Introduction

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 information about the show and Triad Stage’s production of the play, as well as a number of links to additional resources, videos, and information. There is also a section of classroom activities that 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’s themes.

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 mid-19th century in London who undergoes a radical transformation in his worldview. When we meet Scrooge in the beginning of the story, on Christmas Eve, we find him very much ungenerous, speaking about his distaste for Christmas and the holiday season, as well as refusing to donate money to charity. During the play, Scrooge is visited by four spirits, beginning with the ghost of his late business partner, Jacob Marley. Through these spirits, he sees echoes of Christmases from earlier in his life, Christmas activities happening currently in parts of the city he usually doesn't visit, and foreshadows of future Christmases. He awakes on Christmas morning a changed man, and commits to living his life with joy and generosity.

History of Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol

In February 1843, the English Parliament released a report on child labor. The report, which included three years of research and the firsthand accounts of thousands of child laborers, sparked outrage in British society and led to the creation of several pivotal pieces of legislation and inspired Charles Dickens, who had been spent many of his young years in a blacking factory, to pick up the pen.

His original idea was to create a pamphlet that would extol the horrors of child labor titled “An Appeal to the People of England on Behalf of the Poor Man’s Child” but decided instead that his form of protest needed a more human and touching element - something more personal than a pamphlet that would appeal to the humanity of the English people.

Dickens was also at a turning point in his personal life. The success of his serial novel Marin Chuzzlewit was waning, his publishers were threatening to reduce his wages and his family was growing.

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 universal praise.
Adaptation

The story you will see onstage is an adaptation of Dickens’s novella written and directed by Triad Stage Artistic Director Preston Lane. Adaptation refers to 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.

Top left: Poster for the 1951 film “Scrooge,” starring Alastair Simm as Scrooge (image from Wikipedia)
Bottom left: Opening Credits from the 1983 Mickey’s Christmas Carol (image from Wikipedia)
Middle: Cover for 1984 version of A Christmas Carol with George C. Scott at Scrooge (image from Wikipedia)
Right: Poster from the 1992 A Muppet Christmas Carol (image from Wikipedia)

What adaptations of A CHRISTMAS CAROL have you seen or read? 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 fiancé 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. The spirit makes clear that if Scrooge does nothing to change the circumstances, both for himself and for his employee’s family, his own fate is sealed.
About the Author

Born Charles John Huffman Dickens on February 7, 1812 in Portsmouth, England the second of eight children. Because Dickens's father, John Dickens, worked for His Majesty's Navy as a clerk in the Pay Office, the Dickens family often relocated, moving three times by the time the young Dickens was 4 years old.

When Charles was 12, John Dickens was sent to debtors prison. The Dickens family had moved to Camden Town, a poorer part of London after living above their means for several years. When John was imprisoned, as was the custom, Elizabeth and their younger children joined him in Marshalsea debtors' prison in Southwark, London. Charles was forced to drop out of school and take a job at a blacking warehouse where he worked upwards of 10 hours per day. He lived with family, friends, and neighbors, who would later serve as inspiration for characters in his novels.

When John Dickens' grandmother passed away, leaving him an inheritance, he and the family were released from prison and moved in with Charles and his guardian Elizabeth Roylance. Charles' mother encouraged him to stay on at his job at the warehouse and not return to school, but Charles refused. Soon after, however, he was again required to join the working world to help support the family, this time in a law office. There, he excelled and within a year, he was freelance reporting at the law courts of London. This launched his journalism career, and at the age of 18, he became a reporter for several major newspapers in London and eventually wrote numerous books, including the novella *A Christmas Carol*.

Charles Dickens shifted publishing and Victorian literature with his contributions, but perhaps more importantly, his writing made clear and lasting shifts on society that are still visible today. The popularity of the novel as a literary form is a direct reflection of the work of Charles Dickens and his counterparts. The way that we celebrate Christmas—with a focus on family, charity and goodwill—emerged from his great works of fiction. He also helped to increase literacy in Victorian society, and provided access to literature to those who were illiterate through his public readings, where he quite literally read his books aloud for people to listen to. A prolific writer and a charismatic performer, Dickens became one of the first iterations of a modern celebrity. He sold out readings on two continents - people waited hours and hours in the cold to get tickets to his appearances. Drawing from his life experiences, he wrote and lectured to right the wrongs of child labor, poverty and lack of education. While in America, he also lectured against the ills of slavery - likening enslavement to struggle for the rights for the poor of London.

For a complete list of Dickens's written work, along with a timeline of his life, CLICK HERE.
Labor and Social Class in Victorian England

The industrialization of Britain during Dickens’s lifetime saw an evolutionary, but marked, growth in the wealth of the nation. Job creation grew exponentially with over 3,000 textile mills opening in the country, each employing anywhere from 85 to several hundred laborers. Increased factory jobs also helped the growth of railroad production, which supported growth in the coal and steel industries.

Job growth did not stop just in manufacturing and industrial jobs, nor did it completely wipe out the agrarian areas in some parts of the country; it rather made agriculture production more efficient. The service industries also saw great growth, increasing from 1.7 million workers to 6.2 million in a few decades.

With a bustling economy, a monopoly on naval power and an increasing empirical hold on nearly every continent - Britain was holding its position as a global super power. The British people, however, did not always benefit from this new and growing wealth.

Though wages were higher for most people (particularly middle class men), the workload was higher, the workday longer, the labor more dangerous, the living conditions worse and the infant mortality rate rose.

In the cities, the infrastructure could not keep up with the exponential population growth and large homes were turned into tenements and flats, with overcrowded spaces and poor maintenance. The smoke and waste from factories caused health issues. The growing use of horse and buggy travel, lack of indoor plumbing and no useful sanitation system created an atmosphere of filth and illness. 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 such conditions.

Women and children often worked outside the home, for low wages in sometimes dangerous and tedious positions. Women could find work in textile mills or as seamstresses or domestic worker. These wages, however, were often so low that working class women were forced into prostitution. 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.

Victorian Society was clearly defined by social class and one’s wealth status and caste was an integral part of one’s every day life. It determined where and how you lived, your access to healthcare and education and even your leisure and recreational activities. The class system, distilled into its most simple form, was a three class system: working class citizens who gained their money from wages, members of the middle class who earned their living from salaries and profit, and members of the upper class who incurred wealth from property, rent and interest.

While those living in poverty had lives marked by high mortality rates, those in upper and middle classes saw not only a decrease in mortality rates, they also saw an increase in fertility rates. Several factors may have been at play: 1) the advances in the scientific and medical fields made it easier for women to get pregnant, give birth to healthier children and care for them better as they grew. 2) The marriage rates were higher. More people were getting married and more women were getting married younger, therefore increasing their active childbearing years.
The emphasis on marriage may have been political and financial—prosperous families were more able to build households, to merge influential and wealthy families with other influential and wealthy families—but it may have also been the result of the focus on religious values and the presentation of a stricter morality.

Victorian families were patriarchal, with clear roles for women and children in the family and a strong religious foundation. Religious groups, many of which were splitting from the Church of England, all upheld personal morality standards such as temperance, charity, sexual “purity” and family values and church attendance. This was in direct opposition to the evidence presented by the market of prostitution, brothels and pubs, but especially to the upper class Victorians, the appearance of religious fervor was crucial.

The consumption of art, literature, drama and opera were common leisure activities for Victorian citizens. During the era, the novel and serial publications saw a marked rise in popularity. As more people became literate, and the access to periodicals (magazines and newspapers) became more widespread, the modern prose novel as cultural icon took shape. Authors became famous, including Oscar Wilde and Robert Louis Stevenson, in addition to Charles Dickens, and even those who were illiterate could participate in the cultural phenomenon by attending readings and performances.
Classroom Activity

Directions:
Have students compare and contrast the depictions of each of the spirits from these adaptations (or other favorite versions). You might also have them watch pieces of each of the films after reading the passage from the novella and note the ways in which each portrayal of the spirits is faithful to the original (or not). Some sample discussion questions:

- What similarities do you notice between each of the versions of the Ghost of Christmas Past (Present, Future)?
- How are the representations different? Why do you think the filmmakers might have made those choices?
- After reading the description of the Ghost of Christmas Past (or Present or Future), which version do you think is most faithful to the book? Which one do you prefer and why?

If you are examining the images after seeing the play, you might also ask students to include what they remember about each of the spirits from the production in their analysis.

Standards:
Reading Standard 7
- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Reading Standard 9
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Directions:
This performance and the nature of it as an adaptation lend well to students’ writing their own adaptations and variations on the production’s themes.

Content Area: English/Language Arts

Approximate Time: Varies; could be a short writing exercise or a more extended revision and re-writing process over the course of several weeks.

Writing Prompt Suggestions:
- Ask students to write their own story of transformation. This could be a true story, about their own transformation or a transformation they’ve witnessed in a friend, family member, etc., or a fictional story.
- Ask students to write their own ghost story, considering who their ghost might be, who they might be haunting, and why.
- Ask students to write their own version of a Past, Present, Future story; how do past events effect a present situation and hopeful future situation?
- Ask students to write about a time that they changed their mind about an issue they had a very strong feeling about; what made them change their mind, and how has that shift affected them?

Standards
Writing Standard 3
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Writing Standard 5
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
Classroom Activity | Researching a Holiday Song

**Grade Level:** 5th and up (can be adjusted depending on students’ prior experience with research)

**Content Area:** English, Social Studies, Music

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

**Directions:**
Assign or have students choose a traditional or holiday song. 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.

Some song options (or have students choose their own):
- *O Come, All Ye Faithful*
- *Silent Night*
- *O Christmas Tree*
- *Jingle Bells*
- *O Holy Night*
- *Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas*

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: 3rd and up

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 to be used at any time, depending on the questions you choose.

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

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 game, 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.
Classroom Activity | Visual Dramaturgy

Grade Level: Adaptable for Grades 3 and up
Content Area: English/Language Arts
Approximate Time: 30-40 minutes

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’s 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 sily 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 or move to the next piece of paper or ask one volunteer 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 pictures 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.
References


Photo sources are listed in captions.

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


Triad Stage Staff

Artistic
Preston Lane, Founding Artistic Director
Sarah Hankins, Associate Artistic Director
Lauren Smith, Learning Director
Kamilah Bush, Artistic Apprentice

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Bobby Pittman, Facilities/Rentals Coordinator
Justin Nichols, Development Manager
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Erin Barnett, Assistant Costume Shop Manager
Troy Morelli, Master Electrician
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