

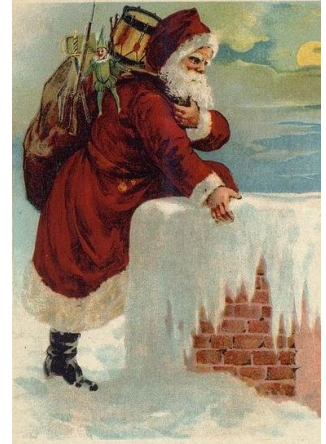
Study Guide prepared by
Catherine Bush
Barter Playwright-in-Residence

'Twas the Night Before Christmas

Book & lyrics by Catherine Bush
Music by Dax Dupuy

Inspired by the poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas*
by Clement Clark Moore

**Performed by the Barter Players, from the historic
Barter Theatre in Abingdon, VA**



Setting

The streets of New York City, Clem Moore's home, and the office of the New York Chronicle. The year is 1823.



Characters

Clem – a hardworking newspaper writer

Catharine – Clem’s wife, deathly ill

Peter – Clem’s son, refuses to believe in the Impossible

Mary – Clem’s daughter, a believer

Mr. Van Buren – the owner of the Chronicle

Candy Man – sells sugar plums

Newsboy – hawks the Chronicle

Santa Claus – jolly old St. Nicholas

Policeman – a beat cop

Sugar Plum Fairy – helps Santa load the stockings

Reindeer – flying reindeer who pull Santa’s sleigh



Note: Cast Size and Doubling of Actors

In this production of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, we will be using only six actors. Some actors will be required to play more than one role. Characters will be distinguished by costume, voice and other physical character traits.



Synopsis

Christmas Eve, 1823. Things aren't looking good for Clem Moore, a hardworking newspaper writer at the Chronicle. His wife Catharine is deathly ill and needs an expensive operation in order to survive – an operation he can't afford. He hopes Mr. Van Buren, the owner of the Chronicle, will advance him the money but instead Van Buren gives him an impossible assignment – to write the best Santa Claus story ever written. If Clem fails, he will lose his job. Clem is at a loss – he considers Santa Claus ridiculous, nonsensical, and Impossible. In desperation, he puts his cynicism aside for one moment and wishes on the Christmas Star. What follows is a night of magic that not only changes Clem's life forever, but changes how the whole world celebrates Christmas.



Vocabulary

dawdling

operation

belief

impossible

nestled

kerchief

clatter

shutters

sash

luster

sleigh

rapid

courses

dash

prancing

tarnish

soot

peddler

droll

wreath

thistle

pawnbroker

ragamuffin

nonsense

penknife

figgy pudding

choose

magic

penniless

maintenance

incessantly

practical

disastrous

sensible

waltz

exposé

infestation

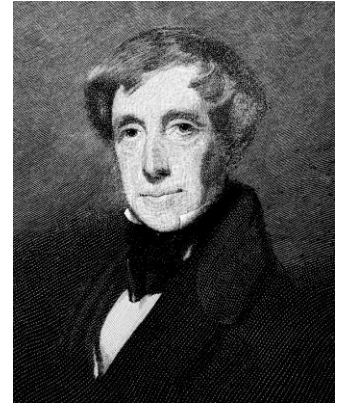
landlord

tradition

Define the words above then write a sentence using each of them. Remember: anyone reading your sentence should be able to understand the word from the context in which it is used.

Biography – Clement Clarke Moore

Clement Clarke Moore (July 15, 1779 – July 10, 1863) was an American professor of Oriental and Greek literature at Columbia College (New York City) as well as a professor of Biblical learning at the General Theological Seminary, where compiled a two-volume Hebrew dictionary. He is generally considered to be the author of the yuletide poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas*. The poem was first published anonymously in the Troy, New York, Sentinel on December 23, 1823, and was reprinted frequently thereafter with no name attached. Moore later acknowledged authorship and the poem was included in an 1844 anthology of his works at the insistence of his children, for whom he wrote it.



A Visit from St. Nicholas is largely responsible for the conception of Santa Claus from the mid-nineteenth century to today, including his physical appearance, the night of his visit, his mode of transportation, the number and names of his reindeer, and the tradition that he brings toys to children. Prior to the poem, American ideas about St. Nicholas and other Christmastide visitors varied considerably.

Biography of the Playwright

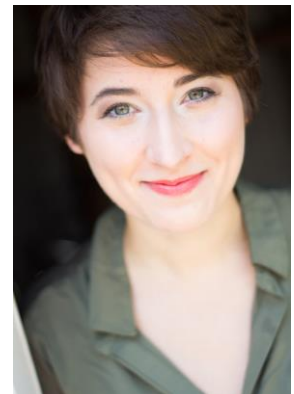


Catherine Bush lives in Abingdon, Virginia where she is Barter Theatre's Playwright-in-Residence. Her plays for young audiences include *Cry Wolf!*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel*, *Frosty*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth*, *My Imaginary Pirate*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *The Call of the Wild*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *Rudolph*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, *Mother Goose: The Musical*, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*, *Jingle All the*

Way, *Antigone*, *Robin Hood*, and *Great Expectations*. 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*, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, *Rudolph*, *Frosty*, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, *Jingle All the Way*, and *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* (music & lyrics). Dax holds a B.A. in Theatre from Louisiana College.





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.

Reindeer Fun Facts!



What's in a name?

In North America reindeer are also called caribou. The name “reindeer” is of Norse origin (from the old Norse word “hreinn” for deer) and has nothing to do the reins of a sled. The name “caribou” comes to us through the French, who derived that name from the Mi'kmag Indian word “qalipu,” meaning “snow shoveler.”



Anything you can do, I can do better!

Both male and female reindeer grow antlers. Female reindeer retain their antlers until they give birth to their young in the spring. Male reindeer shed their antlers each winter (for those on Santa's team, after Christmas). Reindeer are the only mammals that grow new sets of antlers annually.

A Nose Knows!

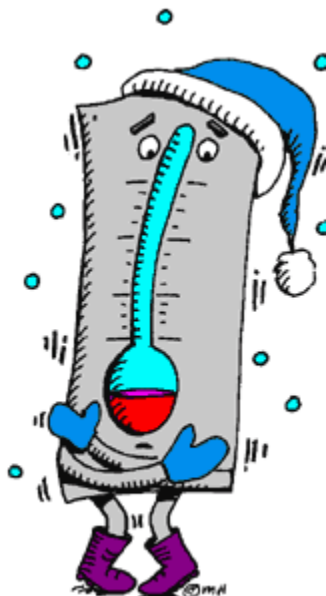
A reindeer's nose is specially designed to warm the air before it gets to his lungs. Reindeer also have a strong sense of smell, and it's that sense of smell that assists them in finding the lichen under the snow. They can sniff out the plant material easily, even through snow that is 2 feet deep.



Up on the housetop, reindeer paws...

(I know, I know – it's "pause" – but you get the idea)

Reindeer have large special hooves with four "toes" on each foot. The toes spread out wide to act like snowshoes, distributing the animal's weight so that it can "float" over snow.



Oh, the weather outside is frightful!

Reindeer were built for the snow and cold. Their bodies react to changes in temperatures by making adjustments. When temperatures become frigid, they have the uncanny ability to lower the temperature in their legs to near freezing levels. This keeps their core body heat even.

Questions/Activities

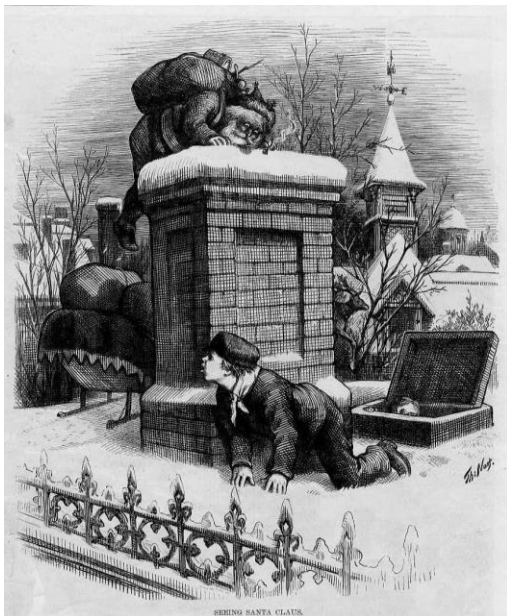
1. In *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, Mary and Peter hope to receive sugar plums for Christmas. What is a sugar plum? Using the internet, research how sugar plums used to be made. Do sugar plums have anything to do with the plums that grow on trees? **Present your findings to the class.**



2. This play is adapted from the poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas* written by Clement Clark Moore. Who is St. Nicholas? Was he an actual person? How did he become the Santa Claus we know and love today? **Research this phenomenon and present your findings to the class.**

EXTRA CREDIT!!

Who was Thomas Nast? What was his occupation? How did he influence the American perception of Santa Claus?



3. The poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas* is an example of **anapestic tetrameter**. Define anapestic tetrameter.

da da DUM da da DUM da da DUM da da DUM...

Using *A Visit from St. Nicholas* as a template, **write your own poem about Christmas traditions at your house, the winter weather, building a snowman, etc.** Make sure the story embodied in your poem has a beginning, a middle and an end. **Read them aloud to the class.**

4. This play is set in New York City in 1823. **Locate New York City on a map.** How far away is it from your hometown? **Using the internet, research the history of New York City.** Who were the first inhabitants? Who were the first European settlers? Why did they settle there? Was it always called “New York?” What is Manhattan? Why is New York City also referred to as “The Big Apple?” What were living conditions like for the working class in 1823? What part of the City was occupied in 1823? What was the population of the City? How does that compare with the population today?



5. In reality, Clement Clark Moore was a professor who lived on a grand estate in New York called Chelsea. In this play, he is a newspaper writer for *The New York Chronicle*. Research the history of the newspaper in New York City. What sort of newspapers existed in 1823? Was the *New York Chronicle* a real newspaper? When did the *New York Times* come into existence? The *Wall Street Journal*?



6. 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: 'Twas the Night Before Christmas

7. In this play, Mary wishes on the “Christmas Star” known throughout the rest of the year as the “evening star.” What is the evening star really? Do you believe in wishing on a star? If you could have one wish, what would it be?



8. *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* is a musical. How was music used to tell the story? Do you think it was effective? Write your own song using the words from the poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas* and perform it for your class.



9. The Sugar Plum Fairy has a role in this play even though she isn't mentioned in the poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas*. Where did the Sugar Plum Fairy originate? Why do you think her character was included in this play?

10. In this play, Clem's boss, Mr. Van Buren, undergoes a change of heart once his newspaper is saved. How does his transformation affect everyone else in the story?

11. After seeing the play, compare and contrast the characters of Mary and Peter, more specifically how they react to certain situations. Which one can you relate to?



12. The poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas* is written in first person. How does the narrator's point of view influence how events are described? Does the play *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* use the same point of view to tell its story? How would this story differ if it was written from Santa's point-of-view?



WORD SEARCH

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

Clement Moore, Chronicle, New York City, Christmas Eve, impossible, Sugar Plum Fairy, snoozer, Santa Claus, chimney, Candy Man, Mary, Peter, special edition, practical, Mr. Van Buren, newsboy, Beggar, waltz, operation, Lena, reindeer, mouse, Dasher, Comet, Cupid,

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

Color Santa and his reindeer!

'Twas the Night
Before Christmas

