



THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER

EDUCATION GUIDE • GRADE LEVELS K-5

Education Guide Information by Derek T. Pickens

Charleston Stage, now celebrating its 45th Anniversary Season, is in residence at the Historic Dock Street Theatre. Charleston Stage is South Carolina’s largest resident professional theatre. More than a half million students have attended Charleston Stage’s fully professional productions at the Historic Dock Street Theatre over the past 45 years. Charleston Stage school shows feature dazzling scenery, stunning costumes, and casts of professional actors.

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By Barbara Robinson

SYNOPSIS:

In this hilarious Christmas classic, a couple struggling to put on a church Christmas pageant is faced with casting the Herdman kids--probably the most inventively awful kids in history. You won't believe the mayhem - and the fun - when the Herdmans collide with the Christmas story head on! This delightful comedy is adapted from the best-selling Young Adult book, and has become a holiday staple for groups across the United States! Features plenty of great roles for children and adults, a few favorite Christmas carols, and a lot of laughs!

CHARACTERS:

- Bob Bradley** - solid family man, father of Beth and Charlie
- Grace Bradley** - firm and loving, mother of Beth and Charlie
- Beth Bradley** - the narrator
- Charlie Bradley** - kid brother
- Ralph Herdman** - ragged, scroungy, slouching manner, touch of adolescent cool
- Imogene Herdman** - loud, bossy, and crafty
- Leroy Herdman** - tough, sure of himself
- Claude Herdman** - tough, combative
- Ollie Herdman** - looking for trouble, Claude's usual partner in crime
- Gladys Herdman** - small, wiry, and feisty
- Alice Wendleken** - prim, proper, pain in the neck
- Mrs. Armstrong** - largish woman, managerial in voice and manner
- Mrs. McCarthy** - a younger, less imperious version of Mrs. Armstrong
- Mrs. Slocum, Mrs. Clark, and Mrs. Clausing** - the church ladies
- Reverend Hopkins** - head of the church
- Children of the Church** - Maxine, Elmer, Hobie, David, Beverly, Shirley, Juanita, and Doris

RECOMMENDED SUBJECT AREAS:

Social Studies:

- Charleston Areas Explored: Sullivan's Island, Fort Moultrie
- The History of Edgar Allan Poe

ELA:

- Poetry and Short Stories

THEMES EXPLORED:

- Acceptance
- Giving
- Taking in the Less Fortunate

GRADE LEVELS K-5



PLAYWRIGHT AND AUTHOR OF THE ORIGINAL BOOK

Barbara Robinson

Barbara Robinson is an American author best known for her humorous yet touching children’s stories such as *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* (1972) and *My Brother Louis Measures Worms and other Louis Stories* (1982). On her website she mentions that she became interested in writing for children because “there’s no greater audience than boys and girls who read books and demand that those books be the most exciting, the most mysterious, the most touching, the funniest...the best.”

Robinson was born on October 24, 1927, and grew up in the small town of Portsmouth, Ohio. She was an only child, her father passed away when she was three, and, as a result, spent a great deal of time with her mother growing up. It was her mother, a schoolteacher, who encouraged and inspired Robinson’s love for reading and writing from an early age.

In 1948 she graduated from Allegheny College receiving an honorary doctorate of letters. Later that year she met and married John F. Robinson, with whom she had two daughters.

She began her career as a magazine short story writer, but she admits that she “stumbled into” the field of writing for children. She merely focused on “writing good stories.” Throughout her life over fifty of her poems, plays, and stories have been published in magazines and journals such as *McCall’s*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Redbook*. She also was featured in the biographical publication *Major Authors and Illustrators from Children and Young Adults*.

For *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* she was awarded the Georgia Children’s Book Award, Minnesota’s Maude Lovelace Book Award, and it was named an ALA Notable Children’s Book. The book sold over 800,000 and was adapted into a popular play, first performed in 1982 at the Children’s Theatre in Seattle. This story inspired two sequels involving the same mischievous characters—*The Best School Year Ever* (1994) and *The Best Halloween Ever* (2004).

Mrs. Robinson passed away on July 9, 2013, but her many writings will continue to delight and entertain audiences and readers. According to Catherine Balkin, former executive at Harper Publishers, Robinson was a “funny, charming, and kind” author who “will be missed by a great many students, including those who are now adults.”

CREATING “CHRISTMAS PAGEANT”

Often Robinson was asked how she came up with the storyline for *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. Were the Herdman’s real? Was she in a Christmas pageant like the one in her book? She told the *Houston Chronicle* in 2011 that she “made the kids up,” but she owed her inspiration to the small town in which she grew up and her mother who taught school for forty-nine years. She claimed that in her Ohio hometown she observed at “a close and daily range” almost every kind of human behavior and that her mother was always bringing home stories from the classroom, which certainly influenced her work. In *Christmas Pageant* Robinson wanted to use the rowdy and mischievous Herdman’s to demonstrate that no kid is truly “bone bad,” and perhaps their redeeming qualities reveal themselves in surprising and unlikely ways.

Fun Fact - In Australia, New Zealand, and the UK the story has an alternate title - “The Worst Kids in the World.”

CHRISTMAS PAGEANTS

Christmas pageants began in the Middle Ages (500 AD-1500 AD) as way to teach biblical stories to people in the community who could not read. During these times it was uncommon for the average person to know how to read—being able to write one’s own name was impressive. Often they were quite elaborate; people wore costumes, live animals were used, and they could last for hours. At the time the church provided much of the entertainment for its village or town, and these recreations of biblical stories were considered events not to be missed. St. Francis of Assisi and his followers performed the first Nativity Play in 1223 to remind the local population that Jesus was born for them, both rich and poor. Later these plays left the church and toured in wagons called “pageants.”

FUN 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.

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.

The Salvation Army has been sending Santa Claus-clad donation collectors into the streets since the 1890s.

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.

Construction workers started the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree tradition in 1931.

CONTENT WARNINGS

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever is appropriate for all ages! There is mention of smoking, and the phrase “sex and underwear” is used when describing what people think the Herdman’s have been talking about.



Kindergarten, First, and Second Grade

ELA Meaning and Context | Standard 5 - Determine meaning and develop logical interpretations by making predictions, inferring, drawing conclusions, analyzing, synthesizing, providing evidence, and investigating multiple interpretations.

Indicators - 5.1 & 5.2

ELA Meaning and Context | Standard 7 - Analyze the relationship among ideas, themes, or topics in multiple media and formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.

Indicators - 7.1 & 7.2

Third, Fourth, and Fourth Grade

ELA Meaning and Context | Standard 5 - Determine meaning and develop logical interpretations by making predictions, inferring, drawing conclusions, analyzing, synthesizing, providing evidence, and investigating multiple interpretations.

Indicators - 5.1 & 5.2

ELA Meaning and Context | Standard 7 - Analyze the relationship among ideas, themes, or topics in multiple media and formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.

Indicator - 7.1

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

NOTE TO TEACHER: Please feel free to adjust activities to meet the needs of your classroom.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

In the play Mrs. Bradley reads passages from Luke 2:1-20 the Bible telling the story of Jesus's birth. Below is story of this Christian tale with more historical context, if you wish to share it with your class.

King August, who ruled Palestine, wanted to know the number of people in his kingdom. He requested everyone to return to the birthplace of their 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.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Today it seems every time the holiday season rolls around a slew of Christmas carols, both religious and secular, accompany it. Where did the tradition of these songs come from?

Carols were first sung in Europe thousands of years ago beginning as a pagan tradition in honor of the Winter Solstice. The Winter Solstice usually occurs around the 22 of December, very close to Christmas. The word carol means “a dance or song of praise and joy.” Early Christians took over the pagan holiday and replaced the pagan songs with Christian ones to celebrate Christ rather than the pagan beliefs. However, these Christian versions were sung in Latin, a language the common man did not speak, and therefore citizens disliked the new tradition. By the Middle Ages, most people had lost interest in celebrating Christmas, until St. Francis instated the Nativity Plays. Sometimes the songs sang in these plays were in Latin, but often they were rewritten in the vernacular and encouraged viewers to join in singing.

CHRISTMAS CAROL CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Have students share their favorite Christmas carols and why they like them. Choose one and stage the carol as a small theatrical production. Brainstorm with the students characters in the song, and even characters that could appear in the song. Help the students stage it and assign short lines of dialogue to each student. Note: There does not need to be a “final product,” just have fun!

Alternatively, you could use the actual song and have the students create simple choreography.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Discussion Questions

After seeing our production of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, have a debrief with your students and ask the following questions.

- Why do you like *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*? (For instance, is it funny? Do you like the characters? Do you like the “message?”)
- Which character changes the most during the story? Why do you think so?
- Are you more like Imogene, an “outward wrongdoer” who is amazed, astounded, and awed by the story of Christmas, or the Beth (the narrator) - a church-goer who’s heard the Christmas story so much by now that she forgets to be amazed by this startling story?
- Why do you think the author includes such obvious wrongdoing as Imogene swearing in church, smoking in church, and Gladys’s bullying? Could she have left those out and the story been as good or meaningful?

Free Lessons on Teachers Pay Teachers

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Browse/Search:the%20best%20christmas%20pageant%20ever/Price-Range/Free>

Teacher Vision Resources

<https://www.teachervision.com/reading/best-christmas-pageant-ever-project-ideas>

Lesson Plans and Ideas

<https://www.brighthubeducation.com/lesson-plans-grades-3-5/78404-the-best-christmas-pageant-ever-book-activities-and-teaching-ideas/>

DOCK STREET THEATRE



For almost 300 years audiences have delighted in performances at the Historic Dock Street Theatre which stands on the site of the very first theatre building in America which opened its doors in 1736. The current building, originally The Planter's Hotel was built in 1803 and in 1937 was converted into the Dock Street Theatre know today. Charleston Stage presents over 150 performances at the Historic Dock Street Theatre playing to theatre goers from every state in the union and many foreign countries. The Dock Street Theatre, newly renovated in 2010, is currently owned and managed by the City of Charleston. Other

performing arts groups including Spoleto Festival USA perform here annually.

On February 12, 1736 the Dock Street Theatre opened with a performance of *The Recruiting Officer*. Built on the corner of Church Street and Dock Street (now known as Queen Street), the Historic Dock Street Theatre was the first building in America built exclusively to be used for theatrical performances. Flora, the first opera performance in America, took place at the Historic Dock Street Theatre.

The original Dock Street Theatre was probably destroyed by the Great Fire of 1740 which destroyed many of the buildings in Charleston's French Quarter. In 1809, the Planter's Hotel was built on this site and in 1835 the wrought iron balcony and sandstone columns of the Church Street facade were added. A number of notable persons worked and patronized the Planter's Hotel including the noted 19th Century actor Junius Brutus Booth (father of Edwin and John Wilkes Booth). Robert Smalls, an African-American Civil War hero, who stole a steamboat in the harbor and sailed it out past the Confederate-held Ft. Sumter and turned it over to the blockading Union Fleet, served as a waiter in the hotel's dining room prior to the war. Charleston's famed Planter's Punch was first introduced here.

After the Civil War, the Planter's Hotel fell into disrepair and was slated for demolition. But in 1935, after Milton Pearlstine made the property available to the City of Charleston and at the urging of Mayor Burnet Maybank and other notable citizens, the original building became a Depression Era WPA (Works Progress Administration) project. At that time, the present theatre was constructed within the shell of the

DOCK STREET THEATRE



Planter's Hotel. The hotel's grand foyer became the grand foyer of the theatre and the hotel's dining room now serves as the box office lobby. The beautiful woodwork and mantels of the second floor drawing room were salvaged from the Radcliffe-King Mansion (circa 1799) which stood at the corner of George and Meeting Streets and was razed to build the College of Charleston gymnasium, another WPA project. Modeled on eighteenth century London playhouses by Charleston architect Albert Simons, the present Dock Street Theatre's new stage house and auditorium were built in the hotel's courtyard. The local carpenters who were put to work as a part of this Depression era relief effort utilized locally grown and milled native black cypress for the beautiful warm wooden interior. Following this \$350,000 renovation, The Historic Dock Street Theatre's second grand opening took place on November 26, 1937. Notables in the audience included author DuBose Heyward (*Porgy*) who was named writer-in-residence.

The Historic Dock Street Theatre reopened for the third time on March 18, 2010 after a three year, \$19 million dollar renovation by the City of Charleston. This extensive full-scale renovation brought the historic theatre into the 21st century with state-of-the-art lighting and sound, modern heating and air conditioning, and new restrooms and seating. In addition, the theatre was made seismically secure and fully handicapped accessible. Extensive sound-proofing was added to ensure that outside noises no longer intruded on performances inside.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone wants to have a great time at the theater, but many students are unaware of how to do so while also being respectful. The first thing you must do is define what theatre etiquette is. Here are some general guidelines that are followed in the theater:

- Be respectful of performers during the show. The audience is very close to the stage, and the actors are aware of all movement and noise. So, please no talking during the show.
- There should be no eating, drinking, or gum chewing during the show.
- Hats should not be worn in the theatre. This includes baseball caps.
- There should be no movement in and out of the theatre during the performance unless it is an emergency.
- Make sure to turn off all electronic devices.
- There should be no audio or video recording during the performance.
- Most importantly, ENJOY THE SHOW!

These rules can sometimes seem negative, so to make learning about it fun, use the following activity to introduce your students to audience etiquette.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Act out their behavior and dress at four different types of performances.
- List appropriate modes of behavior and dress for each event.
- Identify people in the group who advance, hinder, or add nothing to the group's purpose.

- Identify the type of performance from the actions and attire portrayed.
- Explain why each type of conduct and clothing is appropriate for the venue.
- Produce a poster and brochure outline audience behavior for the theatre.

MATERIALS

- Colored tickets to different events
- A hat

SC Academic Standards for the Visual and Performing Arts

Theatre - Valuing and Responding | Standard 7 - The student will analyze, evaluate, and derive meanings from improvised and scripted scenes, live theatre performances, and theatrical performances on film, television, and other electronic media.

Indicators - T7.1 | Identify, demonstrate, and use audience etiquette to be used during theatre activities and performances.

Aim

How do we behave differently for a live theatre production than we do at other types of performances?

ACTIVITY (30-45 MINUTES)

- Divide class into four groups by having students pull tickets from a hat to four events on four different colors of paper (e.g., white, pink, yellow, green) reading “Admit One.”
- Students get together with those with the same color tickets. Write on the board:

Those of you with the following colors will attend the following events:

- 1) White = A private screening of [insert title of popular movie]
- 2) Pink = A live concert by [insert name of relevant pop/rock band]
- 3) Yellow = A Broadway Musical or Play
- 4) Green = An interactive Improvisation show

- Distribute brainstorm sheet to each group.
- Instructor's prompt: Discuss what you believe is the appropriate way to dress for your event as well as the appropriate behavior for the audience. You are to select a recorder from your group who will write the group's responses. Next, plan a brief (one-minute) scene in which you act out your even, showing the audience's behavior. You will have ten minutes to complete this task.
- After 10 minutes, have each group act out their event for the class without revealing it. Ask the students: What event were they demonstrating? How did you know which event was being portrayed? How many of you have been to an event like the one you portrayed in class?
- Have reporters tell the class what each group decided about dress and behavior at the event it attended.
- Ask: How many of you have ever been to a performance that began with announcements to the audience? What were they? Why were they made?

SUMMARY

How is dress for the four events different? Why is audience behavior different in a participatory even than it is an audience? How do you think our behavior should be at the Dock Street Theatre?

BRAINSTORM SHEET

GROUP MEMBERS: _____

RECORDER'S NAME: _____

EVENT: _____

APPROPRIATE DRESS

REASONS

APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

REASONS

Please make sure the following information and bus parking map is given to your bus company before your scheduled performance.

- 1) Dock Street Theatre is located at 135 Church Street in downtown Charleston. The area of Church Street that Dock Street Theatre is located on is a one way street. Please access Church Street via Broad Street. (See attached map)

- 2) IMPORTANT - You may load/unload passengers on Church Street in front of Dock Street Theatre. There are additional bus zones located by St. Philip's Church located 1/2 block away from the theatre. (See attached map) Police officers and staff will be there to assist with traffic flow. Bus drivers will be advised as where to stop and load/unload passengers.

- 3) Do not travel on Chalmers Street. The residents on this street along with the City are trying to preserve the historic cobblestones, and the weight of buses can damage these stones, which align the street.

- 4) There is a designated bus parking zone on Concord Street where you can park. (See attached map) You can also park near the Aquarium. No buses are allowed to park in front of Dock Street Theatre or by St. Philip's Church during the performance. School Matinees are typically one hour long. Dock Street Theatre staff will be in contact with the bus driver to arrange pick up of students. Bus drivers be prepared to provide cell phone number.

- 5) There are multiple City Parking Garages near the Dock Street Theatre if traveling by car. (See attached map)

- 6) The side streets surrounding Dock Street Theatre also have metered parking spots if traveling by car. Parking here is free after 10pm and all day on Sunday.

- 7) If you have any questions, there will be police officials and Dock Street employees to further direct you once you arrive to the scheduled performance.

Thank you for taking the time to review our bus policy and procedures. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Erika Greco, Box Office Manager, at 843.647.7363 or by email at egreco@charlestonstage.com.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS TO DOCK STREET THEATRE

From North Charleston/Airport:

Take I-26 towards Charleston. Take the Meeting Street Exit (221B). Turn right onto Meeting Street. Continue on Meeting Street and travel to Broad Street. Turn left on Broad Street. Turn left on Church Street. Dock Street Theatre will be on the left hand side just past Chalmers Street.

From Mt. Pleasant:

Take Coleman Blvd. to Hwy. 17 South or take Hwy. 17 South across the Cooper River Bridge towards Charleston. There are two ways to get to the theatre from the bridge:

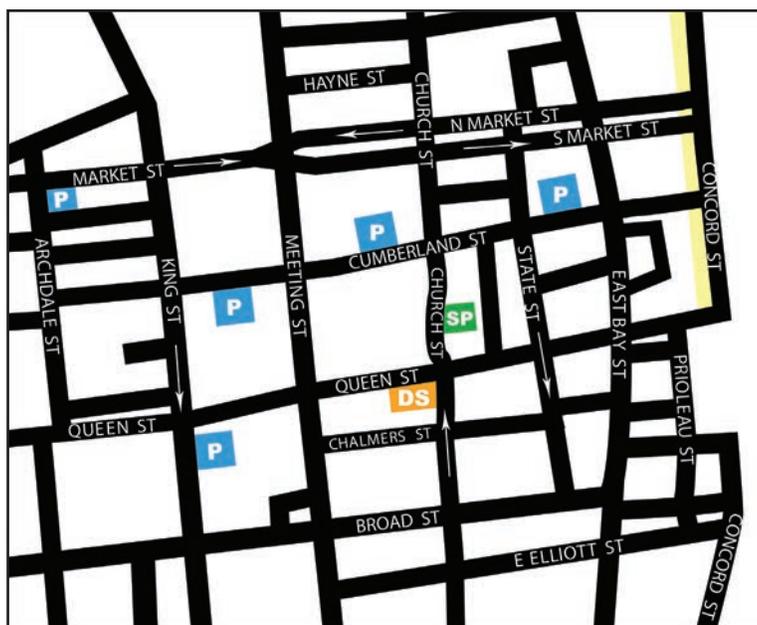
1) Take the Meeting Street Exit. Turn left onto Meeting Street. Continue on Meeting Street and travel to Broad Street. Turn left on Broad Street. Turn left on Church Street. Dock Street Theatre will be on the left hand side just past Chalmers Street.

or

2) Take the East Bay Street Exit. Turn left onto East Bay Street. Continue on East Bay Street and travel to Broad Street. Turn right on Broad Street. Turn right on Church Street. Dock Street Theatre will be on the left hand side just past Chalmers Street.

From West Ashley, Kiawah, Seabrook and James Island:

Take Hwy. 17 North across the James Island Connector and exit onto Lockwood Drive South. Take Lockwood Drive South which turns into Broad Street. Travel down Broad Street and cross over Meeting Street. Turn left on Church Street. Dock Street Theatre will be on the left hand side just past Chalmers Street.



Map Key:

-  Dock Street Theatre (135 Church St.)
-  St. Philip's Church
-  City Parking Garages
-  Concord Street Bus Parking Zone

HAVE KIDS WHO'D LIKE TO TAKE THEATRE CLASSES?



Acting Classes

200+ Students Attend Acting Classes After School

Charleston Stage's TheatreSchool offers classes year round for students from kindergarten through high school at Charleston Stage's West Ashley Theatre Center. Acting classes for students of all ages and abilities are taught by members of Charleston Stage's Professional Resident Acting Company. Classes range from beginning classes to performance workshops and performance troupes. Classes culminate in mini-performances held at the West Ashley Theatre Center. Tuition scholarships are available for need-based students.

Register online today at CharlestonStage.com/Education!



ArtReach In-School Workshops

Bringing Professional Actors Into the Classroom

Charleston Stage's Resident Professional Actors provide dynamic workshops in area schools through a partnership with Engaging Creative Minds. Workshops use theatrical skills to teach academic subjects and can be combined with a school matinee performance experience. For information on booking ArtReach workshops, contact Rylee Coppel, Director of Education and Engagement, at (843) 225-3900 or rcoppel@charlestonstage.com.



TheatreWings High School Apprenticeships

A Tuition-Free Apprentice Program For Teens

The TheatreWings High School Apprentice Program is designed to allow talented young people the opportunity to work directly with theatre professionals and gain first-hand experience in professional theatrical production. Students explore stage management, lighting and sound, as well as set and costume design and construction. Designed for highly dedicated students, TheatreWings requires more than 100+ hours of apprenticeship each season. For more information, email TheatreWings Co-Coordinators Ravyn Meador or Caleb Garner at wings@charlestonstage.com.

For more information on our programs, call the Education Office at (843) 225-3900 or visit CharlestonStage.com/Education.