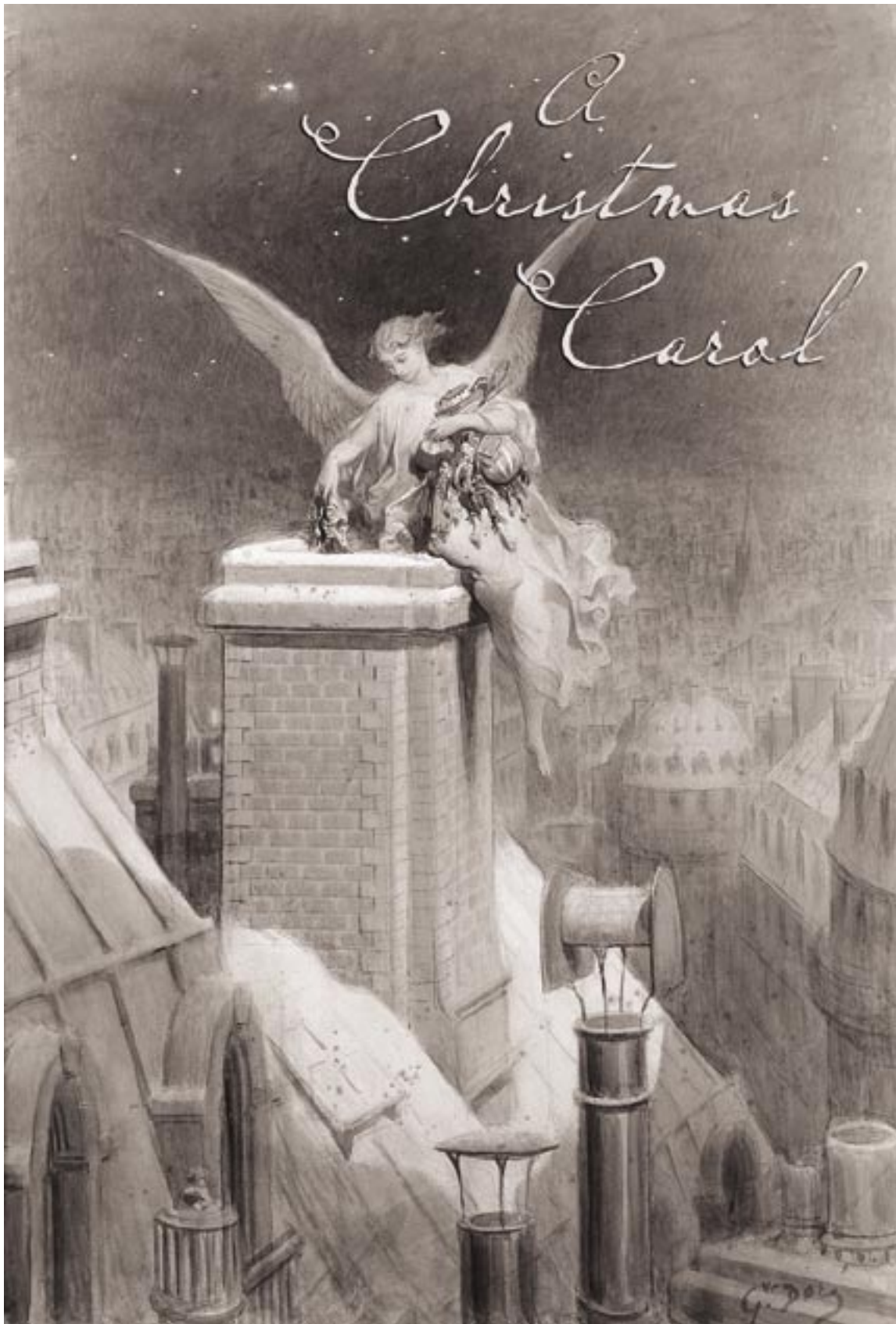


The  
**SHAKESPEARE**  
Theatre of  
New Jersey

Bonnie J. Monte  
*Artistic Director*



**a study guide**

compiled and arranged by  
the Education Department of  
The Shakespeare Theatre of  
New Jersey

# A Christmas Carol: A Brief Introduction

It is possible that no other single piece of fiction has had the kind of sweeping cultural influence that can be attributed to Charles Dickens's first "Christmas story."

To some extent, *A Christmas Carol* was written for financial reasons. By 1843, when he began work on the short novel, Dickens and his wife had four children with a fifth on the way, a large mortgage payment, and were subjected to frequent requests for financial help from family members. His latest serial novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, had suffered a disappointing fall-off in monthly sales. Dickens' first try at writing a novel all at once, rather than in serial form, was motivated in part by his hope of getting a quick influx of cash from a bestseller.

As usual with Dickens, however, the novel's form and content was principally dictated by a powerful social message he wished to convey. He had recently visited the Field Lane "Ragged School," part of a chain of charitable establishments that had been set up to provide free instruction in reading and math for the poor. He was appalled at the filth, misery and ignorance of the men and boys he met there, and at the thought of how his society mostly overlooked the sufferings of its vast lower class. He resolved that the Christmas book which was taking shape in his head would "strike a sledgehammer blow... on behalf of the Poor Man's Child." Indeed, its working title was *The Sledgehammer*.

Although he was simultaneously finishing *Martin Chuzzlewit*, as Dickens plunged into his tale of Scrooge's fateful encounter with the Ghosts he found himself increasingly engrossed in the "little Christmas book." As he worked, he later wrote, he "wept and laughed, and wept again... and thinking whereof, walked about the black streets of London fifteen or twenty miles many a night when all sober folks had gone to bed."

Dickens was determined that the book would be physically beautiful—his own personal Christmas gift to the English public—and also affordable for the average family. When his publisher was unwilling to do so, he paid out of his own pocket for the first edition's gold-stamped cover and hand-colored engravings. Ultimately this, combined with the fact that he held the price to five shillings (roughly \$20 in today's money), meant that Dickens made far less from the book than he had hoped.

Nevertheless, the sales of the book in sheer volume were (and continue to be) astounding. The first printing of 6,000 copies appeared in bookstores on December 19, 1843 and was sold out on December 22. Not only did the book continue to be printed and sold throughout Dickens's lifetime, but he then adapted it for public readings which he gave throughout the world up to the year of his death. In later years, when he could no longer write as quickly, these readings became one of his principal sources of income.

Dickens would go on to write four more "Christmas books" and numerous Christmas stories in his magazines, simply because his reading public demanded it. None of these achieved the popularity or lasting acclaim of *A Christmas Carol*, but nonetheless Charles Dickens was indelibly associated with Christmas by almost everyone in England for the rest of his life. Many years later, in a letter to his daughter Mamie, he would grumble that he felt as if he "had murdered a Christmas a number of years ago, and its ghost perpetually haunted me."

Far from being the murderer of the Christmas holiday, however, Dickens's *Carol* may have almost literally saved it. By 1843, most of the Christmas traditions depicted and alluded to in the novel were dying out. Many of them had originated in England's farm culture, and were being forgotten as more and more people flocked to cities and factory work. Others had been suppressed by the Puritans and never really revived. Scrooge's attitude that Christmas should be just another day of work was by no means universal, but it was far more common than today's reader might suspect.

Dickens was never comfortable with organized religion, and while he alludes to the religious nature of Christmas in the novel, the "sledgehammer blow" he strikes is on behalf of charity and human kindness rather than any specific religious belief. The association of the holiday with charitable giving and the opportunity to personally right society's injustices is one of the novel's most powerful legacies.

Dickens was also a gregarious, outgoing man who loved parties, games, and festivities of all kinds. Religious figures, particularly those in the Puritan tradition, had actually done much to strip Christmas of its festive qualities during the 17th and 18th centuries, but it was precisely this aspect of dancing, feasting and laughing with one's neighbors that Dickens loved most about Christmas. There are few more powerful literary defenses of the humanizing value of a party than Dickens's *Carol*.

Modern-day readers in England and the United States may take it for granted that nuclear families would gather for a special meal on Christmas, but this tradition is almost entirely attributable to *A Christmas Carol*, which essentially became a handbook for reworking the old rural Christmas traditions for a modern urban lifestyle. It sparked a "Christmas renaissance" that led directly to our contemporary traditions of exchanging gifts and Christmas cards, giving a Christmas bonus to employees, elaborately decorating the home and, most of all, roasting a "prize turkey." It is even possible to argue that Dickens is the single individual most responsible for the fact that Christmas is celebrated today as a secular holiday by so many families outside the Christian tradition.



Mr. Fezziwig's Ball, an illustration by John Leech from the first edition of *A Christmas Carol*, 1843.

# The Life of Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens was born February 7, 1812, the second child of John and Elizabeth Dickens. (His beloved older sister, Fanny, would be immortalized in *A Christmas Carol* as Scrooge's sister, Little Fan). John Dickens was a civil servant, working as a clerk in the Navy Pay Office at the time of Charles's birth.

In 1817, John Dickens was assigned to the huge Navy shipyards in Chatham, Kent. During the family's five years in Chatham, Charles started school (beginning his lifelong love affair with books) and discovered the theatre, which he regularly attended with his uncle. He later described this as the happiest period in his childhood, and would move back to the vicinity of Chatham as an adult.

By 1822, however, there were six Dickens children, and the family's finances, always stretched thin by John Dickens's inability to live within their means, took a further blow when he was transferred back to London. The family relocated to a four-room house in the seedy neighborhood of Camden Town. By 1824, their situation was so precarious that 12-year-old Charles was pulled out of school and sent to work at a full-time factory job. Eleven days after Charles began work at the factory, John Dickens was imprisoned for non-payment of debts, and the rest of the family was placed with him in the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison. Charles was left to fend for himself on his six shillings a week (barely enough for him to eat, let alone to help support his family).

For five long months, Charles Dickens worked long, tedious days in the rat-infested warehouse. This traumatic experience left deep emotional scars, and Dickens was so ashamed of his family's situation that he talked about his experiences at the factory to only two people during his life. Nevertheless, it would have a profound impact on his writing as well as his subsequent fierce devotion to social welfare, especially when it involved children and education. In particular, his time in the factory ingrained in him a sense of loneliness and isolation with which he struggled throughout his life. As his fictional alter ego David Copperfield put it, "I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support, of any kind, from anyone..."

By June of 1824, John Dickens was released from prison and Charles was able to return to school for a few more years. As a teenager, he again found work to support himself, first as a clerk in a law office, then as a newspaper reporter. He was eventually assigned to cover sessions of Parliament, and taught himself shorthand in order to take accurate transcripts of the speeches and debates, winning a reputation as London's fastest political reporter.

During this time, Dickens began writing magazine stories as well, and then novels in the new serial form. Books were still fairly expensive items in Dickens's time, but the introduction of serialization made them far more available to a wide middle and lower middle class audience. Essentially, serial novels were purchased on an installment plan, one chapter at a time. Charles Dickens became a master of this form, skillfully building suspense and inserting tantalizing details in each chapter.

In 1836, shortly after publishing his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of a newspaper editor. They would go on to have ten children together, and eventually to separate in 1858.

Between 1836 and 1865, Dickens published several novels which were extraordinary popular successes, and published and edited two magazines. He was able to travel to the United States, Canada, Italy and Switzerland, and to purchase a large house in Gad's Hill, near his childhood home in Chatham. Nevertheless, maintaining this upper middle-class lifestyle with such a large family proved to be a continuous challenge, and Dickens frequently worked to the point of exhaustion.

Charles Dickens was the first real "celebrity author," and he used this status to vehemently criticize all kinds of social injustice in Victorian England, from the slum conditions in which many people lived to the maltreatment of child laborers, prisoners, and others. He is still one of the most popular and widely read English authors, and not one of his books has ever gone out of print.

In 1865, Dickens was involved in a terrible train derailment that killed 10 people and seriously injured 49 others. Typically, Dickens (whose train car had tipped but not overturned) went to the aid of the injured passengers until rescuers arrived, then clambered back into his own carriage to retrieve his half-finished manuscript for *Our Mutual Friend*. While he had seemed relatively unscathed at the time, his health was never good following the accident, and in June of 1870 he suffered a stroke and died at home. He was laid to rest in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, in a tomb that reads: "He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world."



A photograph of Charles Dickens taken in 1850. From the collection of the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

# About the Adaptor: Neil Bartlett

Born in 1958, Neil Bartlett grew up in Chichester, West Sussex, England, which he has described as a “boring town in the south of England.” For a prolific writer and dramatic artist to be, a very good secondhand bookstore turned out to be the town’s saving grace. He developed an abiding interest in literature and theatre.

Bartlett completed his undergraduate studies at Oxford University, where he became interested in a dramatic style called hypertheatricality that has permeated much of his work. In essence, hypertheatricality eschews realism and acknowledges its make-believe nature in strong and sometimes outrageous ways. Rather than using technical effects that create the illusion of reality, Bartlett’s hypertheatricality tends to be more minimalist in its design aspects and to rely more on the actors and the imagination of the audience members. In this adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, Bartlett’s hypertheatrical style can be seen in the way the actors become the bells of London and Scrooge’s watch.

Shortly after graduating from college, Bartlett and a group of friends founded his first theatre company, the 1982 Theatre Company. He performed in or directed any number of performances in strange venues, such as street corners, staircases, or hospitals. He also worked as the administrator for a gay community theatre, a street clown, and a supporting act for the famous Goth band Bauhaus. During the 1980s Bartlett also wrote his first book, *Who Was That Man?*, about the life of Oscar Wilde, and has gone on to write critically acclaimed novels about gay life in England.

During the mid to late 80’s, he was a key director for England’s renowned Theatre de Complicité (now known simply as Complicité), and his production of *More Bigger Snacks Now* helped define the company’s groundbreaking reputation as well as his own reputation as an up-and-coming director. Complicité’s experimental, movement-based approach has had a profound influence on Bartlett’s subsequent work as a director.

In 1988 Bartlett formed another theatre company called Gloria, which created and toured close to twenty shows in a ten-year period. Gloria went to major theatres across England and the United States, including the Royal National Theatre and the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. Gloria’s productions were adaptations, new works, and musically-imbued theatre performances, all achieving the high level of theatricality for which Bartlett is known. He wrote or adapted thirteen shows and performed in six of the productions. In this period Bartlett was also highly productive in the activist scene, working with London’s first International AIDS Day and many other rallies, benefits and sociopolitical causes.

In a controversial move at the time, Bartlett was appointed the artistic director for London’s run-down and failing Lyric Hammersmith Theatre in 1994. Over the ten years of his tenure, it became one of London’s most cutting-edge and critically-acclaimed theatres. The pricing policy was drastically altered to attract new audiences, included young people and minorities, and the season selection became challenging and unusual. Under Bartlett, the Lyric Hammersmith became one of the predominant theatres for innovative work in London. It specialized in outrageous musicals, unique Christmas shows, experimental theatre, and work that consistently challenged both the audience and performers. Bartlett was also instrumental in adding a strong educational component to the Lyric’s programming.

In 2000, Bartlett received an O.B.E. (Officer of the British Empire) for his remarkable work in restoring the Lyric Hammersmith to thriving artistic success. He left in 2004 to return to a life as a freelance director and writer, and now lives in Brighton with his partner James Gardiner.

He has developed a reputation as a wildly intelligent writer, translator, and adaptor as well as a talented performer, director, and teacher. He has been described as a “protean polymath of a creator.” His work is almost always perceived as “edgy” and often more than slightly controversial. Bartlett frequently takes on older plays or stories and brings them to the present age, giving a fresh approach and perspective on their themes. He has notably adapted two Dickens novels for the stage, *A Christmas Carol* and more recently *Oliver Twist*. His most recent project was a joyous, gender-bending *Twelfth Night* this fall at the Royal Shakespeare Company which included John Lithgow in the role of Malvolio.



Costume sketch for Ebenezer Scrooge by designer Karen Ledger for The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey’s 2007 Main Stage production.

# Dickensian Times: A Chronology

1807: Robert Fulton invents the first successful steamboat. Slavery is abolished in England.

1812: Charles Dickens is born in Portsmouth, England.

1815: The Battle of Waterloo ends the Napoleonic Wars.

1824: Dickens's father and family are imprisoned for debt, while 12-year-old Charles begins a full-time job at Warren's Blacking Factory.

1825: Trade unions are legalized in England.

1827: The Dickens family is evicted for failing to make their mortgage payments. Charles leaves school for good and begins work as a clerk in a law office.

1830: The world's first commercial railway, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, begins operation.

1834: Dickens becomes a reporter for the *Morning Chronicle* and meets his future wife, Catherine Hogarth.

1836: Dickens marries Catherine Hogarth, and publishes *Sketches by Boz* and his first serial novel, *The Pickwick Papers*.

1837: Dickens publishes *Oliver Twist*. Samuel Morse invents the telegraph. The first ocean-going steamship is produced.

1838-39: Daguerrotype photographs and photographic paper are introduced.

1842: Dickens visits the United States for the first time.

1843: *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *A Christmas Carol* are published.

1849: Dickens publishes *David Copperfield*.

1854-56: The Crimean War takes place between England and Russia.

1858: Dickens separates from his wife and embarks on reading tours for additional income. The first trans-Atlantic telegraph cable is completed.

1859: Charles Darwin publishes *On the Origin of Species*, which lays out his theory of evolution.

1860: Dickens publishes *Great Expectations*.

1865: Dickens is injured in the Staplehurst train crash, from which he never fully recovers.

1867: Dickens gives his final reading tour in the United States. Alfred Nobel invents dynamite.

1870: Dickens gives a dozen farewell readings in England, and is received by Queen Victoria. He suffers a stroke on June 9 and dies at home, leaving his final novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, unfinished.

# Words and Phrases from *A Christmas Carol*

**avarice** - greed

**baleful** - deadly, malicious

**beguile** - to deceive

**bob** - slang for a shilling (a coin worth 1/20 of a British pound)

**cant** - insincere or cliché sayings

**congeal** - to solidify or thicken

**corroboration** - confirmation

**Dandini and the Princess** - a reference to the composer Rossini's version of the Cinderella story, which featured the faithful servant Dandini

**deft** - skillful

**dirge** - a funeral hymn or lament

**entreaty** - a plea

**execrable** - despicable, disgusting

**farthing** - a coin equal to 1/4 of the British penny

**gratis** - free

**gruel** - thin, watery oatmeal or porridge

**ha'penny** - a half-penny coin

**infernal** - of or relating to hell

**intercede** - to intervene

**latent** - dormant

**liberality** - generosity

**loiter** - to linger idly or aimlessly

**morose** - sullen or gloomy

**munificent** - very generous

**odious** - hateful, repellent

**officious** - overly dutiful or obliging

**opulence** - richness

**peal** - a loud ringing (as of bells)

**(plum) pudding** - a traditional Christmas dish more like a soft fruitcake than American pudding

**poulterers** - a butcher shop specializing in poultry (chickens, turkeys, etc.)

**profundity** - depth

**replete** - full

**savory** - good-tasting

**scanty** - meager, insufficient

**scuttle** - a metal bucket with a conical top, used for storing coal

**Social Services** - in Dickens's time, a phrase that referred mainly to workhouses and other means of essentially incarcerating the poor

**sordid** - filthy, foul

**tacit** - understood, implicit

**terrestrial** - of or relating to the earth

**venerate** - to honor or revere

**workhouses** - a publicly-funded place where people who were unable to support themselves could live and work. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment controversially aimed to make English workhouses as harsh and degrading as possible so that only the truly destitute would choose to live there. Dickens and others criticized the squalor and sometimes abusive treatment that resulted from this law.

# Commentary and Criticism

“Dickens is one of the masters of prose.”

George Gissing  
*Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*

“Because *A Christmas Carol* has never lost the power of its original impact as the epitome of the spirit of Christmas festivities, Dickens’s connection with the season is nearly always associated with the trappings of the book.”

Ruth F. Glancy  
“Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes”

“Was there ever a better charity sermon preached in the world than Dickens’s *Christmas Carol*? I believe it occasioned immense hospitality throughout England; was the means of lighting up hundreds of kind fires at Christmas time; caused a wonderful outpouring of Christmas good feeling, of Christmas punch-brewing; an awful slaughter of Christmas turkeys, and roasting and basting of Christmas beef.”

William Makepeace Thackeray  
from an 1852 speech

“The story sings from end to end like a happy man going home....It is lyric and exclamatory, from the first exclamatory words of it. It is strictly a Christmas Carol.”

G.K. Chesterton  
*Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens*

“As for *A Christmas Carol*, the individual critic had quite best hold his peace... it is so spread over England by this time that no sceptic could review it down...I am not sure the allegory is a very complete one, and protest, with the classics, against the use of blank verse in prose; but here all objections stop. Who can listen to objections regarding such a book as this? It seems to me a national benefit, and to every man or woman that reads it, a personal kindness.”

William Makepeace Thackeray  
reviewing the book for *The Independent* in February 1844

“Dickens... wrote the story not just to be read, but to be read out loud, for an audience. His words don’t describe; they enact. When London freezes, the prose stamps and chatters; when Scrooge is in his counting house, the words are as cramped as his miserable clerks... When the story rises to its great emotional and moral climaxes, the prose tolls like a bell...”

Neil Bartlett  
from his introduction to this adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*

## Dickens on Childhood Poverty

“The careless maintenance from year to year, in this, the capital city of the world, of a vast hopeless nursery of ignorance, misery and vice...is horrible to contemplate.

I know the prisons of London well...I have visited the largest of them more times than I could count; and the children in them are enough to break the heart and hope of any man. These children pass and repass through the prisons all their lives; they are never taught; the first distinctions between right and wrong are, from their cradles, perfectly confounded and perverted in their minds; they come of untaught parents, and will give birth to another untaught generation; in exact proportion to their natural abilities, is the extent and scope of their depravity; and there is no escape or chance for them in any ordinary revolution of human affairs.

The frightful neglect by the State of those whom it punishes so constantly, and whom it might, as easily and less expensively, instruct and save; together with the sight I had seen there, in the heart of London; haunted me, and finally impelled me to an endeavour to bring these Institutions under the notice of the Government.”

*The Daily News*  
March 13, 1852



A bust of Charles Dickens was made from life by sculptor Henry Dexter during Dickens’s 1842 trip to America, not long before he wrote *A Christmas Carol*. According to his wife and friends, it was extremely life-like. This cast of the lost original is in the collection of the Dickens Museum in London.

## Carol Transformations

Audiences around the world found themselves profoundly moved by Charles Dickens’s public readings of *A Christmas Carol*. In 1857, Dickens read the story in Chicago. One of the audience members, a factory owner named Fairbanks, was so affected by the reading that he decided to “break the custom we have hitherto observed of opening the works on Christmas Day.” Not only did he close the factory for Christmas Day, he gave a turkey to each of his employees.

# Christmas Traditions Before and After Carol

When we think of Christmas, there are many similar images that will come to mind for those who have grown up in the Anglo-American culture. Santa Claus, presents, wreaths, poinsettias, and Christmas trees are just a few of the dominant symbols each holiday season. Most of this Christmas paraphernalia originated only within the last 150 years, however. In fact, the celebration of Christmas in England and the United States was revolutionized by Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. His "little Christmas book" had a huge impact on popular culture, and solidified many of our traditions for the holiday.

When Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, English Christmas traditions had been in decline for centuries. Stores and factories remained open on December 25th, and many people were forced to work on Christmas Day.

Christmas was first promoted as a major holiday in Western Europe by Pope Gregory in 601 CE. The pope urged Christian missionaries to adapt the many local, pagan traditions of a winter festival around the solstice into a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Throughout Europe, many cultures had a tradition of celebrating the slow return of the sun after the winter solstice. Pope Gregory and his successors hoped that by integrating local customs into the church rituals, the English and others would be more likely to accept the Christian religion.

The very date of Christmas, December 25, seems to have originated from one of these pagan traditions. Mithraism was an early Iranian religion focused around the sun god Mithras. In Mithraic tradition, Mithras was born to a virgin in a cave on December 25<sup>th</sup>. The Roman Emperor Constantine declared the date to be the Roman Christmas holiday in 325 CE. Because Mithraism had a large following in the Roman army, he reasoned that it would be an easy transition for them to worship Jesus's virgin birth on the same day on which they were already used to celebrating such an event.

For several centuries after Pope Gregory's proclamation, almost everyone in England lived an isolated, rural lifestyle which made it easy to preserve and pass on traditional celebrations. These usually involved the entire village community centered around the local lord's manor house. Feasting, traditional games and music, and the burning of a Yule log over the 12-day Christmas period made up the bulk of the medieval English Christmas. By Shakespeare's time, wealthy people would sponsor elaborate Christmas revels that included sumptuous feasts, live music and theatrical entertainment.

All of this changed when the Puritans took control of the English government in 1642. The Puritans were concerned at how many aspects of the traditional Christmas were pagan in origin, right down to the date. The Puritan dictator Oliver Cromwell, who also notoriously banned theatre in England, said that celebrating Christmas in the traditional way was "an extreme forgetfulness of Christ." In 1652, Parliament actually banned Christmas, declaring: "No observance shall be had of the five and twentieth day of December, commonly called Christmas Day; nor any solemnity used or exercised in churches upon that day in respect thereof." Because so many early settlers in America were Puritans, this distaste for Christmas made itself felt in this country as well.

By the time the Puritans were driven from power, England and the United States were entering the throes of vast economic and social changes caused by industrialization and the change from a rural to an urban society. Traditional communities were being dispersed,

and the old traditions were practiced (or even remembered) by fewer and fewer people.

The revival of Christmas in England, and then America, was due in part to the popularity of Queen Victoria and her husband Prince Albert, role models for many people in the 19th century. Albert, who was German, brought many German Christmas traditions, including the decorated Christmas tree, to Buckingham Palace, and English and American families were eager to imitate the royal family.

*A Christmas Carol* may have done the most to inspire the holiday's renewed popularity, however. Dickens's little book depicted humble family celebrations that almost anyone could aspire to, even in an urban setting. Although Christmas was a normal workday for most people at the time, by portraying this as a miserly practice Dickens literally shamed untold thousands of business owners into making it a day off.

Dickens also did a great deal to separate Christmas from its religious context, so that families from all Christian denominations (and even some from other religious traditions) felt free to celebrate it in the traditional way once again. While *A Christmas Carol* briefly alludes to Jesus Christ, Dickens was never comfortable with organized religion, and he took pains to ensure that his story was not explicitly religious, but that it would promote what he held to be universal values of kindness and charity. *A Christmas Carol* helped create a new secular tradition that merged feasting and fun with social charity, and which has inspired both Christians and non-Christians to this day.



Queen Victoria and Prince Albert decorate their Christmas tree with the royal family in this illustration from the December 1860 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*, a popular magazine for women.

## Additional Topics for Discussion

### About the Play

1. *A Christmas Carol* is, in part, a novel about personal transformation. Ebenezer Scrooge is a very different person as a man than he was as a boy, and changes still further as a result of his ghostly encounters on Christmas Eve. Does Dickens provide any explanation for Scrooge's initial transformation into a cold-hearted and antisocial old man? What specific tactics do the three spirits use to reverse this? How do these tactics combine to change Scrooge's outlook on life? Is this transformation plausible? Compare the events of the novel/play to experiences you may have had that have drastically changed your beliefs and behaviors.

2. Scrooge's relationship with Belle falls apart when he becomes obsessed with money and material gain. What is the novel's attitude towards making money? How does Dickens's depiction of attitudes towards business and making money compare with those attitudes in our own society? Discuss the relative value of money and material possessions in your own life.

3. Dickens, like many other writers and thinkers in the Victorian era, was deeply interested in the concept of childhood. Victorian society came to emphasize childhood as a critical, formative period which determined what kind of adult a person would become. How are children depicted in *A Christmas Carol*? What do you think Dickens was trying to say about the importance of childhood, and how children should be treated? Why are Want and Ignorance depicted as "Man's children?"

4. In England, telling spooky ghost stories is a Christmas tradition. Why would this be so? Why do you think Dickens chose to place *A Christmas Carol* in this tradition? The section focused on "Christmas Yet to Come" is generally the darkest and scariest part of the story. Does this have an impact on the way you experience the happy ending that immediately follows it?

5. *A Christmas Carol* changed the way many people in England and America viewed the Christmas holiday. Almost every culture has traditional holidays when usual activities are set aside for a short time and people gather for special activities. What is the purpose and importance of having holidays? Compare Christmas as Dickens depicts it with other holidays that you celebrate or know about. How do holidays impact your life throughout the year?

### About this Production

1. This stage adaptation of the play by Neil Bartlett uses a small group of actors who each play several roles, create most of the sound effects and, as Bartlett puts it, "even, on occasion, impersonate props." Why do you think Bartlett chose this way of telling the story? How did these choices affect you as an audience member?

2. In this production, Dickens's words are interspersed with several traditional Christmas carols that are sung by the actors. How does the addition of this music affect the telling of the story? Was there a relationship between the songs that were chosen and the scenes which they accompanied? How would the play have been different without music?

## Follow-up Activities

1. Write a review of this production of *A Christmas Carol*. Be sure to include specific information and your own reactions to both the acting and the design elements (lights, set, costumes and sound). Explain what you liked about the production, and what you disliked, and support your opinions. Then submit your review to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Education Department, or see if it can be published in your school newspaper.

2. **Fred's Party** Scrooge's fun-loving nephew Fred is planning a Christmas party in the novel. Using print and online sources, research what kind of games an actual Victorian Christmas party might have included, as well as the etiquette of the time. Host your own version of Fred's party in the classroom— for extra credit, you might even incorporate some aspects of Victorian food or fashion.

3. **Ten Years Later...** Dickens famously wraps up *A Christmas Carol* with just a few sentences that do no more than hint at the future lives of Scrooge, the Cratchits, and the other characters. Write your own sequel that fills out Dickens's ending with additional detail. How do the lives of the characters change as a result of Scrooge's transformative experience?

4. **Tradition Exchange.** Survey your class about their holiday traditions, and discuss what these traditions have in common as well as what is different about each of them. Discuss the role that tradition plays in our lives. Then hold a classroom celebration in which each person shares an aspect of his/her holiday traditions with the group: a food, a song, a story or so on.

5. **Adaptations.** Neil Bartlett used Charles Dickens's words to create a particular kind of adaptation for the stage. *A Christmas Carol* has also been adapted into films, cartoons, television shows and comic books. Using Dickens's original novel as a basis, create a visual or literary adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* that can be presented to the class. Your adaptation could be a mural on craft paper or the storyboard for a film. It might take the story into a new context, such as modern-day New Jersey. Afterwards, discuss both the process of adaptation and how your adaptation (and others) communicated the story and themes of the original.

6. **Charity Campaign.** Charles Dickens wrote this book, in part, to "strike a sledgehammer blow on behalf of the Poor Man's Child." Discuss some other ways in which people advocate for social causes they believe in. Working individually or in small groups, design a campaign that will "strike a sledgehammer blow" for a cause that you think is important. Try to use the full range of media available to you: pictures, words, music, etc. If possible, implement your campaign in your classroom or school, and assess its impact.

### Teachers:

*Do you have activities or exercises to suggest for this play? We are always looking for new ideas to inspire students (and teachers). Send your suggestions to [info@ShakespeareNJ.org](mailto:info@ShakespeareNJ.org) and we will share them with other teachers, and maybe even include them in future study guides.*

*The activities on this page can each fulfill multiple Language Arts Literacy and Visual/Performing Arts standards. See p. 10 for a guide to New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards.*



**Test Your Understanding**

- Who wrote *A Christmas Carol*?
  - Neil Bartlett
  - William Shakespeare
  - H.G. Wells
  - Charles Dickens
- In what era does the story of *A Christmas Carol* take place?
  - Victorian
  - Present
  - Elizabethan
  - Jacobean
- Who is Fred in relation to Scrooge?
  - his son
  - his nephew
  - his employee
  - his grandson
- Jacob Marley was as dead:
  - “as a coffin-nail.”
  - “as a door-nail.”
  - “as a dormouse.”
  - “as a humbug.”
- How is Christmas portrayed by Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*?
  - as a solemn Christian religious holiday
  - as a time to get lots of presents
  - as a time to experience family dysfunction
  - as a joyous time to spend feasting with family and friends
- What is Scrooge’s attitude toward Christmas at the beginning?
  - it’s a day wasted when work could have been done
  - it’s a wonderful holiday
  - it’s a chance to get some sleep
  - it’s the reason so many people in London are poor
- Which Ghost does not speak?
  - the Ghost of Christmas Past
  - the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come
  - the Ghost of Christmas Present
  - they all speak
- How does Jacob Marley’s ghost first appear to Scrooge?
  - in his door knocker
  - in his dinner plate
  - as a human phantom
  - as a disembodied voice
- What character flaws does Scrooge exhibit at the beginning of the story?
  - bad temper
  - greed
  - selfishness
  - all of the above
- Where does the Ghost of Christmas Past take Scrooge first?
  - to the Fezziwigs
  - to Belle
  - to his old school
  - to a ship on the sea
- What are the names of Mankind’s children, according to the Ghost of Christmas Present?
  - Apathy and Greed
  - Sadness and Sloth
  - Ignorance and Want
  - Indolence and War
- What words of Scrooge’s does the Ghost of Christmas Present repeat back to him?
  - “Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?”
  - “I wish to be left alone.”
  - “Bah! Humbug!”
  - “Show me no more!”
- How long does Scrooge’s transformation by the ghosts take?
  - three nights
  - one year
  - one night
  - twelve days
- What surprise does Fred receive on Christmas Day?
  - a new tie from his wife
  - a raise from his employer
  - a visit from three ghosts
  - a visit from his uncle
- Who receives the prize Christmas turkey?
  - Scrooge
  - the Cratchits
  - Fred
  - Belle

## Meeting Core Curriculum Standards

In 1996, the New Jersey State Board of Education adopted Core Curriculum Content Standards that set out to clearly define what every New Jersey student should know and be able to do at the end of his/her schooling. The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is committed to supporting teachers by ensuring that our educational programs are relevant to standards-based teaching and learning. Viewing a performance at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey and participating in the post-performance discussion can serve as a powerful springboard for discussion, writing, and other outlets for higher-order thinking. On this page, and on the discussion and activities page (**p.8**) you will find suggestions for ways to align your study of our production to each standard.

### LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY STANDARDS

As a theatre dedicated to the classics, we are continually engaged in exploring some of the world's greatest literature, and the relationship between the written text and performance. Our philosophy and practice follow the four underlying assumptions of the Language Arts Literacy CCCS: that "language is an *active process* for constructing meaning," that "language develops in a *social context*," that language ability increases as learners "engage in texts that are *rich in ideas and increasingly complex in language*," and that learners achieve mastery not by practicing isolated skills but by "*using and exploring language* in its many dimensions." In the practice of theatre, we merge all areas of the language arts, as the standards suggest, "in an integrated act of rehearsal, reflection, and learning." Using the visual and performing arts to motivate and enhance language arts learning is explicitly recommended by the CCCS, citing extensive research.

Below, you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to each of these standards.

**STANDARD 3.1:** All students will apply the knowledge of sounds, letters and words in written English to become independent and fluent readers, and will read a variety of materials and texts with fluency and comprehension.  
*Read a scene from the play as a class and use context clues to interpret new words and expand vocabulary (3.1.C/F); demonstrate understanding by performing a scene from the play (3.1.G); compare and contrast literary elements in the play with another text being studied (3.1.H)*

**STANDARD 3.2:** All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.  
*Write a new ending for the play in blank verse or in modern prose (3.2.D), write a critique of the play which will be workshopped and published in a classroom setting (3.2.A/B/D)*

**STANDARD 3.3:** All students will speak in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.  
*Participate in a post-show discussion (3.3.A/B), memorize and perform a monologue or scene from the play (3.3.D)*

**STANDARD 3.4:** All students will listen actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations.

*Select one speech or line from the play and compare how it was performed in the stage and film version (3.4.A/B)*

**STANDARD 3.5:** All students will access, view, evaluate and respond to print, nonprint, and electronic texts and resources.  
*Discuss how the play expresses cultural values of the playwright's time (3.5.A); compare and contrast the printed text with its staged version (3.5.B)*

### VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS STANDARDS

According to both No Child Left Behind and the New Jersey CCCS, the arts (including theatre) are a core subject and "experience with and knowledge of the arts is a vital part of a complete education." In the area of performing arts, performances, workshops and study guide exercises developed by The Shakespeare Theatre address all five state standards.

Below, you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to each of these standards.

**STANDARD 1.1:** All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in response to dance, music, theatre and visual art.  
*Discuss the use of metaphor in both the text and the design of the production; discuss how the play expresses cultural values of its period and/or of today*

**STANDARD 1.2:** All students will utilize those skills, media, methods, and technologies appropriate to each art form in the creation, performance, and presentation of dance, music, theatre and visual art.  
*Perform a monologue or scene from the play; participate in a classroom workshop that develops the physical and technical skills required to create and present theatre*

**STANDARD 1.3:** All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dance, music, theatre and visual art.  
*Participate in a post-show discussion of elements such as physicality and creating motivated action; discuss the relationship between playwright and production design*

**STANDARD 1.4:** All students will develop, apply and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.  
*Write a review of the production using domain-appropriate terminology; develop a class rubric for effective theatrical presentations; compare and contrast the play with work by other artists*

**STANDARD 1.5:** All students will understand and analyze the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.  
*Discuss the representation of social issues (class, political leadership, etc.) in the play; research how the historical period affected the writer's work; compare the play to work from other historical periods*



Costume sketch for Mrs. Fezziwig by designer Karen Ledger for The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's 2007 Main Stage production.

**Cover Artwork:**

*Christmas Eve* by Gustave Doré (1832-83); Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France/Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library; Nationality/copyright status: French/out of copyright.

**Sources for this study guide:**

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Scrooge confronts Ignorance and Want, an illustration by John Leech from the first edition of *A Christmas Carol*, 1843.

**Test Your Understanding Answer Key**

- 1. d    2. a    3. c    4. c    5. d    6. a
- 7. c    8. a    9. d    10. b    11. b    12. a
- 13. b    14. d    15. c

## About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

The acclaimed Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey (formerly called “New Jersey Shakespeare Festival”) is one of the leading Shakespeare theatres in the nation. Serving nearly 100,000 adults and children annually, it is New Jersey’s only professional theatre company dedicated to Shakespeare’s canon and other classic masterworks. Through its distinguished productions and education programs, the company strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for contemporary audiences. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the east coast, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey marks its 45th season in 2007.

In addition to producing and presenting classic theatre, the Theatre’s mission places an equal focus on education— both for young artists and audiences of all ages. The Theatre nurtures emerging new talent for the American stage and cultivates future audiences by providing extensive student outreach opportunities. Through our work, we endeavor to promote literacy, civilization, community, cultural awareness, the theatrical tradition, and a more enlightened view of the world in which we live and the people with whom we share it.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of 20 professional theatres in the state of New Jersey. The company’s dedication to the classics and commitment to excellence sets critical standards for the field. Nationwide, the Theatre has emerged as one of the most exciting “new” theatres under the leadership of Artistic Director Bonnie J. Monte since 1990. It is one of only a handful of Shakespeare Theatres on the east coast, and in recent years has drawn larger and larger audiences and unprecedented critical acclaim. The opening of the intimate, 308-seat F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre in 1998, provided the Theatre with a state-of-the-art venue with excellent sightlines, and increased access for patrons and artists with disabilities.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is a member of ArtPride, The Shakespeare Theatre Association of America, Theatre Communications Group, and is a founding member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

## Other Opportunities for Students... and Teachers

### **SHAKESPEARE LIVE! EDUCATIONAL TOURING COMPANY**

*Shakespeare LIVE!* is the educational touring company of The Shakespeare Theatre. This dynamic troupe of actors brings exceptional abridged productions of Shakespeare’s masterworks directly into the classroom. Workshops are also available in Stage Combat and Shakespeare in Performance.

### **JUNIOR AND SENIOR CORPS**

Young actors are given the opportunity to participate in the excitement of the Theatre’s summer season through this program, which offers classes, a final presentation, as well as behind-the-scenes and front-of-house experience. Geared for students in grades 6 through 12, admission to this program is through audition and/or interview.

### **SUMMER PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM**

For graduating high school seniors and for university students, the intensive Summer Professional Training Program offers acting apprenticeships and professional internships, providing academic training and hands-on experience in acting, technical, artistic and arts management areas. For a full brochure of the opportunities available, please contact the Education Department.

### **SHAKEFEST: SUMMER SHAKESPEARE INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS**

Designed for elementary and secondary teachers of Shakespeare, *ShakeFest* is an weeklong intensive filled with myriad practical ways to conquer “ShakesFear” and excite students about the Bard. In hands-on sessions, experienced teaching artists model active and exciting performance-oriented techniques to get students on their feet and “speaking the speech.”

### **SHAKESPERIENCE: NJ STUDENT SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL**

This annual festival, developed in partnership with the Folger Shakespeare Library and Rider University, gives middle and high school classes the opportunity to spend a day at the Theatre experiencing Shakespeare together as both actors and audience. The *Shakespeare: NJ* Festival celebrates the power of performance as a teaching tool on a statewide scale.

Funding for the 2007 Student Matinee Series is provided, in part, by a grant from Target.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is an independent, professional theatre located on the Drew University campus.

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