

ASF Study Materials for

A Christmas CAROL

by Charles Dickens
adapted by Geoffrey Sherman

Director Nancy Rominger
Set Designer Paul Wonsek
Costume Designer Elizabeth Novak
Lighting Designer Tom Rodman
Sound Designer Will Burns



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The Characters

Charles Dickens,
author and magician



Ebenezer Scrooge, a
businessman
Bob Cratchit, his clerk
Fred, Scrooge's nephew
Charity men, collecting for poor
Jacob Marley, the ghost of
Scrooge's late partner

Spirit of Christmas Past
Fan, Ebenezer's sister
Mr. Fezziwig, Scrooge's first
employer
Mrs. Fezziwig, his wife
Belle, Ebenezer's beloved

Spirit of Christmas Present
Fred's wife, her sister, Topper,
and other guests
Mrs. Cratchit, Bob's wife
Martha, Peter, Belinda, and
Tiny Tim, the Cratchit
children
Londoners, party guests, street
children

Spirit of Christmas Future
Merchants from the Exchange
Old Joe, buyer of stolen goods
Mrs. Dilber, a charwoman

Setting: London in 1843

This *Spirited* Tale

A *Christmas Carol* is one of the most familiar and loved of Christmas tales, which is just what Dickens hoped it would be. The old miser, Scrooge, is saved from his own skinflinted, hard heart by the ghost of his late business partner, Jacob Marley, who chastizes him and sends three Spirits to teach Scrooge a lesson about caring for his fellow man. Dickens's idea could not be clearer—material things are of less import than those of the spirit.

The Spirit of Christmas Past shows Scrooge his own childhood and youth, his dreams and chances for love, all ruined by his greater love of money. In turn, the Spirit of Christmas Present shows Scrooge contrasting celebrations—the party at his nephew Fred's house, to which Scrooge refused an invitation, and the dinner at his clerk Bob Cratchit's home. In both gatherings warmth and good wishes abound, despite the poverty and illness haunting the Cratchits.

Amuch chastened Scrooge meets the Spirit of Christmas Future, ready to learn, and he sees his own fate—an un mourned death—should he not change his ways. So when Christmas morning dawns, a joyous Scrooge arrives at Fred's door, humbly seeking to join the family gathering. His reformed heart even gives Bob Cratchit a raise and helps save Tiny Tim, who does not die after all and can instead “bless us every one.”

Thus it is a story about a man, a story about England, a story about a collective past and a more individualistic and money-centered present, a story about family love, friendship, and the bonds of fellow feeling, and about awareness of the plight of others. *A Christmas Carol* has become a holiday fixture, perhaps because, like a philanthropic booster shot, we need to hear and heed its message on an annual basis. It is one of the most heartwarming cautionary tales ever written, one ASF always enjoys having on stage for the holidays.



Above: Celebrating Christmas past—Arthur Rackham's illustration of the Fezziwig ball; below, Christmas present—Bob Cratchit and his son Tiny Tim, who have much less than Scrooge and much more

About the Study Materials

These materials can supplement classroom study or provide links to issues in other works. They contain a synopsis on this page and units on:

- Unit 1: Dickens and the story's genesis and place in his life and writing
- Unit 2: Illustrating the meaning (book illustration and significant quotations)
- Unit 3: Victorian social context
- Unit 4: Context and history of Christmas celebration in England

as well as information about the ASF production design and pre-show and post-show **activities** for the story and play (tinted red)

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UNIT 1: Dickens Creates A Christmas Carol



Charles Dickens in 1843,
when he wrote *A Christmas Carol*

Dickens's Major Works

<i>Sketches by Boz</i>	1833-36
<i>Pickwick Papers</i>	1836-37
<i>Oliver Twist</i>	1837-38
<i>Nicholas Nickleby</i>	1838-39
<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i>	1840-41
<i>Barnaby Rudge</i>	1841
<i>American Notes</i>	1842
<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	1843
<i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i>	1843-44
<i>Dombey and Son</i>	1846-48
<i>David Copperfield</i>	1849-50
<i>Bleak House</i>	1852-53
<i>Hard Times</i>	1854
<i>Little Dorrit</i>	1855-57
<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	1859
<i>Great Expectations</i>	1860-61
<i>Our Mutual Friend</i>	1864-65
<i>The Mystery of Edwin Drood</i>	1870

About Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens was 19th-century England's most prolific and popular novelist. Born in 1812 near London, he recorded the tale of his impoverished childhood and child labor experience in his autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield*. He was sensitive to the plight of the poor all his life, as *A Christmas Carol* testifies.

For a time the young Dickens thought of becoming an actor, but his writing career intervened. He began as a court reporter and journalist using the pen name "Boz" until the sprightly and entertaining *Pickwick Papers* (1836), his first novel, gained him instant success in his own right. His novels were serialized in

London periodicals with each episode eagerly awaited by thousands of readers every week. In addition to entertaining his readers, he also treated social problems and promoted reforms in such novels as *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist* or satirized contemporary values in works such as *Hard Times*.

Later in life Dickens toured widely, reading from his works, especially from his first and most famous Christmas story, *A Christmas Carol* (1843). He died in 1870, but his works continue to be popular and are often adapted to television, film, and stage.

Dickens's *Life* and *A Christmas Carol*

- When his family moved from Chatham to London in 1822, Dickens was left behind in school, just as young Ebenezer is in the story. Like Ebenezer, the young Charles Dickens enjoyed reading adventure stories such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tales of the Arabian Nights*.
- Dickens had a sister named Fan who went with the family to London. She had one son, like Scrooge's nephew Fred in *A Christmas Carol*.
- Like the Cratchit children, as a child Charles Dickens knew poverty firsthand. His happy family fell into increasing poverty due to his often improvident father, who ended up in debtors' prison.
- The Cratchits' modest Christmas dinner, warmed by family love, is very like the Christmas celebrations of Dickens's youth in Camden Town. And the families are similar, with six children in each, Charles Dickens matching Peter Cratchit as eldest son.
- The young Charles Dickens, a bright, sensitive boy like Peter Cratchit, at the age of 10 was sent to work long hours for low pay in a blacking (shoe polish) factory.
- Tiny Tim*, whom Dickens only saved from a realistic death in his last revision of the story, is like Dickens's young brother and sister who died in infancy.
- Dickens loved holiday parties like the one at Fred's house and games such as "Yes and No."



The Cratchits celebrate (Greta Lambert, Billy Sharpe, ASF 2012)

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“Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveler, thousands of miles away, back to his own fireside and quiet home!”

—The Pickwick Papers

Dickens’s *Earlier* Portrayals of Christmas

In his early works, Dickens had a consistent view of the joys of Christmas, for he treasured the communal warmth of “the good old days,” and he was even willing to employ spookiness to make his case.

In Sketches by Boz

In “A Christmas Dinner,” an essay in *Sketches by Boz* (1836), Dickens declared Christmas “the season for gathering together of family connexions,” for love and forgiveness, and asserted that such a family gathering, “in a strain of rational goodwill and cheerfulness, [can do] more to awaken the sympathies of every member of the party in behalf of his neighbour, and to perpetuate their good feeling during the ensuing year, than half the homilies that have ever been written, by half the Divines that have ever lived.” Much of *A Christmas Carol*, too, focuses on family and friends—Fred’s party, the Cratchit dinner, and the Fezziwig dance.

In Pickwick Papers

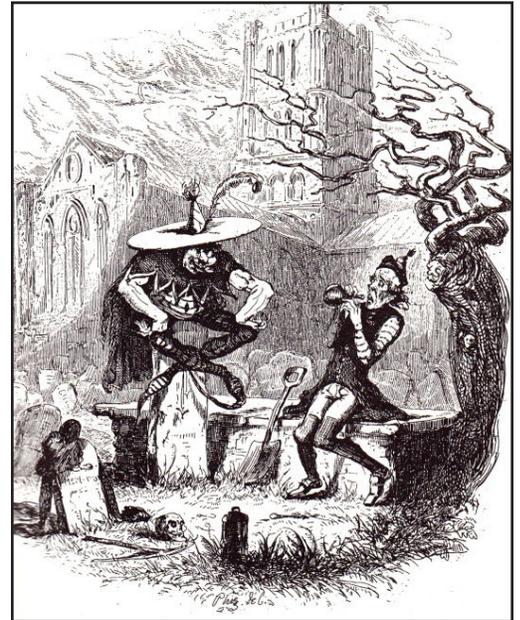
In his next piece, *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), Dickens provided a Christmas chapter in which the Pickwickians go to Dingley Dell, where they are entertained with songs, dances, mistletoe, as well as blindman’s buff and other games: “everyone sits down with us on Christmas Eve as you see them now—servants and all; and here we wait, until the clock strikes

twelve, to usher Christmas in, and beguile the time with forfeits and old stories.” Such a party, reminiscent of the celebrations once held during the Twelve Days of Christmas in rural England, is much like the Fezziwig party: “it was the season of hospitality, merriment, and open-heartedness; the old year was preparing, like an ancient philosopher, to call his friends around him, and amidst the sound of feasting and revelry to pass gently and calmly away.”

During this gathering for feasting, kissing under mistletoe, and games is told a Christmas ghost story, “The Goblins Who Stole a Sexton,” the tale of an ill-tempered old gravedigger, Gabriel Grub, a prototype of Ebenezer Scrooge. One Christmas Eve, goblins kidnap the inebriated sexton from the grave he is digging and carry him to their cavern underground, where he sees visions of Christmas life among the rich and poor. He awakens in the churchyard the next morning a changed man, much as Scrooge does from his supernatural Christmas Eve travels. Softening a hard heart at Christmas is a foolproof pattern, as Dickens knew only too well.



“Christmas Eve at Mr. Wardle’s,” an illustration from *Pickwick Papers* by “Phiz” Browne, of an old traditional Christmas under the mistletoe



“The Goblin and the Sexton,” an illustration by “Phiz” Browne

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“When it was done I broke out like a madman. Such dinings, such dancings, such conjurings, such blind-man’s-buffings, such theatre-goings, such kissings-out of old years and kissings-in of new ones, never took place before.”

—Dickens on completing
A Christmas Carol



The heart of the story for Dickens—confronting Ignorance and Want (James Bowen as Christmas Present, ASF 2012)

The *Genesis* of A Christmas Carol

In 1843, Dickens was having both artistic and economic troubles. He was in his “Chuzzlewit agonies,” for his latest novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, was not as popular with readers as his earlier works had been, and the decline in weekly periodical sales seriously affected the Dickens’s family income at a time when they were spending more and his wife was pregnant with their fifth child. Moreover, after five successful novels, his publishers had cut his salary. So Dickens considered writing pamphlets as another way to appeal to his readers.

The Cause: Child Labor

The subject of child labor was on many Englishmen’s minds following the 1842 report from the Commission for Inquiring into the Employment and Conditions of Children in Mines and Manufactories. Not quite believing what he read, Dickens went to Cornwall to see the dreadful conditions for himself. Much shaken, he decided to write a pamphlet, “**An Appeal to the People of England, on Behalf of the Poor Man’s Child.**”

Before he could write it, however, he was also asked to support the “ragged schools” of London, free schools for poor children (“ragged” refers to their clothing), and he planned yet another pamphlet. Then on October 5, 1843, Dickens and other dignitaries were invited to Manchester to speak on the problems of the poor. Before a working class audience, Dickens called ignorance the greatest cause of human misery and education England’s brightest hope.

The New Idea: A Christmas Story

He was determined to write something to arouse his compatriots’ feelings on this topic and to address the issues of Want and Ignorance in Victorian society. While out walking one night in Manchester, he suddenly conceived the story of Ebenezer Scrooge. Thus his appeal to the people of England on behalf of the poor man’s child took a radically different form than he planned. He wrote intensely for six weeks, weeping and laughing as he worked, and was so excited by the process that he walked the streets fifteen miles a night to think.

Getting It Published by Christmas

By the second week of November, Dickens had completed the manuscript while still writing weekly installments of *Chuzzlewit*. He pushed to have his new story published for the Christmas season. He agreed to pay the production costs himself in order to reap the profits. He got John Leech to illustrate the tale, insisted on hand-colored prints of the etchings, and it was ready for sale a few days before Christmas.

The book was a tremendous success; by Christmas Day, the entire first edition of 6,000 copies had been sold. By New Year’s Day, the second edition, too, was sold out. And, of course, it was instantly cannibalized by unauthorized dramatists, songwriters, and other publishers, the surest sign of success in Victorian London. Yet because of the illustration and binding costs, Dickens actually made very little profit from the sales and ended up deeper in debt, despite his great success.

Question

We tend to think of *A Christmas Carol* as Scrooge’s story. Dickens actually had a different point in mind, one about poverty and the plight of poor children. As we read or view his story, does the point he wanted to make get through? What is the point of his story in our world?

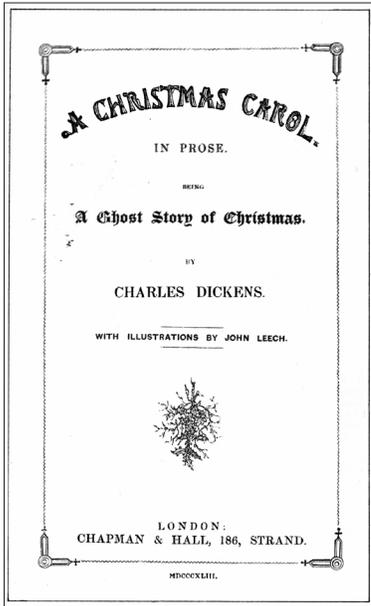


Arthur Rackham’s
sketch of the
Cratchits’ future

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Dickens's Narrative *Voice*

The Victorian era is the great age of the English novel, ranging from Jane Austen and the Brontës through Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot, to Hardy and Conrad. It is also an age of the omniscient narrator, the knowing voice that comments on character, action, and significance, the “dear Reader, she married him” approach to narration. By contrast, the mainstays of the modern novel, in keeping with modernism’s fragmentation and psychological fallibility, more often present a narrative voice that is partial, flawed, or fickle.

In Dickens’s story, the narrator has a distinctive, even chatty point-of-view in the famous opening:

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that....Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail....

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years....

The mention of Marley’s funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate....

This confident, confiding, sprightly voice with a tale to tell focuses on Marley as a means of introducing the protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, and the narrator has a grand time presenting the essentially cold and miserly nature of that curmudgeon:

Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed



nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

The opening “stave” of the *Carol* is filled with this exuberant narrational sportiveness. Dickens never lectures or becomes sanctimonious because he has important issues to discuss along the way. He can describe Want and Ignorance with powerful simplicity at the end of Stave III; neither Scrooge nor the reader will miss the point. Once the story engages in scene and dialogue, the action focuses more tightly. But the narrator has hooked the reader with his engaging, entrepreneurial air of having a great story to tell; he knows we will want to share both it and his artistry in telling it, for a good tale well told is worth the listening.



Above right, Rodney Clark as unredeemed Scrooge; left, at Fezziwig's party Scrooge remembers his love for Belle as he dances with the fiancée he lost years before (Alice Sherman and Rodney Clark, ASF 2012)

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UNIT 2: Illustrating the Meaning



Above: Two fireside scenes: the Ghost of Marley entreating Scrooge, and the reformed Scrooge treating Bob Cratchit to a drink. This is the only Cratchit illustration among John Leech's original eight. The first drawing of Bob Cratchit with Tiny Tim did not appear until 1867. The Spirit of Christmas Present (right) provides a third fireside scene.

Illustrating A Christmas Carol

Novels in the 19th century were often published in weekly serial form before they appeared as a single volume, and the serial versions were illustrated. We tend to think of picture books as children's fare, but Victorians had even their serious novels served up with visual accompaniment.

Dickens's Illustrator

Because he was already writing a novel in the autumn of 1843, Dickens's usual illustrator, "Phiz" Browne, was busy illustrating *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Because Punch cartoonist John Leech had been seeking the chance to work with the author, Dickens asked him to provide eight engravings for *A Christmas Carol*, drawings that have become the best known of all Dickens illustrations.

Dickens examined each of Leech's sketches, suggesting changes to bring the drawings in line with the text, such as changing The Ghost of Christmas Present's robe from the traditional red worn by Father Christmas to bright green.

What's In and What's Left Out

Consider the choice Leech and Dickens made for the original eight illustrations:

1. Frontispiece: the Fezziwig ball
2. Entrance of Marley's ghost
3. Spirits futilely offering help to the needy
4. Scrooge extinguishing Christmas Past
5. The Ghost of Christmas Present
6. Scrooge seeing Want and Ignorance
7. Scrooge seeing his own gravestone
8. Scrooge and Bob Cratchit sharing a bowl of smoking bishop

Notice that nowhere is there a picture of Bob Cratchit carrying Tiny Tim (in fact, no picture of Tiny Tim at all), nor is there any illustration of Fred's party, although these two events were the most popular subjects for illustrating this story later in the 19th century.

How good a job did Leech do in conveying the import of Dickens's story?

If you got the commission to illustrate *A Christmas Carol*, which eight moments would you select, and which one would be your frontispiece?



Leech's etchings for the Spirit of Christmas Present and the Spirit of Christmas Future.

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"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

—Stave 4

Dickens's Public *Readings*: The First Afterlife of *Carol*

Having written *A Christmas Carol* to address the plight of the poor, later in his career Dickens addressed his own fiscal plight by turning his annual Christmas story into a personal economic gold mine. For over a decade after its publication, he gave charity readings of one of his Christmas tales, sometimes to crowds of 2,000 eager attendees, but by 1858 he decided that if there was money to be made from his readings, it should end up in his own pocket.

Dickens's expenses were enormous; he had ten children and in a kind of genetic fate they proved to be as improvident and debt-ridden as Dickens's own father had been. Moreover, Dickens began to live separately from his wife in a marriage that had grown increasingly unhappy, so he had to support two domestic establishments. He needed the money. He was aware that "he had long ago turned Christmas into a commercial imperative, and his reading tour [would be] the logical extension of that transformation of the spirit into money." So he began to offer public readings.

Such a reading was not a dull, arid affair. Dickens had been an amateur actor all his life, and in his youth he even aspired to become a professional. He took the details of characterization seriously, rehearsing every tone, pause, and gesture for maximum effect on his sellout audiences.

Biographer Fred Kaplan offers a psychological insight into this aspect of Dickens:



Charles Dickens reading from his works

Eager to please in a childhood world in which he needed to demonstrate that he was worthy of being loved, he had developed a performance personality, wearing the various masks that would earn him applause. He had been an entertainer, a song-and-dance child singing for his emotional supper. He had become a self-conscious actor and playwright, performing in his own and other people's stage dramas.

So the performer was much a part of Dickens. In his readings he found the experience of affecting an audience to chortles and sobs at his words and story to be compelling: "What a thing it is to have Power," he wrote. Once discovered, it is a power he never completely abandoned.

If a bit of the moneygrubbing Scrooge crept back into Dickens, it was at least a highly profitable part of Scrooge. Within two years in the late 1860s, he earned £33,000 from his readings alone—the modern equivalent of close to two million dollars. So the man who invented the domestic Christmas also, it seems, invented the commercial holiday overload we now "celebrate" every December.



*Charles Dickens brought his own characters to life in his readings as well as his writing, and he read the end of *A Christmas Carol* with exceptional power. (Arthur Rackham)*

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Rodney Clark as Scrooge

Vocabulary

covetous = *wanting what another has, greedy*

pudding = *in England, often a generic term for dessert, especially a hot dessert*

homage = *honor, respect, tribute*

farthings/ shillings/ pounds = *British money*

workhouse = *Victorian institution for the poor or homeless, with very harsh conditions*

Treadmill Law/ Poor Law = *Victorian laws that legislate the treatment of the poor, insisting on work rather than welfare*

reclamation = *recovery*

dowerless = *without a dowry or marriage settlement for the bride; no profit for the groom*

charwoman = *cleaning woman*

intercourse = *in the 19th-century it meant verbal communication between persons; conversation; an interchange of thoughts and feelings*

A "Wake Up" Call: Quotations to Consider

- "Marley was dead, to begin with.... This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate." (narrator)
- "'A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!' cried a cheerful voice. 'Bah!' said Scrooge, 'Humbug!'"
- "I have always thought of Christmas time ... as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys." (Fred)
- "'Are there no prisons? ... And the Union workhouses?' demanded Scrooge. 'Are they still in operation?'"
- "I wish to be left alone." (Scrooge)
- "It is required of every man ... that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death." (Marley)
- "Business! ... Mankind was my business." (Marley)
- "I wear the chain I forged in life...." (Marley)
- "'A small matter,' said the Ghost, 'to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.' ... 'It isn't that, Spirit. He [Fezziwig] has the power to render us happy or unhappy, to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil.... The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.'" (Scrooge)
- "Another idol has displaced me.... I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you.... May you be happy in the life you have chosen!" (Scrooge's former fiancée)
- "He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see." (Bob Cratchit)
- "God bless us every one." (Tiny Tim)
- "If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die." (Present)
- "This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, ... but most of all beware this boy...." (Present)
- "And I know," said Bob, "I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was; although he was a little, little child; we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it."
- "Spirit! ... hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?" (Scrooge)
- "... and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge." (narrator)

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UNIT 3: Victorian England: Poverty and Daily Life

Victorian England: The Plight of the *Poor* Man's Child

Want and Ignorance preceded even Ebenezer Scrooge as major characters in Dickens's first Christmas tale and for good reason. By 1800 the Industrial Revolution had moved countless thousands from England's failing agrarian economy into urban factories or mines, and consequently onto the mercy of capitalists more interested in profit than promoting human welfare. Conditions were dire, earnings were meagre, and Dickens knew too well the soul-stunting effect of such work from his own days as a child in Warren's Blacking Factory.

Child Labor

In many poor families, everyone worked, women and children included, and the average working day was brutally long and punishing, often causing deformities and illness. **In 1802 the first child labor law decreed children could work only 12-hour shifts six days a week**, so most worked from 6 a.m. to 7 or 8 p.m. with short meal breaks. The reforms of the 1833 child labor law forbade employing children under nine in textile factories and limited them to a 54-hour work week; such was the benignity of Victorian England. Their older siblings still worked twelve hours per day under difficult and even dangerous conditions for wages of a few pence a week.

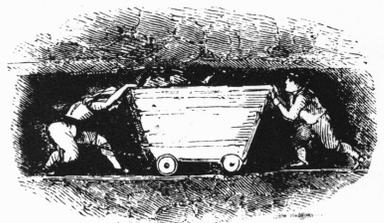
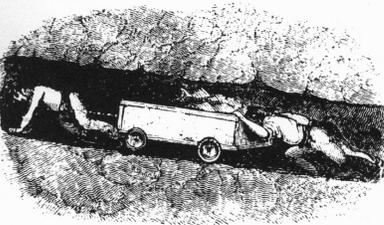
In the coal mines even six-year-olds worked in tunnels too narrow for adults, harnessed to carts and hauling coal in the darkness for twelve-hour shifts. Their younger siblings worked the trapdoors of the ventilation system. Because children proved cheaper than the upkeep for ponies, even young girls worked with the men in the mines, with predictably appalling consequences.

In the cities, poor families could sell four- or five-year-old boys to chimney sweeps, who made them climb into narrow chimneys to remove the built-up coal tar that might otherwise start a fire. The boys worked until they died or were too large to fit in the chimneys, and the adult sweeps assumed no responsibility for the children's education or physical or moral well-being. Reform efforts began in 1817 but never passed, and the practice continued until 1875.

Female Labor

Among workers, a new 'male breadwinner' ideal began to define 'skilled labor' as a male preserve, thus keeping higher paying positions for men and relegating girls and young women to menial tasks at pitiful pay. Consequently, girls in towns and cities often became seamstresses; since fabric was inexpensive, even middle-class women could follow changing styles. In this "ladylike" trade, the conditions were those of the sweatshop. During "high season" (April through July) the long hours were extended, sometimes all night, to meet demand for ball gowns and attire for special entertainments.

Remember that Martha Cratchit is working as a seamstress, sending a pittance home to help, and that for the same reason her younger brother Peter is about to join her in the ranks of the overworked and underpaid Victorian youth labor market, an experience remarkably different from a teenager getting a part-time job today.



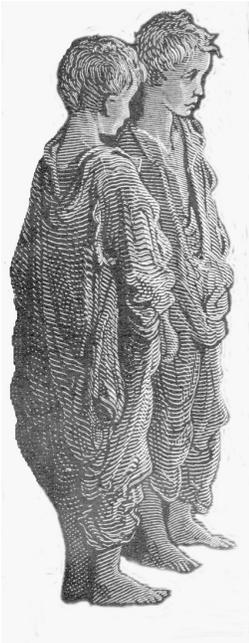
Images of child workers, both boys and girls, in the mines, from the 1842 parliamentary report on child labor—children chained to "want and ignorance"; right, Leech's illustration of the spirits Marley shows Scrooge, the ghosts who ignored others' need in life



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UNIT 3: Victorian England: Poverty and Daily Life



Above: from one of Doré's etchings of poor children in mid-19th century London. Below: a child worker in a textile mill



19th-Century Accounts of Child *Labor*

“The Chimney Sweeper” by William Blake

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry “weep! ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep!”
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb’s back, was shaved, so I
said,
“Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head’s
bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white
hair.”

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned &
Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they
run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun;

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho’ the morning was cold, Tom was happy &
warm;

So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.
(from *Songs of Innocence*, 1794)

Factory Report Testimony of Emily Pennington (age 16):

“Has been an apprentice as a milliner 2 years and three-quarters; is boarded and lodged; paid a premium of 20 [pounds] for five years [of training] ... In the winter season begins to work half-past 7 a.m. and leaves off about 11 p.m., if they are not very busy; occasionally goes on till 12, not later. In the summer begins at half-past 6 a.m., and leaves off about 1 in the morning; ‘has sat up till 2 or 3’ ... Generally the work is finished earlier on Saturdays than on other nights, being about 10 in the busy season. Does not begin earlier on Mondays. Never works on Sunday; goes to church regularly. In the winter busy season has breakfast at 7 a.m., for which a quarter of an hour is allowed; dinner at half-past 12, for which there is no limited time, generally about a quarter of an hour; tea at 6, a quarter of an hour allowed; supper at 10, for which there is a quarter of an hour or 20 minutes.... If they sit up till 1 or 2 in the morning a cup of coffee is allowed, but nothing to eat.... When she has sat up a long time has pain in the back, and the legs ache; has had swelling of the feet.... Is rather round-shouldered; this is not uncommon. Had very good health before she came here, but since has been several times ill; has a cough every winter....”

This experience is comparable to Martha Cratchit's life trying to earn a few shillings to help her family.

Research Topics

- Child Labor Today: **Research** child labor laws today in the United States and in the third world. Are the conditions of Victorian labor still with us (the long hours, the pitiful pay, the harsh conditions)?
- 19th-Century London Population Growth: London and its suburbs doubled in population between 1801 and 1841—to a city of 2.25 million—and then doubled again in the next 40 years. **Research** Malthus and his view of the population rise; **research** the urban issues of Victorian London.

A Christmas CAROL

by Charles Dickens

adapted by Geoffrey Sherman

UNIT 3: Victorian England: Poverty and Daily Life



The Christmas pudding (dessert)
by Arthur Rackham

Victorian Life: Preparing the Christmas *Feast*

Much is made in the Cratchit household of the smell of “our” goose cooking and of going to get the goose. The children are not just running into the kitchen and pulling a baking pan out of the oven. There would have been no goose-sized oven in the 3- or 4-room house the Cratchits lived in (which is much like the house Dickens and his five siblings grew up in when he was a boy). Moreover, the presence of a goose on the table would have been a great treat; many of the poor in London rarely saw meat of any kind during the year.

The Cratchits would have belonged to a “goose club,” which was a means of saving up to buy a goose for Christmas. Saving began in early fall, and how much a family saved dictated the size of goose they ultimately ate on the day. The goose was cooked by a local baker, whose ovens hummed on holidays when even the poor might have a special treat.

The economy of the poor was instructive in its practicality: when they had some money, they bought good clothes, not in order to have warm clothes to wear in winter but to have something valuable to pawn when times turned bad, as they inevitably did. Pawning and redeeming personal items were for some families weekly events, and the only time a garment was out of hock would be on Sunday morning.

"And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table...."

'Here's Martha, mother!' cried the two young Cratchits. 'Hurrah! There's such a goose, Martha!'

... Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; and in truth it was something very like it in that house."

—Stave 3



Dickens's illustrators also worked for the Victorian illustrated newspapers. This is John Leech's 1848 "Fetching Home the Christmas Dinner" for such a newspaper.

A Christmas CAROL

by Charles Dickens

adapted by Geoffrey Sherman

UNIT 4: The History of the Holiday

A History of the English Christmas Celebration

- **878:** Alfred the Great proclaims that the Twelve Days of Christmas—December 25 through Epiphany on January 6—should be celebrated in England.
- **1170:** King Henry II commands the court to celebrate the season with plays, masques, and spectacles.
- **1248:** King Henry III begins the custom of giving food to the poor during the Twelve Days of Christmas. He also has 600 oxen killed for one holiday banquet.
- **1377:** King Richard II gives a holiday dinner that uses 2,000 cooks to feed 10,000 guests.
- **early 1400s:** King Henry V serves “a glutton mass celebration” with venison, roast heron, capon, mutton, boar, and beef. Sugar (which had to be brought from Bengal) was another holiday delicacy, eaten at the end of the meal.
- **1500s:** The Tudor monarchs host elaborate holiday pageants. Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* is probably first performed at one such pageant (c. 1600).

Celebrating Christmas: Holiday and Holy Day

Tiny Tim Cratchit never hung up a Christmas stocking; Santa never once visited his house on Christmas Eve. That wasn’t because he was poor or had been wicked, for in 1843 when Charles Dickens first published *A Christmas Carol*, no child in England hung up a stocking at Christmas. Santa didn’t even appear on seasonal greeting cards in England until the 1870s.

How Christmas Began

Because the raucous ancient Roman new year festival of Saturnalia overlapped the time of Christ’s birth, the early Church had waited until the second century before proclaiming it a holy day, and two more centuries before celebrating it as a public feast. Then, with an eye to proselytizing, the Church began to capitalize on the pagan rites and combined some of those customs with Christmas to facilitate conversions. So holy day blended with holiday, piety with revelry, Twelfth Night with the Feast of Fools.

Not a Holiday? Not a Holy Day?

Yet by early 19th-century England, Christmas had all but died out as a celebration. There was almost no mention of it in Victorian newspapers until the 1850s. It was neither holiday nor holy day. What happened?

Oliver Cromwell and the Puritan civil war took care of the holy day in 1652 by banning any observance or solemnity in conjunction with December 25th. Cromwell considered earlier English Christmas celebrations involving pageants, feasts, and caroling to be “pagan superstition.” Thus the centuries’-long tradition of rural celebrations with squire and tenants gathering in the manor hall was broken and declined after the Restoration.

The Industrial Revolution had taken care of the holiday, so that in Dickens’s time December 25th was a regular working day in the cities, as Scrooge reminds Bob Cratchit.

Dickens to the Rescue

In the 19th century, Dickens’s treatment of the Christmas season refocused the English Christmas from the memory of traditional feasting and drinking, gaming and frivolity to a middle-class family celebration, a domestic festival. Yet thanks to Dickens, this day of revelry for parents, children, relatives, and family friends also became a time for thinking of those less fortunate, and there were many such in Victorian England. Charities began to seek donations to help poor children; warm, practical gifts were specially made for the “deserving” poor; and food was distributed, just as aristocrats had given alms in centuries past.

None of the newly developing rituals bore any specific religious significance. But while the fortunate could romp, make merry, and anticipate dining on a fat goose or turkey, they usually did so with some concern for sharing their benefits with those beyond their family circle, and for this benevolence commentators and historians give credit to one man—Charles Dickens—and his tale of Mr. Scrooge’s ghostly visitors. In England, Dickens is the man who helped recreate our tradition of celebrating Christmas.



The old style of holiday celebration at the Fezziwig party—greenery, feasting, and dancing—in John Leech’s original frontispiece

A Christmas CAROL

by Charles Dickens

adapted by Geoffrey Sherman

UNIT 4: The History of the Holiday

"It is quite extraordinary to find that in almost every newspaper from the weighty *Times* down to the popular illustrated weeklies, there is practically no reference to Christmas at all during the first three decades of the nineteenth century..." until Dickens wrote his story, a new model for the holiday.

—*Christmas Past* (1987)

Carols and Songs in the Show

- "The Carol of the Bells"
- "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen"
- "In the Bleak Midwinter"
- "Good King Wenceslas"
- "The Coventry Carol"
- "I Saw Three Ships"
- "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"
- "The Holly and the Ivy"
- "Ding Dong Merrily"
- "We Wish You a Merry Christmas"

Quotation from Michael Patrick Hearn, *The Annotated Christmas Carol* (New York: Potter, 1976).



The joyous musical ending of *A Christmas Carol* at ASF (2012)

The *Carols* of *A Christmas Carol*

True to the title, Sherman's adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* is filled with song—English carols in the best holiday spirit.

Dickens intentionally named his tale a "carol" and divided it into five "staves" or verses. The caroling tradition is an ancient one; some authorities point to translations of the New Testament that have the angel appearing to the shepherds and saying or singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men." Songs were part of church celebrations of Christ's birth as early as the year 129 CE.

The Medieval Tradition

In England caroling provided a view of older traditions of Christmas festivity, for caroling was the central element of medieval wassailing, when groups would sing from door to door and be given hot wassail (a combination of spiced ale and sherry). The tradition was that no one could be turned away during the Twelve Days of Christmas. Some old carols ("Deck the Halls") tell of decorating the great hall for the holidays; others tell of giving ("Good King Wenceslaus") or Bible stories ("The First Noel").

In the Victorian Era

But like so much in the English tradition of Christmas, by the early 19th century caroling had almost died out, especially in London, for in the 17th century Cromwell banned caroling along with holiday celebration. One 19th-century scholar, Davies Gilbert, set about collecting carols lest they disappear entirely and published them in *Ancient Christmas Carols* in 1822 (notice that the title does not imply the carols were much used). A larger collection by William Sandys appeared in 1832. In a letter to Dickens, Sandys explained that:



Poor carolers begging, 1836

In many parts of the kingdom, especially in the northern and western parts, the festival is still kept up with spirit among the middling and lower classes, though its influence is on the wane even with them; the genius of the present age requires work and no play, and since the commencement of this century a great change may be traced. The modern instructors of mankind do not think it necessary to provide popular amusements, considering mental improvement the one thing needful.

In Dickens's time, caroling had degenerated into a form of enterprising holiday begging on London streets, a way for the needy to call attention to themselves. The only carol known in the cities was "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen," and significantly, that is the only traditional carol Dickens mentions in *A Christmas Carol*. With Dickens's literary nudge and the work of music scholars, however, Victorian families rediscovered the old Christmas carols and began to sing these joyous holiday songs.

A Christmas CAROL

by Charles Dickens

adapted by Geoffrey Sherman

UNIT 4: The History of the Holiday



Thomas Nast's iconic image of Santa

For these and other Christmas traditions, see *A Christmas Carol Christmas Book* (Boston: Little Brown, 1984) or Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries, *Christmas Past* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1987).

Where Christmas *Traditions* Come From

- **Saint Nicholas** was originally a generous Turkish bishop in the 4th-century Church noted for performing miracles. English tradition grew up around a figure known as Old Father Christmas, a jolly, red-robed, holly-crowned patron of festivity and feasting as seen in John Leech's original illustrations for *Christmas Present*.

- **Santa Claus** is largely an American creation, based on "Sinter Klaas," a version of St. Nicholas, handed down by pre-Revolutionary Dutch settlers on Manhattan Island, who saw "Sint Niklaas" as the bearer of gifts on Christmas Eve.

The figure was immortalized and Americanized by New York scholar Clement Clark Moore, who in 1822 had six children under the age of seven. That December he began a rhyming tale for his children, "Twas the night before Christmas..." and from the Dutch figure created Santa with his reindeer sleigh. Later, in the 1860s, American cartoonist Thomas Nast gave Santa his recognizable visual form.

- **Christmas trees** came to England from Germany with Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert. The Hanoverian monarchs were all of German background and were used to bringing a tree indoors and decorating it during the winter holidays. In 1841 reports of the royal Christmas tree at Windsor—seven feet tall and placed on a table with an angel on top—made the custom fashionable in England. The tradition of a tree with gifts tied on it had been part of Roman Saturnalia; in medieval Germany, records tell of pine trees with apples tied to them in Christmas pageants. In Victorian England the tree was hung with candy, candles, and presents.

- **Burning the Yule log** was originally part of the Druid holiday of Yule and the Saxon solstice feast for the sun's return.

- **GREENERY**: Since ancient times, **evergreens** were seen as a symbol of nature's rebirth, which Christian tradition linked to the idea of immortality. Despite its pagan origin, even early English churches were decorated with evergreens, which freshened the air in rooms long shut up in cold weather.

- **Holly** was used by the Romans, who brought it to England. Folk tradition said holly hung at the head of a bed could prompt sweet dreams. And some saw in the cluster of three holly leaves and three berries a symbol of the Trinity.

- **Mistletoe**, "the golden bough," the most sacred plant of the pagan world, was associated with peace and healing. Enemies who met under it had to lay down their weapons and swear a truce. It was also known as "allheal" and seen as a charm against evil as well as a symbol of fertility, so churches refused to admit it, but homes often used it as a holiday decoration. Apparently, the English invented the custom of kissing under the mistletoe.



The royal Christmas tree, 1848, a picture that influenced the Victorian holiday

A Christmas CAROL

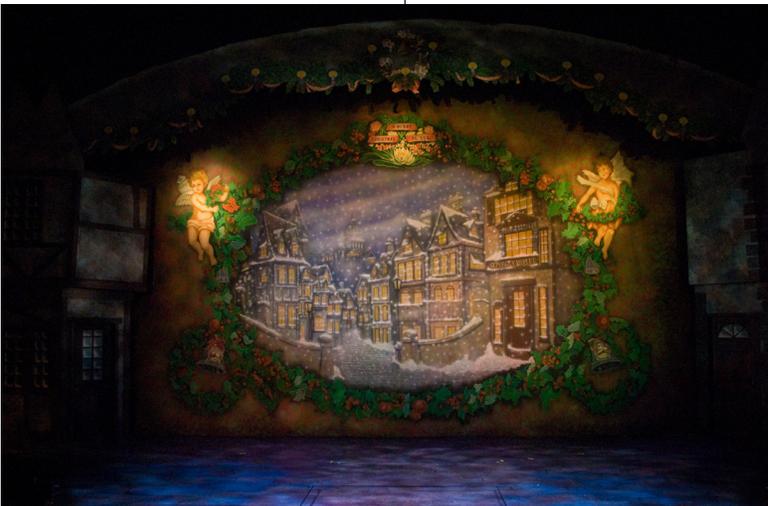
by Charles Dickens
adapted by Geoffrey Sherman

Designing the *Set* for *A Christmas Carol*

Designer Paul Wonsek approached the design for *A Christmas Carol* as "a Victorian Christmas present, with somewhat muted colors as if we are seeing a world far removed from our own." The cobblestone floor he designed was the basis of the visual development, Wonsek explains: "The original design was to have all the images of the voyage to the past, present and future grow from the real images of the

London Street and the Exchange. So things repeat themselves in the trips to the past, and seem to grow from the original reality to slightly more abstract images. The gravestones in the graveyard look like they came out of the cobblestone floor. Units with color seem to be grayer at the bottom as if they too were coming out of the cobblestones. Colors in the Exchange show up again in the past and Christmas decorations repeat themselves. It's as if we used the world around us to create the images for Past, Present and Future."

The houses on each side of the street scene form part of the permanent proscenium arch for the action, while more specific environs replace the central block of houses scene by scene, as these sketches show.



Paul Wonsek's show curtain, a Victorian Christmas card (above); at right, Wonsek's design for Scrooge's parlor



Design for the Fezziwig party, and (right) design for Scrooge's grave (a dark scene played in front of the street scene, which is not visible then)



A Christmas CAROL

by Charles Dickens
adapted by Geoffrey Sherman



Costume rendering for
Tiny Tim

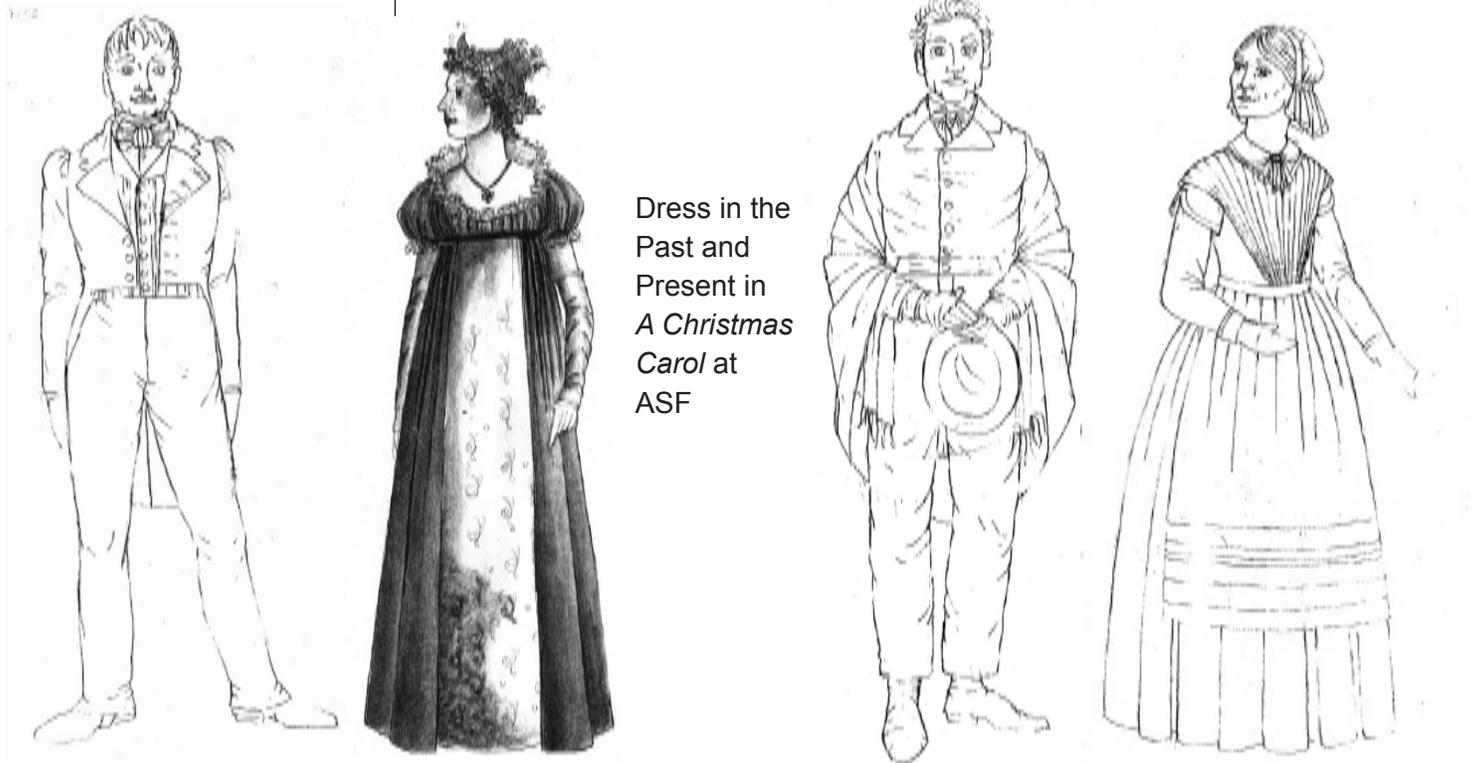
Designing *Costumes* for *A Christmas Carol*

Elizabeth Novak, ASF's Resident Costume Designer, revels in the chance to use the massive stock of Victorian costumes ASF has built up over its years of producing *A Christmas Carol*, especially since she has designed most of them. In working on this show the costume shop resembles a Victorian haberdashery as it fits and adjusts costumes for the production.

The basic costumes for the play represent the 1840s, the era in which Dickens wrote the story. Yet one of the usual spectacular costume moments in the show, Novak observes, is the Fezziwig ball because it shows a festive gathering.

The ball is a memory from Scrooge's youth and thus from several decades in the past, when fashions and festivity differed from Victorian sobriety. Scrooge's youth is the Romantic era in dress, which has empire bodices for women based on the French Empress Josephine's Greek revival garb. By the mid-19th century, women were back in corsets and layers of crinoline petticoats. While there is a significant (and, in costume terms, visible) time gap between Past and Present, part of the power of the Spirits' implication is that there is not much gap between Present and Future—Scrooge's death could soon be upon him—and so the clothing does not change from Present to Future. Novak comments that the costumes should not grab attention in the show; after all, "the focus in this piece is on the story rather than on the costumes."

Novak's costume renderings for the past of the Fezziwig ball in early 19th-century (left)—and for the present, with Mr. and Mrs. Cratchit in 1840s dress (right) for ASF's A Christmas Carol, the Musical (2008)



Dress in the
Past and
Present in
*A Christmas
Carol* at
ASF

A Christmas CAROL

by Charles Dickens
adapted by Geoffrey Sherman



The Victorian London door knocker that inspired Dickens

Pre-Show *Activities* (no knowledge of Dickens's story required)

- **Character Traits:** Compare someone who lives for him- or herself to someone who lives for others and is aware of their need—a selfish person versus a generous person. Who is considered smarter and more successful in our world? What values do we think someone need to have to get ahead? Is there a liability to being selfish? a liability to being generous?
- **The Value of Holiday:** Early in the story, Scrooge is invited to join others in giving, to join others in celebrating, to join others in feasting. He scorns such activities. What is the value of a holiday celebration? Narrate an example of your family holiday traditions and discuss what its value is. [Since Christmas is mentioned in the story's title, use Christmas or any comparable celebration (Hannukah, Kwanzaa, Ramadan, family reunions) for this exercise.]
- **Those in Need:** How does our society view those in need, those who have less than we have? Is there poverty and need in America? How do we address others' need as a society and/or as individuals? Does Christmas have anything to do with those in need? What about the other 364 days of the year?
- **The Mid-19th Century:** What do you know about conditions of life and economy in England around 1840? how about America in 1840 or 1850? Was the population rural or urban? middle class or more sharply divided?
Do a bit of research if you don't know the answers. For instance, who could vote in England in 1840? in America in 1840?
- **Ghosts:** Do you believe in ghosts? Scrooge didn't until Marley appeared. Do the dead have any messages or advice for the living? What would you do if a dead friend or relative suddenly appeared to you and gave you some advice? Imagine such a dialogue and sketch the scene.
- **The Power of the Past and Childhood:** What value does your childhood have for you? Who was special to you then? What moments do you remember best? What were the joyous group moments? Why have those memories stuck with you?
Interview your parents, grandparents, or someone their age about their childhood. What are their best memories? What value does their childhood have for them? How did they celebrate holidays? Write up your interview and how you view their memories.
Do you believe children are more pure than adults? why or why not?
- **Work and Families:** Do you know anyone whose family has a farm? How old are you when you start to help with the work on a farm? How old do you have to be to work in the city or suburbs? What kind of work is available? What kind of work around the house do you do? Who is responsible for doing the work in a family and/or for a family?



As *Christmas Present* shows Scrooge the holiday gathering at Fred's, Scrooge begins to enjoy the guessing game. (ASF, 2005: Christian Rummel, Shannon Warrick, James Devlin, Lauren Hendler, Philip Pleasants, and Kathleen McCall)

A Christmas CAROL

by Charles Dickens

adapted by Geoffrey Sherman



John Leech's original illustration for the end of the Ghost of Christmas Past's visit with Scrooge—Scrooge with a candle snuffer trying to put out the Ghost's "light." Why would Scrooge want to do such a thing? What effect has the Ghost had on him?

The candle snuffer would have been instantly recognizable in the pre-electrical Victorian era. Do we know what it is on sight—see top picture.



Scrooge McDuck, in one of the great adaptations of this classic story

Pre- or Post-Show *Activities* using *A Christmas Carol*

Short analytical reading project:

- Compare chapters 28-29 of *The Pickwick Papers*, including "The Goblins Who Stole a Sexton," to *A Christmas Carol* in terms of the activities celebrated, the tales' protagonists, supernatural elements, and results. Decide what is important to Dickens in a Christmas story early in his career.
- Or compare *A Christmas Carol* to the great medieval morality play *Everyman*, another powerful cautionary tale.

ART: Illustrating the Story

- If you were commissioned to provide eight illustrations for *A Christmas Carol*, which eight moments in the story would you select? Which seem to be the most graphic, the most central, the most revealing of character? Sketch or collage one of your moments from the story.
- And which moment would you choose to be the frontispiece, the one opposite the title page?

HISTORY/ Economics

- Analyze Scrooge's business. He seems to be a kind of banker or loan shark, since people owe him money and he collects. What is the range of businesses today that loan money—banks, savings and loans, credit unions, credit cards, payday loan offices? What is the risk of using each one? Which kind seems closest to Scrooge's?

What is the history of banking in the middle of the 19th century? What are the attitudes toward a loan shark, toward the need for capital for investment?

- Research how much changed in English society and business between 1775 and 1850—how was society structured? where was the money? how was money made? where were the workers and what work were they doing? under what conditions? what was their pay?
- Research child labor conditions, pay, and laws in 19th-century England and compare them to child labor conditions around the world today (i.e. who made your sneakers?).

Spectral Visitors

- What is the difference between a ghost and a Spirit? What are the connotations and suggestions of each term? Which term does more for the story?

Character and Change

- Chart Scrooge's character as we meet him early in the play and how he defends against change.
- How like Scrooge was/is Marley? Why can Marley get through to Scrooge when others seem unable to affect him? How does Scrooge respond to Marley?
- What do we learn of Scrooge by visiting his past? What made him the man he is? How does the past affect Scrooge? How does he respond to seeing it again?
- What about the present does Scrooge know and what does he not know? Does he respond to the present differently because of the Spirit's reminder of his past?
- What matters to Scrooge as he meets the future? Are his questions and concerns any different as a result of his visits to past and present?
- Is Scrooge's change permanent or temporary? How do you know? Can people really change so radically? Why or why not?

Defining Genre

Dickens used the "Carol" idea by calling his chapters "staves," that is, verses of a song. Dickens's Five Staves are:

1. Marley's Ghost
2. The First of the Three Spirits
3. The Second of the Three Spirits
4. The Last of the Spirits
5. The End of It

Given the presence of Spirits, it is also easy to see why he called his tale a ghost story. What are the nature and values of a Christmas carol compared to those of a ghost story, and which kind of work better describes *A Christmas Carol*?

If **comedy** means a story in which a members of a group are separated and finally reunited, and in which the protagonist is like us or worse in terms of status and morals, is this story a comedy?

A Christmas CAROL

by Charles Dickens
adapted by Geoffrey Sherman



Photo: Sayed Alamy

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