

# THE CHRISTMAS THAT ALMOST WASN'T



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## Dear Educator,

As an organization that values the arts and education, we have created this Study Guide as a helpful resource.

Our Study Guides are designed to be a valuable tool for teachers in two ways: helping you to prepare your students before the show, and enriching and extending their experience after.

Our goal is to serve principals, teachers and students in their pursuit of Illinois State Standards and to integrate the arts with your core curricular subjects.

## Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts, Music & Dance,  
Teamwork, Communication,  
Just Plain Fun!

Visit us at [www.absproductions.com](http://www.absproductions.com)

# Pre-Performance Questions

1. **How many of you have experienced a live theater performance? What performance did you see?**

2. **What are some of the differences between going to the theater and watching television or going to a movie?**

- Theater features live on-stage actors. They have spent many weeks rehearsing for the performance.
- The audience is a very important part of the performance. Appreciation and enthusiasm for the performers is shown by close attention and participation and applause at the proper times.
- The theater is a very special place. Its atmosphere is entirely different from your home where the television is always available.
- It is easy to identify with live actors. You can see how they use their bodies and voices to convey different emotions.
- Actors wear clothing (or costumes) and make-up to help create the different characters they play.
- There is much more to live performances than actors. Special sets, lighting, music, costumes and (of course) the audience, add to the total experience.

3. **Introduce your students to the following theatrical terms:**

Play • Acts & Scenes • Producer • Program • Spotlights

Costumes • Props • Director • Stage • Curtain Call • Stagehand • Lobby • Usher

Musical Theater • Orchestra Pit • Playwright • Scenery • Makeup • Actor

4. **Discuss the role of the audience and proper theater etiquette.**

- Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything, and so that you will not disturb the rest of the audience.
- It is easier for you (and the rest of the audience) to see and hear the performance if you stay in your seat and listen very carefully.
- In long performances, there will be an intermission. There is no intermission in our production. This performance will run approximately one hour in length.
- Sing or participate if you are invited to do so. Your participation is often very important!
- Listen to how the music sets the different moods and affects your own feelings.
- Show the cast and crew your appreciation for their hard work with applause. Do this when you like a song, dance or joke, and of course at the end of the show!
- Most importantly... **have fun!**

# About the Show

## The Story:

Excited about the arrival of Santa Claus on Christmas eve, little Sarah can't seem to settle down and go to sleep. To pass the time, her Father decides to tell her a bedtime story about the Christmas that *almost* wasn't.

Due to a terrible accident at the Toyshop, the formerly sweet Toymaker has been turned into a mad scientist who is on a mission... A mission to cancel Christmas! It's now up to the life-sized toys to save the day! Through song, dance and audience participation, the toys teach each other about the true meaning of Christmas, rescue Santa Claus and ultimately save the Toymaker from his evil spell.

## Setting:

**TIME:** The Present and the Past

**PLACE:** In and around the magical Toyshop

## Characters:

**Sarah & Father (who tell the story)**

**The Toymaker (good now turned evil)**

**Marty (the Toymakers Elf assistant)**

**Annie (a rag doll)**

**Nutcracker (a toy soldier)**

**Teddy (a stuffed bear)**

**Brittney (a fashion doll)**

**Perry (a Postman)**

**Santa Claus (as himself)**



## Songs:

**The Toymakers Lament - *The Toymaker***

**Welcome to the Christmas Toyshop - *The Toys***

**Best Time of the Year - *Annie and Perry the Postman***

**'Twas the Night Before Christmas - *The Toys***

**We are the Toys - *The Toys***

**Jingle Bells - *All***

# Post-Performance Questions

## **1. MUSIC**

- Was music used in the performance? Was it live or recorded? How could you tell? When was the music used? Why? Did it help develop the plot? What types of music was used, or were different types used?
- Can you describe how different kinds of music would make you have different kinds of feelings?
- When a play is a musical, an actor must have additional skills. Can you name some?
- A musical costs much more to produce. Can you name some additional expenses? (ie; music director, a practice piano, a choreographer etc.)

## **2. SETS**

- Describe the sets used in the play you just saw. What props or details were used to suggest specific times or settings? How could lighting be changed to create a mood, season or time of day? What materials might have been used in building the sets? How were the sets and props moved on and off the stage? Describe a simple scene (ie; a day at school, a trip to the store, a ride in the car or on the bus), ask students to describe a basic set for the scene.

## **3. COSTUMES**

- What would you need to know to create costumes for a play (ie; Historical research, sewing, theatrical effects etc.)?
- Why is the right costume important to the character in the play?

## **4. DANCE**

- Describe the kind of dancing in the play. How is it different from the kinds of dancing that the class might know? What purpose could dance have in a play?

## **5. PRODUCTION**

- Make a list of all the personnel needed for a play or musical. (ie; directors, actors, musicians, playwrights, set designers, costumes designers, light & sound designers, stagehands, choreographers, producers, etc.)

# Art & Writing Activity

- Draw a picture of your favorite part of the show. Describe what is happening in your picture below.



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# Your Review of the Show!

Often, plays and musicals will get reviewed by a critic. Now it's your turn! Write a review of our production of *The Christmas That Almost Wasn't*. Who was your favorite character? What did you like or dislike about the costumes or scenery? Did you like the songs? What was your favorite part?

25 cents

The form is designed for a 25-cent review. It features a decorative ribbon at the top. Below the ribbon is a large rectangular box for a title or introductory text. The main body of the form is divided into two vertical columns. The left column contains a smaller box at the top, followed by a series of horizontal lines for writing. The right column consists of a single continuous column of horizontal lines. At the bottom right of the form, there is a section labeled "ABOUT THE AUTHOR" which includes a small square box for a signature or name.

# Be an Actor Activity

Actors have to be good at remembering – remembering their lines and remembering their moves. They also have to be able to change the way they talk and move to play different roles – with lots of people watching too! Some of our actors in our show have to play multiple different parts! Actors must also be good at speaking and singing clearly so that the audience can always hear what they are saying – otherwise they won't be able to follow the story!

- **Choose a character** from *The Christmas That Almost Wasn't* and make a list of words to describe them.
  - How do they talk? How do they walk?
  - Are they young or old?
  - Are they a human or an animal?
  - Are they smart? Silly? Friendly? Grumpy?
- **Try walking around the room** as each of these character types. How does playing a character make you walk differently? Now give them a voice – how do they talk?
- **Improvise** little scenes with each other, then see if you can swap characters and play the scenes again. How does it change?

Which character do you find it easier to be?

# Thinking of Themes

## Advanced Activity

### **Objective:**

After viewing *The Christmas That Almost Wasn't*, students become familiar with recognizing themes in a story.

**Vocabulary:** Theme, Plot, Characters, Setting

### **Lesson:**

Discuss the meaning of theme

*A theme is an underlying message meaningfully created and connected to the story's plot, characters, and setting.*

Ask students to take five minutes to think about the themes shown throughout the play *The Christmas That Almost Wasn't*.

Think about what message the playwright was trying to send to the audience. Students can then share their opinions about the theme(s) of the show. Themes will vary from student to student.

Ask students to choose a particular theme and draw a picture of the scene in which the theme is best articulated to the reader.

Next, students should write a summary explaining the theme, how it is exemplified in the story, and what is drawn on the picture. Ask students to share their summaries and illustrations with the class.