

Squirrel's New Year's Resolution • Reader's Theater •

by | Pat Miller

Grades
1–4



New Year's Day was observed by the Babylonians in ancient times. The ancients didn't begin the year on January 1, but on the first day of spring as determined by the solar calendar—usually March 23. It made sense that as the earth was renewed, so was the year. In 46 BC, Julius Caesar developed what came to be known as the Julian calendar, and he decided the new year should begin on the first day of this calendar, in the month named for Janus.

Janus was the god of beginnings and guardian of doors and entries. Janus had two faces and could look back at the year just past and forward to the year yet to come. Though the first day of the year was moved twice more by Christians, Pope Gregory XIII revised the Julian

calendar into today's Gregorian calendar, used in most parts of the world. He returned New Year's Day to January 1.

Cultures that traditionally used a lunar calendar celebrate the New Year on a date that fluctuates from mid-January to mid-February. In fact, no matter which of the twelve months you select, some faith, culture, or people are marking the beginning of a new year. For more information, see www.newyearfestival.com/new-year-dates.html.

New Year's traditions revolve around food, celebration, and hoping and planning for a better year to come. It's a custom in the South to eat black-eye peas on New Year's Day to insure a plentiful income in the coming year. Some cultures eat cabbage leaves for the same reason—

so they will have lots of “green” the whole year. The Dutch eat donuts to bring good fortune; the circular pastry represents successfully completing a year’s cycle, or coming full circle.

Some people think that what you do in the first few minutes of the New Year can set a good tone for the months to come. That’s the basis for kissing ones you love in the first seconds of January 1, and why people often welcome January 1 together with families and friends. You can check out any time you like, but you can’t leave until after midnight!

Fireworks and champagne are common on the eve of the new year, as are parades the following day. The Tournament of Roses Parade in California dates back to 1886 when flower-bedecked carriages trotted in progression to celebrate the ripening orange crop. Today the parades often precede high-profile football games.

A common tradition worldwide is that of making resolutions. The old year, and its failings and problems, are in the past and each of us faces a fresh start. How will we begin? What can we improve? What bad habit can we lose? Making resolutions is so prevalent that it is even part of the school curriculum in many districts. Though school is closed on New Year’s Day and several days after, students’ often return to a new semester, a perfect time to make a fresh start. Use the first two websites below to make resolutions with students, and reserve the Funny New Year’s Resolutions for yourself and your colleagues.

eHow—How to Make a New Year’s Resolution

www.ehow.com/how_12077_new-years-resolutions.html

USA.gov—Popular New Year’s Resolutions

www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/New_Years_Resolutions.shtml

Funny New Year’s Resolutions for Adults (Start the new semester with laughter!)

www.newyearfestival.com/funny-new-year-resolutions.html

Sharing the Book

Squirrel’s New Year’s Resolution (Albert Whitman, 2010) tells the tale of how an earnest but inexperienced Squirrel strives to think of a resolution on her first New Year’s Day. She visits her friends to see what they’ve resolved. Many of the characters and the locale are the same as *Substitute Groundhog* (Albert Whitman, 2006), also written by Pat Miller and illustrated by Kathi Ember.

Before performing the reader’s theater, read the book aloud. Students will benefit from hearing your expression and pacing, especially to bring out the humor in the story.

Because Squirrel has the largest part in this script, you might want to have several Squirrel readers. If you divide the part with two readers, the second reader begins with the part with the single asterisk (*). To share with three readers, the second reader begins with the part with two asterisks (***) and the third at three (***). They will ignore the *.

Apprise the audience that the voice of Squirrel may change with a new reader, but there is only one Squirrel in the story. To help the audience know which animal is speaking, use the patterns at www.librarysparks.com. You can make them into transparencies and project them onto sheets of fun foam to trace, or simply duplicate them on card stock. Make headbands or attach them to wooden sticks that students hold up like stop signs while reading their lines.

Duplicate the appropriate number of scripts, including one for yourself and one extra, if the teacher stays for the performance. Highlight each character’s name in the list of parts and then in the script. If you print in color, the parts are color-coded for you.

To choose parts, you can have the teacher decide; you can number the chairs students sit in and randomly select enough numbers to fill all the parts (use bingo numbers to save time); or choose all the animals except Squirrel and let the audience participate by chorally reading her part. If you choose the latter, you will need highlighted scripts for each of the Squirrel readers.

Squirrel's New Year's Resolution

Written and adapted by Pat Miller

Roles

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Narrator 3

Narrator 4

Radio Announcer

Bear

Turtle

Mole

Skunk

Dr. Owl

Rabbit

Squirrel*

Porcupine

Squirrel has a large part. It can be split with a second reader (), or two additional readers (** and ***).

Narrator 1: It was the first morning of the new year and Squirrel was pinning up her new Nut of the Month calendar.

Narrator 2: She was surprised to hear the radio announcer.

Radio Announcer: It's January first. A great day to make a resolution!

Squirrel: Make a resolution? How do you do that? Bear might know.

Narrator 3: Squirrel headed for the library where Bear was the li-bear-ian. I mean, librarian.

Bear: Happy New Year, Squirrel!

Squirrel: Same to you, Bear. Do you know how to make a resolution? Is it like making a snack?

Bear: Resolutions are more important than snacks.

Squirrel: More important than snacks? What is a resolution?

Bear: A resolution is a promise you make to yourself to be better or to help others. When we begin a new year, we make a fresh start.

Squirrel: Wow! Did you make a resolution?

Bear: I did. I resolved to teach others how to read. I'm going to teach Skunk as soon as she gets well.

Squirrel: Oh no, Skunk is still sick.

Narrator 4: Squirrel hurried to Skunk's house for a visit.

Narrator 1: Squirrel stepped into Skunk's house and found her grumbling in bed.

Narrator 2: Skunk was sick of being sick.

Skunk: I'm stuck in bed until Dr. Owl says I'm better. I would rather be learning to read. That's my New Year's resolution.

Narrator 3: Squirrel knew how to cheer up her friend.

Narrator 4: She hid at the foot of the bed.

Narrator 1: She popped up and shouted, "Boo!"

Narrator 2: Skunk giggled. Hide and Skunk was her favorite game.

Narrator 3: Squirrel popped up again.

Squirrel: Boo!

Narrator 4: She dropped back down. She popped back up.

Reader's Theater

****Squirrel:** Boo!

Narrator 1: By now, Skunk was laughing hard.

Narrator 2: Just then Dr. Owl came by.

Dr. Owl: Skunk, I can tell by your laughter that you are feeling much better. Now you can visit Bear. Just make sure you have a healthy lunch first.

Squirrel: Lunch!

Narrator 3: Squirrel headed for the Hidey Hole Diner.

Squirrel: Maybe someone there can help me with my resolution.

Narrator 4: On her way, she met Mole and Turtle. Mole was holding a map close to his nose.

***Squirrel:** What are you doing?

Mole: Turtle and I resolved to plant a garden. But I can't find a good place to dig with all these trees.

Squirrel: Wait here.

Narrator 1: Squirrel dashed up an oak tree and looked down.

Narrator 2: She spied Wildcat Creek and on its bank, a perfect place for a garden.

Narrator 3: Squirrel scampered down and led Mole and Turtle through the woods to the edge of the creek.

Narrator 4: She helped them stake out string for the borders of the garden.

Mole: Thanks, Squirrel. I will start digging right after lunch.

Squirrel: Lunch!

Narrator 1: Squirrel rushed away. She still hadn't thought of a resolution.

Narrator 2: At the diner, Squirrel found a stool at the counter.

Narrator 3: Next to her, Porcupine was talking to himself.

Narrator 4: He looked grumpy.

Squirrel: What's wrong?

Porcupine: I resolved to be less grumpy. So I'm trying to laugh more. But I can't think of anything funny.

*****Squirrel:** I can help you think of something funny. Like, why did the squirrel run back and forth across the road?

Porcupine: I don't know, why?

Squirrel: Because she was nuts!

Porcupine: [laughing] I get it! That reminds me. What's striped and bouncy?

Squirrel: [giggling] Tell me!

Porcupine: Skunk on a trampoline.

Narrator 1: Squirrel laughed herself right off the stool.

Porcupine: That's a good one! I'd better write these down.

Narrator 2: Off he went to find paper and pencil.

Narrator 3: Squirrel felt left out.

Squirrel: Porcupine has a resolution. So do Bear and Skunk and Mole and Turtle. I'm the only animal in the forest that hasn't made a New Year's resolution.

Narrator 4: Rabbit came to take Squirrel's order.

Rabbit: Would you like to try my New Year's Special?

Squirrel: Sure. Maybe it will help me make a resolution. I wish I knew how.

Rabbit: Think of a way to improve yourself. Or a way to use what you're good at to help others.

Narrator 1: Squirrel ate her lunch special and thought hard.

Narrator 2: The door squeaked as Skunk came in.

Skunk: I need a healthy lunch! Thanks to Squirrel, I'm feeling better!

Bear: Sit with me, Skunk. I see you brought our first book.

Narrator 3: Turtle and Mole came in next.

Mole: What do you have for two thirsty animals that just started a garden?

Turtle: Squirrel found a terrific place for it.

Narrator 4: Porcupine hurried in.

Porcupine: Do you know why Bear said caw, caw?

Narrator 1: Before anyone could answer, Porcupine answered himself.

Porcupine: He was learning another language!

Narrator 2: All the animals laughed.

Mole: I didn't know you were so funny.

Porcupine: Me either. Squirrel got me started.

Rabbit: You're doing a good job on your resolution, Squirrel.

Squirrel: I didn't know I had one.

Rabbit: Your actions are better than words. It looks like you resolved to help someone every day.

ALL: Hurray for Squirrel!

Narrator 3: It was going to be a very happy New Year.











