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Family Plays

CHRISTMAS PLAYS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES



How Santa Claus Discovered Christmas

Drama by

MARTIN L. PETERSON

'Twas the Night Before Columbus Day ...
I Mean Christmas

Drama by

MAGGIE LAWRENCE

The Angels' Greatest Message

Drama by

SANDRA POUND

CHRISTMAS PLAYS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

Drama. By Maggie Lawrence, Sandra Pond and Martin L. Peterson. Three completely different short plays: *'Twas the Night Before Columbus Day I Mean Christmas* (9 m. or w.) by Maggie Lawrence presents the funniest recitation of the famous poem you've ever heard. A nerdy character who brags about his infallible memory enters the stage to recite the poem and messes up every line ... to the enormous delight of children in the audience, who prompt him. *Most of the 9 cast members may be men or women. Approximate running time: 20 minutes.* *The Angels' Greatest Message* (6+ m. or w.) by Sandra Pond presents the Christmas story in a refreshing new way, from the point of view of the angels who are chosen to announce the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. The Littlest Angel, who has dreamed of going to earth to pet a little lamb, begs to go along. *Approximate running time: 15 to 20 minutes.* *How Santa Claus Discovered Christmas* (12+ m. or w.) by Martin L. Peterson tells about the Christmas Eve when Santa Claus sprained his ankle and was confined to a wheelchair. Just as he is giving up hopes of delivering toys to all the little children in the world, a young boy shows up and offers to help him—and does. When Santa thinks they have finished the job, the little boy tells him there is one child left, and leads Santa to Bethlehem and the manger, where Santa sees the Wise Men delivering the world's first Christmas presents. *Flexible. A children's choir may be added if desired. Approximate running time: 30 to 40 minutes.* All three plays together make a full evening's entertainment. *Approximate running time: 65 to 80 minutes. Code: CL5.*

Family Plays

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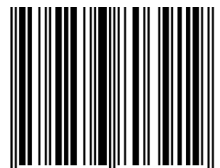
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Christmas Plays for
Young Audiences

'T WAS THE NIGHT
BEFORE COLUMBUS
DAY . . . I MEAN
CHRISTMAS

By

MAGGIE LAWRENCE

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MAGGIE LAWRENCE

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('T WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE COLUMBUS DAY ...
I MEAN CHRISTMAS)

The author dedicates this play, with love, to
Angela Camilla

and to the original cast of Culpeper County High School,
Culpeper, Va., who didn't let me down.

Original Cast

*Stage Manager Chris Clayton
*Narrator Dale Long
*Sister Sara Curtis
*Brother Chris Titchenell
Sugar Plum #1 Rachel Diamond
Sugar Plum #2 Amy Hanrahan
Father Todd Doyal
Mother Catherine Mothershead
Santa Claus Rob Spidle

* May be male or female

For a larger cast more Sugar Plums may be added.

Time: Now

Place: Your auditorium or theatre

The poem that most of us know as “’Twas the Night Before Christmas” was originally titled “A Visit from Saint Nicholas.” It was written in 1822 by Clement Clarke Moore for his six children. Published in 1823, it quickly became America’s most popular Christmas poem.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Here is the funniest recitation of the famous poem you've ever seen or heard. A nerdy character, whose arm is probably bruised from patting himself on the back, enters the stage to recite the poem from memory. But he can't remember the words—to the enormous delight of the children in the audience, who prompt him.

The video tape, available from the publisher, shows two different ways of presenting the play. In the first performance, the audience is given freedom in prompting the Narrator and correcting him, and laughing at him. This spontaneous reaction results in the loss of some lines, but since everybody knows the poem anyway, it doesn't seem to matter—the audience had the time of their lives. In the second performance the Stage Manager tells the audience to be quiet until he signals them, the Narrator says, "Don't tell me," and teachers in the audience help keep them quiet. This made for a smoother performance, and the audience enjoyed it—but maybe not quite as much as the first audience did. Each producer will have to decide which approach to take.

The play is flexible in casting and staging. The Stage Manager, the Narrator, and the children may be played by males or females. The cast size may be increased by adding more Sugar Plums (no limit). The first video performance takes place on the floor of a large room (the young audience sits on the floor). The second video is on a stage.

As the video shows, the cast and the audience had fun.

TIME: 15 to 20 minutes

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Large notebook, pencil—Stage Manager

Legal-size note pad, pen—Narrator

2 Christmas stockings—Sister, Brother

Pocket handkerchief—Narrator

Pack of toys (including paddle ball, mints, lollipops, etc.)—Santa Claus

Cup of milk, plate of cookies—on mantel

Costumes

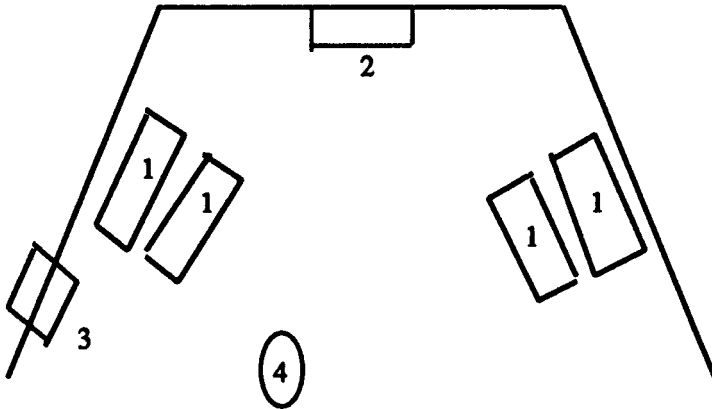
Stage Manager is dressed casually in backstage working garb. Narrator may wear a suit and bow tie, or sport clothes. Boy and Girl (Brother and Sister) wear night clothes. To give an old-fashioned flavor to the scene in keeping with the poem, Sister may wear an old-fashioned nightie and night-cap and Brother may wear a night gown or long-johns. Man and Woman (Father and Mother) may be costumed similarly. Other night clothes may be worn, as the video shows. As described on page 5, Mother wears a pantyhose on her head because she couldn't find a kerchief. The Sugar Plums would be appropriately attired in colorful (purple?) blouses or tutus and ballet slippers. Head pieces resembling sugarplums or gum drops would add a “tasteful” touch. Santa Claus should wear a standard Santa costume (well stuffed if the actor isn't naturally fat).

Sound

The only required sound effect is the clatter of pots and pans falling off stage.

The Set

The acting area needs four small beds or cots, a fireplace, straight chair. Here is a suggested arrangement:



1—Beds

2—Fireplace

3—Window (may be mimed)

4—Chair

Trim props, a Christmas tree, additional furniture, etc., may be added if desired.

Stage Manager, Narrator, and Sugar Plums may enter through openings in the stage curtains or doors in the set. Santa enters the fireplace from the rear.

'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE COLUMBUS DAY . . . I MEAN CHRISTMAS

[When the play begins, MOTHER and FATHER are in beds at Stage Right and BROTHER and SISTER are in beds at Stage Left. STAGE MANAGER enters Stage Left carrying a notebook, pencil behind one ear. He comes to Stage Center and addresses the audience]

STAGE MANAGER. Hi. I'm the stage manager for this show and we're all glad you could be here for our special production of "The Night Before Christmas." Before we start I just wanted to let you in on a little secret. The narrator . . . *[he looks to Stage Left and lowers his voice]* the narrator is a pretty nice guy, but let me warn you—he is NOT ready for this show. And the trouble is, he thinks he's got it just perfect. So what I'm saying is, maybe you could help him out once in a while. When he forgets a word or a line—look over to the side *[he points to Stage Left]*, and when I count to three, give him the right word. Occasionally we'll let him figure it out for himself, but when I give the signal, let him have it. Okay? And one other thing to remember, the last line is: "Happy Christmas to all and to all a good night." Got that? Let's try it together. And . . . HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL AND TO ALL A GOOD NIGHT! That's great! We'll get through this yet. And here he comes—the star of our show—Mr. Narrator! *[Leads applause. STAGE MANAGER crosses to Stage Left, where he can be seen slightly behind the curtain]*

[NARRATOR walks in, Stage Right, self-consciously proud. He carries a legal pad and pen. He bows slightly to the audience, then sits down on the chair in a formal manner]

NARRATOR. Good morning *[or afternoon]* . . . thanks for being with us today. As our stage manager may have told you, this play is more than just a simple production of "The Night Before Christmas." This play is intended to serve as a demonstration of my remarkable powers of memory. Just yesterday I heard—for the very first time, mind you—a recital of that lovely poem by Clement Moore, "The Night Before Christmas." And now, twenty-four hours later, I'm going to recite it for you as I write it down

for the first time. All the while our actors will act out the parts. Now isn't that incredible? My mother always said I had a mind like a steel trap. Well, I hate to brag, but you know what they say—"Let your little light shine." So if you're ready, here we go. Ready, actors? [ACTORS in beds holler out, "Ready!"] Okay . . . [Clears his throat, moves around to get comfortable] I think I'm ready now . . . okay . . . here I go . . . [squints in concentration] "'Twas the night before . . . before" . . . wait a minute, I've got it . . . "'Twas the night before" . . . don't tell me . . .

STAGE MANAGER. [Hisses] Starts with a "C." It starts with a "C"!

NARRATOR. Of course! "'Twas the night before Columbus Day and all through . . ."

STAGE MANAGER. No! No!—[Scribbles on large sheet of paper, then holds it up. It reads "Christmas." Motions to audience and whispers, "One, two, three." Audience hollers: "Christmas!"]

NARRATOR. [With polite laugh at himself] Of course, I remember now, how silly of me. "'Twas the night before Christmas." [He scribbles it down] I must have let my mind wander. That's what happens when you let your mind wander, even for a second—even a great mind like I have . . . let that be a lesson to us all. Why I'll bet even Albert Einstein . . .

GIRL. [Rises from twin bed, dressed in old-fashioned nightie and cap] Could we get on with it please? We have to be back at the school sometime this week.

NARRATOR. [Slightly flustered] Surely! Of course! Here we go. [Clears his throat] "'Twas the night before Christmas and allllll through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a . . . a . . . [starts to panic] not even a RHINOCER-OUS!"

[STAGE MANAGER writes "mouse" on paper, holds it up and gestures to audience, then to narrator, inviting them to tell him the right word. Audience should holler "Mouse!"]

NARRATOR. [Leaps from his seat in sudden panic] Mouse! Where?! [Jumps up on top of chair, gets down on knees and leans over back of chair to see under it, gets up and shakes his pant legs all the while exclaiming] Did it run up here? Where did it go? [STAGE MANAGER hurries out on stage to calm him down, explaining quietly with whispers and gestures that the word was "mouse" and it rhymes with "house." NARRATOR, flustered gets slowly back into seat, tries to re-assume dignity]

[The two CHILDREN get out of bed, each holding a Christmas stocking and posing in front of the chimney ready to hang them]

NARRATOR. *[Takes out pocket handkerchief and wipes his face]* Now where was I . . . heh heh . . . not a creature . . . stirring . . . not even a mouse . . . here we are . . . “The Easter baskets were hung by the . . .” *[Both CHILDREN together turn in astonishment and interrupt him]*

CHILDREN. Hold it! What do you mean “Easter baskets”? What do these look like? *[They hold up stockings; NARRATOR looks with bewilderment from them to what he has written and back again]*

BOY. Wrong holiday!

NARRATOR. Did I say “Easter baskets”?

BOY. Sure did.

NARRATOR. And those are stockings, aren’t they? *[KIDS nod. NARRATOR turns to audience and points a finger]* Now you see what I mean about letting your mind wander. It can happen at any time to anybody . . . *[BOY whistles for his attention: NARRATOR turns, BOY gestures to show action of hanging stockings by the chimney]* Oh! Right! Well, here we go. “The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that Saint . . . Saint Christopher soon would be there.”

STAGE MANAGER. *[Holds his head violently shaking]* NO!

NARRATOR. It’s not Saint Christopher? But he’s the traveling saint, isn’t he . . . well, what? Saint Augustine? *[STAGE MANAGER continues to shake his head “no” vigorously]* Saint Gregory? Theodore? Sebastian? Valentine? *[NARRATOR gets more and more indignant]* Well it has to be one of those—I know it has three syllables!

STAGE MANAGER. *[Assuming hopeless posture, he holds up sign reading “Nicholas”]* Tell ’em, kids.

AUDIENCE. Nicholas!

NARRATOR. *[With look of revelation]* Nicholas! Well, I’ll be darned—forgot all about him—better write that down before I forget. *[He sits down and scribbles on his pad. Sits back happily]* Now, where were we? Stockings were hung . . . okay, now I remember . . . *[touches fingertips to head in deep concentration]* “The children were nestled all snug in their beds . . .” *[CHILDREN are climbing into beds and getting comfortable]* “while visions of . . . of . . .” *[two ACTRESSES wearing candy-type costumes and ballet shoes leap lightly onto the stage and begin dancing around, on, and over the beds. NARRATOR turns, sees them, watches for a moment]* “while visions of FRUITCAKES dance on their beds.” *[DANCING stops]*

1st SUGARPLUM. What did you call us?

2nd SUGARPLUM. Yeah—we didn't put on these silly costumes and come dancing around out here just to get insulted, y'know.

1st SUGARPLUM. He oughta have more respect.

2nd SUGARPLUM. I'll say he should! ANYBODY can be a fruitcake. It takes REAL TALENT to be a sugarplum! *[They give each other a "high 5"]*

1st SUGARPLUM. You know what I have a good mind to do? I have a good mind to just walk off this stage right now! *[NARRATOR is making small imploring gestures of innocence, interjecting ad lib, "But girls, listen, I didn't mean, we have to . . ."]*

2nd SUGARPLUM. Me, too! *[She jumps down from bed: they both start to leave in a huff. 2nd SUGARPLUM stops, says to 1st] Wait a minute! We haven't danced in their heads yet! It says "visions of sugarplums danced in their heads."*

1st SUGARPLUM. *[Ignoring the narrator's attempts at interruption] But what about him? I'm not going to waste my art on somebody who can't tell a fruitcake from a sugarplum.*

2nd SUGARPLUM. Oh, he's harmless I guess. Let's just finish the job and get out of here. Whose head are you going to dance in?

1st SUGARPLUM. Hers, I guess.

2nd SUGARPLUM. Okay, I'll take the guy. *[They both start to jump up on the beds and begin dancing. Both CHILDREN sit bolt upright in alarm]*

BOY. Hey! Nobody dances in MY head!

GIRL. I'd like to live to see Christmas, if you don't mind—go on, beat it! *[She bats at the Sugarplum with the covers, finally gets out of bed and stalks off Stage Left; BOY follows, interspersing ad lib comments] This job wasn't supposed to be dangerous! Can't you just see it? Knocked out by a dancing sugarplum! Let's get out of here. [BOY and GIRL go off, Stage Left; SUGARPLUMS both standing on a bed, openmouthed, watch them go. NARRATOR is watching in horror, hands to his face. Pause]*

1st SUGARPLUM. *[Incredulously] Well paint me green and call me Sam!*

2nd SUGARPLUM. Can you beat that? Well, there's one sugarplum around here who knows when she's not wanted. C'mon. *[They start to leave. She stops, turns suddenly, bumping into 1st Sugarplum] I've got a friend who's got a cousin who knows this agent, and all we need's one audition and hello Hollywood!*