



The Best Christmas Pageant Ever Study Guide



by Andrew Clausen

CD Version

For the novel by
Barbara Robinson



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The Best Christmas Pageant Ever Study Guide

A Progeny Press Study Guide

by Andrew Clausen

with Michael Gilleland

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Synopsis

Everyone agreed that the six Herdman kids were the worst kids in the world. They lied, they stole, they hit little kids, they talked dirty, and even the girls smoked cigars. Sunday School was a safe haven for the other children because the Herdmans never went there. But when the Herdmans show up one Sunday looking for chocolate cake, they hear about the Christmas pageant and decide they want to take part.

To the dismay of everyone involved, the Herdmans land the main parts in the play. Although everyone expects a disaster, the Herdmans bring a fresh interpretation to the Christmas story, a story they had never heard before.

Vocabulary

Chapters 1 & 2:

A word is *in context* if we see it in the sentence where it was written. It is *out of context* when it is by itself. The following underlined words are shown in the context of the sentence from the book. See if you can figure out from reading the sentence what the underlined words mean, then write the meaning from the dictionary.

1. Miss Brandel was sort of a wreck too, and most of the first graders were hysterical, so somebody took them outdoors and let them have recess for the rest of the day.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

2. “It could be measles or chicken pox . . . any number of things . . . contagious things.”

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

3. Sometimes Imogene would blackmail the fat kids if they had anything she wanted . . . like Wanda Pierce’s charm bracelet.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

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4. For awhile she got ten cents a week from Floyd Brush, till Floyd caught double pneumonia and lost fifteen pounds and didn't care anymore.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

5. We figured they were headed straight for hell, by way of the state penitentiary . . . until they got themselves mixed up with the church, and my mother, and our Christmas pageant.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

6. Mrs. Armstrong was also chairman of the Ladies' Aid Bazaar, and coordinator of the Women's Society Pot-luck Supper, . . .”

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

7. “Not a very Christian sentiment,” my father said.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

8. “Maybe not, but it's a very practical one,” mother told him.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

Chapter 1

Fact and Opinion:

A *fact* is a true statement about something. It can be proven, and usually does not involve personal feelings. An *opinion* cannot be proven; it merely states what a person feels or thinks about something or someone. Below are a list of statements about the story. Write fact or opinion in the blank after each statement.

Example: The Herdmans were the worst kids in the world. opinion

1. The Herdmans set fire to Fred Shoemaker's toolhouse. _____
2. The Herdmans stole doughnuts from the firemen. _____
3. The Herdmans' cat was mean. _____
4. The cat had one short leg, a broken tail, and one missing eye.

5. Mrs. Herdman walked the cat on a length of chain. _____
6. The Herdmans' cat ate Ramona Billian's two pet mice. _____
7. Claude Herdman wasn't very smart. _____
8. Imogene Herdman was just like the other Herdmans. _____
9. Mrs. Herdman worked double shifts at the shoe factory. _____
10. Gladys was the meanest Herdman of them all. _____

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Point of View:

Point of view is the position from which a story is being told. *First-person narrative* means the story is told by one of the characters in the story. The action of the story and the feelings of the characters are limited to the narrator's knowledge. The personal pronouns *I, my, mine, etc.*, indicate first-person narrative. In *second-person narrative* you, the reader, are a character in the story. Second-person narrative is an uncommon form. In *third-person narrative* the story is told from an outside viewpoint. It is the most common point of view used. Third-person narrative lets readers know about the actions and feelings of several or all characters.

1. What point of view is used in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*? How do you know?

2. So far, what can we tell about the narrator of the story?

Questions:

1. Write three or four sentences describing the Herdmans.

2. What happened to Mr. Herdman?

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3. Why isn't Mrs. Herdman home very often?

Thinking About the Story:

4. What is a blessing in disguise?

5. How was the burning down of Fred Shoemaker's toolhouse a blessing in disguise?

6. The narrator describes Alice Wendleken as "nasty-clean." What do you think this means?

7. The narrator says "As far as anyone could tell, Imogene was just like the rest of the Herdmans." What might this statement imply about Imogene Herdman?

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8. Write three or four sentences describing Imogene.

9. Reread the last sentence of Chapter 1. Considering the title of the story, what does the last sentence of Chapter 1 lead you to believe?

Dig Deeper:

10. Read Luke 6:27–31. What does it mean to “do to others as you would have them do to you”?

11. If you lived near the Herdmans, would you have a hard time following this command? Why or why not?

12. According to these verses, how should we treat those who mistreat us?

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Answer Key

Chapter 7

Similes:

Answers will vary. Accept reasonable responses.

1. The way the Herdmans behaved in school is being compared to piranhas in a feeding frenzy: a lot of dangerous commotion.
2. The first rehearsal is being compared to a long three-hour bus ride. A long bus ride gets boring and the passengers get restless, so the children at rehearsal must have been similarly restless.
3. The entry of the Herdmans is being compared to the way outlaws enter a saloon. Outlaws might enter a saloon looking for trouble or planning to cause trouble.
4. The way the Herdmans looked is being compared to the way people look on Halloween. On Halloween people dress in costumes, frightening or funny, but certainly out-of-the-ordinary or unnatural.
5. The noise at the back of the church is being compared to the sound of someone dropping all the collection plates: a sudden, loud, clanking sound.
6. Mother's optimism about the Christmas pageant is being compared to General Custer being optimistic at Little Big Horn. At Little Big Horn General Custer and his men were killed. (This one may require some explanation to students.)
7. The humming is being compared to the sound of an old refrigerator. One thinks of the sound of an old refrigerator as monotone and annoying.
8. The way Ralph and Imogene looked is being compared to the way refugees look on the news: bewildered and confused about being in a strange place, not sure of what to do next.
9. The way the shepherds banged their crooks around (and the sound it makes) is being compared to the banging around of hockey sticks. The image of a rough, chaotic hockey game is brought to mind.
10. Imogene's sudden understanding of Christmas is being compared to the way one suddenly comes down with chills and fever: it happens quickly, and there is no control over the way one's body reacts to the illness.

Questions:

1. They brought a ham.
2. They got the ham from their family's Christmas food-basket.
3. The narrator was impressed because the Herdmans had never given anything away before.
4. In these verses, the widow gave all she had to live on. She gave out of her poverty, and Jesus commended her for it. No one would ask the Herdmans, who were needy themselves, to give anything or contribute to any sort of charitable cause. And yet, out of their poverty, they gave.
5. Near the end of the pageant, she began crying.
6. Answers will vary. This indicated that in spite of her rough exterior, Imogene's heart was softened in some way through this pageant. Perhaps she only then came to an understanding of the Christmas story and what Jesus' birth meant.
7. Answers will vary. The Herdmans acted as people would have really acted in the circumstances, because they'd never heard the Christmas story before. All the nice sentiment about the story was taken away, and what was left was very plain and easy to understand.
8. Answers will vary. Man judges people based on what they look like and what they act like, but God overlooks that. He sees into the heart and can see how a person feels, what motivates a person, and why they do what they do.
9. Answers will vary. The people at the church saw a bunch of misfit troublemakers.
10. Answers will vary. Perhaps one would see that the Herdmans, like everyone, are in need of acceptance, love, and the grace of God.
11. Answers will vary.

Word Search

1. Herdmans; 2. the cat; 3. shepherd; 4. Alice; 5. Charlie; 6. Imogene, Ralph; 7. Wise Men; 8. Gladys; 9. Herod; 10. cigar; 11. ham; 12. pageant; 13. Christmas, Jesus.