

ENRICHMENT GUIDE & SOCIAL STORY

THE BEST  
**CHRISTMAS**  
PAGEANT EVER

THE MUSICAL

 **FIRST  
STAGE**  
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH THEATER

PROUD CORNERSTONE MEMBER  
  
UNITED PERFORMING ARTS FUND

## DEAR FIRST STAGE FRIENDS,

The horrible Herdmans are the worst kids in the history of the world. The entire town panics when these rowdy six siblings are cast in the church's annual Christmas pageant. It's up to good-hearted Mrs. Bradley to help the Herdmans - and the rest of the town - discover the true meaning of Christmas before it's too late. Silent night? Not a chance, but sometimes a little joyful noise is just right for Christmas.

Enjoy the show,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Coltyn Giltner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Coltyn Giltner  
Education Director  
(414) 267-2972  
cgiltner@firststage.org



# CREATING THE CAROLS OF THE SEASON

## A HISTORY AND LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITY

**“In the days of Caesar Augustus a decree went out that all the world should be taxed, and Joseph went into Bethlehem with Mary his wife, who was great with child. And while they were there, she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them at the inn.**

**AWAY IN A MANGER**

**NO CRIB FOR A BED”**

*– Ivy, Grace, and the Kids*

### A HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Christmas carols play an important part of Christmas pageants and the holiday season, but do you know how Christmas carols became the ear worms that we listen to the whole season? Let’s take a look at the history of Christmas carols. Then, you’ll get a chance to create your own!

While carols are usually associated with Christianity and Christmas, they actually were first sung by pagans—or people who didn’t believe in the major religions of the time. Pagans would sing carols all year round to celebrate important events—like May Day, the changing of the seasons, and the start of the harvest in the fall. Carols would usually be accompanied by dances, plays, and feasts. When they were sung in the winter, they were called “midwinter songs” and were used to keep people’s spirits up during the bitter cold of the winter; which is very similar to how carols make us feel today.

Soon, Christianity began to spread through Europe and carols were only sang during the Christmas season and the beginning winter became the time for festivity. The first ever documented Christmas carol was “Angel’s Hymn” which was written in 129 (not-so-fun fact: no one actually has heard the “Angel’s Hymn” or know how its tune goes, just that it should be sung). As Christianity pushed pagan beliefs out, the festivity that accompanied carols shrunk down. By the time St. Francis of Assisi and his followers started to influence the celebration of Christmas, carols were still able to lift spirits and bring people together, but the dancing was limited to everyone linking hands and moving in a circle.

# CREATING THE CAROLS OF THE SEASON

## A HISTORY AND LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITY

In fact, over time, Christians began to use carols to bring even more people together during the Christmas season. In the 1800s, churches started offering Christmas carol specific services. Groups of carollers also started gathering in public areas to perform carols for passers-by. These groups were called waits, which then became the wassailers we know today who travel door-to-door to share their carols with their neighbors.

Nowadays, Christmas carols have become more than just a way to celebrate Christmas. We hear carols on TV, in stores, or our favorite streaming service that are about many of the other holidays around the same time, the wintery weather, coming together with our friends and family, and celebrating the coming New Years celebrations. This holiday season, listen to some of the songs you hear and try to see how many different themes you can hear!

If you'd like to learn more, feel free to visit [The English Heritage](#) and [Classic FM](#) websites.

Now that you know a bit more about how we got the Christmas carols we know today, it's time to write your own carol. Follow the steps below to get started!

1. To get started with our new Christmas carol, let's consider the carols we know. Think about some of your favorite carols-like "Jingle Bells", "Silent Night", "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" – and ask yourself: what stories do these songs tell? Feel free to write these stories down as examples.

# CREATING THE CAROLS OF THE SEASON

## A HISTORY AND LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITY

2. Now it's time to brainstorm. You will want to set yourself a timer for 5 minutes. During those 5 minutes, you are going to create a list of any themes or story ideas you have for your brand new Christmas Carol. Your list can be related to Christmas, holiday traditions your family has, or the season of winter. Use the lines below to write your list.


3. Next, pick the idea from your brainstorm list that you are most excited about and answer the following questions:
- What does your theme or idea make you think of? Brainstorm a list for a few minutes.
  - How is your theme or idea important to Christmas or the holiday season?
  - What are your favorite three things about your theme or idea?

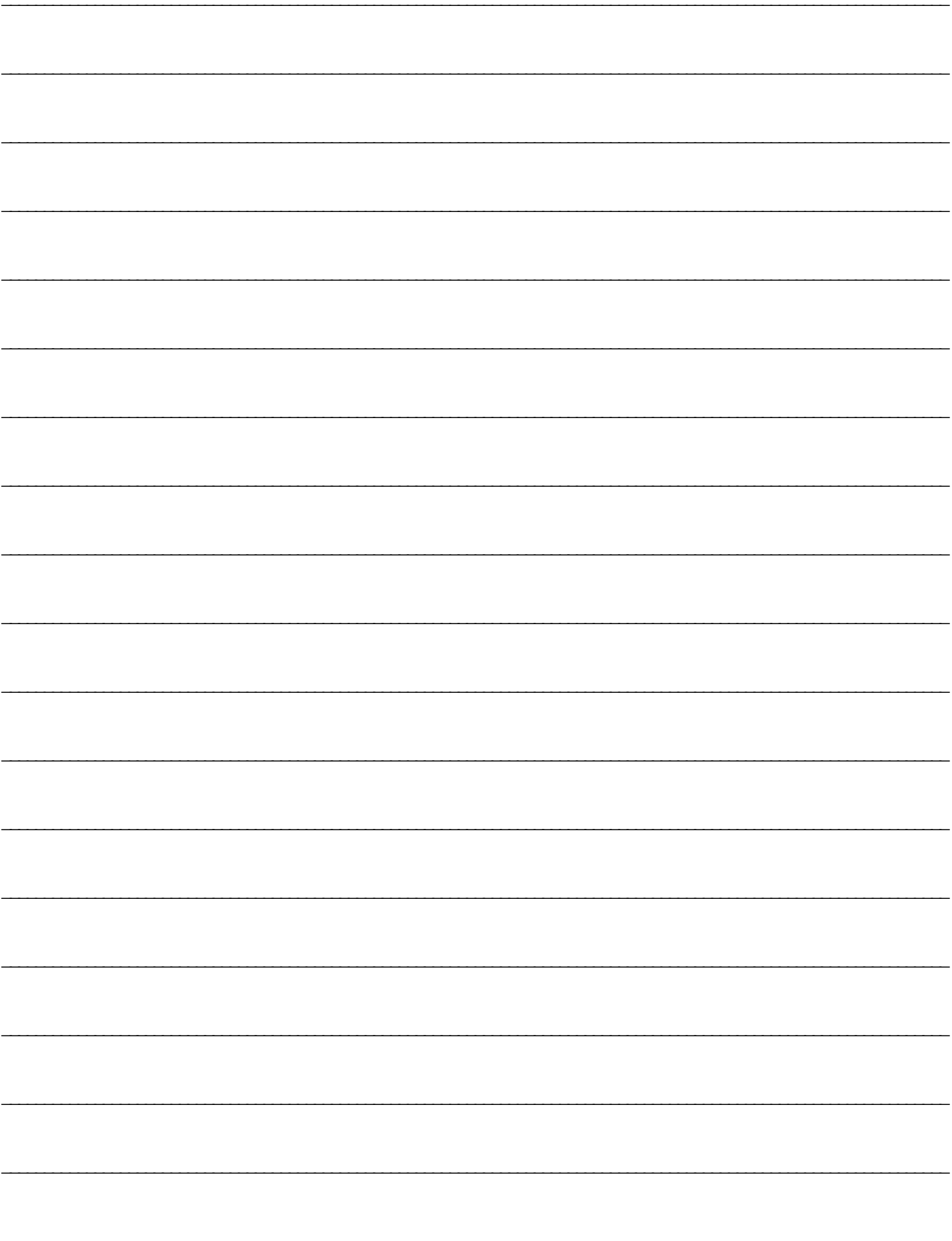
# CREATING THE CAROLS OF THE SEASON

## A HISTORY AND LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITY

4. Using your answers as inspiration, we are now going to create the lyrics to your carol. Writing lyrics is like writing poetry: the lyrics are made up of verses, or lines, that make up small chunks called stanzas. Our lyrics are going to be sung to the tune of “Mary Had A Little Lamb”. Take a look at the lyrics to “Mary Had A Little Lamb”

*Mary had a little lamb,  
Little lamb,  
Little lamb.  
Mary had a little lamb  
Whose fleece was white as snow  
  
And everywhere that Mary went  
Mary went,  
Mary went.  
And everywhere that Mary went  
The lamb was sure to go.*

5. In “Mary Had A Little Lamb”, each syllable of every word is sung for the same amount of time. So, your lyrics should line up in the same way: with each syllable lasting the same amount of time. If you’d like to add more stanzas, feel free to – your song can be as long as you’d like! You can write your lyrics on the next page.
6. Once your song is complete, get together with your friends, family, or class and have a caroling session of your own! We recommend having Christmas cookies and hot chocolate as you’re sharing your carols to make it more festive.





# GLADYS THE ANGEL ORNAMENT

## A HOLIDAY ART PROJECT

**“HEY MISSUS BRADLEY!  
I WANNA BE IN THE SHOW.  
HERE’S HOW IT’S GONNA GO:  
I WANNA BE THAT ANGEL THING  
WITH THE BIG PINK WINGS.  
MISSUS BRADLEY!  
MISSUS BRA-A-AD-LEY!  
PUT ME INTO THE SHOW.”**

– Gladys Herdman

Every Christmas Pageant and every play needs decorations. An easy decoration you can make at home that’ll really put you into the holiday spirit is a little angel ornament inspired by Gladys Herdman’s costume for the Angel of the Lord. Follow the directions below to create your own angel ornament.

### MATERIALS

- One sheet of white construction paper (the sturdier, the better)
- Two sheets of construction paper, any color (the sturdier, the better)
- Scissors
- Glue
- Tape
- Markers or crayons
- Yarn in preferred hair color
- Sparkly gold or silver pipe cleaner
- Thread

### DIRECTIONS

1. On the white paper, trace out both of your hands. On one of the other pieces of construction paper, trace out your footprint of one of your feet. Make sure to keep your sock or shoe on!
2. Cut the tracings of your hands and foot out. The hands will become your angel’s wings and the tracing of your foot will become the body of your angel.

# GLADYS THE ANGEL ORNAMENT

## A HOLIDAY ART PROJECT

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3. On your last piece of construction paper, draw a circle and cut it out. This will be your angel's head.
4. Once everything is cut out, use your glue to glue the head to the angel's body. Then, glue your angel's wings on both sides of the angel's body. When the glue is dry, feel free to decorate your angel with crayons, markers, or and sparkly extra craft supplies you may have.
5. Next, cut short strips of yarn to be the hair of your angel and glue them onto your angel's head. We recommend you cut strips that are longer than what you need and then carefully giving them a haircut to the length you'd like their hair to be.
6. Finish your angel by taking your sparkly pipe cleaner and forming it into a halo shape. Secure the halo onto the angel by taping it onto the backside of the angel's head.
7. Tie a loop of thread onto the halo and your angel ornament is ready to hang from a Christmas tree, off a shelf, or on the wall!

# BASKETS FOR THE NEEDY

## A PHILANTHROPY ACTIVITY

1. The holiday season is an important time to give to those in need and help those around you. Many families make it a tradition to help out at soup kitchens, to donate extra toys and meals to the poor, and to collect donations for charities. Traditions like these can be great ways to grow closer with your friends, classmates, and family. In this activity, you are going to create a plan to help people and spread holiday cheer in your community.
2. Finding the best way to give to others can be a challenging task to begin. Let's start by doing some brainstorming on your interests, strengths, and important causes that mean something to you. In the space provided, write your response.
3. Now that you have a list of your interests, strengths, and things that are important to you, let's do some research into some great organizations in your community and across the nation that you can donate to or volunteer with. Use the questions on the next page to guide your research about 3 organizations or charities you'd be interested in helping out this holiday season. Take a look at the list below for some examples and feel free to look for more!
  - a. [Alex's Lemonade Stand](#)
  - b. [Sojourner Family Peace Center](#)
  - c. [The Trevor Project](#)
  - d. [Ronald McDonald House Charities](#)
  - c. [United Way](#)
4. Once your research is complete, look back over the organizations and opportunities you found and pick which one would be the most interesting or the easiest to do. Think of a few people – like your friends, family, or even your whole class at school – you can volunteer with. Volunteering is much more fun and rewarding when done with others. So, reach out to them to create a plan to volunteer together!
5. After you've completed your volunteer opportunity or sent in your donation, take a moment to think back on your experience: How did you feel volunteering? How do you think your help made the holiday season even more bright for someone else? How would the world change if more people lent a hand during the holiday season (and even year round)?

# BASKETS FOR THE NEEDY

## A PHILANTHROPY ACTIVITY



Person or organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Where are they located: \_\_\_\_\_

Why help is needed: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What good or service it provides: \_\_\_\_\_

Mission statement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why are you interested in this organization? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other interesting facts or stories about the charity: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How can people help? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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How can people help? \_\_\_\_\_

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How can people help? \_\_\_\_\_

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# TECH TALK WITH KAREN ESTRADA

## How long have you been working with First Stage? What have been some of the different shows you've worked on? Any favorite roles you've had?

I was an academy student from 6-12th grade. I was a young performer in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* as Imogene in 1991 and *Beatrix Potter's Christmas* in 1994 and have been involved in First Stage productions (actor, director, understudy) as an adult almost 20 times since 2008.

Shows: *Giggle Giggle Quack*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Seussical*, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (4 times?), *Pinkalicious*, *Anatole*, *The Snow*, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *On the Wings of a Mariposa* (director), *The Adventures of Rock, Paper, Scissors*, *The Girl Who Swallowed a Cactus* (virtual), *The Amazing Lemonade Girl*, *Little Women* (director). I am reprising my role as Grace Bradley in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical*. I've also taught in the Academy.

*Anatole*, *Edward Tulane*, and *The Legend of Rock, Paper, Scissors* are standouts for me. Directing *Mariposa* and *Little Women* were wonderful experiences – difficult and extremely rewarding.

## What is it like working on a First Stage show?

Fun and loud! It's inspiring and gratifying to watch the choices and joy of young performers allowed the opportunity to act out their own stories for audiences of their peers.

## What are some of your favorite memories from doing *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* over the years?

As a young performer the play opened with the Herdmans blowing up the Stamper's shed and there was an explosion with lights, sound and fog as we entered from the vom. The smell of stage smoke is very nostalgic and pleasant to me to this day.

I was directed to "give birth" to baby Jesus from under my nightgown and opening night I grabbed the baby by the head to pull it from under my nightgown and the neck popped off of his body. Luckily, it was wrapped up and glued into swaddling clothes so the body didn't fly into the audience.

## What are your holiday traditions?

We put up a real Christmas tree and decorate it, my husband and I watch the *Muppet's Christmas Carol* every year and we spend lots of time with family and friends eating good food and exchanging gifts.

# TECH TALK WITH KAREN ESTRADA



## **What is your favorite part of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*?**

Watching the Herdmans be embraced by their community after they show vulnerability and softness. They soften the hearts of those who are supposed to be warm and embracing.

## **It's been over 50 years since *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* was first published as a book and had its First Stage performances. Why is it still important to perform *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* today?**

The town – both adults and kids alike – have been telling a story about the Herdmans they thought was the whole story: that the Herdmans are bad, mean kids. This causes the Herdmans to be even more ostracized and othered in their community and, unsurprisingly, they act out even more. By taking a chance on the Herdmans, those ragtag siblings expose new facets of the Christmas story, themselves and the town as a whole. Everyone learns to look at the people in these stories with more empathy and humanity and love.

## **Any advice you would give to anyone who would be interested in auditioning for a play (either at school, in their community, or even at First Stage)?**

Practice your material, ask for help if you need it, it's okay (and totally natural) to be nervous but you can be brave anyway! At the audition, make strong choices, be kind and have fun! And keep trying even if you don't get cast right away.



# POST SHOW QUESTIONS



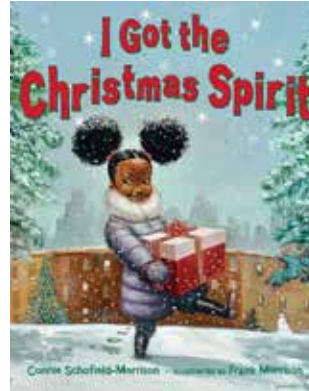
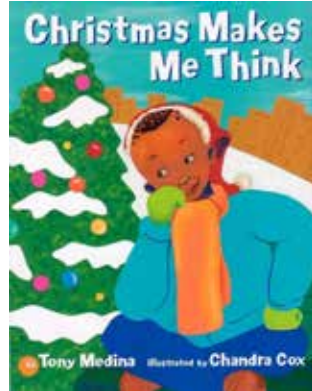
1. Beth and Charlie Bradley, along with many other kids at church, are not excited about being a part of the Christmas pageant again this year because it is always exactly the same every single year. What were the differences in this year's pageant that made it anything but the usual?
  
2. How do you think the Herdman kids changed after being a part of the Christmas pageant? Why? How do you think the other kids in the pageant changed after being a part of the pageant with the Herdmans? Why?
  
3. The Christmas pageant did not go as originally planned, but everyone agreed that it was the best pageant ever. Has something you planned ever not gone the way you expected it to? How did this make you feel at first? How did you feel about the event when it was all over? What positive twists came from this event not going as planned?

# WHO SAID IT?

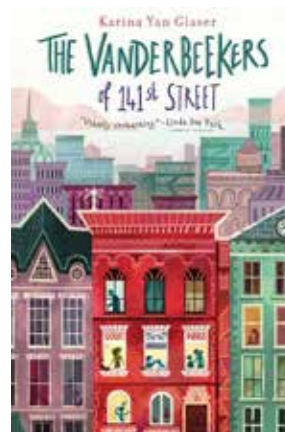
1. "The best thing about Sunday school is there are no Herdmans there." - Charlie
2. "Why rehearse? This is going to be the worst Christmas pageant ever." - Luanne
3. "Hey Mrs. Bradley. If this is a play, why aren't we playing?" - Ralph
4. "Does that mean I have to go?" - Bob/Mr. Bradley
5. "Hey, everybody! Unto us a child is born!" - Gladys
6. "It's the shepherds you have to worry about. They're always whamming each other with their canes." - Ivy
7. "Okay, team, put a cork in it. We all know Mary was pregnant." - Grace/Mrs. Bradley
8. "Imogene told me she was playing Mary and if I even opened my mouth, she would get a pussy willow and jam it so far into my ear it'd come out the other side." - Alice
9. "What kind of cheapo king gives oil for a present?" - Imogene
10. "I'm a shut-in. He wasn't visiting me. Something has to be done about this!" - Helen/Mrs. Armstrong
11. "Stop ringing the doorbell. People will think I locked you out." - Grace/Mrs. Bradley

# RECOMMENDED READING

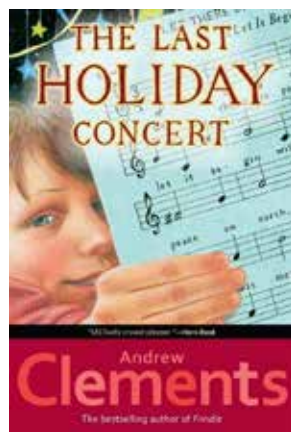
## PICTURE BOOKS:



## FOR EARLY READERS:



## FOR MIDDLE GRADE READERS:



THE BEST  
**CHRISTMAS**  
PAGEANT EVER  
THE MUSICAL

**GOING TO A SHOW  
AT THE TODD WEHR  
THEATER**

**SOCIAL STORY**

# I am going to see a First Stage show at the Todd Wehr Theater.



I am going to see the show with

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**Watching a play is like watching TV or a movie,  
except people are on stage in front of us.**



They are called actors. They can see and hear me too.  
I can't turn the channel or turn the volume up and down.

# A play is made up of many interesting things.



Costumes



Scenery



Sound



Lighting

When we arrive at the theater, we will probably have to climb some stairs. There are stairs outside the building, and inside the building.



We may need to wait in line to scan our tickets.



When we are waiting, I can stay with my family or teacher.



# An usher will help us find our seats.

We will enter the theater and find our seats.



There are bathrooms in the lobby. If I need to, I can use the bathroom before we go to our seats.

**Someone will show us where to sit.**



The audience area is for all of us.



The stage is for the actors only.

## When I am in the theater waiting for the show to start:

1. I can talk to my family or friends.
2. I can take a short break in the lobby.



# There will be a lot of people in theater and it may get noisy.

If it gets too loud:

1. I can bring headphones if I want.
2. I can put my hands over my ears.
3. I can leave the room and take a short break in the lobby.



I can come back when I am ready.

## During the show:

1. I can watch and listen to the actors quietly.
2. I can applaud if I like something.
3. I can hold things in my hand that make me feel comfortable.



## If I need to talk:

1. I can talk quietly to my family.
2. I can write down what I want to say.
3. I can leave the room.

# After the show there will be a “talkback.”

**The talkback is a chance for me to ask questions.**

1. I will raise my hand to show that I want to ask a question.
2. I will wait for the leader to call on me to ask my question.
3. I don't have to ask a question if I don't want.



**I can ask different kinds of questions:**

1. I can ask questions about the show.
2. I can ask questions about the scenery, costumes, lights, or sound.

**After the show is finished,  
I will leave the theater with my family.**



THE BEST  
**CHRISTMAS**  
**PAGEANT EVER**  
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## MEET THE “KERPOW” CAST

These are the actors you will see at the  
Sensory Friendly Performance on  
Saturday, December 9, 2023 at 3:30PM.



THE BEST  
**CHRISTMAS**  
PAGEANT EVER  
THE MUSICAL

# THIS IS KAREN.



They play a character named Grace Bradley.

Mrs. Bradley directs the Christmas Pageant after Mrs. Armstrong falls and has an accident. Mrs. Bradley works very hard, tries their best to make the pageant a success, and stands up for the Herdmans. Mrs. Bradley is the mother of Beth and Charlie and is married to Mr. Bradley.

THE BEST  
**CHRISTMAS**  
PAGEANT EVER  
THE MUSICAL

# THIS IS PIETJA & SILVIA.



They play characters named Beth and Charlie Bradley. Beth and Charlie are Mr. and Mrs. Bradley's children. Beth and Charlie are both afraid of the Herdmans who bully them at school and steal Charlie's lunch. Beth and Charlie help Mrs. Bradley put together the Christmas Pageant.

THE BEST  
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**THIS IS TERRANCE, LORELEI, LAYLA,  
HARLOW, MARLOW, AND MILA.**



They play Ralph, Imogene, Leroy, Ollie, Claude and Gladys Herdman. The Herdman's cause trouble in their town, bully their classmates, and are judged by all. The Herdmans struggle and lash out because they have a difficult life at home. The Herdmans play all of the big parts in the Christmas Pageant and shock the town.



They play Helen Armstrong. Mrs. Armstrong has directed the Christmas Pageant for years and has very strong opinions about how it should be done. Helen slips on the ice while volunteering for the church and hurts herself. Helen blames Mrs. Bradley who forgot they were supposed to help her out that day. Helen is stuck in a hospital bed and injured – they call Mrs. Bradley often to complain or make demands about the pageant.

THE BEST  
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# THIS IS CHASE.



They play Bob Bradley. Mr. Bradley encourages Mrs. Bradley by saying she is doing an important thing working with the Herdmans and that the pageant will be a success- though they complain about having to go to it. Mr. Bradley often jokes around and has fun with his family.

THE BEST  
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# THIS IS J.T.



They play Reverend Hopkins. Reverend Hopkins is a leader of the local church. The Reverend is a peaceful and kind person, standing up for the Herdmans despite his congregation judging them.

THE BEST  
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# THIS IS CYNTHIA,\* BREE, & LAURA.

*\* Cynthia not pictured*



They play Connie, Betty, and Luanne, also known as: “The Church Ladies” – a group of local women who volunteer their time in the church. The Church Ladies have strong feelings about their friends and neighbors and often gossip about the pageant and the Herdmans.



They play Alice Wendleken. Alice is outspoken and judgmental of the Herdman's, Mrs. Bradley's directing, and the fact that she is not able to play Mary in the Christmas Pageant. Alice is sometimes friendly to Beth, and the two of them struggle to be friends throughout the play.



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# THIS IS THE ENSEMBLE.



They play classmates and fellow churchgoers from town. The town's children act in the Christmas Pageant and try to avoid getting in trouble with the Herdmans who scare them.

THE BEST  
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**MEET THE "SHAZAM" CAST**

THE BEST  
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# THIS IS BENNETT & MAIA.



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**THIS IS JOSH, MAYA, GRANT,  
ROCIO, LUCIA, & EVIANA.**



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THE BEST  
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**THIS PRODUCTION IS A MUSICAL.  
IT CONTAINS MUSIC, SINGING, AND DANCING.**

This play features entrances through audience. The actors will enter and exit the stage using the stairs in the audience area. Please avoid standing or blocking aisle entrances for the safety of the cast and your fellow theater-goers.