DISCOVERY GUIDE

KeyBank PRESENTS

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Based on the novel by CHARLES DICKENS
Adapted & Directed by MARK CUDDY
Music & Lyrics by GREGG COFFIN

Geva Theatre Center P.L.A.Y. 2021

E SL F E D E R A L C R E D I T U N I O N

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Photo by Ron Heerkens, Jr.
In an effort to help your students enter into the world of A Christmas Carol, we have divided this Discovery Guide into three separate sections – one targeted for elementary students, one for middle school, and one for high school. We encourage you to take the following pages and use them in whichever ways best suit your lesson plans or connect with the culture of your classroom. There is, of course, no need to adhere to only the sections designated for your grade level(s) – this guide is full of thoughts and questions about Charles Dickens and his motivations for writing A Christmas Carol, about the magic of the holidays (and its observations the world over), and the limitless ways to tell this story.

DEAR EDUCATORS,

Most people would hardly consider Charles Dickens to be a radical, but following the publication of A Christmas Carol in December 1843, the label quickly became attached to the author’s name. Upon learning of the depths of poverty experienced by many of his fellow Londoners – particularly children – Dickens embarked on a mission to deliver, as he wrote in a letter to a friend, a “sledgehammer blow” that would have “twenty thousand times the force” of the government report that first inspired his reaction. Dickens was especially incensed by wealthy industrialists, whom he described as “sleek, slobbering, bow-paunched, overdied, apoplectic, snorting cattle,” whose massive fortunes, he believed, were made at the expense of those suffering the most.

While Dicken’s initial impulse was to write a pamphlet titled “An Appeal to the People of England, on Behalf of the Poor Man’s Child,” he soon realized that the scope of his project was much larger then that of a slim publication and decided to write a novel detailing the crushing poverty occurring around him. When his long-time publishers refused to offer their full support for what they considered to be a book that would be off-putting to readers, Dickens’ belief in his undertaking was so great that he assumed the monetary risk and self-published A Christmas Carol.

Much of the reluctance of his publishers stemmed from Dickens’ insistence on giving detailed descriptions of poverty, drawn primarily from his research into the subject as well as his own experiences of financial insecurity as a youth. A Christmas Carol’s mention of Martha Cratchit working long days as a factory seamstress, or Tiny Tim’s deteriorating medical condition – and his family’s inability to afford the proper care – were common concerns for many readers who saw versions of their own lives portrayed in Dickens’ tale.

Dickens also used A Christmas Carol as a means by which to comment on the uncharitable view of the poor held by many of England’s well-off residents. Ebenezer Scrooge’s inquiries into the efficiency of the country’s prisons and poorhouses, for example, reflected the thoughts of whose who considered the impoverished to be lazy and unwilling to work. They believed that the indignities of scarcity would be sufficient motivation for the poor to improve their situation on their own.

And while the play is important from a historical standpoint, as it offers us a glimpse of life for Londoners from various classes, once we look past the antiquated styles of dress and unfamiliar references, A Christmas Carol is remarkably contemporary. The struggles of the Cratchit family, and others like them, are not too far removed from those experienced by families throughout the world today – they could be our relatives and neighbors. It is this sense of constant relevance that has kept Dickens’ story permanently in-print since its original run.

This year in particular, we urge you to view A Christmas Carol through the lens of our individual and collective experiences of the pandemic and social justice. Whether your students are encountering A Christmas Carol for the first time, or are returning to it, we’re confident they will find themselves reflected in the story – just like Dickens’ early audiences – and will be touched by his call to treat all of our “fellow passengers to the grave” with kindness, grace, and dignity.

Sincerely,
The Geva Education Department

“It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk in fellowship among mankind.” – Jacob Marley
DEAR EDUCATOR

This section is comprised of ideas for activities that your elementary-aged students can complete in preparation for A Christmas Carol. Included is a synopsis, visual activities, discussion questions, and writing prompts.

SYNOPSIS

Bah, humbug! A Christmas Carol is the story of a grouchy old man who only cares about money. He doesn’t like Christmas because he doesn’t believe that he can profit from it. He is visited by four ghosts – his old business partner Jacob Marley, The Ghost of Christmas Past, The Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. They show him his life from the past, present, and future. They help him realize how unhappy he is, and help him see the unhappiness that he causes in the people around him. He learns that love is more important than money, and he changes his life to live with love in his heart and to share that love with everyone around him. In the end, he has a happy Christmas, and gives others the gift of a Merry Christmas as well.

VISUAL ACTIVITIES

What does Scrooge do with his money? Draw a picture of things you think he might buy or do.

What do you think Scrooge could do to be nicer to the people around him? Draw how you would help him become a good person.

Draw yourself standing next to Tiny Tim. Don’t forget how tiny he is!

Be the Costume Designer!

Christmas Past is described as an angelic child in the script. Draw what you imagine Christmas Past would look like.

Christmas Present is first seen sitting on a throne. What do you think that means for the rest of his appearance? Use your imagination to draw him.

Christmas Yet to Come is described as a shadowy figure. Use your imagination to draw what it would look like.

Jacob Marley is the very first ghost to visit Scrooge. He is Scrooge’s former business partner. The script describes him as scary. Draw what you imagine he looks like.

Charles Dickens’ Childhood

When Charles Dickens was a boy, his family was very poor. His father’s debt was more than the family could afford, and they were sent to jail. Charles had to drop out of school in order to work at a factory, so that he could earn money to pay off his family’s debt. He spent his days pasting labels onto jars in a shoe factory and earned very little money. His family eventually came home and Charles was able to go back to school, but he never forgot how awful it was to work in a factory. Ever since, Charles worked hard to help the poor. One of the ways he did that was to write stories that made people really think about how the poor were treated. An example of one of these stories is A Christmas Carol.

Pretend that Charles Dickens is your friend. Write a letter to him to tell him how you feel about his life.

“A Mercy! Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?” – Scrooge
HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

Did you know that *A Christmas Carol* was important in popularizing many of the holiday traditions celebrated today? It was written at a time when people thought the day should just be about religious observations and not include any kinds of celebrations. Charles Dickens, though, believed that the holiday season was a good time of year to think about the ways that we can all be nicer and kinder to one another, and show our appreciation for our families and friends. He thought that by writing about his ideas in *A Christmas Carol* it might change how people celebrated the holiday. His story led to the creation of many Christmas traditions in England and America, including singing Christmas carols and sending cards. Holiday songs actually existed long before *A Christmas Carol* was written. They started in ancient Rome when people grew tired of dark winter nights and began to look for ways to have fun with their friends and neighbors. They would often hold parties with lots of food, and plenty of singing and dancing – and many people have been celebrating winter holidays in the same way ever since. The sending of cards at the holidays also goes back to a time when people would often send a long letter to loved ones to let them know about all the things they had done during the previous year. In 1843 – the same year that Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* – a government worker named Henry Cole found himself so busy that he didn’t have time to write his yearly letter. Instead, he decided to have 1,000 cards printed up to send out to those he cared about as a way to let them know that he was thinking of them. He sold the cards that he didn’t use, and the idea eventually became very popular across the world.

Think about how you celebrate winter holidays and then act out, write about, or draw some of your holiday traditions. Do any of these traditions include helping other people? If so, how does it make you feel to help others? If you exchange gifts during the holidays, what do you like most about giving someone a present? What are other ways that you can show people that you are thinking of them during the holidays?

ADAPTATIONS

Have you ever seen or read *A Christmas Carol* before? There are many different versions of this classic story. Some examples of these movies are: *Mickey’s Christmas Carol* (1983); *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992); and *A Sesame Street Christmas Carol* (2006). If you have watched any of these, you have seen an adaptation of the original *A Christmas Carol*. The play you are going to see is a recent adaptation, made especially for Geva!

“Merry Christmas, Bob, to you and your family.” – Fred
Voices lift in unison with songs to say, 'Welcome now the blessings of this Christmas Day.' – Carolers

WRITING PROMPTS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU GO

* What do you know about A Christmas Carol?
* Have you seen A Christmas Carol before? Have you ever seen it at Geva?
* Have you ever seen a play or musical?
* What do you know about London?

* What do you think the set of A Christmas Carol will look like? What will the costumes look like?
* What are your favorite holiday traditions? Why are they your favorites? Do you know where the traditions came from?
* What do you think Scrooge will be like when you see him on stage for the first time?
* Do you know any ghost stories? Do ghosts always have to be scary?

AFTER THE SHOW

* Why do you think A Christmas Carol has remained such a popular story throughout the years?
* What was your favorite part of the show?
* Who was your favorite character? Why?
* What did you think of the four ghosts?
* Why did the ghosts visit Scrooge?
* Why did Jacob Marley have chains on him?

* When the Ghost of Christmas Present showed Scrooge the dinner party, do you think the words he overheard hurt his feelings? How would you feel in that situation?
* How was Tiny Tim different from his brothers and sisters? What did Scrooge do to help Tiny Tim?
* Why did Scrooge buy a turkey for the Cratchit family at the end of the play?
* Scrooge has been compared to the Grinch. How are they similar?

* What lesson does Scrooge learn in this story?
* How do you think Scrooge will carry forth throughout the year the lessons he’s learned? Do you think he will help those less fortunate? Will he show gratitude for those who have helped him?

HOLIDAY MUSIC

Music often plays a very important part in holiday traditions throughout the world, and the holiday at the heart of A Christmas Carol is no exception. This production’s Composer and Lyricist, Gregg Coffin, decided to base the music on many different Christmas carols. A composer is a person who creates music, and a lyricist is a person who writes the words that are sung. Coffin believes that Christmas carols help us to experience a sense of joy, hope, and brightness during the holiday season. He explains that, “the holidays are a time when music really comes to the foreground in everybody’s life. People who don’t usually sing at any other time of the year will find themselves humming holiday tunes. For a composer and musician, it’s a wonderful time of year and a wonderful collection of songs to enjoy.”

Notice in A Christmas Carol that every character has a connection to the play’s music. How does the music affect the characters? How do the words to the songs impact them? Do they make them happy? Sad? Quiet? Watch for Scrooge’s relationship with music throughout the play and how it changes. Why do you think that is? Pay attention to how he reacts to songs at the beginning of the show, and how he responds at the end.

Think about the holiday songs that you enjoy. What do you like most about them? Are they fun to sing with a group and share with others? Do they tell a story? Do they make you feel happy? Which songs in A Christmas Carol did you respond to the most? Why do you think you liked them? If you were to create a holiday song, what do you think you would write about? What would it sound like? Do you know any other songs or music from other winter holidays around the world?

“Voices lift in unison with songs to say, ‘Welcome now the blessings of this Christmas Day.’” – Carolers
DEAR EDUCATOR

This section of our Discovery Guide explores relevant content, research ideas, writing prompts, discussion questions, and individual and group activities to help connect your middle school students with key themes in Geva’s production of *A Christmas Carol*. Individual selections or the unit as a whole may be distributed to your students for investigation and discovery, according to your classroom schedule and curriculum needs. Please consider that we also eagerly welcome letters and projects from students sent to the theatre for the cast, crew, and artistic team, and we are happy to share them as they arrive.

SYNOPSIS

Set in England in the 1800s, *A Christmas Carol* tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, a selfish and bitter businessman who hates Christmas and cares more about money than anything or anyone else. On Christmas Eve, as he tries to fall asleep, he is visited by the ghost of his former business partner Jacob Marley, who died seven years ago to the day. Marley warns Scrooge that if he doesn’t change his unkind and miserly ways, he will end up like himself – a tormented soul bound by chains and agony. To assist Scrooge in becoming a better person, Marley sends three more spirits to visit Scrooge during the night. The Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge both joyful and heartbreaking memories from his past. The Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge both moments of happiness with his family and visions of the home life of his clerk, Bob Cratchit, and his family. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come haunts Scrooge with the miserable life and death that await him – and others – if he does not change. Scrooge awakes from his journey in the morning as a changed person who vows to keep these lessons in his heart forevermore.

DEVELOPING A CHARACTER

As actors prepare to play characters, they analyze what their character’s goals and tactics are. They do this to tell the story as truthfully as possible, so that the play feels very real both to the actors and to the audience. Choose three characters from the box below. For each character, write their name, their objective, a tactic they use to try to achieve their objective, and if they succeed or fail in reaching their objective by the end of the play.

**Example:**
**Character:** Jacob Marley
**Objective:** To warn Scrooge about his future and prevent him from sharing his fate.
**Tactic:** Scare Scrooge with his own haunting image, and send three spirits to show him his own past and present, and what his future will be like if he does not change.
**Outcome:** Succeed. Scrooge changes his ways and becomes a better person.

Bob Cratchit / Mrs. Cratchit / Ghost of Christmas Past / Fan / Mr. Fezziwig / Ghost of Christmas Present / Tiny Tim / Martha Cratchit / Belle / Fred / Young Ebenezer / Scrooge / Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

**Character:**________________________
**Objective:**________________________
**Tactic:**________________________
**Outcome:**________________________

**Character:**________________________
**Objective:**________________________
**Tactic:**________________________
**Outcome:**________________________

**Character:**________________________
**Objective:**________________________
**Tactic:**________________________
**Outcome:**________________________

DESIGNING A GHOST

It is the decision of a play’s director and costume designer to choose what the characters in the play look like onstage. While they may choose to present the ghosts in a way that is similar to what Charles Dickens envisioned in his novel, they may also choose to portray them completely differently.

The worksheet for this activity is on page 11. [Click here to jump to the worksheet.]

“I am here tonight to warn you that you have yet a chance of escaping my fate.” – Jacob Marley
“Tim and I almost joined a group of buskers outside of St. Paul’s and danced for coins all night!” – Bob Cratchit

LIFE INSPIRES ART

Charles Dickens was born in England and shared a home with his father (a Navy pay-office clerk), mother, and seven siblings. Living with his large family as a young boy, Dickens happily referred to this time in his life as “a happy dream.” Charles spent his childhood reading and acting since he suffered from seizures and had to spend much of his time indoors. But these joyful years ended when Charles’ father, unable to repay money he owed, was sent to debtor’s prison. At the age of 12, Charles was sent to live alone and work in a factory to make money to support his family. His sister Fanny was sent away to school, and his mother and the rest of his brothers and sisters were sent to live in the prison with his father. Charles experienced the pains of child labor and the terrible way the poor people of London lived. When the family was released from debtor’s prison Charles attended school and became a clerk at a legal firm and, later, a reporter for the courts, where he learned about the British legal system. Dickens became somewhat of a celebrity in England, famous for his novels and goodwill, and advocating for proper care and compassion for London’s most impoverished and unrepresented citizens – especially children, the sick, and the poor.

Activities: For many artists (composers, playwrights, painters, authors, choreographers, etc.), the art they create is inspired by their own life story.

* In the paragraph above, use a highlighter to mark any similarities you notice between Dickens’ own life and the story or characters in *A Christmas Carol*.
* Research an artist you like. Were any of their artistic creations inspired by their own life story?
* If you were to create a piece of art (visual, performance, written, etc.), would you use your own past as a springboard? Is there a specific event in your life you would use for inspiration?

LIFE IN LONDON FOR THE LOWER CLASS

While Dickens was alive, it is believed that over 100,000 children in London never attended a school of any kind. Children from well-off families often attended school or were educated by a governess until they reached the appropriate age for boarding school. However the poor children who were lucky enough to go to school may have attended “ragged schools” – or schools for poor children. In many instances, the ragged schools not only provided basic education, but also minimal food, clothing, and shelter for their students. The buildings were often run-down, over-crowded, full of disease, and covered in soot from the growing industrialization of the country.

Many children also worked in factories, iron and coal mines, shipyards, construction businesses, and as matchbox makers, stitchers, chimney sweeps, and scrap metal scavengers. Lower or working-class families could not survive without the wages earned by each family member, including children, who sometimes worked 16 hours per day and were paid much less than adults were paid.

Families who could not afford housing or find jobs usually ended up living in workhouses – huge buildings that served as a temporary home to the destitute of London. Families in workhouses were usually separated by gender and age, and they didn’t get to see each other very often. The workhouse was a humiliating and degrading place to live, and people only stayed there as a very last resort. They were specifically designed to make living as miserable as possible so, in theory, people would work harder to avoid having to go there. Not unlike the ragged schools, workhouses were often dilapidated and unsanitary. Many Victorians died from illness and disease, which were very common because of unclean drinking water, improper waste disposal, and a lack of good nutrition.

Questions: Charles Dickens thought it was important to help the poor of London. Is there a group of people in Rochester that might need someone to help stand up for them, their rights, or their needs? What can be done to help them? Is there anything you can do to help them?

Activity: Comparing life in Victorian London to life in Rochester in 2021 can help us explore how life for the lower and working classes have changed over time.

WRITE A MONOLOGUE!

Writing a monologue in the voice of a particular character can be a fun opportunity to discover more about the character’s life and imagine details about them that the playwright may not have included in the play.

The worksheet for this activity is on pages 12-13.  
Click here to jump to the worksheet.
A Traditional Victorian Christmas

What individuals who celebrate Christmas may think of as a “traditional Christmas” did not really exist before Dickens’ time. Many ideas of what Christmas commonly encompasses – Santa Claus, Christmas cards, Christmas carols, presents, wreaths, a Christmas dinner, and time with family for singing and playing games - were not established or popularized until the 1800s. Christmas’ emphasis on doing good and helping people in need came, in large part, directly from Charles Dickens. The centerpiece of the Victorian Christmas celebration was the Christmas dinner feast. Because so many people had so little money and no gifts to give, a grand dinner of delicious food was the gift everyone looked forward to enjoying and sharing the most. Of course, the contents of a family’s Christmas dinner all depended on what they could afford, but the traditional Victorian Christmas dinner usually consisted of a Christmas bird or some other meat (goose, chicken, turkey, roast beef, a boar’s head, ham, or wild game), dressing (stuffing), potatoes, sweet or savory pies (such as cranberry or mince meat), oranges, pears, apples or other fruit, a hot punch, and a traditional plum pudding. (Visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4o1wYwkv9g&t=773s to see a 15-minute video about how plum pudding was made, and its significance at Christmas time for all social classes in 18th century England and North America.)

Plum Pudding: A traditional English plum pudding was similar to a cake, and tasted sweet (and a little savory too). It was often made of some combination of porridge, suet (beef or mutton fat), breadcrumbs, raisins, prunes, currents, citron (lemon or orange peel), nuts, rum or brandy, sugar, butter, eggs, flour, milk, and spices such as nutmeg or ginger, and was cooked in a copper kettle over the fire. The making of a plum pudding was a very exciting family event. On a day called Stir-Up Sunday, several weeks before Christmas, each family member would take a turn at stirring the pudding clockwise with a wooden spoon for good luck. A ring (symbolizing marriage), a coin (symbolizing wealth), and a thimble (symbolizing a happy single life) were sometimes added to the pudding’s batter as well. Between Stir-Up Sunday and Christmas Day, the pudding was stored in a hanging bag. On Christmas it would be taken down, boiled in beef broth for a few hours, decorated with a spring of holly, doused in brandy, lit on fire for presentation, and then served by the head of the household with a blessing for all who would eat it.

Discussion Questions: Is plum pudding what you expected it would be like? Would you try a traditional Victorian plum pudding if it were offered to you? Why or why not? Why do you think plum pudding was such an important Christmas ritual for Victorian families? Can you think of another dish that families in another culture might make together (like cookies in America, tamales in Guatemala, hallacas in Venezuela, stollen in Germany, or bigos in Poland)?

* Is there a meal or special dish that you and your family enjoy during a particular holiday? What foods or drinks are included in that meal?
* Why do you eat the dish you described above? Does it have a special meaning or significance? Is it a tradition?
* Do you eat any of the same foods during your holiday meal that the Cratchits or other Victorian Londoners might have eaten during their Christmas dinner? If so, which foods do you and your family still eat today?
* Are there any dishes included in the Victorian Christmas feast that you would like to try if you had the opportunity? Are there any you would not try?
* Does your family celebrate any winter holidays? If so, which holiday? What are your family traditions during this holiday?

WINTER HOLIDAYS AROUND THE WORLD

A Christmas Carol is set in the context of the Christian tradition of Christmas, but there are many more winter holidays that are celebrated by other faiths and cultures in America and around the world.

The worksheet for this activity is on page 15.

Click here to jump to the worksheet.

Writing Prompts

* What does it mean to have the “holiday spirit”? How is it similar among different cultures and faiths? How are the various winter holidays unique from one another?
* What are the most important things in your life? What brings true happiness?
* What makes someone a good person?
* If you could change one thing from your past, what would it be, and why?
* Why did Charles Dickens write A Christmas Carol?
* What do you think Dickens wanted you to take away from the story?

“Every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips should be boiled in his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!” – Scrooge
DEAR EDUCATOR

The following pages were designed with your high school students in mind. The focus for the first two pages of this section is on the “why” behind what is, arguably, Dickens’ most famous work. We hope that you will see these pages as launching points not just for your students’ explorations of *A Christmas Carol* as a work of fiction but, also, as a path to consider the ways that Dickens’ deeply-held concerns are still with us – be they child labor, extreme poverty, or poor working conditions (and the ways in which those topics intersect). The final page of this section invites your students to consider the myriad of design choices that are presented in our production of *A Christmas Carol*. The way that a story is told, of course, is just as important as the “why”. And when the “how” is combined with the “why,” that’s when the magic happens.

SYNOPSIS

*A Christmas Carol* begins on Christmas Eve in 1843, exactly seven years after the death of Ebenezer Scrooge's business partner, Jacob Marley. Scrooge hates Christmas and has no place in his life for kindness, compassion, or charity. He refuses his nephew Fred's dinner invitation, and rudely turns away two gentlemen who seek a donation to provide a Christmas dinner for the poor. His only “Christmas gift” is allowing his overworked and underpaid clerk, Bob Cratchit, Christmas Day off with pay – which he only does in order to keep up with social convention.

Returning home that evening, Scrooge is visited by Marley’s ghost. Marley warns him to change his ways, lest Scrooge suffer the same miserable afterlife as Marley. He alerts Scrooge that he will be visited by three ghosts who will accompany him to various locations with the hope of helping him to experience a transformation.

The first of the spirits, the Ghost of Christmas Past, takes Scrooge to Christmas scenes of his youth, hoping to remind him of a time when he was more innocent. The second spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Present, takes Scrooge to several current Christmas settings – most notably the home of his impoverished clerk Bob Cratchit, introducing his youngest son, Tiny Tim, who is seriously ill but cannot receive treatment due to Scrooge’s unwillingness to pay Cratchit a decent wage. The third spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, shows Scrooge dire visions of the future, including Tiny Tim’s death, if he does not learn and act upon what he has witnessed.

Scrooge awakens on Christmas morning with joy and love in his heart and decides to spend the day with his nephew’s family after anonymously sending a prize turkey to the Cratchit home for Christmas dinner. Scrooge has become a different person overnight and now treats his fellow citizens with kindness, generosity, and compassion, gaining a reputation as a person who knows “how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge.”

ABOUT CHARLES DICKENS

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, the second of eight children. Dickens was an eager student with a deep love of reading and writing. Unfortunately, Dickens' father incurred debts that he was unable to repay, and when Charles was twelve years old, his father was sent to debtor's prison while Dickens was sent to a factory to help support his family. After his father received an inheritance left by a deceased relative and repaid the debt, Dickens was able to leave the factory and return to school and his family. Charles left school at age 15 to become a law clerk and then a reporter. He began writing stories in 1836 under a pseudonym. The stories, called *The Pickwick Papers*, were published in monthly installments. He became the editor of the magazine that published his next novel, *Oliver Twist* - also in monthly installments. Dickens went on to write 13 more novels before his death in 1870. Many of his works deal with social issues and reforms of the day, especially poverty and education, which was certainly the influence of his time as a child laborer.

“*I am not the man I was! This is not the man I will be!“* – Scrooge
LONDON IN THE 1800S

During the 1800s, London was one of the most advanced cities in the world. Britain was in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, and its capital was reaping the financial benefits of such growth. The city, however, was also suffering the consequences of these rapid advances. The price of this explosive growth was untold squalor throughout the city.

Imagine nineteenth century London: The homes of the burgeoning upper and middle classes in extremely close proximity to areas of unbelievable poverty and filth. Street sweepers fought a losing battle in an attempt to keep the streets clean of manure, the result of thousands of horse-drawn carriages. The city’s many chimney pots belched coal smoke, resulting in soot settling everywhere. In many parts of the city, raw sewage and human waste flowed into gutters that eventually emptied into the Thames River, a water source used by the entire population.

WHY DICKENS WROTE A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Charles Dickens was particularly concerned with the health, treatment, and well-being of children, especially those affected by the results of England’s rapid industrialization. By the mid-nineteenth century, for example, it is believed that well over a hundred-thousand children in London had never attended a school of any kind. Those children who did not attend school worked. Many worked in factories and mines. Some children began work at the age of three, and in some of the more dangerous workplaces – such as iron or coal mines – the life expectancy generally didn’t exceed the mid-twenties. Children were often the preferred workforce in these industries because they could be paid less than adults, often no strength was required to operate a machine and, as these machines were completely new, there was no need for experienced adult laborers. It was not uncommon in the earlier part of nineteenth-century England for children to work 16 hour days (the same as adults).

One of the ways that Dickens sought to draw attention to the plight of the poor was through the use of his own celebrity. Dickens’ works – novels, serials, and essays alike – were extremely popular. They were accessible, easily affordable, and often spoke directly to the experiences of his readers. As a result, Dickens attracted crowds wherever he went and often gave well-attended readings of his writings. It was Dickens’ belief that he should use this fame to highlight the needs of those less fortunate Londoners, be it more sanitary living and working conditions, clean water, or better equipped schools.

Discussion Question: Consider the use of a celebrity’s fame as a way to draw attention to a particular social issue. Has a celebrity’s involvement introduced you to an issue or social cause? Was it effective? Did this introduction lead you to explore the issue in greater detail? What actions did you take as a result of this exploration?

Research China (or any other country or region undergoing modernization) and compare their experiences to nineteenth-century London. What is similar? What is different? And what can be done to manage the impacts (both positive and negative) of these changes?

“IT IS MORE THAN DESIRABLE THAT WE SHOULD MAKE SOME SLIGHT PROVISION FOR THE POOR AND DESTITUTE, WHO SUFFER GREATLY AT THE PRESENT TIME.” – Subscription Gentleman
Think about the evolution of a story as it becomes a play. There is a script: words on a page put there by a playwright. There are actors who have memorized those words in order to share that story with us. But once that story finds its way to the stage, it takes a group of designers to bring it to life, and to help us experience the sensation of living in the world of the play. We asked several of the designers of *A Christmas Carol* to consider their hopes for your experience with the story.

### Lindsay Jones, Sound Designer
“*This production has so much music that is beautiful and lush, full of spirit. With sound, I can bring the darkness; the moments of tension and danger that contrast with that.*”

### Gregg Coffin, Composer and Lyricist
“I hope my music adds to the peaks and the valleys of Scrooge's journey. The ‘songs’ in this production are specifically written to be songs for a play with music. That means none of them develop character or move plot along. All the sung moments elaborate on textual ideas that have already been presented.”

### Adam Koch, Scenic Designer
“For this production, we wanted to strip away the heavy adornment and the usual formal decorative baggage that can come with a telling of this traditional Dickensian story. One of the thrills and challenges of designing for this production is the opportunity to make a seemingly simple space magically transform into all the haunting, joyous, scary, splendid, freezing, cozy, and infinite worlds within *A Christmas Carol*.”

### Dan Scully, Video Designer
“When looking at collections of Victorian engravings of London, I discovered each technique of engraving imparts its own emotional charge. I’m trying to illuminate the different kinds of experiences each ghost brings.”

### Devon Painter, Costume Designer
“Scrooge probably thinks he and his life are basically alright, and Marley is the first warning saying: No, you’re not at all alright. Marley needs to be truly scary, gruesome enough to be truly gross and uncomfortable.”

### Activities
In small groups, create your own design team with one person handling each of the specific design elements. Don’t forget to include a Lighting Designer. Paul Hackenmueller, the Lighting Designer for *A Christmas Carol* wasn’t quoted on this page, but his work is extremely important to your understanding and enjoyment of the show. Consider all of the ways in which the different design elements will collaborate with one another, and how they can enhance the telling of the story.

Select one design element and track how many different approaches that designer uses over the course of the play. Why do you think they made those specific design choices? What different choices would you have made if you were the designer?

“*Do you believe in me or not?*” – Jacob Marley
In his novel *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens describes the Ghost of Christmas Past as ungendered - neither a boy nor a girl - but a young child with long white hair, a white gown, and an ethereal glow. The Ghost of Christmas Present, we are told, is a jolly and giant man with dark brown curly hair and a green, fur-lined robe with a wreath atop of his head. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come never speaks and is shrouded in a black, hooded cloak - except for one long, skeletal hand sticking out from beneath the cloak, with a beckoning finger.

However, it is the decision of a play’s Director and Costume Designer to choose what characters look like in their production. While they may choose to present these three ghosts, and the ghost of Jacob Marley, in a way that is similar to what Charles Dickens envisioned in his novel, they may also choose to portray them completely differently.

In Geva’s production of *A Christmas Carol*, Costume Designer Devon Painter and Mark Cuddy, the show’s Director and Adapter, choose to stay mostly faithful to Dickens descriptions of the Ghost of Christmas Past and the Ghost of Christmas Present when they considered how these two characters would look in our production. There are slight changes that give these characters each a unique quality, but they mostly align with Dickens description of them.

**Activity:** Using the novel, read Charles Dickens descriptions of the ghosts of Christmas Past and Christmas Present in *A Christmas Carol*, then consider the pictures of the same two characters, below, in Geva’s stage adaptation. What are the similarities and what are the differences? Why do you think these choices were made? Would you have done anything differently? Is this how you imagined they would look?

(Above: The Ghost of Christmas Past in Geva’s *A Christmas Carol*, 2011-2012)  
(Right: The Ghost of Christmas Present in Geva’s *A Christmas Carol*, 2011-2012)  
* Photos courtesy of Ken Huth/Huth Photo
Write a Monologue!

Writing a monologue in the voice of a particular character can be a fun opportunity to discover more about the character’s life and imagine details about him or her that the playwright may not have included in the play.

Bob Cratchit / Mrs. Cratchit / Ghost of Christmas Past / Fan / Mr. Fezziwig / Ghost of Christmas Present / Tiny Tim / Martha Cratchit / Belinda Cratchit / Peter Cratchit / Belle / Fred / Young Ebenezer / Scrooge/ Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

Step 1: Pick one character from the list above to focus on.

Step 2: Brainstorm ideas for your monologue by thinking about events that person would experience in their life. You may choose an event that happens in the play, or you can make up an event that character would be likely to experience, based on what you already know about them.

Step 3: Consider how your character would respond to that event, what they think or feel about it, and why. This step is very important because what your character thinks and feels about the event will make up the body of your monologue.

Step 4: Decide what your character’s objective or goal is in saying this monologue and pinpoint who exactly your character is talking to as they deliver this monologue.

Step 5: Write a short monologue from your character’s point of view and in their voice about the event.

Tips to remember:
- Use first person (“I” and “we”)
- Use present tense - your character is using their monologue to share a story with someone and achieve their goal right now, even if the event already happened
- Write with purpose - remember your character’s objective (what they are trying to achieve in the monologue) and the audience (who they are talking to)
- Use specific details to focus on the event you selected, rather than using general statements to tell a character’s life story

Example:
- **Character:** Belle
- **Event:** Accepting an invitation to a springtime tea with Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig
- **Objective:** To explain to them why she has chosen not to marry Ebenezer and to help them understand why things didn’t work out between them
- **Audience:** Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig
Character: ____________________________________________________________

Event: ______________________________________________________________

Objective: __________________________________________________________

Audience: __________________________________________________________

Monologue: __________________________________________________________

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Then & Now: Comparing and Contrasting

Use the chart below, the “Life in London for the Lower Class” article on page 6 of the *A Christmas Carol* Discovery Guide, and your own research about work, education, home life, health, and social justice initiatives in Victorian London to compare and contrast life then to life in Rochester in 2021.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Then (Victorian London)</th>
<th>Now (Rochester, 2021)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Home Life</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Justice</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Now, analyze the information you collected to determine how life for the lower and working class has changed over time. Answer the following questions:

- Do any of the problems that existed in Victorian London still exist in Rochester today? If so, which ones?
- Do you think issues in the categories above have gotten better or worse?
- Do we have new problems that Victorian Londoners did not have to worry about? If so, what are they? What can be done about them?
Winter Holidays Around the World

_A Christmas Carol_ is set in the context of the Christian tradition of Christmas, but there are many more winter holidays that are celebrated by other faiths and cultures around the world.

In small groups, pairs, or individually, research any winter holiday in another country and prepare a presentation for your class about that holiday. If desired, this project could also include making a traditional holiday food from that celebration, singing or playing a traditional song or selection of music from that holiday, drawing an outfit rendering or finding and showcasing photos of a garment worn during that holiday, or even preparing and including the class in a ritual or tradition that is a significant part of the celebration of your selected holiday.

Use this page to help guide your research and presentation.

The winter holiday I/we have chosen is: _____________________________________________

The date, dates, or time of year this holiday occurs is: __________________________________

Where in the world, or among what group of people, is this holiday celebrated? ______________
______________________________________________________________________________

Why is this holiday celebrated? Is it a religious celebration, a cultural celebration, or both? ______________
______________________________________________________________________________

What foods or drinks, if any, are associated with the tradition of this holiday? ______________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What other rituals or traditions are significant to this holiday? Consider clothing, colors, music, gifts or goods exchanges, ceremonies, activities, items used or needed in the celebration, mood (solemn, lively, etc), and community (is this holiday celebrated individually, in families, or as a larger community? Is there a community-building or charitable component to it?). What is interesting or significant about this holiday? ______________
______________________________________________________________________________
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The person to have their head cast (for the creation of the real mask used in Geva’s production, this person is the actual actor who plays Jacob Marley, but for the making of the test mask used in these photographs, one of our costume shop staff members volunteered) is prepared for the casting with a well-secured bald cap or shower cap to fully cover and protect their hair, along with a sheet or tarp to keep their skin and clothes clean, and Vaseline to smear on their face to help moisturize the skin, as well as on the eyebrows, eyelashes, and any other facial hair so the alginate used in the casting, once dried, can dislodge easily from hair follicles.

The person creating the mold and the person having their head cast should also take a moment to establish hand signals or some other form of non-verbal communication so when the person’s mouth is covered with alginate and plaster, they can communicate that they are safe and comfortable, or signal that something needs adjustment.

Slow-set alginate (a structural compound in the form of powder derived from seaweed cells; this is the same compound that a dentist or orthodontist uses if a dental casting or impression is made of your teeth) is mixed in a 1:1 ratio with water to form a thick, gel-like composition. Although the alginate is slow-set, it still dries very quickly and must be applied rapidly and immediately after mixing. The alginate is applied thickly and in all grooves of the face—including the eyelids and corners of the eyes, indentations of the lips, and the skin between the nostrils (being very careful to make sure the nostrils remain clear). Before it sets, a layer of cheesecloth (a loose-woven, gauze-like cotton cloth used commonly in making cheese and for cooking), or some other form of fuzzy cotton, is imbedded in the alginate. When set, the alginate becomes slick and nothing will stick to it; adding cheesecloth atop the alginate so it imbeds itself before it sets gives the plaster bandages used in the next phase of casting something to stick to.

The plaster bandages are purchased as a roll, and then cut into strips of varying lengths and heights. When the strips are dipped in water to moisten them, rung
out, and applied to the cheesecloth overlay of the alginate, the plaster bandages provide form and a sturdy structure. Around 3-4 layers of bandages are applied to ensure a solid cast.

With a blow-dryer set to warm, the plaster is set until dry. The alginate can feel damp and cold, so moderate warmth from the blow dryer is not harmful or too hot for the person being cast. It can take up to 30 minutes for the plaster to set, so it’s important to keep in contact with the person inside the mold to make sure they’re comfortable, breathing freely, and aren’t experiencing panic or claustrophobia.

When it’s time for the cast to come off, the person inside can simply scrunch their nose and wiggle their face around; the preparatory application of Vaseline to the face and facial hair, along with the slimy quality of the alginate, make it easy for the person to detach from the alginate layer. The person doing the casting then uses snippers to create a rear incision in both the alginate and plaster layers from the nape of the neck to the crown so that the person inside can remove the mask from their head.

The next step is to create the positive plaster cast. To do this, take the head mold that was created in the first stage of the project and fill in any holes or incisions - such as the nostril holes and the seam that was cut up the back of the mold so the person could free their head - with mortician’s wax or Roma Plastilina (an oil-based modeling clay), and then tape over the filled-in areas with duct tape. The goal is to close up any holes, cuts, or other areas that would allow a substance to leak through, and to create a bowl (with the top of the skull being the bottom of the bowl, and the neck opening being the top). The head mold is then placed opening-up in a box with rags, foam, newspaper, or other materials surrounding it so that it cannot move within its container.

Ultracal 30 (a low-dust gypsum cement plaster) is then mixed with water in a roughly 1:2/3 ratio (it should be the consistency of gravy and cling to a utensil, but also be pourable). In a steady stream, the cement mixture is poured into the head mold until it’s flush with the top. Gently tap or rock the box containing the mold to release the air bubbles (which can create holes or make the final form structurally unsound) until no more bubbles rise to the surface. The mask will take 12-24 hours to cure, depending on temperature and humidity. The cement heats up as it cures, so if the mask is solid and cool to the touch, it’s ready to be de-molded. This is done by cutting the plaster and alginate up the back seam again so that the cement face can be extracted.

The craftsperson then uses Roma Plastilina clay to sculpt additional features onto the plaster mold. In our case, we need the mask to resemble a corpse who has been dead
for seven years, so adding a protruding brow, enlarged nose, and build up around the cheekbones will help give a gaunt look and make the eye sockets appear sunken in.

A sheet of Thermoplastic (a generic term for a plastic that comes in bead or sheet form and, when heated, becomes moldable like a clay, but cools back to a solid) is heated up with a heat gun or steam from an iron until it reaches the consistency of clay. The thermoplastic is then stretched across the plaster face and pressed into all the grooves of the facial features to create the mask the actor will actually wear. Thermoplastic sets fairly quickly and, when hardened, is able to easily detach from the plaster face. If additional shaping is needed, it can be heated again and re-molded.

The thermoplastic face mask, after removal from the cement form used to shape it, is then manipulated with paint, tape, hair, clay, etc. to give it the texture, color, and look of a corpse, with skin peeling back from the bone and a detachable jaw. A painted mesh hood with a zipper up the back (for easy on and off access for the actor) snaps onto both the jaw and the mask. This mesh hood is the piece that comes in direct contact with the actor’s skin during performances, so this piece - unlike the rest of the mask - is washable. The actor playing Jacob Marley is taken to the eye doctor and fit with white contact lenses that make his eyes appear to be just eye sockets with no eyes or pupils. When the mask is paired with the contact lenses, the rest of Marley’s costume, the chains and trunk, and sound effects that manipulate the actor’s voice, the result is truly fresh from the crypt.
Check out this short video which provides an introduction to Geva’s production of A Christmas Carol, featuring two actors from the show. View it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzFkUCfzRbg

See the next page for “Eminent Victorians,” an article about several influential people of color who lived in London during Charles Dickens’ lifetime.

Mary Seacole (1805-1881) was a Jamaican nurse and self-taught healer who traveled extensively, tending to the sick in Central America and notably in Crimea where she treated wounded soldiers at her own expense. She spent the last years of her life in London, where she was championed by members of the aristocracy and the royal family, and where in 1857 she wrote The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands, the first autobiography written by a Black woman in Britain.

George Augustus Polgreen Bridgetower (1778-1860) was a virtuoso violist who was born in Poland to a German mother and a West Indian father who claimed to be an African prince. By age 10, George had moved to London and was performing as a violin soloist at the Drury Lane Theatre. As a child, he gave many concerts in England and France, and came under the protection of the Prince Regent who oversaw his musical education. On a trip to Vienna in 1803, he met Ludwig van Beethoven, who was so impressed with his talent that he dedicated his Violin Sonata No. 9, now known as the Kreutzer Sonata, to him.

Mary Prince (1788-?) was born into slavery in Bermuda. In 1828, she was brought to London by her owner. She ran away and found support with the Anti-Slavery Society, but was unable to obtain legal freedom. In 1829, she dictated her life story, The History of Mary Prince, which was published in 1831 and which caused a sensation. It was the first slave narrative told from a woman’s point of view, and it was highly influential on public opinion and eventually on the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Mary Prince was still living in London in 1833, but after that, little is known about her life. No images exist of Mary Prince, but this plaque was erected in her honor in London in 2007.
Africanus Horton (1835-1883) was born in British Sierra Leone. His father was a liberated enslaved person of Igbo ancestry. In 1855, he received a British War Office scholarship to study medicine in England, which he did at King's College, London, later finishing his degree in Edinburgh. While in London, he adopted the name "Africanus" to honor his African heritage. After graduating, he became one of the first Africans to be commissioned as an officer in the British Army, in which he held the post of Staff Assistant Surgeon. He was also the author of several books and essays in which he advocated for African self-government.

Fanny Eaton (1835-1924) was an artist's model favored by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood for whom she was a muse between the years 1859-1867. Simeon Solomon pencil-sketched this portrait of her in 1860. Born in Jamaica in 1835, she and her mother arrived in Britain some time in the 1840s and by 1851 were living in London. She married and had ten children, supporting them by domestic work supplemented by her income from posing for artists such as John Everett Millais, Gabriel Dante Rossetti, and many of their colleagues. Rossetti, in a letter to Ford Madox Brown, praised Eaton's "very fine head and figure." Although until recently her effect on the style of Pre-Raphaelite paintings has been overshadowed by the effect of their white models, she has received more recognition in recent years. For example, in 2020, Prima magazine named her as one of six Black British women who had "changed the world."

Bill Richmond (1763-1829) was born into slavery on Staten Island, New York, but during the War of Independence, British commander Earl Percy witnessed Richmond's fighting skills in bar-room brawls, and arranged for Richmond's freedom, his emigration to England, and his education in cabinetry and boxing. Richmond became a professional boxer after moving to London, and after retirement created a boxing academy which several prominent boxers attended, as well as some amateur ones like poet Lord Byron. Richmond was recognized as the outstanding fighter of his day.
UPCOMING PRODUCTIONS WITH STUDENT MATINEES:

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or copy and paste this URL: https://gevatheatre.org/student-matinees/

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