

Ideas! for Hosting a Christmas Play Party

The Christmas skits can be performed by just one family at home, with parents taking the narrative roles while the children act out the pantomime parts—or vice versa!

The actors don't have to get every movement exactly right. The beauty of pantomime is that it leaves room for imagination. Families can create their own actions, expressions and movements and are welcome to even add a line or two to the story. Create, improvise and laugh together while practicing for your play party, and make the play your very own.

The skits can also be performed by a small group of families. Each family practices one section of the play. One example of dividing up the skit, is for one family to be the storyteller and his family; another could be the Sheep and Shepherds; another could be the Wisemen, Camel, and Star; and another could be Mary, Joseph, the Angel, and the Innkeeper. Then everyone can come together for a Christmas Play Party and enjoy performing the play together.

You don't need to make costumes or props, although children love to dress up, and making costumes and props can be half the fun! Keep things simple, let the children be creative, and most of all, have fun together.

Four Skits - Four Advent Themes - Four Storytellers

There are four versions of the skit, each with a different storyteller that represents each of the four themes of the advent candle: hope, peace, joy and love, creating an opportunity to center the theme of your party on one of these virtues. My hope is that families will make their Christmas Play Party a tradition. As children act out different characters over the years, they can experience the Bethlehem story from new perspectives and grow in their understanding of God's truths.

Combine your Play Party with other family Christmas Traditions

Your Christmas Play Party could easily be combined with other Christmas activities to make the gathering even more fun. Here are just a few ideas:

A Christmas Cookie Exchange

Invite each family to bring a favorite Christmas cookie to share. Children can help bake, decorate, package, and exchange the cookies.

A White Elephant Gift Exchange

A traditional white elephant exchange can be a fun addition to your Christmas Play Party, especially when the goal is laughter and togetherness rather than expensive gifts.

The “Something I Love” Gift Exchange

One gift exchange game my family does every Christmas Eve is a little different. Instead of buying a gift for someone else, each person purchases or makes something they would personally love to receive and represents something about themselves. Everyone wraps their gift and brings it to the gathering without any tag on the gift saying who it is from. To play, everyone selects a number from a hat, and each person takes a turn choosing and opening a gift. After opening each gift, the person who opened the gift keeps guessing until they figure out who the gift is from. Then the giver of the gift tells why the gift represents something about themselves.

A Gift from Your Home

Here's another idea that doesn't require buying anything. Draw names ahead of time and ask each person to bring something they already own or something they have made for the person whose name they drew. When the gift is opened, the giver explains why they thought that person would enjoy it. This can turn a simple gift into something much more personal and meaningful.

Make Play Practice a Game!

When it comes to assigning parts, sometimes more than one person will want the same character. If that happens, put the names in a hat, close your eyes, and draw one.

Let God pick!

And remember that not everyone wants to be an actor or actress. That's perfectly wonderful, too. Some children would rather sit in the “audience” and watch the play so let them sit with the storyteller's family and be part of the celebration in a very “non-actor” way.

Two games I have used with my Sunday School classes are classic charades and a variation of charades that work especially well for practicing the characters in this play.

For the first game, simply play classic charades. Write characters or actions from the play on slips of paper, put them in a hat, and let the children take turns choosing one to act out while everyone else calls out guesses.

The second game, three people take turns acting out the same character pulled from the hat. Then comes the fun part! The “audience” is given soft little stuffed animals and votes for their favorite performance by tossing their stuffed animal toward the actor they enjoyed watching. The person with the most stuffed animals wins a prize. Everyone can

volunteer to be on the teams of 3 actors as many times as they wish, but I usually follow the rule that everyone must win a prize first before participants can start winning more than once. This usually works for shy or younger kids to be encouraged by older kids to go up and take a turn performing. When they go up and try, when it is time to vote by throwing stuffed animals, I usually call out excitedly, "I think ___(name)___ did great!" which is the clue for voters to throw their stuffed animal toward the brave actor. The point isn't really to choose a winner. The point is to compliment one another, encourage creativity and give children confidence to express themselves. I believe everyone should win by being themselves!

My #1 Rule: We Only Use Kind Words!

My number one rule for children playing together is simple:

"We only use kind words!"

I have said this many times in my Sunday School classes, and sometimes I have had to repeat it loudly when someone forgets.

Play acting is self-expression. When a child gets up in front of others and acts, they share a little piece of themselves. That takes courage.

We want to create a place where children feel safe enough to be silly, creative, imaginative, and themselves.

In a large classroom, after watching someone act out a part, I would have the children raise their hands and tell me something they liked about the performer's act.

In a smaller group, I might simply go around the room and let each person say one kind thing about the performance.

It changes the focus from judging one another to encouraging one another.

We only use kind words!

Performance Notes

There are two songs sung a cappella in the script, so you don't need any musical accompaniment.

The first is a Christmas version of **"Old MacDonald Had a Farm,"** sung by storyteller and his family.

The second song is sung by Mary to baby Jesus.

We have used **"Isn't He Beautiful"** by John Wimber, but you could also use the first verse of **"Mary Had a Little Lamb"** or the opening lines of **"Silent Night,"** sung slowly as a lullaby.

If your Mary doesn't want to sing, that's perfectly fine. Someone else can sing the song, or a group can sing while Mary simply smiles down at the baby and gently rocks Him in her arms.

And, to answer an often-asked question: we do not use a pillow under Mary's outfit to indicate a "before and after" arrival in Bethlehem.

As the play progresses, Mary and Joseph, the Angel, and the Innkeeper enter and exit the stage area, acting out the Christmas story as it is told by the storyteller then eventually come on stage to stay until the end.

The Shepherds, along with their sheep, and the Wisemen, along with their camel, follow the Star when they enter and remain on stage until the end.

The actors who are pantomiming the Bible story do not need to speak or make sounds. That said, I have often had children—and even parents—add their own lines.

On the Characters list, my recommendations about whether a child or adult should fill a particular role are only suggestions. Parents in traditional kid's roles and kids in traditional parent's roles can be very fun! It's a family play to create and imagine and travel together to the inside of the Christmas story!