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## Teacher's Guide For



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by Squeaky Clean of "Mistletunes"**

# The “December Dilemma”

It has been called “The December Dilemma:” with school populations made up of children from many ethnic and religious backgrounds, what is a school supposed to do about Christmas? Decorate the school with Santa Claus and Christmas trees? Pretend that the holiday doesn’t exist? Create a mumbo-jumbo “Christmahanakwanzika” holiday that is essentially meaningless? As a public institution, aren’t there constitutional restrictions regarding the separation of Church and State and promotion of religion?

SQUEAKY CLEAN has been performing December programs in schools since the 1980s. During that time, we’ve seen schools that bring Santa Claus in for a visit as well as schools who engage in the kind of “politically-correct” celebrations that are often held up for ridicule.

The answer is really very obvious: schools are in the business of teaching and December presents a wonderful opportunity to learn about celebrations observed by Christians, Jews, Muslims as well as various African, Asian and South Asian cultures. According to the Anti-Defamation League: *the basic guideline that you need to remember is that the public schools can teach about religion as long as they do not preach religion.*”

A visit by SQUEAKY CLEAN creates a celebratory atmosphere that is entirely separate from any religious observance.



# About Our Show

"Mistletunes" is an interactive musical program where we perform a selection of rock and roll and other popular songs associated with the December holidays. The songs are largely secular in nature, such as "Jingle Bell Rock" and "Frosty the Snowman." We do not make any overt religious references, though according to the Anti-Defamation League, many symbols originally associated with Christmas have acquired secular meaning. And many immigrant families participate in Christmas rituals as part of their assimilation process, without connecting them to Christian beliefs.

Throughout the program, we refer to holidays from many different cultures, including Christmas, Hannukah, Kwanzaa, Diwali, and Dongzhi. Since the Islamic holidays migrate through the months, any given December may or may not have a holiday associated with it.

Our goals are to make sure that no child feels excluded from the festive atmosphere; to see that audience members learn a little bit about holidays that they don't celebrate at home; and to send the message that there is nothing wrong with sharing in the fun of a holiday that you don't personally observe.



# Synopsis of Show

As children enter the performing space, they hear a carefully selected program of pre-show Holiday music that anticipates the multicultural experience to come (the Drifters *White Christmas*, *Corrido Navideno* by Brave Combo, Erran Baron Cohen's hip-hop version of *Dreidel*). The stage is decorated with brightly-colored shopping bags and snowflakes. In larger venues, we have peaceful winter landscapes projected on a large screen.

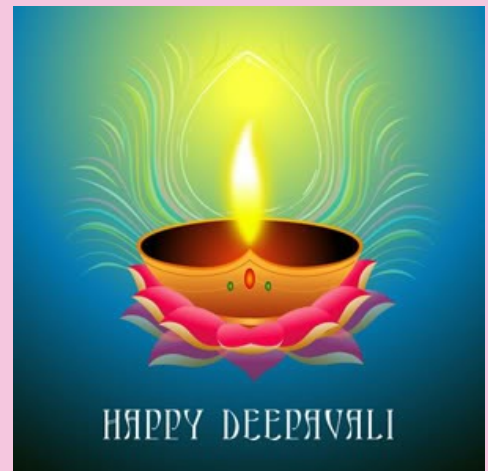
We welcome the audience and acknowledge that it is a very exciting time of year, with so many celebrations and family gatherings. We tell the children that they do not need to ask permission to sing along whenever they know a song.

Glenn then plays the familiar Jingle-Bell guitar riff that leads into the Bobby Helms classic, *Jingle Bell Rock* (familiar to children from *Home Alone 2*, *A Muppet Family Christmas*, *Mean Girls*, *Two and a Half Men* and *Glee*). The lyrics to the song, like its predecessor *Jingle Bells*, celebrates the fun of a traditional winter outing.

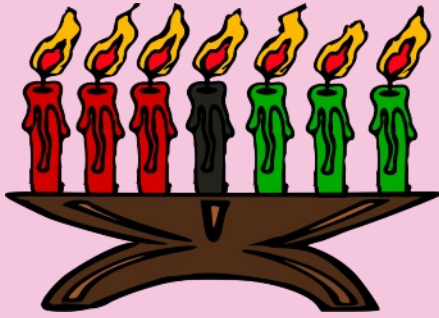
Suzanne tells the audience that we are going to sing a song about a special Holiday animal. Glenn pretends to be confused until Suzanne dons a pair of lighted antlers, the first of many silly hats she will wear. By now, the children are bursting with excitement, ready to help Suzanne sing *Rudolph, The Red -Nosed Reindeer*. This is often the song that the children know best.

At this point, we talk about one of the customs shared by many December holidays: special sweet treats. We mention the Diwali desserts that our South Asian neighbors shared with us earlier in the year; the unique dumplings (Tang Yuan) that Chinese families eat during Dong Zhi; potato latkes Jewish families eat for Hannukah and Christmas cookies that everyone loves to share. We continue with the sweet-tooth theme and sing the Chordette's hit *Lollypop*, with optional cheek-popping instructions from Suzanne.

Next, Glenn refers to the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year, when darkness comes very early in the day. He speculates that there must be a common human urge to make the darkness of December go away and that is why so many holidays include candles: Diwali is sometimes known as the Festival Of Lights where lighted *diyas* ward of darkness and evil; Dong Zhi observances on the evening of the Winter Solstice include a ceremony with incense and candles; Christians mark the progress of Advent with a candle that marks the days until





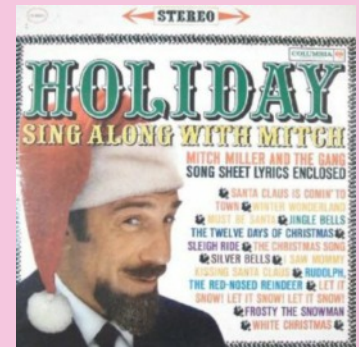


Christmas; the *Kinara*, which holds seven candles, in an important part of Kwanzaa celebrations. And Suzanne and Glenn tell the children that their family celebration of Hannukah also includes candle lighting.

Suzanne asks the children if they know about a special toy that is associated with Hannukah. The band strikes us a Twist-beat and Suzanne directs the children in various hand movements and invites them to join

her in singing *The Dreydel Song*.

Then with a fanfare of game-show music, Glenn announces that we are going to play "America's Latest Quiz Show Sensation: Know Your Holiday Characters!" Our drummer Phil is selected as the contestant and gets several clues: who's got a beard that's long and white; who comes around on a special night. While the children know the answer, Phil seems to be baffled. Suzanne then produces a series of Santa hats as a clue, culminating in a comically oversized hat that Glenn wears. By now, Phil knows it *Must Be Santa!* This song, originally recorded by Mitch Miller in the 1960, is performed as a lively polka.



Suzanne tells the children that we're going to sing a song about another famous holiday character with a corncob pipe and a button nose and two eyes made out of coal. but first she has to get an appropriate hat. She makes a mistake and puts on a chicken hat at first, but after the children point this out, she puts on a snowflake hat. She then sings *Frosty the Snowman*, as performed by the Ronettes on the 1963 Phil Spector album *A Christmas Gift for You*.



Glenn mentions that Hispanic communities have a holiday that comes twelve days after Christmas: Three Kings Day. The band then strikes up *Feliz Navidad*, composed in 1970 by Puerto Rican singer-songwriter Jose Feliciano. This bilingual favorite is familiar to all children, and we invite them to sing it to their teachers and, in turn, invite the teachers to sing it to the children.



The program now addresses the African-American holiday Kwanzaa, which celebrates seven principles of African culture. Glenn singles out the principle of *Ujima*, which urges people to solve their problems together. He tells the story of the tiny oxpecker bird, who lives on the back of a rhinoceros and eats the insects that annoy his host. Glenn's performs his original song *This Marvelous Relation-*



ship, featured on the band's *Pull Together* CD, which details how the two creatures get along without taking advantage of each other.

We then announce the imminent arrival of three special holiday guests: three pre-selected audience members (preferably adults) who put on simple costumes backstage and appear as Simon, Theodore and Alvin. They lip-sync the celebrated *Chipmunk Song* and demonstrate their prowess with the hula-

hoop, to the obvious delight of the audience.

We then have a quiet moment of reflection when we sing Stevie Wonder's 1967 hit *Someday At Christmas*, which envisions a Christmas with "no hungry children and no empty hands."

Before concluding the show, we introduce the band members, thank the people who made our show possible and remind the children to follow the instructions of their teachers to safely leave the theater. Glenn then announces that we're going to do a song from "the best Holiday move ever: Home Alone 1." But first, Phil is encouraged to put on a funny Christmas tree hat. Then Glenn reminds the audience of the scene in the movie when Kevin puts Dad's aftershave on his face. As they re-enact "the Kevin," Suzanne delivers her rendition of *Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree*, recorded by 13-year old Brenda Lee in 1958.



As the audiences leaves the theater, we may play *Santa Claus is Coming To Town* or Darlene Love's *Christmad (Baby Please Come Home)* as an encore.



# “Mistletones” and Multicultural Education

Faced with an increasingly diverse school population, the U.S. Education establishment has been urging teachers to adopt a multicultural approach in their classrooms. It is hoped that they will provide students with knowledge about the history and contributions of cultures other than their own. Not only will this instill pride in each child's distinctive background, it will reinforce the idea that every culture has made positive contributions to the American mosaic.

Multiculturalism prepares children for a future where no single cultural group is considered “dominant” or “mainstream.” Our “Mistletones” program provides students with an opportunity to see how other December celebrations exist side-by-side with the Christian celebration of Christmas. No Jewish, Muslim or non-religious child should have to feel that “normal” people celebrate Christmas or that their own celebrations are less important because “everyone” celebrates Christmas.

Our multicultural program benefits Christian children as well, opening their eyes to the celebrations of their non-Christian classmates. Far from being a “war on Christmas,” multiculturalism allows schools to acknowledge the religious importance of the holiday for Christians. While others may enjoy the secular aspects of decorations, TV specials and gift-giving, Christmas continues to carry deep spiritual significance for many.

It would be misleading to imply that all other December celebrations have the same significance as Christmas has for Christians. In a perfect world, exploration of other cultures' holidays would not just happen in December. Hannukah is a minor Jewish holiday, whereas the Passover festival, which celebrates freedom, would have great resonance for non-Jewish populations. Major Islamic celebrations are calculated according to a lunar calendar and fall at different times every year. Chinese New Year provides a chance to celebrate Chinese culture during mid-Winter, when everyone could use a pick-me-up.

By booking “Mistletones,” your school will provide an opportunity for children of every background to sing fun songs about Rudolph, Dreidels, Santa, Frosty, Sleigh Rides. By validating the practices of families who celebrate different holidays (or none), we hope to give everyone a chance to understand their unique place amidst all the Holiday Hoopla.

# Highlights of ADL Statement About Religion in Schools

Any classroom exploration of December holidays must deal with religion. Discussing Christmas without mentioning the the birth of Jesus does a disservice to both Christian believers and children of other backgrounds who know little about the religious origins of the holiday.

Nevertheless, teachers are understandably cautious when speaking about religion in the classroom. As a respected authority figure, any implicit endorsement of one religion over another would carry great weight. But today's children are living in a world where conflicts and misunderstandings between religious groups are behind much of the strife we read about daily. It has never been more important for children to understand and respect people of other faiths.



The Anti-Defamation League, founded in 1913, sees itself as a protector of the religious rights of all, strongly promoting the separation of church and state. It has provided guidance to public educators about issues like school prayer and Bible clubs. Here are some excerpts from their guide to "Religious Issues In Your

Child's Public School:" [full text

[http://archive.adl.org/issue\\_education/guide\\_parents/print.asp](http://archive.adl.org/issue_education/guide_parents/print.asp)]

- No child should ever be made to feel like a stranger in his or her classroom
- Adults – whether they are teachers, administrators, community leaders or parents – must be careful to distinguish between teaching about a religious holiday and actually celebrating that holiday
- Students should not be put on the spot and asked to explain a religious or cultural tradition. It sends an implicit message that the holiday is too "exotic" for anyone but an insider to understand. Rather, a teacher should seek out a well-written and age-appropriate book to explain the holiday
- The courts have decided that decorations featuring Christmas trees, Santas, wreaths, wrapped gifts and reindeer have become secular symbols of the season. Nevertheless, more inclusive decorations such as snow flakes,





gingerbread houses and mittens may be used as an alternative.

- Excusing non-observant children from a classroom Christmas party can be insensitive. A more inclusive party could celebrate the winter season or a variety of holidays.
- Receiving gifts from Santa Claus is a Christian tradition, inappropriate in a public school classroom. An option that is true to the spirit of the season would be encouraging children to seek donations for children who don't have any toys
- A holiday concert should have a balance between the secular and religious selections. Music selection can be a good opportunity to provide recognition of the holidays observed by non-Christian children. The criteria for selecting the music should be on the basis of its musical and educational value, rather than the religious content.



# Online Resources for Multicultural Celebrations

- Holidays Around the World Lesson Plans:  
[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/lesson213.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson213.shtml) This site has ten lessons about December celebrations from various cultures. It includes how to make a Dreydel and play the game; holiday recipes; no fighting on Boxing Day
- PJ Library provides a list of Hannukah books:  
<https://pjlibrary.org/parents-and-families/reading-tips-and-resources/jewish-holidays/hanukkah/hanukkah-books.aspx>
- Shirin Sinnar in an American-born Muslim mother who wanted to find book that would introduce her daughter to her faith and identity while emphasizing universal values. Her recommendations can be found here:
- This is a lesson plan called "Let's Celebrate Diwali:"  
<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/lets-celebrate-diwali>
- Black Art Depot Today compiled a list of their favorite Kwanzaa books:  
<http://blackartblog.blackartdepot.com/features/featured-books/9-kwanzaa-children-books.html>
- The music publisher J.W. Pepper has a catalogue of SAB and Three-Part Mixed Multicultural Holiday Choral Music:  
<http://www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/search.jsp?redirect=school-choral-music/sab-choir/sab-multicultural-holiday-choir-music&startIndex=0>
- The website "Come Unity" helps adoptive parents in introduce their child to Chinese culture. Their book recommendations would also work well in a multicultural classroom. Their list includes titles about Chinese New Year and other festivals:

