

Fort Wayne youth theatre

*Education
Guide*



2025-2026 Education & Outreach Sponsors



FORT WAYNE METALS

Turning knowledge into solutions.

Fort Wayne youthatre *About Us...*

Did you know Fort Wayne Youthatre is the fifth oldest children's theatre in the country? Since 1934, we've been on a mission to educate, engage, and entertain through the power of live theatre.

It all started when the Old Fort Players (now Civic Theatre) imagined a place where children participated in theatre to develop poise, self-confidence, and an ability to express themselves creatively. Thus, the "Children's Theatre" was born! The very first class had 40 students – paying just \$1 for 8 weeks of lessons! Their first show, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, featured 75 young actors performing for audiences at the Majestic Theatre. Tickets were only 10¢ for kids and 25¢ for adults!

In 1978, Broadway actor Harvey Cocks took the lead as Executive Director, inspiring young performers for more than 40 years. In 1984, the Youthatre began its independent journey. Over the decades, Youthatre moved to different homes across the city before finding its place at Park Lake Professional Center in 2025. Today, Youthatre is guided by Executive Director Heather Closson, Artistic Director Christopher J. Murphy, and a team of amazing local artists.

Youthatre isn't just about what happens on stage—we take theatre into the community, too! Our touring troupe, Youthatre-On-The-Go, brings stories to schools, libraries, hospitals, and community centers. In 2018, our Young Heroes of Conscience series, which has celebrated inspiring figures like Anne Frank, Ruby Bridges, and Harriet Tubman, won the Mayor's Arts Award.

For over 90 years, countless youth have discovered their voices, made lifelong friends, and experienced the joy of storytelling. And the story is still being written – by the young artists of today.



ELEMENTS OF A PRODUCTION

SETS

The scenery pieces that form the area in which the performers act out the play. Sometimes scenery is very realistic, making the audience think they are inside a real house, for example. Other times the scenery is quite fanciful or limited. What different sets can you name in the show? What time and place does it look like?

LIGHTS

The lighting instruments that help to create the right atmosphere on the stage. Lights direct the attention of the audience to specific areas of the stage or to a specific performer. The lights may be different colors to add special effects such as nighttime or a storm. How do the lights in this production show changes in the time and place?

PROPS

The objects performers carry to help them act out the story. Look for important props that help define character or place. Can you name a few?

MAKE-UP

The cosmetic bases, blushes, lipsticks, mascara and eye liners which helps the performer physically become the character he/she is playing. Make-up is also used so that the performers facial features can be seen clearly under the bright stage lights from a distance. Do you notice any special make-up in the show?

COSTUMES

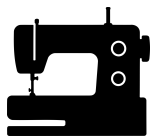
The clothing the performers wear. Depending on the story being acted out, this clothing may be what a character of the time would have actually worn. It may also be very exaggerated or fantastic in the case of a dream or a fairy-tale. Costumes help the audience know what a character is like or where and when he/she lived. Are the costumes drab or colorful? Do they look realistic? What do they tell you about the time and place?



BEHIND *the* SCENES

Any play or musical takes an army of artists behind the scenes working countless hours to create the world you see on-stage. One of these artists is the Costume Designer. Today, we are proud to shine a spotlight on the Costume Designer, Jan Klee!

JAN KLEE (Costume Design) received her undergrad in theatre from IPFW and studied costume design at University of Illinois. Early career highlights include University of Rhode Island, Portland Opera, Calumet Opera House, and Wilkes University. Upon returning to Fort Wayne, Jan designed church dramas while working and raising her daughters. Recently, Jan has designed color guard costumes for Snider and Bluffton. Favorite designs include Dood, Company, and Night Music, for Arena Dinner Theatre. Her Youtheatre credits include A Charlie Brown Christmas, Elf, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Frozen, and many more. Jan loves to make people look good and feel good on stage and can't wait for you to see this wonderful cast.



Jan Klee
COSTUME DESIGNER



Q: What does a Costume Designer do?

A: A costume designer crafts clothing and accessories that enhance characters in a production. They design costumes that align with the story's setting, time period, and characters' personalities, collaborating with the director and creative team to ensure the costumes complement the overall production. This work aids the audience in understanding the characters and their world.

Q: What is your favorite show you have ever designed?

A Little Night Music. The period and style made it especially enjoyable, and I liked how the costumes added to the atmosphere of the production.

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Q: What does your process look like?

I start by reading the play and some history of the time period. I look at fashion magazines from that era for ideas, and I try not to watch film versions. Then I shop fabrics and let them inspire the designs.

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Q: Do you have a favorite mentor or teacher?

Yes. Corliss Nickerson at Portland Civic Theater in Portland, Oregon. She taught me a great deal about design and encouraged me to keep developing my skills.

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Q: If someone wanted to be a costume designer, how should they start?

Work in a costume shop and practice sewing. School was very helpful for me, but real experience on productions is just as important.



ABOUT: STORYLINE

Book to movie...

Based on the humorous book "In God We Trust: All Others Pay Cash" by author Jean Shepherd in 1966. A Christmas Story became a beloved holiday movie that follows the wintry exploits of Ralphie Parker, a 9 year old boy who lives in Northwest Indiana in 1940. He spends most of his time dodging a bully, and dreaming of his ideal Christmas gift, a "Red Ryder air rifle." Frequently at odds with his cranky dad, but comforted by his doting mother, Ralphie struggles to make it to Christmas Day with his glasses and his hopes intact.

Movie to play...to musical...

In 2000, a stage play adaptation of A Christmas Story was written by Philip Grecian. In November 2012, ***A Christmas Story: The Musical***, based on the film, opened on Broadway. Written by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul (music and lyrics) and Joseph Robinette (book), the musical opened to positive reviews. The run ended on December 30 the same year. The musical was directed by John Rando with choreography by Warren Carlyle and featured Dan Lauria as Jean Shepherd. The musical received *Tony Award nominations for Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical* (Robinette), and *Best Original Score (Music or Lyrics) Written for the Theatre*.

The musical was then adapted for television as the three hour ***A Christmas Story Live!***, which aired on the Fox network in the United States on December 17, 2017. Reviews were mixed; on Rotten Tomatoes, the production received a 46% rating based on 13 critics' reviews.



ABOUT: RALPIE'S WORLD

Here are just a few toys, popular items of the day, and historic events in Ralphie's world...



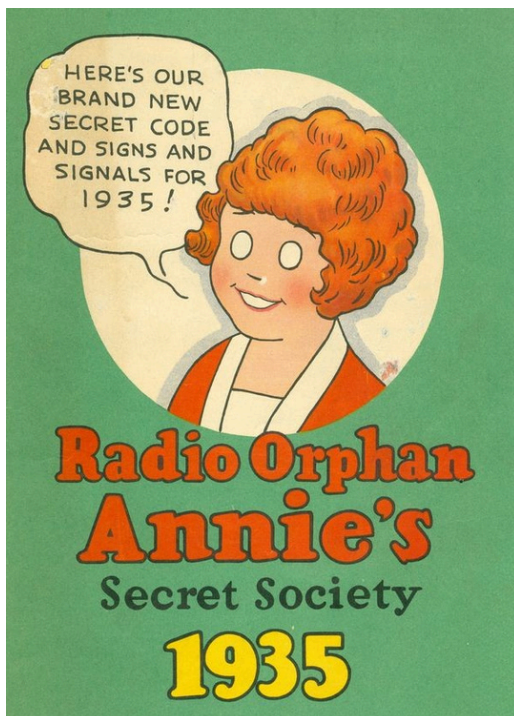
Although the year in which the movie takes place is not specifically stated, the year is probably 1940. This was just as the Great Depression was coming to an end and just before the United States entered World War II. The world of Ralphie Parker in *A Christmas Story* is very different from life today. Televisions were very rare. Instead, radios and newspapers provided an information lifeline for Americans. Whole families gathered around the radio to listen to news broadcasts and popular programs like "Little Orphan Annie," quiz shows, mysteries, dramas, music and sports.

Red Ryder BB Guns were favored by the fictional cowboy Red Ryder in the 1940s. The real Red Ryder air gun featured lever action, spring piston, smooth bore barrel, adjustable sights, and a 650 BB capacity, making it popular among American boys. The "Range Model Carbine-Action BB Gun" depicted in a movie was a fictional creation by Jean Shepherd, including a compass and time-telling device not originally part of the Red Ryder gun. The "Buck Jones" Daisy Air Rifle, which did include a compass and sundial, may have inspired this fictional version.



Radio Flyer, founded in 1920 by Antonio Pasin, is renowned for its toy wagons and sleds. Pasin started his business by crafting wagons at night and selling them during the day. Inspired by the auto industry, he adopted metal-stamping technology and mass production techniques in the 1920s, earning him the nickname "Little Ford." Today, Radio Flyer is the leading wagon manufacturer globally.

ABOUT: RALPIE'S WORLD



The Little Orphan Annie Show was one of the first 15-minute daily radio serials made for children. The show was sponsored by Ovaltine and ran from 1930 to the early 1940s. It was inspired by the daily American comic strip by Harold Gray about a young orphan girl, her dog Sandy, and her guardian, Daddy Warbucks. They encounter many adventures including gangsters, spies and kidnapers. The show was also known for its opening theme song sung by Pierre Andre.

Ovaltine is a brand of milk flavoring created in 1904 in Switzerland and is still available today. The powdery mix, made of sugar, malt extract, cocoa and whey, is often mixed with warm or hot milk. As a sponsor for The Little Orphan Annie Show, Ovaltine offered Secret Decoder Rings in exchange for proofs of purchase. Decoder Rings were all the rage during the golden age of radio, lending an air of participation to popular radio shows like the Little Orphan Annie Show.



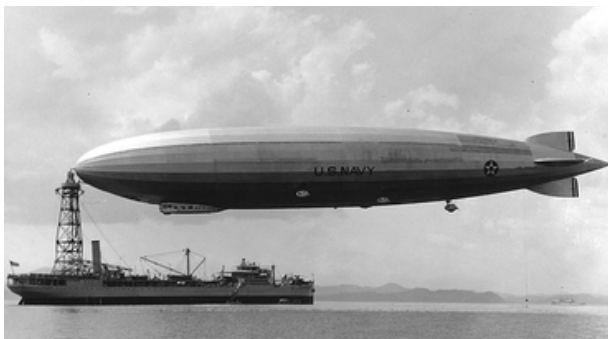
ABOUT: RALPIE'S WORLD



The Great Depression began with the Wall Street stock market crash in October of 1929 and rapidly spread worldwide. The crash marked the beginning of a decade of high unemployment, poverty, low profits, deflation, plunging farm incomes, and lost opportunities for economic growth and personal advancement. Although its causes are still uncertain and controversial, the effect was a sudden and general loss of confidence in the economic future, creating a downward economic spiral of reduced spending, falling confidence, and lowered production.



Randy falls asleep under the Christmas tree with a toy **Zeppelin** or airship in his arms. A Zeppelin is a type of rigid airship (also known as a blimp) pioneered by the German Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin in the early 20th century. Given the outstanding success of the Zeppelin design, the term "Zeppelin" in casual use came to refer to all rigid airships. Zeppelins were operated by the first commercial airline, and served scheduled flights before World War I. After the outbreak of the war, the German military made extensive use of Zeppelins as bombers and scouts.





ABOUT: BIOGRAPHY

**Learn about Jean Shepherd,
Author of the book on which
A CHRISTMAS STORY is based.**

Jean Shepherd was born to Anna and Jean Parker Shepherd in 1921, on the South Side of Chicago. He briefly lived in East Chicago, Indiana, but was raised in Hammond, Indiana, where he graduated from Hammond High School, in 1939. A Christmas Story is loosely based on his days growing up in Hammond's southeast neighborhood of Hessville. As a youth, he worked briefly as a mail carrier in a steel mill and earned his amateur radio license (W9QWN) at age 16, sometimes claiming he was even younger. He sporadically attended Indiana University Bloomington, but never graduated. During World War II, he served stateside in the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Shepherd then had an extensive career in a variety of media



He wrote and narrated many works, the most famous being the 1983 MGM feature film A Christmas Story, filmed at A Christmas Story House, which is now considered a holiday classic. Shepherd narrates the film as the adult Ralph Parker, and also has a cameo roleplaying a man in line at the department store waiting for Santa Claus.

ACTIVITY #1:

PINK BUNNY ORNAMENT CRAFT

This craft is best suited for upper elementary through high school students!



You Will Need:

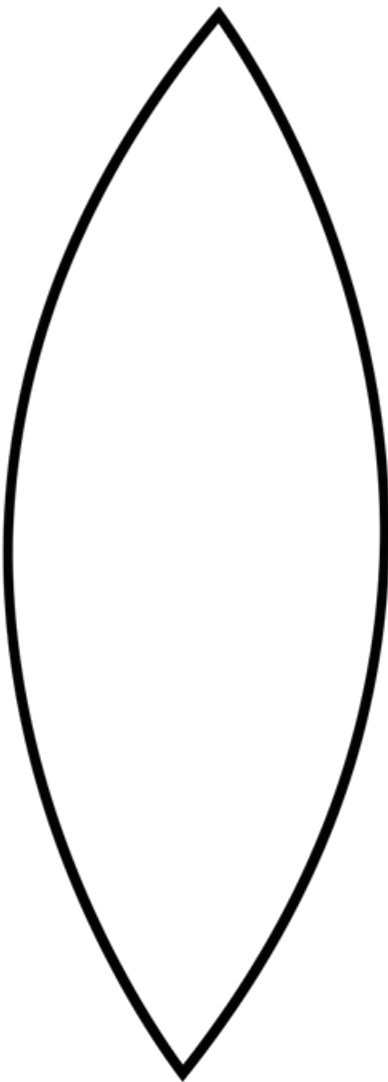
- A gold Christmas ornament
- Dark and light pink construction paper, or felt
- Brown card stock paper, or brown paint or markers
- Glue gun and glue stick
- Scissors
- Thin wire (optional)

Instructions:

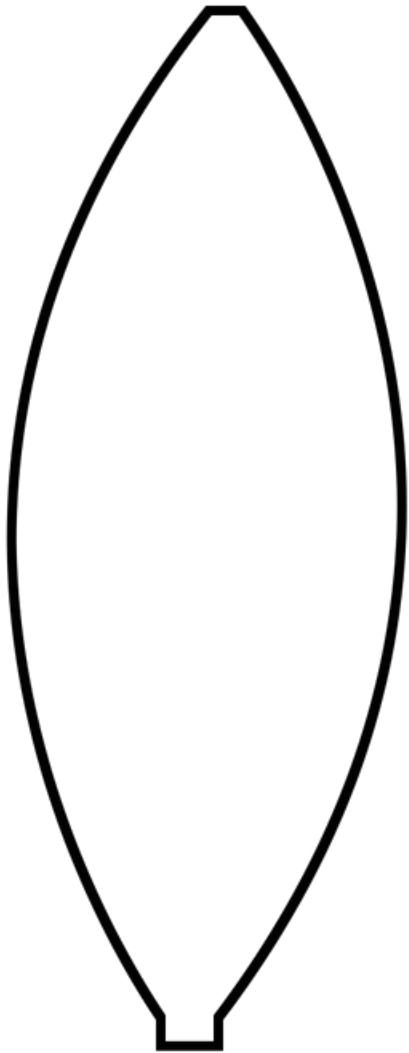
1. Follow the template to cut out the pink hoodie and ear pieces. Glue the inner and outer ear colors together. Shaping wire between the ear pieces (if using) to help ears stand up.
2. Remove the ornament top, and hot glue the hood around the back and sides of the face. Return the ornament topper.
3. Cut out glasses using the template. (paint, or color if necessary) Hot glue on the bridge of the nose.



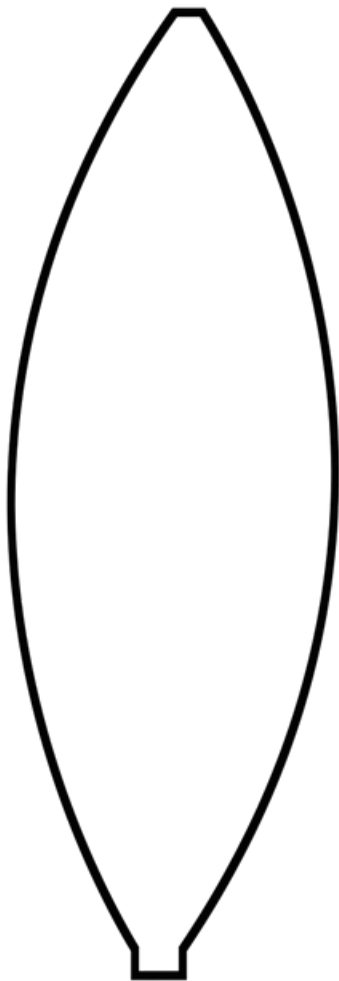
HOODIE X4



EAR X2



INNER EAR X2



GLASSES



ACTIVITY #2:

BUNNY SUIT MASK

This craft is best suited for lower through upper elementary.



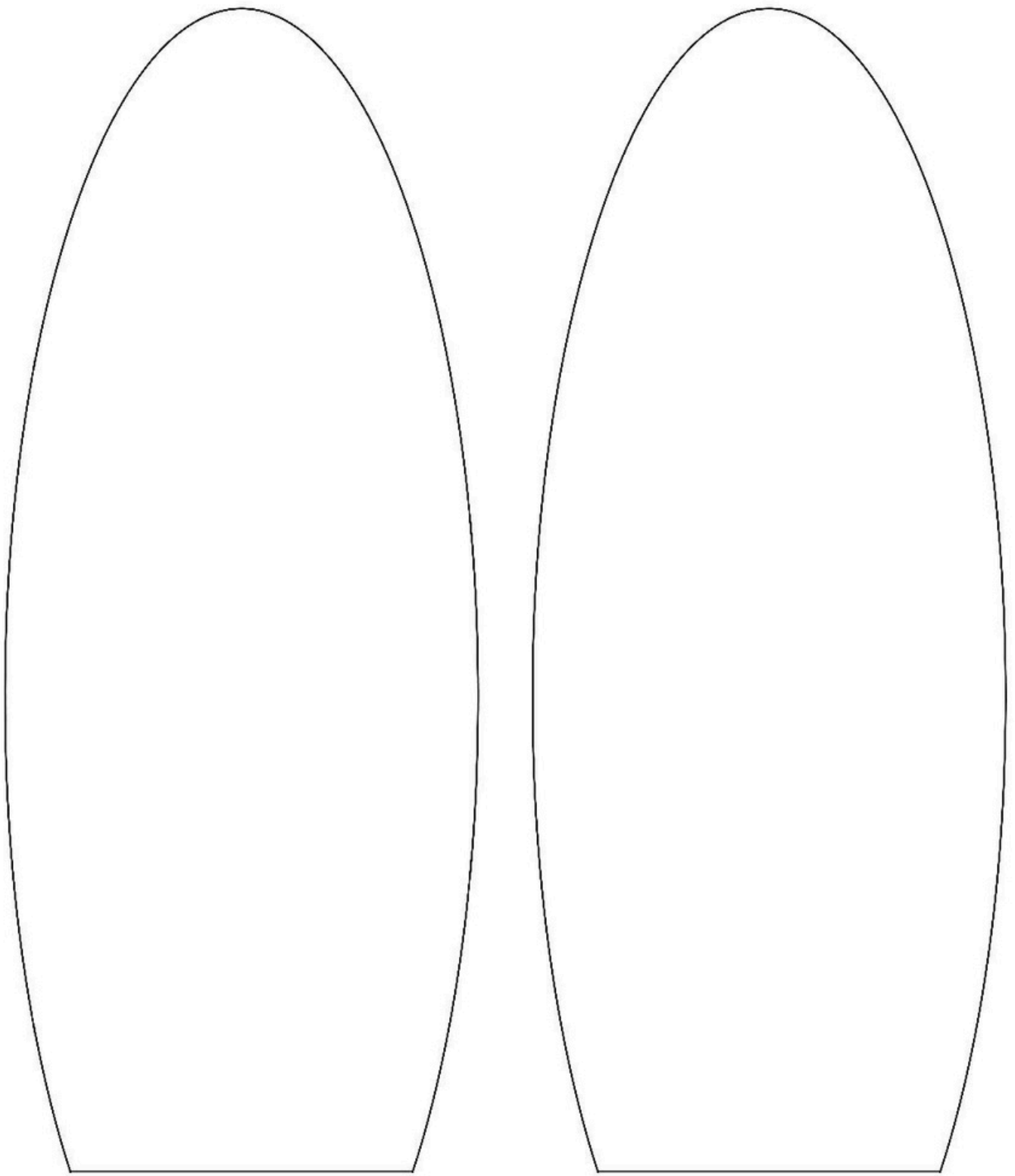
You Will Need:

1. A sturdy 10" paper plate, thick enough to hold shape
2. Printable bunny ears pattern
3. White and pink card stock
4. Pipe cleaners (for whiskers)
5. A jumbo craft stick (for handling)
6. Hot glue gun (adult-supervised!)
7. Circle cutter (~6½") or scissors to cut the face hole

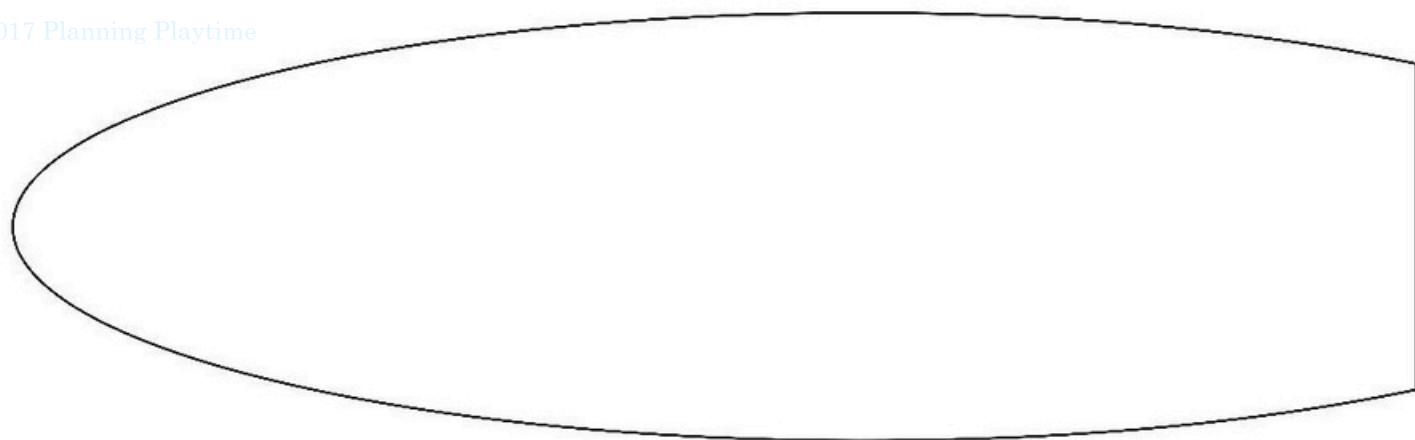
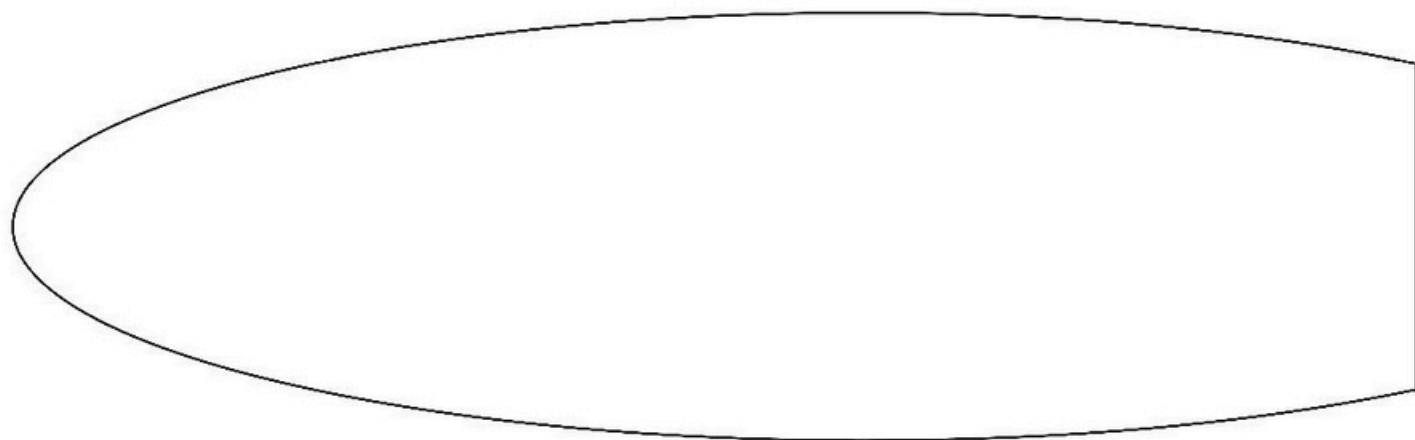
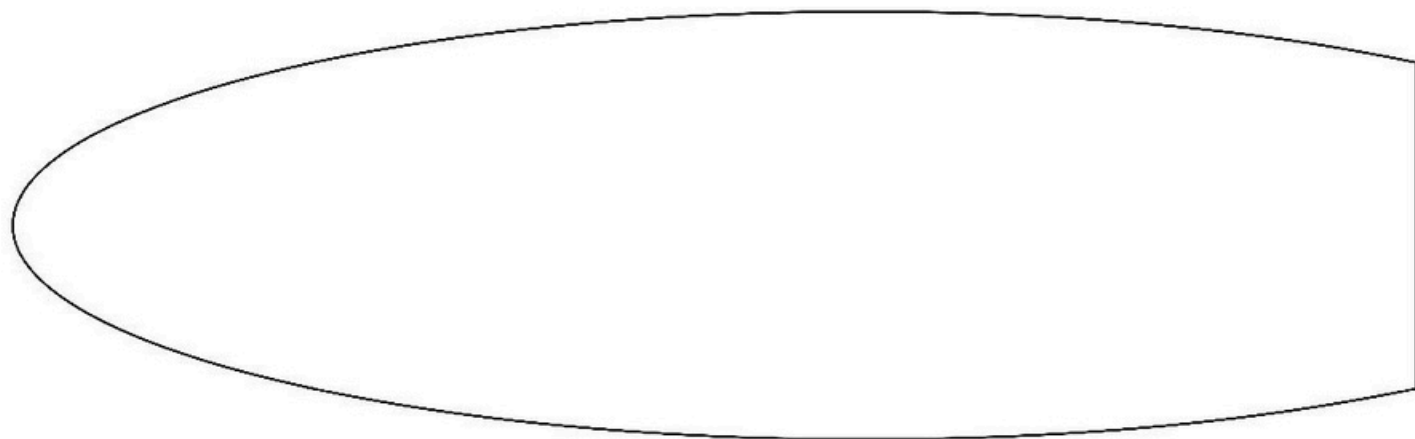
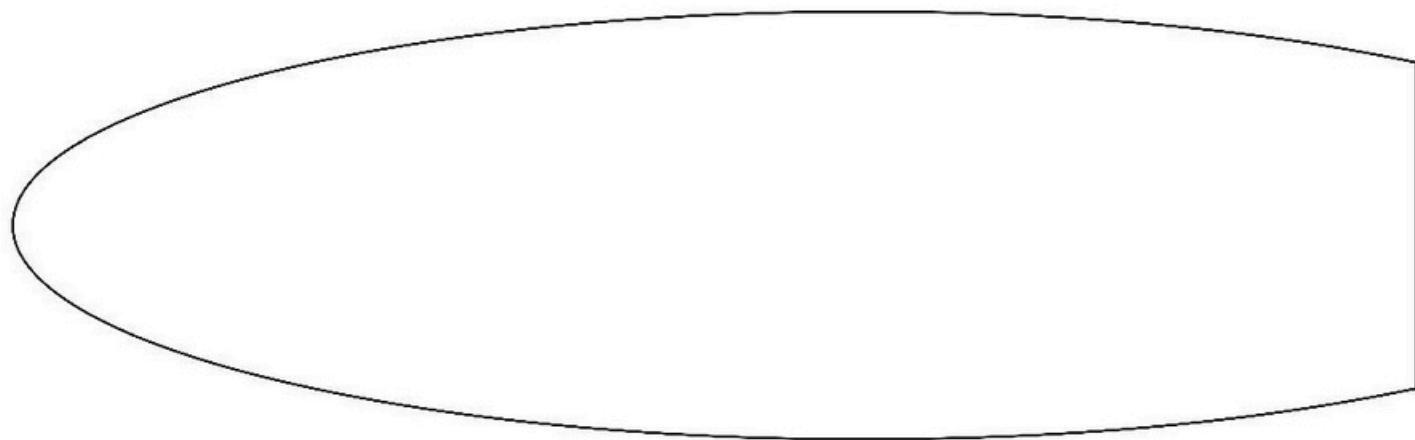
Instructions:

1. Cut out the center of a paper plate to make a hole for your face. Use scissors or trace a bowl to help make a neat circle.
2. Use the bunny ear template (or draw your own) to cut out two white outer ears and two smaller pink inner ears. Glue the pink parts onto the white ears.
3. Glue the finished ears to the top edge of the paper plate so they stick up.
4. Cut six short pipe cleaners for whiskers and glue three on each side of the lower face hole.
5. Flip the plate over and hot glue a jumbo craft stick to the bottom edge.





BUNNY EARS MASK (OUTSIDE)



BUNNY EARS MASK (INSIDE)

A Christmas Story



**You'll shoot
your eye
out!**



**I triple dog
dare ya!**

A+++++

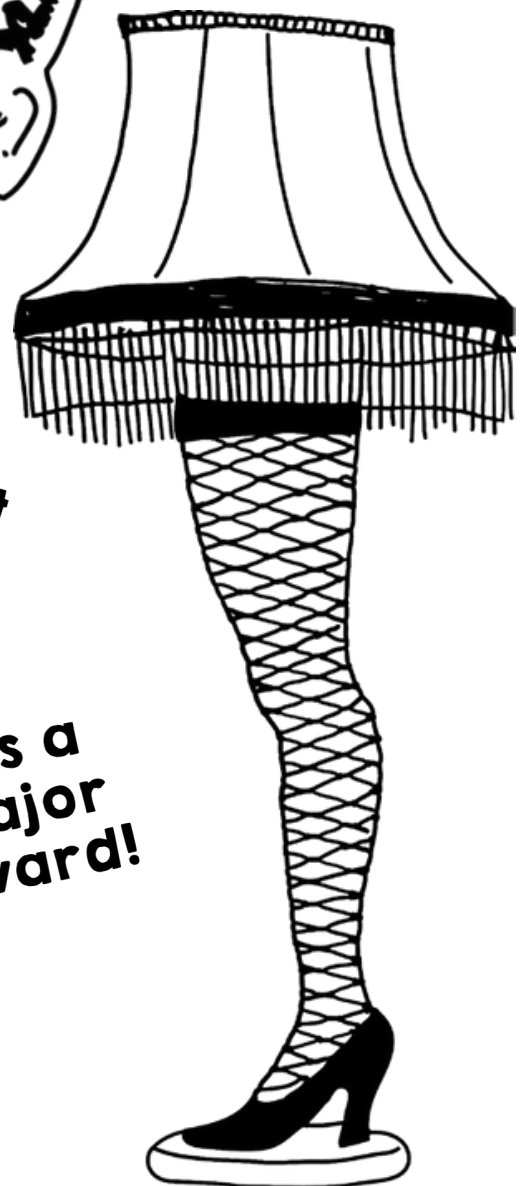
**Be sure
to drink
your
Ovaltine!**



**I can't put
my arms
down!**



**It's a
Major
Award!**



ACTIVITY #1:

VOCABULARY WORDS

Choose what applies to your students grade level from these suggested words.



Poison
Department Store
Subtle Maneuver
Appointed Connection
Fragile
Epic
Benefit
Fuse
Insinuate
Struggle
Conclusion
Retribution
Boggle
Fluidity
Spectacular
Ozone
Emporium
Jealous
Icicle
Glorious

Symbol
Fudge
Annihilation
Christmas
Victory
Guillotine
Disappointed
Marauders
Radio
Connoisseur
Explanation
Nuance
Electric
Profanity
Equations
Remorse
Natural
Justice
Hound Dog
Eloquent

Mangy
Bully
Compass
Punishment
Strange
Stricken
Santa Clause
Prize
Stock
Plastic
Shattered
Gradually
Beautiful
Academic
Remains
Season
Victim
Theme
Mysterious
Margin

Prompts

1. Look up the definitions of the words you don't know in the dictionary
2. Do you remember how the vocabulary words were used in the show?
3. Write sentences using the vocabulary words.
4. Write a "theme" using the above vocabulary words. Perhaps the topic could be "What I want for Christmas."
5. Have a spelling bee using the vocabulary words.

Fort Wayne Youtheatre
ACADEMY
of Performing Arts

ACTING | DANCE | VOICE | TECH THEATRE | PRIVATE LESSONS

Winter Camps
December 2025

Spring Semester
January 31 - March 21, 2026

Summer Camps
June and July 2026

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Suggested Reading...

Elementary: *The Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg, *Red and Lulu* by Matt Tavares, *A Houseful of Christmas* by Barbara Joosse, and *Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree* by Robert Barry.

Middle: *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, by Barbra Robinson, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever* by Jeff Kinney, *The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street* by Karina Yan Glaser, and *Winterhouse* by Ben Guterson.

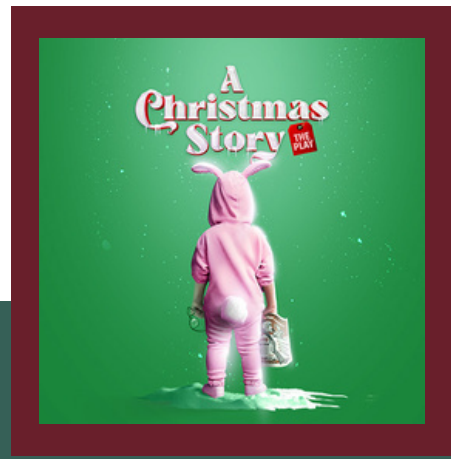
High school: *In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash*, by Jean Sheperd, *A Christmas Story: The Book That Inspired the Beloved Movie* by Jean Shepherd, *A Christmas Memory* by Truman Capote, and *No Talking* by Andrew Clements.



POP QUIZ:

TEST YOUR MEMORY

Test your knowlege of A Christmas Story
with this pop quiz!



1. What does the boy lick and get his tongue stuck to?
 - a. A mouse trap
 - b. Glue paper
 - c. A pole
 - d. A popsicle
2. What is the major award the dad wins?
 - a. A leg lamp
 - b. A trip
 - c. \$1,000
 - d. A car
3. What Christmas gift did Ralphie want?
 - a. A magic wand
 - b. An air rifle
 - c. A collection of meat snack sticks
 - d. A sword
4. What state does the family live in?
 - a. Illinois
 - b. Ohio
 - c. Michigan
 - d. Indiana
5. What is the lead bully's name?
 - a. Scut Farkus
 - b. Flick
 - c. Grover Dill
 - d. Randy Parker
6. What is Santa's response to Ralphie's request for a BB gun?
 - a. "That's a dangerous gift, young man"
 - b. "You'll shoot your eye out!"
 - c. "Why would you want a thing like THAT?"
 - d. "How about something else?"
7. What does Ralphie's little brother get stuck in?
 - a. His snow suit
 - b. A snow fort
 - c. Santa's gift bag
 - d. The trunk of their car
8. What happened to the Christmas turkey?
 - a. It was still frozen
 - b. Dogs ate it
 - c. It was full of worms
 - d. It got burnt to a crisp
9. What gift did Ralphie's mom get his dad?
 - a. A new Grill
 - b. Cologne
 - c. A bowling ball
 - d. Socks
10. What message did the secret decoder pen reveal?
 - a. Don't blink
 - b. Shop at Higbees
 - c. Listen to Little Orphan Annie
 - d. Drink your Ovaltine

Answer Key

Q1: c) A pole, Q2: a) A leg lamp Q3: b) An air rifle Q4: d) Indiana Q5: a) Scut Farkus Q6: b) You'll shoot your eye out. Q7: a) His snow suit Q8: b) Dogs ate it Q9: c) A bowling ball Q10: d) Drink your Ovaltine

LANGUAGE ARTS

STANDARDS

Most Youtheatre productions are literature-based and on the recommended reading list of the Library of Congress.

Language Arts Standard: Perceive, identify, describe and analyze the distinguishing characteristics of form, structure and style of story.

- Retell story identifying plot, theme, characters, and setting.
- Recall story plot utilizing chronological order.

Language Arts Standard: Evaluate Theatre/Literary work based on critical perception and analysis.

- Share perception of theatre experience in the area of voice, movement, mood and motivation.
- Make suggestions for alternative endings.
- Analyze and critique story and performance through creative writing.
- Create a similar story through creative writing.

Language Arts Standard: Use Theatre /Literary work to develop affective areas of self-concept, problem solving and interpersonal skills.

- React to feelings of self and others within a production.
- Identify conflict within story as it relates to self and others.
- Compare and contrast problems and resolutions found in different stories and real life situations.
- Express personal attitudes, values, and belief systems as it relates to theatre piece.
- Interact freely in conversations, class discussions and dramatic activities.
- Contribute to the solving of problems through dramatization/improvisation.

Language Arts Standard: Examine Theatre /Literary work in a historical and multicultural context.

- Identify similarities and differences between characters from diverse cultures depicted.
- Identify historical differences/figures in different time frames depicted in story.
- Identify significance of historical aspects in story.

Exploring Aesthetics: A Philosophical Basis for Life!

- Attending live theatre helps children value its importance to the community and helps develop a lifelong commitment and love of Theatre and Literature. Students experience aesthetic growth through appreciation of Theatre.
- Students discover through experience that making art is an essential human activity. It requires collaboration, and enhances creative thinking.

