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CELEBRATING MUSICAL THEATER



# A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

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**December 8-23**  
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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



**Study Guide**

# A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

## Overview

### Ideas/Themes Presented in *A Musical Christmas Carol*

- Guilt, Innocence, & Accountability
- Wealth & Poverty
- Compassion & Charity
- Redemption & Getting a Second Chance
- Keeping Christmas Spirit

### Educational Goals of the Production Study Guide

- To provide background material on the subject matter, structure and history of the musical.
- To guide discussion and suggest activities around some of the themes and ideas of the musical.
- To demonstrate the time and effort behind the scenes that are needed to present a full-scale production.
- To inspire an appreciation of musical theater and its process.

### Objectives for Students

- To explore the themes and ideas of *A Musical Christmas Carol*.
- To further their understanding and enjoyment of musical theater as an art form and career opportunity.
- To practice skills outlined in the Pennsylvania Academic Standards of Communications and Arts & Humanities, especially those of critical thinking, reading, writing and artistic expression.
- To exercise the muscle of empathy by making connections between themselves and the material.

### This Guide Includes:

- Synopsis
- Introduction to the Creative Team
- About Charles Dickens
- Dickens and the Victorian Christmas
- Tiny Tim's Ailment
- History of the Production from Page to Screen to Stage
- How Do They Do That
- Putting It Together
- Suggested Topics for Discussion/Activities for the Classroom
- Reading List
- Website Resources



## Teachers Guide

## *A Musical Christmas Carol* Characters

### **Ebenezer Scrooge**

Scrooge is the protagonist of the story and is one of the best-known characters in all of literature – a frightfully miserly old geezer who positively loathes Christmas.

### **The Cratchits**

Bob Cratchit is Scrooge's assistant, a loyal and diligent employee and a loving family man. Poor but happy, Bob and Mrs. Cratchit work hard to provide for their family, which includes Martha, Peter, Melinda, Belinda, Wyatt and, of course, Tiny Tim, whose poor health does nothing to squelch his generous spirit.

### **Fred**

Fred is Scrooge's nephew and only living relative. A friendly man, he stops by on Christmas Eve to wish Scrooge a Merry Christmas, and does not let his uncle's nasty demeanor bother him or affect his relationship to his uncle.

### **Alice**

Alice is Fred's new wife. She has never met Scrooge, but knows him well enough to guess correctly at Fred's imitation of the disagreeable miser.

### **Bess and Topper**

Friends of Fred and Alice who Scrooge sees making merry on Christmas Day.

### **Fan Scrooge**

Fan is Scrooge's deceased sister. She seems to have been a loving and supportive presence in his youth.

### **Mrs. Dilber**

Mrs. Dilber is a parched old crone and Scrooge's housekeeper. He treats her shabbily and in a vision of Christmas Yet to Come, we see her making a profit from Scrooge's death.

### **The Ghost of Jacob Marley**

Marley is dead. There is no doubt whatsoever about that. He died Christmas Eve seven years past, and Scrooge was his sole partner, sole administrator, sole mourner and sole friend. Marley comes back to haunt Scrooge and warn him of what awaits him if he doesn't change his ways.

### **The Fezziwigs**

Old Fezziwig is Scrooge's one-time employer. A large and genial man, he and his wife are known for their kindness and generosity. They throw a huge Christmas party with food, music, dancing, drinks and good cheer all around, before falling on hard times.

### **Dick Wilkins**

Dick worked with Scrooge as an apprentice under Fezziwig and was one of Scrooge's few friends. Later, he harshly condemns Scrooge for betraying Fezziwig and losing his nobler ideals.

### **Belle**

Belle is Scrooge's one-time girlfriend who left him years ago because she felt that he had changed for the worse. In a vision of Christmas past, we see her tending to the poor in a shelter.

### **The Ghost of Christmas Past**

The first spirit to visit Scrooge is The Ghost of Christmas Past. Scrooge is able to travel with her to long-ago times and places and to remember a time when he was more open and hopeful about life.

### **The Ghost of Christmas Present**

The second spirit is loud and boisterous, lusty and jovial. He reveals to Scrooge how others are celebrating Christmas without him.

### **The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come**

This ghost does not speak, but shows Scrooge a bleak future. Resembling the popular image of the Grim Reaper, The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is enshrouded in a long black robe. This chilling spirit reveals that Scrooge's passing will be a relief to some and ignored by others.

## Teachers Guide

### Story Synopsis

#### Act One

*A Musical Christmas Carol* begins with the flickering of a lone candle in the dark. As the lights slowly come up, the company enters one by one singing in soulful harmony the opening strains of "Silent Night." On stage, we see a lifetime's worth of foreclosure acquisitions. A carriage, clocks of all shapes and sizes, armchairs, garden statues – the space seems haunted by the eclectic collection. It is murky and still.

The company begins to tell of Jacob Marley's death seven years ago, and of his business partner, Ebenezer Scrooge, a cold-hearted, tight-fisted miser. It is Christmas Eve, and carolers, shoppers, beggars and vendors fill the stage as we see Scrooge for the first time, barking at all who encounter him as he tries to collect loans from the unfortunates who owe him money. He clears away carolers in front of his counting house and enters the tiny, cloistered office, chastising his clerk, Bob Cratchit, for burning too many coals in the stove.

Scrooge is visited by his nephew, Fred, a good-natured man who tries to celebrate the holiday with his uncle, but he and several charity workers are all rebuked with a resounding "bah, humbug!" and sent on their way. A mysterious voice seems to call out to Scrooge, but he dismisses it and continues to work.

In another part of town, Mrs. Cratchit and her family are preparing for their meager Christmas "feast." It is obvious that the family is poor in material goods but richly blessed by the joy of each other's company. Tiny Tim, the youngest of the Cratchits, must walk with the aid of a cane and is closely tended to by his brothers and sisters as they marvel at the Christmas windows.

Back at Scrooge & Marley's counting house, the day is ending. As Scrooge winds his way home, the shoppers hurry by him, bent against the cold. A group of beggars suddenly part, revealing for a moment a spindly figure all dressed in soiled white. The street scene freezes as the voice utters "Scrooge," points at Ebenezer, and then vanishes in the swirl of Christmas activity.

Scrooge is visibly upset when he arrives home, having seen and heard some strange things. He is typically curt and disagreeable to his housekeeper, Mrs. Dilber, and she is all too happy to leave him alone with his cold gruel. Suddenly we hear the sound of servant's bells, clock bells and city tower bells in a great cacophony, and a cloud of fog billows in the room, revealing the Ghost of Jacob Marley, laden with chains and strongboxes.

Marley's ghost explains that he is required in death to wander the earth, walking among humanity as he never did in life. He has come to warn Scrooge that he must change his ways, and he foretells that three spirits will come to Scrooge over the course of the night. Marley disappears into a crowd of chained ghostly wretches at the window. Scrooge snaps the drapes closed. When he opens them again, all the specters have vanished. He bolts to the safety of his bed until the clock strikes one, and the room fills with the sound of ticking clocks. When he peeks out to investigate, he sees the Ghost of Christmas Past hovering in a vibrant, ghostly glow.

The spirit instructs Scrooge to touch her hand, and Scrooge finds himself transported to the school that he attended as a boy, watching all of the other children leaving for Christmas. Scrooge's sister, Fan, runs in and tells him that their father said he could come home this year.

The next stop is the shop where Scrooge was an apprentice as a young man. There, we see Fezziwig, a ruddy, jovial man, tell his clerks to put away their work to prepare for the holiday festivities. Tables of food are brought in, and musicians begin to play as Fezziwig and his wife lead the dancing. We see young Ebenezer propose to the lovely and kind-hearted Belle. The vision ends, and Scrooge tells his spirit guide that that was the last Christmas that he remembers fondly.

Next, they visit the same place years later, as young Ebenezer and his partner, Jacob Marley, oversee the foreclosure of Fezziwig's estate. Belle implores Scrooge to choose kindness over business, but he refuses. She tells him that he has changed because of his obsession with money and fear of poverty. She returns his ring and breaks off their engagement. Young Ebenezer and present-day Scrooge are both heartbroken, and Scrooge begs to be shown no more. The spirit shows him Belle working in a shelter for the poor and celebrating Christmas with a dilapidated Mrs. Fezziwig. Scrooge is overcome with emotion and falls on his bed asking for deliverance from the visions as the lights fade on Act One.

#### Act Two

The Company enters singing and the lights rise on Scrooge sprawled across the bed. The clock ticks and chimes two, moving downstage. The clock opens and the figure of Christmas Present emerges. This spirit takes Scrooge through London, where shopkeepers are joyfully setting out baskets of food and happy people are doing last-minute shopping.

The spirit takes Scrooge to the home of Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit. Mrs. Cratchit and some of the children are preparing the Christmas dinner and gleefully awaiting the arrival of Tiny Tim and Mr. Cratchit from church. Bob Cratchit raises a toast to Scrooge, and the family begrudgingly joins him. Before leaving the Cratchit house, Scrooge asks the spirit if Tiny Tim will live. He is told that if things do not change, the young boy will die.

Next, they visit a party at the house of Scrooge's nephew, Fred, where the guests are playing a game like charades. Scrooge enjoys the festivities until he realizes that the beastly ogre that Fred is portraying is meant to be him. Before leaving, the Ghost of Christmas Present opens his gigantic robe to show Scrooge two pathetic-looking young children: Ignorance and Want. Scrooge asks if there isn't someone who could take care of them, and the spirit responds with Scrooge's own words: "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?" As the last toll of three o'clock sounds, Christmas Present disappears, leaving Scrooge frightened and alone.

A low moaning is heard, and the drapes of the bed canopy part to reveal a form with long curtained arms reaching for the chair in which Scrooge sits. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is shrouded in black and does



not speak. This mysterious apparition takes Scrooge to the Cratchit's house, where the family is mourning the passing of Tiny Tim. Next, they see a group of businessmen discussing the death and upcoming funeral of a friendless old man, and a group of thieves, led by Mrs. Dilber, picking and sorting at Scrooge's possessions.

The Spirit takes him to a churchyard and shows him a grave with his own name on it. Scrooge falls to his knees and begs for the chance to change as the

drape of Christmas Future melts, becoming the bed curtains. A Christmas carol is heard as the light of Christmas morning slowly warms Scrooge's room. Elated that he is alive and has a second chance at life, Scrooge giddily greets Mrs. Dilber, gives her a raise and the day off. Mrs. Dilber is confused and unsettled by his behavior, and makes a quick exit.

Scrooge calls down to a boy in the street and sends him to the poultry shop to buy the biggest turkey for the Cratchits. Fred comes in to once again invite Scrooge to dinner, and the changed man surprises him by accepting enthusiastically. In the street, he meets the workers from the charitable organization that he chased from his office the day before. He gives them money and promises more, hurrying to his Counting House. Bob Cratchit arrives for work a few minutes late, and for a moment, Scrooge acts like his old self. Then, he breaks into a smile and tells Cratchit he is tripling his salary. Before Cratchit can take it all in, Fred comes in with all the other Cratchits who tell Bob that it was Scrooge who sent them the turkey. Scrooge announces that he is taking everyone to a Christmas fair in Surrey. Amid all the stunned reactions, Scrooge leans over and asks Tiny Tim what he says to that, and Tim replies with his family's prayer, "God Bless us, every one."

# A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

## About Charles Dickens

Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England on February 7, 1812, the son of John and Elizabeth Dickens. His family moved to London before he was 2, but his father had trouble making enough money to feed his large family and was thrown in prison for not paying his bills, along with his family. Charles, who was 12 years old, did not have to go to prison because he was already working at Warren's Blacking Factory.

The family was released from debtor's prison a few months later, thanks to an inheritance that Dickens' father, John, received when his mother died. His mother wanted Charles to continue on at the factory, but his father rescued him from that fate and enrolled him in school in London. Dickens attended



school until he was fifteen and then worked as a clerk in a lawyer's office, studying Latin at night.

Dickens began his career as a writer in 1829 when he became a freelance court reporter, and by 1832 he had moved on to become a newspaper reporter. In 1834, he started publishing sketches of London life using the pseudonym "Boz." In 1836, these short pieces were collected in a book called *Sketches by*

*Boz*. Soon after the publication of these, a publisher approached Dickens to write humorous text to accompany a series of plates by the illustrator Robert Seymour. This project grew into *The Pickwick Papers* and launched the writer's career as a novelist, during which he would produce such classics as *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

By 1843, he had completed four books and was in the middle of the next when he took time out in October and November to write *A Christmas Carol*. Originally published on December 17, 1843, the book was favorably reviewed and became an instant success. Despite the impressive sales of the book, it did not turn a profit, due largely to Dickens' commissioning eight drawings from a well-known artist. Dickens blamed his publishers for the disappointing revenue and broke off relations with them after his next work.

Dickens was motivated by real social concerns that are evident in *A Christmas Carol*, and the story can be seen as an appeal for charity. Such charity was desperately needed during the severe economic depression of London in the 1840s. In the mid-19th century, London was a crowded, dirty place — a fact that no one did more to publicize than Dickens himself. Industries were not regulated, which resulted in widespread pollution and exploitation of the work force. Laborers, many of them children, were required to work 14-hour days in order to help their families pay bills; if a family was unable to make ends meet, they might end up in debtor's prison.

Having suffered considerable hardship during his upbringing, the passionate feelings evoked in Dickens' writings about poverty and other social inequalities were based on bitter experience. It is suggested that the Cratchit's house is modeled on the small four-room house at 16 Bayham Street in Camden Town where Dickens lived at the age of 10: the six Cratchit children correspond to the Dickens children of that time, the character of Tiny Tim being echoed in Charles' youngest, sickly brother, who was known as "Tiny Fred."

Dickens also did charitable work, managed a theater company and edited magazines. When he died in 1870, he was buried in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, an honor reserved for England's most notable literary figures.

## Teachers Guide

## Dickens and the Victorian Christmas

At the time when Dickens was writing, the Christmas tradition was not the glittery, colorful, festive holiday that most people recognize today. At the beginning of the Victorian period, the celebration of Christmas was in decline. The medieval Christmas traditions, which combined the celebration of the birth of Christ with the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia (a pagan celebration for the Roman god of agriculture) and the Saxon winter festival of Yule, had come under intense scrutiny by the Puritans under Oliver Cromwell. Pagan traditions like holly, wreaths, wassailing - even the date of December 25th (borrowed from pagan cultures because it was the date of the Winter Solstice) — were not embraced as they are now.

Dickens scholar David Perdue asserts that Dickens probably had more influence on the way that we celebrate Christmas today than any single individual in human history:

*"The romantic revival of Christmas traditions that occurred in Victorian times had other contributors: Prince Albert brought the German custom of decorating the Christmas tree to England, the singing of Christmas carols began to thrive again, and the first Christmas card appeared in the 1840s. But it was the Christmas stories of Dickens, particularly his 1843 masterpiece A Christmas Carol, that rekindled the joy of Christmas in Britain and America."*  
(<http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/christmas.html>)

One reason that the story draws people in is that Dickens' ideas of Christmas closely resemble our own ideas — he gave them to us. Most of the folklore associated with a traditional Christmas was actually created by Victorians like Dickens and Clement Clarke Moore, author of *The Night Before Christmas*. As Michael Patrick Hearn, best-selling author of *The Annotated Christmas Carol* writes,

*"It is impossible to think of Christmas today without A Christmas Carol. It is as much a part of the season as mistletoe and plum pudding. Dickens in A Christmas Carol defined better than anyone before or since the secular meaning of Christmas: 'a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely.' ... It makes us wonder what have we made of our own lives and is there any redemption for us."*

## Tiny Tim's Ailment

In the December 1992 issue of the American Journal of Diseases of Children, Dr. Donald Lewis, an assistant professor of pediatrics and neurology at the Medical College of Hampton Roads in Norfolk, Virginia, theorized that Tiny Tim suffered from a kidney disease that made his blood too acidic.

Dr. Lewis studied the symptoms of Tim's disease in the original manuscript of the 1843 classic. The disease, distal renal tubular acidosis (type I), was not recognized until the early 20th century, but therapies to treat its symptoms were available in Dickens' time. Tim's case, left untreated due to poverty, would produce the symptoms alluded to in the novel.

According to the Ghost of Christmas Present, Tim would die within a year. The fact that he did not die, due to Scrooge's newfound generosity, means that the disease was treatable with proper medical care. Dr. Lewis consulted medical textbooks of the mid-1800s and found that Tim's symptoms would have been treated with alkaline solutions that would counteract the excess acid in his blood and bring on a rapid recovery.

(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>)



Photo: Harry Gaglio

## Teachers Guide

### A Christmas Carol: From Page to Stage to Screen

Shortly after Dickens published *A Christmas Carol* in 1843 as a means to get out of debt, the streets of London were buzzing with pirated editions and unauthorized dramatizations of the story. Although proud as any author should be that his seasonal tale of redemption had hit and sustained such a powerful chord with the public, Dickens was soon as frustrated with the odd liberties being taken with the text as he was infuriated by the fact that he was not being paid royalties. One such early version for the stage was tweaked to include scenes where Fred, Scrooge's nephew, loses his wealth in a shipwreck and Cratchit, portrayed as a wisecracking clown, is mugged on his way home by a completely new character, Dark Sam.

Dickens own love for the stage is evident in the great theatricality of his writing. He enjoyed reading the story in public, much to the dismay of his peers in the publishing world, who looked down upon such obvious self-promotion. Dickens recited the story in 1853 for the first time at



Birmingham Town Hall to an audience of 2,500. He read it the following year to 3,700 at Bradford's Educational Temperance Institute. According to the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, December 11, 1855, the whole assembly rose spontaneously to cheer when Dickens got to the line, "and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father." To this day, *A Christmas Carol* is one of the most produced plays around the world by professional and amateur troupes alike.

Dickens' characters are described so thoroughly and his plots are so full of dramatic moments, that it is no wonder that his stories have been adapted into hundreds of plays, musicals and films. Many critics name the 1951 British film starring Alastair Sim as Scrooge as the definitive version of the story, expertly balancing the elements of somber morality tale with dark humor. The coveted role of Ebenezer Scrooge, who experiences the kind of transformation that actors dream about portraying, has been taken on by the likes of Albert Finney (with Alec Guinness as Jacob Marley) in the lavish 1970 musical version, *Scrooge!* Tim Curry, Bill Murray, Michael Caine, (*A Muppet Christmas Carol*), Simon Callow, Jack Elam (*Scrooge's Rock n' Roll Christmas*), James Earl Jones, George C. Scott, Patrick Stewart and Kelsey Grammer. Actresses have tried their hand at the role as well, including Cicely Tyson as a miserly entrepreneur in the 1997 television film *Ms. Scrooge*, and Vanessa Williams in *A Diva's Christmas Carol*.

Several animated versions have been made, the most popular starring Mickey Mouse and Mr. Magoo. The *Jetsons*, *The Flintstones*, *Fat Albert* and *The Simpsons* have all interpreted the classic, and Richard Williams' animated version based on the original John Leech drawings and featuring the voice of Alastair Sim won an Academy Award in 1971.

Indeed, *A Christmas Carol* has been adapted to the stage, screen and television so many times that there is an entire book on the subject. *A Christmas Carol and its Adaptations*, written by Fred Guida, chronicles the many incarnations of the story and includes scenes from old kinescope films and foreign productions.

# A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

Pittsburgh audiences have been enjoying the Pittsburgh CLO's production of this classic tale since 1992, when Edmund Lyndeck first donned the dressing gown of old Ebenezer Scrooge. One element of David Bell's faithful adaptation that makes it such a local favorite is the elegant blending of over a dozen traditional carols into the show's score. Mournful and haunting, joyful and cheering, the carolers' voices escort us from scene to scene, accompanying us on our journey through remembered and anticipated Christmases, past, present and future.

### How Do They Do That?:

Nowhere is the spectacle of musical theater as thrilling than on the contemporary American stage where new technology is combined with age-old "tricks" to create magical results. Young people who are used to watching film and television are often pleasantly surprised by the infectious energy of live performers. The lights, the music, the costumes and the sets combine to create a mood and transport the audience into a different time and place.

Most young theatergoers, and even experienced ones, are impressed by and curious about what they see and how it's done. Discuss the following theatrical terms and special effects with your students before and after the performance.

*The action takes place in London, England on Christmas Eve 1859. Ebenezer Scrooge is a greedy, unkind and ruthless accountant who has spent his whole life collecting things that belong to others. His house is chock-full of jewelry, furniture, clothing...*

**Prop** — Short for properties, prop is the term for stage furniture, set dressing and, more commonly, articles used in performance by actors.

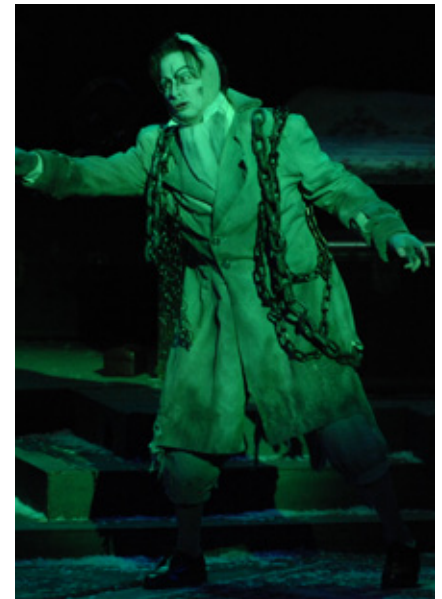
Think of it as a scavenger hunt. The prop coordinator scours the city looking for interesting and era-appropriate furniture and fixtures. He/she may visit flea markets, antique shops, stores or local vendors. He may also borrow things from other theaters. Once he finds what he needs, he makes sure that each and every one is in good condition. If it needs to be fixed or painted, the props coordinator is in charge of making sure the work gets done.

Most of what you see on our stage is now owned by CLO. That means that after the production everything goes back into storage in our Construction Center on Pittsburgh's South Side. Some of the things, like rugs and bikes, are borrowed every year from the same vendors.

**Trap** — Removable or moveable sections of the floor, or sometimes of the set. A trap is used for scenic effects such as sunken stairs and scenery or disappearing actors. These floor sections can be moved by hand, but today, many theaters have mechanical and even computerized traps.

**Smoke Machine** — This machine is filled with fog juice and produces a chemical smoke or mist.

**Sound Effects** — Sound effects include the digital adaptation used to create changes in the voices of the ghosts. For example, in order for Marley to sound old, nasty and ominous, his voice goes through a microphone to a reverb unit, which is multi-programmed to have a series of equalizations on vocal quality. The same is true for the ghost of Christmas Past, whose voice takes on an angelic, vibrato-ish quality, since she is a young girl.



# A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

One Christmas Eve, Scrooge heads home for a nice bowl of thick, pasty gruel before he goes to bed. This night seems to be like any other night until he hears the rattling of chains and the chaotic ringing of bells throughout his house. Suddenly, seemingly out of thin air, Scrooge is surprised at the sight of his only friend Jacob Marley standing before him...Jacob Marley, a man who's been dead for seven years...

**Lighting effects** and **sound play** a huge role in creating a mood, an atmosphere, a vision or even an illusion. In the CLO's production of *A Musical Christmas Carol*, many special effects are used during the appearances of the ghosts.

Marley's ghost appears through a **trap door** in the stage floor preceded by a burst of **smoke** from a **smoke machine**. **Lights** of green and purple are used in combination with the **smoke** to create an ominous, deathly appearance. Later, Marley gets hooked up to a **steel cable** (rendered nearly invisible by a combination of light and smoke) and appears to "magically" fly out of sight.

A dazed and confused Scrooge is then taken for the ride of his life when three unexpected, uninvited guests (the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future) pay him a visit of supernatural proportions. He is forced to take a long, hard look at his life from his unhappy childhood, to his nasty and greedy adulthood.

Ghost of Christmas Past appears out of a wardrobe in Scrooge's bedroom. With the use of **dry ice** beneath and a blast of **chemical mist** around and above, she appears to be levitating. She is actually standing on a **levitating platform** and is pushed out of the wardrobe

Ghost of Christmas Present appears to float out of a clock surrounded by **smoke** and exits through the same **trap door** from which Marley's ghost appeared.

Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come appears through a **trap** in Scrooge's bed. For the Wall of Spirits, **smoke** is piped through a trough of **lights**. When the actors and actresses put their faces above the light, through the smoke, the illusion of a wall is created.



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### Putting It Together

Putting on a show is a little like building a big machine – hundreds of small parts must be put together piece by piece to bring a story to life on the stage. Most of the work has to be completed long before opening night.

Mounting a musical at the Pittsburgh CLO requires many different people working together, and it all starts with a team of **writers**. **Playwrights** work with **music composers** to create musicals, revising their ideas for the story, dialogue and songs until they have a script. Sometimes, theaters ask writers to create something especially for them – this is called commissioning a script. And sometimes, writers send their scripts to a theater hoping that the **producers** will choose to produce their play. Either way, the writers may be making changes to the script up until final rehearsals.

At Pittsburgh CLO, the **executive producer** and his assistants choose the scripts that they think will make the best season. The executive producer then must hire a **director**, **choreographer** and a team of **designers** for each show. These artists have specific jobs to do.

The director is the leader. He/she makes most of the decisions about the play and often spends months before rehearsals begin meeting with designers and thinking about the show. The **music director** is in charge of the singing and instrumental music. Some musicals may require a small accompaniment of piano and drums, while others involve an entire orchestra. The choreographer creates all the movement and dancing. These three artists will work very closely to make sure the acting, singing and dancing all come together effectively.

Meanwhile, the **set designer**, **costume designer**, **lighting designer** and **sound designer** are reading the script and talking with the director about how the musical will look and sound. The designers have **assistants** and **crews** to help them build, paint, sew and set up all the technological elements.

While the **director** and **associate producing director** hold auditions to find the right **actors** for the part, the **marketing department** of the theater is busy creating posters and television commercials to get the word out about the show and to help the **box office** sell tickets. The **administrative staff** helps these departments, as well as coordinating transportation and accommodations for the **cast and crew** that comes in from out of town, making sure the theater and rehearsal halls are ready, and creating study guides like this one.

The actors may go through three or four auditions before finally being chosen to be in the cast. Each cast member must learn his/her lines, songs and dances. Actors in *A Musical Christmas Carol* have only one week of rehearsals together before the show opens, and one day to rehearse on stage with the orchestra. In this short amount of time, they must get to know their fellow actors and get used to their costumes, make-up and props.

Thousands of hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars later, the **ushers** have seated you, the audience, the lights have dimmed, and all that hard work is about to turn into magic. As soon as this show closes, the CLO production team will be busy gearing up for another Summer Season at the Benedum Center.



# A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

## Teachers Guide

### Suggested Discussion Topics/ Classroom Activities

#### Topic A: Wealth & Poverty

A recurring theme in the work of Dickens is the tremendous gap between the rich and poor. In fact, he portrayed the gritty world of the working class and lower class of London at a time when most novelists—most of them educated and from the upper class—had no sense of what poverty or its victims were like. How aware are we of the plight of the more unfortunate, or of the programs available to us to help them?

**ACTIVITY:** Students read the local paper for a week and create a scrapbook or collage of stories and pictures depicting poverty. Students spend the next week researching the local resources available for support. Perhaps the class can choose a program or organization, such as a soup kitchen, and volunteer time there.

#### Topic B: Redemption & Making a Difference: Scrooge for Mayor

In light of his disturbing visits with three spirits, Scrooge wants to change the world. How will Scrooge take advantage of his second chance? What if he ran for mayor of London?

**ACTIVITY:** Students act as a team of campaign managers divided into five special areas for research: Labor, Education, Health, Women's Issues, & Technology. Students are encouraged to keep these questions in mind:

- What is daily life like for London residents?
- What are Scrooge's new viewpoints on daily life in London?
- How will Scrooge's new viewpoints on daily life change his opinions on public policy in London?
- What solutions and programs will Scrooge support in his run for mayor?

After researching their areas, teams will develop a platform for social change and present it to the class.

#### Topic C: Adapting a Story

Dickens' novel has been made into countless film, musical, stage and television productions. What makes the story so timeless that it survives adaptation? What are the elements of the story that can change but have the lessons remain as vibrant? What are the elements that must remain?

**ACTIVITY:** Students write a synopsis for an updated version of *A Christmas Carol*, using people who are in the news or who are famous in the community. Synopses can be turned into short stories for a contest, or scripts for production.

#### Topic D: Victorian Customs

Many of the holiday customs that we associate with a traditional Christmas began in the Victorian Age (1837-1901).

**ACTIVITY:** Students divide into groups to research Victorian Christmas traditions, fashion, decoration, games and entertainment, cuisine and famous personalities. The groups collaborate to plan and host a Christmas Carol banquet, featuring period food and customs, and attended by students dressed as characters from *A Christmas Carol*.



# A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

## Teachers Guide

### Website Resources & Reading List

#### Christmas stories by Charles Dickens:

*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

#### Other Christmas stories:

Truman Capote, *A Christmas Memory*, 1966  
Barbara Robinson, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, 1972  
O. Henry, *The Gift of the Magi*, 1922  
Clement Moore, *A Visit from St. Nick*, 1822

#### Other novels by Charles Dickens:

*Sketches by Boz*, 1836  
*The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*,  
aka *The Pickwick Papers*, 1837  
*The Adventures of Oliver Twist*, 1838  
*The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, 1839  
*The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1841  
*David Copperfield*, 1850  
*Bleak House*, 1853  
*Hard Times: For These Times*, 1854  
*A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859  
*Great Expectations*, 1861  
*Our Mutual Friend*, 1865  
*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 1870

#### Fiction about Dickens:

Patricia Davis, *A Midnight Carol*, 1999  
The story of how Dickens' novel came to be.

#### History & Criticism:

Daniel Poole, *What Jane Austen Ate and  
Charles Dickens Knew*, 1993  
Describes the trials and tribulations of daily life in  
19th-century England

Christopher Hibbert, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 1975

Stone, Harry, *A Christmas Carol – Giving Nursery Tales a Higher Form,  
in Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales,  
Fantasy and Novel-Making*, 1979

#### www.victorianweb.com

Includes links to online e-books of Dickens' complete works as well as extensive biographical and historical information on Dickens and the Victorian Age

#### www.dickensfair.com

The Great Dickens Christmas Fair

#### Charles Dickens Page by D. Perdue

<http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/>

This site provides a comprehensive guide to Dickens's life and writings. It includes a timeline, a map of London during his time, and in-depth discussion of Dickensian characters.

#### Talking to Charles Dickens

<http://www.talkingto.co.uk/ttcd/index.asp?AuthorID=5>

The answers and opinions here are written by leading experts on Dickens.

#### Charles Dickens Biographies

<http://dickens.fi/dickens.html>

A collection of links connects to online works, biography, historical background, and other online sites about Charles Dickens.

<http://www.incwell.com/Biographies/Dickens.html>

Compiled by Spectrum Biographies

#### Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities:

1. All students describe meanings they find in various works from the visual and performing arts and literature based on the aesthetic understanding of art form.
2. All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and culture, showing that they understand the important features of the works.
3. All students relate various works from the visual and performing arts and literature to the historical and cultural context within which they were created.
4. All students produce, perform or exhibit their work in the visual arts, music, dance or theater, and describe meanings their work has for them.