

Everything I Learned About Christmas I Learned From TV

As a child I loved all the children's Christmas shows. *Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer*, *Merry Christmas Charlie Brown*, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, to name a few. With no videos, cable, NetFlix or DVR, these shows were once a year opportunities. If you missed a show, you wouldn't see it again for an entire year.

So, these were BIG events in my childhood.

I was so addicted to these shows that, looking back, I can now discern that everything I know about Christmas I learned from TV.

Specifically, I learned from TV **three big lessons about Christmas**.



Lesson #1: There is Something Special About Christmas

How the Grinch Stole Christmas



The first lesson I learned was from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. The lesson was this: There is something special about Christmas. Something that transcended the presents, Christmas trees, meals, or decorations. Christmas, to quote from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, was "a little bit more" than all these things.

If you don't recall the show, here's the basic plot. The Grinch, who lives in the mountains high above Whoville, hates the noise associated with Christmas. So, he dresses up like Santa Claus and ties a horn on the head of his dog Max to make him look like a reindeer. In these disguises they set off for Whoville.

Once in Whoville the Grinch proceeds to steal all the Christmas presents, trees, decorations, and food. He packs all this up and heads back up the mountain just as Christmas day is dawning.

The Grinch's plan is simple. He figures that if he takes away all the Christmas "stuff" the Whos won't be able to celebrate Christmas.

But the Grinch is wrong. In the climactic scene the Who's come out of their homes and, without a single piece of Christmas paraphernalia or presents, begin to sing their Christmas song, *Welcome Christmas*:

"Fah who for-aze! Dah who dor-aze!
Welcome Christmas, Come this way!

Fah who for-aze! Dah who dor-aze!
Welcome Christmas, Christmas Day.

Welcome, Welcome Fah who rah-moose
Welcome, Welcome Dah who dah-moose
Christmas day is in our grasp
So long as we have hands to clasp

Fah who for-aze! Dah who dor-aze!
Welcome, welcome Christmas
Welcome, welcome Christmas Day"

Upon hearing the song the Grinch has this realization, and I quote:



"So he paused. And the Grinch put a hand to his ear.
And he did hear a sound rising over the snow.
It started in low. Then it started to grow...

But the sound wasn't sad!
Why, this sound sounded merry!
It couldn't be so!
But it WAS merry! VERY!

He stared down at Who-ville!
The Grinch popped his eyes!
Then he shook!
What he saw was a shocking surprise!

Every Who down in Who-ville, the tall and the small,
Was singing! Without any presents at all!
He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming!
IT CAME!
Somehow or other, it came just the same!

And the Grinch, with his grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,
Stood puzzling and puzzling: "How could it be so?
It came without ribbons! It came without tags!
"It came without packages, boxes or bags!"
And he puzzled three hours, 'till his puzzler was sore.
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!
**"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store.
"Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!"**

And this realization has such a profound effect upon the Grinch that his heart, previously two sizes too small, grew three sizes that day.

So, I learned from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* that Christmas was more than ribbons or tags. More than packages, boxes, or bags. Christmas was MORE.

But here was the deeply puzzling thing about *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Watch it as many times as you want and it will never be revealed just what Christmas was truly about. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is a negative tale. **It tells you what Christmas *isn't*. But it fails, in a quite puzzling way, to tell you what Christmas *is*.**



So as child I was left in quite a quandary. Christmas was clearly very special, but it was still a mystery.

Luckily, there was more TV to watch! And a part of the mystery of Christmas would be revealed to me in that quirky tale of a mutant reindeer and his friend, the elf, who wanted to be a dentist...

Lesson #2: Christmas Means Misfits Have a Place

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

After watching *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* I knew there was something special about Christmas. But *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* never says exactly why Christmas is special. I got a clue to answering this question by watching that classic Christmas program *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*.

The entire plot of Rudolph centers around misfits. The central misfits are Rudolph and the elf Hermey.



Rudolph, obviously, has some kind of genetic mutation. He's got a red nose and that, well, just isn't natural. So he is shunned, mocked, and excluded from the reindeer games.

Hermey has a different problem. He's terrible at making toys. And he also doesn't enjoy singing in Santa's elf choir. What Hermey really wants to be is a dentist. But for this curious interest Hermey is, like

Rudolph, ostracized and made fun of. They are both, clearly, misfits. This is captured in the mournful little song they sing *We're a couple of misfits*:

We're a couple of misfits
We're a couple of misfits
What's the matter with misfits
That's where we fit in!

We're not daffy and dilly
Don't go 'round willy nilly
Seems to us kinda silly
That we don't fit in.

We may be different from the rest
Who decides the test
Of what is really best?

So Hermey and Rudolph leave
Christmas Town and set out on their
own.



The misfit theme is continued when Hermey, Rudolph, and Yukon Cornelius, after being chased by The Abominable Snowman, find the Island of Misfit Toys. This is an island where rejected, unwanted, and unloved toys find sanctuary. Rudolph, sympathetic to the plight of the Misfit Toys, because Rudolph knows what it's like to be a misfit, promises to take their plight to Santa. This is the lament of the misfit toys:

We're on the Island of Misfit Toys Here we don't want to stay
We want to travel with Santa Claus In his magic sleigh!

A pack full of toys Means a sack full of joys
For millions of girls And for millions of boys
When Christmas Day is here
The most wonderful day of the year.

A jack-in-the-box waits for children to shout
"Wake up! Don't you know that it's time to come out!"
When Christmas Day is here
The most wonderful day of the year.

Toys galore, scattered on the floor
There's no room for more
And it's all because of Santa Claus.

A skooter for Jimmy
A dolly for Sue
The kind that will even say, "How do you do?"
When Christmas Day is here
The most wonderful day of the year.

How would you like to be a Spotted Elephant?
Or a Choo-Choo with square wheels on your caboose?
Or a water pistol that shoots -- jelly?

We're all misfits!

How would you like to be a bird that doesn't fly? I swim!
Or a cowboy who rides an ostrich?
Or a boat that can't stay afloat?

We're all misfits.

If we're on the Island of Unwanted Toys
We'll miss all the fun with the girls and the boys
When Christmas Day is here
The most wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful day of the year!

At this point in the show all the misfit themes are coming to a climax. **We see misfits seeking community, we see empathy as one misfit identifies with another.**

But the story takes its most radical, surprising, and extreme turn when the personification of evil, The Abominable Snowman, comes back as a peaceable creature who is also in need of loving community. Apparently, this "evil" creature is also a misfit. And the hint is that he's "abominable" because he's been marginalized and without community.



So, summarizing all this, I learned from Rudolph this important lesson about Christmas: **Something about Christmas means misfits have a place, a community, a home. Or, rephrased, Christmas means that there are no more misfits.**

But I was still puzzled as a child. **From *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* I learned that Christmas was more than presents and Christmas trees. And from *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* I learned that Christmas had something to do with misfits finding a place of love. But in both shows, the reason behind it all remained elusive. Why do misfits have a home? And what does being a misfit have to do with Christmas? *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* never says.**

So I was quite puzzled. But luckily, there was more TV to watch! And I finally got my answers in a speech delivered by a boy who loved to carry a blue blanket...

Lesson #3: The True Meaning of Christmas

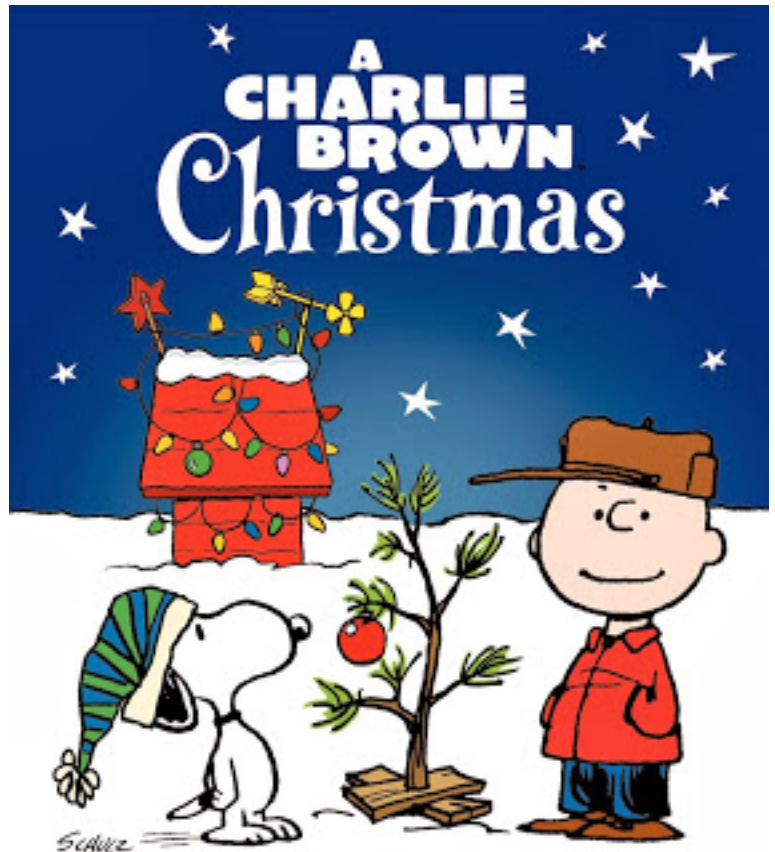
A Charlie Brown Christmas

After the hints about Christmas from the Grinch and Rudolph I finally turned to that trusted friend Charlie Brown.

In *A Charlie Brown Christmas* Charlie Brown is struggling to find out why Christmas is so depressing. He seeks advice from this local psychiatrist, Lucy, who gets him to direct the school Christmas play.

Well, this doesn't go very well. Eventually, Charlie Brown is rejected as director and asked instead to go buy a Christmas tree for the play.

Most of the symbolism in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* focuses on the tree he picks out. Out of all the shiny, bright artificial trees Charlie Brown picks a real but forlorn little tree that isn't much more than a branch.



Charlie Brown takes this tree/branch back to the cast and they laugh at both him and the tree. This ridicule pushes Charlie Brown over the edge and he finally screams, "Would someone please tell me the true meaning of Christmas!!!!!" At which point Linus steps forward.

But before we hear Linus's answer, let's reflect on the symbol of the forlorn little Christmas tree. It's a humble little tree, not much to look at. And it's rejected and despised by men. And yet, it is real. All those flashy other trees are dead, cold, and fake. They are empty and hollow. But this fragile little tree is REAL. It's fragile, but real.

And all this taught me that **whatever Christmas is about, it is about something that is humble, about something fragile and weak, about something that is despised, marginalized, and overlooked. It is life, it's real, but it's so humble that it is easily overlooked and passed over.**



So, to recap, these are all the lessons I learned about Christmas from watching TV:

- **I learned that Christmas was MORE and that it had something to do with finding community.**
- **I learned that, because of Christmas, there were no more misfits, no more outsiders or marginalized ones.**
- **I learned about empathy, compassion, communities of former misfits.**
- **I learned about how community can be the route for the redemption of evil.**
- **And here with Charlie Brown, I learned that the humility of Christmas makes it often overlooked and despised.**

But to this point in all this TV viewing, no one ever connected the dots among all these things. No one had spoken the word that explained just what all this stuff had to do with Christmas. So I perfectly understood why Charlie Brown screamed "Would someone please tell me the true meaning of Christmas!!!!!"

Well, Charlie Brown and I finally got our answer. Linus steps forward and explains it all:

Luke 2: 1-14 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. ² (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) ³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) ⁵ To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And the angel said unto them,

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

¹⁴ **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."**

May there be peace on earth and good will toward all. Merry Christmas.

