

A Christmas Carol

Adapted by Dennis Powers and Laird Williamson

From the story by Charles Dickens

Directed by Laird Williamson

November 29 - December 29, 1996

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Photo by Ed Blandon

Study Guide

prepared by the Education Department of the Denver Center Theatre Company
and contributing writer Sally R. Gass



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A Christmas Carol: A Synopsis by David



The Characters

Adapted for the stage almost immediately after its publication – a performance in London is recorded in 1844 – *A Christmas Carol* lends itself easily to drama because of its many vivid characters and incidents along with its striking use of fantastic elements. Inevitably changes must be made, because of Dickens' heavy dependence on descriptive embellishment. In adapting the story, Laird Williamson and Dennis Powers have somewhat streamlined the narrative while preserving the basic plot and spirit of the original. The play is structured in one act and is presented without an intermission. The principal characters are as follows:

Scrooge, a mean-spirited miser. Also seen as a **Boy** and as **Young Scrooge**
Dickens, the author (who does not appear in the original)

Marley, the ghost of Scrooge's dead partner

Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future

Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's downtrodden but forgiving employee

Mrs. Cratchit and children, including the sickly **Tiny Tim**

Two Gentlemen, whose holiday charity appeal is spurned by Scrooge

Belle, Young Scrooge's girlfriend

Fred, Scrooge's amiable nephew, and his wife, **Mary**

Fezziwig, Young Scrooge's jolly employer

Mrs. Fezziwig, wife of the above

Mrs. Dilber, a laundress

Old Joe, a fence

Mrs. Filcher, a charwoman

A young caroler "emerges" on a darkened stage, singing a Christmas air. The figure of old Scrooge now appears, hunched over his office desk. He is briefly stirred by the song, then returns to his figures. Now the figure of Dickens walks into the light, telling the audience about Scrooge and his late partner Marley. Overhearing, Scrooge protests the noise. Bob Cratchit, a poor employee, enters and warms himself briefly at the fire. Scrooge orders him back to work.

Enter the Two Gentlemen, who ask Scrooge to help the poor in honor of the holiday season. Scrooge testily refuses, saying that his taxes are being used to keep the poorhouses in operation. The men exit. The nephew Fred enters, attempting to cheer the old miser and speaks happily of the season. Scrooge denounces not only Christmas, but romantic love as illusions. Fred leaves. Cratchit attempts to leave work early on Christmas eve; Scrooge grumbles but allows him to go. Now Dickens returns and raises a death-mask likeness of the late Marley before Scrooge. He disappears, leaving the frightened miser alone to enter his dwelling.

Marley's Ghost appears to Scrooge and announces that he has been "doomed to wander through the world," saddled with the chains of his miserly life. The alarmed Scrooge asks for a word of comfort, but Marley has none to give, for only now, too late, does he realize that his true business on earth was not money grasping but "charity, mercy, forbearance and benevolence." Marley tells his former partner that he will be visited by three spirits, without whose visitation he will surely be doomed to a wandering misery. Marley dissolves.

Scrooge falls asleep and is awakened by the midnight tolling of his clock. Soon he is confronted by the Ghost of Christmas Past, his own past. The ghost touches Scrooge over the heart and the scene is transformed into a vision of the miser's birthplace. In the dreamy mingling of past and present which follows, Scrooge sees and calls out to his boyhood friends. With growing poignancy he reviews his childhood. His sister Fan appears, telling him that their father has become a kind man and "home's like heaven." She exits with the Boy Scrooge, singing the caroler's song.

Now Scrooge's girlfriend, Belle, appears speaking with the Young Scrooge. They discuss the wrongs inflicted by his father, and Young Scrooge reveals his bitterness. Belle offers her own kind heart to him and then after a kiss, they exit. Fezziwig, Scrooge's first employer, enters followed by Mrs. Fezziwig. They dance joyfully and are joined by other dancers in a spree of merriment. Fezziwig gives presents to Young Scrooge and his friend. The Fezziwigs depart.

Belle returns and gently chastises Young Scrooge for falling in love with money: "You fear the world too much. All your other dreams you've locked away, beyond the world's reproach." She exits saying, "May you be happy in the life you have chosen." Overcome by emotion, the old Scrooge begs the spirit to return him to the present.

Returning home to bed, he is soon awakened by the Ghost of Christmas Present. Touching the spirit's robe, Scrooge is transported to the humble home of the Cratchits. Christmas dinner preparations are being made by Mrs. Cratchit and the children. Cratchit enters the happy scene with his sickly but kind-hearted son, Tiny Tim, on his shoulder. The little boy says, "I hope the people saw me in church, because it might be good to remember on Christmas Day who made the lame to walk and the blind to see." The family then settles down to a feast of goose. When the watching Scrooge asks the ghost if Tiny Tim shall live, he replies by reminding Scrooge of his cold-hearted denial of the charity appeal. Scrooge feels humbled and remorseful. Now, the Christmas pudding is brought out to great excitement.

The Christmas dinner gathering of Fred's family appears near that of the Cratchits. The guests play a game in which Scrooge himself is the "animal" in question. Fred charitably says that he feels sorry for the old man, who cheats himself of holiday cheer and good companionship.

This scene now fades and is replaced by one of a miner's family, toasting one another and joining in the caroler's song. Now a light comes back on the Cratchits, the father is raising a toast to the feared though not hated Scrooge.

Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present enter.

From under his great cloak, the ghost brings the miserable, childish figures of Want and Ignorance. They are, he notes bleakly, the offspring of man. Now the Ghost fades out.

Soon the Ghost of Christmas Future enters, followed by a group of businessmen. The businessmen laughingly speak of Scrooge, who does not realize they are talking about him

as if he were dead.

The Cratchits appear, mourning the death of Tiny Tim and comforting each other with thoughts of the little boy's good spirits. Scrooge asks if this must come to pass, but the ghost is silent. The figures of Mrs. Dilber, Old Joe, Mrs. Filcher and the Undertaker's Boy now appear in Scrooge's bedroom, circling around his cold dead body on the bed. They pick at his belongings and speak sharply of his failings when alive. Finally Old Joe says, "What do you think I could get for the corpse?" and they all laugh.



In an overgrown churchyard, Scrooge approaches a forgotten grave and realizes at last that it is his own. Confronted with his mortality and this vision of loneliness and death, he cries out, asking forgiveness for his past sins and vowing to mend his ways. He collapses in exhaustion as the vision fades. Coming to his senses, he realizes that the true spirit of Christmas now lives in him. He calls out to a boy passing nearby and discovers that it is Christmas Day. He sends the lad off to buy a turkey. Now, walking through the town, Scrooge is joined by the other characters of the play, wishing each and all a Merry Christmas.

Next morning, at his office, Scrooge at first pretends to be his old self, then suddenly gives the amazed Bob Cratchit a raise. The whole company cheers and Dickens enters the scene to tell the audience that Scrooge is a new man and that Tiny Tim still lives. On this joyous note, the play comes to a close.

Dickens' England

by Pat Pederson-Lawton

Courtesy of *Stage View* from Syracuse Stage

We are so like our ancestors of that period (1782-1919), and yet so unlike; so near them in time and in affection, so far removed from them in habits and in experience. There lie the paradox and romance of modern history.

~ George Macaulay Trevelyan *British History in the Nineteenth Century*.

This belief persisted well into the 19th century.

British history in 19th century Victorian England, to many of us, was a time of prosperity, refinement, high living standards and overstuffed living rooms; it was *Upstairs, Downstairs*. But life in *fin de siècle* England was very different from life at mid-century. Inner-city England in the 1830s and 1840s was plagued by Industrial Revolution problems at its height. Air, soil and water pollution were not dealt with any more than overcrowded living conditions or factory life's disruption of family structures. The British government encouraged the economic potential of the Revolution but discouraged legal or political intervention in its problems. There was no precedent for legislation of private enterprise, the prevalent economic theory being *laissez faire*. "The result was that by 1832 there was scant provision for the political, municipal, educational or sanitary needs of the population, most of whom were not even tolerably clothed or fed." This, Dickens knew at first hand, between his family's chronically unstable economic condition and his stint as a reporter for *The Mirror of Parliament*.

In the early 1800s, factory workers put in as many hours as their employers required or lost their jobs. Not until the Factory Act of 1833 limited the hours of children and youths and prohibited the employment of children under the age of nine, was there any regulation. Implementation of the Act led to government factory inspection and to the Ten Hours Bill, which limited women and youths to ten hours per day. They performed much of the finish work in textile factories and the mining done in shafts no bigger than crawl spaces, so in effect work ceased when they left.

The Poor Law of 1834 created a board of three commissioners to oversee local parish relief, the first national government agency. Like preceding Poor Laws it also required that those unemployed but able to work be sent to workhouses, where conditions were often deplorable at best. Since 1688, workhouses had been under the control of private contractors, who set their own hours, maintained working conditions or not, and paid living wages or not with no one to answer to. An outbreak of fever in 1838 prompted the Board to intervene, leading to the formation of the Health Board in 1848, the Local Government Board and the Ministry of Health. However, the attitude of the well-to-do was: "Let the able-bodied man be given the choice of earning his own living or going into the workhouse, and then, if he still cannot find work on the land, send him to the factory or the colonies."

Prisons were also managed by private contractors, who, like those overseeing workhouses, took them on as profit-making ventures; there were no government subsidies or support of any kind. It is estimated that some 40,000 people were arrested every year for debt alone. "In some prisons nothing could be had for nothing, as not even a minimum allowance of food was supplied out of the public funds.... In other prisons the free food was filthy and inadequate. The debtor, the most innocent class of prisoner, was least able to purchase alleviation."

While it's true that legislation like the Education Act of 1870 eventually led to "a reading public co-extensive with the nation," in 1818 only one third of all children attended school. Many of these schools were church-sponsored; the government began supporting school construction in 1833 and formed an Education Committee in 1839 to monitor the construction grant and inspect the school buildings. In 1839, the government did nothing to maintain quality in education. Like prisons and workhouses, schools were operated by private individuals seeking to make a profit; there were no national standards to which they were compelled to conform.

Thus, by the time *A Christmas Carol* was published in 1843, the seeds had been sown for rudimentary change. Still, the working classes were faced with many of the same untenable conditions as they had before, some of which were addressed by the Reform Bill of 1867. By then, "the idea of change was no longer new and shocking. In 1832, the nation had been made supreme and had been so defined as to include half the middle class. In 1867 it was defined again so as to include the rest of the middle class and the working men of the towns." This era of government legislation, including the Education Act and others, and the slowing of the Industrial Revolution's pace, paved the way for the improved living conditions and general material increase for all classes that we associate with Dickens' England.

The Roots of Christmastime Celebrations

by Sally Gass

"Masters in this hall, hear ye news today

Although the Christmas story centers in the Christ Child of Bethlehem, celebrations at this time of year commenced long before His coming. Anthropologists believe that celebrations near the time of Christmas began in Mesopotamia over 4000 years ago as the festival called "Zagmuk" which renewed the world for another year. To the Mesopotamians, New Year was a time of crisis. In their mythology, their chief god, Marduk, had routed the monsters of chaos and built an orderly world, but after crops had been harvested, the empty brown fields revealed that life was dying. To keep death from triumphing, the drama of Marduk and the evils of chaos had to be reenacted each year. But there was a darker side to this ceremony that required a sacrifice. Hypothetically, the king of the Mesopotamians had to die at the end of the year; he would then accompany Marduk into the underworld and battle at his side, while a new king took his place on earth. However, an alternate or "mock" king was substituted; a criminal was selected, dressed in royal garb, and given all the homage and indulgence due a king, while the people around him celebrated. But when his counterfeit reign was over, he was slain in place of the real king. The people rejoiced, joined processions of masqueraders, built bonfires, and exchanged gifts and visits.

Another festival called Sacaea was celebrated by the Persians and Babylonians. At this time, the masters and slaves exchanged places; the slaves commanded, the masters obeyed. One slave was chosen to be head of the household, and everyone paid homage to him. This ritual lasted 12 days. As the old year died, the rules of ordinary living were relaxed; then, as the new year arrived, the order of the world was recaptured.

In ancient Babylonia, Marduk conquered the monsters that lived before our world was created; in Greece, it was Zeus who fought and overcame Kronos and his Titans. This myth then traveled to Rome. The Romans believed that the ancient god of seed-time, Saturn, who had ruled their country before their own day, was overthrown by Jupiter. So Kronos became Saturn, and Sacaea became Saturnalia.

The festival of Saturnalia began around the middle of December when the days were darkest and continued until January first. In its midst was December 25th, the day, as the Romans calculated, when the sun was at its lowest ebb. The Roman Saturnalia and the holidays which followed were boisterous. People masqueraded through the streets, ate huge dinners, visited their friends and gave each other good-luck gifts. The houses of the Romans were decked with boughs of laurel and green trees, with lighted candles and lamps — for the spirits of darkness were afraid of light. Masters and slaves ate together on this occasion and sometimes they exchanged their respective roles.

The Christians found Saturnalia celebrations to be too boisterous for their liking, so they borrowed from the Persian religion, Mithraism. The followers of Mithraism worshipped the sun and celebrated its return to strength on December 25th, as the day of the Unconquered Sun. So the Christian church used that day of merriment, greenery, lights and gifts to celebrate the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem.

To Christians, the beginning of a new era came with the coming of Christ, His death, His resurrection. By 336 or 353 AD, the birth of Christ was officially celebrated on December 25th in the city Rome. Thus, Christians celebrated this event during that long interval between the dying of the old year and the birth of the new and on into the spring. This time of celebration was an old, old habit of centuries, but borrowing this time from other cultures and religions, it was now richer and different in meaning.

To these events must be added the feast that accompanied the Cleansing of the Temple that occurred in the latter part of December; while in the cold North, the Teutons observed the winter solstice, calling it by a word we know as "Yule." Because the nights were long, it was referred to as "twelve nights."

**"At Christmas play and make good cheer,
For Christmas comes but once a year."**

~ Thomas Tusser, 1557.

Christmas Customs and Winter Celebrations

"I have often thought, says Sir Roger, it happens very well

Christmas, New Year's and the winter solstice are celebrated in some fashion all over the world. Likewise, there are other celebrations during this time of year. St. Lucy's Day or Luciadagen is celebrated on December 13 and marks the official beginning of the Christmas season in Scandinavian countries. Santa Lucia was betrothed to a pagan nobleman against her will; in an attempt to end the relationship, she cut out her eyes on the shortest, darkest day of the year. But God restored her vision as a reward for her sacrifice and she became the symbol for the preciousness of light. Lucy means "light" and to the sun-starved inhabitants of Scandinavia, she always appears in a shining white robe crowned by a radiant halo of candles set into metal crown covered with lingonberry leaves. The oldest daughter of the family usually assumes the "Lucia" role, followed by her entourage of younger members of the family who act as gnomes (tomten). They waken each member of the household on the morning of December 13 with a tray of coffee and saffron buns.



December 16 opens the nine day Posada season in Mexico. The Posadas are a reenactment, in dramatic play and song, of the story of Mary and Joseph searching for shelter the night Christ was born. The Posada singers/actors set out along the street to ask for shelter in various homes where parties are in full swing. After being repeatedly rejected, they finally find their kindly "innkeeper" who invites them in to feast and break the "piñata." The piñata is a clay pot decorated with tissue in the shape of an animal and filled with treats. Each guest is blindfolded, whirled around until s/he is disoriented and then takes a whack at it with a stick. When the piñata is broken, the sweets come showering down and the guests scramble to retrieve them. With the breaking of the piñata, the celebration comes to an end.



In Italy, the actual day for a large scale exchange of gifts is not Christmas, but the day of Epiphany (January 6), when the "Befana," a benevolent old witch



comes down the chimney to fill children's shoes with "goodies," plus, in retribution for some misdeed, a few pieces of charcoal. On Christmas Eve, Italian children write a traditional "Christmas Letter" to their parents in which they promise to be good and obedient. These letters are read by the papa amid the general excitement and for edification of the whole family.

Some winter festivals in the world celebrate other events and do not pertain to Christmas. Among these is Dewali, a Hindu festival meaning "a row or cluster of lights," which takes place in early November. Its week long festivities are highlighted by lamps, fireworks, bonfires, a gift exchanges and festive, vegetarian meals. Families clean and whitewash their homes and draw elaborate designs (alpanas) on their floors with colored powder to welcome Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity. Then they set up rows of little clay lamps (diyas), decorating their courtyards, windows, and roofs with light in the belief the Lakshmi won't bless a home that isn't lit up to greet her.



Hanukkah is celebrated by Jewish families for eight days somewhere between November 25 and December 26. Hanukkah commemorates the successful rebellion of the Jews against the Syrians in the Maccabean War of 162 BC, but the military associations of this festival are not emphasized. What is really being celebrated is the survival of Judaism. After the Jews' victory, they cleansed and rededicated the Temple in Jerusalem and relit the Holy Perpetual Light. But they discovered there was only enough oil to keep the lamp burning for one day and it would take eight days to get more. Miraculously, the small bottle of oil lasted for the entire eight days. It is for this reason that Hanukkah is also known as the Feast of Lights.

Jewish families today celebrate this holiday by lighting a special candelabrum called a Menorah, which holds eight candles, one for each day of the festival, plus a ninth, the shamash or "server" used to light all the others. One candle is lit on the first night, two on the second, and so on through to the eighth night when all are lit. A special prayer is recited during the lighting, and while the candles burn, songs are sung and games are played, including the four-sided top, the "dreidel." Other customs include the giving of gifts, especially to children and the eating of potato pancakes (latkes).



The Chinese New Year begins in the twelfth month of the Chinese year with a rigorous housecleaning, both materially and spiritually. All the dirt which is collected is thrown out the door and with it go the evil influences, which may be hidden in the heap of dust. Yet the gods must be appeased, too; and so the Chinese family celebrates the hearth god on the 24th day of the twelfth month. The family gives him a farewell dinner, consisting of only sweet things so that he can only say sweet things about them to the other gods. After the dinner, the image of the god must depart to heaven. He is set upon some bamboo stalks arranged to form a kind of chair; then a fire is set and in the midst of flames the god rides up to heaven accompanied with a display of fireworks. The fireworks also serve the function of frightening evil spirits away. As the last day of the year comes closer, people buy the traditional New Year's gifts: flowers, trees, rare fruits, fine food and items of silk. It is also a time when one must settle all debts; another sort of "cleaning up." "Gung hay fat chou" is the Chinese greeting for Happy New Year, but it also means "Wish you make a lot of money." The holiday is concluded with the Parade of the Golden Dragon, which is the symbol of strength that marks the end of one year and the beginning of another. The dormancy of winter is bid farewell to make room for the rebirth of spring.



A relatively new holiday is Kwanzaa, established in 1966 by Maulana Karenga who decided that African Americans needed a time of cultural reaffirmation rather than a time of rampant commercialization. The name Kwanzaa comes from a Swahili word meaning "first" as in the phrase "matunda ya kwanza" (first fruits). Occurring annually from December 26 to January 1, Kwanzaa is a time of fasting, feasting and self-examination. Although it occurs at the same time of the year as Christmas, Hanukkah and other winter celebrations, it is not designed as an alternative to or replacement for any of the holidays. Kwanzaa may be celebrated jointly with any or all of the year-end holidays.

The celebration of Kwanzaa is guided by the Nguzo Saba or Seven Principles. Each day of the week-long festival is devoted to one of these building blocks of self-awareness:

- Umoja** — unity
- Kujichagulia** — self-determination
- Ujima** — collective work and responsibility
- Ujamaa** — cooperative economics
- Nia** — purpose
- Kuumba** — creativity
- Imani** — faith

The number seven is at the core of the seven-day celebration with seven principles and seven symbols. The symbols are:

- Mazao** — fruits and vegetables
- Mkeka** — the placemat on which they are arranged
- Kinara** — a seven-branched candlestick that holds the mishumaa saba
- Red, black and green candles** that are lit each evening
- Muhindi** — ears of corn representing each child in the home
- Kikombe cha umoja** — the communal chalice from which a ceremonial libation is poured
- Zawadi** — the gifts

It is a family holiday, where one is free to improvise on the music, food and language.

Thus, in the winter observances of Christmas, St. Lucy's Day, Posada, Dewali, Hanukkah, Chinese New Year and Kwanzaa described above, we see a commonality of rededication celebrated with light, food and gifts in this the dark time of the northern hemisphere that signifies an end of the year and a rebirth or new beginning.

**"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is
for the eyes to behold the sun."
~ Ecclesiastes, 11:7.**



Anecdotes from *The Annotated Christmas Carol*

There are many allusions to Dickens' life and the Victorian era in his famous story. *The Annotated Christmas Carol* gives us some insight into his life and times.

According to *The Dickensian* (Sept. 1938), Dickens took the name of Scrooge's partner from one Dr. Miles Marley. At a party at which both were present, Dr. Marley, who knew of the novelist's interest in unusual names, mentioned that he thought his own last name was quite remarkable. Dickens reportedly replied, "Your name will be a household word before the year is out." (p1)

Dickens likely derived his main character's name from the colloquial vulgar word "scrooge": to crowd or to squeeze. The meaning is apparent in the old man's description as "a squeezing, drenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner." The miser's character was also based in part on that of the gravedigger Gabriel Grub in *The Pickwick Papers* who was described as "an ill-conditioned, cross-grained surly fellow — a morose and lonely man." (p59)

According to Charles Kent in *Charles Dickens as a Reader* (1872), Fred, Scrooge's nephew, was "quite unconsciously but most accurately — a literal description of Dickens himself, just as he looked upon any day in the blithest of all seasons." (p 61)

When Scrooge is confronted by Marley's ghost, the specter is described as "having no bowels." At one time the bowels were thought to be the center of compassion. Thus, Marley, like Scrooge, lacked in life any pity for his fellowman. When Marley takes off the bandage round his head — his lower jaw dropped down upon his chest. The dead at the time were often bound round the chin and head to keep the mouth closed. (p74)

The Ghost of Christmas Past is described as "a strange figure"; there is an ambiguity in age in that it is a child and an old man at the same time. The illusion of youth suggests the "Christkind," the Germanic Christ Child who, during the Reformation, replaced the Roman St. Nicholas; this figure, thought to be a girl, was said to be a messenger who came to announce the coming birth of Christ. Supposedly, the name "Christkind" was corrupted into Kris Kringle, the prototype for the American Santa Claus. The spirit may be either male or female. In the Alastair Sim film, the spirit was an old man; in the Mr. Magoo cartoon, a child; and in the movie musical "Scrooge," it was played by Dame Edith Evans. (p85)

When The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge to see his old school, they find a solitary boy reading. This child was the boy Charles Dickens. In a biography by Forster, "Dickens was a very little and sickly boy — subject to attacks of violent spasms which disabled him from every active experience." (p90) The boy is rescued from his loneliness by his little sister Fan, who comes to take him home. In reality, Fan (Fanny) was the name of Dickens' older sister who was gifted in music. (p94)

Scrooge's schoolmaster makes a brief appearance in this scene. Dickens painted many unsympathetic portraits of educators in *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*. Dickens described schoolmasters as "ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or dog—" (p94)

Scrooge's betrothed, Belle, breaks their engagement because of his greed. Belle might be the abbreviation of "Maria Beadnell," the woman young Dickens loved and lost to what he believed were economic necessities. Dickens and Maria met again when both were middle-aged, but no romance was rekindled. (p105)

The inspiration for Tiny Tim came from a visit to Manchester in October, 1843, when he visited his sister Fanny and her invalid son, Harry Burnett. Several years later, when his nephew did die, Dickens immortalized him as this character, as well as other handicapped children in his fiction. (p120)

As the Ghost of Christmas Present is about to leave, he shows Scrooge two wretched, miserable children. The boy is Ignorance; the girl is Want. These characters act as Dickens' visual metaphor and strongest plea for an active concern for children of the poor. His own childhood had been difficult and he had worked from dawn to dusk for meager wages. He expressed concern for those children who "know nothing of affection, care, love, or kindness of any sort." (p141) He predicted that if such children were left to suffer, it would lead to Britain's destruction. As the Spirit says, "Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased." (P142)

A Dickensian Timeline

1812, February 7: "I am born" in Kent.

1823: the Dickenses move to Cheapside, London; Charles is kept out of school to save money.

1824: Charles is sent to the bootblackening factory. Two weeks later his father goes to debtor's prison; the rest of the family, except Charles, followed soon after. Charles continues to work after his family leaves prison.

1824/25: Charles returns to school.

1827-1830: Charles becomes an office boy in an attorney's office, learns shorthand and eventually becomes a freelance reporter.

1830: He obtains a "reader's ticket" to the British Museum; becomes a staff reporter for *The Mirror of Parliament*.

Ca. 1830: He begins seeing Maria Beadnell; her family did not approve and she strung him along until he finally broke it off; she is said to be a model of *David Copperfield's* Dora.

1833: Charles publishes first London sketch in *Monthly Magazine*.

1836, February 7: *Sketches by Boz* published.
April 2: Charles marries Catherine Hogarth.

1836/37: *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist* appear in monthly installments simultaneously. *Pickwick* finished and *Oliver Twist* half done, he begins *Nicholas Nickleby*.

1841: Publication of *The Old Curiosity Shop* in *Master Humphrey's Clock* pushed that magazine's sales to a 100,000 a week.

1842: First American tour.

1843: His first Christmas story, *A Christmas Carol*, sells 6,000 copies the first day.

1843/44: *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

1843: Dickens begins his private theatrical productions; public readings of *A Christmas Carol*, *Cricket on the Hearth* and other works begins.

1849: *David Copperfield*; 1852: *Bleak House*; 1854: *Hard Times*.

1857: *Little Dorrit*.

1858: Catherine Hogarth Dickens moves out of the Dickens

household, having withstood Charles' flirtations and neglect for many years.

1859: *A Tale of Two Cities*; 1861: *Great Expectations*.

1864/65: *Our Mutual Friend*.

1867: Second American Tour.

1860s: Public readings supplant writing new novels.

1868: His health becomes increasingly delicate. Doctors counsel him that he is risking paralysis and a stroke.

1869: He begins *Edwin Drood*.

1870: March 15: last public reading.
June: He moves to the Kent countryside, where he died, June 9, 1870, surrounded by his children. Buried in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey, June 14, 1870.

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Activity Package

Study Questions

1. One facet of Dickens' genius was his talent for transforming the most ordinary people into memorable figures. Choose five characters from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and describe the devices he used to make these characters unforgettable.
2. Most of Dickens' novels are concerned with the social and political problems of Victorian England. Do you think *A Christmas Carol* stimulated reform at the time in which it was first published? How did *you* feel after the show?
3. Do you think Charles Dickens could have ended *A Christmas Carol* differently? If yes, how?
4. Who was your favorite character? Why?
5. Pretend it is one year later, after the story ends. What do you think will be different about Scrooge the next Christmas? What about Bob Cratchit? Mrs. Cratchit? Tiny Tim?
6. Write a short version of this story from another character's perspective. Pretend you are Mrs. Cratchit or Scrooge's nephew, Fred. Tell the story as they might perceive it. How would they explain Scrooges' change of heart?

Expressive Movement

1. Explore natural movements that express greed. Exaggerate these movements.
2. Explore natural movements of giving. Exaggerate these movements.
3. Select a scene in the play *A Christmas Carol* that contains these attitudes. Using the greed and giving exaggerated movements, choreograph the scene, either with or without music. Any music can be used — traditional, rock, jazz, classical. Let the movement tell the story of the scene. If music is used, choreograph the scene two different ways. One time allow the movement to be dictated by the music; another time let the music be secondary and the movements be primary. This second way may feel as if the movement is fighting against the music, but this often results in a more interesting piece of choreography. Remember, the most important element in this creation is the feeling from inside that first the choreographer, and then the performers bring.

Reaching Inside Through Art

created by Carole Edie Smith; Empire State Institute for the Performing Arts

Examine the colors, textures and shapes of Scrooge. Create a two or three dimensional piece of art that expresses Scrooge at the beginning of the play and another that represents him at the end of the play. If you really get into it, create a transitional piece that depicts his character in the middle of the change. Remember, this work will still have some elements of his old self as it begins to add elements of the new.

Detective Work

After the Show:

I. Answer the following questions about Scrooge as if he lived now.

1. Favorite TV show _____; song _____;
movie or author _____; expression _____;
color _____; weather _____;
sport _____; smell _____;
food _____; biggest pet peeve _____;
political affiliation _____.

2. If he were a member of a musical group, what would its name be? _____.

II. Now anonymously answer the same questions of yourself.

1. Favorite TV show _____; song _____;
movie or author _____; expression _____;
color _____; weather _____;
sport _____; smell _____;
food _____; biggest pet peeve _____;
political affiliation _____.

2. If he were a member of a musical group, what would its name be? _____.

III. After 15 minutes collect the questionnaires, mix them up and redistribute one to each student checking that students do not get their own.

Ask the students to fill out the following:

You have been given some information about a classmate. Use that information to make some inferences about that person as you answer the following questions. Draw the best conclusions you can and state the reason(s) for your conclusions. Some conclusions you will feel more certain of than others but make your best guess.

1. What is your classmate's favorite subject in school? Why do you think so?

2. What is your classmate's favorite meal? How did you decide this?

3. Describe his/her favorite activities.

4. How would his/her room be decorated?

5. What job or profession will your classmate have in ten years from now? Why?

6. What will his/her home or apartment be like ten years from now?

IV. The following day ask students to describe their classmate's responses to the first questionnaire and their own inferences, conclude by guessing who the classmate is; to maintain suspense, keep the real identities secret to the end.

Discuss

1. How hard was it to come up with these answers?

2. Can you get any kind of a picture of the individual from the information given?

3. How often do we make choices without realizing it, and how often are the inferences upon which our choices are based only partially correct, at best?

4. How does this influence the way we communicate and relate to others?

Recommended Reading

These works are recommended as "read-to's," "read-alongs" and "read-about's" to extend the spirit of the holiday season.

Bolton, Philip H. *Dickens Dramatized*. Boston, MA: Mansell, 1987. Dramatizations of Dickens' work.

Briggs, Raymond. *Father Christmas*. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973.

British writer /illustrator Briggs tweaks the reader's nose as he gives us

his version of Santa Claus grumbling his way ("Blooming soot!," "Blooming chimneys!," "Blooming snow!") through his beloved labor. A hilarious glimpse, vibrantly illustrated, of the right jolly old elf.

Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol* in *The Christmas Books*, vol.1. Penguin, 1984.

This story exists in many editions, but its original version is as fresh and touching today as when it was written nearly 150 years ago.

"The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton" in the *Complete Ghost Stories of Charles Dickens*. Edited by Peter Haining. Franklin Watts, 1983.

Dickens, who loved to tell and write ghost stories, also gave the world the story of stingy, ill-humored Gabriel Grub, sexton and grave-digger, years before he wrote *A Christmas Carol*. The goblins, offended by the way Grub "keeps Christmas," decide to "show the man of misery and gloom a few pictures from (their) own great storehouse" which make him a changed man. Much shorter than *A Christmas Carol*, this story lends itself to dramatization and is a good example of Dickens' writing.

Fraser, James Howard. *Las Posadas; A Christmas Story*. Illus.

Nick Degrazia. Northland Press, 1963.

A Mexican Christmas story with wonderful illustrations for children.

Harris, Jessica B. *A Kwanzaa Keepsake: Celebrating the Holiday with New Traditions and Feasts*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

A book containing social life, customs and cookery of African Americans celebrating this holiday.

Johnson, Barbara. *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. Harper & Row, 1972.

Excellent modern portrayal of the real meaning of Christmas. The horrible Herdsman children, "absolutely the worst kids in the history of the world... lied and stole and smoked cigars (even the girls) and talked dirty and hit little kids and cursed their teachers," are cast as the leads into the holiday show at school.

Lane, Julie. *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*. New York: Equity Publishing Corp., 1932; reprinted, 1979.

In this story of Nicholas the Wandering Orphan, the author unifies all the different cultural traditions into one story: the gift-giving, toy-making, prancing reindeer, stocking-filling, the first Christmas tree decorating, coming down the chimney and finally how Nicholas came to be known as "Saint Nicholas" and "Santa Claus."

Madhubuti, Safisha L. *The Story of Kwanzaa*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1989.

Contains the holiday story and material about African folklore.

Moeri, Louise. *Star Mother's Youngest Child*. Illus. by Trina Schart. Hyman, Houghton Mifflin, 1975.

The life of a grumpy old woman who had never properly celebrated Christmas is changed the year that the Star Mother's youngest child comes to earth to find out what Christmas is all about.

Moore, Clement C. *The Night Before Christmas*. Illus. by Grandma Moses. Random House, 1961.

This enduring poem is in an oversized book and is a treasure to share.

Seuss, Dr. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Random House, 1957.

A modern children's classic.

Van Allsburg, Chris. *The Polar Express*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

Another delightful Christmas story for children.