

**CHARLES DICKENS**



**CHRISTMAS**

**CAROL**



ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY

**GEOFFREY SIMON BROWN**

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# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome educators!

Theatre Calgary's 2023-2024 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, BELINDA,  
BEN, MARGRET,  
PETER, & 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 just 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** The first ever adaptation was a six-minute film called *Marley's Ghost (1901)*.
- 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)

## FOOD SCARCITY & CHRONIC ILLNESS IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

The Industrial Revolution in England brought a division of social classes and disparity in wealth that was presented in much of Charles Dickens's writing, including *A Christmas Carol*. Between Corn Laws that limited product imports and the Potato Famine affecting crops, food was restricted into major cities, creating a greater need among the lower classes.

Misconceptions about causes of disease have led to this time period being known for malnutrition and outbreaks of highly contagious illnesses, rampant in poor, crowded neighborhoods. While cholera, tuberculosis, and scarlet fever were fatal and common, it was rickets that was commonly associated with malnutrition. This bone disease was caused by a lack of vitamin D, calcium, and phosphate.

It's possible that Tiny Tim, the famed character in *A Christmas Carol*, has a chronic illness like rickets that may have physical symptoms like skeletal abnormalities, but it can also be 'invisible,' manifesting as brittle bones and chronic pain. Today, many physical and neurological conditions and illnesses that limit or challenge a person's movement or activities are also 'invisible,' leading to additional struggles with communication and accessibility.

[Click here](#) for a book list featuring other young characters with chronic illnesses— visible and invisible.

## 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:*

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**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?

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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...

## Whose Story is This?

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A traditional adaptation of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, like the one Theatre Calgary is presenting this season, is told from Scrooge's perspective. But, as you can see on pg. 5 of this guide, there are many other characters in this story. This activity allows students to explore the context of this story from another character's perspective.

**Focus Question.** What would *A Christmas Carol* look like through the eyes of another character?

**Objective.** Students will be able to examine themes from *A Christmas Carol* by exploring the perspective of another character.

### Procedure.

- 1 Provide students with the Character List from pg. 5 of this guide, and ask them to choose one whose perspective might be different than Ebenezer Scrooge's.
- 2 Students can respond to this prompt with a **journal or diary entry** in the voice of this character or as a **monologue** (a speech intended to be spoken aloud).  
Consider the following factors when determining a character's voice:
  - What is their age, awareness of the world around them, and use of vocabulary?
  - What social class do they hail from? What type of education have they had?
  - What is their relationship to Scrooge or other characters in the world of *A Christmas Carol*? How would this affect their feelings?
- 3 Start by having students choose a scene or moment from the story, and then determine how their chosen character might feel in that moment.
- 4 Once students have had time to draft their journal entry or monologue, they should pair up with a partner (who has the same character or a different one!) and share what they've created.
- 5 As a class, hear a few examples and discuss the following:
  - What insight do we gain into the story by hearing the voices of other characters?
  - How might the story change if these characters' perspectives were included?
  - What interpretations did you hear that differ from your own?

# IF YOU HAVE AN HOUR...

## A Magic Lantern

Theatre Calgary's production of *A Christmas Carol* begins with projections from a magic lantern, also referred to as an optical lantern. This simple projection device, an early form of cinema, can be replicated in your own classroom to help students share their own stories.

**Focus Question.** How do science and art come together in a magic lantern?

**Objective.** Students will be able to recreate the effect of the magic lantern to use the science of light and shadow to show their own images.

### Procedure.

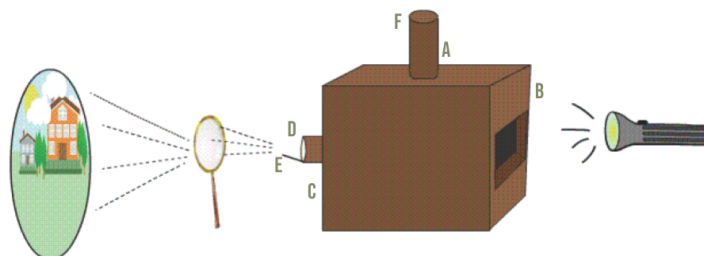
- 1 Prepare in advance the materials you will need to build a magic lantern and its slides. Group students in teams. For younger grades, you'll need to recruit some adult volunteers:

#### For the lantern

- A cardboard box, at least 6"x6"x8"
- A flashlight
- A paper towel or toilet paper roll
- 2 pieces of cardboard: one about 2"x11" and the other about 2"x2"
- Tape
- Scissors/Box cutters (if you have adult helpers)
- Magnifying glass (optional)

#### For the slides

- Heavy duty plastic freezer bags OR sheets of acetate (transparency sheets—*What a great opportunity to use this outdated office supply!*)
- Permanent markers (Note: Washable magic markers will smear on plastic and acetate)
- Light cardboard for slide frames, each 7 x7", optional
- Tape



- 2 To make the lantern box,

- A. Cut a round hole in the top about the size of a toilet paper roll.
- B. At one end of the box, cut a hole big enough to reach inside with a flashlight in your hand.
- C. At the opposite end, cut a 3" hole for the lens tube. To make the lens tube, cut the large piece of cardboard, roll it into a tube 3" in diameter, and tape it into the 3" hole.
- D. Tape the 2" square piece of flat cardboard along the bottom of the lens in the front, with a flat part sticking out of it by 1" to hold the slide.
- E. Fold up the front edge of this flat slide holder to make a slot for the slide to sit on.
- F. Make the chimney by taping a paper towel roll or toilet paper roll in the top hole.

- 3 Prompt students to consider a tradition that's important to them. It could be a family tradition or one with their chosen family (i.e., a sports ritual, holiday celebration, weekend routine, etc.)
- 4 Have them draw out a draft version of their image on paper, first. They could choose to trace a photograph, too!
- 5 To create the slides,
  - Cut out pieces of acetate or freezer bag about 3 ¼" x 4" to make the slides.
  - Draw your pictures on the slides with permanent markers. (The best pictures have solid, dark colors—not just outlines.)
- 6 Turn out the lights, illuminate the flashlight, and hold each slide on the ledge at the end (See E above)
- 7 As each student presents their slide, open the floor for the following storytelling options. Try one or all!:
  - Ask for observations about what students are seeing in the image
  - Have the presenter provide a caption for the image
  - Ask the class to offer a caption for the image
  - Allow the presenter to describe the tradition depicted in the story

**MODIFICATIONS** | Students can draw their slide and present them on a traditional overhead projector or on a single magic lantern constructed by the teachers.

| Have students create a three frame story on three separate slides: beginning, middle, and end



# 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.

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- 1 What would this story look like if it were set in the present day?
- 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 If you were to be visited by a spirit from the past, what would they show you? What about the future?
- 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**

Aliza Sarian

[www.alizasarian.com](http://www.alizasarian.com)



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