Welcome to the educator resource guide for Triad Stage’s production of *A Christmas Carol*. We are excited to share this adaptation of Charles Dickens’s classic story with students during our student matinee performances. The original publication of the story changed the way that western society views the Christmas holiday.

Our goals for this guide include:
- Noting historical and artistic context about the show that you can share with your students.
- Providing practical instructional activities that you can use in your classroom that make connections between the production and curricular standards in areas including English/Language Arts, Social Studies, and Drama/Theatre.
- Offering opportunities for students to make personal connections between the production and their own experiences, as well as sparking dialogue about the play’s central themes and big ideas.

In the guide, you will find dramaturgical (background) information about the show and Triad Stage’s production of the play, as well as links to additional resources, videos, and information. There is also a section of classroom activities which are aligned with secondary English/Language Arts and Social Studies standards, are designed to meet curricular goals, and seek to support students’ exploration of the play.

If you have any questions about the guide or how to use it, please don’t hesitate to reach out to Learning Director Lauren Smith at lauren@triadstage.org.

**Key**

- Questions for Dialogue
- Interesting Facts
- Classroom Activity
About the Story

*A Christmas Carol* tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, a businessman from the 1700s who lives in London and undergoes a radical transformation. When we meet Scrooge at the beginning of the story, he is hardened against feeling for others, hates Christmas, and refuses to donate money to help those less fortunate than he is. He also has become distant with his sole family member and isolated from his community.

On Christmas Eve Scrooge is visited by four spirits, beginning with the ghost of his late business partner, Jacob Marley, who warns Scrooge of the possible consequences of his actions. These spirits show Scrooge echoes from Christmases earlier in his life, Christmas activities happening currently in parts of the city he doesn't usually visit, and predictions of future Christmases. He awakens on Christmas Day as a changed man, and commits to living his life with joy and generosity.

History of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*

Charles Dickens was inspired to advocate for the poor after the English Parliament released a report on child labor. His first attempt at advocacy came in the form of a pamphlet titled “An Appeal to the People of England on Behalf of the Poor Man’s Child”. This wasn’t enough to reach the hearts and pockets of his audience. Dickens decided to try a different approach, something more personal than a pamphlet that would appeal to the humanity of the English people. Today we know the product he created as the novella *A Christmas Carol*.

Dickens was also at a financial turning point in his personal life. The success of his last book was waning, his publishers were threatening to reduce his wages, and his family was growing. He needed a financial success. He began to write *A Christmas Carol* on October 7th, 1843, and the manuscript was complete by the end of November. On December 19th, 1843, the novella hit the streets and was met with widespread praise.

• What are some reasons Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*?
• Why did Dickens believe a novel would be more effective than a pamphlet?
• What other books, plays, or other piece of writing can you think of that were written as responses to events in society?
Meet the Characters

SCROOGE
He’s our main character - we follow his journey throughout the play. He owns an accounting firm and lives alone. Many people who know him think he is mean and cheap.

THE BEGGAR WOMAN AND BEGGAR CHILDREN
 Appearing at the beginning of the play, these characters serve as narrators throughout the story. They represent the poor citizens of London.

BOB CRATCHIT
Scrooge’s clerk. Scrooge pays him poorly and complains about letting him off of work for the holiday.

CRATCHIT FAMILY
Bob Cratchit’s large family includes his wife Mrs. Cratchit, his daughters Martha and Belinda, and his sons Peter, Edward, and Tiny Tim, who has a disability that affects his ability to walk. Mrs. Cratchit is angry at Scrooge for how he treats Bob.

FRED
Scrooge’s nephew and only living family member. Fred invites Scrooge to dinner every Christmas, but he always refuses. Fred, his wife, and his friends joke about how mean and lonely Scrooge is.

JACOB MARLEY
Marley was Scrooge’s business partner, but he died several years ago. The chains he wears as a ghost are a punishment for a life lived with little generosity.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST
The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge on a journey to visit his memories of Christmas. When she arrives, she rides in a winter sleigh and carries a staff.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
The Ghost of Christmas Present takes Scrooge on a journey to visit people he knows, including Bob Cratchit and his nephew Fred. She is very tall and her dress is shaped like a Christmas tree.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE
The Ghost of Christmas Future is the final ghost. He appears as a child and shows Scrooge what his future will be if he doesn’t change his ways.

• Which characters are your favorite? Why?
• Which characters do you think are the most similar to you? The most different from you?
Adaptation

The story you will see onstage is an adaptation of Dickens’ novella written by Triad Stage Artistic Director Preston Lane. The production was directed by Triad Stage Associate Artistic Director Sarah Hankins. Adaptation means taking a piece of source material, such as the novella published in 1843, and re-imagining the core story in a new way.

There are MANY adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* including multiple live-action films, cartoons and animations in additions to countless adaptations for performance onstage.

- What adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* have you seen or read, if any? What do you remember about the stories? How were they different?
- What other books or stories have you seen that were adapted? How were the adaptations different from or similar to the original story? Which did you prefer?
A Holiday Ghost Story: The Spirits of Past, Present, and Future

Preston Lane’s adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* highlights the ways in which the original story is foremost a ghost story. Some of the particularly memorable moments within the story stem from Scrooge’s interaction with the spirits of Christmas Past, Present, and Future. Below, you’ll see several interpretations of each one of these spirits from various adaptations.

The Ghost of Christmas Past guides Scrooge through a number of holiday experiences from his past, re-introducing him to an old girlfriend and the man who mentored him through his business apprenticeship, among other people.

The Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge a number of holidays that are happening all around him in London, including the celebration Scrooge chose not to attend at his nephew Fred’s house and the modest but joyful celebration at his employee Bob Cratchit’s house. This spirit also introduces Scrooge to the poverty that exists in England, which Scrooge had denied previously.

The Ghost of Christmas Future (or Christmas Yet-to-Come), foreshadows Scrooge’s eventual death, as well as the death of Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit’s son, if Scrooge does nothing to change the circumstances, both for himself and for his employee’s family.
About the Author

Charles Dickens was born on February 7th, 1812 in Portsmouth, England as the second of eight children. Because his father worked in the navy, the Dickens’ family often relocated, moving three times by the time Dickens was four years old.

When Charles was twelve, his father John Dickens was sent to debtors’ prison. The Dickens family moved to Camden Town, a poorer part of London, and adjusted to a different quality of life. Charles was forced to drop out of school and take a job at a blacking warehouse where he worked upwards of ten hours per day pasting labels on bottles of boot blacking (shoe polish). Family, friends, and neighbors from this chapter of his life would later serve as inspiration for characters in his novels.

At the age of 18, Dickens began his journalism career and was a reporter for several major newspapers in London. Eventually he began writing short stories and novels, including the novella *A Christmas Carol*.

Why was Charles Dickens’s work important in western literature?

His writing made clear and lasting shifts on society that are still visible today. Dickens’ work made novels as a literary form popular to this day. Many of the books we read today are similar in structure to those Dickens wrote. Additionally, the way British and American society celebrates Christmas (with a focus on family, charity and goodwill) emerged from his works of fiction, particularly *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens provided access to literature through his public readings, where he read his books aloud at a time when many people were still illiterate. Dickens’ work gained popularity throughout his career until he reached celebrity status, traveling to America to give talks about the ills of slavery and other topics.

- What adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* have you seen or read, if any? What do you remember about the stories? How were they different?
- What other books or stories have you seen that were adapted? How were the adaptations different from or similar to the original story? Which did you prefer?
During Dickens’ lifetime, England became highly industrialized, meaning that most people went from making their living farming to making their living producing things in factories. This led to increased job creation and a bustling economy. Though wages were higher for many people (particularly middle class men), the workload was more intense, the workday longer, the labor more dangerous and the living conditions worse. Cities could not keep up with the rate of growth and the smoke and waste from the factories caused health problems. In 1855 new government agencies, such as the Medical Officer of Health and Sanitary Inspectors and the Metropolitan Board of Works, were formed to deal with these conditions.

Women and children often worked outside the home for low wages in sometimes dangerous and tedious positions. The treatment of child laborers during this era brought about the necessity of Child Labor Laws. Children worked in nearly every industry, including such jobs as coal mining, chimney sweeping, textile weaving, steel milling, and laundry and domestic service.

**What was Victorian Society like?**
Members of Victorian Society were clearly defined by their social class and amount of wealth. Wealth and class determined where and how individuals lived, their access to healthcare and education, and even their leisure and recreational activities. While those living in poverty had lives marked by high infant mortality rates, those in upper and middle classes saw not only a decrease in infant mortality rates, they also saw an increase in fertility rates.

There was a clear emphasis on marriage in Victorian society. The high marriage rate may have been the result of the focus on religious values and the presentation of a stricter morality. Victorian families often required women and children to fulfill clear domestic roles in the family, and frequent church attendance and temperance (not drinking alcohol) were important values.

- What was life like for children who worked in factories?
- How is this different from your experience of growing up today?
- Why was literacy (knowing how to read) important when Dickens was writing? Why is it still important to us now?
Classroom Activity | Researching a Holiday Song

Grade Level: Secondary

Content Area: English, Social Studies, Music

Approximate Time: 1 hour in-class work time, homework time, 5 minutes per student to present

Directions:
- Assign or have students choose a traditional or holiday song. This can be a group project or an individual project, depending on your students. Ask them to research that song, including:
  - Its country or region of origin;
  - Its history (when was it written? First performed?)
  - Artists who have performed or recorded the song and their interpretations
  - Text analysis of the song; what is it actually talking about (especially if it uses language that we wouldn't use anymore today)
  - Any other interesting facts
- Ask students to choose a favorite recording to play as part of their presentation

When should I use this activity? This activity could be used either before or after the performance.

Standards:
Writing Standard 7
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Writing Standard 8
Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Speaking and Listening Standard 4
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Classroom Activity | Cover the Space with Discussion Questions

**Grade Level:** Secondary

**Content Area:** Any

**Approximate Time:** 20-30 minutes

**Directions:**
Clear space in the room, moving desks to the outside edge so there is room to walk around (alternatively, use an open space, such as a cafeteria).

Ask students to walk around the space, covering every inch of the floor with the bottoms of their feet, not moving in any particular pattern. You might ask them to check in with their bodies and stretch or move anything that feels tight or needs to be shifted. You might also ask them to focus on their breathing, taking some deep breaths while walking.

Eventually, you might ask students to find a partner, someone who is standing near them. Once they are in pairs, ask them to discuss a question that you share with them. Give them a few minutes to talk, then ask them to resume covering the space. Repeat this process with desired number of questions.

After students have a chance to talk with each other, you might choose to ask a few pairs to volunteer to share what they talked about in their conversation.

**Some sample questions might include:**
- What was your favorite part of the story and why?
- Which of the Ghosts (Past/Present/Future) did you think was the most influential for Scrooge? Why?
- What holiday or annual traditions do you like to participate in, either at home or at school?
- Think about a time you changed your mind about something. What made you change your mind? How did that shift change your behavior?

**Extension:** This activity also works well to get students into groups based on their ideas or interests. You might ask students to think of one word that sums up their idea of a topic (Christmas, the holidays, annual traditions, etc.) and share that word as they cover the space. Then, they can find a group with other students who have shared similar or complementary ideas.

**When should I use this activity?** This activity can be adjusted for use at any time, depending on the questions asked.

**Standards**

**Speaking and Listening Standard 1**
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Classroom Activity | Object Metaphor

Grade Level: Secondary

Content Area: English/Language Arts and Social Studies

Approximate Time: 20-25 minutes

Directions:
Assemble a large assortment of random objects (mirror, whisk, nutcracker, funnel, candle, etc., whatever you might have in your classroom) where all students can see them. It is helpful to have as many (or more) objects than participants. Invite students to respond to a prompt about the objects. For example, you might ask students to compare their strengths as a learner to an object; model this first (i.e. This object is round and open at the top to bring a lot of things in and then narrows to a tight small hole. I am a funnel as a learner because I am good at taking a lot of different ideas and putting them together into a single, powerful argument.)

Once students get the idea of the activity, you might ask them to choose an object that represents different characters within the story, most immediately Scrooge, and have them describe why they feel it describes that character.

As an extension or alternative, you might have students find their own objects in the classroom or bring them from home that represent various characters from the story.

Standards
Writing Standard 9
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
Directions:
Put out several large pieces of paper or markerboards and ask 4-6 students to gather around each page (if you have a smaller group, you can also use one long piece of paper). Have students read a chosen passage from Dickens’ A Christmas Carol (a suggested passage is below, but you could use any passage you like) and call out a few images or items that stick out from Dickens's description.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about with flaring links, proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slily down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. The cold became intense. In the main street, at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowings sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the windows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed. Poulterers’ and grocers’ trades became a splendid joke: a glorious pageant, with which it was next to impossible to believe that such dull principles as bargain and sale had anything to do. The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor’s household should; and even the little tailor, whom he had fined five shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and bloodthirsty in the streets, stirred up to-morrow's pudding in his garret, while his lean wife and the baby sallied out to buy the beef.

Next, ask students to take a marker/colored pencil/crayon and draw their version of the scene or items that came to mind. Ask them to think about the theme, feeling, or mood that comes to mind after reading the passage. Give them 2-3 minutes to draw (you might play music in the background). After you ask them to conclude, either have the groups rotate to the next piece of paper, or ask one volunteer from each group to move the piece of paper to the next group.

For the second round, ask students to take a look at what their peers have drawn and look for ways that they can add to the drawings to even more fully capture the ideas of the passage. They could add details, add items, or add more characters to the scene.

Repeat this process at least two more times, asking students to make the urals considerably more detailed each time. After the final round, ask students to rotate to their original position or move their original papers back to them.

Reflection Questions:
- How did you decide what to draw and how to add details?
- How did your original drawing change with other people's additional ideas?
- What do you notice about the drawings? What elements are most prominent? Why might that be?
- How might you describe the theme or mood of our drawing and of this scene?

When should I use this activity? This activity is ideal as a pre-show activity.

Standards
Reading Standard 1
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Classroom Activity | This Setting Needs

Grade Level: Elementary

Content Area: English/Language Arts, Social Studies and Theater

Approximate Time: 30 minutes

Directions:
Explain that students will be building different settings/scenes from A Christmas Carol. Ask students to brainstorm three different settings from A Christmas Carol. For each setting, brainstorm a list of what characters and objects are in this setting.

(For example, if the setting was Scrooge’s bedroom, some possible things we might find in this setting are: Scrooge, Marley, the bed, Ghost of Christmas Past).

Explain that we will be creating each of the major settings from A Christmas Carol using our bodies. For each setting, students will create the environment using their bodies. Once students have brainstormed for each of the settings, pick one setting and invite students to choose an object or character from the brainstorm to embody. Continue inviting students to build the setting with the prompt: This Setting Needs until the image is complete.

Ask audience members (anyone who is not in the image) what they see. What setting are we in? Who are all of our characters? What moment from A Christmas Carol might this be? How might each character be feeling?

Repeat this process for a number of the settings. You might also put a “thought bubble” above the heads of the characters and ask the audience what that person might say in this moment/setting.

Reflection Questions:
• What new information did we gain about these characters?
• What was it like to bring the settings from A Christmas Carol to life? If you played a character, what did that feel like? If you played an object, what did that feel like?

When should I use this activity? This activity can be used before or after coming to see A Christmas Carol. If used before, it can be used as a previewing activity to get to know the characters and settings. If used after, it can be used as a reflection activity.

Standards
Reading Standard 3
Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
References

The Drama-Based Instruction Network. http://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/


Photo sources are listed in captions.

For additional information about Triad Stage’s production of A Christmas Carol, please visit our Dramaturgical Website.


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