‘TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Book, Music and Lyrics by Bruce Craig Miller

TEACHER RESOURCES

‘Twas the Night Before Christmas and this study guide are produced in support of the Virginia Standards of Learning in English, History, Social Sciences, and Science.

AT THE LIBRARY

The Night Before Christmas: A Classic Illustrated Edition by Clement C. Moore and Cooper Edens

‘Twas the Night B’fore Christmas: An African-American Version by Melodye Benson Rosales

ON THE WEB

A Visit From St. Nicholas
poetryfoundation.org/poems/43171/a-visit-from-st-nicholas

Twas The Night Before Christmas
archive.org/details/Twas-The-Night-Before-Christmas

PLAY SYNOPSIS

At turns heartwarming and hilarious, this charming Christmas musical is complete with a jolly Santa, reindeer on the roof, moonlight on the snow, Ma and Pa in their caps, and sugarplums dancing in the dreams of hopeful children.

Our careworn poet, Clement Moore, is struggling to write a Christmas poem. Clement is uninspired, until his eyes and his heart are opened by loving, joyous images all around him in his own home. He begins writing his immortal poem with these words, “‘Twas the night before Christmas...” His poem is a delight to his family and to many generations of families who can’t imagine Christmas without “A Visit from St. Nicholas.”
Before the Show

1. ‘Twas The Night Before Christmas is a live theatrical production performed by actors. Discuss the differences between watching a movie or television. What kinds of theatre manners are needed in a play?

2. Read Clement Moore’s ‘Twas The Night Before Christmas on the next page as a class. Talk as a class about how each of your classmates celebrates holidays in their home. We all celebrate in different ways!

You have an important part to play! How to play your part:

A play is different than television or a movie. The actors are right in front of you and can see your reactions, feel your attention, and hear your laughter and applause. Watch and listen carefully to understand the story. The story is told by actors and comes to life through your imagination.

RHYME AND VOCABULARY IN A VISIT FROM ST. NICHOLAS

Rhyme (noun): a repetition of similar sounds in two or more different words; most often used in poetry

Many poems contain words that rhyme. Read A Visit from St. Nicholas on the next page. Use different colored pencils to circle the pairs of words that rhyme.

What do the following words mean in the poem, A Visit from St. Nicholas, on the next page?

Work with a partner, the poem, and a dictionary to find out.

1. sash __________________________

2. lustre __________________________

3. coursers __________________________

4. peddler __________________________
'Twas the night before Christmas, when all thro’ 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 danc’d in their heads;
And Mama 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 the 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 minature sleigh, and eight tiny rein-deer,
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 call’d them by name:
“Now! Dasher, now! Dancer, now! Prancer and Vixen,
On! Comet, on! Cupid, on! Donner and Blitzen;
To the top of the porch! To the top of the wall!
Now dash away! Dash away! Dash away all!”
As dry leaves 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 dress’d all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnish’d with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys was flung on his back,
And he look’d 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 laugh’d, like a bowl full of jelly:
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laugh’d 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 fill’d all the stockings; then turn’d with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose.
He sprung 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.”
Write a Poem

Write a poem below about your favorite holiday. Include information about your family traditions, as well as the sights, sounds, smells and feelings that make that holiday special. Be sure to use rhyming words!
This play was set in 1822. Everyday life has changed in many ways since then. In the chart below, circle the objects which could have been around in 1822, and put a square around the objects in today’s world. What did you notice?

CHALLENGE

Read about life during the 1800’s. In what ways was it different than today’s world? Write a paragraph describing all the ways your life would be different if you had lived back then. If you could travel back to Clement Moore’s time, what one item from today’s world would you take to give the author? Justify your choice.
Use “America’s Library” Online to Discover Clement Clarke Moore. Explore Clement Clarke Moore on the Library of Congress website at:
www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/nation/jb_nation_moore_1.html

Use the information you find on the Library of Congress site to answer the following questions:

1. Why was Mr. Moore visiting Greenwich Village on Christmas Eve?

2. How many children did Mr. Moore have?

3. How did Mr. Moore travel through New York City on the evening he wrote the poem?

4. Who inspired his poem?

5. Who was Clement’s father? What can you infer about his family?

6. In 1822, Clement Moore’s children listened as their father read his poem. In 1922, children in the US listened to the poem on a phonograph. What are some ways that we can listen to or experience the poem today? What technological advances allow us to experience it differently?

Think About It  Mr. Moore may have been embarrassed by the light-hearted holiday poem, which somehow made its way into the public without his knowledge in December 1823. Why do you think he may have felt this way?

Vocabulary to Know
- penned
- folklore
- inauguration
- scholar
- editions
- phonograph

CHALLENGE: RESEARCH THE ADVANCES
Research the advances in how we communicated and experienced stories in 1822 versus how we communicate and experience stories in the present day. Create a timeline of important inventions or advances in communication technology.
When you are in an audience at 'Twas the Night Before Christmas, or any play, pay attention to the following:

**Cue**
1) Command given by stage management to the technical departments.
2) Any signal (spoken line, action or count) that indicates another action should follow

**House Lights**
The auditorium lighting, which is commonly faded out when the performance starts.

**Blackout**
The act of turning off (or fading out) stage lighting

**Curtain Call**
At the end of a performance, the acknowledgment of applause by actors — the bows.

**Build / Check**
Build is a smooth increase in sound or light level; check is the opposite — a smooth diminishment of light or sound.

**Fade**
An increase, decrease, or change in lighting or sound.