

# Theatre IV Classroom Study Guide



## 'Twas the Night Before Christmas

*Book, Music & Lyrics by Bruce Miller*

### A Father's Love

**T***was the Night Before Christmas*, tells of sugar plum fairies and of old St. Nick. There's another story behind this timeless classic, and Theatre IV portrays it through this play. The show takes you into the home of Clement Clark Moore and his family the day before Christmas. Moore is pressed for time and is stressed beyond mangement because his daughter is sick and he has not written the family's annual Christmas poem. With the spirit of Christmas in the air, the story takes a magical turn for the best. *Twas the Night Before Christmas* is sure to put a smile on your face, snap in you fingers and a tear in your eye. This well-written show is beautiful expression of a father's love and the mysteries of Christmas.



## Theatre IV's 'Twas the Night Before Christmas

Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863)

**C**lement C. Moore was an American educator and poet who was born in New York City and graduated from Columbia University in 1798. A biblical scholar, he was also a professor of Oriental and Greek Literature at the Episcopal General Seminary from 1821 - 1850. The seminary was erected in New York City on land Moore had donated.

He is perhaps best remembered for his poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas," with its famous beginning " 'Twas the night before Christmas." The poem was first published (anonymously) in the Troy Sentinel on December 23, 1823. Some people have claimed that the poem was actually written by Henry Livingston, Jr., a land surveyor who also composed poetry. According to tradition, Moore wrote the poem in 1822 as a Christmas present to his children.

### New York City

**N**ew York City is the largest city in the United States and the seventh largest in the world. Only Shanghai, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Tokyo, Moscow, and Beijing are larger. The population of New York City is over seven million. Only eight states (not including New York) have more people than New York City.

Affectionately called "The Big Apple," New York City was founded by Dutch settlers in 1624 and has attracted immigrants from around the world. The Statue of Liberty, erected in New York Harbor in 1886, became the symbol of a new life for those entering the United States.

During Moore's lifetime, European immigrants were pouring into the city. By 1880, New York had over 60,000 inhabitants, more than any other city in the country. New York City is divided into five areas called boroughs: Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island.

### Reindeer

**R**eindeer live in northern Europe and Asia, and are closely related to the North American caribou. Reindeer can be tamed and are highly prized possessions in the arctic regions. Reindeer and caribou differ from other members of the deer family in having deeply cleft hooves, a hairy muzzle, and somewhat broader antlers which are borne by both males and females.

Reindeer stand about 3 1/2 feet high and weigh an average of 300 pounds. They are able to draw sleds over the snow at the rate of 12 to 15 miles per hour. Reindeer are noted for their endurance as well as swiftness and can travel with a load of up to 300 pounds.

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## Saint Nicholas

The original Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas, was born in Turkey in the 4th century. He was an early Christian bishop who presided over Myra, a city in Asia Minor, who became widely known his love of children and for his generosity. He is the patron saint of sailors in Sicily, Greece, and Russia. He is also, of course, the patron saint of children. In 16th century Holland, Dutch children would place their wooden shoes by the hearth in hopes that they would be filled with a treat. The Dutch spelled St. Nicholas as Sint Nikolass, which became corrupted to Sinterklass, and finally to Santa Claus.



Writing in 1809, Washington Irving pictured Santa as a jolly, chubby fellow riding through the air in a sleigh drawn by reindeer, but it was Clement Moore's poem that indelibly etched the classic image of Santa Claus in the imagination of children and adults.

## The Origins of Christmas

Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith. Born nearly two thousand years ago, Christians believe Him to be the Son of God. Whether Jesus was really born on December 25th, no one can say for certain. It was chosen because it already was a holiday in ancient time's - a pagan feast. It is thought that the Nativity did take place on the 25th of the month; but which exact month is uncertain and every month at one time or another has been assigned. The Roman Church picked December 25th, and though questioned for several generations by the Eastern Church, it became a universal date in the fifth century.

## Christmas Cards

Christmas cards are a major element in the observance of the season. Some 1.5 billion cards are sent annually, an average of about sixty per family. The exact year the custom began may never be established, but it seems clear that it was in the decade of the 1840's that the first cards were produced. George Buday states in his "The Story of the Christmas Card" that the Cole-Horsley card, which has received considerable attention, appeared in 1843. This card, made for Sir Henry Cole by John Calcott Horsely, portrayed "brimming cheer" in the center and at each side of the happy family group, in smaller panels, were shown acts of charity- "Feeding the Hungry" and "Clothing the Naked." A thousand of these were lithographed by a Mr. Jobbins of Warwick Court, Holborn, and sold by a gift-book company in Old Bond Street for a shilling a piece. The Cole-Horsley Card is the basis for the set decoration used for this play.

# Theatre IV's 'Twas the Night Before Christmas

## The Christmas Tree History and Legend

**F**or Christian families in North America, Germany and other parts of Europe, the Christmas tree is one of the main symbols of the Christmas season. In America this year, over 33 million families will celebrate Christmas with a live or cut Christmas tree. Many legends exist about the origin of the Christmas tree.

The tree, used as a symbol of life, is a tradition older than Christianity and not exclusive to any one religion. Primitive peoples noticed that evergreen trees did not die during the winter, which they believed was a sign of immortality. Long before there was a Christmas, on the shortest day of the year in December, Egyptians would bring bright green palm branches into their homes as a symbol of life's triumph over death. Romans adorned their homes with evergreens during Saturnalia, a winter festival in honor of Saturnus, their god of agriculture. Oak trees decorated with golden apples were a part of the winter solstice festivities for Druid priests. During the Middle Ages, an evergreen hung with red apples was called the Paradise tree, the symbol of the feast of Adam and Eve held on December 24th.

The Christmas Tree of today probably dates back to the 16th century in Germany. It was common for Germanic families both rich and poor to decorate fir trees with colored paper, fruits, roses, and sweets. Later, the Christmas tree custom became popular in other parts of Europe. The Hessian soldiers during the American Revolution brought the Christmas tree custom to the New World. German immigrants spread the tradition throughout the United States. Around 1900, many communities began to decorate large outdoor trees and the practice continues to this day and every year, a national Christmas tree is placed on the White House lawn in Washington, D.C.

To learn about caring for a cut Christmas Tree, go to:

<http://www.christree.org/selection/index.html>

## Christmas Tree Facts *(From The National Christmas Tree Association)*

- Real Christmas trees are an all-American product, grown in all 50 states, including Alaska and Hawaii.
- Real trees are a renewable, recyclable resource.
- For every real Christmas tree harvested, 2 to 3 seedlings are planted in its place.
- There are about 1 million acres in production for growing Christmas trees.
- Each acre provides the daily oxygen requirements of 18 people.
- There are about 15,000 Christmas tree growers in the U.S., and over 100,000 people employed full or part time in the industry.
- It can take as many as 15 years to grow a tree of average retail sale height (6 feet), but the average growing time is 7 years.
- The top Christmas tree producing states are Oregon, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, California, and North Carolina.
- The top selling Christmas trees are: balsam fir, Douglas-fir, Fraser fir, noble fir, Scotch pine, Virginia pine, and white pine.



# Theatre IV's 'Twas the Night Before Christmas

## Discussion/Activities

1. Clement Moore wrote the poem "A Visit From St. Nicholas" as a Christmas present for his children. Discuss the special meaning of "homemade" presents and how special it is to give and receive presents that have been made especially for someone. Have students write holiday poems, stories or letters as presents for their family or friends.
2. Ask students to recite other Christmas (or other holiday) poems that they know. Remind students that the lyrics of many Christmas carols are based on poetry. (i.e. "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was originally a nursery rhyme, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" is a poem by Phillips Brooks, and "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" is a poem by Dinah Maria Mulock Craik.)
3. In the play, students are introduced to the history behind Santa Claus, and other early books and poems about Santa are mentioned. As a class project, research St. Nicholas and try to find early accounts of Santa Claus including the descriptions found in the Washington Irving book, *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, and the book of poems, *The Children's Friend*, which are mentioned in the play. Research the history behind other countries versions of Santa Claus including France's Pere Noel, and England's Father Christmas.
4. Share the history of Christmas traditions with your students. Encourage students from other religions to share their holidays and traditions with classmates. Ask students to research other holiday celebrations including Hanukkah and Kwanza.

**T**heatre IV is the second largest theatre for young audiences in the nation and is the Children's Theatre of Virginia. We encourage your comments about *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. Please send your letters to:

**Theatre IV, 114 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220**

If you need to reach Theatre IV by phone, please call **1-800-235-8687**.

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# A Visit from St. Nicholas

'T was 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 my 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 tiny 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 Donder and Blitzen!  
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!  
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!  
As the 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.'

— *Clement Clarke Moore*



# Holiday Word Search



M

C O S

M L U L R

F L E S E E Z

C L A M E I I S N

S H O T E O G N M E U

K H R M C N T H D T W L T

D R T I E A T E U E S Y O I M

S T F U S K H M L M E A O M N A E

Y A I N S T M E O T F R N R J O K I G

M L G S G A M U P O S S K C K C L O V E T

P A L N B L N A L O R I G D H A T R E E F L D

F Q K O C J E T S R E E M U L P R A G U S G Z A R

C U W N J H O T A W B M P R E S E N T S B X K P O A T



Santa  
Clement Moore  
Mouse

Poem  
Elf  
Christmas

Reindeer  
Mistletoe  
New York

Sugar Plum  
Presents  
Sleigh

Tree  
Love  
Jolly

Gift  
Nutmeg  
Cap