



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service

SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Leader Training Guide Songs of Christmas

Objectives:

1. Participants will learn the history of Christmas carols and songs.
2. Participants will enjoy the songs of the season.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

The original meaning of "carol" is a circle dance with singing, often used at pagan celebrations during the Winter Solstice event around December 22. Gradually, such singing became known as an expression of joy, and carols eventually were introduced to religious institutions. In 1223, St. Francis of Assisi purportedly introduced carols to his nativity plays and Christmas Mass, thus beginning the long history of Christmas carols.

During the 1300s, carols were primarily deeply spiritual songs about the Christ child and the Virgin Mary. Songs were sung in both English and Latin, and they were solemn, religious compositions. Over the next century, the elaborate nature of holiday carols turned them into a musical art form consistent with the rich, medieval culture of the 1400s and 1500s.

In the 1600s, the Protestant Reformation gained prominence, and many Christmas carols were discontinued or banned as inappropriate for the church. As the popularity of carols faded, many classic songs faded from memory and have largely been lost.

As you talk about each Christmas Carol, have your group sing the popular ones. Lyrics are available for printing at <https://www.41051.com/xmaslyrics>

1. ***O Come, All Ye Faithful:*** The Latin version of this carol, "Adeste Fideles," was written by John Francis Wade (1711-86), who fled England after the 1745 Jacobite rebellion to teach music in the school for British Roman Catholic exiles in Douai in France.

It was first published in 1760, and it has been suggested that it might have incidentally served as a coded rallying cry for the Stewart cause. The English translation was made by Frederick Oakley and William Brooke in 1841.

The tune "Adeste Fideles" is usually attributed to Samuel Webbe, and dated to 1782. But it is has also been ascribed to Wade himself or to the French composer Charles Favart. "O Come, All Ye Faithful" is used by many congregations as the entrance hymn for Christmas Eve services. And, the tune is sometimes added to the lyrics "Why are we waiting?", performed spontaneously by crowds throughout the English-speaking world wherever lines form and delays frustrate.

2. **Hark! The Herald Angels Sing:** This carol was originally a poem published in 1739 by Charles Wesley, brother of John Wesley. The Wesleys were founders of Methodism. However, the original opening line was "Hark how all the welkin rings." Welkin is an Old English term referring to the sky or heaven. The Rev. George Whitefield, a friend of the Wesley brothers, tweaked the opening line to the one we know today. In these early versions, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" was sung to several different tunes. The tune and tempo sung today came from German composer Felix Mendelssohn.
3. **Deck The Halls:** This cheerful tune dates to 16th-century Wales, where its melody and much of the lyrics were taken from the New Year's Eve song "Nos Galan." A musical makeover was completed by Scottish folk music scribe Thomas Oliphant. He went on to become a renowned translator of songs as well as a lyricist for the court of Queen Victoria. But Oliphant's version is not the one most commonly sung today. Additional changes were made in 1877 and 1881.
4. **Good King Wenceslas:** This unconventional but beloved carol dates to 1853 when English hymn writer John Mason Neale first wrote its lyrics. Set to the tune of the 14th-century carol "The Time Is Near for Flowering," "Good King Wenceslas" focuses on the journey of a kind man who set out in terrible weather on the post-Christmas holiday of Saint Stephen's Day to provide aid to poor neighbors.

The "king" in the song was a real man, Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia, who ruled from 924 to 935. Wenceslaus was adored by his subjects. His great acts of charity led to him being declared a king and an eventual upgrade to sainthood. He is now the patron saint of the Czech Republic.

5. **All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth:** In 1944, grade school teacher Donald Yetter Gardner and his wife, Doris, sat down with a group of second-graders in Smithtown, New York, to help them compose a song for Christmas. While there are different versions of the origin, they all involve a group of children saying, "All I want for Christmas is... ." It's not so much that any students wished for those absent front teeth but more that Gardner was charmed by their requests hindered by toothless lisping.

As Gardner told it, he went home that night and in just 30 minutes wrote the Christmas tune that would earn him royalties until his death. A performance of the song at Gardner's school led to a meeting with Witmark Music Company and ultimately to Spike Jones and his City Slickers recording the tune in 1948. Gardner gave up his teaching job to become a music consultant and editor.

6. **Jingle Bells:** Though one of the most popular non-religious Yuletide tunes, "Jingle Bells" was not originally created as a Christmas tune. Written by James Lord Pierpont in 1850s in Savannah, Georgia, this song originally titled "The One Horse Open Sleigh" was intended to celebrate Thanksgiving. The local Unitarian Church is where Pierpont played the song on the organ and is considered the birthplace of "Jingle Bells." However, some sources insist it originated in Medford, Massachusetts.

"Jingle Bells" was renamed in 1857 when its lyrics and notes were first published. Decades passed before it rose in popularity. Yet, it made history on December 16, 1965, becoming the first song broadcast in space to the crew of *Gemini 6*.

7. **O Tannenbaum:** Commonly translated as "O Christmas Tree," this carol comes from Germany. The earliest version of the song dates to the 16th century and a folk song by Melchior Franck about the tradition of bringing a small fir tree into one's home to decorate. This decorating tradition and its celebratory song moved from Germany to the United States along with its immigrants.

Revisions to the lyrics were made in 1819 and 1824. As Christmas tree-trimming caught on in the 1800s, "O Tannenbaum" grew in popularity.

8. **O Little Town of Bethlehem:** Phillip Brooks, Episcopalian preacher and Yale University instructor, wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem" after a life-changing journey. In 1865, Brooks rode on horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, where he participated in the Church of the Nativity's five-hour long Christmas Eve celebration, complete with hymns. Returning home, this experience proved so profound that he channeled it into the song sung in churches to this day.
9. **Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas:** "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" lyrics were written by Hugh Martin for a scene in the 1944 movie musical *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Judy Garland sings the bittersweet song to her little sister, trying to cheer her up as their family move away from their hometown.

But Garland, her co-star Tom Drake and director Vincente Minnelli initially reacted to the song as depressing and asked Martin to rewrite the lyrics. Though he initially resisted, Martin eventually and reluctantly made several changes to make the song more upbeat.

In 1957, Frank Sinatra asked Martin to revise the line "Until then we'll have to muddle through somehow." He told Martin, "The name of my album is *A Jolly Christmas*. Do you think you could jolly up that line for me?" Martin's new line was "Hang a shining star upon the highest bough."

10. **Silent Night:** The words of "Silent Night" were written by a Priest called Joseph Mohr in 1816. The music was added in 1818, by his school teacher friend, Franz Xaver Gruber, for the Christmas service at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf bei Salzburg, Austria.

Father Mohr asked Franz Gruber to compose the melody with a guitar arrangement. It was several years later that Gruber wrote an arrangement for the organ.

There is a legend associated with the carol that says, Father Mohr wanted the carol to be sung by the children of the village at the midnight Christmas Eve service, as a surprise for their parents. But in the middle of practicing, the organ broke and not a note would come from it! So the children had to learn the carol only accompanied by a guitar. They learned the carol so well that they could sing it on its own without accompaniment.

At Midnight Mass in 1818, Father Mohr and Franz Gruber sang each of the six verses with the church choir repeating the last two lines of each verse. Mohr penned the guitar arrangement around 1820. There are a number of manuscripts of various "Stille Nacht" arrangements that were written by Franz Gruber in later years. It's thought that the song might have traveled around the area with an organ repairman, Karl Mauracher. It was translated from the original German into English in 1863 by John Freeman Young. The carol was sung during the Christmas Truce during the First World War in December 1914 as it was a song that soldiers on both sides knew!

By the time that the carol was famous, Father Mohr had died. Franz Gruber wrote to music authorities in Berlin saying that he had composed the tune, but no one believed him. It was thought that Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven had written it! But then the 1820 manuscript was discovered, and Gruber received his credit.

11. *The 12 Days of Christmas:* In England, between 1558 and 1829, it was not legal for Catholics to practice their Christian faith in public or private. Being a Catholic was treated as a crime. If you even owned a Catholic Bible, you could be put in prison!

Catholics were prevented from worshipping according to their faith traditions because King Henry VIII fell out with the Catholic Church and started his own “Protestant” Church (what is now the Church of England). But, there were many people who were still Catholics, and they worshipped in secret.

“The Twelve Days of Christmas” was written in England. Legend says the song was written to help Catholic children learn about the Roman Catholic faith. In the carol, the days and the gifts are supposed to represent special symbols and have hidden meanings, because it was illegal to have anything in writing that would indicate that you were a Catholic.

But there's **NO evidence that this is true** and it seems most likely just to be a folk song and that the “special” Catholic” meanings were added at a MUCH later date! Also, all the symbols can be used by Protestants and other Christians, not just by Catholics!

The 12 Days of Christmas refer to the twelve day period that starts with Christmas day and ends the day before Epiphany (January 6 – the day celebrating the visit of the Magi or Wise Men to the Christ child).

The song begins, “On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me... .” The “true love” was meant to represent God, the true love of the world. The “me” was meant to represent every man or woman who receives these gifts.

How many gifts are there in total in the 12 Days of Christmas? 364

12. *Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town:* Penned by James “Haven” Gillespie, this jolly tune was first performed on American singer Eddie Cantor’s radio show in 1934. Its inspiration came from a place of grief. Gillespie was a songwriter who had fallen on hard times, both financially and personally. He got the call to write a Christmas tune for Cantor just after learning his brother had died.

Initially, he rejected the job, feeling too overcome with grief to consider writing a playful holiday song. But on the subway ride recollecting his childhood memories with his brother and his mother’s warnings that Santa was watching changed his mind. He had the lyrics written in 15 minutes, and then called in composer John Coats to create the music that would become a big hit within 24 hours of its debut.

It was an instant hit: It sold 100,000 copies of sheet music the very next day, and more than 400,000 by Christmas.

13. *White Christmas:* Irving Berlin knew he had just written a classic when he completed “White Christmas.” Bing Crosby sang it on his radio show in 1941 and recorded it in 1942. It was the best-selling single in any music category until Elton John's version of “Candle in the Wind.”

14. *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer:* The Rudolph character was created by a Montgomery Ward employee in 1939 for the company. Johnny Marks decided to adapt the character to a song which pretty much made it an instant hit.

Marks also was responsible for other Christmas songs like “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,” “Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree” and “A Holly Jolly Christmas.” “Rudolph” was first sung by Harry Brannon, but the 1949 Gene Autry version is probably the one you know and love.

15. Silver Bells: Like “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” “Silver Bells” also was originally in a movie – *The Lemon Drop Kid*, released in 1951. It was sung by Bob Hope and Marilyn Maxwell. The joke behind “Silver Bells,” though, is that the song started out being called “Tinkle Bells” – until the songwriter told his wife about his great new song, and she informed him that tinkle was what little kids did when they peed. The song was inspired by Salvation Army workers ringing bells outside in the snow.

16. Frosty the Snowman: “Frosty” was pretty much written to capitalize on the success of Gene Autry's Rudolph rendition. (It was released just one season later). I'm partial to the versions Jimmy Durante recorded to go with the 1969 television special, myself.

17. Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer: Husband and wife duo Elmo and Patsy recorded the song in 1978 and it started circulating in the San Francisco area. It only took a couple of years to become a cult hit. However, Elmo and Patsy divorced, so in 1992, Elmo recorded it solo. He also released a sequel in 2002: “Grandpa's Gonna Sue the Pants Offa Santa.” I feel like he tried to capitalize on that one about 20 years too late.

Suggested Materials:

Print your own Christmas song lyrics at <https://www.41051.com/xmaslyrics/>

Suggested Activities:

Have the group join in a few Christmas Songs

Lesson Summary:

Enjoy this lesson with your friends as you celebrate the Holiday Season.

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