

# Study Guide and Activities



This study guide includes information about our production along with creative activities to 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-TheaArts.(K-5).T.A.A.1: Analyze literary texts and performances. NCES-TheaArts.(K-5).T.A.A.1.1: Recall the basic parts of a story, such as characters, setting, and events.

## Mainstage production Ages 4 and older



Written by **Jahna Beecham**  
and **Malcom Hillgartner**

Adapted from the book  
by **Barbara Robinson**

Director  
**Adam Burke**

Music Director  
**Mike Wilkins**

Choreographer  
**Ron Chisolm**

## Themes explored

Christmas, family, mischief,  
musical comedy

## 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 the other children.

Later that night, Grace is reading the church newsletter that auditions for the pageant are soon, but her husband tells her 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 deliver baskets to the needy, but no one wants to go to the Herdman's house. Grace ends up delivering one, 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!

## Santa's Bag

Santa's Bag is celebrating its 45th year of bringing a fun shopping experience to the children of Charlotte, Nov. 29 through Dec. 2, at **ImaginOn: The Joe & Joan Martin Center**.

It offers children under the age of 12 the opportunity to purchase inexpensive, pre-wrapped gifts for their family and friends. Gifts are priced between \$.50 and \$5. Children are escorted by helpful "elves" through the experience. Cash, Checks and MasterCard or Visa will be accepted. Admission is **free** and the event is open to the public. [Click here](#) to view hours of operation or learn how to sponsor a child.

# On your way to ImaginOn

## The Story Jar



The Story Jar is a unique sculpture outside the McColl Family Theatre. It is an ever changing exhibit that features items from current and past shows at Children's Theatre of Charlotte. Our current show is *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical*. Can you find all of the items listed below?

angel wings                      basket  
phone receiver                  spam

## 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](http://ctcharlotte.org).

## Audience expectations

Young audiences should know watching live theatre isn't like watching more familiar forms of entertainment: they can't pause or rewind it like a DVD, there are no commercials for bathroom breaks, nor can they increase the volume to hear it if someone else is talking. Encourage your students to listen and watch the play intently, so they may laugh and cheer for their favorite characters when it's appropriate.

At the end of the play, applause is an opportunity for students to thank the actors. Live theatre only exists when an audience is present, and your students' energy and response directly affects the actors on stage! Here are some other guidelines to keep in mind while you are watching the performance:

- Respect others during the performance. Stay seated and keep your hands to yourself.
- Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices during the performance.
- Photography and video of the performance is prohibited by copyright law.
- We do not permit food and drinks in the theatre.



NCES-TheaArts.(K-5).TA.CU.2: Understand the traditions, roles, and conventions of theatre as an art form. NCES-TheaArts.3.TA.CU.2.1: Illustrate theatre etiquette appropriate to the performance situation.



## Theatre 360 connections

Theatre 360 provides a way to interact with Children's Theatre of Charlotte productions by extending the theatre experience for families and classroom—providing access to all! Best of all, many programs are free. Go to [ctcharlotte.org/theatre-360](http://ctcharlotte.org/theatre-360) to view the full list of events throughout the year.

**Audience engagement** These interactive experiences located around ImaginOn are available from the first public performance of a production through the entire run of the show. We change the exhibits to reflect the uniqueness of each show.

**Online engagement** Whether you're a teacher or a parent looking for quality activities, we've assembled a collection of online games, websites and articles that deepen the connections of elements from the show. [Click here](#) for online content for *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical*.

**Workshops and residencies** Teachers, are you looking for a way for your class to make stronger connections with our shows? You can add our workshops, led by our professional teaching artists, before or after you view the performance. Or incorporate the arts into your everyday classroom through a residency created to fit your subject area. Contact our programs coordinator, Tommy Prudenti, at [tommyp@ctcharlotte.org](mailto:tommyp@ctcharlotte.org) to book yours today!

# Before the show

## 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 where 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.

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

This is a quote from Constantin Stanislavski, a Russian actor and teacher. Many people use this quotation to express the idea that every role is important to the play. What do you think it means?

## 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 the students may already know and then supplement the list with the holidays listed below. Encourage 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.).

## Make a 3D Christmas Tree

[Click here](#) and follow the online tutorial to make your own origami Christmas tree.



NCES-VisualArts.(3-5).VA.V.3: Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.



# Before the show

## The BIG QUESTIONS before the show

1. The pageant doesn't go as originally planned, but everyone agreed 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?
2. Do you know anyone in your class, school or neighborhood who acts like the Herdman children? Without naming him or her, what might cause some of his or her behaviors?



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-HealthEd.4.ICR.1.1: Explain the importance of showing respect for self and respect and empathy for others.

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

### Six nonprofits masterminded by kids

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).

## Make your costume

A costume is any piece of clothing worn by an actor 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.

Click on the link below and use the template to complete your costume 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.



Barbara  
Robinson

Barbara Robinson was born in Portsmouth, Ohio. Robinson began writing stories in elementary school and credits her mother, a schoolteacher, in getting her started. Robinson's favorite thing about writing stories is creating true-to-life characters, and she believes studying theatre in college helped her in bringing those characters to life in her books.

Robinson wrote *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* in 1972 and also wrote the adaptation for the television movie and the stage play. She 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 for *McCall's*, *Redbook* and *Ladies Home Journal* and has some books of poetry.

[Click here](#) to learn more about Barbara Robinson.

# After the show

## The BIG QUESTIONS after the show

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. Musical theatre combines songs, spoken dialogue, acting and dance. Each element helps to tell the story. Did any one song from the musical 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-TheatreArts.4.TA.A.1.2: Critique choices made about characters, settings, and events as seen, or portrayed in, formal and informal productions.

## Worksheet key

French (2)	Greek (4)
Swedish (10)	Irish-Gaelic (5)
Mandarin-Chinese (1)	German (3)
Italian (6)	Japanese (7)
Spanish (9)	Russian (8)

Want to learn more about different holiday traditions and customs from around the world? [Click here](#) to discover more ways to say holiday greetings in other languages.

## What happens next?

As a group, review the final events of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical*. Instruct the students to 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 ends. 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 encouraging students to write a journal entry from the perspective of their character in the scene. The students should focus on what their characters were 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.

## Christmas Facts

- Each year, 30 to 35 million real Christmas trees are sold in the United States alone.
- In the Greek and Russian orthodox churches, Christmas is celebrated thirteen days after Dec. 25, which is also referred to as the Epiphany or Three Kings Day. This is the day it's believed 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, Boston outlawed the celebration of Christmas, and police fined law-breakers five shillings.
- 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 not declared a federal holiday in the United States until 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.

# Worksheet for after the show

COPY PAGE

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

See if you can match the holiday greeting with its language of origin by writing the number in the blank. Check out this website to see pronunciations of each phrase and other holiday customs, [www.whychristmas.com/customs/languages.shtml](http://www.whychristmas.com/customs/languages.shtml).

## Holiday Greeting

## Language

- |     |                         |     |                  |
|-----|-------------------------|-----|------------------|
| 1.  | Sheng Dan Kuai Le       | ___ | French           |
| 2.  | Joyeux Noël             | ___ | Swedish          |
| 3.  | Fröhliche Weihnachten   | ___ | Mandarin-Chinese |
| 4.  | Kala Christouyenna      | ___ | Italian          |
| 5.  | Nollaig Shona Dhuit     | ___ | Spanish          |
| 6.  | Buone Feste Natalizie   | ___ | Greek            |
| 7.  | Meri Kurisumasu         | ___ | Irish-Gaelic     |
| 8.  | Schastlivogo Rozhdestva | ___ | German           |
| 9.  | Feliz Navidad           | ___ | Japanese         |
| 10. | God Jul                 | ___ | Russian          |

If you enjoyed the show, travel to **ImaginOn** or your local **Charlotte Mecklenburg library branch** and check out these books. Check availability at [cmlibrary.org](http://cmlibrary.org).

### Recommended for erarly readers

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

A little stuffed bear has no name or clothes. Upon hearing 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 for which he forgot to ask. 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!

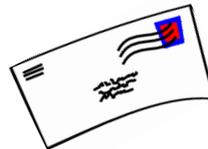
## THEATRE CORNER

Every play Children's Theatre of Charlotte produces 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.

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



NCES-TheaArts.(K-5).TA.A.1: Analyze literary texts and performances. NCES-TheaArts.(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.

Children's Theatre of Charlotte is supported, in part, with funding from the Arts & Science Council, and the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Cultural Resources.



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[www.ncarts.org](http://www.ncarts.org)