

Good Grief! Atheist Group Disgruntled With 'A Charlie Brown Christmas'

An Arkansas school district is battling a group of atheists trying to block the opportunity for children to see a play based on a Christmastime classic.

Alliance Defending Freedom sent a letter Monday to Little Rock School District and one of its schools to encourage them to ignore an atheist group's complaints about allowing students to view a play based on the classic Charles Schulz television special *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

"Schools should not have to think twice about whether they can allow students to watch a classic Christmas production simply because a Bible verse is mentioned in it," said ADF Legal Counsel Matt Sharp. "*A Charlie Brown Christmas* has become an iconic Christmas story and tradition. Are **atheist groups** going to start demanding that students be blocked from attending other classic productions just because they contain religious references? An overwhelming majority of Americans agree that it's okay to celebrate Christmas in schools and in the public square."

After being contacted by a parent, the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers lodged a complaint with the Little Rock School District because Terry Elementary School is providing a voluntary opportunity for students to attend a matinee production of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* being staged at a local church on Dec. 14.

In a letter sent home to parents, teachers explained that the trip to see the production is optional and that students who do not attend will be able to attend another class so they won't be deprived of an educational opportunity. The letter

explained that the purpose of the trip is to “expose your child to the amazing world of theater productions and enhance your child’s creative imagination in the area of dramatic arts.” The letter further explained that the play includes a discussion of the Christian origin of Christmas “through some of the songs and scenes.”

“There is no violation of the so-called ‘separation of **church and state**’ by allowing children to learn about theater through observing a stage version of this beloved program that contains the same religious elements as the television version,” the ADF letter explains. “Given that schools themselves may organize and sponsor Christmas programs and performances (including a performance of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*) and study the historical origins of Christmas, schools may likewise organize a field trip to see a third-party theatrical performance where students hear Christmas carols and learn the historical origin of Christmas.”

The letter offers free legal assistance to the school district if anyone files suit to challenge the opportunity the school has offered for students to see the play: “We hope that you will resist the demands of the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers who seek to deprive students of the opportunity to participate in this educational (and constitutional) trip to see *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.”