

A
**CHARLIE
BROWN™**
Christmas
LIVE! ON STAGE



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S | **STATE** | **THEATRE**
NEW JERSEY

KEYNOTES

WELCOME!

State Theatre New Jersey welcomes you to the school-day performance of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. These *Keynotes* provide information, discussion topics, activities, and resources to use both before and after the performance. The materials are designed to help you integrate the show with learning objectives in many areas of the curriculum.

We look forward to seeing you and your students at the State Theatre!

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State Theatre New Jersey—creating extraordinary experiences through the power of live performance.

A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS

by Charles M. Schulz

Based on the television special by Bill Melendez

and Lee Mendelson

Music by Vince Guaraldi

Stage Adaptation by Eric Schaeffer

By Special Arrangement with Arthur Whitelaw and Ruby Persson

THE STORY

It's the Christmas season, and everyone is happy and excited—everyone except Charlie Brown. He just can't seem to get into the holiday spirit. Lucy tells him he should participate in some kind of group activity. The children need a director for their Christmas play, she says; Charlie would be perfect!

All around him, Charlie sees that everybody seems to think that Christmas is about material things. Lucy complains about not getting the presents she wants. Snoopy decks out his doghouse with elaborate decorations in the hopes of winning a cash prize. Sally has a long list of presents she wants Santa to bring her, but it would be fine with her if he just gave her money instead.

The children and Snoopy rehearse their play in the school auditorium. Charlie says that what the show really needs is a Christmas tree. Lucy tells him to get a shiny aluminum tree—the biggest one he can find. The children make fun of Charlie when he brings back a plain little pine tree.

Charlie is still confused about the true meaning of Christmas, until Linus recites the Christmas story, with its message of peace and good will. That's what Christmas is really about—not money or presents or big, fancy artificial trees.

Now Charlie becomes convinced that his scrawny little tree will be perfect to use in the play—until he discovers that its branches aren't strong enough to hold the decorations. He thinks he's a failure.

The other children decide the tree is not so bad, after all. They cover it with decorations. Charlie Brown can't believe how beautiful his friends have made the tree. At last he understands the true meaning of Christmas.



FROM SCREEN TO STAGE

A Charlie Brown Christmas began as an animated television special in 1965 and has been part of the holiday tradition ever since.

Based on the *Peanuts* comic strip created by Charles M. Schulz, the show was written by Charles Schulz, produced by Lee Mendelson, and directed by Bill Melendez. The classic jazz score was composed by Vince Guaraldi.

This 2013 stage adaptation by Eric Schaeffer is officially authorized by Lee Mendelson and the Schulz family. It includes Vince Guaraldi's original score for the television special. The live stage version has been performed on stages across America.



BEFORE THE SHOW

- Ask students: What is your favorite holiday? Why do we celebrate this holiday?
- Have children to talk about special things they do to celebrate this holiday, such as traditional foods, songs, dances, decorations, ceremonies, rituals, etc.
- Who are the family members and friends who celebrate this holiday with them?
- Ask students if they celebrate a holiday other than Christmas, such as Hanukkah or Kwanzaa. What can they tell you about these holidays?

Watch *A Charlie Brown Christmas* television special with your students before the show. Then discuss:

- What happens in the story?
- Who are the characters?
- How do you think the play will be different from the movie? How will they change the cartoon characters into real people?

AFTER THE SHOW

- What did you see and what did you hear?
- What was your favorite part of the show? Why?
- What questions did the show raise for you? (“I wonder...”)
- Was there anything in the show that reminded you of something that happened to you?
- Charlie Brown tells Linus that he doesn’t “feel the way I’m supposed to feel” at Christmastime. Why do you think he says that? How did his feelings change at the end of the play? What made them change?
- What lessons did Charlie Brown learn about the true meaning of Christmas?
- How did the other kids treat Charlie Brown? Did they treat him the same way at the beginning and the end of the play? How did they change?
- Have you ever been unhappy because you didn’t get a present you really wanted? What did you do?
- Have you ever given a present to someone else? What did you give and whom did you give it to? How did it make you feel to give someone a present?



CHARLES M. SCHULZ

The creator and cartoonist behind *Peanuts*, Charles Schulz was born in Minneapolis, MN in 1922, and grew up in St. Paul. As a child, he loved to read the Sunday comics each week with his dad, and soon decided he wanted to be a cartoonist. He studied art through a correspondence course. In 1947, Schulz's first comic strip, *Li'l Folks*, was published, featuring early versions of the characters that later became Charlie Brown and Snoopy. Many of the characters and situations in his cartoons were inspired by details from Schulz's childhood. (For example, Snoopy was based on his old family dog, Spike.) On October 2, 1950, *Li'l Folks*—renamed *Peanuts*—made its first appearance, published in seven newspapers. At its height, *Peanuts* appeared daily in 2,600 papers in 75 countries, in 21 languages. Over nearly 50 years, Schulz drew nearly 18,000 *Peanuts* strips. The franchise later expanded into TV shows, movies, books, greeting cards, plush toys, and more. Schulz was also a major influence and inspiration for other cartoonists.

In 1999, Charles Schulz announced his retirement, after being diagnosed with colon cancer. He died on February 12, 2000, the night before his final *Peanuts* cartoon was published. He was honored posthumously with the Congressional Gold Medal.



VINCE GUARALDI

The composer for *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Vince Guaraldi was born in San Francisco in 1928. He began playing piano at a very early age, and developed a love for boogie woogie, American jazz, and Latin jazz. He performed with well-known jazz ensembles and also recorded several albums on his own. In 1963, his song, "Cast Your Fate to the Wind," won a Grammy Award for Best Original Jazz Composition. Producer Lee Mendelson heard the song, and invited Guaraldi to compose the music for a *Peanuts* film. Vince went on to create the scores for 17 *Peanuts* movies in all, earning an Academy Award nomination and four Grammy nominations. His soundtrack album for *A Charlie Brown Christmas* has sold more than four million copies, making it one of the best-selling Christmas albums of all time. Vince Guaraldi died of a heart attack in 1976, at age 47.



FUN FACT:

Vince Guaraldi was briefly an unofficial member of the Grateful Dead, performing with them while they were without a keyboard player.

WATCH AND LISTEN

During the performance, pay attention to the different theater elements used in the show. These include:

MUSIC - Pay attention to the music, and the way it helps set the mood for what's happening in the show. When does it sound exciting? Sad? Funny?

COSTUMES - Do the actors' costumes look the same or different from the way the characters look in the TV show? Do the costumes help you recognize the characters in the play?

LIGHTING - Notice how the lights onstage change during the show. They get brighter and darker, change colors, move around, and do other things.

SETS/SCENERY - Pay attention to the scenery. Does it look like the TV show? Notice how the actors move the scenery around during the show.



BE A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER

Going to see a show at the theater is not the same as going to a movie or watching TV. The performers will be right there with you and the rest of the

audience, which makes it very exciting! It also means you have a special responsibility to respect the performers and the rest of the audience so that everyone can enjoy the show. Make sure to follow these rules:

- **If you have a phone, make sure to turn it off before the show starts. Keep it off until the show is over.**
- **During the show, give the performers all your attention. Stay in your seat and don't talk.**
- **Taking pictures or recording the show is not allowed.**
- **Don't eat or drink in the theater. And no chewing gum, please!**



BOOKS

Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!, by Anabel and Barnabas Kindersley. DK Children, 1997. Grades 2-6.

How the Grinch Stole Christmas!, by Dr. Seuss. Random House Books for Young Readers, 1957.

Walk This World at Christmastime, by Debbie Powell. Big Picture Press, 2016. Grades K-3.



WEBSITES

Peanuts Comics Archive has an extensive archive of vintage *Peanuts* strips, character profiles, videos, and more.

www.peanuts.com/comics/#Vje51ytUWFk

The official Charles M. Schulz Museum website.

<https://schulzmuseum.org>

School Band & Orchestra celebrates Vince Guaraldi's score with activities connected to music and performing arts curriculum.

<http://sbomagazine.com/current-issue/5012-such-spirit-through-the-years-guaraldis>

Education World: December Holidays Around the World offers lesson plans, activities, and more.

www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson213.shtml

www.educationworld.com/holidays/archives/december.shtml

Christmas Around the World is an interactive site for learning about Christmas celebrations around the world.

<https://www.whychristmas.com/cultures>



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