The Best Christmas Pageant Ever



By

Barbara Robinson

A Novel Study
by Nat & Joel Reed

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever

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About the Author: Nat Reed, a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years, served as a full-time instructor at Trent University's Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, please visit reednovelstudies.com.

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Suggestions and Expectations

Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one chapter of ***The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*** and is comprised of four distinct sections:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (page 7) as well as a **Checklist** (page 6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature*, *Grade 5*, makes reference to:

a) determining the meaning of words and phrases... including figurative language;
b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
c) compare and contrast two characters;
d) determine how characters … respond to challenges;
e) drawing inferences from the text;
f) determining a theme of a story... **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include: the true meaning of Christmas; acceptance of others whatever their appearance; showing compassion; the danger/outcome of prejudice.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *personification*
4. Identify *similes*
5. Identify *anagrams*
6. Listing compound words
7. Identifying parts of speech
8. Identify *syllables*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. The Five W's Chart
3. Create a synopsis
4. Identify the climax of the novel

Character Activities

1. Compare characters
2. The protagonist
3. Relating personal experience

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Create a poem
2. Research of a topic
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Write a description of personal feelings
6. Write a book review
7. Create a journal entry
8. Opinion writing

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a movie poster
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

The Herdmans are the worst kids in the history of the world. They lie, steal, smoke cigars, swear, and hit little kids. So no one is prepared when this outlaw family invades church one Sunday and decides to take over the annual Christmas pageant. None of the Herdmans has ever heard the Christmas story before. Their interpretation of the tale -- the Wise Men are a bunch of dirty spies and Herod needs a good beating -- has a lot of people up in arms. But it will make this year's pageant the most unusual anyone has seen and, just possibly, the best one ever. (Courtesy of the Publisher)

Author Biography

Barbara Robinson



Barbara Robinson was born and raised in Portsmouth, Ohio, the only child of Theodore L. Webb and his wife Grace Webb (née Mooney). Her father died when she was three. Robinson's mother, a schoolteacher in Portsmouth for forty-nine years, got her interested in books, and she began writing at an early age. She attended Allegheny College, where she received a bachelor's degree in theatre. In addition to her children's books, Robinson wrote many short stories in publications such as *McCalls*, *Redbook*, *Ladies Home Journa*l, and has several books of poetry. Robinson lived in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. She died July 9, 2013, at her home in Berwyn at the age of 85. Robinson had two daughters with her husband, John F. Robinson, and three grandchildren. (Adapted from Wikipedia)

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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

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Name: _____

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Chapter 1



Before you read this section:

It is important for an author to create an interesting **protagonist** (main character) for any work of fiction. *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever certainly features some fascinating characters (like the Herdman clan).* Think back on some of the most interesting main characters you have met in previous stories you've read. What do think makes for an intriguing character that really keeps your attention?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

chemistry	disguise	penitentiary	hydrangea
hysterical	contagious	blackmail	magnify

1. The principal feared that if Ollie had chicken pox, he might be _____.
2. Binoculars will _____ a distant object so it might be seen more clearly.
3. _____ is branch of science.
4. My aunt planted a _____ plant in her back yard.
5. I'm sure most students thought the Herdman kids would end up in a _____.
6. Ramona was almost _____ when her two pet mice were devoured by the cat.
7. What kind of _____ are you going to wear on Halloween?
8. Sometimes Imogene would _____ her classmates.

Questions 

1. What is the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One?

2. What evidence does the author provide to prove that the Herdman kids aren't too bright?

3. In your opinion, what was the worst thing one of the Hermans did in this chapter? Why was this action so bad?

4. Which of the Herdman kids do you think is the worst? Why?

5. What proof do we have that even their parents couldn't stand them?

6. How would this chapter's conclusion probably qualify as an example of a cliffhanger?

Language Activities

A. Research.



The Herdman's cat seems to be a real piece of work. In fact the mailman even suggests that it might not be a house cat at all, but a **bobcat. T**he bobcat or lynx is about twice the size of a normal house cat, with a short bobbed tail and a spotted coat. It is found in both the United States and Canada and even down into some parts of Mexico. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, research three interesting facts about this fascinating member of the cat family.

1	
2	
3	

B. A **simile** is a comparison using the words "like" or "as". We find an example of a simile in this section: *Sometimes Imogene would blackmail the fat kids if they had anything she wanted . . . like Wanda Pierce's charm bracelet.* Another example might be, *The rifle kicked like a mule.* What is being compared in this last example?

The rifle – a mule

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following item(s) with something from your own imagination:

a) the sound of a grandfather clock

b) When you come across another example of a simile in this novel, come back to this activity and record it below.

C. Anagrams



An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:

a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in this section of ***Spy School.***

Word	Anagram	Clue
thing		When the moon comes up.
being		Too much, too fast.
grade		Showed anger, big time!
shape		It's just a _____ she's going through."
time		A tiny arachnid.
state		Savor.

D. The Good Old Indispensable Adverb!



An **adverb** is a part of speech defined as *a modifier (or helper) of a verb* (usually an action word). Often an adverb will end in the letters ***ly*** (i.e. ***slowly***). Our novel features a good many creative adverbs.

1. *You could actually see the donuts all around Ollie Herdman's middle.*

   → In this sentence, which verb does ***actually*** modify? _____

2. *She nearly knocked Alice cross-eyed before one of the teachers saw her...*

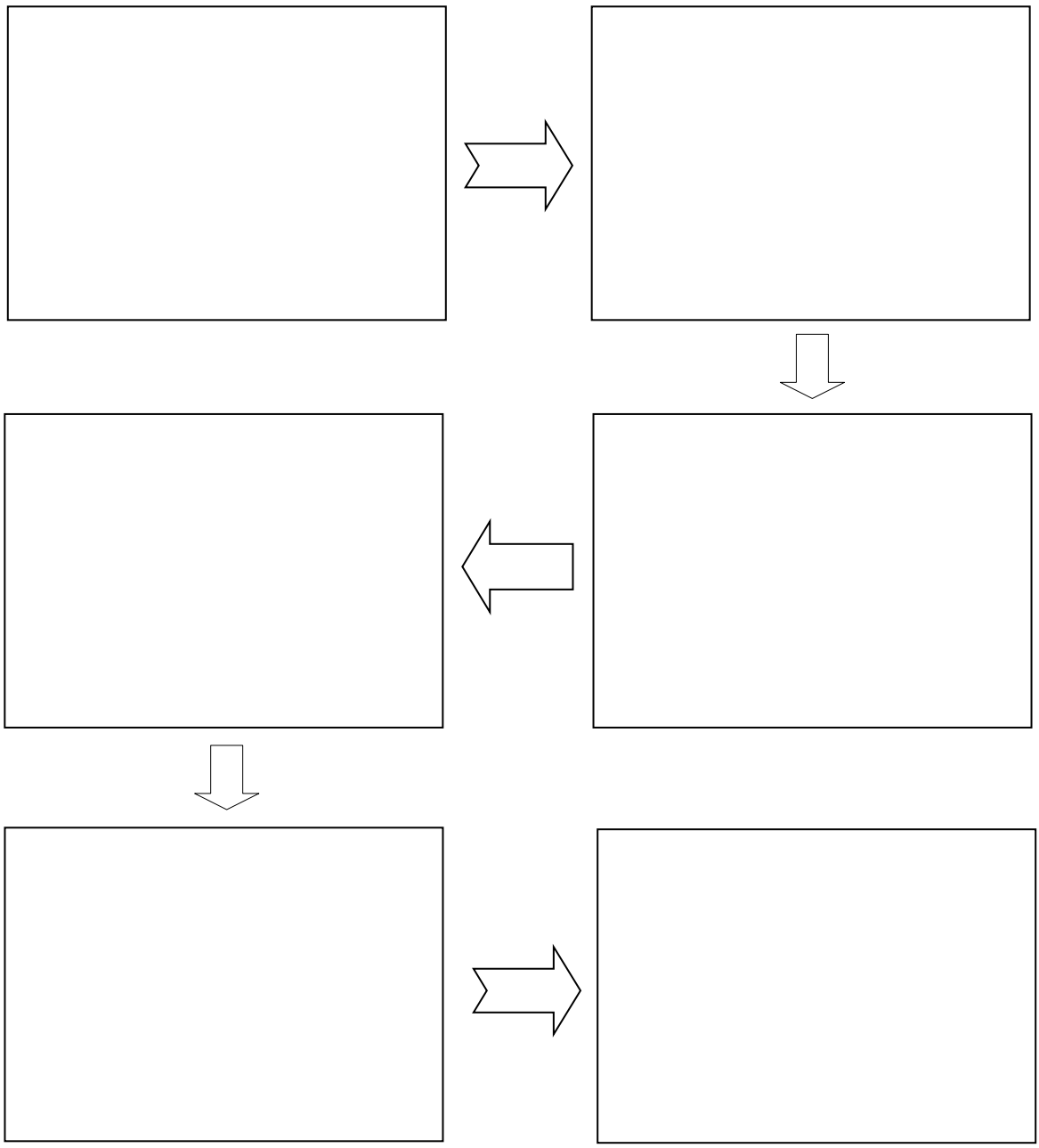
   → In this sentence, what verb does ***nearly*** modify? _____

3. *The nurse went all through her head with a fine-tooth comb and a magnifying glass, and finally said it was all right.*

   → In this sentence the adverb _____ modifies the verb _____

E. Sequence Chart

Choose what you consider to be the six most important events in this section. In each of the six boxes below list the six events that you have chosen, describing what happened and telling why you consider this to be an essential part of the story.



F. The Diamante Poem.



There are many forms of poetry available to the aspiring poet other than the rhyming poem. One of the forms of poetry that is the most fun to tackle is the **Diamante** poem.

The Diamante Poem

The diamante poem has a distinct form and a distinct shape. Directions for creating one is as follows:

Line 1 – Noun or subject – one word.
Line 2 – Two adjectives that describe Line 1.
Line 3 – Three ***'ing*** words that describe line 1 (i.e. *playing*).
Line 4 – Four nouns – the first two are connected with Line 1, the last two are connected with Line 7.
Line 5 – Three ***'ing*** words that describe Line 7.
Line 6 – Two adjectives that describe Line 7.
Line 7 – One noun synonym for the subject.

Following the above instructions, try your hand at writing a diamante poem using an idea, event or character from Chapter One as your inspiration.

Title: _____

Extension Activity

A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words



Use the three boxes to describe and illustrate the beginning, middle and end of this section.

Beginning Picture:	Beginning:
Middle Picture	Middle:
Concluding Picture:	Concluding: