

theatre:
CALGARY

Stafford Arima, Artistic Director

PLAY GUIDE



NOVEMBER 28 - DECEMBER 31, 2025

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome educators!

Theatre Calgary's 2025-2026 Play Guides are intended to support your students' experience at Theatre Calgary this season. We encourage you to use some or all of these materials to provide context for your students before, during, and after their visit to Theatre Calgary. While not mandatory for students to enjoy the production, opportunities to connect art to personal life can deepen understanding and appreciation.

With that in mind, each guide provides you and your students with a range of contextual material. You will find background information on the play and playwright; social, linguistic, and historical context; expectations for the theatre; activities for you to lead in the classroom; and reflection questions to guide discussions. You'll find activities that connect to current events, are interdisciplinary, can be tied into your curriculum, and can be facilitated for various lengths of time.

Pages marked with a ★ can be photocopied and distributed to students.

We hope that you and your students enjoy your experience at Theatre Calgary this year!

ABOUT THE PLAY

SUMMARY.

This adaptation of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* begins with a musician and a magic lantern (see pg. 12!) that projects an animated scene. The audience is taken through the bustling streets of 1843 London on Christmas Eve, until they reach the offices of Scrooge & Marley.

Scrooge is working late in his office with his clerk, Bob Cratchit, when two charity workers arrive seeking a donation to help the poor and less fortunate. Scrooge refuses, though he reluctantly agrees to let Cratchit spend Christmas Day with his family, as long as he comes in early the next day. But he refuses an invitation to celebrate the season with his nephew, Fred.

Later that night, the ghost of Jacob Marley, his deceased business partner, appears to Scrooge at his home. He informs him that he will be visited by three spirits who will help him to avoid the terrible fate that Marley is suffering—wandering the earth bound by the “chains he forged in life.”

The Spirit of Christmas Past is the first to appear. They take Scrooge to see the places and people of his past. Scrooge is reminded of the deep affection he once felt for his sister, Fred's late mother. He visits his first employer, Mr. Fezziwig, and remembers the joy and happiness that the Fezziwigs spread at Christmas time. He also sees his former fiancé, Belle, who broke up with him because of his single-minded pursuit of wealth.

The Spirit of Christmas Present visits Scrooge next and takes him to see the celebrations happening around town. They visit the Cratchit home, where Scrooge first learns that Bob's son, Tiny Tim, is very ill. When they visit Scrooge's nephew, Fred, and his wife, Emily, they are gathered with their friends for Christmas Eve dinner playing a game where they're making fun of Ebenezer.

STORY WHOOSH

is an interactive storytelling technique that enables any kind of plot to come alive, even without participants having prior knowledge.

- The teacher facilitates the shared storytelling by bringing individuals and groups in and out of the action.
- As soon as characters, objects, places, or events in the story (i.e., servants, bad thoughts, ships, etc.) are mentioned, the first students step into the circle and make a shape or pose that represents what has been narrated.
- At any time the teacher can say “Whoosh!,” and students quickly return to their ‘places’ in a circle.
- Continue the story around the group, so that different students get to play various characters and everyone gets a chance to try several roles, regardless of gender.

The Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come shows Scrooge three businessmen ruthlessly discussing the recent death of an unnamed associate. He is shown his belongings being sold off after his death. Afterwards, he is then taken to the Cratchits' home, where the family is mourning Tiny Tim's death. The spirit takes Scrooge to a graveyard and points to a tombstone that turns out to bear his own name. He begs for the spirit's pity and promises to keep the spirit of Christmas in his heart year-round.

Scrooge wakes up in his bedroom on Christmas Day a changed man—full of joy. He heads outside, happily greeting everyone he meets. He encounters the same two charity workers who had visited his office the night before and apologizes for his negative attitude with a donation to their cause.

He visits Fred's family and friends who have gathered for Christmas Day and asks for forgiveness. His next stop is the Cratchit home to give Bob a raise and a turkey for their feast. Fred brings his family and friends to the Cratchit home to celebrate, and the community gathers around.

The musician reappears and recounts Scrooge's change of heart. The play finishes with the famous line, "God bless us, every one!" exclaimed by Tiny Tim.

THOUGHTS FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

"When I began [the process of adapting *A Christmas Carol*], I started thinking a lot about how polarized we are right now in our political views, and how they have divided us...This story brings people together to talk about humanity, giving back, and caring for each other, without an agenda," Geoffrey Simon Brown told Heather Oliver in a 2019 interview. He worked closely with the creative team to develop the first draft of this adaptation of Charles Dickens's classic story. He was able to collaborate with Stafford Arima, Theatre Calgary's Artistic Director and the director of *A Christmas Carol*, to hone the script.

Brown's adaptation updates the dialogue, while staying true to the original story. "I was interested in digging into the characters more, especially some of the female characters. The play itself is set in 1843, but our palate as a society has changed, so I made changes that would connect more with a modern audience."

"We are all connected. This is the message here. It's important to see outside of us and ours alone, and see the larger community and world that we all belong to."

Excerpted from Theatre Calgary's 2019 *A Christmas Carol Play Guide*

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN.



SCROOGE

EBENEZER SCROOGE
a miser

BOY SCROOGE
a student

YOUNG SCROOGE
an apprentice

THE CRATCHITS

BOB CRATCHIT
Scrooge's clerk

ALICE CRATCHIT
Bob's wife

**MARTHA, PETER,
BELINDA, MARGRET,
BEN, & TINY TIM**
Cratchit children

FRED'S FAMILY

FRED
Scrooge's nephew

EMILY
Fred's wife

**PENNY, ROSE,
& TOPPER**
Fred & Emily's friends

TOWNSPEOPLE

ETHEL & BETHEL
charity workers

THOMAS
a child who sings carols

SAM
a beggar

**ARNAULT, WALTON,
& KOCH**
bankers

OLD JOE
a merchant

MRS. CHARNOCK
a cleaning person

MRS. DILBER
a laundress

CAROLINE & SIMON
a couple indebted to Scrooge

PICKLE
a girl who buys a turkey

GHOSTS & SPIRITS

JACOB MARLEY
the ghost of Scrooge's late partner

**GHOST OF
CHRISTMAS PAST**

**GHOST OF
CHRISTMAS PRESENT**

**GHOST OF CHRISTMAS
YET TO COME**

FIDDLER
a musician who steps in and out of
the world of the play

PEOPLE FROM SCROOGE'S PAST

FAN
Scrooge's sister

MR. CREAKLE
Scrooge's school teacher

**MOLLY, TOMMY,
STEERFORTH, JANE,
GEORGE, & SALLY**
Scrooge's classmates

MR. FEZZIWIG
Scrooge's first employer

GERTIE FEZZIWIG
Mr. Fezziwig's wife

DICK WILKINS
Scrooge's colleague & friend

BELLE
Scrooge's fiancé & Dick's wife

JILL
Dick & Belle's daughter



HISTORICAL + SOCIAL CONTEXT.



5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT A CHRISTMAS CAROL

- 1** Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in six weeks.
- 2** The first performance of *A Christmas Carol* was a reading of the novella by Charles Dickens himself.
- 3** Shortly after the book was published in 1843, there was a rise of charitable giving across Britain.
- 4** Dickens “practiced what he preached,” donating financially to causes like the abolition of U.S. slavery and the education of young people living in poverty.
- 5** *A Christmas Carol* has since been adapted into well over 100 scripts and films.

CAN YOU RECOGNIZE THESE FAMOUS SCROOGES?



1. Michael Caine, *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992); 2. Bill Murray, *Scrooged* (1988); 3. Jim Carrey, *A Christmas Carol* (2009); 4. Alistair Sim, *A Christmas Carol* (1951); 5. Scrooge McDuck, *Mickey's Christmas Carol* (1983); 6. Patrick Stewart, *A Christmas Carol* (1999)

DISABILITY REPRESENTATION IN *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

The character of Tiny Tim is a symbol of hope in the story of *A Christmas Carol*, used to show that people, and society, can change for the better. It is essential for modern theatre-goers to be mindful that this symbolism doesn't veer into the cliché of the “sweet innocent” with a “heart of gold.”¹

Whether the character of Tim, written in the Victorian era when the understanding and language surrounding disabilities was extremely limited, had a condition caused by malnourishment (like rickets) or was born with a disability, current stagings of *A Christmas Carol* aim to be thoughtful to avoid representing the Cratchit family as its own cliché—the caregivers who sacrifice their personal needs in order to care for their disabled child, lacking in any other character depth.

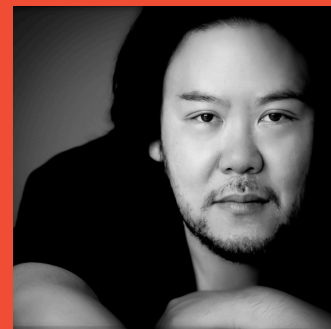
In reality, those with disabilities occupy a range of life experiences that cannot be captured in a single story. We encourage you to consider the following when talking about characters with disabilities in plays, movies, or on television:

- Consider person-first language (a person with a disability, rather than a person defined by disability)—Here's a great [cheat sheet](#).
- Not all disabilities are visible. Be kind, patient, and inclusive.
- Be careful not to assume that you know what someone needs. It's okay to ask.
- Language around disability is personal and always changing.

For more information on disability representation, we encourage you to check out some of [these resources](#).

¹“The ‘Tiny Tim Effect’: Stereotypes of Disability in Popular Stories” by Adrianna Simmons

AN INTERVIEW WITH *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* DIRECTOR, STAFFORD ARIMA



After directing a three-person version of *A Christmas Carol*, how have you approached this year's full cast production differently?

STAFFORD. [This script] actually made its debut in 2019. The author, Geoffrey Simon Brown, has gone back and made some small adjustments. And doing the adaptation for the three-person version gave him more insight into, "Do we really need all of that?" So in many ways, the production that will grace the stage this year is a brand new production.

What feels particularly relevant in *A Christmas Carol* this year?

STAFFORD. We definitely know enough Scrooges in the world that are following a rhetoric that we are constantly hoping will change. This piece celebrates transformation and celebrates the possibility that you can go from a "Scroogie," miserly kind of curmudgeon to dancing in the streets and twirling around under a Christmas tree. It's the hope of transformation and metamorphosis in a person's character.

What makes *A Christmas Carol* more than just a Christmas story?

STAFFORD. In the same way that you don't have to be Jewish or know what a *shtetl* is to understand [the musical], *Fiddler on the Roof*, you still understand the themes of tradition and family—a father going, "Oh, my goodness, my daughters are growing up, and they're becoming modern women." So to me, I think of *Christmas Carol*, in a very similar vein. Taking place around the 25th of December is specific to Dickens's story, but the actual theme of the piece resonates with, I think, a much more inclusive and diverse audience.

WANT TO GIVE BACK TO CALGARY?

You don't need money or expertise to contribute to your community. Below are some groups that accept youth volunteers. There's something for everyone!

- Apply for a **Calgary Youth Foundation** grant to bring a community betterment project to life
- Join the **Mayor's Youth Council** to advocate for your needs in city policy
- Volunteer at the **Calgary Public Library** as a buddy or class assistant
- Donate your time to the **Calgary Food Bank**
- Commit to caring for cats or dogs at **AARCS**
- Get a group together to pack **Kits for a Cause** with the Women's Centre of Calgary
- Help build houses or get Calgarians set up in places of their own with **Habitat for Humanity**

For more ideas, check out [Youth Central](#). And, of course, all of these organizations and many more accept financial donations of all sizes.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATRE



An open mind.

Let the performance surprise you! Stay open to what can happen. Look for moments of theatrical magic (how did they change that costume so quickly?) and unexpected dialogue.

Assigned seats.

Every seat in the theatre offers a unique perspective on the action. Appreciate what you can see from your seat that someone else might not.

Live actors.

The performers on stage can see you, hear you, and feel your energy. And actors love student audiences! Laugh when something is funny! Gasp when you're surprised! Applaud when you're impressed! The actors thrive on audience reactions.

A break from reality.

Theatre-makers ask the audience to "suspend their disbelief." If someone on stage says the red ribbon is blood, then it is! If an actor takes flight, then imagine you can't see the strings. This is what the actors ask of the audience. Embrace the magic of theatre.

Questions.

Listen carefully to the story being told. If you have a question, keep your voice to a whisper so it doesn't disturb others. (See the call out on Q + As to help you form great questions for the team behind the show.) Let yourself be challenged by the content. What new ideas or perspectives are you hearing?

Disconnection.

Put your phone away and immerse yourself in the technology of the theatre. The sounds and lights from your device are distracting to the actors, fellow audience members, and you! Plus, the law says that photos and videos aren't allowed, anyway.

PREPARING Q'S FOR A Q + A

While you watch the show, consider how the creative team (see pg. 9) brings the story to life on stage for you.

Consider questions about the process:

- How did the lighting / set / costume / sound designer...
- What made the director choose to...
- How did the playwright decide to...

Ask questions about the story:

- Why did [character] make the decision to...
- Can you explain how...
- Why didn't _____ happen?

Learn more about each job:

- Why did you decide to become a...
- What do I need to do to become a...
- What has been your favorite...



THEATRE TEAM TALKBACK

Theatre is a 'team sport,' and it's not the actors alone who bring a production to life. After your show, you'll have a chance to ask questions of the creative team. Here are some of the folks you might expect to speak with:

The Playwright writes the script, sometimes from an original idea, and sometimes adapted from a book or story—decides what the characters say and, often, gives the designers guidelines on how the play should look.

The Director creates the vision for the production, how it will look on stage, and works closely with the actors, costume, set, and lighting designers to make sure everyone tells the same story.

The Actors use their bodies and voices to bring the playwright's words and the director's ideas to life on the stage.

The Designers imagine and create the lights, scenery, props, costumes, and sound that will compliment and tell the playwright's story in a way that matches the director's vision.

The Stage Manager assists the director during rehearsals by taking detailed notes and making sure the actors and designers understand these ideas. They run the show during each performance by making sure the actors' entrances and exits and the lights and sound all run smoothly.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

IF YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES...

How Many Beans?

Social and economic status is an important theme in the story of A Christmas Carol. This activity gives students an opportunity to consider the choice-making involved in how they spend their money.

Focus Question. How do you distribute financial resources based on your values and priorities?

Objective. Students will begin to understand personal finances and budgeting and be able to articulate their choices.

Procedure.

1 Distribute the following number of beans, grains of rice, jelly beans, or other small manipulatives to each student (or pair of students):

$\frac{1}{3}$ of the class gets 10 beans | $\frac{1}{3}$ of the class gets 20 beans | $\frac{1}{3}$ of the class gets 30 beans

2 Give each student (or pair) a copy of the [Bean Budget planner](#).

Please note: This is an editable document so that you can adapt the language / layout to meet your classroom needs (i.e., emerging readers, etc.)

3 Students should use their bean allotment to determine how they would use their budget.

4 Discussion about this process is essential.

- What did you prioritize? Why did you make those choices?
- How did you feel knowing that some people had more or fewer beans than you did?
- What would you do differently if you had fewer beans? What if you had more?
- What does this look like in *real* life?

EXTENSION: | Reflect on what you would do if you could share your beans. What percentage would you distribute, and how would you determine who would get them?

| How would you plan a holiday celebration using this budget?

IF YOU HAVE 30 MINUTES...

Ghost of Your Past

Ebenezer Scrooge begins to see his life differently when he is asked to 'visit' moments in his own life and look at them from outside of himself. This exercise asks students to look at a moment from their own lives from the outside: What might they do differently if they had the chance?

Focus Question. If you could relive a moment from your past, what would it look like?

Objective. Students will be able to write and draw a story from their past that taught them a valuable lesson.

Procedure.

- 1 Direct students to reflect on a moment in their lives that has impacted them. Provide examples from your own life as a model. As this prompt will be challenging for many, give them time to journal about this moment, while you circulate to help prompt students who may be stumped. Consider the following starters to help:
 - What changed in your life when a sibling was born? When a parent remarried? When you moved to a new place?
 - How did you feel after you started a new school? Got in a huge fight with a friend? Made a mistake you got in trouble for?
 - Who has had a significant influence in your life—a family member? A teacher? A coach?
- 2 Give students the option to write a narrative, [dialogue](#), or create a [detailed storyboard](#) or graphic depiction of this moment. Provide them the following reminders to help them add detail:
 - Who were the other people present that had an impact in this moment? (*characters*)
 - Where and when were you in time? How old were you? What time of year was it? (*setting*)
 - What were the events of that day? What happened before? After? (*plot*)
 - What did you learn from this moment? How did it change you? (*theme/message*)
- 3 Encourage students to reflect on any part of that moment they would do differently and include those details in their story.
- 4 Provide space and time for sharing—first in trusted partners, then, if time, as a larger group.
- 5 Reflect: *What surprised you in responding to this prompt? Was this a moment you'd thought of recently? What would be different today if you had a chance to make that change?*

IF YOU HAVE AN HOUR...

Poverty Awareness Zines

The modern connections to A Christmas Carol's theme of poverty is indisputable, even here in Calgary. Inspired by *Enough for All*, this lesson asks students to create a zine that raises awareness around what poverty looks like in Calgary.

Focus Question. What does it mean to live in poverty in Calgary today?

Objective. Students will be able to design and illustrate a zine that shares their perspective on poverty in Calgary in order to raise awareness within their community.

Procedure.

- 1 Review this [slide deck](#) with current statistics and definitions of poverty in Calgary, Alberta, and Canada.

* Note: Sources for this content come from the City of Calgary, Statistics Canada, and Enough for All

- 2 Give students time to reflect on this.
 - **JOT:** What do you feel when you hear this information? Is this new to you?
 - **TURN TO A PARTNER:** What role can you play in making a change?
 - **SHARE:** What would you want other people in your community to know about poverty in Calgary?

- 3 Introduce the concept of a zine as a social justice tool for sharing information on a specific topic in a personal way.

- 4 Guide students through the process of folding the page to make their zine (directions on [Slide 11](#)). For more details on the Enough for All Zine Project, [visit this site](#).

- 5 While students work on their zine, consider playing the [Let's Talk Poverty podcast](#) from Enough for All with Indigenous Elder Wanda First Rider.

- 6 Allow time at the end for students to share their zines at their tables or with a partner.



EXTENSION: Set up a gallery walk where students can view and respond to one another's zines using sticky notes.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

A theatrical experience is not complete without reflection. What is the audience talking about when they leave the theatre? Here are some questions to pose to your students following their experience with *A Christmas Carol* at Theatre Calgary.

- 1 Why do you think *A Christmas Carol* is performed by theatre companies around North America year after year?
- 2 What aspects of our society do you recognize in the Victorian Era? How have we progressed? In what ways have we remained the same?
- 3 Which of the three spirits do you think had the greatest influence over Scrooge's change in attitude?
- 4 Have you ever encountered a "Scrooge?" What did you say to them? What do you wish you had said?
- 5 Could this story be set at a time other than Christmas? What would change about Scrooge's revelations?

THEATRE CALGARY PLAY GUIDES DEVELOPED BY

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