

# *bah, humbug* how ~~bad~~ is it?

Find out what's total Scrooge 'tude—and what's in good spirit.

NOT BAH,  
HUMBUG!

BAH,  
HUMBUG!

## how *bah, humbug* is it to not reciprocate when a friend sends a holiday card?

Relax—you won't be a joy buzzkill. "Holiday spirit is about spreading cheer, so accept the sweet gesture of a greeting for what it is," says Elaine Swann, founder of The Swann School of Protocol in Carlsbad, CA. Keep in mind, too, that people are more than happy to show off photos of their kids. "And nobody's really keeping tabs on whether or not they receive a card back," says Swann. Still, a quick text or email to those who didn't receive a greeting from you will be appreciated: "Thanks for the adorable card—everyone looks awesome. Happy Holidays to all, xoxo." As Swann says, "The feelings behind gestures are what stick with us—the cards get tossed after the New Year."

● **NOT BAH, HUMBUG!**



[good question]

## how *bah, humbug* is it to not hang a stocking for your pet?

Maybe dogs and cats won't pout about being left off the mantel lineup, but your kids might—pets are family, after all. Stockings for them are to your benefit when presents are opened: "Anyone who's had to clean up wrapping paper shredded by a dog on Christmas Day knows it's an excellent way to unveil new and exciting toys," says Kate Abbott, cohost of the podcast *It's A Doggy Dog World*. For her Jack Russell terrier, Qwill, and cocker spaniel mix, Katie, she's stuffed stockings with plushies and homemade biscuits. Felines will purr over wand toys and catnip-dispensing balls. And food puzzles are a treat for any four-legged friend. Just consider waiting till Christmas morning to put in snackables, so your pet isn't tempted to keep leaping up or jumping onto the mantel for a preview.

● **BAH, HUMBUG!**



## how *bah, humbug* is it to give relatives the same gift?

A great gift is a great gift, and if it just so happens to be perfect for a couple of family members, then go for it, says Mary Steffel, Ph.D., a professor of marketing at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, who studies consumer behavior. "People tend to obsess over holiday shopping, but the reality is, each recipient will appreciate a nice present, unique or not." In fact, her research has found that when gift givers overly focus on not repeating prezzies, they end up choosing more obscure stuff that receivers might not like as much. If your aunts enjoy baking, they'll each adore the adorable oven mitts you found. Sidestep any in-person gift-opening awkwardness by saying something like, "I loved this so much, I couldn't resist getting it for both of you!"

● **NOT BAH, HUMBUG!**

[good question]

## how ***bah, humbug*** is it to break the news about Santa to a child who's not your own?

"When it comes to cultural and philosophical matters that parents establish for a child, no one has a right to tread on them," says John Mayer, Ph.D., a pediatric and adolescent psychologist in Chicago, IL. Rather than reprimanding, "Say plainly, 'Look, Nicky believes, and we've felt it's important to keep that going for him.' Let them know they crossed a boundary to help ensure they don't do it again." Keep the fantasy alive for little ones by explaining, "Maybe Uncle Claude said that because some people don't believe in Santa but we do, and we're going to have the best Christmas!" For older kids, discuss how the myth of Santa helps children learn about giving and morals (as in, naughty vs. nice) and is just plain fun, and assure them they can keep the magic going for younger kids.

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## how ***bah, humbug*** is it to have never seen *It's a Wonderful Life*?

Does it have a seriously feel-good message? Yep. Is "Every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings" one of the most iconic lines ever? Yep. But there are no "musts" when it comes to movies, says Bob Mondello, film critic for NPR. "Although *It's a Wonderful Life* can be comforting to watch, there are other gorgeous classics like *The Shop Around the Corner* and great newer classics like *Black Nativity* and *A Christmas Story*."

Really, whatever feels like tradition works: "I have friends who watch *Die Hard* every Christmas!" he says. If you want to introduce *Wonderful Life* to "ick-that's-so-old" kids, head to YouTube for a choice scene or two.

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