

Ideas! for Hosting a Christmas Play Party

The skit could be performed by just one family at home, with parents in the narrative roles and children acting out the pantomime parts, or vice versa!

The skit could also be performed by a small group of families, with each family practicing a section of the play (one example of many - Dog family. Sheep & Shepherds. Wisemen, Camel & Star. Mary, Joseph, Angel & Innkeeper) then plan a Christmas Play Party to enjoy the play together.

You would not need to make costumes and props, even though kids love to dress up and making costumes and props is half the fun! Just keep things simple and have fun together!

There are four skits with a different storyteller in each, but the skits are primarily the same. My idea was for families to make the Christmas Play Party a tradition.

As children act out different characters over the years, they would have a new perspective of the Bethlehem experience, and a new understanding of God's truths.

Each of the four characters represent the themes of the four advent candles: Grammie Cat – Hope; Nana Dove – Peace; Daddy Dog – Joy; and Grandpa Donkey – Love. In the book, *“Grammie Cat's Christmas”* each character has a chapter in the book where they tell a story about themselves and how they found God's hope, peace, joy and love, with the intention of teaching children how to find God's hope, peace, joy and love for themselves.

Centering your party on one of these four themes creates opportunities for us to open our hearts and experience and learn more about Him.

Your Christmas Play Party could include reading that character's story from the book. You could also offer a special gift or surprise for children reciting from memory the Bible verse related to the theme, found at the end of each chapter of the book. (Some kids need more help to recite from memory, so being “close” and trying, or saying the verse together as a group works great.) I created games I played with my Sunday School classes to help children memorize a Bible verse. See *“Activities”* for a list of games.

Your Christmas Play Party could be combined with another activity to add to the fun.

- A Christmas cookie exchange

- A white elephant gift exchange

- One gift exchange idea is one my family does every Christmas Eve. Each person purchases or makes and wraps a gift that is something they would love to get! (opposite!) Then everyone selects a number out of a hat and each person takes a turn selecting and opening a gift. After opening it, they must keep guessing until they figure out who the gift is from. (We play, No stealing!) Then the person who gave the gift shares something about themselves and why they love the item they gave. Interesting enough, every time we play this, (mind you, with people you have known all your life) we would be pleasantly surprised at all the new things we learned about each other.

- Another gift exchange idea is to not buy anything but draw names ahead of the party and bring that person something you own or made. When they open your gift, you tell them why you thought they would enjoy the gift you gave them.

Family Practice Times:

As far as assigning parts, if more than one person wants the same part, put names in a hat, close your eyes and pull out a name. Let God pick them. Also, not everyone wants to be an actor or an actress. It is perfectly wonderful if they want to be in the “audience” and just watch and be a part of the storyteller’s family.

Make a game out of practice time together.

- Two games I have played before with my children in Sunday School are classic charades (see “*Activities*”), and a version of it where 3 people take turns acting out the same character pulled out of the hat. The “audience,” armed with soft little stuffed animals, then votes for their favorite act by throwing their stuffed animal at them. The person with the most stuffed animals thrown at them wins a prize. Of course, the younger kids are often shy, so after their first try, either myself or another person will usually call out loudly, “I think _____ (Johnny) did great!” That is the cue for others to throw their animal at the brave little actor. It is about complimenting and encouraging self-expression and creativity. I believe everyone should win by being themselves.
- My #1 rule. “We only use kind words!” Play acting is self-expression. My classes have heard me say this often, “We only use kind words!” I repeat it loudly when someone has broken the rule. In a large classroom full of kids, after watching someone act out a part, I would have the children raise their hand to say what they liked about the performer’s act. In small groups, I would go around the room and let each person say something kind about the performer’s act.

Performance Notes:

There are two songs sung a cappella in the script, so there is no need for musical accompaniment. The first is a Christmas version of “Old Mac Donald Had a Farm” sung by Daddy Dog and the dog family (or donkey, dove or cat 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 first lines of “Silent Night” sung slowly as a lullaby. If you have a Mary who does not want to sing, let the song be sung by someone else, or a group as Mary smiles down at the baby and 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” arriving to Bethlehem.

As the play progresses, Mary and Joseph, the Angel and the Innkeeper, enter and exit (stage left) acting out the Christmas story as told by the storyteller. The shepherds with their sheep and the wisemen with a camel follow the Star when they enter and stay on stage until the end. No words need to be spoken, or sounds made by the actors who are pantomiming the Bible story, even though I often have had children and parents add their own lines. On “The Characters” list, the recommendation for a child or an adult to fill the role is just a suggestion. Have fun with it.

The idea behind casting adults/parents in this children’s play was to create an opportunity for families to make memories together. Whether the parent is in the play or not, the child is performing with other adults and rehearsing at home becomes a game when parents and children imagine themselves as the different characters in the play and have fun together. By making up their own actions and sometimes adding lines to the play, (because pantomime actions are always open to adding words, especially when it comes from the actor’s heart) families can add their own joy to performing the play. Please feel free to create and improvise, and travel together to the inside of the Christmas story.