



1. chorus ['kɔːrəs]
2. pantomime horse
['pæntəmaɪm
,hɔːs] UK
3. principal girl
[,prɪnsəpəl 'gɜːl]
UK
4. villain ['vɪləɪn]
5. water pistol
['wɔːtə ,pɪstəl]
6. principal boy
[,prɪnsəpəl 'bɔɪ]
UK
7. custard pie
[ˌkʌstəd 'paɪ]
8. audience
[ˈɔːdiəns]
9. stage [steɪdʒ]
10. sweets [swiːts]
UK
11. dame [deɪm]
UK
12. wig [wɪɡ]
13. costume
[ˈkɒst.ju:m]
14. fairy ['feəri]

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VOCABULARY

Going to a panto

Do you know what happens in some British theatres at Christmas? It's panto season. VANESSA CLARK presents language to talk about going to a pantomime.

MEDIUM PLUS

What is a pantomime?

Pantomimes are loud, brightly coloured shows, with singing, dancing and general craziness. Most are based on **traditional tales**, such as *Cinderella* or *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Every pantomime has certain **stock characters**, with many of the **main parts** given to TV stars.

The absolute star of every panto is the **dame**, always played by a man **in drag**. The dame is usually a **widow**, and she will **pick on** a man in the **front row** of the audience to **flirt with** and **make jokes** about.

The **principal boy** is the **hero** of the panto and is traditionally played by a young woman in **tights**, **thigh boots** and a short **costume**. At the end of the play, he marries the **principal girl**, and they both live **happily ever after**.

The **evil villain** always enters from **stage left** (the right from the audience's point of view), whereas the **good fairy** always comes on from **stage right**. This tradition dates back to medieval times, when the two sides of the stage represented heaven and hell.

The **pantomime horse** (or **cow** or **camel**) is played by two actors in one costume. Like all the two-legged characters, the animal has to dance in the **grand finale**, which is usually a **wedding scene**.

Why is a panto so much fun?

A panto has a lot of **physical comedy**, or **slapstick**: people fall over, fall off ladders, get a foot stuck in a bucket and throw **custard pies** (paper plates full of shaving foam) at each other. There's always a chaotic **chase scene**. There are **silly jokes** for the kids, and a lot of **sexual innuendo** and **double entendre** for the adults, as well as **topical jokes** and **parodies of popular songs**.

The **audience** is expected to **participate**, too — to **boo the baddies**, to **cheer the goodies** and to **shout out warnings** (“He’s behind you!”) and other **stock phrases** (“Oh, yes, it is!” and “Oh, no, it isn’t!”).

At the end, there’s always a **singalong**, with the audience divided into two teams for a **singing battle**. The audience is rewarded with **sweets thrown from the stage** — and **squirts of water**, too.



PRACTICE

Now try the following exercises to practise talking about pantomimes.

Exercise 1

E

Study the illustration on the opposite page and find the words defined below.

- The area where the actors perform is the
- The people who watch the pantomime are the
- Clothes worn by an actor are a
- False hair worn by an actor is a

Exercise 2

M

Match the names of the different panto characters (1–4) to their descriptions (A–D).

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| A. She uses her magic to help the good characters. | 1. dame |
| B. It has four legs and can dance. | 2. villain |
| C. He’s the baddy in the story. Everyone shouts “Boo!” at him. | 3. fairy |
| D. She’s the absolute star of the panto, always played by a man in a dress. | 4. pantomime horse |

Exercise 3

A

Complete this description of a visit to a pantomime with the correct words from the list.

booed | innuendo | participation | picked on | silly | singalong

We had a great time at the panto. We were sitting in the front row, and poor Mike was (A) by the dame. There was a lot of sexual (B), but there were also plenty of (C) jokes to make the kids laugh. The audience (D) was wonderful: we (E) the villain and joined in the (F) at the end.

Answers

- A. stage
B. audience
C. costume
D. wig
- A-3; B-4; C-2; D-1
- A. picked on
B. innuendo
C. silly
D. participation
E. booed
F. singalong

