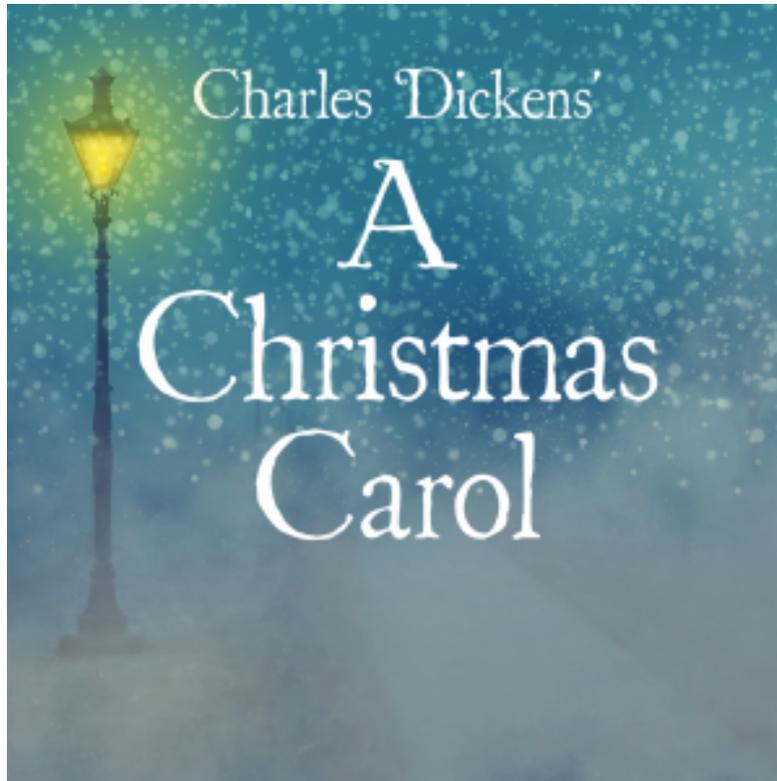


# **Sacramento Theatre Company**

## Study Guide



## **A Christmas Carol**

An Adaptation of the Book by Charles Dickens

**Study Guide Materials Compiled by Caitlin Skinner**

# **Sacramento Theatre Company**

## **Mission Statement**

The Sacramento Theatre Company (STC) strives to be the leader in integrating professional theatre with theatre arts education. STC produces engaging professional theatre, provides exceptional theatre training, and uses theatre as a tool for educational engagement.

## **Our History**

The theatre was originally formed as the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre in 1942, an ad hoc troupe formed to entertain locally-stationed troops during World War II. On October 18, 1949, the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre acquired a space of its own with the opening of the Eaglet Theatre, named in honor of the Eagle, a Gold Rush-era theatre built largely of canvas that had stood on the city's riverfront in the 1850s. The Eaglet Theatre eventually became the Main Stage of the not-for-profit Sacramento Theatre Company, which evolved from a community theatre to professional theatre company in the 1980s. Now producing shows in three performance spaces, it is the oldest theatre company in Sacramento.

After five decades of use, the Main Stage was renovated as part of the H Street Theatre Complex Project. Features now include an expanded and modernized lobby and a Cabaret Stage for special performances. The facility also added expanded dressing rooms, laundry capabilities, and other equipment allowing the transformation of these performance spaces, used nine months of the year by STC, into backstage and administration places for three months each summer to be used by California Musical Theatre for Music Circus.

Sacramento Theatre Company can accommodate 292 patrons in the proscenium-style auditorium of its Main Stage, while the Pollock Stage offers a more intimate experience with only 87 seats in a black box-style theatre. Both provide good acoustics and sight-lines. This professional, Equity theatre presents seven professional productions per season with a reputation for excellent stage adaptations of classic literature. Three annual productions in the Cabaret Stage, which seats 100, round out the experience with high-quality Broadway musical revues.

The Young Professionals Conservatory, a training program for young theatre artists, was founded in 2003. The program, as well as the entire STC School of the Arts, is directed by Miranda D Lawson.

**For further information about the Sacramento Theatre Company please visit us online:**

**<http://www.sactheatre.org>**

# A Christmas Carol

## Sacramento Theatre Company Production Study Guide

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## About Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England on February 7, 1812 as the son of John and Elizabeth Dickens. A clerk in the Navy Pay Office, his father was well paid but had a poor sense for finances and eventually lost his house. As was the custom, the entire Dickens family was taken to debtor's prison at Marshalsea until the money was paid. Young Charles was spared from prison and removed from school to become the family breadwinner to work off the family payments. Charles was put to work for six shillings a week at Warren's Blacking Factory, a boot-blackening factory. Here he experienced a painful childhood putting on labels to shoe polish canisters. In fact, the poor conditions of his factory work were so traumatic, Dickens was scarred psychologically for life. Later, his childhood, poverty and abandonment would be a major influence in his work.

When Charles turned twelve, the Dickens' were finally released and his father gave Charles the amazing opportunity to become a day pupil. Between the years of 1824- 1827, Dickens studied at Wellington House Academy in London and at Mr. Dawson's school. At age fifteen, he was employed as a law office clerk for an attorney. Later, after studying shorthand, Dickens worked as a court and Parliamentary reporter. In 1829, he became a free-lance reporter at Doctor's Commons Courts where he found a passion for writing. In 1833, he published a series of sketches about London life and his reputation as a fine writer, reporter and observer of life was established. He wrote for *True Son* (1830-32), *Mirror of Parliament* (1832-34) and the *Morning Chronicle* (1834-36). In 1834, Dickens adopted the famous pseudonym "Boz."

Dickens's career as a writer of fiction started in 1833 when his short stories and essays appeared in periodicals. His *Sketches By Boz* and *The Pickwick Papers*, a comic novel, were published in 1836. In the same year on April 2nd, he married the daughter of his friend George Hogarth, Catherine Hogarth. Due to the success of *The Pickwick Papers*, which ended in 1837, Dickens began a full-time career as a novelist who produced such early works as *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickelby*. In addition, Charles and Catherine had their first son in 1837, which became the first of ten children.

From 1840's and onward, Dickens spent much time traveling to Canada and the United States, campaigning against many of the social evils of his time. In December 1843, *A Christmas Carol*, the first of Dickens' Christmas books appeared. A year later, after touring Italy, Switzerland and France with his family, Dickens debuted his theatrical company where he frequently wrote, directed and acted in many plays. Fourteen years later in 1858, Dickens performed his first public readings for pay while separating from his wife.

Among his later works are *David Copperfield* (1849-50), where Dickens used his own personal experiences in the factory, *Bleak House* (1852-53), *A Tale Of Two Cities* (1859) and *Great Expectations* (1860-61). In 1860 Dickens moved to Gadshill Place, a mansion near Rochester, Kent. During 1869, his readings continued in England, Scotland and Ireland, until he collapsed from a mild stroke. Surviving, he began to write his final novel, *The Mystery Of Edwin Drood*. On June 8, 1870 at age 58, Charles Dickens suffered another stroke and died. The unfinished mystery novel *The Mystery Of Edwin Drood* was published in 1870.

## **Synopsis: *A Christmas Carol***

Ebenezer Scrooge has lost his only friend, his business partner Jacob Marley. Seven years have passed since Marley's death, and Scrooge has not changed a bit. He still refuses to give to the poor, still only grudgingly gives his employee Christmas day off, and still refuses his nephew's offer of Christmas dinner. He dismisses the whole holiday as a "Humbug."

But his Christmas spirit (or lack thereof) is soon called into question by some actual spirits. First, Marley's ghost arrives and promises that three more spirits will arrive.

The ghost of Christmas Past brings Scrooge on a tour of his unpleasant childhood and the loss of a fiancée, but also reminds Scrooge of the good times in his past, when, as the employee of Fezziweg, Scrooge learned what a joyous holiday Christmas could be.

The ghost of Christmas Present shows him the celebrations currently unfolding without him: including the merriment on the streets of London, the sentimental family celebration of the Cratchits, and the more rollicking party thrown by Scrooge's nephew Fred. But Christmas Present also warns Scrooge that without more money, the Cratchit family will lose its youngest and most fragile member, Tiny Tim.

The journey grows darker yet with the visit of The Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come, who shows Scrooge the world after Scrooge's death: his old business cronies who care not for his demise, his maid who steals the very blankets from his deathbed, and Tiny Tim's passing from this world.

Scrooge awakens the next morning to find himself gloriously transformed. Not only can he once again laugh, but he recognizes the value of charity and Christmas spirit- he buys dinner for the Cratchits, and finally joins Fred and Fred's wife for Christmas dinner. Scrooge becomes well known for his devotion to the Christmas holiday.

## **Characters: *A Christmas Carol***

**Ebenezer Scrooge:** A penny-pinching, crotchety, and wealth-obsessed businessman for whom Christmas is nothing more than a "humbug"

**Jacob Marley:** Scrooge's long-time business partner, dead seven years, comes back to help save his friend. Jacob, in life, was a penny-pinching miser like Scrooge and is suffering for it in the afterlife.

**Bob Cratchit:** Scrooge's faithful employee, who endures Scrooge's mistreatment until Scrooge, reformed by the visit of the three spirits, raises Bob's salary and vows to help his struggling family.

**The Cratchit family:** Bob and Mrs. Cratchit's other children and Tiny Tim's older brothers and sisters, including the eldest daughter Martha who has left home to work in a factory, young daughter Belinda, and two young sons, Peter and Edward.

**Mrs. Cratchit:** Not as forgiving of Scrooge as her husband, but deeply loves her children and husband.

**Tiny Tim:** Cratchit's youngest son, who teeters on the brink of death, and who harbors nothing but goodwill in his heart.

**Fred:** Scrooge's nephew and only living relative, who never gives up on his Uncle Scrooge and faithfully asks him to Christmas dinner every year. This good-hearted nephew is the son of Scrooge's sister Fan.

**Fan Scrooge:** Scrooge's beloved sister, mother of his nephew Fred. She has died before the story begins, when giving birth to Fred, but her kindness and joyful presence in Scrooge's childhood lives again in the shadows shown to Scrooge by the Ghost of Christmas Past.

**Mr. Fezziwig:** Scrooge was apprenticed to "Old Fezziwig" after he left school. Scrooge's old employer celebrates Christmas the old-fashioned way. "He had the power to make us happy," Scrooge says.

**Mrs. Fezziwig:** Mr. Fezziwig's jovial wife

**The Miss Fezziwigs:** Mr. Fezziwig's fun loving daughters

**Belle:** Scrooge's past love; the two become engaged, but Belle breaks it off when Scrooge becomes too obsessed with money and business, and instead goes on to live a happy life married to another man

**Ghost of Christmas Past:** This spirit shows Scrooge his lonely and difficult childhood and gradual decline into the miser he will become.

**Ghost of Christmas Present:** This spirit shows Scrooge the joy that Christmas brings, both at the poor household of the Cratchits and at the home of his nephew.

**Ghost of Christmas Future, or the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come:** This spirit shows Scrooge the demise of Tiny Tim and of himself, leading to Scrooge's reformation.

## Charles Dickens: Pop Culture Icon Turned High Culture Icon

*“The great novelist who was also the great entertainer, the greatest entertainer, probably in the history of fiction.” - Walter Allen, The English Novel*

Dickens had an amazing ability to capture the imagination of all audiences. With a keen sense of observation, a sharp wit, and an incredible command of the English language, Dickens' essays, short stories and novels became a popular sensation worldwide. Many factors contributed to this fame, not least of which was the increase of technology during the Industrial Age, which primed the newly-forming working class to become the perfect audience for Dickens' political and social stance toward the working public, and the new medium of the serial novel.

During Dickens' time, London was the largest and most spectacular city in the world- and it only grew with the coming of the Industrial Revolution, a time in which massive and rapid technological changes lurched the world forward. This rapid growth included the addition of new streets, docks, and factories. The 1830s brought the development of the railroad, which provided quick transportation for thousands of people while accelerating the expansion of the city. Additionally, new improvements in production processes for newspapers, magazines and books increased in both speed and efficiency for publications. It was these transportation devices and printing inventions that helped spread Dickens' fame across the globe.

While Britain was experiencing the Industrial Revolution, human growth and literacy was also on the rise: lower and working class people who had previously been unable to read, and who previously hadn't had access to literature, suddenly were able to acquire and experience literature in much higher numbers. Dickens tailored his fictions directly to this new audience, and provided a voice and witness for the causes and aggravations of the poor and working classes. Dickens' political and social views, which invoked compassion and humanitarianism amongst his audiences, helped assure his increasing popularity across all class boundaries.

Another factor that added to Dickens' fame and popularity was the process by which he and his publishers choose to distribute his books. All of Dickens' major stories were published serially, in monthly or weekly sections. It was too expensive for the poor and working class to purchase one full novel, so by dividing up the stories, people could pay a more reasonable sum for each installment. For example, a full-length novel cost about 31 shillings in 1836 while the average worker earned only 6 shillings per week. However, the price of one shilling for a monthly installment of 32 pages with 2 illustrations and advertisements was a much more sensible deal for the public. Dickens wrote each novel with this publication process in mind, and ended each series with a suspenseful hook or “cliffhanger.” By leaving people at the edge of their seats, Dickens ensured the purchase of his next issue.

So while we consider Dickens' work today to be high-brow, classic literature, the truth is, his legacy was born by appealing to regular people, just like you and me!

***Activity:*** *Think of an example of someone famous who is really popular to many different kinds of people in modern day. Compare their work to the work of Dickens. Why do you think this modern person has such a broad appeal?*

## Dickens, London, and the Victorian Age

Charles Dickens wrote during the Victorian Age, an era named after Britain's Queen Victoria, who ruled from 1819 to 1901. During Dickens' time, London reigned as the world's center for commerce, culture, and government. England's Industrial Revolution contributed to many amazing benefits for both the city and its people; however, there were several downsides. The sacrifices for explosive economic growth and world trade domination included a rise in poverty, hunger and squalor.

By the time Charles Dickens published his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837), industrialization had immensely changed the physical, social, and cultural landscape of Great Britain. The emergence of the factory system drew country farmers and laborers to the great city in unparalleled numbers. In 1800, the population of London was approximately one million and by 1880, that number grew to 4.5 million. This tremendous population growth brought overcrowding, crime, pollution and disease.

A deep seeded division between England's rich and poor social classes developed during the Victorian Age. At one extreme, wealthy businessmen and royalty lived in luxury while at the other, the indigent poor begged for shillings in the urban filth. The Victorian concept of poverty allowed for little compassion. The poor, in general, were considered to be of inferior moral character and their poverty was seen as the result of these innate deficiencies.

One exception to this social rule, were the physically debilitated - the blind, for example. Consistent with these beliefs, British law provided for two kinds of welfare under the guidelines of The Poor Laws. These welfare types were the "undeserving poor" and the "deserving poor." The "undeserving poor," those who could work but were poor due to their own inadequacy, were employed in state sponsored "workhouses." These institutions were specifically designed to be uncomfortable and provide a dirty, backbreaking day of labor. This way, the "undeserving poor" would be taught to dislike state welfare and would seek their own means of financial stability. Persons who spent beyond their means were faced with the prospect of debtor's prison, a humiliating situation in which whole families were forced to take up temporary residence in dingy prisons until the debt was resolved. The "deserving poor," by contrast, were allowed "in-house" charity, consisting of handouts of food, clothing, and other basic necessities. This generosity towards the "deserving poor" was justified by their physical or mental disabilities.

England's poor were also the primary victims of the poor sanitation of the Victorian Era. Until the second half of the 19th century, London residents were still drinking water from the same Thames River in which raw sewage was being deposited. Due to the tainted drinking water, disease ran rampant. Several outbreaks of Cholera in the mid 19th century along with "The Great Stink" of 1858 (when the stench of the Thames caused Parliament to dismiss for recess), stirred up a great cry for action. Sir Joseph Bazalgette, chief engineer of the new Metropolitan Board of Works (1855), put into effect a plan that was completed in 1875. This plan finally provided adequate sewers to serve the city and created laws, which required drinking water to have proper filtration. In addition, these laws prevented companies from supplying drinking water that was drawn from the most heavily tainted parts of the Thames.

And in this way, The Victorian Era wasn't all bad- the period saw early reform efforts with respect to issues of child labor, unfair factory wages and work schedules, voting rights, and prison reform. Reform bills in 1832, 1867, and 1885 dramatically reduced the financial and property qualifications of voters, which allowed a diminished the power of the moneyed elite. In the mid- 10 1800's, reformers also began to demand reductions in the standard 14-hour workday

for industries. Many bargaining processes effectively established shorter working days and weeks, safer work environments and restrictions on child labor.

**Activity: Imagine for Yourself-**

*"It was market-morning. The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire; a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog, which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above. All the pens in the centre of the large area, and as many temporary pens as could be crowded into the vacant space, were filled with sheep; tied up to posts by the gutter side were long lines of beasts and oxen, three or four deep. Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a mass; the whistling of drovers, the barking dogs, the bellowing and plunging of the oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs, the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides; the ringing of bells and roar of voices, that issued from every public-house; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping and yelling; the hideous and discordant din that resounded from every corner of the market; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro, and bursting in and out of the throng; rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses". - Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist*

***Imagine you were a member of the working class in Victorian England during the Industrial Revolution- write a diary entry about a typical day in your life.***

## The Evolution of Christmas

The celebration of Christmas as we understand it today was dwindling in popularity at the beginning of the Victorian period. Prior to this time, people in England celebrated Christmas traditions that originated in medieval times; these 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 Germanic winter festival of Yule. But these revelries came under intense scrutiny by Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans. Additionally, with the Industrial Revolution in full swing, workers had little time to celebrate Christmas.

However, the romantic revival of Christmas traditions eventually flourished due to Prince Albert's introduction of the German custom of decorating the Christmas tree, the reintroduction of Christmas carols (which had all but disappeared at the turn of the century), the production of Christmas cards in the 1840s and, most importantly, the Christmas stories of Dickens. Although Dickens celebrated the festival of Christ's birth in numerous works, it is *A Christmas Carol*, published on December 19th, 1843, that had the most influence on preserving and restoring the Christmas spirit and customs. This timeless classic was the predominant reason the joy of Christmas in Britain and America was rekindled.

In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens describes the holidays as "a good time: 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, and to think of other people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys". Dickens' name had become so synonymous with Christmas that on hearing of his death in 1870 a little costermonger's girl in London asked, "Mr. Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die too?"

Today, after more than 160 years, *A Christmas Carol* continues to be relevant, sending a message that cuts through the materialistic trappings of the season and gets to the heart and soul of the holidays.

***Activity:*** *What does the spirit of Christmas mean to you? What traditions do you and your family use to celebrate? And if you don't celebrate Christmas, what are some traditions you've experienced that bring the same sense of family, kindness, and togetherness?*

## **The Road to *A Christmas Carol***

For over 150 years, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* has been the quintessential holiday classic. An immediate success at its publication in 1843, Dickens' tale has long captured the imaginations of readers, filmmakers and viewers with its universal themes of gratitude, generosity and redemption. On a broader scope, *A Christmas Carol* masterfully illustrates the timeless conflict between good and evil, challenging us to examine the consequences of our actions -- which, in our global society, has an even greater impact than in Dickens' time.

Dickens' cherished little Christmas story, the best loved and most read of all of his books, began life as the result of the author's desperate need for money. In the fall of 1843, Dickens and his wife were expecting their fifth child. In addition, requests for money from his family, a large mortgage on his Devonshire Terrace home, and lagging sales from the monthly installments of *Martin Chuzzlewit* had left Dickens short of money.

As the idea for the story took shape and the writing began in earnest, Dickens became engrossed in the book. He wrote that as the tale unfolded he “wept and laughed, and wept again” and he “walked about the black streets of London fifteen or twenty miles many a night when all sober folks had gone to bed.”

At odds with his publishers, Dickens paid for the production cost of the book himself and insisted on a lavish design that included a gold-stamped cover and four hand-colored etchings. He also set the price at 5 shillings so that the book would be affordable to nearly everyone.

The book was published during the week before Christmas 1843 and was an instant sensation but due to the high production costs, Dickens' earning from the sales was lower than expected. In addition to the disappointing profit from the book Dickens was enraged that the work was instantly the victim of pirated editions. Copyright laws in England were often loosely enforced and there was a complete lack of international copyright. He ended up spending more money fighting pirated editions of the book than he was making from the book itself.

Despite these early financial difficulties, Dickens' Christmas tale of human redemption has endured beyond Dickens' own vivid imagination. It was a favorite during Dickens' public readings of his works late in his lifetime and is known today primarily due to the dozens of film versions and dramatizations which continue to be produced every year.

***Activity:*** *Think of a book or other kind of story that had a very profound impact on you, and how you saw the world. Explain how that story changed you and why.*

## ***A Christmas Carol: Born to Entertain***

Dickens was, first and foremost, an entertainer. From childhood and into adult life he loved the stage and the admiration he received from the public. He performed in amateur theatricals throughout his life and, had he not achieved early fame as a writer, he would almost certainly have made a career on the stage.

In 1853 he began giving public readings of his works, first for charity and then for pay in 1858. No other great author had ever performed their works in London, however; Dickens works were uniquely suited for performance. Throughout the 1860s Dickens performed several reading tours in Britain and made more money from the readings than from writing. With the promise of big money, along with stage manager George Dolby, he undertook a reading tour in America from December 1867- April 1868 that earned him 19,000 pounds. On his return to England, and with declining health, he began a farewell tour of Britain in October 1868. This tour included a very passionate and dramatic performance of the murder of Nancy from *Oliver Twist*. Other performances included scenes from *A Christmas Carol*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Pickwick*, and his favorite, *David Copperfield*. However, the most popular of his readings was *A Christmas Carol*, for which Dickens wrote a condensed version that he could read in an hour and a half.

***Activity:*** *What's a book or story you've read that you think would work very well onstage? What about that story suits it to be a play?*

## **Want and Ignorance: The Deepest Themes**

One major theme in *A Christmas Carol* is rooted specifically in Dickens' observations of the thousands of children in Victorian London who were living in unimaginable poverty, filth, and disease. In 1839, it was estimated that nearly half of all funerals in London were for children under the age of ten. Those who survived grew up without education and resources: they virtually had no chance to escape the cycle of poverty. Dickens felt that this cycle of poverty could only be broken through education, and thus became interested in the Ragged Schools in London.

Ragged Schools were free schools, run through charity, in which the poorest children received religious instruction and a rudimentary education. Dickens generally applauded the work of these schools, although he disapproved of introducing religious doctrine at the expense of a practical education, which would help the pupil become a self-sufficient member of society. Despite the availability of these schools, most poor children remained uneducated due to the demand for child labor.

Dickens introduces these children, and the primary social forces which kept them from thriving, in *A Christmas Carol* through the allegorical twins, Ignorance and Want. The Ghost of Christmas Present shows them, wretched and almost animal in appearance, to Scrooge with the warning: "This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased." This is also why, in our version of the story, the action opens with the haunting voice of a young child begging for money- the beggar child represents the heart of the needy of Victorian London, and ultimately, the heart of Scrooge's redemption.

## Tiny Tim, Big Impact

And of course, we also meet these children who so captured Dickens' heart and attention through the Cratchit children, and in particular, Tiny Tim Cratchit. Of all the affecting scenes from *A Christmas Carol*, none touches the heart of both modern and Victorian readers alike more than the death of Tiny Tim, foreshadowed to Scrooge by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Child mortality and the struggles of raising a large family were common in the 19th century, so many readers of this time likely suffered firsthand the loss of a child.

Michael Patrick Hearn, in his book *The Annotated Christmas Carol*, reports that one observer of a public reading by Dickens of *A Christmas Carol* in Boston in 1867 noted that the passage of Tiny Tim's death "brought out so many pocket handkerchiefs that it looked as if a snowstorm had somehow gotten into the hall without tickets".

But exactly what illness did little Tim suffer from? It's never clearly stated in the story, but 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 in Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol* 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. Dr. Lewis explained that Tim's case, left untreated due to the poverty of the Cratchit household, 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 1800's and found that Tim's symptoms would have been treated with alkaline solutions that would counteract the excess acid in his blood and recovery would be rapid.

While other possibilities exist, Dr. Lewis feels that the treatable kidney disorder best fits "the hopeful spirit of the story."

*Source - AP Science Writer Malcolm Ritter-1992*

**Activity: Rewrite the story of *A Christmas Carol* from Tiny Tim, The Beggar Child, or another Cratchit child's point of view. What was daily life like for them? What did London look like? Sound like? Smell like? What challenges did any young person face on the streets of London? What further challenges would face a physically challenged individual? What sorts of dangers lurked in the city?**

## Themes in *A Christmas Carol*

*A Christmas Carol* is built upon numerous contrasts: rich and poor, warmth and cold, plenty and hunger, family and loneliness, generosity and miserliness, affection and cruelty, dream and reality, past and present, and present and future. Some specific themes of contradiction explored in the story include:

**Fate vs. Redemption:** Scrooge's journey from a cruel miser to a generous humanitarian.

**Rich vs. Poor:** Scrooge versus Bob Cratchit and the enormous gap between the "haves" and the "have nots."

**Material vs. Spiritual Wealth:** Scrooge's pursuit of money is his spiritual downfall, versus Bob Cratchit's virtues, which stem from his priorities being properly focused on family, love and companionship.

**Law vs. Justice:** Scrooge's wrong belief that the poor deserve their fate.

## Study Guide Questions: *A Christmas Carol*

- 1.) What is Scrooge's development throughout the story? How does he change throughout the play?
- 2.) Discuss the causes of the changes that took place in Scrooge. What did he see in each time period, and how did this affect his relationships with the people in his life?
- 3.) Do you believe that your fate can be altered by the choices you make? Why or why not?
- 4.) Discuss what might have happened to Scrooge if the spirits had not visited him. Explain your reasoning.
- 5.) How does Scrooge react to seeing Tiny Tim, and how does it change his feelings toward his clerk and the poor?
- 6.) Is Tiny Tim's phrase, "God bless us, every one" relevant in today's culture? Why or why not? Use specific current events to explain your answer.
- 7.) Who are Ignorance and Want and why are they important?
- 8.) Compare and contrast this play with other versions of the story (examples: the original novel, A Muppet Christmas Carol, the Alistaire Zimm black and white film, etc).

## **Study Guide Questions: Engage With the Play**

**By Caitlin Skinner**

Take charge of your theatre-going experience and make it your own by asking yourself questions before, during, and after watching a play.

### ***Questions to ask before the play:***

#### **If you HAVE read the play...**

How did you envision the set, or the visual world of the play, while reading?

How did you imagine the characters looked while reading the play?

What themes did you notice repeating throughout the play?

What images jumped out at you while reading the play?

How would you describe the central theme of the play in one sentence?

#### **If you HAVE NOT read the play...**

Do you know anything about the play? If so, what do you know?

#### **In general...**

When you think about "theatre," what impressions come to mind?

What does "theatre" mean to you? What do you expect your experience to be when you watch a play? Do you expect to be bored? Excited? Engaged? Curious? Angry? Tired?

### ***Questions to ask after the play:***

#### **If you READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT...**

How did the production set differ from what you had imagined while reading the play? How was it similar? How did these changes affect your understanding of the story?

Did the characters look different from how you envisioned them looking while reading the play? Did they sound different? Act differently? How did these changes affect your understanding and opinion of each character? How did these changes affect your understanding of the overall story?

How did the themes and images you noticed while reading translate to performance? Did the same themes and images jump out at you? Did you notice new ones?

Did this particular production seem to have the same central theme, or a different central theme from the one you discovered while reading? What elements of the staging, acting, or design helped convey the theme?

Did the story gain or lose anything when seeing it performed? Did you enjoy reading it more, or watching it?

**If you HAVE NOT READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT...**

How did the play live up to your expectations? Did it turn out the way you thought it would? Was your knowledge of the play correct?

Were you able to follow the story?

Which part of the story did you most respond to?

What themes and images jumped out at you?

Which character did you most relate to? Why?

**In general...**

How did this production change or confirm your original impressions of "theatre"?

How did your experience watching the play differ from how you expected it would go?

In your own words, how would you summarize the plot of the play? How is the plot different from the story, or the thematic implications, in the play?

Did you feel the story was relevant to your life? How and why?

Did you feel the story said something about our society, or about the world at large? If so, what?

Do you feel this story is an important one to tell and keep telling? How and why?

What kind of stories do you most respond to?

## California State Standards

Giving students the chance to experience live theater at the Sacramento Theatre Company not only gives them the chance to enrich their understanding of literature, humanity, and the world, but also includes the added benefit of fulfilling several of California's State Standards for Education, including:

### California Arts Standards in Theater:

**RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

#### 6.TH:Re7

Describe and record personal reactions to artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

#### 7.TH:Re7

Compare recorded personal and peer reactions to artistic choices in a drama/ theatre work.

#### 8.TH:Re7

Apply appropriate criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

#### Prof.TH:Re7

Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.

#### Acc.TH:Re7

Demonstrate an understanding of multiple interpretations of artistic criteria and how each might be used to influence future artistic choices of a drama/theatre work.

#### Adv.TH:Re7

Use historical and **cultural context** to structure and justify personal responses to a drama/theatre work.

**Enduring Understanding:** Theatre artists reflect to understand the impact of drama processes

#### PK.TH:Re7

With prompting and supports, recall an emotional response in **dramatic play** or a **guided drama experience**.

#### K.TH:Re7

With prompting and supports, express an emotional response to characters in **drama experience**

#### 1.TH:Re7

Recall choices made in a **guided drama experience**.

#### 2.TH:Re7

Recognize when artistic choices are made in a **guided drama experience**.

#### 3.TH:Re7

Understand and discuss why artistic choices are made in a drama/theatre work.

#### 4.TH:Re7

Identify artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation

#### 5.TH:Re7

Explain personal reactions to artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work

**RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

**Enduring Understanding:** Theatre artists’ interpretations of drama/theatre work are influenced by personal experiences, culture, and aesthetics.

**Essential Question:** How can the same work of art communicate different messages to different people?

**Process Component:** Interpret

PK.TH:Re8	K.TH:Re8	1.TH:Re8	2.TH:Re8	3.TH:Re8	4.TH:Re8	5.TH:Re8
<p>a. With prompting and supports, explore preferences in <b>dramatic play, guided drama experience</b> or age-appropriate theatre performance.</p> <p>b. With prompting and supports, name and describe characters in <b>dramatic play</b> or a <b>guided drama experience</b>.</p>	<p>a. With prompting and supports, identify preferences in <b>dramatic play</b>, a <b>guided drama experience</b> or age-appropriate theatre performance.</p> <p>b. With prompting and supports, name and describe settings in <b>dramatic play</b> or a <b>guided drama experience</b>.</p>	<p>a. Explain preferences and emotions in a <b>guided drama experience</b> or age-appropriate theatre performance.</p> <p>b. Identify causes of character actions in a <b>guided drama experience</b>.</p>	<p>a. Explain how personal preferences and emotions affect an observer’s response in a <b>guided drama experience</b> or age-appropriate theatre performance.</p> <p>b. Identify causes and consequences of character actions in a <b>guided drama experience</b>.</p>	<p>a. Consider multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.</p> <p>b. Consider multiple ways to develop a character using physical characteristics and prop or costume design choices that reflect <b>cultural perspectives</b> in drama/theatre work.</p>	<p>a. Compare and contrast multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.</p> <p>b. Compare and contrast the qualities of characters in a theatre work through physical characteristics and prop or costume design choices that reflect <b>cultural contexts</b>.</p>	<p>a. Justify responses based on personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.</p> <p>b. Explain responses to characters based on <b>cultural contexts</b> when participating in or observing drama/theatre work.</p>

c. With prompting and supports describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in **dramatic play** or a **guided drama experience**.

c. With prompting and supports describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in **dramatic play** or a **guided drama experience**.

c. Explain or use text and pictures to describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in a **guided drama experience**.

c. Explain or use text and pictures to describe how others' emotions and choices may compare to the emotions and choices of characters in a **guided drama experience**.

c. Examine how connections are made between oneself and a character's emotions in drama/theatre work.

c. Identify and discuss physiological changes connected to emotions in drama/theatre work.

c. Investigate the effects of emotions on posture, gesture, breathing, and vocal intonation in a drama/theatre work.

**RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 9:** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

**Enduring Understanding:** Theatre artists apply criteria to understand, explore, and assess drama and theatre work.

**Essential Question:** How do analysis and synthesis impact the theatre artist's process and audience's perspectives?

**Process Component:** Evaluate

PK.TH:Re9	K.TH:Re9	1.TH:Re9	2.TH:Re9	3.TH:Re9	4.TH:Re9	5.TH:Re9
a. With prompting and supports, discuss and make decisions about <b>dramatic play</b>	a. With prompting and supports, discuss and make decisions with others in <b>dramatic play</b> or a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	a. Build on others' ideas in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	a. Collaborate on a scene in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	a. Understand how and why groups evaluate drama/theatre work.	a. Develop and implement a plan to evaluate drama/theatre work.	a. Develop multiple criteria to evaluate drama/theatre work.
n/a	n/a	b. Compare and contrast the experiences of characters in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	b. Describe how characters respond to challenges in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	b. Evaluate and analyze problems and situations in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.	b. Analyze and evaluate characters' choices in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.	b. Analyze and evaluate a character's circumstances in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.
n/a	n/a	c. Identify props and costumes that might be used in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	c. Use a prop or costume in a <b>guided drama experience</b> to describe characters, settings, or events.	c. Consider and analyze <b>technical theatre elements</b> from multiple drama/theatre works.	c. Explore how <b>technical theatre elements</b> may support a <b>theme</b> or idea in a drama/theatre work.	c. Assess how <b>technical theatre elements</b> represent the <b>theme</b> of a drama/theatre work.

## California Reading Standards in Literature:

**Standards in Integration of Knowledge and Ideas for grades 6-12:** Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

**Grade 6 students:** Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

**Grade 7 students:** Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).

**Grade 8 students:** Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

**Grade 9-10 students:** Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.

**Grade 11-12 students:** Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

# Theatre Etiquette

- Arrive at the theater on time.
- Visit the restroom before the performance begins.
- Turn off your cell phone. Do not speak on the phone or text during the performance.
- Pay attention to announcements that are made prior to the show about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
- Don't speak during the performance unless you are encouraged by the performers to participate.
- Remember that the Overture (introductory music) in musical theater is part of the performance, so be quiet when it begins.
- Do not take pictures during the performance. It can be very distracting to the actors and can cause a mishap. It can also be a violation of an actor's contract.
- Remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment.
- Do not eat or drink in the theater.
- Do not put your feet up on the seats or balcony and do not kick the seat in front of you.
- Don't put or throw anything on the stage.
- Do laugh when the performance is funny.
- Do applaud when it is appropriate during the performance.
- Do applaud when the performance is over... this tells the performers and crew that you appreciate their work.
- Stand and applaud if you really thought the show was great (a standing ovation).
- Do not whistle, stomp your feet, or scream out to the performers except for a Bravo or Brava.

## Additional Resources

***The Charles Dickens Page. David A. Perdue.***

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

***TNT Learning: Educators Guide. Turner Learning***

(<http://turnerlearning.com/tntlearning/christmascarol>)

***The Victorian Web. Philip V. Allingham.***

(<http://scholar.nus.edu.sg/landow/victorian/authors/dickens>)

***A Christmas Carol, Project Gutenberg***

(<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/46/46-h/46-h.htm>)

***A Christmas Carol Study Guide, The Goodman Theater***

(<https://www.goodmantheatre.org/Documents/Study%20Guides/0809%20Season/A%20CHRISTMAS%20CAROL%20Student%20Guide%202008.pdf>)

***The Dickens Fellowship***

(<https://www.dickensfellowship.org/life-charles-dickens>)