

PLAY GUIDE



The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical

Book & Lyrics by Jahnna Beecham
Music & Lyrics by Malcolm Hillgartner
Based on the play by Barbara Robinson

Presented at The Lexington Opera House: November 30th - December 9th

Show Sponsor: **BallHomes**

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Dear Educator -

Lexington Children's Theatre is proud to be producing our 81st season of plays for young people and their families. As an organization that values the arts and education, we have created this Play Guide for teachers to utilize in conjunction with seeing a play at LCT.

Our Play Guides are designed to be a valuable tool in two ways: helping you prepare your students for the enriching performance given by LCT's performers, as well as serving as an educational tool for extending the production experience back into your classroom.

We designed each activity to assist in achieving the Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS), including the National Core Arts Standards for Theatre. Teachers have important voices at LCT, and we rely heavily on your input. If you have comments or suggestions about our Play Guides, show selections, or any of our programming, your thoughts are greatly appreciated. Please email Jeremy Kisling, our Associate Artistic Director in Charge of Education, at jkisling@lctonstage.org.

Please use the Teacher Response form following a performance. We are thrilled that you rely on LCT to provide your students a quality theatrical experience, and we hope this resource helps you in your classroom.

-LCT's Education Department

The mission of our education programming



The mission of Lexington Children's Theatre's Education Department is to **provide students of all ages with the means to actively explore the beauty, diversity, complexity, and challenges of the world around them through the dramatic process.** We strive for young people to develop their own creative voice, their imagination, and their understanding of drama and its role in society.

Your role in the play

You may wish to have a discussion with your class about your upcoming LCT experience and their role as audience members. Remind your students that theatre can only exist with an audience. Your students' energy and response directly affects the actors onstage. The quality of the performance depends as much on the audience as it does on each of the theatre professionals behind the scenes and on stage.

Young audiences should know that watching live theatre is not like watching more familiar forms of entertainment; they cannot pause or rewind us like a DVD, there are no commercials for bathroom breaks, nor can they turn up the volume to hear us if someone else is talking. Your students are encouraged to listen and watch the play intently, so that they may laugh and cheer for their favorite characters when it is appropriate.

At the end of the play, applause is an opportunity for your students to thank the actors, while the actors are thanking you for the role you played as an audience.



What to know – before the show!

About the Play

Meet the Herdmans - the “worst kids in the history of the world.” They invade the church one Sunday and decide to take over the annual Christmas pageant. *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, written by Barbara Robinson in 1972, has become a Christmas classic. In 1982, Barbara Robinson adapted her book for the stage; since then, her script has been performed annually by theatres around the country. In November 2016, the Children’s Theatre of Charlotte, premiered *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical* written by Jahnna Beecham and Malcolm Hillgartener. In the musical version, the production really focuses on the Herdmans and their struggle to fit in, and the music reminds us that we all need to support and care about each other - not only during the holidays but throughout the year. *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* is about transformation. *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* has a worthwhile message for us all to hear this holiday season: If you open your heart, people will surprise you.

At first, Mrs. Bradley must face the disbelief and horror of local townspeople when she casts Imogene Herdman as Mary, her brothers as Joseph and the Wise Men, and her biting younger sister as the angel who brings the news to the shepherds. Surely the pageant will be an unruly mess! But the Herdmans’ involvement with the pageant brings surprising results. Attitudes change toward the Herdmans, the Christmas story, and all of those involved with the Christmas pageant. Augmenting the professional production staff from LCT are many children from Lexington and surrounding communities, who went through an audition process much different than the “Who wants to be what?” casting method in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. They have rehearsed several nights a week for nearly eight weeks, and they look forward to your arrival at the Opera House. Enjoy the show!

Class Christmas Tree

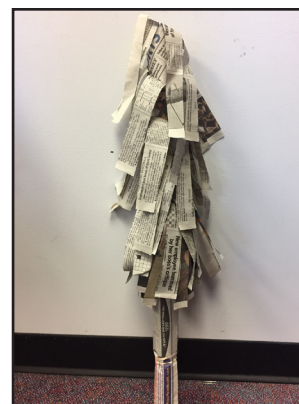
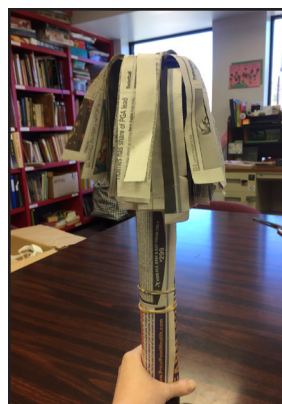
Bring the beauty of the holidays into the classroom with this fun and easy tree craft!

How to make it: Paste six or seven full sheets of newspaper together end to end to make one long strip of newspaper. Roll this long strip loosely into a tube about two inches in diameter. Put a rubber band around each end of the tube to keep it from unrolling.

How to do it: Take the rubber band off the top of the roll of newspapers. With scissors, make four six inch cuts in the top of the roll. Bend the torn parts over, letting them fall outside the tube. Reach inside the tube with your fingers and slowly pull up the center coils a little bit at a time, holding the roll of newspapers steady as you do. Gradually work the center of the coil up and up until you magically create a six foot tall Christmas tree (from *Christmas Magic*, by James Baker, 1998)!

Ways to Extend: Have the students decorate the tree by painting or coloring it. Ornaments may be drawn on colored paper, cut out, and attached to the tree with paper clips.

KAS: VACr1.2.4, VACr2.1.4



What to know – before the show!

The Season of Giving

The holidays are a time for giving and receiving. Have your students write a wish list of what they want for this holiday season. Take time to share by choosing volunteers to read their lists.

The holidays are also a time for compassion among families and communities. Ask the students to think about people in their community that are in need (i.e. people who are orphans, homeless, or low-income) and make a wish list for one of them. How would the lists be different? Have a few students read from their new lists. As a class, think of ways to help people in need in the community.

Participate in a holiday project by starting a charity drive for a shelter or another charitable organization. The students may bring canned food, clothing, or wrapped toys. Encourage students to get their friends and families involved, too.

If you need some suggestions on where to find families in need, a good place to start is with the coordinator of your school's family resource center. If your school does not have one, here are some organizations we recommend:

God's Pantry: www.godspantry.org

Salvation Army: www.salvationarmy.org

Toys for Tots: www.toysfortots.org

United Way of the Bluegrass: www.uwbg.org



KAS: WR4 7, WR5 7

The Best Christmas Story Ever

Beth Bradley shares her favorite story about a Christmas tradition in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical*. Ask the class about the holiday traditions their families have. What makes those traditions special? Do they have a favorite? Have each student write a personal story about a previous holiday season. They may write about favorite gifts they received, funny stories, or special moments that occurred. When the writing assignment is complete, give students the opportunity to share their stories either by reading them aloud or memorizing them and presenting them as if they were a storyteller. You can extend this activity by assigning small groups of students to recreate a few of the stories, and having the writers be the directors within their



KAS: L.4.3a, L.4.3b, THCr2.1.4a, THCr2.1.5a, THCr3.1.4a

How to grow – after the show!

What Happens Next to the Herdmans?

As a group, review the final events of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical*. Have 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. Each group should act out their scenes using improvisation. In what ways have characters and their attitudes changed? What is happening in their lives? 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 from the scene. The students should focus on what their character was thinking and feeling during the scene and how their opinions have changed.

KAS: TH-Pr6.1.4, TH-Pr6.1.5



Bring the Story Alive!

In groups of four or five, have students choose a short book about a winter holiday (picture books are especially helpful). Encourage exploration of holidays other than Christmas, such as Hannukkah or Kwanzaa. After reading the book, have each group list all the characters and settings in their book. Then have the students decide the number of scenes and characters in their story. Once they have outlined their story, have the group act out the story from beginning to end. Allow ample time for rehearsal, and then have the groups present their scenes to the class. Have the whole class discuss the process of turning their book into a script. Was this a difficult process? Why or why not?

KAS: TH-Cr2.1.4.a, TH-Cr2.1.5.a, TH-Re7.1.4, TH-Re7.1.5, TH-Re8.1.4.a, TH-Re8.1.5.a



How to grow - after the show!

Merry Christmas Around the World!

See if you can match the "Merry Christmas" greeting with its language of origin. If you need help refer to <http://www.santas.net/howmerrychristmasissaid.htm>.

The Language:

Hawaiian
Portuguese
French
Greek
Mandarin
Spanish
Russian
Japanese
German
Italian

The Saying:

Sheng dan kuai le
Joyeux Noël
Frohe Weihnachten
Kala Christouyenna
Mele Kalikimaka
Buon Natale
Feliz Natal
Schastlivogo Rozhdestva
Feliz Navidad
Merii Kurisumasu



It's All About Perspective

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever is told from the point of view of one person: Beth Bradley. How would the story change if it were told from a different perspective? How would Alice tell the story? Or Gladys Herdman? Individually, have the students rewrite *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* from the perspective of a different character in the play. They may choose to write the entire story or about a particular event, like the pageant. Encourage the students to explore their character's thoughts and feelings about the events in the story. Do those thoughts and feelings change at any point? Why or why not? Choose a few volunteers to share their character's perspectives of certain events (i.e. the Herdman's first day at church or the Christmas pageant). Try to get as many varied perspectives as possible to be represented and shared.



KAS: WR4 3.a & 3.b, WR5 3.a & 3.b

How to grow - after the show!

What to Read Next

The Best School Year Ever

by Barbara Robinson

The six horrible Herdmans – the worst kids in the history of the world – cause mayhem throughout the school year.

My Brother Louis Measures Worms and Other Louis Stories

by Barbara Robinson

Young Mary Elizabeth relates the humorous misadventures of her brother Louis and the other wacky members of her unpredictable, very odd family.

Soup

by Robert Newton Peck

The adventures and misadventures of two boys growing up in a small Vermont town.

Red Ranger Came Calling: A Guaranteed True Christmas Story

by Berkeley Breathed

In 1939, while spending Christmas with a well-meaning aunt, a young boy who does not believe in Santa Claus has an unusual experience that changes his thinking.

Everyone Else's Parents Said Yes

by Paula Danziger

Matthew cannot resist the temptation to play practical jokes on his older sister and all the girls in his class at school, so by his big eleventh birthday party they have all declared war on him.

LCT teaches in YOUR school!

Would you like to see some of these play guide activities modeled in your classroom?

Book a workshop for your class with one of LCT's teaching artists! In our pre-show workshops, our teaching artists will engage students in acting skills and themes from the play through drama activities. In our post-show workshops, students will extend their play-going experience by strengthening their personal connection to the play and deepening their understanding of the themes and characters.



Call us at 859-254-4546 x226 to book a pre or post-show workshop for your class!

To learn more about Lexington Children's Theatre and our programming for your school visit:
www.lctonstage.org/for-educators/in-school-experiences/