



The Night Before Christmas



Teacher's Resource Pack

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1. Using this Resource Pack

The Teacher's Resource Pack for *The Night Before Christmas* is designed to provide teachers and students with creative ways of engaging directly with the show. Offering a selection of insights into the process of creating theatre, you will also find ideas and suggestions for practical classroom activities and discussion points you may wish to utilise both in the lead-up to your visit and once you have seen the show.

For teachers it provides:

- Information and resources on the story and themes of *The Night Before Christmas*
- Curriculum links to subject areas such as English, Drama and Citizenship
- Practical activities to inspire your students' creativity
- Information and activity worksheets that can be photocopied and shared with the class

For KS1 students it provides:

- A plot synopsis, character profiles and introduction to the themes of *The Night Before Christmas*
- Practical and creative activities based around the themes of the show
- A guide to reviewing and reflecting on the production

Throughout the pack you will find the following symbols:

 Starting points for discussion

 Ideas for practical activities

2. Introduction to the Show

1. Plot Synopsis

One Christmas Eve, as her family celebrate downstairs, Emily is in her bedroom, far too excited to even think about sleeping. She's much more interested in all the presents she is looking forward to receiving. In fact, her only interest in Christmas is her own presents. Emily isn't the sort of girl to be very interested in other people, as long as her Christmas presents are bigger and better than everyone else's, Emily is happy.

When her dad arrives to make sure she's asleep, he agrees to read her a bedtime story and they begin to read *The Night Before Christmas*, but Emily gets distracted when she realises she hasn't hung her stocking! How will she get her presents with no stocking to fill? Dad tries to persuade her that she'll get her presents anyway, but Emily insists that they go and hang her stocking right away!

Whilst they go downstairs, Eddie the mouse emerges, but is soon scared away when Emily and her dad return. Finally agreeing to go to sleep, Dad is annoyed when he discovers Emily has misplaced her mum's bangle. He isn't sure she deserves any presents if she can't look after other people's things; Emily is upset and worried that maybe Santa won't come now. She decides to finish reading the book, but soon spots Eddie sneaking around. Even though it's cold outside and thick with snow, and even though it's Christmas, she wastes no time in throwing the mouse out of the house.

Eddie is cold and alone and upset that Emily has told him mice can't have Christmas. He thinks Christmas should be for everyone and decides to track down Santa to ask if a mouse is allowed Christmas. Eddie has to get back in to the house to wait for Santa, whilst avoiding the attention of Cecil, Emily's cat.

Running away from the cat, Eddie meets Dymotron, a toy robot that Emily has abandoned because he wasn't the coolest toy that Christmas. A hero at heart, Dymotron decides to help Eddie on his mission to get back into the house and meet Santa, who is due to arrive at midnight.

Together they make their way to the living room, where Lizzie, the fairy from the top of the Christmas tree, is preparing Santa's arrival. It's her first time on the job and she's worried that she won't be ready in time.

There's so much to do: tinsel to be hung, decorations to be polished, jokes to be written for the crackers... She'll never be ready in time!

Dymotron goes into hero mode and stays behind to help Lizzie get ready whilst Eddie goes on to meet Santa, but not before Lizzie gives him some good advice: he has to make friends with Emily, because Christmas is a time for friends and family. If Eddie wants to have his Christmas, he needs to forgive Emily for throwing him out in the cold.

Eddie is on his way back to Emily's bedroom, when Cecil the cat corners him. Cecil's in a very good mood as he has stolen the bangle that Emily borrowed from her mum. He likes watching people get in trouble and can't wait for Christmas morning when Emily will be told off. The mouse manages to scare the cat off, leaving the bangle behind as he runs away.

Meanwhile, in her bedroom, Emily has finished reading *The Night Before Christmas* and realises that Christmas is supposed to be for everyone. She's very upset that she threw Eddie out the window, but delighted when Eddie returns with her mum's bangle. She starts to read to the mouse, but falls asleep, just as a very special visitor arrives with some presents for her...

2. Meet the Characters

Emily

- She likes getting presents, but isn't very interested in sharing them with other people

Dad

- He loves Emily a lot, but is disappointed when she is selfish and thoughtless

Eddie

- A house mouse
- He is brave and quick-thinking
- He thinks everyone should be able to be happy

Cecil

- Emily's cat
- He likes to cause trouble

Dymotron

- A toy robot
- He likes to help people in trouble

Lizzie

- The fairy from the top of the Christmas tree
- She is quite disorganised and gets confused

3. Key Themes

Friendship

Through their experiences on Christmas Eve, both Emily and Eddie learn that friendship is extremely important. Neither of them can have a real Christmas until they are able to become friends. They do this through accepting each other's differences and by forgiving previous bad behaviour.

Family

Christmas is a time for family and in the show we can see the love that Emily and her Dad have for each other. Emily is upset when she realises that her Dad is annoyed at her for being careless with her Mum's bangle, but we always know that he still loves his daughter.

Dymotron and Lizzie fall in love on Christmas Eve and look forward to spending time together. Perhaps this is the beginning of a new family too.

Tradition

At the beginning of the story, Emily has a very narrow view of what Christmas is. She is only interested in the presents and the traditions associated with them: hanging up a stocking and leaving gifts under the tree.

Whilst Eddie learns how Christmas can be for everyone through his adventures, Emily learns this from the poem at the heart of the story. She reads the poem in a book that belongs to her Mum - suggesting a family tradition.

Celebration

Through the story of the play, we learn that celebration is about sharing happiness with other people. Mum and Dad's party downstairs sounds

like a good party because there are lots of people there, all having a nice time together. Emily is alone and not really celebrating Christmas, just wanting lots of presents. By the end of the show Emily and Eddie have become friends and are able to celebrate properly by sharing their celebrations.

4. Big Wooden Horse

Big Wooden Horse Theatre Company aims to present high quality theatre to younger audiences across the United Kingdom and to represent the best of British theatre craft abroad.

They believe that young people deserve highest quality of writing, performance and production that a professional theatre company can offer.

The company's productions always strive to both entertain and inform young people, drawing from different cultures and traditions to present entertaining and educational work.

www.bigwoodenhorse.com

3. Activities

SECTION 1: The Poem

Curriculum Links: English

- En1.2.f Identify and respond to sound patterns in language
- En1.8.b Read aloud and recite
- En1.10.b Share ideas and experiences
- En2.3.d Learn, recite and act out stories and poems
- En2.3.e Identify patterns of rhythm, rhyme and sounds in poems and their effects
- En2.3.f Respond imaginatively to what they read

Curriculum Links: Citizenship

- Ci.2.a Take part in discussions with one person or the whole class
- Ci.2.f Recognise they belong to various groups and communities
- Ci.4.c Identify and respect the similarities and differences between people

SECTION 2: Reviewing the Performance

Curriculum Links: English

- En1.1.b Choose words with precision
- En1.3.a Take turns in speaking
- En1.4.c Comment constructively on drama they have watched
- En1.8.c Describing events and experiences
- En3.1.c Putting ideas in to sentences
- En3.9.a Writing to communicate to others

SECTION 3: Drama Exploration

Curriculum Links: English

- En1.4.a Use language and actions to explore and convey situations, characters and emotions
- En1.4.b Create and sustain roles individually and when working with others
- En1.11.a Use drama to work in a role
- En1.11.c Use drama to respond to performances

3. Activities

1. The Poem

The Night Before Christmas, or *A Visit from Saint Nicholas*, was written by American poet Clement Clarke Moore in 1822. Since then it has become a favourite seasonal tradition, featuring in picture books, film and now on stage.

On the following pages you will find the poem in full.

Tasks



Read the poem as a class, taking turns for each line. Pay special attention to the end of each line. What pattern is there? Use simple percussion instruments to find the rhythm of the poem.



Draw a picture that responds to each verse or stanza of the poem. Pick out the important words from each section to help you.



Find out what festivals other students in the class celebrate. Do any of these festivals have traditional poems or songs associated with them?



Write a short, simple poem about the night before something you look forward to (e.g. birthday, holidays, or a different festival) using adjectives relating to the feeling of excitement.

The Night Before Christmas by Clement Clarke Moore



'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through
the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St Nicholas soon would be there.

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads.
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap.

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below.
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tinny reindeer.

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name!

“Now Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! On, Cupid! on, on Donner and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! Dash away! Dash away all!”

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky.
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of Toys, and St Nicholas too.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St Nicholas came with a bound.



He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot.
A bundle of Toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler, just opening his pack.

His eyes-how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow.



The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath.
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook when he laughed, like a bowlful of jelly!

He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself!
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings, then turned with a jerk.
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose!

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, 'ere he drove out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!"



2. Reviewing the Performance

Many theatre shows are reviewed by newspapers, magazines and websites. The reviews tell the reader a little bit about the show and then comment on what was good and what was bad. People then read these reviews to help them decide if they want to see the show.

Reviews are only one person's opinion, and it is important to remember that not everyone likes or dislikes the same things. Someone writing a review might have disliked something that you thought was fantastic, or they might have really liked something that you hated.

Tasks



Write a review of *The Night Before Christmas* to tell everyone what you thought of it. Begin by picking a few words to describe the show in general (e.g. “exciting”, “funny”, “boring”). Use your describing words in full sentences to talk about specific things in the show that you liked or disliked. Make sure you explain why you thought something was good or bad.



Once everyone has written their review of the performance, find out what you all thought about the show by discussing different aspects of *The Night Before Christmas*. Talk about specific things like the costumes, the music and the sets. Was there anything everyone liked? Was there anything everyone disliked?



Choose your favourite character from *The Night Before Christmas* and draw a picture of them. Choose words that you feel best describe the character and why you like them.

3. Practical Exploration

These drama activities are designed to extend your students' experience and help them reflect on key relationships and themes from *The Night Before Christmas*.



Cat & Mouse

- Divide the class in to pairs and spread them around a large space (hall or playground). Each pair should be holding hands.
- Choose one pair to be Cecil and Eddie (the Cat and Mouse).
- The Cat should chase the Mouse around the space, trying to catch them. If they succeed, roles are reversed and the Mouse becomes the Cat and should immediately start trying to catch them.
- At any time the Mouse can hold hands with one of the other people around the space. If they do this, the person on the other side of that pair becomes the Mouse and must run away from the Cat.
- You can play until everyone has had a chance to be the Cat or Mouse, or until you have an extremely tired group of students.



Wandering Robots

- Ask the class to think about the robotic movements of Dymotron the robot.
- Play some music and as it plays the group must move like robots.
- When the music stops, Dymotron's batteries have run out and they must freeze. If anyone is moving they are out of the game.

(You could use different characters for different movements. For example, dance like Lizzie the fairy, but when the music stops someone has come in the room and you must freeze on top of the Christmas tree. Or scuttle like Eddie the mouse and freeze when the cat's nearby)



Fairy Footsteps

- Choose one student to be the Fairy on the Christmas Tree. It is their job to guard all the presents.
- When they turn their back, the other students can try and sneak up on them to get the presents.
- Whenever the fairy turns around, everyone must freeze. Anyone spotted moving must go back to the start of the course.
- The first person to reach the Fairy and either tap them on the back, or pick up the present is the winner and is the Fairy for the next game.



Mask Making

Masks are a great way of helping students with less confidence join in drama activities. By wearing the mask, they can feel more engaged with the role they are playing and less self-conscious about being perceived as acting strange by their peers. You may wish to use the following mask templates before undertaking any of these drama games to create a horde of mice and cats to play the games. Just photocopy onto card and let your students colour in to their own designs. Maybe they can think of other masks to make to fill out the cast of characters.



