



**Holiday Study Guide – December 2019**  
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## Characters:

**Charles Schulz:** the creator of the *Peanuts* comic strip, which ran from 1950-2000 and featured all the characters that appear in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and many more!

**Charlie Brown**

**Snoopy**

**Sally**

**Lucy**

**Linus**

**Pig Pen**

**Frieda**

**Schroeder**

**Violet**

**Patty**

**Shermy**

## Summary:

*Schulz*

Charles Monroe Schulz was born on November 26, 1922 in Minneapolis, MN and grew up in nearby St. Paul. Although he claims early in the monologue to be a “fairly person” with “nothing very remarkable” in his upbringing, he went on to create the wildly popular comic strip *Peanuts*, which ran from 1950-2000 and remains one of the longest continuous stories about a single character by a single author. In this one-man show Schulz leads the audience through his life and career as a cartoonist and describes how he developed his iconic characters (many of which appear in *A Charlie Brown Christmas!*)

*A Charlie Brown Christmas*

The play opens with the children ice skating on a pond. As Charlie Brown and Linus catch up to their friends, Charlie Brown confides that he feels like something is wrong with him because he just can't get into the holiday spirit, saying, “I just don't understand Christmas I guess.” Afterwards when he checks his mailbox, he finds that no one has sent him a Christmas card.

The children catch snowflakes on their tongues and throw snowballs at a tin can sitting on a wall, until Linus uses his blanket as a sling and knocks the can down. Meanwhile, Charlie Brown visits Lucy at her psychiatric booth to ask for advice. Lucy tries to help Charlie Brown “label” his fears by asking if he's afraid of cats,

staircases, the ocean, crossing bridges, responsibility, or, finally, *everything*. Charlie Brown tells her that his problem is that he just doesn't feel happy with Christmas, and that he feels "sort of let down," and Lucy suggests he get involved in the holiday spirit by directing a Christmas play.

When Charlie Brown gets home he sees that Snoopy is decorating his doghouse for a "spectacular, super-colossal" Christmas decorating contest in order to win a cash prize. Charlie Brown's sister, Sally, asks Charlie Brown to write a letter to Santa for her. In her letter she asks for a long list of presents and says that if Santa can't manage sending the presents he can just send money in "tens and twenties."

Rehearsal for the Christmas play begins. Charlie Brown tries to direct his friends, but they keep distracting each other or refusing to work together. When Charlie Brown laments that the play is "all wrong," Lucy tells him to just accept that the whole holiday is just a big "commercial racket." She then suggests that Charlie Brown go pick out a big aluminum Christmas tree

Charlie Brown and Linus look for a tree, and in the middle of the fantastical artificial trees Charlie Brown finds a little natural tree. Linus says that it doesn't "fit the modern spirit," but Charlie Brown picks it out anyway. When he shows the tree to his friends, however, they insult him for picking such a "poor tree." Charlie Brown concedes that maybe Linus was right and maybe Charlie Brown just doesn't know what Christmas is about. In response, Linus quotes a passage from the Gospel of Luke, ending by saying "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

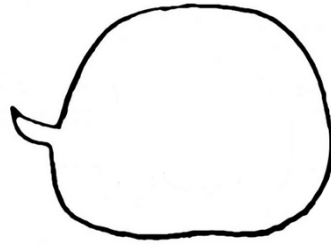
Charlie Brown takes the tree home and sees that Snoopy has won first prize in the contest. Charlie Brown decides to decorate the little tree anyway, saying that he won't let commercialism ruin his Christmas, but when he adds an ornament to the tree it falls over. He wails that "everything I touch gets ruined!" and runs away. The other children begin to gather around the tree and decorate it together with Snoopy's lights from his doghouse. As they decorate, they say it isn't such a bad tree and that it just needed a little love. Charlie Brown returns, and the children wish him a Merry Christmas. The play ends with all the children singing carols together.

## Did You Know?

Adapted from Schulz by James Froemel, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/8-things-didnt-know-peanuts>,  
<https://www.metv.com/lists/9-festive-facts-about-a-charlie-brown-christmas>, and  
[https://kids.kiddle.co/Charles\\_M.\\_Schulz](https://kids.kiddle.co/Charles_M._Schulz)

- Charles Schulz's father was a barber, just like his character Charlie Brown's father
- By the time of Schulz's death, *Peanuts* was running in over 2,600 newspapers worldwide and reaching a readership of over 350 million people
- Many of the *Peanuts* characters are based on people Schulz knew; Charlie Brown was his colleague at Art Instruction, Inc., Linus and Shermy came from Schulz's friends Linus Maurer and Sherman Plepler, and Snoopy was loosely based on Schulz's childhood dog Spike
- Schulz's Army division helped liberate the Dachau concentration camp during World War II
- One of Schulz's favorite painters was Andrew Wyeth, and he loved classical music
- The team for *A Charlie Brown Christmas* had six months to create the television special and a budget of only \$76,000 — compare that to *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, which had a budget of \$300,000 just a year later
- The television network CBS didn't think that the special would be very popular, since they thought it was too slow and lacked energy
- Aluminum Christmas trees were very popular through the mid 1960's before the special aired, but after *A Charlie Brown Christmas* aluminum trees lost popularity in favor of natural trees
- Many of the voice actors in the special were children and too young to read, so a network executive had to recite the lines to them, and the children would repeat the lines for the recording
- Schulz died on February 12, 2000, just one day before his final comic strip was scheduled to run. Schulz had predicted that his work would outlive him, and he requested that no other artist be allowed to draw the *Peanuts* comic strip

Draw your own *Peanuts* character. Give yourself a catchphrase, too!



Create your own four-panel comic strip with your new character:


**A Charlie Brown Christmas Word Search:**

N C L I I S S L Y E T D W C R  
I H S A W N I H T C I T H S E  
U R T R I N N A E R U A Y N H  
G I S N U C C K E R R L Y O T  
N S T S E I R C E L M P E W O  
E T A W D M T E I E O Y K B R  
P M R N X O A E M O P H Z A B  
I A Y X R E B N N M H E T L H  
G S T N D R X S R H O Y R L O  
P T S S O I P U V O P C M G C  
E R V W A I B O H P O T N A P  
N E N T X B E E T H O V E N D  
Y E D R E H P E H S Y L L A S  
C A R O L S X D Q M R Z B J Q  
P Z T P R Y H W L H Q W N U A

BEETHOVEN  
CHRISTMAS TREE  
INNKEEPER  
OH BROTHER  
PENGUIN  
SALLY  
SNOOPY

CAROLS  
COMMERCIAL  
LINUS  
ORNAMENT  
PIG PEN  
SHEPHERD  
SNOWBALL

CHARLIE BROWN  
DIRECTOR  
LUCY  
PANTOPHOBIA  
RATS  
SHERMY  
SYNDICATE

## Key Words:

1. Continuous: uninterrupted in time
2. Bubble gum cards: trading cards, often baseball cards, sold along with packets of bubble gum
3. Unrequited: not returned or reciprocated
4. Thalassophobia: the fear of the sea or of sea travel
5. Pantophobia: the fear of everything
6. Disinfectant: chemicals used to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria and other organisms
7. Babylon: ancient city near the Euphrates River in southwest Asia that was famous for its magnificence and culture
8. Syndicate: an agency that buys articles, stories, columns, photographs, comic strips, and other features to publish them in newspapers
9. Portfolio: a case for carrying loose papers, drawings, and documents
10. Perspective: a drawing technique that shows three-dimensional objects on a flat surface
11. Commercialism: inappropriate emphasis on profit or success
12. Swaddling: long, narrow strips of cloth used to bandage infants to prevent free movement
13. Beethoven: a classical German composer born in 1770 who became very successful in his lifetime, despite being losing his hearing in the middle of his career
14. Abiding: continuing without change
15. Tidings: news or information
16. Reconcile: to win over with friendliness, to bring into agreement
17. Compromise: an agreement reached by finding a middle ground
18. Recollection: a process of remembering something
19. Scholastic: dealing with school or learning
20. Correspondence: letters of communication, as with a pen pal

## Theatre Etiquette

Live theatre is really happening – right now – and it is an art form that depends on both actors and audience. When you walk into a theater you can feel that something is about to happen. It is exciting just to be in the room. The stage holds the secret of what is about to come to life! Sometimes it is so thrilling you want to get goofy, laugh, and shout. But remember that when the play begins everyone in the audience has a responsibility. You are part of the play. You are connected with the other people in the audience and the actors on stage. They can SEE you, HEAR you, and FEEL you, just as you can see, hear and feel them. If you are talking about what you did yesterday or opening a candy wrapper, you will miss something, and it will miss you. Your laughter, your responses, your attention, your imagination, and most especially your energy, are part of the experience. The play can be better because of YOU!

### Theatre Etiquette:

1. Arrive on time. Make sure to visit the restroom and get settled in your seat before the performance begins!
2. Turn off cell phones and other devices, and do not take photos or videos during the performance. All of this can be very distracting to the actors and those around you.
3. Pay attention to announcements that are made about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
4. Don't speak during the performance (not even whispering!) unless there is an emergency.
5. Remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave due to a personal emergency, try to exit during intermission or an appropriate break in the show.
6. No food or drink in the theater. Wait until intermission to search through your purse or bag – you may be making more noise than you think.
7. The actors want to hear your reactions to the show! You can laugh, applaud, and show your enjoyment of the performance. Appropriate times to clap are between acts or sets, at the end of a solo, or when the performance has concluded. Please feel free to express your reactions to what is happening onstage.
8. Enjoy the performance!



## Theatre Terms

1. Actor – A person who performs in the play onstage
2. Apron – The portion of the stage that is outside the proscenium arch (the arch between the stage and the auditorium)
3. Choreographer – Creates the show's dances, teaching routines to the actors
4. Director – The person charged with the overall interpretation of a work, who conducts rehearsals, blocks the action (tells actors where & when to move), and assists the actors in developing their characters
5. Front of House – The part of the theater where the audience is seated
6. House – Used to describe the audience or as a short way of saying "front of the house"
7. House Manager – Person who ensures that the audience members are seated in their appropriate places by the time the play starts; ensures that the play starts on time by communicating with the stage manager
8. Pit – An area at the front of the house, usually sunken below the level of the stage, where the musicians and conductor work during the show
9. Props (Properties) – All the objects that can be picked up or moved by the actors used in a play or musical to help tell the story
10. Scenery – Everything on stage (except the props) used to represent the place where, and sometimes when, the action is occurring





## Discussion Questions

1. Describe your favorite design element — costume, lights, sound, set, etc. How did it help to tell the story of the show? How did all the designs contribute to the director's concept of the show?
2. How did the actors' performances help tell the story? What vocal choices, movements, and other acting choices did they use to tell us about their characters?
3. In *Schulz*, Charles Schulz talks about having to compromise with the syndicate on the name of his comic strip. Describe an instance where you had to compromise with others. Why was it important to reach an agreement, and how did you do it?
4. Charles Schulz says that "all the loves in the strip are unrequited," and that this is partly because "failure is funny" and partly because "life contains disappointment." Why do you think it was important to him to show these ideas through his comic strips?
5. At the beginning of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* Charlie Brown says he just doesn't "understand Christmas." How does his viewpoint change over the course of the show?
6. What does it mean to commercialize a holiday? How does commercialism change the way we celebrate important events?
7. At first Charlie Brown's friends don't like his choice of Christmas tree, but in the end they call it a nice tree. What causes them to change their minds, and how does their behavior towards both the tree and Charlie Brown change?
8. The television special that is the basis of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* first premiered in 1965 and continues to be broadcast each holiday season to this day. What about the story and characters do you think resonated with audiences then and now?

## Further Resources

WV Humanities Council's suggested classroom activities for Schulz  
<http://wvhumanities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/HATeachersClassroomActivities.pdf>

A segment of *Schulz* followed by an interview with James Froemel  
<https://youtu.be/T8b1xiXWB5Y>

"The Making of A *Charlie Brown Christmas*"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zJRu0qitJE>

A *Charlie Brown Christmas* coloring pages  
<https://www.woojr.com/a-charlie-brown-christmas-coloring-pages/>

"The Top Ten Lessons I Learned from *Charlie Brown*"  
[http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson\\_images/lesson1096/top10\\_lessons.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1096/top10_lessons.pdf)

A *Charlie Brown Christmas* tree painting activity  
<https://www.gluedtomycraftsblog.com/2015/11/handprint-charlie-brown-christmas-tree-keepsake.html>

