A Christmas Carol

by CHARLES DICKENS
adapted by CRISPIN WHITTELL
directed by LAUREN KEATING

PLAY GUIDE
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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

Guthrie Theater Play Guide
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“Christmas is ... the only time of year when people open up their closed-off hearts and think of those below them as if they’re fellow passengers to the grave and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.”

– Fred to Scrooge in A Christmas Carol

About This Guide

This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show’s history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you’re a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We’re glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story. 

DIG DEEPER

If you are a theater company and would like more information about this production, contact Dramaturg Jo Holcomb at joh@guthrietheater.org.
Scrooge, a miserly and miserable old man, torments everyone he sees on most days, but is especially cranky on Christmas. He shouts at carolers, refuses to give money to charity and threatens a small beggar boy. His ebullient nephew Fred comes to visit him at his frigid office to invite him to Christmas dinner. Scrooge, predictably, declines. Fred leaves, and Scrooge grudgingly agrees to give his clerk, Bob Cratchit, Christmas off with pay, though Scrooge feels ill-used by this. Cratchit leaves. When approached by his faithful housekeeper, Mrs. Dilber, for the same benefit, he refuses and demands that she be at work the next day. Scrooge closes shop and changes into his dressing gown.

Settling in for the night, Scrooge is disturbed — and alarmed — by the ghost of his old partner, Jacob Marley. Marley warns him to mend his ways or he, too, will be forced to roam the earth in the chains he forged for himself with his cruel ways. Marley tells Scrooge that he will be visited by three spirits and should listen to what they have to say. As soon as Marley leaves, the clocks in Scrooge’s house go berserk and the Ghost of Christmas Past appears. Together they journey back to Scrooge’s sad school days, where he delights at seeing his sister Fanny, and to a grand Christmas party thrown by his early employer, Old Fezziwig. Scrooge begins to realize that Fezziwig’s joy was infectious, it spread to all his employees and it was worth more than whatever the party cost him. We also see Scrooge woo, and then lose, the beautiful Belle. The ghost tells Scrooge, “I show you only what is good, and fine, and beautiful. So that should you glimpse it again — as you glimpsed it once — you will grasp it as if your life depends on it.” As quickly as she arrived, the ghost is gone, leaving Scrooge alone again in his bed.

Scrooge is soon visited by the Ghost of Christmas Present. The ghost takes Scrooge to see how the Cratchits celebrate Christmas. Though they are poor and have little to eat, they are happy with what they have and to be in each other’s company. Scrooge also learns that Tiny Tim, Bob’s wise young son, is very ill and will likely die without proper care. Despite how poorly Scrooge treats him, Cratchit offers him a toast nonetheless, grateful for what he has.

The scene shifts to his nephew Fred’s house, and we see simultaneously how the other (richer) half live and that Fred, too, knows how to keep Christmas with friends and family. Generously, Fred proposes a toast to his uncle as well, hoping that Scrooge will find some happiness in life. Games abound, food is plentiful and a good time is had by all. Scrooge begins to wonder if he is truly missing something special. Before the spirit leaves him, he reveals two small, sick children — Ignorance and Want — and Scrooge, moved, inquires if they have no place to stay. The spirit throws Scrooge’s words back in his face: “Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?” Christmas Present, too, fades away.

The next visit, from the Ghost of Christmas Future, shows Scrooge his fate if he does not mend his ways. Poor Tiny Tim has died, as has Scrooge. Many grief-stricken people attend Tiny Tim’s funeral; Scrooge has not a single mourner. Mrs. Dilber begins to sell off his possessions, and Scrooge realizes that he must mend his ways or he will simply die forgotten and unloved. The transformation of Scrooge is profound: he awakens to Christmas bells, gives money to charity, sends a huge turkey to the Cratchits, sings along with the carolers and gives Bob a big raise. He even reconciles with his nephew. Scrooge’s story of redemption, beloved by readers and audiences for 175 years, remains as powerful and uplifting as it ever was. From that point forward, we’re told, no one kept Christmas as faithfully or fruitfully as Ebenezer Scrooge.
Characters

**Setting**
London, December 24–25, 1843

**Characters**

**Ebenezer Scrooge,** a miserly businessman  
**Bob Cratchit,** his clerk  
**Mrs. Cratchit,** his wife  
**Martha, Peter, Belinda and Tiny Tim,** their children  
**Fred,** Scrooge's nephew  
**Kitty,** Fred's wife  
**Mrs. Polkinghorne,** Kitty's mother  
**Jane and Mabel,** Kitty's sisters  
**Jacob Marley,** the ghost of Scrooge's old business partner  
**Ghost of Christmas Past**  
**Ghost of Christmas Present**  
**Ghost of Christmas Future**  
**Ignorance and Want**  
**Youngest Scrooge,** Ebenezer Scrooge as a schoolboy  
**Fanny,** Scrooge's older sister  
**Mr. Fezziwig,** Scrooge's former employer  
**Mrs. Fezziwig,** his wife  
**Daisy, Dora and Deirdre Fezziwig,** their daughters  
**Daniel, David and Donald,** suitors to the Fezziwig daughters  
**Young Scrooge,** Ebenezer Scrooge as a young man  
**Young Marley,** Jacob Marley as a young man  
**Belle,** Scrooge's former fiancée  
**Belle's Husband**  
**Mr. Wimple,** Scrooge's tenant  
**Mrs. Dilber,** Scrooge's housekeeper  
**Old Joe,** a junk salesman  
**Scrooge's Priest**  
**Bunty and Bumble,** taking a collection for the poor  
**Various carolers, revelers, children, Fezziwig guests and citizens of London**
I have endeavored in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it!

Their faithful friend and servant, C.D.

Charles Dickens
_A Christmas Carol_, December 1843

_[A Christmas Carol] is a national benefit, and to every man and woman who reads it a personal kindness._

William Makepeace Thackery
_Fraser's Magazine_, February 1844

There was indeed nobody that had not some interest in the message of the _Christmas Carol_. It told the selfish man to rid himself of selfishness; the just man to make himself generous; and the good-natured man to enlarge the sphere of his good nature. Its cheery voice of faith and hope, ringing from one end of the island to the other, carried pleasant warning alike to all, that if the duties of Christmas were wanting, no good could come of its outward observances; that it must shine upon the cold hearth and warm it, and into the sorrowful heart and comfort it; that it must be kindness, benevolence, charity, mercy, and forbearance, or its plum pudding would turn to stone and its roast beef be indigestible.

John Forster
_The Life of Charles Dickens, Volume 2_, 1874

The narrow space within which it was necessary to confine these Christmas Stories, when they were originally published, rendered their construction a matter of some difficulty, and almost necessitated what is peculiar in their machinery. I never attempted great elaboration of detail in the working out of character within such limits, believing that it could not succeed. My purpose was, in a whimsical kind of masque which the good-humour of the season justified, to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts, never out of season in a Christian land.

Charles Dickens
_Preface to a collection of his Christmas Stories published in 1852_
A Novel Petition for London’s Poor

By Jo Holcomb
Dramaturg

In the spring of 1843, Charles Dickens began work on a pamphlet titled “An Appeal to the People of England on behalf of the Poor Man’s Child.” Although beloved for his fiction, Dickens was first and foremost a political writer and reformer.

Not long after conceiving the idea for his political pamphlet, he changed course. In October 1843, he began writing A Christmas Carol and finished it in six weeks. Truth be told, Dickens was in a bit of a financial crisis himself. He was 31, already raising four (of what would be 10) children and the returns from his recent serial, Martin Chuzzlewit, were disappointing. He “dashed off” Carol, and it was published on December 19, 1843 — just in time for late holiday sales and the Dickens’ family Christmas.

The fact that Dickens considered income when writing Carol should in no way diminish his own commitment to social reform and his arguments on behalf of
the poor. The realities of his own life led him to recognize the serious need for reforms that would provide more comprehensive care for the poor — particularly the children of poverty. As a child, Dickens experienced the fear and uncertainty of his family’s diminishing resources. His father was sent to the workhouse for not paying his debts, and the rest of the family joined him there with the exception of 12-year-old Charles, who was left behind to earn his keep at Warren’s Blacking Factory putting labels on pots of blacking boot polish.

As an adult, having pulled himself out of the mire of poverty, Dickens never forgot the experience of his youth and, in many ways, continued to be damaged by it. His writing would reflect his memories, as evidenced in the hard road of Oliver Twist or the autobiographical David Copperfield. By the year he wrote Carol, child labor in Great Britain had reached a critical tipping point. Children who didn’t attend school worked in factories, mines, shipyards, construction or any number of menial jobs. Many children began working at age 3 in some of the most dangerous places, averaging 16 hours of hard labor a day. Life expectancy was low, as they rarely lived beyond their mid-20s.

“I have very seldom seen in all the strange and dreadful things I have seen in London and elsewhere, anything so shocking as the dire neglect of soul and body exhibited in these children. Side by side with Crime, Disease, and Misery in England, Ignorance is always brooding.”
— Charles Dickens, “Ignorance and Crime,” The Examiner, 1848

In Dickens’ day, well over 100,000 children in London had never attended school of any kind. Those who received some sort of education often attended schools run for profit by private owners known as “ragged” schools, which were charity institutions created to provide a rudimentary education for destitute children.

“Many thousands lack the most basic necessities. Hundreds of thousands lack common comforts.”
— Bumble in A Christmas Carol

Leading up to the novel’s writing, Dickens was particularly struck by two factors directly related to the treatment of poor children. Earlier in 1843, he had read a government report on child labor with statistics that were supported by interviews with child laborers. He learned that girls who sewed for a new market of the middle class were housed above the factory floor and worked 16-hour days, much like Martha Cratchit. Another report revealed that 8-year-olds dragged coal carts through underground tunnels for 11 hours a day. Sadly, these stories represented a norm — not an exception.

Dickens also visited the Field Lane ragged school at the behest of a friend and philanthropist, which further incited Dickens to take action with his pen. He was sickened by what he called the “atmosphere of taint and dirt and pestilence.” In Carol, Dickens made a plea for the poor by writing about the living and education situations for poor children and adults alike and contrasting it to the grasping Scrooge — an attempt to reveal not only the need for Scrooge’s reclamation but the need for a radical change of heart across London’s entire population.
The Transformative Power of Kindness

From Director Lauren Keating
It is my honor to be helming *A Christmas Carol* for a second year, as this production holds a uniquely special place in my heart. It served as a personal gateway to my professional theatrical career and has a meaningful history with my family.

For many of us in this Twin Cities-based company, Dickens’ classic story defines the holidays and can act as a much-needed balm for what may be a challenging time of year for many. From the first rehearsal to our final show, we all commit to the vision of a world where we can come together despite differences, believe that transformation is possible and share a great hope for what our collective future can be.

During this year’s rehearsals, I lost my beloved Aunt Carol. Her humor, spirit and ferocity inspired me to be the leader I am today, encouraging my every accomplishment with a wholehearted “You go, girl!” In my striving to make this year’s production even more magical and inclusive in its storytelling, I honor my Aunt Carol’s legacy and spirit, which always sought adventure and celebration. For me, *A Christmas Carol* is meant to embrace its audience wholeheartedly and live our Guthrie values to the fullest, ensuring that every single person feels welcomed, seen and invited to be authentically at home with us.

My Aunt Carol lived the lessons I believe Dickens most wants us to take away from his timeless tale — kindness and community. True kindness, as she demonstrated and Dickens espouses, is inconvenient. True kindness is when you extend a hand to someone you don’t really know or aren’t sure you really like. True kindness is when you take the time you aren’t sure you have or lend the dollar you’d rather keep. True kindness asks you to go out of your way for others and for the good of your community. Because we can only truly thrive when we all thrive. This type of transformative kindness is what Scrooge learns throughout the course of his long night’s journey and what I hope we will take with us as we venture back out into these increasingly divided times.

*A Christmas Carol* asks us to open our hearts and believe — to believe in the best in ourselves and others without wasting a moment. This is what is so magical, unique and imperative about this production and why we continue to return to it year after year. It isn’t about one night at the theater. It’s about creating an experience that bonds us throughout the year through shared memories and lessons learned.

My father loves to randomly ask, “You there! What day is today?!” Without missing a beat, someone will reply, “It’s Christmas day, sir!” And to that, he has only one response: “Good, then I haven’t missed it!” I hope our production will bring you and your family this kind of hope, joy, comfort and togetherness during the holidays and long after you leave us today.
Dickens and the Christmas Tradition

“Dickens’ Christmas Carol has become such an essential part of Christmas that we can hardly imagine the holiday season without it.”

_A Chronicle of Dickens’ Christmas Carol_, Theodore and Caroline Hewitson, 1951

Theater, like the holiday season, is laden with traditions. Everyone knows never to utter the word “Macbeth” in a theater; never to wish an actor “good luck” but rather to “break a leg”; and to always keep the ghost light on. Similarly, the holiday season brings with it many well-established traditions: trips to visit Santa at an insanely crowded mall; the decoration of Christmas trees and the hanging of mistletoe; huge dinners of turkey or ham; midnight mass; or Chinese dinner and a movie.

Since 1975, the Guthrie’s annual production of _A Christmas Carol_ has been a Minnesota tradition both for audiences and artists alike. This tradition, like the theater itself, is living and organic.

This section is designed to explore holiday traditions and invite you to come and take part, once again, in the living tradition of the Guthrie’s _A Christmas Carol_.

It is often said that Dickens “invented” modern Christmas. While this may be a slight exaggeration, it is no exaggeration to suggest that he radically shaped — and continues to shape — the way we celebrate Christmas today.

Our historical Christmas origin tale is generally well-known: Christian belief mixed in with the Roman traditions of Saturnalia, the Scandinavian Yule traditions of feasting and merriment and a mixture of northern European cuisines — combined with a heady mixture of North American commercialism. But it was not always this way, and Dickens is largely responsible for the festive, family-oriented celebration we know today.

There is no date given in the Christian _Bible_ for the birth of Jesus, but beginning in late antiquity and continuing through the Middle Ages, the Feast of the Nativity was usually celebrated on December 25. In the early Middle Ages, Advent was a time of general merriment: harvest festivals, feasting and revelry began on the Feast of St. Martin de Tours on November 11 and lasted for forty days. When Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day 800 A.D., the actual celebration on December 25 gained greater prominence so that by the later Middle Ages, Christmas was the dominant feast of winter.
Christmas in the Middle Ages was a very public affair: communities celebrated together, and it was a time to solidify relationships through gift-giving. Employers and servants would exchange small gifts, as would landlords and tenants. On occasion, a manorial lord might give his manor the gift of a feast or some ale. All people of means would give alms to the poor. In England, where A Christmas Carol takes place, Christmas became a widely celebrated party with lots of food, wine, dancing and card-playing.

Following the Protestant Reformation, the Puritans in England sought to eliminate the celebration of Christmas. Since it had no Biblical basis, they viewed it as a Catholic invention and decried the lax morality of drinking and dancing to celebrate the Nativity. Following the English Civil War (1642–1651), the Puritans effectively banned Christmas in 1647, which remained in effect throughout the Commonwealth and Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. Christmas became legal again with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, but celebration remained sparse, and even church services for Christmas were relatively poorly attended until the early 19th century.

Thus by the time Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol, Christmas was a fairly subdued affair. It was neither the community festival of the Middle Ages nor the important religious celebration of late antiquity nor the ribald celebration of the 17th century. But the tide was turning. The Royal Family began decorating and displaying Christmas trees — borrowed from their German heritage — and Christmas dinners became more elaborate and common. So when Dickens proclaims that Christmas is a “good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time,” he is hearkening back to a well-established tradition of merriment, charity and reverence, combining aspects of Christmases past. Dickens focuses his holiday not in the commons but at the family hearth. It becomes a personal celebration and a time for reflection as well as celebration. Dickens both reflects his society’s views about the importance of hearth and home as well as projects his own social conscience into Christmas. Dickens’ Christmas is not solely inward-looking, portraying an idealized scene of Victorian domesticity; it also requires that each person admit that humankind is his business — it is an opportunity to make the world a better place. For Scrooge, perhaps Dickens’ most famous invention, Christmas is an opportunity for rebirth. No doubt Dickens hoped Scrooge would be an example to all: to keep Christmas in one’s heart, always, and not to shut out the wisdom the season offers us.

Written by Matt McGeachy for the 2010 A Christmas Carol play guide

Adapted from the 2006 A Christmas Carol program
BUILDING THE PRODUCTION

From the Creative Team

Crispin Whittell
Playwright

A *Christmas Carol* is one of the great, great, great stories. It’s relevant because there are still people who think that money is the most important thing in life. Moving back to England got me thinking about what *Carol* would look like in London in 2016. As long as there are people who are less fortunate than the Scrooges of this world, and as long as people chase after money believing it to be the be-all and the end-all, these issues will be staring us in the face. I was thinking, “How would one do a modern version of *Carol*?” Well, Tiny Tim would be Syrian or Iraqi and Scrooge wouldn’t be the old man with a bent back and a candle. He’d be working on Wall Street or in the city.

Each year, I think the play becomes closer to Dickens’ original novella. And something you might not know unless you are English is that we aren’t afraid to mess about with Shakespeare and even Dickens. In my opinion, the British feel that Dickens’ reputation is solid, so we don’t feel squeamish about messing with his stories.

Dickens is one of the greatest people in history, but I didn’t go into adapting his story thinking that I have to show reverence to him. I wanted it to be un-boring, alive, funny and modern in feel. It’s an important show for the Guthrie to try and get as right as possible for the families who come and see it.

When you think of *A Christmas Carol*, you don’t automatically think “dance.” But I think there are so many opportunities to use dance and movement to serve our story. I’ve enjoyed working with Lauren [Keating] and production team to find those moments that further the tale’s emotion or further the story of Belle and Young Scrooge.

Even as people are dancing and celebrating at the Fezziwig party, we can tell more of the story by showing the characters’ interactions with each other and using movement to deepen the audience’s connection to the story. It’s been a joy to play and explore all kinds of dance with this amazing cast.

Regina Peluso
Choreographer

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From the Creative Team

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When you have artists dedicated to creating original music for a production, a director gets to work with that composer to specifically enhance what's going on in the play, instead of having to find pre-existing songs to meet the same end.

For me creatively, everything comes from the script. I'll read through the new adaption of the script and mark places where I think there could be some music, and I also mark where the mood or tone changes, places where I think I could support a moment with some music. I go through the entire script making all my notes, and then I meet with the director. At this meeting we compare our notes, and hopefully we agree on where there is music and how that music should sound and feel. I always try to get myself into the mindset of the director in order to support his or her vision.

It's my first time in Minneapolis and my first time working at the Guthrie, and I'm thrilled to be part of this production.

What I love about A Christmas Carol is that — spoiler alert — there are a lot of Christmas carols! As I looked through the score and practiced the carols on my own before our first rehearsal, it made me happy. Singing makes me happy to begin with, but there's just something magical about singing carols. Even though it was only October, it still gave me those warm, holiday feelings.

Each member of the cast entered rehearsal at a different point on their singing journey, and I'm proud of the beautiful work we've created together.
When first approaching the design, the director and I looked at a number of different worlds. There is the London of present Scrooge, the world of his past memories and finally the world of his future. With the costumes, we also wanted to represent the different class and economic structures within the London of Scrooge, especially the difference between the upper class and the poor and destitute.

Representing this distinction of class is a big theme in many of Dickens’ stories and novels, and is really apparent in the costuming of the Cratchit family, who are barely making ends meet. It is important to show their poverty in their clothes, so every article of clothing is worn and has been mended over and over and over again. In contrast, the first big scene in Scrooge’s past is the Fezziwig party, where we see Scrooge as a young man before he changes into his present miserly self. The costumes are very colorful and bright to reflect the festive mood — a stark contrast to the London of the older Scrooge we see later in the play, with its dark and muted colors.

There’s a reason why so many theater companies produce this story every year. It’s an uplifting story, and it renews our faith in humanity. It’s also a great challenge, for no other reason than the sheer number of costumes and the several decades represented in the play. The play has costumes that are very stark and spare and also lush and vibrant. To be able to do all of those in one production is great.

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A Christmas Carol feels like a rite of passage for any voice or dialect coach. Standard British cockney and Home Counties dialects are a go-to, but this story takes place in a country where people don’t all sound the same. So we talked about how it could be exciting for a variety of characters to have a variety of British accents.

We also talked about how the three ghosts would sound as supernatural beings. My goal is always to work with each actor, nurture what’s already in their wheelhouse and build on that.
THE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR

The role of the narrator is important to this adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*. Which characters serve as narrators in this production? How do the narrators propel the action of the play? Do you feel like the narrator is talking directly to you when speaking? How does this differ from how characters usually interact onstage?

Classroom Activity: Select a book or story that you know well. If you were retelling this story in the role of narrator, what would you include? What would you leave out? Create the role of narrator for this story and, using a selection of the book or story you chose, narrate that section for your peers.

THEMES AND IDEAS

What do you believe is the central theme, or main idea, of *A Christmas Carol*? Where in the play is the theme most obvious? Which characters help to express the theme of the play? Do you believe this play has a moral? If so, what do you believe it is? Can you think of examples of other books, movies, stories, songs or other works of art that have a similar theme?

If you are familiar with other works by Charles Dickens, can you find similar themes in his other works? How does Dickens utilize character, plot, subject matter and narrative style to express these ideas and themes? Are there other artists who come to mind that are concerned with the same themes as Dickens?

SOCIAL STUDIES/HISTORY

Classroom Activity: Much of Charles Dickens’ work is focused on 19th-century England and disparities between the classes. Select a topic below and research it through the lens of 19th-century England and how the topic relates to *A Christmas Carol*. Then report back to the class to paint a more complete picture of the setting for the play.

- Labor laws (especially child labor laws)
- Ghosts and ghost stories
- English royalty
- Homelessness
- Clothing
- Crime
- Religion
- Music and Songs
- Women in Society
- Industrial Revolution
- Slavery
- Printing/Publication
- Satire
- Science/Evolution
- Colonialism
- Other Writers of the Era (Brontë, Carroll, Conrad, Kipling, Thackeray, etc.)

COMEDY VS. TRAGEDY

Do you believe that *A Christmas Carol* is a comedy or a tragedy? What do each of these classifications mean to you? Which aspects of the story are comic? Which are tragic? Which do you feel is most effective in *A Christmas Carol*? How does one support the other in the telling of the story?

MARLEY’S CURSE

According to the story, Marley is condemned to “walk the earth.” Why do you think this is his punishment? For what deeds or omissions is he being punished? Do you believe the chains that he wears are a metaphor? If so, what do they represent, and how is this metaphor central to the story’s plot? What do you believe is implied by the multitude of fettered spirits that accompany Marley’s ghost?

SCROOGE AND CRATCHIT

How would you describe the relationship between Scrooge and Bob Cratchit at the beginning of the story? Do you think that their employer/employee relationship is representative of 19th-century labor laws and customs? Why or why not? Do you think their relationship would be typical today? What has changed, if anything, between employers and employees as well as with labor laws?

HUMBUG!

What does the word “humbug” mean? What words are the modern-day equivalents of “humbug”? Thinking back on the play, which aspects of the Christmas celebrations does Scrooge call “humbug”? When is the first time in his life that Scrooge uses the term? Why do you think Scrooge has such a dour outlook on these celebrations? What events led to his feelings about Christmas? Are there any aspects of the holiday season that you believe are “humbug”? 
NATURE VS. NURTURE
For centuries, philosophers and scientists have tackled the question of whether humans are born with instincts that define their conduct throughout life or whether their behavior is the result of education, the influence of family, etc. How do you think this story of Scrooge supports one theory vs. the other? Do you think Scrooge is the product of his environment or was he born that way? How do you explain his transformation based on your assessment?

THE LESIONS OF THE GHOSTS
Each of the ghosts that visit Scrooge is meant to teach him a lesson. What do you believe Scrooge learns from the Ghost of Christmas Past? The Ghost of Christmas Present? The Ghost of Christmas Future? Each ghost in this Guthrie production is very different from the other in terms of appearance, costuming, demeanor, gender, voice and movement. Why do you think each ghost has been created to appear the way they do? How does the appearance complement the lesson to be learned?

If you were the central character of A Christmas Carol, what would the ghosts have revealed to you? What lessons do you think they would have wanted you to learn? How would the ghosts in your story appear?

Do you believe the lessons from the Ghosts have any meaning in your own life? Did you learn or discover anything from the play that might change your behavior or attitudes? If so, what? Do you believe it is possible to enrich or understand your own life in a deeper way through seeing plays, listening to music, reading books or experiencing other types of art? Can you think of an example of art you have experienced that has made you think or feel differently about yourself or some aspect of the world?

WHAT MAKES A CLASSIC?
Every year, productions of A Christmas Carol are staged in theaters around the world. Why do you think this story has remained so popular for so many years? Some scholars believe that a classic is a story that both defines its own era and transcends its time. Do you believe A Christmas Carol qualifies by this definition? Do you think this makes it a classic? What qualities do you think a book has to have to be a classic? What other books have you read that you believe are classics? Why should those books be considered?

ADAPTATION
Adapting a novel for the stage poses many challenges. After seeing A Christmas Carol at the Guthrie and reading the book, find examples of moments from the play that were adapted from prose — not dialogue. How did the play use theatrical elements — lighting, symbolism, music, setting — to capture Dickens’ novel? When do you think this was most successful? Were there elements of the book that were “lost” in the production? Were there moments in the production that are not found in the book?

Classroom Activity: Ask students to select a novel (other than A Christmas Carol) of their choice — preferably a favorite book they have read and know well. Ask students to select one section of text from their book that includes both dialogue and descriptive prose. Then, have them translate that section into a theatrical script and encourage them to capture as much of the prose as they are able through theatrical means — either as additional dialogue, lighting or setting instructions, movement, music or any other element they choose. Finally, have students read their scenes aloud for one another and discuss the challenges and choices they made on behalf of their own adaptation.

Classroom Activity: Read a passage from A Christmas Carol aloud. What aspects of the text are effective as spoken language? What aspects of the text seem most appropriate for theatrical staging? How does the written text differ from how it was staged in the production?

Classroom Activity: Many TV and film adaptations have been made of A Christmas Carol, including “A Diva’s Christmas Carol” starring Vanessa Williams for VH1, “Mickey’s Christmas Carol” by Disney and Scrooged starring Bill Murray. If you were going to write a modern-day version of A Christmas Carol, where would you set the story? Who would be your Scrooge? In what industry would they work? Individuals or small teams should work to develop scenes from their modern-day versions of the story to present for one another.

THEATRICAL STAGING
Often, the most theatrical moments in a production highlight or point to the play’s most significant themes. In this production, what do you believe are the most theatrical moments? Do you believe these moments indicate the play’s central themes?

How does the Guthrie production create the atmosphere of Dickens’ 19th-century London? What do we learn about Scrooge and his world through the set, costumes, props, lights and sound? How do costumes help us understand characters’ social or economic
classes? What changes in fashion are apparent in the costumes for the scenes from Scrooge’s childhood (set around 1790) to the Fezziwig party (set around 1800) to the party at Fred’s (set around 1840)? Select a scene or image you remember from the play and describe each of the elements that support the scene.

MUSIC
Describe the different ways music is used throughout the play. How does the live music set a tone for a scene, advance the action of the story, define characters and contribute to the overall production?

HOLIDAYS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
Classroom Activity: Interview a parent, grandparent or older relative about their favorite memories of a past Christmas or holiday tradition of their own culture. What foods, smells, sounds, images and people do they recall from that holiday? Write a description of these memories that captures as many details as possible. Think about your own favorite holiday memory and do the same. Try to capture as many sensory details as possible. Imagine a future holiday when you are an older adult, and again write a detailed description of how you imagine your perfect holiday.

THROW A VICTORIAN HOLIDAY PARTY
Classroom Activity: As a class, plan a Victorian holiday party complete with food, games, songs, dances and costumes of the era. Be as authentic as you can! Ask each student to come as a character from the play or the Victorian era. Meet and mingle in character as you enjoy the festivities.

HOLIDAY TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD
Classroom Activity: Christmas is celebrated differently throughout the world. In certain cultures, Christmas is not a holiday, but other wonderful celebrations take place and are honored. Ask each student to either a) select a country to research specific Christmas traditions or b) select a holiday other than Christmas to explore in detail. Ask each student to prepare a report or create a poster board that features pictures, images or samples of holiday fare.
For Further Reading and Understanding

**BOOKS**


**FILMS AND VIDEOS**
http://us.imdb.com/M/person exact?Dickens%2C+Charles
A list of films adapted from Dickens' novels and short stories

**WEBSITES**
http://www.stormfax.com/1dickens.htm
The text of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*

http://www.charlesdickenspage.com
David Purdue’s Charles Dickens Page includes information on Dickens — on the page, onstage and in life

http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/-matsuoka/CD-Chesterton-CD.html
G.K. Chesterton’s biography, Charles Dickens, 1906

http://lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/-matsuoka/CD-Forster.html
Entire text of John Forster’s biography, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 1872–1874

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/victorians/index.shtml
Interactive BBC site about children in Victorian England, designed for children from 9–11

http://www.wwnorton.com/nael/victorian/welcome.htm
Illuminating primary documents relating to British society in the Victorian Era

http://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/snow/1859map/
Searchable map of London in 1859, from the UCLA Department of Epidemiology

http://www.victorianweb.org
Site designed and edited by Professor George P. Landow for Brown University as a resource for Brown students studying Victorian literature

**A SELECTION OF CHRISTMAS LITERATURE**

*Editor’s Note:* Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* is one among many stories arising out of the Christmas holiday. What follows is a selected list which may include many of your own favorites.

**Novels, Short Stories and Poems**
The First Christmas, Luke, chapter 2 (*Bible*)
*The Legend of Bafana*, traditional European story
*Baba Yaga*, folktale, probably Russian in origin (19th century)
*The Nutcracker*, E.T.A Hoffman (1816)
*The Sketch Book*, Washington Irving (1819–1820)
*The Night Before Christmas (A Visit from St. Nicholas)*, Clement C. Moore (1822)
*The Fir Tree*, Hans Christian Anderson (1845)
*The Snow Queen*, Hans Christian Andersen (1845)
*The Little Match-Seller*, Hans Christian Anderson (1846)
*Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott, chapters 1–3 (1869)
“How Santa Came to Simpson’s Bar,” Bret Harte (1870)
*Christmas Every Day and Other Stories Told for Children*, William Dean Howells (1892)
“The Burglar’s Christmas,” Willa Cather (1896)
“Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus,” Francis P. Church, *The New York Sun* (1897)
*The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*, L. Frank Baum (1902)
“The Tailor of Gloucester,” Beatrix Potter (c. 1902)
“The Gift of the Magi,” O. Henry (1906)
*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis (1950)
*A Child’s Christmas in Wales*, Dylan Thomas (1954)
*A Christmas Memory*, Truman Capote (1956)
**Novels, Short Stories and Poems (continued)**

*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, Dr. Seuss (1957)

*The Polar Express*, Chris Van Allsburg (1985)

*The Santaland Diaries, Holidays on Ice*, David Sedaris (1992)

*Santa’s Twin*, Dean Koontz (1996)

**Plays**

*Babes in Toyland*, Glen MacDonough and Victor Herbert (1903)

*The Man Who Came to Dinner*, George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart (1939)

*Black Nativity*, Langston Hughes (1961)

*The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, Barbara Robinson (1972)

*Christmas on Mars*, Harry Kondoleon (1983)


*The Eight Reindeer Monologues*, Eric Goode (1994)

*They Sing Christmas Up in Harlem: A Lenox Avenue Christmas Carol*, Eric LeRoy Wilson (2000)