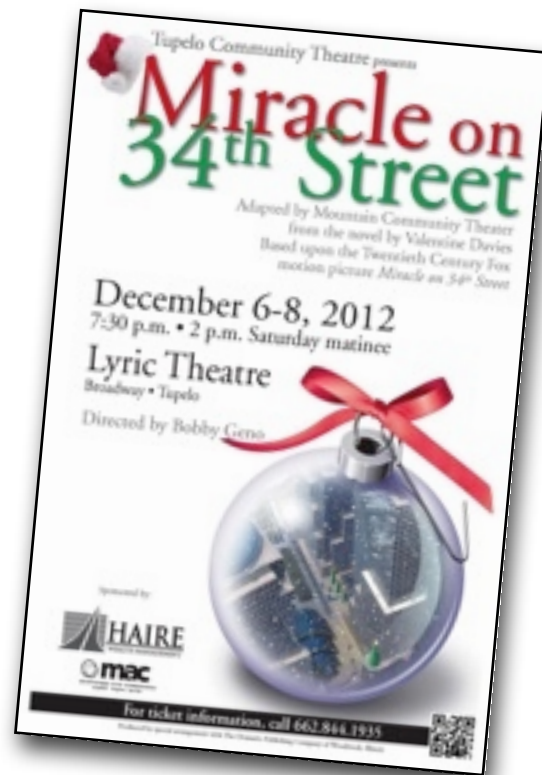




Miracle on 34th Street

Study Guide

Tupelo Community Theatre production based on the 1947 film written by Valentine Davies
<http://www.tct.ms> • Miracle on 34th Street • December 6-8, 2012



Note:

This study guide was adapted with permission from a study guide prepared by Catherine Bush, playwright in residence for the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia.

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The ideas in this study guide are intended as starting points for a cross-curricular study based upon the 2012 Tupelo Community Theatre production of *Miracle on 34th Street*. The study guide is primarily aimed at students in primary, intermediate, and secondary grade bands. The learning activities primarily seek to complement and extend the pleasure students will derive from their visit to the theatre while also addressing standards from Mississippi curriculum frameworks and Common Core State Standards. Although this study guide is by no means exhaustive, it is offered as a loose guide for planning.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Setting

Various locations in New York City

Characters

Doctor Pierce

Kris Kringle

Doris Walker

Susan Walker

Fred Gayley

Judge Harper

Sawyer

Mr. Macy

Mr. Bloomingdale

Shellhammer

Finley

Mara

Halloran

Teenagers/Children/Elves/Parents/Pedestrians/Shoppers, etc.

Synopsis

Macy's Department Store in New York City hires Kris Kringle, an old man who has been living in a retirement home, as a replacement Santa. His effect on the customers and the commercial rivalry astonishes his employers, especially Doris Walker, the hard-working personnel manager. Not everyone, however, perceives Kris as gentle and well-meaning. Macy's vocational counselor and self-appointed psychologist, "Dr." Sawyer, considers Kris to be deluded and dangerous. She has Kris committed to Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital, where Kris awaits a competency hearing. His only hope of escape lies with a young lawyer named Fred Gayley, Doris Walker's neighbor. Fred is in love with the cynical Doris and wants nothing more than to marry her and be a father to her daughter, Susan. But convincing Doris he is worthy of her love is not easy; in fact, it's almost as difficult as the new challenge that awaits him in court: convincing the judge -- and all the rest of the world -- Santa Claus really does exist. But Fred has Kris Kringle on his side, as well as the United States Postal Service, and with a little help from the power of belief, is able to pull off a true Christmas Miracle.

Biography of the Author

Valentine Davies was born August 25, 1905, in New York City. After graduating from the University of Michigan, he spent some time in the Coast Guard before moving back to New York, then Hollywood, to pursue a writing career. In 1947, Davies wrote the novel, *Miracle on 34th Street*, which became a movie the same year, earning the author an Academy Award for Best Original Story. He also wrote and directed *The Benny Goodman Story* (1995) and was nominated for another Academy Award for the screenplay of *The Glen Miller Story* in 1955. He died in Hollywood on July 23, 1961.

TEACHING IDEAS

Before You see the Play

Legend of Santa Claus

Elementary/Middle/High School

Find out all you can about the legend of Santa Claus. Who was the original Santa? Show on a map, the names by which he is known in other parts of the world. How do other countries' Santas differ from our own? Find as many pictures of him as you can. Make a display of the information and pictures for your classroom wall. Write a narrative essay retelling the legend of Santa Claus or an expository essay comparing and contrasting the legends from different parts of the world.

[MS Curriculum: ELA- Competencies 2, 3, and 4; SS-Content Strand: Culture]

Find some poems which have Father Christmas in their theme, for example Roger McGough's 'The Man who Steals Dreams', 'The Night Before Christmas' by Clement C. Moor, 'Santa Go Home' by Ogden Nash, 'Has Father Christmas Forgotten Me?' by Michael Rosen and 'Kris Kringle' by Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Write these out and add them to your display. You may wish to write some poems of your own. Create a circle map for Santa Claus, using details from the poems and pictures.

[MS Curriculum: ELA- Competencies 2, 3, and 4]

Claus Crafts

Elementary

Design and make some decorations which feature Santa Claus, they could be to hang on the Christmas tree or made into table ornaments or you may just want to make a model, it's really up to you.

[MS Curriculum: Visual Art Goals 1 & 3]

Should they believe in Santa?

Middle/High School

Should they believe in Santa? When did you stop believing that Santa was really the person who delivered your presents on Christmas Day? How did you feel about it when you knew?

Take a vote to see who, in your class, agrees or disagrees with the idea that young children should be taught to believe in Santa Claus. Some of you may wish to say that you're not sure. That's just fine and anyone is free to change his or her mind. Now arrange to have a debate. Choose three people to speak who strongly agree that young children should believe in Santa Claus and choose another three who strongly disagree. Let them all take it in turn to speak for two minutes giving the reasons for their views. When they have finished, anyone can join in the debate. When it is over, take another vote to see how many people have changed their minds. After you have seen the play, it would be a good idea to take a third vote.

[MS Curriculum ELA Framework: Competency 3]



After You see the Play

Which is Better, the Lie that Draws a Smile or the Truth that Draws a Tear?

Elementary/Middle

Doris Walker, the personnel manager from Macy's Department Store and mother of Susan, believes that the truth is one of the most important things in life and that believing in myths and fantasies eventually makes you unhappy. On the other hand, her friend Fred Gayley is shocked when Susan tells him that she knows that Santa is not real.

Read the following statements and fill in the chart below to show which statements describe Doris and which describe Fred. If you wish, you may use some of the statements for both of these characters.

- a) wants Susan to be a happy child
- b) finds it hard to have faith in others
- c) finds it easy to have faith in others
- d) is an honest, good person
- e) is loyal
- f) is prepared to stand up for what she or he believes
- g) always does for others what is in their best interests
- h) always tells the truth

Doris	Fred

Is seeing believing? How do the actors and playwright persuade us that it would be better for Susan to believe in Santa Claus? Think about the expressions on her face. How does she change after she begins to believe in Santa Claus?

In a court of law, we have to swear to tell the truth. Is the little girl telling the truth when she says Mr. Kringle is Santa Claus? How does Kris persuade us that he is telling us the truth about his identity? Does evidence matter in this case? Why does the court ultimately rule in Kris's favor?

[MS Curriculum: ELA- Competencies 2, 3]

Signs and Symbols

Elementary

Santa Claus is a symbol of Christmas. Write down as many words as you can think of that the image of Santa brings to your mind.

On a large piece of paper, draw six more symbols of Christmas and under each one write at least four words for which they stand.

Make a collection of signs and symbols and display them in your classroom. How do they communicate their messages?

Colors also work on a symbolic level and often in plays, the director uses colors and scenery to help tell their stories. How did the colors in the costume and set help to tell the story of the play? Did the scenery and costumes change to reflect the changes in the stories mood?

[MS Curriculum: ELA- Competencies 2, 3,]

Commercialism and Christmas

Middle/High School

In the play, Kris complains that “we’re losing the spirit of giving from our heart.” He complains about the “commercialism” of Christmas. You may have heard people say that Christmas is too commercialized these days.

What do they mean by this? What is commercialism? Clearly stores need to make money and the men and women that work for Macy’s and Bloomingdales are shrewd business people. Do you agree that Christmas is too commercialized? Why or why not?

Write a blog entry or letter to the editor expressing your feelings about the commercialism of a favorite holiday.

[MS Curriculum: ELA- Competencies 1, 3, and 4]

The Lost Scene

Middle/High School

Create a scene that isn’t in the production. Write a scene that occurs before the beginning of the play.

How did Kris Kringle end up in a retirement home? Write a scene that occurs after the play ends.

Where is Kris at the end of the play? Write dialogue for the scene, recruit actors, and film the scene or give a dramatic reading.

[MS Curriculum: ELA- Competencies 2, 3, and 4]

Other Questions/Discussion Starters

Elementary

- 1) If you could make a Christmas wish list, what would be on it? What was your favorite Christmas gift ever? What made it so special? Is it better to give or receive? Why?
- 2) This play is called *Miracle on 34th Street*. What is the “miracle”? What is the significance of 34th Street?
- 3) Design a Christmas card to send to friends and family that depicts your favorite scene from *Miracle on 34th Street*.
- 4) Macy’s Santaland is world famous. Draw a picture of what you think Santaland looks like.



Middle

- 1) Why is the trial of Kris Kringle such a difficult one for Judge Harper? What are his conflicts?
- 2) Find a map of New York City online and study it. New York City is made up of five “boroughs”: Manhattan, The Bronx, Staten Island, Queens, and Brooklyn. In which borough is Macy’s Department Store? Looking at the map locate the following: Macy’s Department Store, Bellevue Hospital, The New York State Supreme Court Building, and the U.S. Post Office’s 8th Avenue branch.
- 3) Imagine that you are a psychologist. Create a list of questions that you would pose to people who believe that they are the tooth fairy, the Easter Rabbit, or perhaps the Great Pumpkin.
- 4) Research the history of the x-ray machine. Why would it be the perfect gift for Dr. Pierce?



High School

- 1) Watch the 1947 movie version of *Miracle on 34th Street*. How does this production differ from it? In this production, the setting is updated to the current day. What impact does this change in setting have on the story?



- 2) Kris Kringle's biggest challenge in this play is proving to the world who he is. How can you prove who you are? What methods do we use to identify ourselves? What happens if our "proof of identity" is lost or stolen? How big a threat is "identity theft"?

Vocabulary

intangible
psychiatrist
faith
fantasy
myth
delusion
charade
atrocious
detrimental
deranged