

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever

Nov 17-26, 2023

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Fridays & Saturdays at 7:30 pm

Sundays at 3:00 pm

2nd Street Stage

Hannah Block Historic USO/Community

Arts Center

120 South 2nd Street



By Barbara Robinson

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 audiences across the United States!

About the Thalian Association

Thalian Association Community Theatre is a non-profit, membership organization that's dedicated to enhancing the rich artistic environment of the Cape Fear region. Tracing its

roots back to 1788, the Thalian Association Community Theatre was founded to provide arts education and bring the excitement of the performing arts to Wilmington, North Carolina. Today the Thalian Association Community Theatre produces five major productions annually on the Main Stage at historic Thalian Hall, offers a Youth Theatre program and professionally manages the Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center for the City of Wilmington. In 2007, the North Carolina legislature named the Thalian Association Community Theatre the Official Community Theater of North Carolina.



Character Development in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*

Read the following passages from *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. While you are reading and examining the pictures below, begin to form a mental image of all of the characters that you learn about. Take note of the italic portions which provide stage directions.



The Herdman Kids

CAST

FATHER (Bob Bradley)—solid family man, 35–38
MOTHER (Grace Bradley)—trim, attractive, 35ish
BETH BRADLEY—the narrator, strong voice and presence, 10–11
CHARLIE BRADLEY—traditional kid brother, 8–9
RALPH HERDMAN—ragged, scroungy, slouching manner, touch of adolescent cool, 12–13
IMOGENE HERDMAN—loud, bossy, crafty, 11–12
LEROY HERDMAN—tough, sure of himself, 10–11
CLAUDE HERDMAN—tough, combative, 9–10
OLLIE HERDMAN—looking for trouble, Claude’s usual partner in crime, 8–9
GLADYS HERDMAN—small, wiry, fiesty, 7–8
ALICE WENDLEKEN—prim, proper, pain in the neck, 10–11
MRS. ARMSTRONG—largish woman, managerial in voice and manner, 50ish

BETH. There were six of them—Ralph, Imogene, Leroy, Claude, Ollie and Gladys—and they went through the Woodrow Wilson school like those South American fish that strip your bones clean. They went around town the same way—stealing things and tearing things up and whamming kids . . . so it was hard to get away from them. There was only one safe place.

CHARLIE. (*offstage, singing*)
Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
Because there are no Herdmans there.

BETH. That's my little brother, Charlie. That's what he said when the Sunday school teacher asked what was his favorite thing about church. Charlie said, "No Herdmans." That made the teacher mad because all the other kids said nice things about God and Jesus and good feelings. But old Charlie told the real truth—*No Herdmans!*



The Herdmans

(*Spotlight off BETH. HERDMANS exit s.l. Curtain rises on living room-dining room set. There is a table and four chairs s.r.: A door u.r.c.: A sofa, lounge chair, end tables, one with telephone, s.l. As curtain rises, MOTHER, FATHER, and CHARLIE enter through the door. BETH moves back to join them. They are returning from church, and all except BETH wear coats. FATHER has a newspaper under his arm. CHARLIE speaks as he enters.*)

CHARLIE. I don't care what everybody else said, that's what they really thought. All that other stuff is okay but the main good thing about church is that the Herdmans aren't there, ever. (*CHARLIE drops his coat on sofa.*)

FATHER. (*taking his coat off*) That's not a very Christian sentiment, it seems to me.

MOTHER. (*collecting the coats*) It's a very practical sentiment. Charlie was black and blue all last year because he had to sit next to Leroy Herdman in school.



The Bradley Family - Bob (Father), Grace (Mother), Beth (daughter), and Charlie (son) eat dinner while Mother talks on the phone to Mrs. Armstrong

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. I have to direct the Christmas pageant.

FATHER. Does that mean I have to go?

(Stage lights down: Spot on BETH, DS.R.)

BETH. Our Christmas pageant isn't what you'd call four-star entertainment. Mrs. Armstrong breaking her leg was the only unexpected thing that ever happened to it. It's always the same old Christmas story, and the same old carols, and the same old Mary and Joseph . . . and that's what my mother was stuck with . . . that, and Mrs. Armstrong.

(Spot out on BETH: Up on MRS. ARMSTRONG in hospital bed s.l. She is in the middle of phone conversation. The phone conversation and the family conversation are to be simultaneous, with the phone conversation to be background. Key parts of MRS. ARMSTRONG's conversation are underlined and should be heard. This dialogue can be blocked, just as movement is blocked, and MRS. ARMSTRONG's speeches are deliberately lengthy and full so the audience can be aware of her droning on in the background.)



Mrs. Armstrong in the hospital

MRS. ARMSTRONG. . . . tell you again, Grace, how important it is to give everyone a chance. Here's what I do—I always start with Mary and I tell them we must choose our Mary carefully because Mary was the mother of Jesus . . .

(Spotlight up on dinner table scene DS.R. FATHER and CHARLIE seated: BETH setting the table, pouring water, etc. MOTHER on telephone.)

MRS. ARMSTRONG. . . . but I do explain about the Wise Men and the shepherds and how important they are. And I tell them, there are no small parts, only small actors. Remind the angel choir not to stare at the audience, and don't let them wear earrings and things like that. And don't let them wear clunky shoes or high heels. I just hope you don't have too many baby angels, Grace, because they'll be your biggest problem . . .



The children performing in the Christmas Pageant

IMOGENE. What's a pageant?

ALICE. It's a play.

IMOGENE. Like on tv? What's it about?

ALICE. It's about Jesus.

IMOGENE. (*visibly disenchanted about Sunday school*)
Everything here is.

ALICE. And it's about Mary. Mostly, it's about Mary.

MOTHER. Did you have a question, Imogene?

IMOGENE. No, I want to be Mary . . . and Ralph, over there, he wants to be Joseph.

RALPH. Yeh, right.



The Herdmans perform in the Pageant

MOTHER. Oh. Well . . . Well, I'll just make a list of volunteers for these parts and then we'll all decide who it should be. (*writes on her clipboard*) Ralph Herdman. Now, who else would like to be Joseph? . . . Did you raise your hand, Elmer?

ELMER. No.

MOTHER. Just raise your hands, please, any volunteers. . . . Any of you shepherds? (*Her eye falls on CHARLIE, who makes every effort to seem invisible.*) Very well . . . Ralph Herdman will be our Joseph. Now, Imogene has volunteered to be . . . (*Tiny break here, as if she can hardly bear to connect IMOGENE with MARY.*) . . . Mary. I'll just write that down. . . . What other names can I put on my list? . . . Janet? . . . Roberta? . . . Alice, don't you want to volunteer?

ALICE. (*choking it out*) No, I don't want to.

GLADYS. I'll be Mary!

IMOGENE. Shut up, Gladys. I'm already Mary. You be a Wise Man.

MOTHER. Well, the Wise Men are usually boys. Of course, they don't *have* to be, and we could . . .

Character Questions

Now that you have an idea of the characters in the play from the images and excerpts, answer the following questions:

1. Write three words to describe the Herdman kids

2. Write three words to describe Charlie

3. Write three words to describe Mrs. Armstrong

4. Write three words that describe Mother





5. Why is Mrs. Armstrong in the hospital? Write a sentence to explain.

6. Why was Mother surprised when Imogene Herdman wanted to be Mary? Write a sentence to explain.



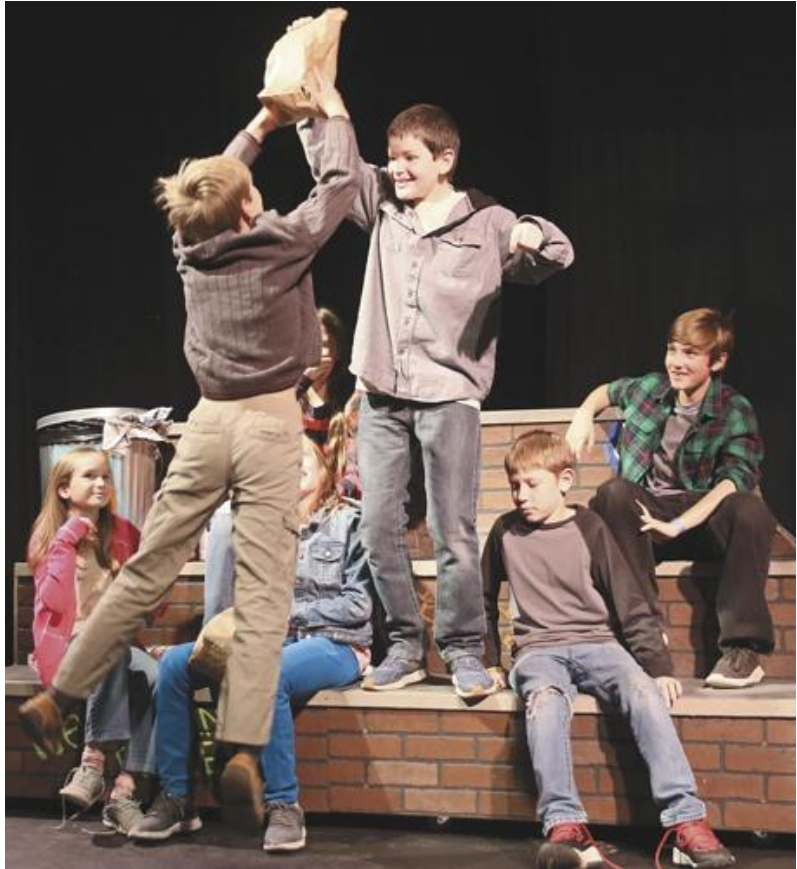


7. Why do you think Father doesn't want to go to the Christmas Pageant? Write a sentence to explain.

8. What did Charlie say was his favorite thing about going to church? Why did this make the Sunday School teacher mad? Write a sentence to explain.



9. Do you think Father and Alice agree with Charlie's answer to the Sunday School teacher? Write a sentence to explain.





10. Who is the narrator of the story? Why do you think they were chosen to be the narrator? Hint: Look at the cast list!

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever Coloring Activity

Color in this illustration of the Herdman kids!

