A Christmas Carol

by CHARLES DICKENS
adapted by CRISPIN WHITTELL
directed by LAUREN KEATING
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.
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.

“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

DIG DEEPER
If you are a theater company and would like more information about this production, contact dramaturg Anna J. Crace at anna_crace@live.com.
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 it 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 more than 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.
Setting and 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 fiancee  
**Belle’s Husband**  
**Mr. Wimple**, Scrooge’s tenant  
**Mrs. Wimple**, his wife  
**Mrs. Dilber**, Scrooge’s housekeeper  
**Old Joe**, a junk salesman  
**Scrooge’s Priest**  
**Bunty and Bumble**, taking a collection for the poor  
**Various Londoners, children, carolers, party guests and pallbearers**
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 Two*, 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 Day in the Life of a Director

By Lauren Keating
Director

① 7 A.M.
Rise and shine! I take a morning run around the lake, which helps me feel focused and grateful to live in a beautiful place like Minneapolis. I also meditate to center my thoughts and think about my intention for the day. When time allows, I make breakfast and coffee for my wife, Claire. It’s important to be supportive when I’m working so much.

② 9 A.M.
I get ready, review the day’s schedule and eat breakfast. While sipping black tea, I listen to NPR news. The artistic work of theater is deeply connected to the present moment, so being informed about what may be impacting the company or the audience is essential.

③ 9:30 A.M.
I drive to the Guthrie while catching up on voice messages via the Voxer app, which is one way I keep in touch with loved ones. Sometimes I sing in full voice to get energized — most likely to songs by Lizzo.

④ 10 A.M.
My Guthrie meetings begin. Right now, we’re deciding which plays will be onstage during our 2020–2021 Season. I stay in touch with colleagues and theaters around the country to discuss potential collaborations and work with the Guthrie’s Literary Projects Group to determine which plays feel urgent and of the moment.

⑤ 11 A.M.
Production meeting for A Christmas Carol. I meet with the Guthrie’s department heads and the creative team to ensure everything is on track. We’re working on some exciting updates to the lighting, snow and ghosts — but I’ll stop there so I don’t give anything away!

I end the meeting by thanking everyone and saying, “Season’s Keatings!” Shout-out to Matt Dawson, one of our incredible stage crew members, for coining the pun. Last year, I was working with Sarah Gullickson, our props manager, to design a mix of silver glitter, plastic silver coins and squares of white and blue tissue paper that floats down around the Ghost of Christmas Past. Matt dubbed the mixture “Season’s Keatings,” and I happily use the phrase any chance I get.

⑥ NOON
Rehearsal begins for the professional actors who comprise the core company — all 17 of them. I’ve worked with many of these actors for years, which has allowed us to develop trust and deeply explore the work. New company members help us examine our choices and keep the work fresh. It’s important to make space for new perspectives and encourage actors to be generative artists. Together, we have built a true company — including everyone...
from past productions and our understudy company — and become a network of local artists who continue to influence and tell this story.

**4:30 P.M.**
Time for the long break before the rest of the company arrives. I might have a meal, prep for evening rehearsal or take a walk to recharge. If I’m lucky, Claire will stop by on her way home from work. She calls herself the “First Lady” of *A Christmas Carol*, and I love when she visits — especially with treats in tow.

**5:30 P.M.**
Our young actors arrive full of infectious energy and enthusiasm. They join H. Adam Harris, our assistant director, for warmups while the creative team and I discuss our plan for the evening.

**6 P.M.**
Everyone’s here! Our stage manager, Tree O’Halloran, rings a bell, I share the evening’s agenda and we dive in. I’ll use the Country Cross — when Scrooge first goes back in time — as an example. First, I describe the story we are trying to tell, why it is a pivotal moment and how each performer’s role contributes to the story. It is vital that everyone in the room understands this.

Next, music director Deborah Wicks La Puma teaches the songs, assigns harmonies and helps the company sound like one gorgeous voice. Then comes the hard part — moving and singing and acting all at once. The actors make it look easy, but it is not. Our choreographer, Regina Peluso, leads a warmup and teaches the company the main components of the dance.

When everyone knows the basics, we create the scene. I direct the actors while Regina builds the movements. When we have a beat — a moment we identify as one point in the story — we run it again and give notes. Little by little, we build the entire Country Cross.

**9:30 P.M.**
The actors head home, and I review what we accomplished and what’s on deck for tomorrow. It feels like a game of Tetris to create the schedule, but Tree is a champion at this. Then I check my email and answer questions that came in about *A Christmas Carol*, my other roles at the Guthrie or *Antigone*, which I’m preparing to direct at Cleveland Play House.

**11 P.M.**
Home sweet home. I wind down with a cup of hot tea and chat with Claire if she’s awake. I stay off my phone and keep a good book handy to quiet my brain after a busy rehearsal day.

**2 A.M.**
Sometimes my eyes pop open in the wee hours and I have a vision about something we staged earlier in the day. I blurrily type a note in my phone and go back to sleep. Many ghosts and visions occupy my dreams during the rehearsal period, so it’s nice when they prove useful.
The People of London’s Past

By Anna J. Crace
Dramaturg

Although the dense, yellow fog that once covered Victorian London has cleared, many of its streets remain the same. As your feet pound the pavement, they walk the same paths that Charles Dickens walked. Every night, he would wander the streets for hours, discovering new pockets of London and being confronted with the poverty and destitution that plagued the city.

As London shifted from agricultural to industrial labor, the population exploded from 1 million to more than 4.5 million, spilling into the suburbs and creating the Greater London we know today. The introduction of the railroads that cut through the city meant commuting from the suburbs to London was feasible, and many flocked to work and live in the city’s outskirts.

However, the Industrial Revolution didn’t just bring jobs to Londoners — it also brought extreme poverty. As the separation between the classes grew, the spirit of the age became one of hard hearts, hard minds and “good” business. This is the spirit that Dickens rails against in his writing. As the son of a debtor who was forced to blacken boots as a child, Dickens had lived the life of many of London’s poor, and he saw those who were more fortunate possess no desire to help and a growing desire to divide the classes even further.

The harsh, inhumane treatment of the poor is arguably one of the darkest shadows to fall over London in the 19th century. The industrial laborers represented the poorest societal classes and were regarded as a drain on the economy. As a result, workhouses were put into effect in 1834 and inhabited by the poor and destitute, including women and children. They were so brutal that many said they would rather die than go to a workhouse. Those who weren’t in the workhouses labored in factories — hazardous places that regularly resulted in serious injury. Factory owners offered lower-cost rental properties, which placed the urban poor in the slums of the East End and forced them to live in appalling conditions.

In addition to the poor, other groups living in London during Dickens’ day were people of color and queer Victorians. The population of men, women and children of African birth or descent, along with those of Asian and Chinese descent, was around 50,000. It is difficult to arrive at exact population figures as there was no formal segregation in Britain’s schools, hospitals and
cemeteries. However, interracial marriages occurred and mixed-race relationships were not uncommon. Although much of queer history in Victorian England is not widely spoken about, at the time Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, the strict laws surrounding male homosexuality were not yet in place. Lesbianism was never made illegal, and some women engaged in what were known as “female marriages.” None of this suggests that these groups were openly accepted in London, but they were part of the Victorian population and deserve to be mentioned among the multicultural makeup of the city — something that modern London now takes pride in.

In *A Christmas Carol*, the Ghost of Christmas Past warns Scrooge, “You cannot escape your past.” And in many ways, Dickens could not escape his. He uses London’s past to confront its future by forcing his readers to face the city’s present circumstances. He asks us to search our souls for compassion and offer it freely and without judgment to the poor, exiled and needy.

Dickens uses two tools to reach his readers: the poor child whose heart is filled with love and the Christmas holiday — a tradition forged by the Victorians — when the prosperous would open their hearts to help the poor and powerless. His great hope was that those in power would see the humanity within the industrial machine London had become.

In that same spirit of love and compassion, this production hopes to honor Dickens and his intention to bring forth our shared humanity. As the Ghost of Christmas Past says, “We are not finished yet.” Many of these communities continue to face the same struggles in our modern world. As Dickens shows us through Scrooge’s transformation in *A Christmas Carol*, it is only through revisiting the past that we see how far we have come and how much more we have to do.
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 40 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. [6]

Written by Matt McGeachy for the Guthrie’s 2010 *A Christmas Carol* play guide

**CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD**

**Did you know that …**

- in Sweden, Christmas Eve is often called “Dipping Day” from a tradition in which families gather in the kitchen to soak the juices of their Christmas meat with rye bread

- in Iran, Christians call Christmas the “Little Feast” and celebrate Easter as the largest religious celebration of the year

- the ceremonial main course of a medieval Christmas feast was a boar’s head — a tradition that persists today at Queen’s College, Oxford

- in Oaxaca, Mexico, December 23 is celebrated as the “Night of the Radishes,” and as part of the festivities, large radishes are carved into the characters of the Nativity story

- on Christmas Eve, the President of Estonia declares an annual Christmas Peace

- in Finland, children receive gifts from Joulupukki, the Christmas goat

- in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and others, Saint Nicholas visits good little children on December 6 each year to leave goodies in their shoes

- in China, Christians celebrate Christmas by decorating trees and having a large family meal, but gifts are exchanged at the Chinese New Year celebration in January or February, accompanied by massive displays of fireworks

Adapted from the Guthrie’s 2006 *A Christmas Carol* program
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 today. 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 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.

While A Christmas Carol is a play with music — not a musical — the movement is such an inherent part of the play because it allows us to physically manifest the story. Movement helps the characters express their emotions and react to Scrooge, and it also impacts our story transitions from beginning to end.

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. I’m thrilled to be back again this year to discover new things and explore all kinds of movement with this amazing cast.
What I love about *A Christmas Carol* is that 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. And this year, we have a new Country Cross that will be really exciting.

I am so delighted to be invited back this year. Even though I’m not a fan of the cold Minnesota weather, this is the dream team. I would travel to Antarctica to work with them on this beautiful show. It’s another home being here.

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*A Christmas Carol* is a huge part of my life because it was the first production I saw at the Guthrie in the early 1980s. It’s been a privilege to be part of the creative team so many times.

When we first started talking about the costumes for *A Christmas Carol* nine years ago, we were focused on the importance of the novel and Dickens’ words. I found this old copy of the novel with illustrations by Gustave Doré that were incredibly inspiring. We focused on the differences between the characters based on their economic status and reflected that in the costumes. For example, the Cratchit family is on the verge of complete devastation, so their clothes needed to communicate the precariousness of their economic situation.

Working on a production like *A Christmas Carol* is fairly unusual in my career. Most of the time on shows, I design the costumes once and it’s done. For this show, the costume design stays relatively the same year after year, but what changes are the actors and what they bring to the characters. It’s been wild and rewarding to see how the actors bring different aspects to the costumes and how the costumes serve different actors in different ways.
I’m a native Londoner and this is my first Christmas in Minnesota, so I’m excited to spend it with this incredible show and theatrical community. As a dramaturg, I’m deeply interested in reimagined classics and how we find their place in history and bring them to a modern audience.

What interests me most about Lauren Keating’s directing work is how focused she is on knowing who the audience is and making sure there is space for everyone. So I’ve done much work and research around visibility, including queer people and people of color in Victorian London and their place in Dickens’ world, which I think will be timely and relevant to our modern Minneapolis audience.

Anna J. Crace
Dramaturg

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. Just like America has a plethora of voices, so is the case in Victorian London.

Last year, we wanted to stay true to Dickens’ storytelling and find possibilities in the voices in the characters from these stories. This year, my goal is to build on that work with each actor and nurture what’s already in their wheelhouse.

I’m thrilled to be back this season and look forward to working with the singers and speakers onstage to uncover more possibilities and make the vocals thrive.

Foster Johns
Voice and Dialect Coach
Discussion Questions and Classroom Activities

**THE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR**
Which characters serve as narrators in this production of *A Christmas Carol*? How do the narrators propel the action of the play? Do you feel like the narrators are 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 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 or 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 LESSONS 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 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) — 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**
https://www.imdb.com/list/ls003558245/
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.

https://manybooks.net/titles/cheirstother09CD-1.html

https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25851/25851-h/25851-h.htm

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. Landrow for Brown University as a resource for Brown students studying Victorian literature.

**ABOUT BLACK VICTORIANS**


ABOUT QUEER VICTORIANS


*Victorian Queer Archive*
http://vqa.dickinson.edu

Although Oscar Wilde often appears in literary classes as the token queer writer for the semester, the Victorian period (1830–1900) was full of writers addressing what we now consider LGBTQIA+ themes in their works. Victorian writers who called themselves “sexologists” and theorized about sexual desire helped pave the way for the field that has now become queer studies. This digital archive contains texts on LGBTQIA+ themes.

ABOUT CHARLES DICKENS


A SELECTION OF CHRISTMAS LITERATURE
*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 Legend of Befana,” traditional European story.

“Baba Yaga,” folktale, probably Russian in origin, 19th century.


“The Fir Tree,” “The Snow Queen” and “The Little Match-Seller,” Hans Christian Andersen, 1845.

*Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott, 1869.

“How Santa Came to Simpson’s Bar,” Bret Harte, 1870.

*Christmas Every Day and Other Stories*, William Dean Howells, 1892.


“Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus,” Francis P. Church, *New York Sun*, 1897.

*The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*, L. Frank Baum, 1902.
The Tailor of Gloucester, Beatrix Potter, 1902.


The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, C. S. Lewis, 1950.


How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Dr. Seuss, 1957.


Santa’s Twin, Dean Koontz, 1996.

Plays

Babes in Toyland, Victor Herbert and Glen MacDonough, 1903.

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

Black Nativity, Langston Hughes, 1961.


They Sing Christmas Up in Harlem: A Lenox Avenue Christmas Carol, Eric L. Wilson, 2000.

Mrs. Bob Cratchit’s Wild Christmas Binge, Christopher Durang, 2005.