A CHRISTMAS CAROL

THE OFFICIAL GRAND THEATRE STUDY GUIDE

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471 Richmond St.
London, ON N6A 3E4

Box Office: 519-672-8800
Online: www.grandtheatre.com
Charles John Huffman Dickens was born in Portsmouth, Hampshire, England on February 7, 1812. He was the most famous English novelist during the Victorian period in England. Dickens' works are famous for their endearing characters and rich storytelling.

Dickens lived a life that is referred to as a “rags to riches” story. The son to Elizabeth nee Barrow and John Dickens, Charles was one of eight children. He had an older brother Frances and younger siblings Alfred Allen, Letitia Mary, Harriet, Frederick William, Alfred Lamert and Augustus Newnham. Charles attended the school of William Giles and while not in school occupied himself by reading and playing with his siblings. The children would often make up and perform plays which could be attributed to Charles’ love for theatre.

Charles’ father was a generous man. This was eventually his downfall, as it resulted in financial difficulties. He was eventually imprisoned in the Marshalsea Prison for owing too much money. Dickens started working at the age of 12 at Warren’s boot blacking company where he glued labels onto jars of boot polish and made six shillings a week. Today, he would have made about 50 Canadian cents per week. This money helped him pay for a place to live and to help support his family. His childhood was over and he was now a part of the working class. The poor working conditions in which he worked as a child left a lasting impression on Charles, reflected in much of his most popular pieces of writing including *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and through one of the main characters in *A Christmas Carol*, Bob Cratchit. Dickens had a talent for depicting the different social classes in his works and was considered a spokesman for the poor and the voice of England at that time.

Charles’ father was released from prison and arranged for Charles to attend the Wellington House Academy in London, England from 1824 to 1827. This set Charles on his path to becoming a writer.

By 1827, due to the family’s financial situation, Charles was forced to leave school and began working as a law clerk. Here, he learned about law, but more importantly, the suffering of the poor within those laws. Some of his later works showed contempt of the law and lawyers.

In 1830, Dickens fell in love with Maria Beadnell who was later sent to finishing school in Paris.

In 1833 *A Dinner at Popular Walk*, his first story, was published. In 1834, he became a political journalist, often reporting on governmental debates and covering election campaigns for a
newspaper called the *Morning Chronicle*. While here, he began to write articles under the pen name Boz.

By 1836, his first book was published and he became an editor of *Bentley’s Miscellany*. Also in 1836, he married Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of George Hogarth, the editor of the *Evening Chronicle*. Charles and Catherine went on to have 10 children: Charles Culliford Boz, Mary, Kate Macready, Walter Landor, Francis Jeffrey, Alfred Tennyson, Sydney Smith, Henry Fielding, Dora Annie, and Edward Bulwer Lytton.

Charles quickly became a success and started publishing many of his works.

In 1851, Charles became involved in amateur theatre writing, directing and acting in productions with his family and friends and then donating any money raised to others in need. In 1857 Charles acted in Wilkie Collins’ *The Frozen Deep*.

Dickens continued to write and travel all over Europe and North America until his death on June 9 1870. Dickens died of a brain hemorrhage at the age of 58 and was buried in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey. His tombstone is inscribed with: “He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England’s greatest writers is lost to the world.”

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**NOVELS**

- *The Pickwick Papers* (Monthly serial, April 1836 to November 1837)
- *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (Monthly serial in *Bentley’s Miscellany*, February 1837 to April 1839)
- *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (Monthly serial, April 1838 to October 1839)
- *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Weekly serial in *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, April 1840, to February 1841)
- *A Christmas Carol* (1843)
- *The Chimes* (1844)
- *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845)
- *The Battle of Life* (1846)
- *The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain* (1848)
- *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*
A Christmas Carol

• Dombey and Son (Monthly serial, October 1846 to April 1848)
• David Copperfield (Monthly serial, May 1849 to November 1850)
• Bleak House (Monthly serial, March 1852 to September 1853)
• Hard Times: For These Times (Weekly serial in Household Words, April 1854, to August 1854)
• Little Dorrit (Monthly serial, December 1855 to June 1857)
• A Tale of Two Cities (Weekly serial in All the Year Round, April 1859, to November 1859)
• Great Expectations (Weekly serial in All the Year Round, December 1860 to August 1861)
• Our Mutual Friend (Monthly serial, May 1864 to November 1865)
• No Thoroughfare (1867) (with Wilkie Collins)
• The Mystery of Edwin Drood (Monthly serial, April 1870 to September 1870. Only six of 12 planned numbers completed.)
• The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices (1890)

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS
• Sketches by Boz (1836)
• Boots at the Holly-tree Inn: And Other Stories (1858)
• Reprinted Pieces (1861)
• The Haunted House (1862) (with Wilkie Collins, Elizabeth Gaskell, Adelaide Proctor, George Sala and Hesba Setton)
• The Mudfog Papers (1880) aka Mudfog and Other Sketches
• To Be Read At Dusk (1898)

Adapted by Jeffrey Pitcher is the Artistic Director of Theatre Newfoundland Labrador. Born and raised in Newfoundland, he has been working as an actor, director and playwright in Canada for the past 25 years. He is the author of over a dozen plays, including Ed & Ed – Trapped, Sound & Fury and Elvis & Mavis. He’s also adapted for the stage J.M. Barrie’s Peter Pan and Dickens’ A Christmas Carol which is currently included in the 2008/09 Season at The Grand Theatre in London, Ontario and at Theatre Northwest in Prince George, BC. His latest play, The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood will premiere at Alberta...
Theatre Projects in Calgary in December.

Pitcher began his career as a writer/actor with the Mummers Theatre Troupe in Newfoundland in 1976. He toured Canada with a number of collectively written and produced plays including *They Club Seals, Don’t They?, The Price of Fish, The IWA Show* and *Weather Permitting*. He became a founding member of Rising Tide Theatre in 1979 and acted and co-wrote a number of plays including *Joey and Daddy, What’s A Train?*. In the 1980s he was a founding member of Theatre Newfoundland Labrador and the Stephenville Festival of the Arts. In 1982, his first play, *The Known Soldier* was produced by Theatre Newfoundland Labrador and Rising Tide Theatre. He continued to act, write and direct in Newfoundland until 1990. In 1991 he moved to Vancouver and studied playwriting at the University of British Columbia. Since then, he’s written over a dozen plays that have been produced across the country as well as the U.S. and Ireland. He’s also had a number of plays produced on CBC Radio. In 2000, Pitcher was appointed Artistic Director of Theatre Newfoundland Labrador. He currently splits his time between Newfoundland and writing in his home base of Vancouver.

**About the Play**

*A Christmas Carol*, written by Charles Dickens, is one of the greatest and most well known Christmas stories of all time. The novel was published by Chapman and Hall British publishing house in December of 1843 and sold over six thousand copies in one week. The novel was written in a time when old Christmas traditions were declining and many thought that the story helped to re-establish the meaning of the Christmas season.

The novel has had many adaptations for the stage, the first one produced only three months after the novel’s first publication.

The play deals with social injustice and poverty and the effect that they have on society. The original novel included illustrations by John Leech and was originally titled *The Sledgehammer* but later changed to *A Christmas Carol*.

**Play Synopsis**

*A Christmas Carol* tells the tale of an old and greedy man, Ebenezer Scrooge, who, with the help from three spirits, undergoes a transformation and learns the true meaning of compassion.

**Setting:** The play takes place in London, England and begins on...
December 24th, Christmas Eve.

ACT I

Scrooge is a lonely, mean and miserly man who declares, “Bah humbug” whenever anyone around him mentions Christmas or tries to spread good cheer. He owns a counting house where a good natured and kind man, Bob Cratchit, is employed. Despite Bob’s friendliness, Scrooge treats him poorly and only after pleading his case does Scrooge let Cratchit take Christmas Day off work.

Scrooge returns home on Christmas Eve and is visited by the ghost of his former business partner Jacob Marley. Marley warns him that unless he changes his ways, Ebenezer will suffer the same fate as he, doomed for eternity to drag behind him the heavy chains he forged in life. He informs Ebenezer that three ghosts will visit him during the night: the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future.

When the clock strikes one o’clock the Ghost of Christmas Past appears. The spirit shows Scrooge key moments of his past, including Ebenezer as a boy in boarding school, his beloved sister Fan, the spirited and generous Fezziwig, his first employer and Belle, his beautiful fiancé.

ACT II

At the stroke of two, Scrooge hears a loud voice calling to him. He discovers it is the Ghost of Christmas Present, a giant of a spirit. Scrooge pleads with the ghost to leave him alone, but finds himself on a street following Bob Cratchit and his son, Tiny Tim, making their way home for dinner. From the Ghost of Christmas Present, Ebenezer discovers that Tiny Tim is very ill and will not live much longer.

Scrooge is then whisked away to the home of his nephew, Fred, where he watches him and his friends playing games and enjoying each other’s company. Fred raises a toast to Scrooge, despite his imperfections and bitterness.

Suddenly Scrooge awakens before the Ghost of Christmas Future. Despite Ebenezer’s questions, the ghost does not speak, only points into the distance.

The spirit shows Ebenezer a series of terrifying scenes: thieves dividing the belongings from the body of the recently-deceased, the home of Bob Crachit after Tiny Tim’s death and Scrooge’s own funeral. These frighten Scrooge as he now knows he must change his
ways in order to alter the future.

In the morning, Scrooge awakens in his own bedroom, noticeably changed from his dreams the previous evening. Scrooge meets his housekeeper and to her joy and amazement, he gives her a raise and a Christmas present.

On his way to his nephew's house for Christmas dinner, Scrooge finds and donates money to Mr. and Mrs. Togget, whom he had turned away the day before.

Scrooge makes his way to his nephew Fred's house where he enjoys games, dinner, and singing Christmas carols with his family.

The next day Bob Cratchit enters Scrooge's office late, fearing he'll be fired. Scrooge confronts Cratchit pretending to be angry. Instead, Ebenezer offers him a salary raise and offers to help take care of his family, particularly Tiny Tim.

Scrooge is a changed man and embraces the holiday season and those around him.

**Characters**

**Ebenezer Scrooge:** a hard, cold miser who spends more time counting money than he does counting friends.

**Bob Cratchit:** a clerk who works at Scrooge's business. A kind fellow who, despite being repeatedly belittled and poorly paid by Ebenezer, remains positive, friendly and generous.

**Tiny Tim:** the son of Bob Cratchit. Like his father, he is a cheerful character despite being very sick.

**Jacob Marley:** Ebenezer's ex-business partner who, while alive, was just as ruthless as Scrooge. Now a ghost, he carries loud and heavy chains – a symbol of punishment for his greed in life.

**Ghost of Christmas Past:** the first of three spirits who visits Scrooge on Christmas Eve. This spirit shows Scrooge of his past life, reminding him of how he was before he became caught up in greed and meanness.

**Ghost of Christmas Present:** the second of the three ghosts to visit Scrooge. This spirit is friendly and generous and shows Scrooge things as they presently are.
**A Christmas Carol**

**Ghost of Christmas Future:** the third and final ghost to visit Scrooge. This spirit is a dark presence, with no distinguishing characteristics other than a skeletal hand that juts out from his black robe.

**Fred:** Scrooge's nephew. A poor man living on the charity of others and who, despite being treated poorly by his uncle, is a positive and cheerful individual.

**Fezziwig:** Scrooge’s first employer. A kind and generous man.

**Molly, Martha and Peter:** other children of Bob Cratchit.

**Mr. and Mrs. Togget:** a couple collecting for charity, turned down by Scrooge when they first ask for a donation.

**Belle:** Ebenezer’s fiancé. Once wildly in love with him, she calls off their engagement with Scrooge when she realizes that his love for money will always be stronger than his love for her.

**Fan (Fannie) Scrooge:** Ebenezer’s beloved, deceased sister and mother of his nephew, Fred.

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**Victorian England**

The “Victorian Period” is named after Queen Victoria who ruled the United Kingdom from 1837 to 1901. At one time, Queen Victoria ruled over a quarter of the world’s population.

During this time, British people enjoyed a long era of prosperity and had the largest empire of any on Earth. This period is also known to be relatively peaceful.

This was a period of time when people in England were very interested in theatre and the arts. Many people attended dramatic, musical, and operatic performances.

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**Ten Interesting Facts about Queen Victoria**

1. Queen Victoria became Queen of England when she was 18 years old. She was queen for over 63 years.
2. Queen Victoria had nine children: four boys and five girls. She also had 40 grandchildren and 37 great grandchildren.
3. As a young girl, she was taught German, English, Italian, Greek and French, arithmetic, music and her favourite subject, history.
A Christmas Carol

4. When the Queen’s husband, Prince Albert, died in 1861 she was devastated and wore black for the rest of her reign.

5. In 2002, the British Broadcasting Corporation conducted a poll regarding the 100 Greatest Britons and Queen Victoria took 18th place.

6. Statues erected to Victoria are common in Canada. She ruled at the same time as Confederation and the creation of several new provinces.

7. Queen Victoria was the first sovereign to take up residence at Buckingham Palace, in 1837.

8. Seven assassinations were attempted on Queen Victoria.

9. Queen Victoria’s childhood nickname was Drina.

10. Queen Elizabeth, the current Queen of England, is the great-great granddaughter of Queen Victoria.

**Something Interesting...**

1. Charles Dickens novels are so popular that not one of them has ever gone out of print.

2. Charles Dickens himself performed on stage in excerpts of *A Christmas Carol* during the famous reading tours of his later years.

**Questions & Activities**

1. Compare the three spirits who visit Scrooge. What do you think each spirit taught Scrooge?

2. By the end of the play Scrooge has undergone a major transformation. Examine the story and major events in the play to explain how his transformation is seen throughout the play? Observe Scrooge’s actions, the actor playing Scrooge’s actions and voice, Scrooge’s costumes, lighting and set.

3. How is wealth treated in *A Christmas Carol*? In the story, how does having lots of money and having none affect different people’s lives?

4. Why do you think Scrooge’s nephew Fred still loves Scrooge, despite Scrooge having been mean to him in the past?

5. Read another of Charles Dickens’ books. Compare one of the following themes between the two books:
   a. Wealth and poverty
   b. Transformation
   c. The supernatural

6. Explain the significance of the two children “Want” and “Ignorance” that the Ghost of Christmas Present’s shows to Scrooge.

7. Fred and his guests play many interesting party games at his
house. Choose one of the games your family plays during any holiday and create an instruction guide to teach others how to play your game. Share your guide with your classmates.

8. Pretend you are Bob Cratchit and imagine what it’s like to work for Ebenezer Scrooge. Write a journal entry about what it is like working for Scrooge before he is visited by the three ghosts. Then write a journal entry after Scrooge’s transformation and explain what kind of a person Scrooge is now and what it is now like to work for him.

9. One of A Christmas Carol’s themes is transformation. Remember and describe a time in your own life when you or someone you know had their life transformed.

10. The story takes place in London, England. In groups, research what London was like during the Victorian Period. Present your findings to the class.

11. In groups, choose a short scene from the play and reenact it in front of your class.

Reference Materials

http://www.victoriaspast.com/FrontPorch/victorianera.htm
http://www.britainexpress.com/History/Victorian_index.htm
http://www.stormfax.com/dickens.htm
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol
http://www.online-literature.com/dickens/
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/dickens_charles.shtml
http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/dickens.htm
http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRdickens.htm
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http://www.online-literature.com/dickens/
http://www.culturevulture.net/Theater/ChristmasCarol.htm

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