

PLAYERS GUILD THEATRE

*A* Christmas  
Carol the new musical

STUDY GUIDE

*For Teachers' Classroom Use*

**2011 *A Christmas Carol* school performances:  
December 6, 7, 13, & 14 at 9:00 & 10:00AM**



## (Pre-Show Discussion)

# INTRODUCTION OF CHARLES DICKENS

## CHARLES DICKENS (1812-1870)

*A Christmas Carol*, probably the most popular piece of fiction that Dickens ever wrote, was published in 1843.

## DICKENS' LIFE WHEN WRITING *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

Dickens begins work on *A Christmas Carol* in October of 1843. It is published during the holiday season of that year. On January 15, 1844, Francis Jeffery (Frank) Dickens, the third son of Charles Dickens, is born.

## POPULARITY OF *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

*A Christmas Carol* was the most successful book of the 1843 holiday season. By Christmas, it sold six thousand copies and it continued to be popular into the new year. Eight stage adaptations were in production within two months of the book's publication.

The book is as popular today as it was over 150 years ago. Charles Dickens, through the voice of Scrooge, continues to urge us to honor Christmas in our hearts and try to keep it all the year.

## RAGGED SCHOOLS

Dickens was involved in charities and social issues throughout his entire life. At the time that he wrote *A Christmas Carol* he was very concerned with impoverished children who turned to crime and delinquency in order to survive.

*"This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want."*

Dickens, as well as others, thought that education could provide a way to a better life for these children. The Ragged School movement put these ideas into action. The schools provided free education for children in the inner-city. The movement got its name from the way the children attending the school were dressed. They often wore tattered or ragged clothing.

## **THEMES OF *A CHRISTMAS CAROL***

Scrooge's transformation is legendary. At the beginning of the story he's a greedy, selfish person.

*" . . . every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart." (Scrooge says to the man who "knew how to keep Christmas well".)*

Initially, Scrooge is a miser who shows a decided lack of concern for the rest of mankind. However, after a ghostly night, Scrooge sees life in a whole new way.

*He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world.*

Beyond merely urging his readers to not be miserly, Dickens seems to be reminding us of the importance in taking notice of the lives of those around us.

*"It is required of every man," the ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and, if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death."*

## **DICKENS HAD THIS TO SAY ABOUT *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*:**

*I have endeavored in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humor with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.*

*Their faithful Friend and Servant,*

*C. D.  
December, 1843*

## MINI-PLOT:

Ebenezer Scrooge is a penny-pinching miser in the first degree. He cares nothing for the people around him and mankind exists only for the money that can be made through exploitation and intimidation. He particularly detests Christmas, which he views as *'a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer'*. Scrooge is visited, on Christmas Eve, by the ghost of his former partner Jacob Marley, who died seven Christmas Eves ago.

Marley, a miser from the same mold as Scrooge, is suffering the consequences in the afterlife and hopes to help Scrooge avoid his fate. He tells Scrooge that he will be haunted by three spirits. These three spirits, the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future, succeed in showing Scrooge the error of his ways. His glorious reformation complete, Christmas morning finds Scrooge sending a Christmas turkey to his long-suffering clerk, Bob Cratchit, and spending Christmas day in the company of his nephew, Fred, whom he had earlier scorned.

Scrooge's new-found benevolence continues as he raises Cratchit's salary and vows to assist his family, which includes Bob's crippled son, Tiny Tim. In the end, Dickens reveals that Scrooge became *'as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew'*.

## THE DEATH OF TINY TIM

Of all the affecting scenes from *A Christmas Carol*, none touches the heart more than the death of the crippled Tiny Tim, foreshadowed to Scrooge by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, especially to Victorian readers. Large families and child mortality were common in the 19th century and many readers may have suffered the loss of a child firsthand.



Michael Patrick Hearn, in his book *The Annotated Christmas Carol*, reports that one observer of a public reading by Dickens of *A Christmas Carol* in Boston in 1867 noted that the passage of Tiny Tim's death *"brought out so many pocket handkerchiefs that it looked as if a snow-storm had somehow gotten into the hall without tickets"*.

## NOTABLE CHARACTERS

**Ebenezer Scrooge** - Scrooge is a cold, miserly creditor whose redemption to kindness and selflessness forms the arc of *A Christmas Carol*. Scrooge neglects the poor and thinks only of his own well-being.

**Bob Cratchit** - Scrooge's overworked employee, a timid man afraid to stand up to his boss' demanding ways. He is the father of a family who is poor in wealth but rich in love.

**Mrs. Cratchit** - Bob's loving wife and mother of his five children, who feels very certain Bob is being mistreated and underpaid by Mr. Scrooge.

**Tiny Tim** - Bob Cratchit's crippled son, Tiny Tim represents goodness and love.

**Jacob Marley** - Scrooge's old business partner, Marley appears to Scrooge as a ghost to warn him about the dangers of his obsession with money.

**Ghost of Christmas Past** - The first Christmas ghost to visit Scrooge. This ghost takes Scrooge back to impacting moments of his past that may help him be redeemed.

**Ghost of Christmas Present** - A larger than life ghost that represents the present, who has 1800 brothers and a life span of one day. He represents celebration and charity.

**Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come** - This solemn, silent spirit represents death, but also the possibility that future is not determined, but open to the free will of humans.

**Fan** - Scrooge's older sister who dies giving birth to her only son Fred. Scrooge loved his sister very much and her death impacted his life very negatively.

**Fred**- Scrooge's nephew, Fred refuses to let Scrooge's "Bah! Humbug!" attitude bring down his spirit. Fred would love to have his uncle to dinner for the holidays in spite of his uncle's attitude and is overjoyed when his uncle attends his party in the conclusion of the musical.

**Elizabeth** – Fred’s lovely wife who does not like the way Fred’s Uncle Scrooge treats Fred or Scrooge’s disposition.

**Mr. Fezziwig** - A robust older gentlemen who was Scrooge’s boss.

**Mrs. Fezziwig** - The loving and jolly wife of Mr. Fezziwig.

**Dick Wilkins** – Scrooge’s best friend and fellow apprentice. He later marries Belle after Scrooge surrenders to his obsession with money and success causing lack of attention and love to the both of them.

**Belle** - The love of Scrooge’s life who has to break up with him because of Scrooge’s greed and love of money. She believes he has found another love, an idol, money. Belle feels money and power have replaced the love they once had.

**Mrs. Dilber** - Scrooge’s underpaid and underappreciated house keeper.

## VOCABULARY

**Carol** - a song associated with Christmas; from the medieval (14<sup>th</sup> century) French word ‘carole’; which originally meant a circle dance; the word could have also been derived from the Latin ‘choraula’ (choral song)

**Crown** - British coin equal to five shillings (no longer in use)

**Ha’ penny** - British unit of money equal to half a penny

**Humbug** - nonsense; especially something designed to be deceptive or misleading

**Mistletoe** - a type of plant with green leaves and white berries; according to Christmas tradition, if you meet some-one under the mistletoe, you are obligated to kiss them

**Shilling** - British unit of money circa 1840 – 1912; British pennies or “pence”

**Workhouse** - a place where poor people or those guilty of minor crimes (usually owing money) were sent and forced to work as their punishment

# THEATRE TERMS

**Director** - person who tells the actors where and when to move and how to interpret the play

**Actor** - person who performs the play on stage

**Stage Manager** - person who manages the stage during rehearsals and performances, ensuring that actors are in their places, props and scenery are properly placed and that lights and sound are coming in and out at the right time

**House Manager**- person who ensures that the audience members are seated in their appropriate places (if there is assigned seating) and by the time the play is to start, ensures that the play starts on time by communicating with the stage manager

**Proscenium Arch** - the frame of the entire stage

**Apron/Thrust** - the portion of the stage that is outside the proscenium arch

**Pit** - where the orchestra and conductor are placed below the audience and stage level if the play is a musical or requires live music

**Properties/Props** - things the actors use on stage in the course of the play. In *A Christmas Carol*, these would be things like the coal for the fire and the turkey

**Scenery** - the pieces on stage that indicate where the actors are. Are they in a bakery? If so, there would be an oven and a counter.

# THEATRE ETIQUETTE

## BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

- \* Please stay in your seat during the show. If you must go to the restroom, you will only be allowed to re-enter the theatre during applause or at the end of the act.
- \* Please do not talk during the show.
- \* You can laugh out loud if you think something that is happening in the show is funny, or clap if you liked something that happened on the stage.
- \* Feel free to stand and applaud at the end of the show if you really, really like the show. (This is called a standing ovation.)
- \* Please do not approach the stage, set or props before or after the show.
- \* Taking photos during the show is not allowed.
- \* Turn all cell phones off during the show.

## DURING THE MUSICAL

- \* **Listen** for vocabulary words
- \* **Notice** how the actors create their characters. How do they move or walk? Do they speak with a proper English accent or are they using Cockney slang? What is the difference?
- \* **Identify** for yourself how the costumes inform you about a character. Are they rich or poor? How do you know?
- \* **Look for** props as you are watching the play. Notice the properties support the actors in their characters and how they support the plot or story of the play. Identify a few props that are personal props or those props used only by one character and a few props that are used to support the plot or story of the musical.

## POST-SHOW DISCUSSION

- \* Discuss the theatrical elements of the performance. How did the costumes, set design, music, etc., enhance the story? How did the costumes help to make the actors look like different characters? What did the actors do (change their voices and accents or move differently)? Can a volunteer from the class imitate their favorite character?
- \* When did the character of Scrooge first appear? What did you think of him?
- \* Did your opinion change after the Ghost of Christmas Past took him to revisit his younger days?
- \* Is it ever too late for someone to change their ways?
- \* What did characters in *A Christmas Carol* do to celebrate the holidays?
- \* Why are the Cratchits so content with so little?
- \* Why is Scrooge so miserable despite his wealth?
- \* What reminded Scrooge of the importance in family?
- \* Who do you like to celebrate the holidays with?

## ALTERNATE ENDINGS

Have students write their own version of *A Christmas Carol*, each starting at the same point in the story (such as when Scrooge meets the first ghost). Read essays aloud or split up into groups and perform. Compare each students' or groups' conclusion to the story. (For example, if Scrooge chose not to change his ways, would it happen exactly as the ghost showed?) Or, if they would prefer, have them write a modern ending to the story.

# A CHRISTMAS CAROL WORD SEARCH

E D E C E M B E R O Q L M A X F D F B P  
 G H O S T S W C H A G A P C Y B R Z J T  
 O D W D N N S I C C U O R A K X W V Q K  
 O N T W E N T Y - F O U R T H F M L S K  
 R V W H I I A N O A A B H B I U O B R V  
 C H E T R N B O B M S U E J R R M L E F  
 S D N A P E T G Q I N A T Y A T N B S T  
 R L T I T V E E P L S N W C B U A C U C  
 E Z Y Y S X R S R Y N V S N H Z R B D G  
 Z S - E A Y V I P T T A R C O U L V I B  
 E D F L M A N F X I M X O X A C A A X S  
 N U I R T D C M M T R V K S N R N E N E  
 E X F A S I M O S W F I V X R T Y Z W O  
 B L T M I L H I A B R H T Y E W L L J V  
 E E H B R O R Z X Q Z A S S R M J Q U C  
 D L E O H H A U N T E D E R X G A P Q A  
 Z L A C C H R I S T M A S E V E W L V N  
 W R T A I Q Q O Z R W L I R S R T D F J  
 D L S J Q D R S N A A Q I G K D R B G B  
 V N X F E A S T H X G F J I S Y F P U B

**A**CHRISTMAS**C**AROL  
**C**H**R**I**S**T**M**A**S**  
**C**H**R**I**S**T**M**A**S**E**V**E  
**D**E**C**E**M**B**E**R

**E**B**E**N**E**Z**E**R**S****C**R**O**O**G**E  
**F**A**M**I**L**I**F**E**A**S**T**  
**F**L**A**M**E**  
**G**H**O**S**T**S

**G**I**A**N**T**  
**H**A**U**N**T**E**D**  
**H**O**L**I**D**A**Y**  
**H**U**M**B**U**G  
**J**A**C**O**B**M**A**R**L**E**Y**

**S**C**A**R**Y**  
**T**H**R**E**E****S**P**I**R**I**T**S**  
**T**W**E**N**T**Y**-**F**I**F**T**H  
**T**W**E**N**T**Y**-**F**O**U**R**T**H**  
**W**I**N**T**E**R

## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT CHARLES DICKENS

In 1822, ten-year-old Dickens moved with his family to 16 Bayham Street, Camden Town, in London. Dickens would later describe the area "*as shabby, dingy, damp and mean a neighborhood as one would desire to see*". He used the house as a model for the home of the Cratchits in *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens would later use the house again as the home of the Micawbers in *David Copperfield*.

Dickens called his little Christmas book a carol; carol being a song or ballad of joy celebrating the birth of Christ. He carries the pretense further by calling the chapters staves; a staff being an archaic form of stanza or verse of a song. He used similar schemes in two subsequent Christmas books: *The Chimes*, in which he called the chapters "quarters" as in the tolling of the clock, and *The Cricket on the Hearth*, where the book is divided into "chirps".





*We appreciate your participation in the Players Guild Theatre Educational Outreach Program.*

*This is our 30th production of A Christmas Carol and our 80th year in operation.*

*Thank you for sharing in this wonderful Canton tradition and for supporting the arts in our community.*

The Players Guild Theatre Staff

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