THEATRE RESOURCE GUIDE

A Christmas Carol
By Charles Dickens
Adapted by James Walker
Directed by Joe Wiener

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Justin Swanson, Assist. Stage Manager
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This theatre resource guide for Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* is designed to be used with students before and after attending the Festival Theatre production. The guide includes information and activities that will increase student understanding of this and other theatrical performances.

The Arts have a special job to do in the development of a creative, concerned, caring society and our children are the perfect place to start. Our mission at Festival Theatre, to *make the arts welcoming to all people as an essential part of their well being for the vitality of the community*, is at the heart of all that we do. Live theatre is an excellent way for students to experience the arts and all the inherent benefits, both on stage and as part of the audience.

You may reproduce any and all of the following pages to use as you wish. The information will help you make the most out of your visit to Festival Theatre. If you have questions or would like more information please contact Festival Theatre 715-483-3387, info@festivaltheatre.org or P.O. Box 801 St. Croix Falls, WI 54024. Enjoy the show!

Sincerely,

Danette Olsen
Executive Director
It’s 1843 and London is the largest, most spectacular city in the world. Queen Victoria reigns over the United Kingdom and the boom of industry has drawn thousands of people from rural areas to the city for jobs.

All this bustle has clogged streets with horses, carts, livestock, and street vendors. The poor and the rich mingle together on crowded streets, coal smoke results in unbreatheable air, and soot settles on everything.

It was a difficult life for children, especially in Camden Town, the downtrodden, market area where Bob Cratchit and his family lived. Children as young as five years old were sent to work to help support their families. The long hours in polluted factories caused sickness and prevented children from being educated to better themselves.

Charles Dickens knew what life in Camden Town was like. He grew up there.

Even in our modern day lives, Christmas brings to mind people who are in want, lacking basic necessities due to poverty. What are some ways that people show charity today?

**Victorian Era Vocabulary**

**Counting House:** a financial office where accounts of trade and lending were kept, like a bank.

**Humbug:** a trick, hoax, deception

**Poor Law:** a system to help the poor in which paupers were forced into workhouses or hired out by overseers as cheap laborers.

**Treadmill:** a machine used as a form of punishment in prisons in which the prisoner operated the device for long hours to grind grain or raise water.

**Want:** lacking basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing or warmth.

**Ignorance:** lacking in knowledge

**Gruel:** a thin, soupy porridge made of boiled ground grain such as millet, oats or barley, or even acorns or peas.

**Pudding:** a sweet or savory steamed dish made with flour

**Shilling:** British money, 1/20 of a Pound, which was considered a good amount.

**Charity:** giving help voluntarily with money, food, or clothing to those in need.
The writing of Charles Dickens was wildly popular in his day. One might say his work was the *Harry Potter* series of Victorian England! His novels and short stories have, in fact, never gone out of print.

At age 10, Dickens’ family moved to Camden Town in London, England. Shortly after, his father fell into financial difficulty and was thrown in debtor’s prison. His concern for the poor and the need for socio-economic reform is a message that runs throughout his work.

By age 21, Dickens had become a journalist. By age 28, he had written five successful novels. He wrote *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, to cover costs from the birth of his fifth child. Because he wanted to keep it affordable, he published it himself and sold it for just a few shillings. Although he made very little money on the novel, it remains one of the most loved Christmas stories written.

Charles Dickens died June 9, 1870 at his home in Gad’s Hill in Kent, England at the age of 58. He is buried in Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey, London, with the inscription on his tomb reading:

“He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed, and by his death, one of England’s greatest writers is lost to the world.”

**A Christmas Carol, a Story in Five Musical Lines**

At Christmas time, we sing carols, or joyful songs of the season. Dickens *A Christmas Carol* is just that—a literary song for Christmas. The story told as a short novel, or novella, is written in five “staves” or lines of music.

**Stave One:** We meet Ebenezer Scrooge, the greedy, heartless, opposer of Christmas. His former business partner (“he’s dead as a doornail...”) Jacob Marley appears and warns him of events to come.

**Stave Two:** Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge to visit his younger, optimistic self.

**Stave Three:** Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge the happiness of people despite their poverty.

**Stave Four:** Scrooge glimpses a grim future with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come: he sees his own death if he doesn't change.

**Stave Five:** Scrooge becomes kind, full of charity and joy because of his journey with the Christmas ghosts.

On stage, the story is told in sections or *acts*. Festival Theatre’s production of *A Christmas Carol* has two acts.
Most of Dickens’ major novels were first published in monthly or weekly installments for journals and magazines. Installments made the stories cheap and widely available. People loved the stories that ended in cliff-hangers and the next Dickens installment was greatly anticipated. Later, the installments were published in book form, showcasing Dickens talent for creating a full novel out of smaller episodes.

A Christmas Carol was first published in 1843 but in just one year’s time, nine different productions of the adapted play could be found onstage in London.

Adapted means the playwright used the original novel as a starting point. Many, many theatres have produced versions of Dickens’s novel to bring this much-loved story to the stage.

In 1991, James Walker, a Festival Theatre actor, took the original story and using his own ideas to create this version of A Christmas Carol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ebenezer Scrooge</th>
<th>the penny-pinching, selfish boss of a Counting House, heartless employer of Bob Cratchit. He represents Victorian London’s rich that ignored the needs of the poor. His transformation is the center of the story.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ghost of Jacob Marley</td>
<td>Serooges former business partner, equally heartless, dead for seven years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Scrooge’s nephew, who carries the joy of Christmas wherever he goes, including to his contrary Uncle Scrooge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Crachit</td>
<td>Scrooge’s overworked employee, a poor father whose household is rich in love and affection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crachit Family</td>
<td>Mrs. Crachit, Belinda, Martha, Rosie, Peter, and crippled Tiny Tim, who represents the goodness of the Christmas spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belle</td>
<td>Scrooge’s former girlfriend, who releases or breaks up with him because of his greed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan</td>
<td>Scrooge’s older sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost of Christmas Past</td>
<td>a spirit that takes Scrooge back in time to his childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost of Christmas Present</td>
<td>a spirit that shows Scrooge kindness and celebration in the present day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come</td>
<td>a spirit that takes Scrooge into the future to show him that the future is determined through his own free will.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What parts of the play do you think came directly from the novel? What parts of the play do you think playwright, James Walker choose to use his imagination? If you have read A Christmas Carol, watch for other differences in the characters or the setting when you attend the performance.
Life in London, On-stage

Theatre Conventions

When you attend a play, you agree to pretend. You agree to “suspend disbelief,” to pretend that the stage action and characters are real. To present a story on stage, actors and other theatre artists often rely on theatre customs. These customs, or conventions, are accepted ways of acting or doing something on stage.

- **A Narrator** is a person in the play who talks to the audience. The narrator sets up the story and explains what will happen or has happened. This adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* uses several narrators to connect sections of the story. The narrators also play characters in the play and sometimes speak directly to the audience. This convention is called *story theatre*.

- **Lighting and Sound** not only allows the audience to see the actors, it is used to create different times of day, moods, and places. As you watch, observe how lighting is used in this production and how it helps to tell the story.

- **Choreography** is the planned dance movements that the actors follow. Actors practice their dance choreography for many hours so that they all move together and at the right times. These dance movements tell you a lot about the characters and help to tell the story. Why might dance movements be used in *A Christmas Carol*?

- **Pantomime** : an actor who plays his/her part with gestures and actions but no actual props

**Problem #1**

How can you show the streets of London, the money lending office, and the Crachitt house all on the same stage?

**Problem #2**

How can you show that the story has gone into another time and place? What convention can communicate this best?

**Problem #3**

What effects build tension and suspense in the story?

There are many ways to solve a problem. During the play, watch for the ways narration and solutions to these problems are handled. Compare Festival Theatre’s solutions to your ideas--what are some other possible ways these problems could be solved?
Playwrights are people who write plays. They write lines of dialogue for the actors to speak. The dialogue gives us information about the story, the characters, the way the characters feel about one another and their situation. The way the actors deliver (speak) their lines also tell you a lot about the character. All of these aspects makes the character convincing or BELIEVABLE.

Actors experiment with different ways to deliver their lines before they decide which best works to both tell the story and shed light on their character. Try delivering these characters’ lines in different ways (happily, angrily, fearfully, proudly, sadly, etc.)

When you attend A Christmas Carol listen for these lines and for how they are delivered. Observe what they tell you about how the characters feel.

Ebenezer’s former business partner Jacob Marley, now deceased, appears to Scrooge, chained and bandaged, with an urgent message.

MARLEY
Oh, captive, bound and double-ironed. Not to know that no space of regretfulness can make amends for ones life’s opportunities misused. Such was I, Ebenezer, such was I!

I am here tonight to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE
You were always a good friend to me. Thank-ee.

MARLEY
You will be haunted by three spirits.

SCROOGE
Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?

MARLEY
It is.

SCROOGE
I think I’d rather not.

MARLEY
Without their visits you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls One.

SCROOGE
Couldn’t I take ‘em all at once, and have it over with Jacob?

MARLEY
Expect the second on the next night at the same hour, the third upon the next night, when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more, and look that, your sake, you remember what has passed between us your sake, you remember.
The Part that YOU play

To prepare for presenting *A Christmas Carol*, seven adult actors and two complete casts of youth actors, in all, memorized their lines, practiced their movements and learned the show’s songs. They worked with director Joe Wiener who helped them move about the stage and play their parts well. The costume, lighting and set designers planned with the director to create a look that was correct. Sound design adds another layer. The stage manager is ready to make sure everyone on stage and backstage does the right thing at the right time. All Festival Theatre needs now is YOU.

YOU have a part to play in *A Christmas Carol*.

You are the audience. Your part requires you to listen carefully and watch closely.

Please laugh or applaud if you enjoy the play, but remember that you and the actors are in the same room. Talking or whispering to friends during the performance will distract the actors.

Help them play their parts well by playing YOUR part well.

Reacting to the Performance


2. What are some “big ideas” or themes of the play that stand out to you?

3. Did any of the characters undergo a transformation during the course of the play? Who? Why?

4. Did you personally identify with any of the characters in the play? Who? Why?

5. Who would you most like to be if you were an actor in the show? Why?

6. Did the theatrical and physical style and design elements of the production (the lighting, the set, the sound effects, etc.) enhance the performance? Explain your reaction. Were there any elements that distracted from the story? Which? Why?

Opportunities for Arts Education abound at Festival Theatre!

For information on our Youth & Family Theatre Series, Creativity Workshops, Summer Creativity Day Camps, and Artist in Residency programs visit www.festivaltheatre.org or contact the Arts Education Director at 888.887.6002.
Follow the Characters

Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* with some messages in mind. He hoped his readers would gain knowledge and insight about the world—specifically, the situation of the poor in London.

Characters, particularly in theatre, are an important part of telling a story. The way characters handle conflict and change are constant part of life and also fictional literature. We can learn about the meaning Charles Dickens hoped to reveal through his characters by thinking about the following questions:

- What do they say or think?
- What do they do?
- What do others or say about them?
- How are they involved in the story’s conflict?
- How do they change?

**Part One:**

- Think of a familiar story such as *Cinderella* or *Little Red Riding Hood*.
- Fill out the mind map below with responses to the questions based on one of the characters.
- After recording “How Do They Change,” think of a theme or a message for the story. For example, a theme for *Cinderella* might be “Hard work and honesty will ultimately be rewarded.”

**Part Two:**

Fill out the Character Analysis Grid to analyze Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*.

**Part Three:**

Use responses from your Character Analysis Grid to write a personal narrative paragraph from the perspective of Ebenezer Scrooge about his transformation in *A Christmas Carol*.
Have students work in partners to fill out the conflict ring and the first three quadrants. Note: others in the story might be the narrator, the author or other characters.

Team each set of students with a second set (groups of four) to work on the final quadrant: How does the character change? As students examine Scrooge’s thoughts and actions, they will see how his internal conflict about how he has lived his life has changed him.

1. What does the character do?
   - Refuses to dine with nephew
   - Refuses charity for poor
   - Chases away caroler
   - Reluctantly gives Bob a half day off
   - Travels with spirits past, present, future from the poor
   - Donates charity to the poor
   - Dresses with nephew on Christmas
   - Buys turkey for Bob & raises salary

2. What does the character say or think?
   - Refuses charity for poor
   - Chases away caroler
   - Reluctantly gives Bob a half day off
   - Travels with spirits past, present, future
   - Donates charity to the poor
   - Dresses with nephew on Christmas
   - Buys turkey for Bob & raises salary

3. How does the character change?
   - Marley—squeezing, wrenching, grasping, grasping, old sinner
   - Nephew—rich enough to need more
   - Woman—displaced, me with a golden idol
   - Mrs. Cratchit—odious, stingy, unfeeling man
   - Nephew—comical old fellow
   - Nephew—play him, suffers from own ill
   - Marley—no one stops & greeks him
   - Marley—squeezing, wrenching, grasping, grasping, old sinner
   - Nephew—rich enough to need more
   - Woman—displaced, me with a golden idol
   - Mrs. Cratchit—odious, stingy, unfeeling man
   - Nephew—comical old fellow
   - Nephew—play him, suffers from own ill

4. How do others feel about the character?
   - Marley—no one stops & greeks him
   - Marley—squeezing, wrenching, grasping, grasping, old sinner
   - Nephew—rich enough to need more
   - Woman—displaced, me with a golden idol
   - Mrs. Cratchit—odious, stingy, unfeeling man
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5. Author’s theme or point of view:
   One's wealth is measured in friendships and good deeds, instead of merely money.