seven days: December 26 – January 1.

Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and chairman of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach, created Kwanzaa in 1966. After the Watts riots in Los Angeles, Dr. Karenga searched for ways to bring African-Americans together as a community. He founded US, a cultural organization, and started to research African "first fruit" (harvest) celebrations. Karenga combined aspects of several different harvest celebrations, such as those of the Ashanti and those of the Zulu, to form the basis of Kwanzaa.

The name Kwanzaa is derived from the phrase "matunda ya kwanza" which means "first fruits" in Swahili. Each family celebrates Kwanzaa in its own way, but celebrations of-

ten include songs and dances, African drums, storytelling, poetry reading, and a large traditional meal. On each of the seven nights, the family gathers and a child lights one of the candles on the Kinara (candleholder), then one of the seven principles is discussed. The principles, called the Nguzo Saba (seven principles in Swahili) are values of African culture which contribute to building and reinforcing community among African-Americans. Kwanzaa also has seven basic symbols which represent values and concepts reflective of African culture. An African feast, called a Karamu, is held on December 31.

The candle-lighting ceremony each evening provides the opportunity to gather and discuss the meaning of Kwanzaa. The first night, the black candle in the center is lit (and the principle of umoja/unity is discussed). One candle is lit each evening and the appropriate principle is discussed.

<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/holidays/kwanzaa/hist.html>



HANUKKAH

Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days and nights, starting on the 25th of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar (which is November – December on the Gregorian calendar). In Hebrew, the word "Hanukkah" means "dedication."

The holiday commemorates the rededication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem after the Jews' victory over the Hellenist Syrians. Antiochus, the Greek King of Syria, outlawed Jewish rituals and ordered the Jews to worship Greek gods.

In 168 B.C.E. the Jews' holy Temple was seized and dedicated to the worship of Zeus.

Some Jews were afraid of the Greek soldiers and obeyed them, but most were angry and decided to fight back.

The fighting began in Modiin, a village not far from Jerusalem. A Greek officer and soldiers assembled the villagers, asking them to bow to an idol and eat the flesh of a pig, activities forbidden to Jews. The officer asked



Mattathias, a Jewish High Priest, to take part in the ceremony. He refused, and another villager stepped forward and offered to do it instead. Mattathias became outraged, took out his sword and killed the man, then killed the officer. His five sons and the other villagers then attacked and killed the soldiers. Mattathias' family went into hiding in the nearby mountains, where many other Jews who wanted to fight the Greeks joined them. They attacked the Greek soldiers whenever possible.

About a year after the rebellion started, Mattathias died. Before his death, he put his brave son Judah Maccabee in charge of the growing army. After three years of fighting, the Jews defeated the Greek army, despite having fewer men and weapons.

Judah Maccabee and his soldiers went to the holy Temple, and were saddened that many things were missing or broken, including the golden menorah. They cleaned and repaired the Temple, and when they were finished, they decided to have a big dedication ceremony. For the celebration, the Maccabees wanted to light the menorah. They looked everywhere for oil, and found a small flask that contained only enough oil to light the menorah for one day. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days. This gave them enough time to obtain new oil to keep the menorah lit. Today Jews celebrate Hanukkah for eight days by lighting candles in a menorah every night, thus commemorating the eight-day miracle.

