

# **That's What Christmas Is About!**

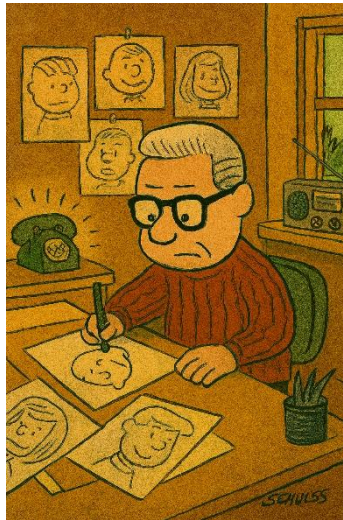


**The Musical Miracle Behind  
A Charlie Brown  
Christmas Special**

## Character Breakdown & Casting Tips

| Character      | Description                              | Casting Notes                        |
|----------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Narrator       | Guides transitions and reflections       | Can be split among multiple students |
| Charles Schulz | Thoughtful, creative, spiritually driven | Ideal for older student or teacher   |
| Lee Mendelson  | Energetic producer, slightly anxious     | Can be comedic or serious            |
| Bill Melendez  | Passionate animator, loyal friend        | Great for expressive students        |
| Animators      | Skeptical, Concerned, Doubtful           | Can be split among multiple students |
| CBS Executives | Skeptical, humorous, dismissive          | Ensemble roles with dramatic flair   |
| Child Reader   | Delivers Luke 2:8–14                     | Must be calm, reverent, confident    |
| Minister       | Delivers closing message                 | Can be student, teacher, or guest    |
| Choir          | Sings carols between scenes              | Flexible group casting               |

## Act 1: The Pitch



### Scene 1: Charles Schulz's Drawing Studio

#### Choir Song Before Scene 1: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

- **Why:** This calm and reflective carol sets the tone for the beginning of the play, aligning with Schulz's creative process and the humble nature of Christmas.

*Narrator: Charles Schulz is hard at work at his drawing board in his home studio, creating another installment of his famous Peanuts comic strip. Little did he know, a series of events was about to unfold that would lead to one of the greatest miracles in television history.*

*Setting: The scene opens in Charles Schulz's simple, home-based studio. The room is modest but filled with creativity—sketches of Peanuts characters are scattered across a large drawing table, along with pencils, erasers, and comic strips in progress. A soft hum of jazz music plays quietly in the background, setting a calm, thoughtful atmosphere. Schulz sits at his drawing board, focused on his latest creation, the familiar lines of Charlie Brown and Snoopy taking shape under his pencil. The space is warm and personal, reflecting the work of an artist deeply connected to his craft.*

*The phone rings. Schulz puts down his pencil and answers the call.*

*Charles Schulz: "Hello, this is Charles Schulz."*

*Lee Mendelson: "Hi, Charles! It's Lee Mendelson. How are you?"*

*Charles Schulz: "Lee! Good to hear from you. I'm doing well, just working on some new strips. What's up?"*

*Lee Mendelson: "I have good news and bad news."*

*Charles Schulz: "What's that?"*

*Lee Mendelson:* "It's something you're going to write tomorrow!"

*Charles Schulz:* "What!?!?!?!?"

*Charles Schulz:* How would you feel about creating a Charlie Brown Christmas special for television?"

*Charles Schulz:* (long pause, surprised) "A Christmas special? For Charlie Brown?"

*Lee Mendelson:* "Absolutely! I got a call from Coca-Cola today and they told me their animated special for this Christmas was delayed and wanted to know if I and Mr. Schulz ever considered doing a Charlie Brown show?' ' And I said 'Absolutely, we've been thinking about it."

*Charles Schulz:* (laughs) "Lee, why did you say that? We never considered a Christmas show before and I don't even have one written."

*Lee Mendelson:* "I know, I lied. Well, Coca-Cola said the Christmas special they have to make a decision on Monday and asked me to send them an outline of the show"

*Charles Schulz:* "Okay?"

*Lee Mendelson:* "Well, will you do it?"

*Charles Schulz:* (long pause, thinking deeply) "Sure. Let's give it a try!"

*Lee Mendelson:* "Great! I'll come up to see you and I'll bring my head animator, Bill Melendez. By the way, Charles, it still needs to be done tomorrow."

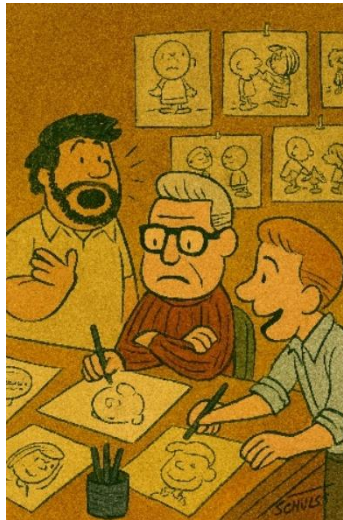
*Charles Schulz:* (laughing) "Tomorrow? Alright, let's get to work."

*Schulz hangs up the phone and looks at his sketches, a thoughtful expression on his face.*

*The scene fades out as Schulz picks up his pencil and begins sketching ideas for the special.*

*Narrator:* "And so, with a simple phone call and a spark of inspiration, Charles Schulz agreed to create something entirely new. A Charlie Brown Christmas was about to take its first step toward becoming a timeless holiday classic."

## Act 2: The Brainstorming Session



### Scene 1: Charles Schulz Meeting in his Studio with Producer Lee Mendelson, and Animator Bill Melendez

#### Choir Song Before Scene 2: "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen"

- **Why:** This upbeat yet reflective carol matches the energy of the brainstorming session as Schulz and his team discuss creating the special.

**Narrator:** "The next day, Charles Schulz, producer Lee Mendelson, and animator Bill Melendez gathered to bring the Christmas show to life. But with only a few days to plan, they had to create something special—and fast."

**Setting:** Charles Schulz's drawing studio, filled with sketches of the Peanuts characters. The room is bustling with activity as Schulz, Lee Mendelson, and Bill Melendez gather around a large drawing table. Papers, pencils, and storyboards are scattered everywhere.

**Charles Schulz:** (sketching) "Alright, we need to come up with a story that captures the essence of Christmas. Something simple, yet meaningful."

**Lee Mendelson:** "I agree. It should be something that resonates with both kids and adults. How about focusing on Charlie Brown's search for the true meaning of Christmas?"

**Bill Melendez:** "That sounds great. We can show his struggles with the commercialization of the holiday and his quest to find something deeper."

**Charles Schulz:** (nodding) "Yes, and we can have him direct a Christmas play with the Peanuts gang. It will be chaotic and funny, but also heartfelt."

**Lee Mendelson:** "Perfect! And we can introduce a small, scraggly Christmas tree that Charlie Brown picks out. It can symbolize the true spirit of Christmas."

*Bill Melendez:* "I love it. We can animate the tree to look really pathetic at first, but then it transforms into something beautiful with a little love and care."

*Bill Melendez:* "And for the music, we can have Vince Guaraldi compose a jazz score. It will add a unique and timeless feel to the special."

*Charles Schulz:* "This is coming together beautifully. But we have some challenges ahead. We have a tight deadline to meet."

*Lee Mendelson:* "Yes, we need to complete this by the weekend. It's going to be a race against time."

*Bill Melendez:* "And we have to work within a limited budget. We'll need to be resourceful with our resources."

*Lee Mendelson:* *I don't think the audience will get this, so we need to add a laugh track to help save the show.*

*Charles Schulz:* (getting up to leave the room and is stopped by the group). "If you add a laugh track, I am out of here."

*Lee Mendelson:* "Okay Charles. And we have to find and direct child voice actors who can deliver authentic performances."

*Bill Melendez:* "We'll also need to overcome any technical difficulties related to animation, sound, and editing."

*Lee Mendelson:* "And let's not forget the network's skepticism. CBS isn't confident in our success."

*Bill Melendez:* "And ensure the music fits seamlessly with the animation. Vince Guaraldi's jazz score will be crucial."

*Charles Schulz:* (smiling) "Exactly. And we can have Linus deliver a monologue about the true meaning of Christmas, quoting from the Bible. It will be a powerful moment."

*Lee Mendelson:* "You want to quote the bible in an animated special?" said a flabbergasted Mendelson

*Charles Schulz:* Yes. It will be a powerful moment."

*Bill Melendez:* "Well, there goes our careers right down the drain,"

*Lee Mendelson:* "Charles, are you sure you want to include Biblical text in the special?"

*Charles Schulz:* "Charles Schulz insisted on one core purpose: 'A Charlie Brown Christmas' had to be about something. Namely, the true meaning of Christmas. Otherwise, Schulz said, 'Why bother doing it?'"

Bill Melendez: Charles, nobody had ever animated anything from the Bible before."

Charles Schulz: "If we don't do it, who will?"

*The scene fades out as the three men continue to brainstorm and sketch out ideas for the Christmas special, determined to overcome the challenges ahead.*

Narrator: "As ideas flowed and the spirit of Christmas began to take shape, the team knew they had something special. But they would soon face doubt from others, and their journey was just beginning."

## Act 3: The Screening



### Scene 1: Screening Room with Animators

#### Choir Song Before Scene 3: "Away in a Manger"

- **Why:** This gentle carol reflects the simplicity and purity of the Christmas story, fitting well as the animators prepare to review the special.

*Narrator: "The special was well on its way to completion, and it was time to show the animators their hard work. But in the quiet of the screening room, doubts started to emerge."*

*Setting:* A small, dimly lit screening room with a projector and a screen. Bill Melendez and Lee Mendelson are seated in the front row, surrounded by about 10 animators. The room goes dark as the projector starts. The animators watch intently, their faces illuminated by the flickering light of the screen. The iconic opening scene of "A Charlie Brown Christmas" begins to play. As the film progresses, the room grows increasingly quiet.

*The film ends, and the room remains silent. The animators exchange uneasy glances.*

*Bill Melendez:* (turning to the animators) "Thoughts?"

*Animator 1:* (whispering) "Is it just me, or does this feel a bit slow?"

*Animator 2:* (nodding) "Yeah, I'm not sure if it's going to hold the audience's attention."

*Animator 3:* "I'm concerned, Bill. It seems slow, and I'm worried it won't be received well."

*Animator 4:* "The pacing feels off. Are you sure the network will go for this?"

*Animator 5:* "I don't know. It just doesn't seem to have the energy we were hoping for."

*Animator 6:* "I'm worried about the opening ice-skating scene. It feels too slow."

*Animator 7: "And did anyone else notice that Schulz's name is misspelled in the closing credits? That's a bad omen."*

*Animator 8: "And the closing credits are nearly illegible over the snowy background."*

*Bill Melendez: "We are way over budget and can't afford to make any more changes. We're out of time and money."*

A long silence covers the entire room when suddenly the senior animator sitting in the back of the room stands up.

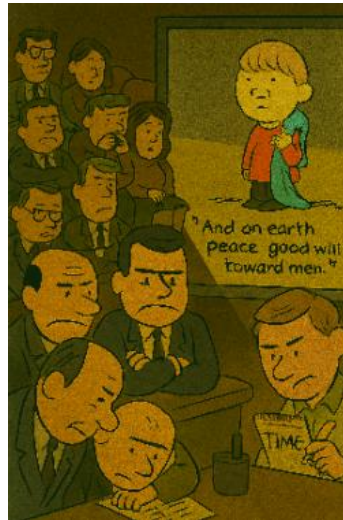
*Bill Melendez: "What is it Ed? What else could possibly be wrong with this show?"*

*Animator 5: "Everyone in this room is wrong. This show is going to run for a hundred years."*

*The scene fades out as the team continues to discuss the screening.*

*Narrator: "Despite the concerns of the animators, one voice in the room remained hopeful. And with that glimmer of optimism, the team pressed on, though their confidence was beginning to waver."*

## Act 4: The Pitch



### Scene 1: CBS Screening Room

#### Choir Song Before Scene 4: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

- **Why:** This contemplative carol sets the stage for the tense moment as the team faces CBS executives, emphasizing themes of hope and waiting.

*Narrator: "With the special nearly complete, it was time for the ultimate test—a screening for the CBS executives. Would they see the wonder? Or would the vision of A Charlie Brown Christmas be met with rejection?"*

*Setting:* A large, formal screening room at CBS headquarters. The room is filled with CBS executives and a Time Magazine television reviewer. Lee Mendelson and Bill Melendez sit nervously in the back row, watching the reactions of the audience as "A Charlie Brown Christmas" is screened.

*The film begins, and the room is silent except for the sound of the projector. As the film progresses, the executives exchange skeptical glances and whisper among themselves.*

*The film ends, and the room remains silent for a moment before the lights come up. The executives and reviewer look unimpressed.*

*Lee Mendelson:* (whispering to Bill) "This isn't looking good, Bill. They're not reacting the way we hoped."

*Bill Melendez:* "I know. They're focusing on all the wrong things."

*CBS Executive 1:* (whispering) "This pacing is off. It's too slow for a children's special."

*CBS Executive 2:* "And the animation is so simple. It doesn't look like the other holiday specials we've aired."

*CBS Executive 1:* (taking notes) "I do not understand the piano music, it fits a funeral, not a children's Christmas special"

*CBS Executive 3:* Where is the action? No explosions? No chase scenes? No one is getting beat up? This is a kid's show!

*CBS Executive 1:* Why do we have these children as the actors? Couldn't we afford trained adults? The kids in my daughter's Christmas play had better voices than these amateurs.

*CBS Executive 3:* "Why is there Biblical text in a children's special? This is risky and I think it will alienate some viewers who may think it is too religious and preachy"

*Lee Mendelson:* (sighing) "We knew this would be controversial, but it's essential to the story."

*Bill Melendez:* "Charles was adamant about including it. He believes it's the heart of the special."

*CBS Executive 1:* "Well, that was... different. I'm not convinced this will be a hit."

*CBS Executive 2:* "It's too slow, and the animation is too basic. I don't see it resonating with our audience."

*Time Magazine Reviewer:* "I appreciate the unique elements, but I'm not sure it will stand out among other holiday specials."

*CBS Executive 3:* "Well, you did your best! This will most likely be the last Charlie Brown show that airs."

*CBS Executive 1:* (talking to other executives): "We probably won't have jobs after this airs."

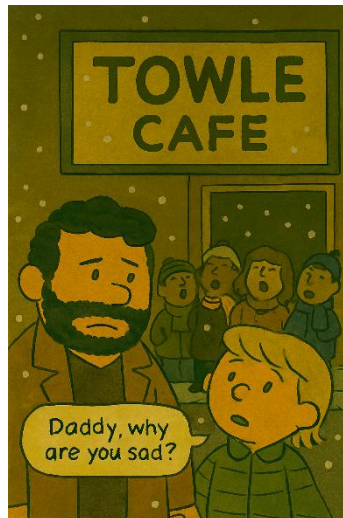
*CBS Executive 2:* It is too late to do anything now. The show airs next week and there is nothing to replace it.

*Bill Melendez:* "I think we've ruined Charlie Brown."

*The scene fades out as Mendelson and Melendez leave the screening room, determined to overcome the negative feedback and deliver a memorable Christmas special.*

*Narrator:* "Their fears seemed confirmed as the CBS executives showed little enthusiasm. The future of the show seemed uncertain, but the team knew that there was something deeper at work—a message that needed to be shared."

## Act 5: The Coffee Shop



### Scene 1: Outside Towle's Café

#### Choir Song Before Scene 5: "Silent Night"

- **Why:** This peaceful carol underscores the quiet joy of the play's success after the special airs, reflecting on the impact of the story.

*Narrator: "The night after the special aired, Lee Mendelson feared the worst. Was this the end of Charlie Brown and the end of their careers?"*

*Setting:* The morning after "A Charlie Brown Christmas" airs on TV. Lee Mendelson is walking with his young daughter towards Towle's Café, their neighborhood coffee shop. Mendelson looks downcast, and his daughter notices his mood.

*Daughter:* "Daddy, why are you sad?"

*Lee Mendelson:* (sighing) "I believe the show was a failure, sweetheart. I think I ruined Charlie Brown."

*Daughter:* (smiling) "Don't be sad, Daddy. I liked the show. It was really good."

*Lee Mendelson:* (smiling weakly) "Thank you, honey. That means a lot to me."

*They walk into Towle's Café. As they enter, the atmosphere is warm and bustling. The regulars and staff recognize Mendelson and start congratulating him.*

*Customer 1:* "Lee! Congratulations on the special! It was wonderful!"

*Customer 2:* "My kids loved it. Great job!"

*Customer 3:* "You did an amazing job. It's going to be a classic, mark my words."

*Just then, Mendelson's assistant rushes into the café, waving papers excitedly.*

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*Assistant:* "Lee! You won't believe this! The ratings are in!"

*Lee Mendelson:* "What do they say?"

*Assistant:* "It was watched by half of the population of the United States! And the reviews are glowing!"

*Lee Mendelson:* (astonished) "Really? That's incredible!"

*Assistant:* "Yes! Everyone loved it. You've created something truly special."

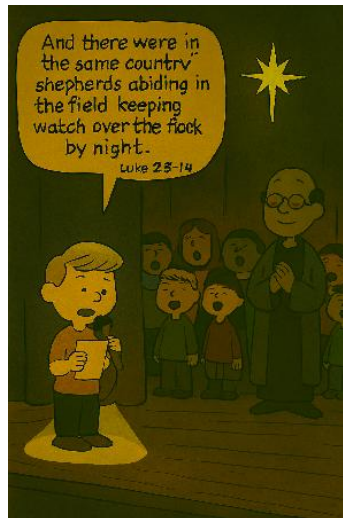
*Daughter:* (hugging her dad) "See, Daddy? I told you it was good."

*Lee Mendelson:* (hugging her back) "You were right, sweetheart. Thank you."

*The scene fades out as Mendelson and his daughter enjoy the moment, surrounded by the warmth and congratulations of their community.*

*Narrator:* "To Mendelson's surprise, the special had touched the hearts of millions. What began as a risky venture was now a resounding success, and the miracle of A Charlie Brown Christmas was born."

## Act 6: The True Meaning of Christmas



*Setting:* The curtain closes, and the stage is dark. After a brief pause, the voice of Charlie Brown is heard, his tone desperate yet searching.

### CHILD VOICE OVER

*"DOES ANYONE KNOW WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT?"*

*(The stage remains in silence for 10 seconds, creating a sense of anticipation. Then, a single spotlight pierces the darkness, illuminating the center of the stage. A small child, holding a microphone, walks calmly into the light. The child pauses for a moment, then begins to read, voice clear and reverent.)*

### CHILD (reading Luke 2:8-14 from the KJV)

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

*(The child finishes, lowers the microphone, and quietly walks out of the spotlight. For 10 seconds, the stage is plunged into darkness. Then, a bright **North Star** appears at the back of the stage, casting a gentle glow. From the darkness, **Linus**' voice echoes, soft and assured.)*

*(The North Star remains shining for a few moments in silence. Then, the lights dim again, and after a brief pause, a **Minister** walks out onto the stage. The minister speaks gently and powerfully, preaching on the message of hope, love, and the true meaning of Christmas.)*

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**MINISTER – (Optional Message)**

*"We rush from Christmas preparations, to parties, and presents all the while trying to catch our breath in the rush for the Season to end. All the while, a still, small voice inside of us reminds us that for us a child is born, to us a son is given, and his is Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, God with us. We too are invited to receive this good news with joy and to share it with others. Let us remember that this gift of love, born in a humble manger, is the reason we gather, celebrate, and sing."*

*(As the minister finishes, a gentle piano intro begins. A children's choir enters, their voices pure and angelic. They sing "**Hark! The Herald Angels Sing**," filling the theater with a sense of peace and reverence.)*

**CHOIR**

*"Hark! the herald angels sing,  
Glory to the newborn King,  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled..."*

*(The song continues, and as the choir reaches the final verse, the stage is gradually bathed in soft light. The **North Star** shines brightly overhead, and the spirit of Christmas fills the room.)*

**Choir Song After Scene 6: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"**

- **Why:** This triumphant carol celebrates the true meaning of Christmas, perfect for concluding the play with a joyful and reflective tone.