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Celebrating Musical Theater

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A Musical Christmas Carol

Byham Theater



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Teacher's Guide

A Musical Christmas Carol

Teacher's Guide

Overview

Ideas/Themes Presented in *A Musical Christmas Carol*

- Guilt, Innocence & Accountability
- Wealth & Poverty
- Compassion & Charity
- Redemption & Getting a Second Chance
- Keeping the Holiday 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 based on the musical's key ideas and themes.
- To demonstrate the necessary time and effort required to present a full-scale musical production.
- To inspire an appreciation of musical theater and its processes.

Objectives for Students

- To explore the themes and ideas presented within *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
- 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
- Audience Etiquette
- Reading List
- Website Resources



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 holiday 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 nor affect his relationship with his uncle.

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

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

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

Mrs. Dilber
Mrs. Dilber is a parched old crone and Scrooge's housekeeper, whom he treats poorly. 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. He died Christmas Eve "seven years past," and Scrooge was his sole partner, administrator, mourner and friend. Marley comes back to haunt Scrooge and warn him of what awaits 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, right before they fall on hard times.

Dick Wilkins
One of Scrooge's few friends. Dick worked with Scrooge as an apprentice under Fezziwig. Later, Dick 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
This second spirit is loud, boisterous, lusty and jovial. From The Ghost of Christmas Present, Scrooge learns 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.

A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

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 coldhearted, 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 then 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 are 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 mysterious 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 a great cacophony of servant's bells, clock bells and city tower bells and a cloud of fog billows in the room, revealing the Ghost of Jacob Marley, laden with chains.

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 throughout the night. Marley then disappears into a crowd of chained ghostly wretches at the window and 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, at which time his room is filled with the sound of ticking clocks. When he peeks out the window to investigate, Scrooge 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.

Their next stop is the shop where Scrooge was an apprentice as a young man. There, we see Fezziwig, a ruddy, jovial man, telling his clerks to put away their work in order to prepare for the impending holiday festivities. Tables of food are brought in, and musicians begin to play as Fezziwig and his wife lead the group in a rousing dance. 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 of which he has fond memories.

Next, Scrooge and the spirit 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 by his newfound obsession with money and fear of poverty, returning his ring and breaking 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 decrepit 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 as 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 citizens are doing last-minute shopping.

The spirit eventually brings Scrooge to the home of Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit, where 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 within the game 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 is someone who could take care of them, and the spirit ironically 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 with his thoughts.



A low moaning is soon 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, frightful apparition takes Scrooge to the Cratchits' 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 at and sorting Scrooge's possessions.

The Spirit then takes Scrooge 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 curtains that surround Scrooge's bedframe. 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, but 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 in the future, hurrying off to his Counting House. Bob Cratchit arrives for work a few minutes late, and for a moment, Scrooge acts like his old self. However, he quickly breaks into a smile and tells Cratchit he is tripling his salary. Before Cratchit can react, 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, grappling with poverty just like the Cratchit family in *A Christmas Carol*. His father had trouble making enough money to feed his large family and was ultimately thrown in prison for not paying his bills, along with his wife and children. Charles, who was 12 years old at the time, did not have to go to prison because he held a job at Warren's Blacking Factory.

His family was released from debtor's prison a few months later, thanks to an inheritance that Dickens' father received when his mother died. His mother wanted Charles to continue working at the factory, but his father rescued him from his duties and enrolled him in school in London. Dickens attended school until he was fifteen and then began work 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 newspaper reporting. In 1834, he started publishing sketches of life in London under the pseudonym "Boz." In 1836, these short pieces were collected in a book called *Sketches by Boz*. Soon after their publication, a publisher approached Dickens to write humorous text to accompany a series of plates by the illustrator Robert Seymour. This project ultimately grew into *The Pickwick Papers* and launched Dickens' career as a novelist. He would go on to produce such iconic classics as *Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickelby, David Copperfield, Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

By 1843, Dickens had completed four books and was in the middle of another when he set aside the months of 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 book's impressive sales, however, it did not turn a profit, largely due to Dickens commissioning eight accompanying drawings from a well known artist. Dickens blamed his publishers for the disappointing revenue and broke off relations with them following the publication of his next work.

Dickens' work was motivated by real social concerns that are evident in *A Christmas Carol*, whose story can clearly 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 just as Dickens' own had several years prior.

Having suffered considerable hardship during his upbringing, the passionate feelings evoked in Dickens' writings about poverty and other social inequalities were no doubt based on bitter experience. It is suggested that the Cratchits' 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."

Throughout his life, 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.

Dickens and the Victorian Christmas

When Dickens initially published *A Christmas Carol* in December 1843, Christmas was hardly recognized as the glittery, colorful, festive holiday that is celebrated by most people today. In fact, at the beginning of the Victorian period, the celebration of Christmas was in perceptible decline: 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 endured 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 nowhere near as embraced as they are now.

Dickens scholar David Perdue asserts that Dickens has probably had more influence on the way that Christmas is celebrated 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 *A Christmas Carol* remains so captivating to this day is that Dickens' ideas of Christmas closely resemble our modern ideas — likely because he gave them to us. Much 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 suffers from a kidney disease that makes his blood too acidic.

Dr. Lewis studied the symptoms of Tim's disease in the original manuscript of the 1843 classic. Although the disease, distal renal tubular acidosis (type I), was not recognized until the early 20th century, therapies to treat its symptoms were available in Dickens' time. Left untreated due to poverty, however, Tim's case would produce all the symptoms to which Dickens alludes in the novel. According to the Ghost of Christmas Present, Tim would die within a year.

The fact that Tim does not die at story's end thanks to Scrooge's newfound generosity signifies that his disease was treatable with proper medical care. Dr. Lewis consulted medical textbooks of the mid-1800s and found that Tim's symptoms could have been treated with alkaline solutions that would have counteracted the excess acid in his blood and produced a rapid recovery.
(http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)



Photo: Archie Carpenter

A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

From Page to Stage to Screen

Shortly after Dickens published *A Christmas Carol* in 1843 as a means to relieve himself 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 unofficial version was tweaked for the stage 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 *A Christmas Carol* in public, much to the dismay of his peers in the publishing world, who largely 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 and then read it the following year to 3,700 at Bradford's Educational Temperance Institute. According to



the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, on December 11, 1855, a 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 in the world, frequently performed 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 countless 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 elements of somber morality with an underlying 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 Grammar. Several 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.

Pittsburgh audiences have been enjoying the Pittsburgh CLO's production of this classic tale since 1992. 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 accustomed to watching film and television are often pleasantly surprised by the infectious energy of live performance. The lights, music, costumes and sets combine to create a mood that transports the audience into a different time and place. Most young theatergoers – and even experienced ones – are impressed by and curious about what they see on stage and what goes on behind the scenes. You may find it beneficial to 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, and 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 item is in good condition. If anything needs to be fixed or painted, the props coordinator is in charge of making sure the work gets done. Most of what you will see on our stage during *A Musical Christmas Carol* is now owned by Pittsburgh CLO, which means that after the production is over, many items will go into storage at our Construction Center in Springdale, PA. Some items, 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 or computerized traps.

Smoke Machine — This machine is filled with fog juice and produces a chemical smoke or mist that is non-toxic.



Sound Effects — Sound effects include the digital adaptation used to create changes, particularly 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 young ghost of Christmas Past, whose voice takes on an angelic, vibrato-ish quality.

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 Christmases 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 bursts forth from 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. However, the actress is actually standing on a **levitating platform** and is pushed out of the wardrobe.

Ghost of Christmas Present makes use of special effects by appearing to float out of a clock surrounded by **smoke** as she exits through the same **trap door** from which Marley's ghost appeared.

Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come also 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, the illusion of a wall is created through the smoke.

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 stage. Most of the work must be completed long before opening night. Mounting a musical at Pittsburgh CLO requires many different people to work 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 workable script. Sometimes, theaters ask writers to create something especially for them – this is called commissioning a script. Other times, 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 the show's 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 specialized 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 his or her vision for 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. These designers have **assistants** and **crews** to help them build, paint, sew and set up all of the show's material and technological elements.

While the director holds auditions to find the right **actors** for the part, the **marketing and public relations 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 each of these departments, as well as coordinates transportation and accommodations for any **cast and crew** that come in from out of town, make sure the theater and rehearsal halls are ready, and create study guides just like this one.

The actors may go through three or four auditions before finally being chosen to be in the cast. Once selected, 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 the audience, the lights have dimmed, and the hard work of the cast, crew and staff is about to turn into theatrical magic. As soon as *A Musical Christmas Carol* closes, Pittsburgh CLO's production team will be busy gearing up for another Summer Season at the Benedum Center and year-round entertainment at the CLO Cabaret.

A Musical CHRISTMAS CAROL

Suggested Discussion Topics/ Classroom Activities

Topic A: Wealth & Poverty

A recurring theme in Charles Dickens' work is the tremendous gap that exists 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 many novelists – most of them educated and from the upper class – had no sense of poverty or what its victims truly faced. How aware are we today 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 individual areas, teams will develop a platform for social change and present it to the class.



Topic C: Adapting a Story

Dickens' novel has spawned countless film, musical, stage and television productions. What makes *A Christmas Carol* so timeless that it survives adaptation? What elements may change while still allowing the story's overarching lessons to remain 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 within the local 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.*



Audience Etiquette

Share these tips with your students to ensure they're an all-star audience:

- **Don't miss your cue!** Be sure to arrive with enough time to get settled in your seats and prepare to watch the show.
- **Leave the snacks for later!** Food and drink are not permitted in the theater. Please enjoy any snacks before arrival.
- **Turn off cell phones!** Skip the "vibrate" option and turn your phones completely off as a courtesy to the actors and your fellow audience members.
- **Give all your attention!** By all means, laugh when something is funny, clap when something is amazing, but please leave the talking for the actors. If you have questions or comments, save them until the performance is over so you can discuss them fully with your peers!
- **Show your appreciation!** At the end of the show, applaud for the actors, but wait for the curtain call to be over before leaving your seat. A curtain call is your opportunity to praise the performers, and their opportunity to thank you for your attention.

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

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

www.victorianweb.org
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

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.



Photos: Matt Polk