A Christmas Carol
by Charles Dickens
adapted by James Walker
directed by Jaclyn Johnson

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Using this theatre resource guide

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 and 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, festivaltheatreboxoffice@gmail.com or P.O. Box 801, St. Croix Falls, WI 54024. Enjoy the show!

Sincerely,
Pam Fuchs
General Manager
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 unbreathable 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?
Charles Dickens, a Writer

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.
Novel to Play

Christmas Carol Characters

Ebenezer Scrooge: 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.

Ghost of Jacob Marley: Scrooge’s former business partner, equally heartless, dead for seven years.

Fred: Scrooge’s nephew, who carries the joy of Christmas wherever he goes, including his contrary Uncle Scrooge.

Bob Crachit: Scrooge’s overworked employee, a poor father whose household is rich in love and affection.

The Crachit Family: Mrs. Crachit, Belinda, Martha, Rosie, Peter, and crippled Tiny Tim, who represents the goodness of the Christmas spirit.

Belle: Scrooge’s former girlfriend, who releases or breaks up with him because of his greed.

Fan: Scrooge’s older sister.

Ghost of Christmas Past: a spirit that takes Scrooge back in time to his childhood.

Ghost of Christmas Present: a spirit that shows Scrooge kindness and celebration in the present day.

Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come: a spirit that takes Scrooge into the future to show him that the future is determined through his own free will.

From a novel to a play

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 Dicken’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*.

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.
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**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. In *A Christmas Carol*, watch for the following theatre conventions:

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 allow the audience to see the actors, they are 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** is used to show action using gestures and movement without the use of actual props or words.

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**Solving Stage Problems**

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?

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

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

3. What effects build tension and suspense in the story?
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.)

Lines of Dialogue

What do these lines of dialogue from *A Christmas Carol* tell you about the story? What do they say about the characters? About how they feel? After trying different ways of saying them, which line deliveries worked best? Why?

**FAN** Ebeneezer!

**LITTLE SCROOGE** Fan!

**FAN** Dear, dear brother.

**LITTLE SCROOGE** Fan.

**FAN** I have come to bring you home, dear brother. Home, home, home.

**LITTLE SCROOGE** Home?

**FAN** Yes. Home for good and all! Home for every and ever! Father’s so much kinder than he used to be-- that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said Yes, you should-- and sent me in a coach to bring you! And you are never to come back here again! But first, we are to be together all Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world!

**LITTLE SCROOGE** Home.

**SPIRIT PAST** Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered- but she had a large heart.

**SCROOGE** So she had. Your’e right, I’ll not gainsay it, spirit.

**SPIRIT PAST** She died in childbirth, and had, as I think, children.

**SCROOGE** One child only.

**SPIRIT PAST** True--your nephew, Fred.

**SCROOGE** Yes. Fred.

**SPIRIT PAST** Let us see another Christmas.

*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.*
Theatre Etiquette

To prepare for presenting *A Christmas Carol*, eighteen actors memorized their lines, practiced their movements and learned the show’s songs. They worked with director Jaclyn Johnson who helped them move about the stage and play their parts well. The costume and set were also planned with the director and created a look that was historically correct. The stage manager is ready to make sure everyone on stage and backstage is safe and does the right things 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.

It’s okay to laugh or applaud if you enjoy a play, but remember that you and the actors are in the same room. Talking or whispering to friends during the performance will distract actors. Help them play their parts well by playing YOUR part well.

Reacting to the Performance

After the performance, share your experience of *A Christmas Carol* with your class, family and friends:

- Who was the most memorable character and why?
- How do you describe your overall reaction to the play? Surprised? Intrigued? Delighted? Challenged?
- What were the lessons and themes of the play?
- What was your favorite part of the play and why?

Get Involved

For information about Arts Education opportunities at Festival Theatre, visit [www.festivaltheatre.org](http://www.festivaltheatre.org) or call 715.483.3387.
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 parts 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 say or think 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. Using the completed mind map, think of a theme or message for the story. (For example, a theme from 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 pairs 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.

**1. What does the character do?**

- Refuses to dine with nephew
- Refuses charity for poor
- Chases away caroler
- Reluctantly gives Bob half day off
- Travels with spirits past, present, future
- Donates charity to the poor
- Dines with nephew on Christmas
- Buys turkey for Bob & raises salary

**2. year old: cheerful to money grubbing**

Uncaring of poor to charitable

Stingy to generous

Concerned with wealth to concerned with others

Unhappy to happy

Lonely to friendship

**What does the character say or think?**

- Jail those who owe him money
- Calls Christmas “humbug”
- Workhouses & prisons for poor
- Poor should die & decrease population
- This unhappy corpse could be me
- I am not the man I was
- I will honor Christmas in my heart every day
- I am happy as an angel

**3. How do others feel about the character?**

- Marley—no one stops & grieves him
- Marley—squeezing, wrenching, grasping, clutching, covetous old sinner
- Nephew—no need to be morose
- Woman—displaced me with a golden idol
- Nephew—conical old fellow
- Nephew—pity him, suffers from own ill

**4. 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.

**5. Author’s theme or point of view:**

One’s wealth is measured in friendships and good deeds, instead of merely money.
Character Analysis Grid

1. What does the character do?

2. What does the character say or think?

3. How do others feel about the character?

4. How does the character change?

5. Author’s theme or point of view:

Class Discussion or Short Essay Questions

1. If you were an actor, which character or characters would you like to play?

2. Why do you think the author included both the flashback of Scrooge’s childhood and his apprenticeship to Fezziwig when Scrooge was with the spirit of Christmas Past?

3. Why do you think that the author included the scene between Belle and her husband?

4. When in the play did you see Scrooge beginning to change?

5. Why do you think Charles Dickens included each of the Cratchit family members?

6. Marley tells Scrooge that he will be visited by three different spirits on three different nights. However, the play starts with Christmas Eve and ends on Christmas Day. Do you think that Dickens made a mistake or was this intentional on his part? Why or why not? Explain.

7. What does the Cratchit boys’ excitement about smelling the Christmas goose tell you about their poverty? What other things tell you they were poor?

8. How did you react to the scene with the Charwoman, the Laundress, and the Undertaker? What did you think when you heard that Scrooge did not realize that they were talking about him? How important do you think this scene was to the rest of the play?

9. If you were to write a different ending to the play, how might you end it?

10. Describe the plot of the play in three sentences totaling no more than 100 words and no less than 50 words.

11. Think about the music included in the play, the sound effects, and the accents of the actors. Did each of them enhance or detract from your understanding of the plot?

12. Pick one character from the play and write a character sketch of that character.

13. This play was written over one hundred and fifty years ago and it is still popular. Discuss why you think that this is true.

14. Do we have people in our society that would describe others as “surplus population”?
**Crossword Puzzle**

**Across:**
1. Scrooge’s nephew  
2. Christmas ____  
3. Marley’s necklace  
4. “Crutch” character  
5. Item from Charwoman’s bundle  
6. Scrooge’s partner  
7. Under Christmas Present’s robe  
8. Scrooge says: “If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the ______________.”  
9. What the Charwoman removed from Scrooge  
10. Author

**11. Main Character**  
**12. A miserly character**  
**13. Scrooge’s sweetheart**

**Down:**
9. Fan to Scrooge  
14. Christmas ________  
15. Under Christmas Present’s robe  
16. Christmas ___ ___ ___  
17. Takes place in the __________ season  
19. What the Cratchits’ had for Christmas dinner  
20. Dinners were cooked at the Baker’s _____
Several of the words and traditions in A Christmas Carol may seem strange and unfamiliar to your students. Below are a few phrases and items that may be familiar to them, but that come from times even earlier than the mid-eighteen hundreds.

**Where DID that expression come from anyway? Well, it must may have come from England!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Resulted from:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Bring home the bacon</em></td>
<td>Pork was a rare commodity. When guests were expected, families would hang up their bacon to show their wealth (or that a man could bring home the bacon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Burn the candle at both ends</em></td>
<td>A reed was inserted in a candleholder sideways and then lit at both ends and therefore offered more light which allowed people to stay up later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Adding insult to injury</em></td>
<td>As a castle was being invaded the inhabitants would douse the invaders with boiling urine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Canopy beds</em></td>
<td>There was little to stop bugs, rats, etc. from falling into a bed. Tall bed posts with a sheet over them helped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Don’t throw the baby out with the bath water</em></td>
<td>Entire families shared the same bath water, starting with the father, and then the sons. Finally the women and children, bathed with the babies being last. The water would be so dirty that you could lose someone in it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Chairman of the Board</em></td>
<td>The father sat at the head of the table which was made of a board of wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dirt poor</em></td>
<td>Only the wealthy had something other than dirt floors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>June weddings</em></td>
<td>Most people took their yearly baths in May, and therefore still smelled pretty good in June.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Raining cats and dogs</em></td>
<td>Houses with thatched roofs originally had no wooden layer underneath. Small animals would burrow into the thatch to keep warm. The thatch became slippery when it rained and the animals would fall off the roof.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Thresh-hold</em></td>
<td>Wealthy individuals had slate floors that became slippery when wet. They would put down straw (thresh) to keep from slipping. As the winter progressed they would add more thresh until the thickness of the thresh would start slipping out the door. They added a piece of wood in the entrance which became known as the threshold.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Crossword Puzzle Answers:**

1. Fred  
2. Past  
3. Chain  
4. Tiny Tim  
5. Bed Curtains  
6. Marley  
7. Ignorance  
8. Surplus Population  
9. Shirt  
10. Charles Dickens  
11. Scrooge  
12. Scrooge  
13. Belle  
14. Present  
15. Want  
16. Yet To Come  
17. Christmas  
18. Sister  
19. Goose  
20. Shops