

How-To Make be Santa

by Evan Fickling

I have over ten years' experience being a costumed Santa Claus, Bunny, San Diego Public Library Mascot ODI the Coyote, as well as a few other characters mixed in.

This is not intended as a comprehensive guide, but just some pointers if you are considering this as a job or sideline or just for fun.

- 1) Costumes: Are bulky and warm, it's a good idea to wear shorts and a t-shirt under them. At the same time, they are often not as thick as you think, and printed shirts can often be read through the costume.
- 2) Beards: Real Vs. Fake?
 - a) Fake is easier, but it usually LOOKS fake. And it can be hard to talk.
 - b) Real beards are a lot of work, though.
 - c) If your hair is not perfectly white, you probably need to color it.
 - d) Get stuff to brush into your beard. There are several sprays and liquids you can use that will wash right out. This does mean re-applying before every appearance though.
- 3) Cleaning: If you are a successful Santa, or other character, you won't have time to clean the suit between gigs. Spraying it with some kind of deodorizer, or a mixture of vodka & water helps
- 4) Different kids will have different reactions to Santa, or any costumed character.
 - a) Very little kids won't know the difference between real and fake.
 - b) A little bit older kids might be scared. If you are Santa, try lowering your voice.
 - c) Grade school to middle school kids, might be "too cool for this." Stay in character.
 - d) Skeptics: Some want to prove you are fake. It's good to anticipate some tough questions, the reindeer fly because of magic, Mrs. Claus couldn't make it, etc.
 - e) "Cool kids." A little bit older kids and adults often want their pix with you to be ironic. Nothing wrong with that, just stay in character, other kids are watching.
 - f) True Believers: You get just a few who believe you are the real deal. That's a magical feeling.



- 5) Reading: Sometimes the client will want you to read to children. As a library guy, I'm in favor of this idea, but there are some things to keep in mind.
 - a) Just in practical terms, Santa usually wears gloves. Gloves make turning pages very difficult. You might want to try putting tabs or post it notes on the pages.
 - b) If you can, try to familiarize yourself with the book ahead of time. Are there difficult words? Problematic or old-fashioned ideas? To give the classic example, everyone wants to read "A Visit from St. Nicholas," or "The Night Before Christmas," as it is commonly called. It's one of the sources that cemented our modern image of Santa. It is also 200 years old. It has Santa smoking a pipe, something most parents won't want you to encourage. When I was reading it last year, I kept getting hung up on the line "The moon on the BREAST of the new fallen snow..." Feel free to ad-lib.
- 6) Stay in Character: If you are Santa, you are Santa until you are out of sight. If you are in a mascot costume, keep all of that on until you are out of sight.
- 7) Animal Costumes: Most give you little visibility and don't allow you to move that well. You will need a handler to help you move and to make sure everything looks all right.
- 8) Bunnies, Coyotes, Elephants and Bulls don't talk. Practice hand gestures and basic sign language. "Thank you," is a good one, as well as the "Heart hands." Thank you, Taylor Swift!
- 9) If kids are scared, try playing "Peekaboo."
- 10) HAVE FUN!! Playing a character is a great way to have a second childhood.

