

A Cajun's Christmas Eve

by

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Author's Purpose

The author's purpose for this story is to offer a traditional twist to a classic night before Christmas tale. With the documentation of Southern Louisiana culture, children across the region can connect on a level of humor, information, and, most importantly, their authentic Cajun voice. This fictional story, combined with a touch of fantasy, is appropriate for a third-grade reader.

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(Image taken at Erath Christmas Parade 2021, inspiration behind story)

It was the night before Christmas when little Bobby-Jo's mother tucked him into bed with a kiss on his forehead and a bedtime prayer. "Snug as a mudbug in his crawfish hole!" Bobby-Jo's mother exclaimed. The smell of freshly baked cookies filled the house around them. Bobby-Jo and his mother had spent the

evening decorating sugar cookies with icing, adding a snowman here and a reindeer there. Bobby-Jo snuck one when mother was not looking. The savory, sugar-filled treat sent little Booby-Jo into a rush! He glazed over the remaining cookies when a thought crossed his mind, “I MUST stay awake tonight to watch as **Pere Noel** HIMSELF comes down that chimney. How can I make SURE that happens?” He then waited for mama to turn her head once more toward the barking hounds coming from the front porch, when he snagged a few more of the Christmas-themed cookies to shove deep into his pockets.

While in bed, Bobby-Jo watched as his mother’s dress glided across the hardwood floor on her way out of his bedroom. She turned back one last time before shutting his door and said, “Remember, Pere Noel only visits the homes of little boys and girls who have drifted off into a deep slumber not even a mighty hurricane could wake.” Bobby-Jo assured her that the day’s activities, filled with running the roads through Erath, Louisiana, drained him of all his energy as he pretended to hazily bat his eyelashes at her.

Peering at the crack under his door, Bobby-Jo waited patiently as he listened for mama’s bedroom door to shut for the night. Once the glow of her lamp dimmed, he sprung to action in hope of finally making the acquaintance of this mysterious, yet jolly, red-cheeked man. He had many questions to ask of Pere Noel. Bobby-Jo grabbed his favorite stuffed **opossum** that mama had sewn for him

many years ago to practice his line of questioning in anticipation for the white-bearded intruder. “How do you manage to gift every child across the globe in just one night? Does your belly hurt from eating all those cookies? Have you applied mosquito repellent before coming to South Louisiana?” Though Christmas time usually reflects white-blanketed streets and a temperature low enough to see your breath, the outdoor thermostat hanging on most of Erath’s residents’ porches reads seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit.

Scarfig down the very last cookie from his kitchen heist, Bobby-Jo grabbed his stuffed opossum and flashlight, and headed straight toward his bedroom door. Cautiously opening it, he scanned the dark, eerie hallway for any sign of mama. Once he decided that the coast was clear to make his way toward the living room where their fireplace sat, he could not help but wonder if the hallway had grown longer and darker. “Has it always been this dark down here...?” Bobby-Jo **mutedly** asked his stuffed opossum. He wondered if turning back and bee-lining for his cozy and safe twin bed would be a better idea than embarking into the dark unknown. He looked at his opossum, then back down the hall, and collected all the bravery he could muster. “We have come this far. There is no turning back now!” he faintly whispered again. Bobby-Jo turned on the flashlight and took his first step.

This house has been a home for Bobby-Jo since the day he was born. He knew the exact spot of which window to lay and bask in when the sun rose each morning. He also knew every single floorboard of his family home and which to avoid when tiptoeing down the hallway on this particular night. He carefully shone his flashlight in certain areas to help navigate him down what seemed like the longest hallway in the world, making sure not to shine it anywhere near mama's bedroom door. After stepping over the last of the creaky floorboards, Bobby-Jo smiled with triumph over his accomplished hallway hustle. He proceeded through the living room and sat behind their worn, green couch filled with mama's stitching from sewing it shut so many times, placing his stuffed opossum beside him. He shut off his flashlight and waited.

Sitting in complete silence and darkness, Bobby-Jo could not help but grow sleepy. His eyes began to flutter open and shut as he slid down the back of the couch, resting his head on his stuffed opossum. He had wished that he would have grabbed at least one more sugar cookie. When he thought he could not last another second awake, a thud came from what he thought was the roof. Bobby-Jo shot up faster than a sugarcane stalk. Fumbling for his flashlight, he pointed it straight at the open face of the fireplace. He was glad mama did not light it earlier in the evening, but then again, she had no reason to being that they wore tank tops and shorts to the grocery store that same afternoon. Bobby-Jo stared intently into the

hole of the fireplace, where the shaky, beaming light caught a shimmer of glitter falling from the chimney. He dropped the flashlight while covering his mouth to muffle the gasping noise that inevitably came out. He could not believe what he was about to see. Bobby-Jo scooped up his opossum while hastily grabbing for the flashlight.

He bolted for the fireplace, when he came to an abrupt stop and jolted back to the floor. Bobby-Jo peered up and met the eyes of the mighty Pere Noel. He was tall, round, and had a white, wiry beard that touched the floor. His maroon suit was made of the finest material, and his large, black boots shined brighter than the Mississippi River under a full moon. Bobby-Jo noticed the crumbs of his and mama's sugar cookies on Pere Noel's beard around his smiling teeth. Pere Noel handed Bobby-Jo a sugar cookie. Before he could even think, Bobby-Jo had swallowed the cookie whole, finishing with a loud gulp. Pere Noel chuckled in the jolliest of ways.

"I have many questions for you, Mr. Pere Noel," Bobby-Jo attempted to get out in his bravest voice. Pere Noel gave him a smile of familiarity and assurance, as if he had already known what Bobby-Jo's intentions were before he had even arrived. As Pere Noel began unloading the rather large, red bag that had been perched over his shoulder, Bobby-Jo asked every single question he could possibly think of to grasp a better understanding of this mysterious, yet jolly, red-cheeked

man. His answers left Bobby-Jo astonished! This person who was once a stranger, only ever talked about and described from the imaginations of Bobby-Jo's peers, was now a dear friend who left to a warm and safe feeling in little Bobby-Jo's heart.

Bobby-Jo watched as his newfound companion flew off into the night. The jingle from his sleigh and the bellowing, "Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas, Bobby-Jo!" rang in his head as he drifted off into a deep slumber, clutching his stuffed opossum and flashlight.

Vocabulary

Mutedly- muffled; indistinct: a muted voice.

Opossum- an American marsupial (animal that carries their young in a pouch).

Pere Noel- another name for Santa Claus in French (known widely throughout Cajun French culture).

References

Louisiana Believes State Standards. (2011). https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/standards---k-12-social-studies.pdf?sfvrsn=24665cc3_39

Social Studies

Standard 4: People, Land, Environment

1. 3.4.1 Compare and contrast the physical features of various regions of Louisiana
2. 3.4.4 Explain how humans have adapted to the physical environment in different regions of Louisiana
3. 3.4.6 Distinguish between urban, suburban, and rural communities in Louisiana

Louisiana Believes State Standards. (2022). https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/teacher-toolbox-resources/k-12-ela-standards.pdf?sfvrsn=52b98a1f_38

ELA

Key Ideas and Details

1. Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.
2. Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
3. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

References

Home. Town of Erath. (2020, September). Retrieved from <https://townoferath.com/>

Lee, L. (2021, November). *Papa Noël*. Southern Louisiana Christmas Traditions. Retrieved from <https://www.lafayettetravel.com/blog/post/papa-noel/>

Mississippi River. American Rivers. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.americanrivers.org/river/mississippi-river/>

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Author's Bio

Ashley Riley is majoring in Early Childhood Education at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. This chosen career path stems from her passion for wanting to positively impact the next generation through knowledge, wisdom, and empathy. Her roots run deep throughout the Cajun culture, and this story captures the essence of just that in a fantasy tale that children will cherish for a lifetime, especially around the Christmas holidays.