

Animals Who Save Christmas in Children's Books

By Michele Lacina

This research paper is built upon fictional animals that develop special characteristics to help Santa save Christmas. Building this collection will assist the teacher or librarian in creating a theme or unit centered on the Christmas season with animals as the main hero or heroine. It will also enable a teacher or librarian to present fun filled holiday stories to a variety of students. The books can be read or story told to the younger students while older students can read the book to themselves, present their own version of the story or read the books to the younger students. This will provide a positive and enriching environment throughout the school.

Looking for stories was truly an adventure. I found some books in my personal collection which made me reflect on holidays when I was in elementary school. The school library and the public library were beneficial in the quest for books. Researching on Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble.com also aided in my discovery of tales.

The following is a listing of books I retrieved about animals that saved Christmas. Included in the listing are a bibliographic citation and a synopsis of the story. I listed the reading level to aid teachers in finding materials appropriate for their specific grade level. However, as stated earlier these materials can be used in a variety of ways for a diverse number of grades.

Following the citations is an analysis. A study of character analysis relating to the gender of the main character is conducted. In addition, personality traits were studied. Another structure that was investigated is geography. Where do these stories originate? Extending this, the third structure considered was story settings. Even if the original geographical place is different, do the stories have similar settings, such as location and time?

*Doyle, Roddy. (2001). *Rover Saves Christmas*. United States: Scholastic, Inc.
Synopsis:

Rudolph, on strike and having the flu, refuses to pull Santa's sleigh. Fear not, it's Rover to the rescue! Rover is a special dog with the ability to talk and own his own business. In this mad and unusually funny tale, Rover and the neighbor's children travel the world to help Santa be on time. Packed with lizards, monkeys and a variety of other unusual characters to help save Christmas, this tale is sure to please. (This book is recommended for children from eight to twelve.)

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*Leeds, Robert X. (1999). *Christmas Tails*. Las Vegas: Epic Publishing Company.

Synopsis:

Santa's reindeer become quite ill and Santa is in a fret. However, when his dog, Snuggles, offers to pull the infamous sleigh, Santa refuses the offer making Snuggles feel dejected. Choosing an elite dogsled team instead, Santa discovers one cannot judge a "book by its cover". Santa learns a lesson about friendship and kindness in this wonderful tale of the holiday season.

(This book is recommended for children in grades three through six.)

*St. Christopher, Tori and Koz St. Christopher. (1999). *Gabby Saves Christmas*.

Ohio: Creative Solutions/TKreations.

Synopsis:

Gabby is a tabby that can fly! Santa employs Gabby to pilot his sleigh due to the bright glow her food dish displays. Using her magical flying vessel, she saves Christmas and Santa from terrible events on Christmas Eve.

(This book is recommended for children ages four through eight.)

*Scarry, Richard. (2000). *The Night Before the Night Before Christmas*. New York:

Random House.

Synopsis:

Mr. Fumble, an easily excited pig is eager to spread holiday cheer. He journeys to the North Pole to volunteer as one of Santa's helpers. He accidentally mixes up the dates and Santa and the elves set off on their yearly rounds a day early. Mr. Fumble saves Christmas and Santa after he gets stuck in his chimney.

(This book is recommended for grades kindergarten through third.)

*Scarry, Richard. (2000). *Santa Needs Help!*. United States: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing.

Synopsis:

When Santa becomes trapped on a roof, Mr. Fixit is brought in. Unfortunately, Mr. Fixit makes matters worse! Hilda Hippo gives up her new skis to help Santa's cause. Being generous causes Hilda to miss the grand ski party. Her good deed is rewarded and can teach others about the gift of giving.

(This book is recommended for children between five and eight years old.)

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*Scheidl, Gerda Marie. (1998). *Can We Help You, Saint Nicholas?*. New York: North-South Books.

Synopsis:

This tale is different in that it depicts Saint Nicholas over the traditional Santa Claus. St. Nick oversleeps and is worried he will upset the village children by not arriving on time. Many forest friends teach him the importance of team work and the magic of Christmas.

(This book is recommended for grades kindergarten through third.)

*Schrecker, Judie. (1996). *Santa's New Reindeer*. VA: E.M. Press.

Synopsis:

This is a touching tale of self-sacrifice. Santa has to pull animals from his North Pole Zoo to replace sick reindeer on Christmas Eve. The camels, cows, sheep and a donkey do not want to leave their cozy homes. They become unwilling to pull the sleigh until Santa reminds them of the important role that animals like them played in the first Christmas.

(This book is recommended for grades kindergarten through third.)

*Tryon, Leslie. (2000). *Albert's Christmas*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

Synopsis:

This is a modern day tale of how Santa is helped by a duck and his friends from Pleasant Valley. Albert is sent an email that Santa will need his help on Christmas Eve. In a rhyming account, the story is told of how the animals feed and care for the reindeer and clean the mystical sleigh in twelve minutes! The energetic pictures and humorous prose will excite anyone and put them in the holiday spirit.

(This book is recommended for grades kindergarten through third.)

*Walsh, Vivian. (1997). *Olive, the Other Reindeer*. New York: Scholastic.

Synopsis:

Olive misinterprets "All of the other reindeer" as "Olive the other reindeer". This leads her on an adventure to the North Pole to help Santa Claus, not to mention his beloved reindeer. Her canine talents, especially her amazing sense of smell, assist Santa from making Christmas Eve a disastrous event.

(This book is recommended for ages five to eight.)

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*Wells, Rosemary. (1998). *Mcduff's New Friend*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children.

Synopsis:

After the family falls asleep, awaiting Santa, their dog Mcduff begins to bark. He realizes Santa has had an accident. Mcduff saves Christmas by having his human family help him help Santa out of the garage and the sleigh out of a snowdrift.

Santa rewards Mcduff with a special Christmas gift, a playmate.

(This book is recommended for children ages four to seven.)

Character analysis can be a variety of traits. Character can mean gender, age, personality, motives, similar or different from ordinary people or are they good or evil, just to name a few. One can also consider where the character(s) is from. Considering the books listed above, character analysis consisted of the gender of the main character as well as personality traits. In Rover Saves Christmas, Christmas Tails, The Night Before the Nigh Before Christmas!, Albert's Christmas and Mcduff's New Friend all the main characters are male and would be considered a hero. On the other hand, in Gabby Saves Christmas, Santa Needs Help! and Olive, The Other Reindeer the main character is female and a heroine. However, in two stories Can We Help You, Saint Nicholas? and Santa's New Reindeer there are many main characters and heroes. Neither gender is more powerful than the other. So, in regards to gender in holiday animals stories, one can find books with a champion of either sex, or a story with many heroes of both genders. In all the books, except two, the star(s) of the story are anticipating the arrival of Santa Claus, happy, easily exited and willing to help when needed. In Christmas Tails Snuggles is a calm dog that is snubbed, but through diligence and patience he triumphs over all. The animals in Santa's New Reindeer are unwilling to help Santa in the beginning. Generally speaking, most of the fictitious animals in holiday stories are outgoing and have a desire to please.

Geography structure takes into consideration the location of the story, or where the story is created. All but one of the stories in this paper originates in the United States. Can We Help You, Saint Nicholas? was translated from the Swedish tale Kann ich dir helfen, Nikolaus? (This might explain the use of Saint Nicholas instead of the traditional Santa Claus.) The difference in the location the story was written contributes to the setting.

Setting can mean so many effects. Time, place, multiples of each of the aforementioned and home or abroad to name a few. For the purpose of this paper, the

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settings researched were location and time. The main common feature in all of the stories is that the North Pole is mentioned, or gone to or from. The “village children” are mentioned in Can We Help You, Saint Nicholas?. This makes it unique in that it refers to only one place in the world. The house of McDuff's owners is the main setting in McDuff's New Friend, hence another special place. The other eight stories are typical in that they explore Santa's travels around the world. Time is consistent in all but one story mentioned in this paper. Nine stories tell tales of Christmas Eve and the rush to finish delivering gifts before Christmas Day. The Night Before The Night Before Christmas is exclusive in that it begins on December 23rd and travels into Christmas Eve.

This research proves that characters can be of many sorts. There is no one particular animal represented more than others. In fact, some stories have many animals as main characters that contribute to the plot. Geography is a main factor in that stories from your country are more readily available, therefore more prominent. Setting can enhance a story. Most stories are on Christmas Eve and the North Pole is included in the text. However, finding unique places that the tale journeys to will enhance the story and get more students attention.

In closing, a teacher or librarian wanting to create a thematic unit on animals and holidays can find a variety of topics to use. Hero or heroine?, specific animal or many?, English traditions or others? or specific setting or multiple settings? are just a few things one needs to consider before researching and developing the unit. Once a theme is decided they should look in their own library first. Having books that are familiar will strengthen the presentation. Next, check with the school library and the local library. (Do this early, for the best books are checked out first!) Lastly, use the web to find additional resources.

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Summary

Challenges were brief, fortunately! The toughest decision was to determine whether or not I wanted just one specific animal as the main character in all the holiday stories. I thought using a variety of animals would create more interest among students and teachers. Variety is the spice of life! The only other challenge was determining which books to use. I could not find specific videos (other than the traditional ones), so I used all books. But when a bn.com search pulls up over four hundred books, picking a few can be difficult.

Researching gave me a great sense of direction, but not just for this project. It was a good tool to teach me how to research for other thematic units as a teacher and librarian. The steps were uncomplicated and precise. This is something I can pass on to others. Middle grade and above students should also be able to follow this process.

I can continue this project by adding new titles each year. This will make each holiday season fresh and enjoyable, not dull and routine. Limiting searches to books published within the last few years will narrow the results. Also, as stated earlier, the work can continue through other units or projects.