

# BEHIND THE CURTAIN

A CREATIVE & THEATRICAL STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

## A CHARLIE BROWN™ Christmas



by Charles M. Schulz  
Based on the television special by Bill Melendez  
and Lee Mendelson  
Stage Adaptation by Eric Schaeffer  
By Special Arrangement with Arthur Whitelaw and Ruby Persson

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**RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 5 AND UP**

**NOVEMBER 25 – DECEMBER 23, 2023** PUBLIC SHOWS

**NOVEMBER 15 – DECEMBER 15, 2023** STUDENT MATINEE

As part of DCT's mission to integrate the arts into classroom academics, the *Behind the Curtain Resource Guide* is intended to provide helpful information for the teacher and students to use before and after attending a performance. The activities presented in this guide are suggested to stimulate lively responses and multi-sensory explorations of concepts in order to use the theatrical event as a vehicle for cross-cultural and language arts learning.

Please use our suggestions as springboards to lead your students into meaningful, dynamic learning; extending the dramatic experience of the play.

Your Family Arts Center  
**DALLAS CHILDREN'S THEATER**

Astonishing kids & families with the fun of Broadway-like plays & much more!

Dallas Children's Theater

# BEHIND THE CURTAIN

A Creative & Theatrical Resource Guide for Teachers

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Play ..... A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS

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A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Tams-Witmark LLC. concordtheatricals[dot]com.

"Just Like Me" is written by Lee Mendelson and David Benoit; Published by Songs of Universal, Inc., David Benoit Music and Lee Mendelson Film Productions, Inc. (BMI); All Rights Reserved.

DALLAS CHILDREN'S THEATER, one of the top five family theaters in the nation, serves over 150,000 young people and their families each year through its mainstage productions, educational programming and outreach activities. Since its opening in 1984, this award-winning theater has existed to create challenging, inspiring and entertaining theater, which communicates vital messages to our youth and promotes an early appreciation for literature and the performing arts. As the only major organization in Dallas focusing on theater for youth and families, DCT produces literary classics, original scripts, folk tales, myths, fantasies and contemporary dramas that foster multicultural understanding, confront topical issues and celebrate the human spirit.

DCT is committed to the integration of creative arts into the teaching strategies of academic core curriculum and educating through the arts. Techniques utilized by DCT artists/teachers are based upon the approach developed in *Integration of Abilities* and *Making Sense with Five Senses* by Paul Baker, Ph.D.

**TEKS that your field trip to Dallas Children's Theater satisfies are listed at the back of this Resource Guide.**

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# CURTAINS UP ON PUTTING A PERFORMANCE TOGETHER

Every DCT performance you see is the result of many people working together to create a play. You see the cast perform on stage, but there are people behind the scenes that you do not see who help before, during, and after every production.

## The DIRECTOR

Determines the overall look of the performance.

Guides the actors in stage movement and character interpretation.

Works with designers to plan the lights and sounds, scenery, costumes and make-up, and stage actions.

## The DESIGNERS

Plan the lights, sounds, scenery, costumes, make-up, and actions to help bring the director's vision to life.

There are also designers who work to create the posters, advertisements, programs, and other media for the performance.

## The STAGE MANAGER

Before the performance, they create a cue sheet to guide the crew in getting set pieces on and off the stage during the performances.

During the performance, the stage manager uses this cue sheet to direct people and things as they move on and off the stage.

## The CREW

Build and operate the scenery, costumes, props, and light and sound during the performance.

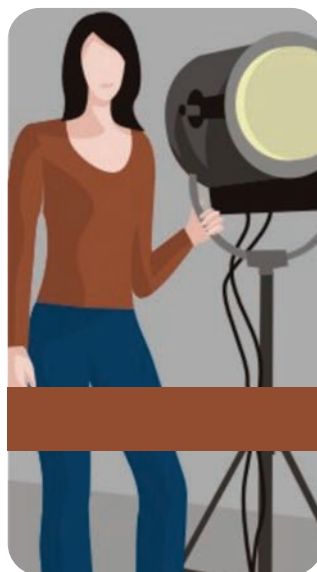
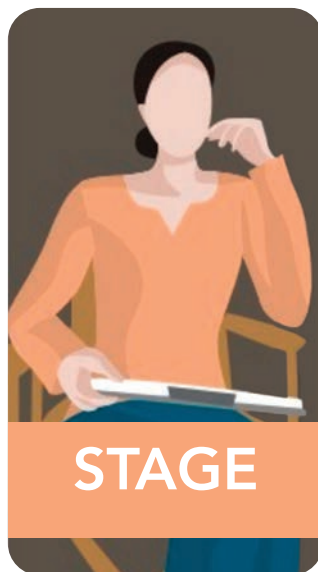
## The CAST

Includes all of the performers who present the story on stage.

## The AUDIENCE

That's right! There can be no performance without you—the audience. The role of the audience is unique because you experience the entertainment with the performers and backstage crew.

You are a collaborator in the performance and it is important to learn your role so you can join all the people who work to create this Dallas Children's Theater production.



# CURTAINS UP ON THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

Watching a play is different from watching television or a sporting event. When you watch T.V., you may leave the room or talk at any time. At a sporting event you might cheer and shout and discuss what you're seeing. Your role as a member of the audience in a play means you must watch and listen carefully because:

- You need to concentrate on what the actors are saying.
- The actors are affected by your behavior because they share the room with you. Talking and moving around can make it difficult for them to concentrate on their roles.
- Extra noises and movement can distract other audience members.



## Are you ready for your role in this performance?

Check the box next to the statements that describe proper etiquette for an audience member.

- Try your best to remain in your seat once the performance has begun.
- Share your thoughts out loud with those sitting near you.
- Wave and shout out to the actors on stage.
- Sit on your knees or stand near your seat.
- Bring snacks and chewing gum to enjoy during the show.
- Reward the cast and crew with applause when you like a song or dance, and at the end of the show.
- Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything or disturb other audience members when you are being seated.
- Keep all hands, feet, and items out of the aisles during the performance.

## CURTAINS UP ON THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE (contd.)



1. Draw a picture of what the audience might look like from the stage. Consider your work from the viewpoint of the actors on stage. How might things look from where they stand?
2. Write a letter to Charlie Brown or Snoopy telling what you liked about their characters.
3. Write how you think it might feel to be one of the actors. Are the actors aware of the audience? How might they feel about the reactions of the audience today? How would you feel before the play began? What about after the show ends?
4. Which job would you like to try? Acting, directing, lighting and sounds, stage manager, set designer, costume designer, or another role? What skills might you need to complete your job?

# CURTAINS UP ON THEATER VOCABULARY

ACTOR	any theatrical performer whose job it is to portray a character
CAST	group of actors in a play
CENTER STAGE	the middle of the stage
CHARACTER	any person portrayed by an actor onstage. Characters may often be people, animals, and sometimes things.
CHOREOGRAPHER	the designer and teacher of the dances in a production
COSTUME DESIGNER	the person who creates what the actors wear in the performance
DIRECTOR	the person in charge of the actors' movements on stage
DOWNSTAGE	the area at the front of the stage; closest to the audience
HOUSE	where the audience sits in the theater
LIGHTING DESIGNER	the person who creates the lighting for a play to simulate the time of day and the location
ONSTAGE	the part of the stage the audience can see
OFFSTAGE	the part of the stage the audience cannot see
PLAYWRIGHT	the person who writes the script to be performed. Playwrights may write an original story or adapt a story by another author for performance.
PLOT	the story line
PROSCENIUM	the opening framing the stage
PROJECT	to speak loudly
PROP	an object used by an actor in a scene
SET	the background or scenery for a play
SETTING	the time and place of the story
SOUND DESIGNER	the person who provides special effects like thunder, a ringing phone, or crickets chirping
STAGE CREW	the people who change the scenery during a performance
STAGE MANAGER	the person who helps the director during the rehearsal and coordinates all crew during the performance
UPSTAGE	the area at the back of the stage; farthest from the audience

# CURTAINS UP AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Attending a play is an experience unlike any other entertainment experience. Because a play is presented live, it provides a unique opportunity to experience a story as it happens. **Dallas Children's Theater** brings stories to life through its performances. Many people are involved in the process. **Playwrights** adapt the stories you read in order to bring them off the page and onto the stage. **Designers and technicians** create lighting effects so that you can feel the mood of a scene. **Carpenters** build the scenery and make the setting of the story become a real place, while **costumers** and **make-up designers** can turn actors into the characters you meet in the stories. **Directors** help actors bring the story to life and make it happen before your very eyes. All of these things make seeing a play very different from television, videos, computer games, or CDs of stories.



*Hold a class discussion when you return from the performance. Ask students the following questions and allow them to write or draw pictures of their experience at DCT.*

- What was the first thing you noticed when you entered the theater?
- What did you notice first on the stage?
- What about the set? Did the set change during the play? How was it moved or changed?
- Was there any space besides the stage where action took place?
- How did the lights set the mood of the play? How did they change throughout? What do you think house lights are? How do they differ from stage lights? Did you notice different areas of lighting?
- What did you think about the costumes? Do you think they fit the story? What things do you think the costume designers had to consider before creating the costumes?
- Do you think the actors were able to bring their characters to life? Did you feel caught up in the story?
- What things do you think they had to work on in order to make you believe they were the characters?

# CURTAINS UP ON ADAPTATION

An *adaptation* is a change made in something so that it can fit a new use. This performance of A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS is an adaptation of Charles Schulz's animated, cartoon T.V. show, into a play that is meant to be performed live on stage for an audience.

***Consider these questions for discussion before you attend the DCT production:***

- What kinds of things did the authors have to consider when writing a script of the story?
- What kinds of things would Charles Schulz be concerned about in making a live adaptation of his story?
- Do you think the performance will be shorter or longer than the animated version?
- What will the characters look like? Will they match their illustrations? What differences can you expect?
- What about the story? What changes might you expect in adapting it for the stage? Why would these changes be necessary?

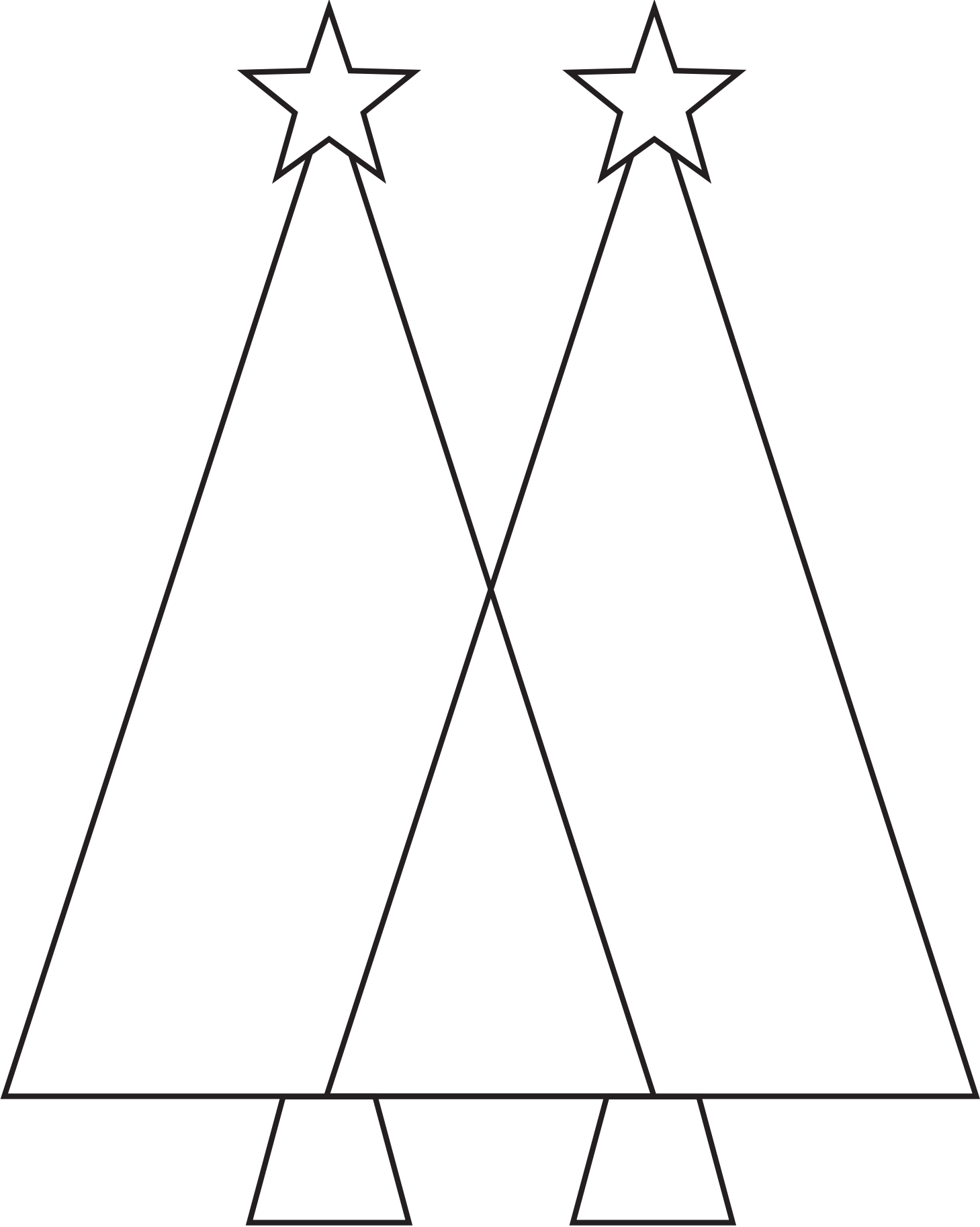
***After the performance, consider these questions:***

- Were there any characters or events that were in the television special but not in the play? Why do you think these choices were made?
- Did the changes make the story stronger or was it weaker because of them?
- What do you think the set and costume designers need to consider when bringing the television special to the stage?
- What things helped to tell the story on stage?



**Use the compare and contrast template on the next page to illustrate the similarities and differences between the television special and DCT's performance of A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS!**





## CURTAINS UP ON THE AUTHOR



**CHARLES SCHULZ** The poetry of Schulz's life began two days after he was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on November 26, 1922, when an uncle nicknamed him "Sparky" after the horse Spark Plug from the Barney Google comic strip. Sparky's father, Carl, was of German heritage and his mother, Dena, came from a large Norwegian family; the family made their home in St. Paul, where Carl worked as a barber. Throughout his youth, father and son shared a Sunday morning ritual of reading the funnies; Sparky was fascinated with strips like Skippy, Mickey Mouse, and Popeye. In his deepest desires, he always knew he wanted to be a cartoonist, and seeing the 1937 publication of his drawing of Spike, the family dog, in the nationally-syndicated *Ripley's Believe It or Not* newspaper feature was

a proud moment in the young teen's life. As Schulz continued to study and hone his artistic style from the late 1920s through the 1940s, the genre of comic art experienced a great shift. Newspaper editors in the late 1940s and 50s promoted a post-War minimalist model, pushing their cartoonists to shrink strip size, minimize pen strokes, and sharpen their humor with daily gags and cerebral humor for an ever-increasingly educated audience. Schulz's dry, intellectual, and self-effacing humor was a natural fit for the evolving cultural standards of the mid-20th century comics. The continuing popular appeal of Peanuts stems, in large part, from Schulz's ability to portray his observations and connect to his audience in ways that many other strips cannot. As each character's personality has been fleshed out over the years, readers came to intimately understand Linus' attachment to his Security Blanket, Charlie Brown's heartache over the Little Red-Haired Girl, Schroeder's devotion to Beethoven, Peppermint Patty's prowess in sports and failure in the classroom, and Lucy's knowledge of ... well ... everything. The rise in Snoopy's popularity in the 1960s had a direct correlation to his evolution from a four-legged pet to a two-legged, highly-imaginative and equal character in the strip, which allowed Schulz to take his storylines in increasingly new directions. Schulz's understated genius lay in his ability to keep his well-known and comfortable characters fresh enough to attract new readers while keeping his current audience coming back for more. He has been awarded with the highest honors from his fellow cartoonists, received Emmy Awards for his animated specials, been recognized and lauded by the U.S. and foreign governments, had a NASA spacecraft named after his characters, and inspired a concert performance at Carnegie Hall. And still today, the Peanuts Gang continues to entertain and inspire the young and the young at heart.

*Excerpted from the Charles M. Schulz Museum site: <http://schulzmuseum.org/>*

# CURTAINS UP ON ART

*"I never thought it was such a bad little tree. It's not bad at all, really. Maybe it just needs a little love."*

- Linus

## A Christmas Tree With Love

What does 'needing a little love' mean to a tree? Why did Charlie Brown think it was "the perfect tree"? How did it look in the end?

### You will need:

- Green construction paper
  - Scissors
  - Pencils
- 

Have students trace their hands and cut out the print. Post their cutouts in the shape of a Christmas tree on a bulletin board and encourage students to bring in pictures, decorations they make, kind words for classmates, or their own signatures to decorate the tree with LOVE.

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## Create Your Own Comic Strip

*"The only thing I ever wanted to be was a cartoonist. That's my Life. DRAWING."*

- Charles M. Schulz

### You will need:

- Colored pencils
  - Comic Strip template
  - Copies of newspaper comic pages or books of comic strips
- 

### Here's How:

- + Provide students with time to look through comics and study them. You might make them available several days before introducing them to the templates and drawing activity. Spend time discussing what messages the cartoonists might be trying to convey through their strips. Talk about the different drawing styles and the limited space cartoonists have to create their messages.
- + Afterward, give each student a comic strip template and have them create their own comic. When they have completed them, provide time to share them with the class and display them in your classroom or hallway.

# Comic Strip Template

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## CURTAINS UP ON MATH

*"How I love hearing that old money plate, that beautiful sound of cold, hard cash—that beautiful, beautiful sound."*

- Lucy

Lucy charges a nickel for "advice" on life's problems. Here are some math problems you can solve to help her keep track of her business finances.

1. On Tuesday, Lucy had five patients come by for advice. How many nickels would she have received? How much money did Lucy make on Tuesday?
2. Lucy would like to purchase a sparkling ornament for her Christmas tree that costs \$1.00. How many patients will she need to see in order to buy the ornament?
3. A patient gave Lucy a quarter for payment. How much money will she need to provide as change? How many nickels would that be?
4. Lucy agrees to see Charlie Brown twice a week for a month. How much money will he need to pay her at the end of the month?
5. Lucy empties her money can at the end of the day and finds three quarters, five dimes, seven nickels, and five pennies. How much money does she have?



***Set up your own classroom "The Doctor Is IN" booth and let students practice counting change and adding money using play coins.***

## CURTAINS UP ON SPEAKING KINDLY

*"This will be the worst Christmas play ever!"*

- Patty

### **Prepare for this activity by creating a large-sized paper image of Charlie Brown.**

After attending DCT's performance of A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS, hold a discussion with students about the way some of the characters speak to and about Charlie Brown at the beginning of the play and when he tries to direct the Christmas Pageant. How do the things they say affect his character?

Ask students to give specific examples of some of the unkind words said to Charlie Brown. Can these things be 'unsaid'? How does watching his reaction to these words make you feel? What would you say or do if you were one of the Peanuts kids?

Extend the activity by allowing students to cut a piece from the Charlie Brown picture for each of the unkind things they say. Discuss how Charlie Brown is "changed" once the pieces are taken from him. What can be done to repair him? Encourage them to think of kind words they might say to Charlie Brown and with each, tape a piece back on to the picture. Once the picture is repaired, ask students if Charlie Brown is the same as before these things were said. Then ask if they think speaking kindly to each other can have a similar effect on themselves and their friends.

## CURTAINS UP ON THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

### **Use the following questions to springboard a discussion of the performance with your class.**

- At the beginning of the show, Charlie Brown says he doesn't understand Christmas. Do you think he understands it better at the end of the show? How would you explain Christmas to someone like Charlie Brown?
- Commercialization means to exploit or manage something to make a profit. What other holidays are commercialized? What is lost when people commercialize things?
- Linus says that the tree Charlie Brown got 'just needed a little love.' What have you made better by giving a little love? What other things that don't cost money can you give during the holiday season, and the rest of the year?
- All the kids work together at the end to give Charlie Brown a Christmas gift. When have you worked together with others? How is working as a team different than doing something by yourself? How does cooperation and teamwork make you feel?



## **CURTAINS UP ON BEING YOU-NIQUE!**

*"I never eat December snowflakes. I always wait until January."*

- Lucy

Each of the Peanuts characters has qualities that are unique to them either in personality, the way they look, a talent they possess, or in the way they interact with others. Begin this activity by discussing what makes each character special, and different from each other. Talk about what it means to be UNIQUE.

Provide students with copies of the snowflake templates and discuss how all snowflakes are thought to be completely unique. Have them cut out the snowflakes.

Place students' names in a container and allow each child to choose a name. Encourage them to write a positive message about the student they chose on the snowflakes and hang them in the classroom as a reminder that each of them is unique and special.

Fill the classroom with a positive snowstorm by spending time each day to draw names and write messages to each other.

## **CURTAINS UP ON MORE**

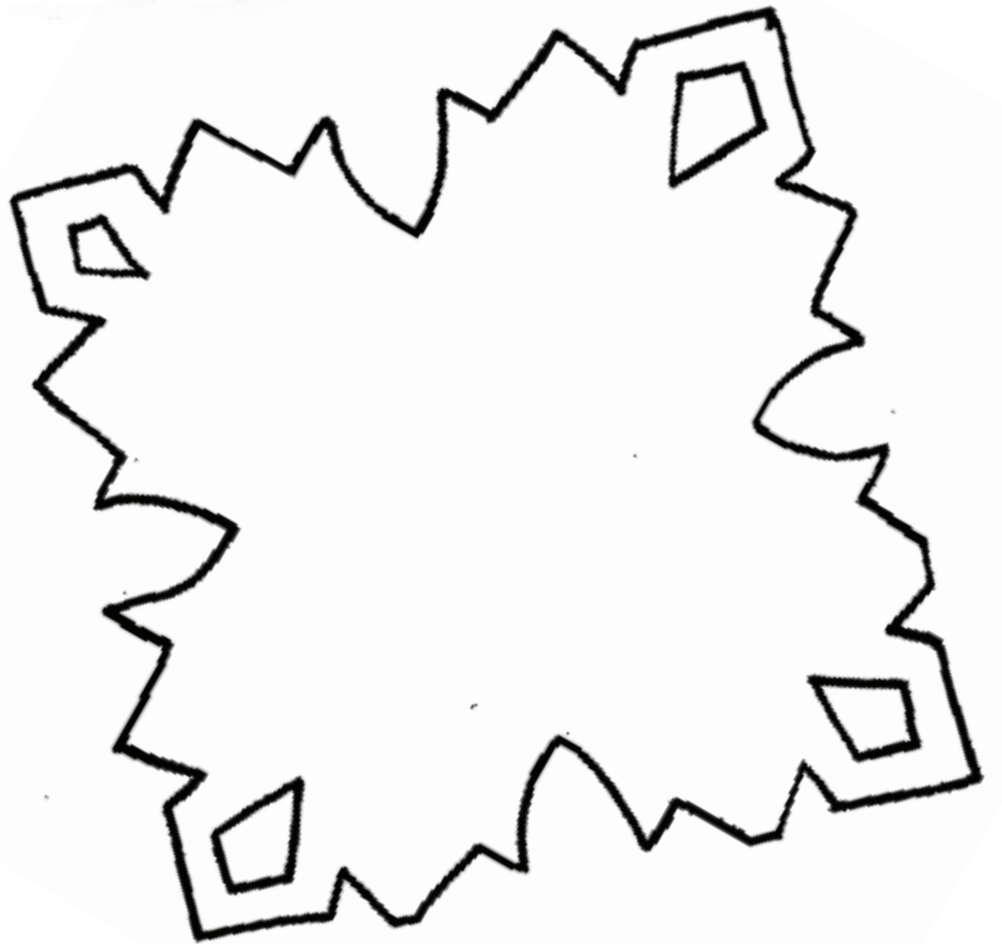
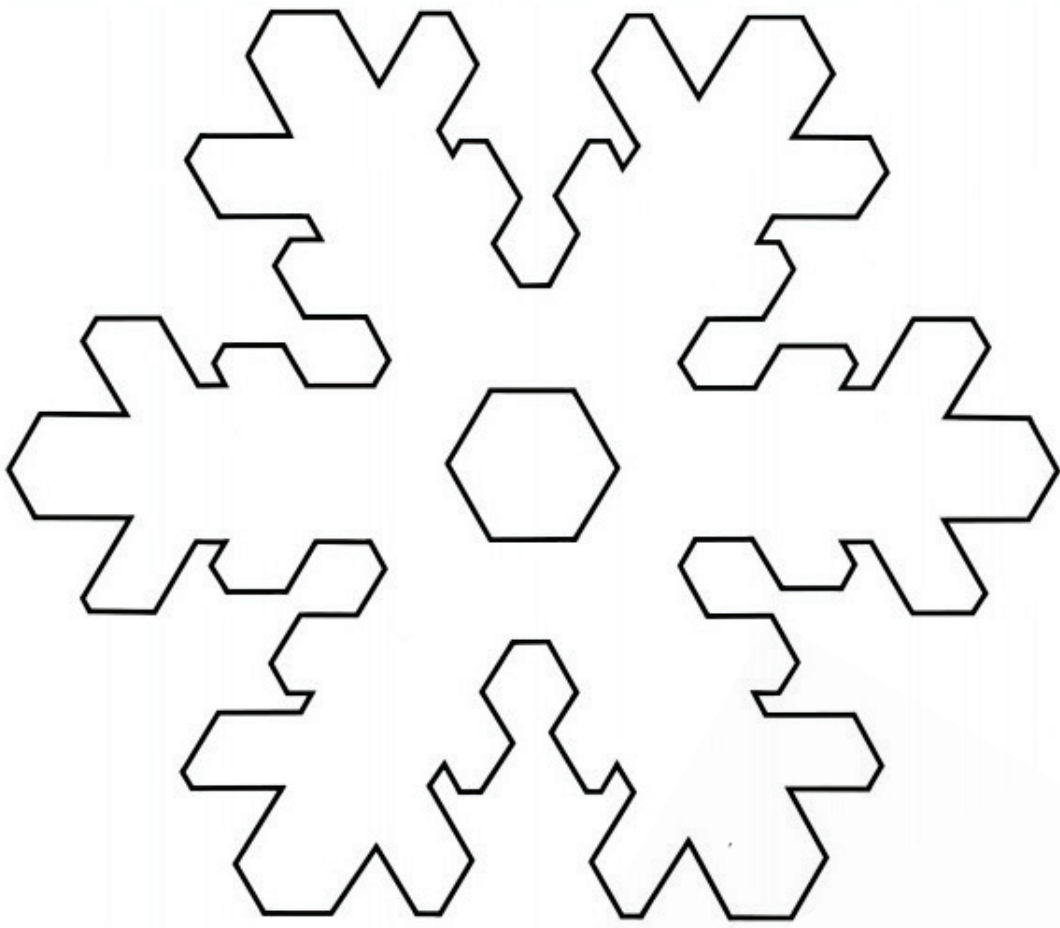
<http://schulzmuseum.org/>

If you love Charles Schulz, you'll love this website!

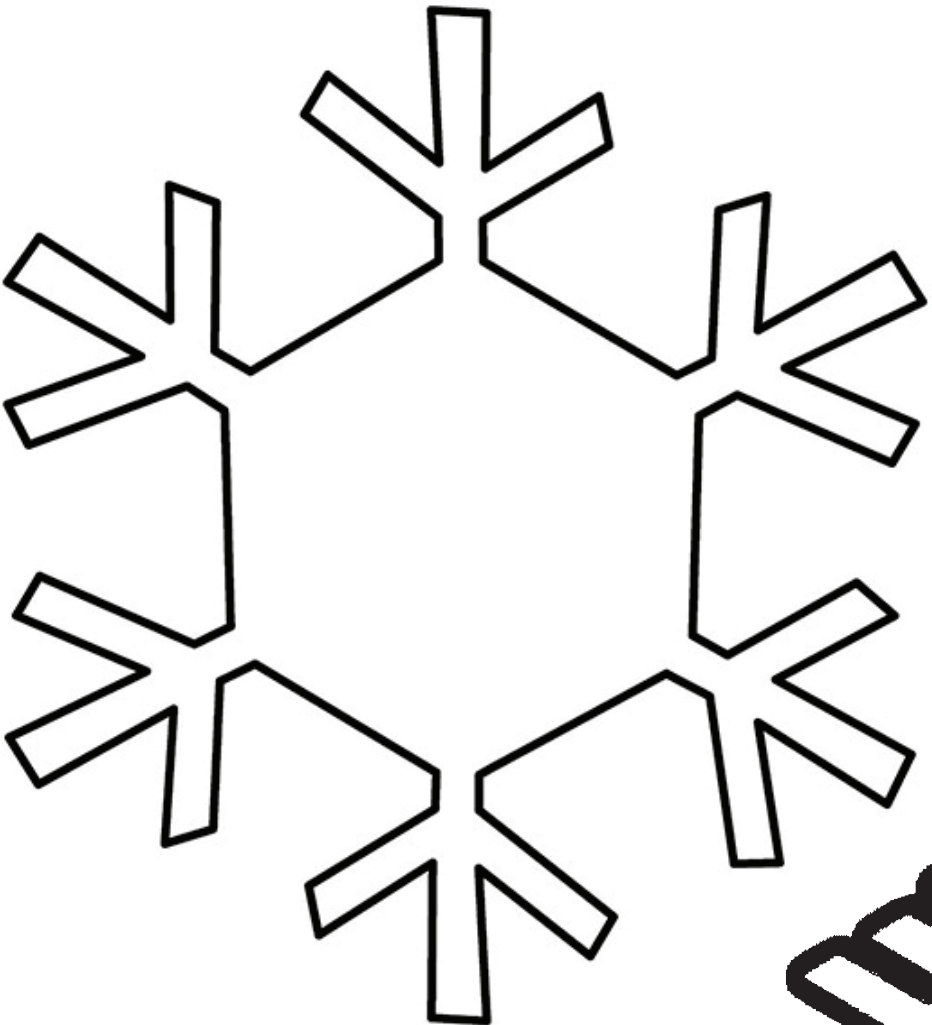
*Charlie Brown's Christmas Stocking* by Charles M. Schulz

*Happiness is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown* by Charles M. Schulz

*The Joy of a Peanuts Christmas: 50 Years of Holiday Comics!* by Charles M. Schulz







# T.E.K.S. SATISFIED BY A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS

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117.4 - Theatre, Kindergarten.

K.5 - Response/evaluation. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

A - Begin to identify appropriate audience behavior.

B - Respond to dramatic activities.

C - Demonstrate awareness of the use of music, creative movement, and visual components in dramatic play.

D - Observe the performance of artists and identify theatrical vocations.

117.7 - Theatre, Grade 1.

1.5 - Response/evaluation. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

A - Identify appropriate audience behavior.

B - Respond to and begin to evaluate dramatic activities.

C - Identify the use of music, creative movement, and visual components in dramatic play.

D - Observe the performance of artists and identify theatrical vocations.

117.10 - Theatre, Grade 2.

2.5 - Response/evaluation. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

A - Identify and apply appropriate audience behavior.

B - React to and begin to evaluate dramatic activities.

C - Employ music, creative movement, and visual components in dramatic play.

D - Observe the performance of artists and identify theatrical vocations.

117.13 - Theatre, Grade 3.

3.5 - Response/evaluation. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

A - Evaluate and apply appropriate audience behavior consistently.

B - Evaluate simple dramatic activities and performances.

C - Incorporate music, movement, and visual components in dramatic play.

D - Observe the performance of amateur and professional artists and begin to compare vocations in theatre.

117.16 - Theatre, Grade 4.

4.5 - Response/evaluation. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

A - Identify and apply appropriate audience behavior at performances.

B - Define visual, aural, oral, and kinetic aspects of informal play-making and formal theatre and discuss these aspects as found in art, dance, and music.

C - Compare and contrast the ways ideas and emotions are depicted in art, dance, music, and theatre and select movement, music, or visual elements to enhance classroom dramatizations.

D - Compare theatre artists and their contributions.