

Study Guide prepared by
Catherine Bush
Barter Playwright-in-Residence

Santa Claus is Coming to Town

Book & lyrics by Catherine Bush, Music by Dax Dupuy

Inspired by the song *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* by John Cootes and Haven Gillespie

*Especially for Grades K-6

By the Barter Players, Barter Theatre, Christmas 2018

(NOTE: standards listed below are seeing a performance of the *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* and completing the study guide.)

Virginia SOLs

English – K.1, K.5, K.6, K.8, K.9, 1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 1.8, 1.9, 2.1, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.12, 2.14, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 3.11, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.9, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.7, 5.9, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.7, 6.9

Music – K.11, K.13, 1.12, 1.16, 2.8, 2.9, 2.11, 2.13, 3.9, 3.10, 3.12, 4.8, 4.9, 4.13, 5.8, 5.9, 5.12, 6.7, 6.9, 6.10

Theatre Arts – 6.5, 6.18, 6.23, 6.24, 6.25

Tennessee/North Carolina Common Core State Standards

English/Language Arts - Reading Literacy: K.1, K.3, K.5, K.7, 1.1, 1.3, 1.6, 1.7, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.3, 5.4, 5.6, 6.4, 6.6, 6.7

English Language Arts – Writing: K.1, K.3, 1.1, 1.3, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3, 2.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.7, 5.9, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.7, 6.9.

Tennessee Fine Arts Curriculum Standards

Theatre – K.4.1, K.4.3, 1.4.1, 1.4.3, 2.4.1, 2.4.3, 3.6.2, 3.6.4, 3.7.1, 3.7.2, 3.8.1, 4.6.1, 4.6.4, 4.7.1, 4.7.2, 4.8.1, 5.6.1, 5.6.4, 5.7.1, 5.7.2, 5.8.1, 6.1, 6.2

Music – K.7.1, K.7.2, 1.7.1, 1.7.2, 2.7.1, 2.7.2, 3.7.1, 3.7.2, 4.7.1, 4.7.2, 5.7.1, 5.7.2

North Carolina Essential Standards

Theatre Arts – K.A.1, K.CU.1, 1.A.1, 1.CU.2, 2.A.1, 3.A.1, 3.CU.1, 3.CU.2, 4.A.1, 5.A.1, 5.CU.1, 6.C.1, 6.C.2, 6.A.1, 6.CU.2

Music – K.MR.1, 1.MR.1, 2.MR.1, 3.MR.1, 3.CR.1, 4.MR.1, 5.MR.1, 6.MR.1

Setting

A small town in America – the kind of place where every second grader dreams of getting a red bicycle for Christmas. The present.



Characters

Pepper McGee – a spirited seven-year-old filled with the Christmas spirit

Tommy Reinhardt – Pepper’s friend and classmate, an emotional roller coaster

Nicky Fortuna – Lucy’s friend and classmate, a nurturer

Bruce Hollingsworth – Lucy’s friend and classmate, prone to nosebleeds

Crystal Bates – Lucy’s classmate and notorious bully

Mrs. Wright – Lucy’s second grade teacher, dependable but lacks pizzazz

Mr. McGee – Pepper’s father

Mrs. McGee – Pepper’s mother

Santa Claus – a jolly old elf

Mr. Bates – Crystal’s father

Mrs. Lewis – a social worker

Alma Johnson – a young mother

Note: Cast Size and Doubling of Actors

In this production of *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, we will be using only six actors. Some actors will be required to play more than one role. Doubling of actors requires distinction between characters. In this production, characters will be distinguished by costume, voice, etc.



Synopsis

Every year, when Christmas spirit fills the air, Pepper McGee’s voice undergoes a magical transformation that allows her to sing like an angel – a gift that is desperately needed when Pepper and her classmates discover that Mrs. Wright, their second grade teacher, is going to “get the can.” The folks in charge at Pepper’s school want a teacher with “pizzazz,” a quality the solid, dependable Mrs. Wright lacks. The only hope for saving Mrs. Wright’s job lies with the Santa Sing-Off, a city-wide competition in which the class that sings the best gets to ride on Santa’s float during the Christmas parade. If that doesn’t give Mrs. Wright pizzazz, nothing will, and with Pepper’s angelic voice, they’re sure to win. Then Pepper goes home and discovers that the early Christmas present promised her isn’t the red bicycle of her dreams, but a baby sister named Lulu. Lulu’s presence upsets all of Pepper’s beloved Christmas traditions and by the time Pepper returns to school, her Christmas spirit is gone – as is her ability to sing. With the deadline for the Santa Sing-Off fast approaching, Pepper writes to Santa Claus and asks him exchange Lulu for a red bicycle. Instead, Santa comes to town and takes Pepper on a journey where she learns that red bicycles have nothing to do with Christmas spirit and, more importantly, that everyone, even babies and bullies, need a home, a place to belong. Pepper return to school with her Christmas spirit – and singing voice – restored. The class wins the Santa Sing-Off and Mrs. Wright – filled at last with pizzazz – keeps her job.



A Brief History

Barter Theatre was founded during the Great Depression by Robert Porterfield, an enterprising young actor. He and his fellow actors found themselves out of work and hungry in New York City. Porterfield contrasted that to the abundance of food, but lack of live theatre, around his home region in Southwest Virginia. He returned to Washington County with an extraordinary proposition: bartering produce from the farms and gardens of the area to gain admission to see a play.

Barter Theatre opened its doors on June 10, 1933 proclaiming, "With vegetables you cannot sell, you can buy a good laugh." The price of admission was 40 cents or the equivalent in produce, the concept of trading "ham for Hamlet" caught on quickly. At the end of the first season, the Barter Company cleared \$4.35 in cash, two barrels of jelly and enjoyed a collective weight gain of over 300 pounds.

Playwrights including Noel Coward, Tennessee Williams and Thornton Wilder accepted Virginia ham as payment for royalties. An exception was George Bernard Shaw, a vegetarian, who bartered the rights to his plays for spinach.

Today, Barter Theatre has a reputation as a theatre where many actors performed before going on to achieve fame and fortune. The most recognized of these alumni include Gregory Peck, Patricia Neal, Ernest Borgnine, Hume Cronyn, Ned Beatty, Gary Collins, Larry Linville and Frances Fisher. The list also included James Burrows, creator of *Cheers*, Barry Corbin, and the late Jim Varney.

Robert Porterfield passed away in 1971. His successor, Rex Partington, had been at Barter in the 1950s as an actor and in the 1970s as stage manager. Rex returned as chief administrator from 1972 until his retirement in 1992. In March 2006, he passed away.

Richard Rose was named the producing artistic director in October 1992. In that time, attendance has grown from 42,000 annual patrons to more than 163,000 annual patrons. Significant capital improvements have also been made. Including maintenance to both theatres, and in 2006, the addition of The Barter Café at Stage II and dramatic improvements to Porterfield Square.

Barter represents three distinct venues of live theatre: Barter Theatre Main Stage, Barter Theatre Stage II and The Barter Players. Barter Theatre, with over 500 seats, features traditional theatre in a luxurious setting. Barter Stage II, across the street from Barter Main Stage and beyond Porterfield Square, offers seating for 167 around a thrust stage in an intimate setting and is perfect for more adventurous productions. The Barter Players is a talented ensemble of actors, producing plays for young audiences throughout the year.

History is always in the making at Barter Theatre, building on legends of the past; Barter looks forward to the challenge of growth in the future.

History of the Song

In 1932, American Tin Pan Alley lyricist Haven Gillespie approached composer John Frederick Cootes with the lyrics for *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. Within minutes, Cootes had written the now-famous melody and took it to his publisher, Leo who liked the piece didn't expect it to do much since it was a "kiddie song." That ten minute song took two years to generate serious interest. Finally, in November of 1934 comedian Eddie Cantor agreed to use it on his radio show. The song was an instant hit! The morning after the radio show, there were orders for 100,000 copies of the sheet music. By Christmas of that same year that number reached 400,000 and has been going strong ever since.

SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN

Words by HAVEN GILLESPIE
Music by JOHN FREDERICK COOTES
Arranged by ROBERT SCHULTZ

Moderately bright

You bet - ter watch out, you bet - ter not cry, bet - ter not pass, I'm

tell - ing you why: Santa Claus is com - ing to

town. He's mak - ing a list and

check - ing it twice, got no fail - ure what's, laugh - ty and nice,

Biography of the Playwright

Catherine Bush lives in Abingdon, Virginia where she is Barter Theatre's Playwright-in-Residence. Her plays for young audiences include *Cry Wolf!*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel*, *Frosty*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth*, *My Imaginary Pirate*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *The Call of the Wild*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Mother Goose: The Musical*, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*, *Jingle All the Way*, *Antigone*, *Robin Hood*, *Great Expectations*, *Clementine the Musical*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. www.catherinebushplays.com



Biography of the Composer

Dax Dupuy is a native of Alexandria, Louisiana. She grew up studying classical piano, until her brother showed her how to improv at age twelve –she has been creating her own melodies ever since. She has composed several Barter Player musicals, including *Mother Goose: The Musical*, *Frosty*, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, *Jingle All the Way*, *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*, and *Clementine the Musical* (music & lyrics). Dax holds a B.A. in Theatre from Louisiana College.



In *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, Pepper McGee dreams of getting a red bicycle for Christmas.



Here are some fun facts about bicycles!

In 1817, German Baron Karl von Drais invented the “draisine” a two-wheeled device propelled by pushing your feet against the ground. This machine was the forerunner of the modern-day bicycle.



The term “bicycle” was introduced in France in the 1860s to describe a new kind of two-wheeler with a mechanical drive (pedals/gear).

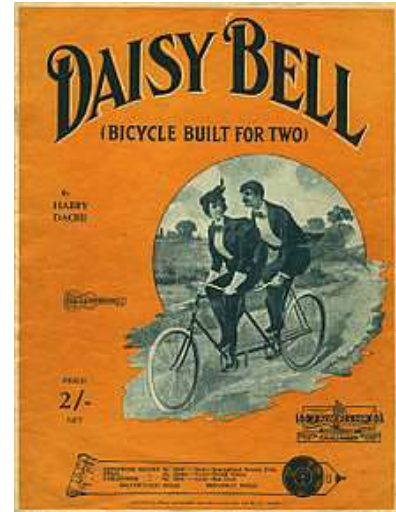
Orville and Wilbur Wright, the brothers who built the first flying airplane, operated a small bike repair shop in Dayton, Ohio. They used their workshop to build the 1903 Wright Flyer.





There are over a half billion bicycles in China. Bikes were first brought to China in the late 1800s.

The song *Daisy Bell* – more popularly known as *A Bicycle Built for Two* – was written in 1892 by Harry Dacre and became a huge success. A bike with more than one seat is commonly referred to as a “tandem” bicycle. The longest tandem bike ever built was 67 feet long and could seat 35 people! The tandem bike shown below only seats 10.



The Tour de France is one of the most famous bicycle races in the world. Established in 1903, it is considered to be the biggest test of endurance out of all sports.

Questions/Activities

1. If Pepper McGee and her classmates win the Santa Sing-Off, they get to ride on Santa's float in their town's Christmas Parade. What is a parade? Does your town have an annual Christmas Parade?



Using the internet, **research the history of parades**. What is their significance in a town or country's culture? When and where was the first official "Christmas" parade? What position does Santa's float occupy in most Christmas parades? **Present your findings to the class.**

2. Pretend you have been asked to **design Santa's Float for your town's Christmas parade**. Draw a picture of how you want your float to look. Then, using an upside-down shoebox as a base and the top for a backdrop (see picture at right) and whatever construction materials necessary (construction paper, popsicle sticks, markers, stickers, papier-maché, etc.) **build your float and display it in your classroom.**



3. Why was winning the Santa Sing-Off so important to Mrs. Wright? What qualities does a teacher need to possess to be good at his/her job? **Make a list of these qualities.** Is "pizzazz" a quality you value in a teacher? **Discuss.**



4. Pepper loved her family's tradition surrounding their Christmas tree: picking it out, chopping it down, stringing the lights, etc. Does your family have any favorite traditions at Christmas? What are they? How would you feel if your parents decided to change this tradition without consulting you? **Discuss.**



5. **Write a letter to your favorite actors from this production.** Tell them what you liked about the play, their performance, etc. Mail your letters to:

The Barter Players
c/o Barter Theatre
P.O. Box 867
Abingdon, VA 24212-0867
ATTN: Santa Claus is Coming to Town



6. What is “Christmas spirit?” How does it affect Pepper’s voice? How does Christmas spirit affect you? **Discuss.**

7. Pepper’s parents adopt a baby girl named Lulu. How does having a younger sister affect Pepper? Do you have any younger brothers or sisters? Are there times when you feel they receive more attention than you do? How do you react when that happens? Do you have older brothers or sisters? Do they ever feel that you receive more attention from than they do? What do they do when this happens? **Discuss.**



8. Pepper McGee wants a red bicycle for Christmas. If you were writing a Christmas list to Santa, what would you put on it? Why are these things important to you? If you could only receive one gift, what would it be? **Discuss.**

9. What kind of person is Crystal Bates? Do you like her at the beginning of the play? How about at the end of the play? What makes some people bully other people? What can you do as a class to prevent bullying? What can you do as an individual? **Discuss.**



10. This play took a character and lyrics from a song and built a story around them. Pick another favorite Christmas carol like *Suzy Snowflake* or *Jingle Bells* and **write the story behind the song.** Then **divide the class into groups and assign each group a scene from the story. Have each group adapt their scene into the scene for a play. Design the appropriate costumes, props and set needed.** Now have each group present their scene in chronological order. Is the story clear? How different is your play from the story you read? How difficult is it to take a piece of literature and turn it into a play? **Discuss.**

11. At one point in the play, Pepper McGee loses her ability to sing. What is your special talent? How would you feel if you woke up one morning and your talent was gone? **Discuss.**



12. This story takes place over a week. **Pick a character from this play and keep a journal as that character during this week.** Keep your journal entries as specific and imaginative as possible. For example, what might Crystal have written in her journal the night she helped Pepper's family decorate their tree?

Compare and Contrast!

Consider Pepper's three friends:



Bruce



Tommy



Nicky

Write a paper comparing and contrasting their relationship with Pepper and with each other. Which one would you want for a best friend?

WORD SEARCH

Searching frontward, backward, horizontally, vertically and diagonally find the following words below:

Pepper McGee, Christmas spirit, Crystal Bates, Santa Sing Off, parade, Little Lulu, red bicycle, basket, Jasmine Fortuna, Tommy Reinhardt, bell, gusher, Bruce, Mrs. Wright, pink plastic tree, miracle, orphanage, Santa Claus, star on top, belong, kid sister, pizzazz

C	C	R	B	Z	B	E	L	L	K	X	E	P	F	A
T	H	T	E	K	Z	H	C	I	C	E	G	I	F	N
O	X	R	H	D	N	A	D	L	G	D	A	N	O	U
M	G	M	I	G	B	S	Z	C	A	A	N	K	G	T
M	A	U	T	S	I	I	M	Z	G	R	A	P	N	R
Y	E	X	S	S	T	R	C	Y	I	A	H	L	I	O
R	C	H	T	H	E	M	W	Y	Z	P	P	A	S	F
E	U	E	A	P	E	Z	A	S	C	O	R	S	A	E
I	R	L	P	D	J	R	I	S	R	L	O	T	T	N
N	B	E	B	A	S	K	E	T	S	M	E	I	N	I
H	P	S	T	A	R	O	N	T	O	P	Q	C	A	M
A	L	I	T	T	L	E	L	U	L	U	I	T	S	S
R	F	S	E	T	A	B	L	A	T	S	Y	R	C	A
D	S	U	A	L	C	A	T	N	A	S	F	E	I	J
T	E	L	C	A	R	I	M	G	N	O	L	E	B	T

Color Santa Claus!



Vocabulary

Define the following vocabulary words then write sentences using them:

behaving

gusher

pressure

bully

float

parade

mature

contest

ordinary

pizzazz

detention

the skinny

miracle

dependable

despair

belong

proud

spectators

career

possible

practice

legacy

heritage

perfect

polish

chrome

deliver

orphanage

adopt

accident

gutter

shortage

apologize

naughty

replace

ruin

situation

plight

exchange

arrange

atrocious

family

mirth

Remember: anyone reading your sentence should be able to understand the word from the context in which it is used.

Suggested Further Reading:

Dora's Christmas Parade by Leslie Valdes

Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree by Robert Barry

The Christmas Spirit Strikes Rotten Ralph by Jack Gantos

I Wished for You: An Adoption Story by Marianne Richmond

Tell Me Again About the Night I was Born by Jamie Lee Curtis

The Bully Blockers Club by Teresa Bateman

Berenstein Bears and the Bully by Stan and Jan Berenstain