

RESOURCE GUIDE

Resource Guide

:: Introduction ::

Since Charles Dickens *A Christmas Carol* first appeared in 1843, it has become so popular that is hard to imagine Christmas without it. The story immediately inspired theatrical adaptations (the first just a few months after its publication), and since then has been produced at theaters around the world in hundreds of different forms, and inspired films, cartoons and television programs.

A Christmas Carol is a McCarter tradition. It has been produced every year since 1980, when then-artistic director Nagle Jackson brought his adaptation to McCarter. The current adaptation by David Thompson was first produced at McCarter in 1991 under the direction of Scott Ellis. In 2000 Thompson revised his adaptation and a new production was created under the direction of Michael Unger. Thompson's adaptation remains faithful to much of the language and all of the spirit of Dickens's story, and in our production, we strive to capture both the injustice and struggles of Victorian life, and the joy and redemption of the holiday season.

:: Plot Summary::



Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim (Sol Eytinge, 1867)

It is Christmas Eve in 19th century London, and Ebenezer Scrooge, the miserly owner of a successful counting house, spends yet another Christmas season trying to kill the joyful spirit of those around him. This day before Christmas finds Scrooge ignoring well-wishers, specifically his nephew, and allowing his underpaid clerk, Bob Cratchit, only one day off for Christmas. As Cratchit heads home to his humble family celebration, Scrooge reminds him to be in extra early the day after Christmas.

At home, Scrooge receives a visit from the ghost of his long-dead business partner, Jacob Marley. The ghost explains to Scrooge that Marley is condemned to restless wandering because he did nothing good for mankind while he was alive. He tells Scrooge that there is still time to save himself from the same fate.



Marley's Ghost (J. B. Beale, 1908)

In an attempt to convince Scrooge to change while there is still time, Marley sends the spirits of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Yet to Come. The spirits take Scrooge on three journeys: The Ghost of Christmas Past forces Scrooge to visit neglected friends, his now-

dead sister and his young sweetheart, who left him when his greed became overpowering. The Ghost of Christmas Present then takes him to two homes—Cratchit's (where the youngest child, Tiny Tim, is ill) and Scrooge's nephew's.



Ignorance and Want
(John Leech, 1843)

In each home, Christmas is celebrated joyfully, and the families even raise their glasses in toasts to Scrooge himself. Finally, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come leads Scrooge to the sorrowful scene following Tiny Tim's death, and eventually to his own terrifying and lonely grave.

These chilling scenes of the future finally spur Scrooge to action. He awakes a new man and begins to celebrate life. Overflowing with his new-found Christmas cheer, Scrooge showers the Cratchits with gifts and his nephew with long-overdue love, proving that even he can change.

::Character Profiles::

Ebenezer Scrooge

is an old miser driven by greed. He has no sympathy for the poor, does nothing to help his fellow-man, and thinks it is foolish to celebrate Christmas.

"If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with a "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled in his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart."

Bob Cratchit

is Scrooge's overworked, underpaid clerk. Money is tight for him and his family, but they find strength in their love for each other and hope for the future.

"It's not that often I get to spend the entire day with my beautiful family. With all of you together... I have everything in the world a man could possibly ask for."

Jacob Marley

Scrooge and **Jacob Marley** were business partners, until Marley's death seven years ago. Marley never turned from his selfish, miserly ways, and his spirit now wanders the earth in chains as punishment.

"I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link. Yard by yard. Mark me! My spirit never walked beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole, and now weary journeys lie before me."

Nephew Fred

is a good-hearted, generous young man who refuses to let his Uncle Scrooge ruin his merry Christmas.

"I always think of Christmas as a good time – a kind, charitable, pleasant time. It is the only time I know of in the year when we open our hearts freely to one another."

Mr. Fezziwig

When Scrooge and Marley were young, they worked for **Mr. Fezziwig** as clerks. Fezziwig was a kind, generous man who held a wonderful Christmas party every year for his employees.

"If I die penniless, I will die happy. I will have done what I wanted to do. There's more to life than money."

Fan

Scrooge had little family as a child (his mother died giving birth to him, and his father was in a workhouse), but his older sister **Fan** loved him dearly.

"I had to see my baby brother for Christmas!"

Lily

and Fred are newly-weds. Lily is kind and welcoming, even to Scrooge!

"Under all that sourness I believe there's still a good man trying to get out."

Belle

was a beautiful, kind, but poor young girl. She and Scrooge were engaged before he learned to care only for money.

"Little by little I have seen all joy in your life replaced by your passion for money."

Mrs. Cratchit

takes care of her four children, working hard to stretch Bob's small salary to pay for their needs. She resents Scrooge a little for his stinginess.

"No matter where you are... or how far apart we may all be... you'll make this pudding and remember all of us together at Christmas."

The Ghost of Christmas Past

conjures up scenes from Scrooge's past, reminding him that Christmas did mean something to him once. In the McCarter production, this ghost is played by children from the Youth Ensemble.

"I told you these were the shadows of the things that have been. That they are what they are, do not blame me!"

The Ghost of Christmas Present

Cheerful and lively, **The Ghost of Christmas Present** sprinkles the spirit of Christmas cheer on those who need it most.

"Every Christmas, another brother or sister tries to spread happiness and Christmas cheer. We are also charged with the task of removing the causes of human misery... which explains my little visit to you."

The Ghost of Christmas Future

is a silent, looming spirit who shows Scrooge the dismal things to come if he does not change. In McCarter's production, this ghost is portrayed by a large puppet.

Tiny Tim

is the youngest of the Cratchit children. Although he is crippled and physically weak, he has a big heart.

"God bless us, every one."

::Historical Context for Christmas Carol::

Understanding the Plight of Victorian England's Poor



"Stirring the Christmas Pudding"
from Harper's Weekly
Supplement, Dec. 1876 Library
of Congress, LC-USZ62-99490

The Clerk—a Short Job Description

Can you imagine spending your entire school day, plus all of your homework time, copying words from a textbook? Add a freezing room and one candle as your only source of light, and you have Bob Cratchit's working conditions—and he had a good job by Victorian standards! Since there were no printers or copiers in the 1800s, businesses hired clerks to copy documents all day by hand. Scrooge expected Bob to keep copying documents word by word for the entire workday—that's 8 to 10 hours per day, six days a week!

And how much did Bob make at this "good" job?

Scrooge paid Bob 15 shillings a week, just 5 shillings short of a pound, or 39 pounds a year. Experts disagree on today's dollar equivalent of the Victorian pound, but they consistently place the value between \$20 and \$200. That means that in the best-case scenario, Bob brought home just under \$200 a week, while in the worst-case scenario, Bob earned less than \$20 a week. Rent on a decent house would have been about 9 shillings a week, leaving

just 6 shillings to feed and clothe a family of six. A loaf of bread cost about a shilling. So things were very, very tight for the Cratchits!

What is a workhouse, anyway?

A workhouse was a building where the homeless, jobless and starving could go to live, work and eat. Even though homelessness was a very common problem in Victorian England, many rich people like Scrooge feared that the poor were just too lazy to work and would take advantage of tax-funded shelter and food. To ensure that their tax money did not "go to waste," the rich insisted that the government make the workhouses as miserable as possible.

Families were separated into large groups of men, women and children. Family members could not even see each other at meals, and certainly could not sleep near each other at night. Each person had to wear a drab gray uniform. The work was mandatory and menial—a common workhouse task was to spend all day breaking larger stones into smaller pieces. The "free" food was no more than one meager portion of gruel per day. On the rare occasion that a person had free time, he or she was forbidden to play cards or any other games, and could rarely visit family in other parts of the workhouse.

Why does Scrooge suggest prison as a resource for the poor?

In Victorian England, if a man could not pay his bills, the government could send him to prison! There, the wardens treated him like a common criminal. The government designed purposefully useless tasks for prisoners to perform so that debtors would realize the pointlessness of their crime. For example, prisoners had to walk the treadmill, a large metal cylinder with evenly spaced steps attached to it. The cylinder spun around and around while the prisoner walked for hours, struggling not to miss a step and to keep pace with the other prisoners suffering the same fate. The task was exhausting, and the government eventually banned the treadmill, but not before thousands of debtors had walked its

steps.

Why does Tiny Tim need a crutch?

Many researchers, pediatricians, and literary scholars have attempted to diagnose Tiny Tim. Here are some of their arguments:

a) Tiny Tim had **rickets**, a Vitamin D deficiency.

The Case for it: Vitamin D is found in milk, which the Cratchits could not afford, and in sunlight, which would have been scarce in the poorer, smog-filled area of London where the Cratchits lived. Without Vitamin D, kids don't build healthy bones, and their legs can bow under the weight of their own bodies—just like Tiny Tim's leg!

The Argument against it: Rickets was not usually fatal, and the Ghost of Christmas Present insists that Tiny Tim will die if Scrooge does not help him. And if the Cratchits did have a problem getting enough Vitamin D, the other children in the family would have had rickets too.

b) Tiny Tim had **TB, or Tuberculosis**, a very common disease of the time.

The Case for it: Though TB was generally a respiratory disease in adults, it could appear in children under 10 as a crippling illness that also caused fatigue (Bob says that Tim is tired.) and weight loss ("Tiny" Tim). Left untreated, TB would have eventually killed Tim. But a little help from Scrooge – good nutrition, rest, and a back-brace – could have saved Tim's life and put his disease into remission.

The Argument against it: At the end of the story, Tiny Tim is cured. TB never would have been completely cured, and Tim never would have been well enough to run into Scrooge's arms.

c) Tim had **Renal Tubular Acidosis**, a type of **Kidney Disease**.

The Case: Doctors would have thought Tim had TB, and they would have given him a medicine that contained excess acids. In fact, many "tonics" or medicines of the day contained acids and other harmful toxins that would have hurt Tim's kidneys. The extra acids in Tim's kidneys would have affected his bone production, and his short stature would have been an early sign of the disease. Then, one side of his body would have become considerably weaker than the other, causing him to walk with one crutch. And RTA is completely curable – Scrooge could have saved Tiny Tim simply by taking him to better doctors who knew what to do!

The Argument: What do you think? Which diagnosis do you think fits Tim the best?

The Food in *A Christmas Carol*

Let's Start with the Goose

Where did the Cratchits get the goose for their fine Christmas feast? It is very likely that the Cratchits raised their goose from gosling to Christmas meal! In cold weather, it may have lived right in the house with the Cratchits. Because food was so scarce in the Cratchit household, they could not afford to feed the goose much, which is why it is so small. When Christmas Day rolled around, the Cratchit children said good-bye to their goose, and Peter took it to the grocer. If Mrs. Cratchit or one of the children hadn't already killed it at home, the grocer killed it, feathered it and put it in the oven. Why take it to the grocer? Fuel was very expensive in Victorian England, and many poor households did not even have an oven. Families had their meat baked at the grocer's about once a week—or only as often as they could afford meat to bake.

The Christmas Pudding

When you think of pudding, you probably think of sweet chocolate pudding made by JELLO. In fact, Belinda's Christmas pudding barely resembled the pudding you eat today. Belinda stirred sugar and "plums" together; "Plums" was a word used in Victorian England to describe raisins, not the sweet purple fruit you eat today. Then, Belinda stuffed the mixture into a ball of thin dough and wrapped the ball in "pudding cloth"—a cotton rag tied at the top. Martha helped Belinda drop her pudding into the kettle, the big pot of water boiling on the family's "hearth" (fireplace.) Because the pudding was

wrapped in cloth, it did not mix with the potatoes already cooking in the pot. This was ideal for a poor family like the Cratchits, who could save a lot of fuel and water by cooking multiple parts of a meal at once, and at the same time produce heat to warm their home. When the pudding was done, the Cratchits gathered round the table and “took up the Christmas Pudding”—pulled it out of the boiling water with a long fork. They unwrapped the pudding and enjoyed their tasty—and practical—dessert. It was the perfect snack for a poor family: The pudding contained fat and carbohydrates to keep the family warm and sugar to give the family energy, was relatively inexpensive, and of course, delicious!

What is gruel?

While the Cratchits treated themselves to Christmas pudding, Scrooge greedily dug into his evening gruel. It was a thin, bland mix of oats and water or milk, and an economical meal to prepare and easy to make in bulk, which is why it was a favorite in institutions like prisons and workhouses—and in Scrooge’s lonely, sparse household. Like most Londoners at the time, Scrooge also believed gruel had medicinal qualities that could cure a cold.

A Little Fun

The Toy Store Window

Many of the toys in Victorian England were similar to the toys you have today, with one important difference: the material. There was no plastic; there were no electronic parts; and of course, there were no video games! Young boys played with tin soldiers, tin drums and even metal yo-yos. Young girls played with dolls. A very wealthy little girl could have had a beautiful creation with a head and arms made of wax or china and a body made of stuffed calico or carved out of wood. She could have dressed her doll in layers of silk or taffetta. Girls who could not afford extravagant dolls made their dolls at home from rags, gave them button eyes, and loved them just as much as if they were made of silk.

:::About charles dickens:::



Charles Dickens (W.P. Frith, 1859)

The tribute to **Charles Dickens** engraved in Westminster Abbey’s honored Poet’s Corner calls him “a sympathizer with the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death one of England’s greatest writers.” Even today, over one hundred years later, Dickens’s stature has not diminished, and he is still admired for his complex characters, brilliant imagery, and themes of human suffering and social responsibility.

Many scholars believe that Dickens’s insight and sensitivity stemmed from a kaleidoscope of contrasting experiences throughout his lifetime. The second of eight children born to a Navy clerk, Charles Dickens grew up in coastal dockyard towns like Portsea and Chatham, and also in Rochester, with its Norman Cathedral towers and Elizabethan mansion at Cobham Wood. His early environs encouraged him to explore the work of English novelists, as well as the delights of the theater.

These positive images of Dickens’s first twelve joyful years soon became a memory when his father fell into debt. The Dickens family moved, first to a shabby tenement in Camden Town, London, then finally to the debtors prison. During his family’s imprisonment, Dickens was forced to work as a child laborer in a dirty boot-blackening warehouse. His despair over his family’s situation led him to lament, “my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man were crushed in my breast.” However, it was just this experience that would figure heavily in his writing, and ultimately it determined the course of his life.

A fleeting financial comeback for the Dickens family allowed Charles to get out of the warehouse, and he went on to make early career attempts in theater, law clerkship and newspaper reporting before finding, in a writing career, an outlet for his creative energies and a means of exorcising his own painful past.

Many of Dickens's novels, including *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Hard Times* (1854) and *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), illustrate the author's sympathy for human suffering and the struggle against social injustice. Dickens called on his own experiences to document the horrors of child labor and the effect of English industrialization on the nation's poor, championing England's oppressed throughout his work. W. Walter Crotch writes that:



The earliest known photograph of Dickens (Unbek, 1843)

Dickens's view of the poor was simple...he refused absolutely to think of them as a class apart, conspicuous either for wickedness or inertia. He held that the fault of their condition lay not in them, but in bad laws, defective social arrangements, inefficient administration and general neglect. In short, they were the creatures of their environment. Believing this, he set to work, and, in the space of a few short years, affected sweeping and enduring reforms in housing, in education, and in the general treatment of children, by the community.

In 1858, Charles Dickens separated from Kate, his wife of twenty years and the mother of his ten children. At this personally trying time, Dickens's restless and depressed spirit found release in the theater. Over a period of twelve years, he toured the British Isles and America with his one-man grand tour—a series of dramatic readings of his most outstanding characters and poignant dramatic prose pieces, receiving rave reviews on both sides of the Atlantic.

Exhausted by his obsession to breathe theatrical life into his characters, Dickens ended his final tour with the words, "I now vanish evermore." He died three months later at the old mansion in Cobham Wood that had been his childhood dream home and which he had recently purchased.

Like the haunting humanizing spirits of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens lives on through work that is a continuing testament to his poetic vision, artistic accomplishment and hope for a more humane world.

::Christmas in the age of dickens::



Santa Claus from *Harper's Bazaar*, December 1867

Christmas as we know it was born in the Victorian era, and Charles Dickens is often credited with contributing to its creation. From 1649-1660, England had been governed as a Commonwealth, led by Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans, who believed that Christmas and several other holidays had come from ancient pagan ceremonies. They tried to cleanse the church and the nation of what they thought were lingering pagan traditions, and in 1644 they actually outlawed the celebration of Christmas in England. In 1660 the Puritans were overthrown, the monarchy was restored with Charles II as king, and a diminished version of the Christmas holiday returned. Great feasting and drinking was done in the name of Christmas in the 18th century, but the nation had lost its spiritual and emotional investment in the season. In the 1840s, Dickens produced a series of extremely popular Christmas tales for the purpose of regenerating the true spirit of Christmas.

A Christmas Carol, the first of Dickens's Christmas Books, is Dickens's most beloved and widely acclaimed fictional piece, cherished for its simple expression of what relations between human beings should be, at Christmas time and throughout the year. In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens gives Scrooge's nephew these words, which sum up the Christmas spirit this enduring tale has preserved for generations past and generations to come:

I have always thought of Christmas time...as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they were really fellow-passengers to the grave and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.



The inscription on Dickens' tombstone in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey
Charles Dickens (W.P. Frith, 1859)

The English Christmas transformed in the mid-1800s, partly as a result of the traditions described in *A Christmas Carol*. The pre-Victorian-era Christmas was gradually reshaped to reflect the Victorian era's religious revival and its growing humanitarianism and romanticism. The presence of the Industrial Revolution was felt in a newly-created, large and visible lower class unable to celebrate Christmas with the same luxurious abandon as their wealthier neighbors. The Victorians' "New Christmas" stressed "the traditional values of neighborliness, charity, and good will" and emphasized the obligation of the rich to the poor.

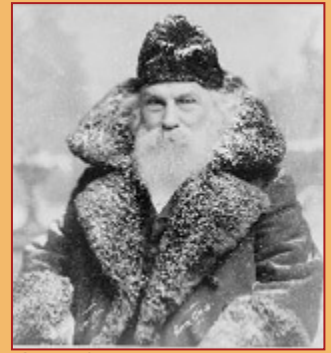
The New Christmas met with some resistance, however, mostly from Puritans, Quakers and others who disapproved of the mingling of liquor and merriment with a sacred holiday, and who were disturbed by some of the tradition's origins in pagan ritual. Writing in 1871, G.K. Chesterton provides an insight into the mid-19th century mindset with his claim that

...in fighting for Christmas [Dickens] was fighting for the old European festival, Pagan and Christian, for that trinity of eating, drinking and praying which to moderns appears irreverent, for the holy day which is really a holiday.

In spite of its detractors, the New Christmas gradually took hold, and the Victorians established many of the customs that are at the center of today's traditional Christmas celebration. In 1840, when Prince Albert celebrated the holiday at Windsor Castle by presenting his family with the "German" Christmas tree, all of England followed suit. The festival began to focus predominantly on the family, particularly on children. The first Christmas cards appeared in 1843, the year that *A Christmas Carol* was published. The originally pagan ritual of caroling was revived, gift giving grew in importance, and the traditional Christmas dinner began to take shape.



More on Christmas customs in Victorian England



"Santa Claus" 1895 Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-113695)



"Christmas Tree at Windsor Castle" wood engraving by J.L. Williams from *The Illustrated London News*, Christmas Supplement, 1848 Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-117376

Charity: Christmas was a time to remember the less fortunate, and a host of charitable causes stepped up their appeals during the holiday season. Well-to-do individuals often visited poorhouses and other charitable institutions on Christmas Day, when a holiday dinner was served to the residents.

Boxing Day, the day after Christmas, was traditionally the day when servants and tradesmen were paid for services rendered during the year: money was deposited in the Christmas box.

Tree: Christmas trees became popular after an illustration of Victoria, Albert, and their children decorating a Christmas tree was published in *The Illustrated London News* in 1848 (shown on the left). Victorian Christmas trees were elaborately decorated with trinkets such as tin soldiers, dolls, whistles, candies, fruit, nuts, and candles. Many decorations were homemade, and children often helped make garlands and paper decorations.

Beverages: "Here we go a-wassailing," begins a familiar carol. No Victorian Christmas was complete without a Wassail Bowl, a strong mulled punch made of sweetened and spiced ale or wine and garnished with roasted crab apples. Drinking the wassail from the same cup was the fashion.

Dance: In *A Christmas Carol*, partygoers at the Fezziwigs' indulge in spirited dancing, akin to modern day square dancing. Another traditional dance was the Pavon or Pavane, named after the peacock because the movements of the gentlemen in their mantles and the ladies in their long gowns resembled a peacock's sweeping steps.

Decorations: Then as now, halls were decked with holly, ivy, red berries, and of course, mistletoe. Young sweethearts kissed under the mistletoe and plucked a berry for each kiss.

Spectacles: The annual holiday excursion for families in the Victorian era was to a Christmas pantomime, a fairy tale or other traditional story adapted for the stage with music, spectacle and stock characters.

Christmas revels at prominent noblemen's dwellings might include masques: short allegorical dramas performed by ladies and gentlemen in elaborate costumes, masks and headdresses, often ending in a formal dance.



Mr. Fezziwig's Ball (John Leech, 1843)

::The history of a Christmas Carol::



Depiction of Dickens's last public reading of *A Christmas Carol* (*The Illustrated London News*, March 19, 1870)

In February of 1843, the Parliament released an unsettling report on child labor. Dickens searched for a response. He talked about writing a pamphlet "on behalf of the Poor Man's Child" and striking a literary "sledge-hammer" by the year's end. In October Dickens gave an address in Manchester to a group of working class people and was stirred by them to write a "Christmas story addressed to a similarly broad national audience." He completed the manuscript of *A Christmas Carol* by the end of November.

By mid-December the first edition of *A Christmas Carol, In Prose, Being a Ghost Story of Christmas* was on the stands. The title was lettered in gold, and it featured gilt-edged pages and eight illustrations by John Leech, half of which were hand-colored. All six thousand copies of the first printing sold out, and two thousand copies of the second printing were committed before publication. Fifteen thousand copies were sold within a year.

Eight London theater companies had dramatic versions of the novel running by February. These extremely popular productions added songs and sometimes characters to Dickens' text to enhance the melodrama. Although Dickens had his misgivings about many of these productions, he made no attempt to shut any of them down. In fact, Dickens later did his own stage adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, then performed it in a public reading, playing all the roles himself. He continually reworked the text, changing the performance to suit each audience.

In the 150 years since *A Christmas Carol* was published, it has been retold and adapted more often and in more ways than perhaps any other fictional work. Its story has been told as a ballet, opera, musical, film, television special, puppet show, orchestral work and cartoon. Paul Davis's book *The Life and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* documents his research on the historical legacy of *A Christmas Carol*; in it he suggests that every age "recreates the story in response to its own cultural needs." For example, Davis shows that Victorian versions treated *A Christmas Carol* as a parable, a secular "retelling of the Biblical Christmas story." In the early 1900s it became primarily a children's story; a few decades later in the late 1920s and early 1930s, versions of *A Christmas Carol* focused on the story as a "denunciation of capitalism" and a way to escape the harsh economic reality of the Depression era. The Scrooge of the '60s became a Freudian figure whose subconscious emerges in the form of Marley and the ghosts. More recently, Scrooge has become again "a social figure placed in the center of unsettling economic realities," much as he was for readers in Dickens's day.

A Christmas Carol's message of generosity and social responsibility has prevailed for 150 years, reminding readers and audiences of the true spirit of the holiday season. As Paul Davis notes, "Dickens may have framed out thoughts and established the broad outlines of the story, but the *Carol* is rewritten each Christmas, and Scrooge, an altered spirit, appears anew with each telling."

::Interview with Michael unger:: Director of A Christmas Carol

When Mara Isaacs, the Producing Director at McCarter Theatre, asked you to take over and create a new production of *A Christmas Carol*, how did you begin to develop a new interpretation?

I went back to why Dickens wrote it in the first place. Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* as a reaction to the child labor abuses that he saw in the tin mining industry in Cornwall, England, back in the mid-1800s. Since that was Dickens's first impulse, I've tried to create a clear representation of that world. The whole set was inspired by this very dark and dreary, poverty-stricken London that Dickens was writing about.

Is there a concept that unifies your interpretation? What inspired it?

The original intention was to show that Scrooge had the tools for his redemption around him all the time – he just did not know how to pick them up and use them. And that was inspired by one single line of Marley's. In the bedroom scene, Marley says to Scrooge: "How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see I may not tell, for I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day." To me that line says that ever since Marley died, he may have been sitting in that chair waiting for Scrooge to be able to see him, night after night. My concept is that Marley has been calling to him every day since he died. It takes seven years for Scrooge to understand this.

What do you hope the audience gains from seeing this production? Does this differ from what you hope the children in the audience understand?

If we all have some bit of Scrooge inside of us, if we all have some kind of a tendency to be slightly stingy or ungenerous to those around us, then watching this play will hopefully make you realize that you can be kind-hearted, and it will help the world.

The message is clear: be a generous spirit in life. I think you can learn that at any age, but you've probably been a Scrooge a lot more often as an adult. You've probably never been a Scrooge as a child, which is why the thirteen kids in the show make it such a magical experience for all the actors involved, who get to relive what it's like to be pure inspiration and not have society cripple them.

You mentioned the thirteen children who act in the show as the Youth Ensemble. Could you speak more about their role as a part of the company?

I have found that the thirteen children in this production have always inspired me in a way that no adult cast can, and I think a lot of the actors that come back year after year come back in part because of the magic of these kids. And I don't know what it is about Princeton water, but these kids are unbelievable. They're talented, and they're nice, and they're generous, and they hunger to learn; and they have twice as much work with this and school. They don't get to take time off from school, and they do even better on their grades – something about the focus of it and being in a professional environment and being treated like professionals. I never treat the kids like kids. The adults were never like, "ok, we have kids here, so we'll talk to them one way and talk to adults another way." No, we treat all of them like pros, and they all step up and give the performance of pros. My Tiny Tim for the past few years [Danny Hallowell] played Young Charlie for me in a musical that just closed [*Behind the Limelight*, about Charlie Chaplin]. He had major scenes and major songs and major dancing, and he was amazing. So, really, I've been amazed at the level of talent in the young actors of Princeton, and it's gotta be something in the water, it really does.

Many theaters all across the world have an annual production of *A Christmas Carol*-

But ours is the best!

Yours is the best. So what's special about this version? Why is it the best?

Emily [Mann, the Artistic Director] and Mara [Isaacs, the Producing Director] have put together a thrilling design team. We cast it very well because great actors love to work at the McCarter. And most importantly, David "Tommy" Thompson has written the best possible adaptation of this piece. He's taken out what you don't need, although you certainly benefit from reading [the novel], and he's added back-story that gives such history to the characters. For instance, Marley never appears in the Dickens novel, except in that one scene when he sits in [Scrooge's] chair, and here he appears throughout. He appears as a little boy teasing Scrooge in the schoolyard. He appears as an apprentice in Fezziwig's store. He's the one who seduces Scrooge into a world of greed and selfishness. So Tommy's done an amazing job in giving back-story and support to the Dickens story, and I just think you cannot see the show without feeling for every person on that stage.

How do you go about introducing the cast to the play?

I always like to try and do something unique on the first day of rehearsal, and I came up with this idea on the second year of the new production: We read the entire Dickens novel every first day of rehearsal, but we insert our play where it fits. We read in the Dickens novel until we get to a scene from the Tommy Thompson adaptation. Then we read the scene. When that scene leaves off we go back to the Dickens. It works like a puzzle that gets everyone into the world of the Dickens and onto the same page, into the language, the Dickens tone, and it informs a different approach to the piece. So the first step is always directly into the Dickens and then we dovetail it with Tommy's script. It's a really cool experience.

What are some of your other favorite *Christmas Carol* traditions?

There is a very unique family that's created every year with *Christmas Carol*. We have some old members of the cast that have been in the show before – those are the actors of Christmas Past. We have actors of Christmas Present who are new in that year, and we have the actors of Christmas Future, who are the kids who become inspired in incredible ways. The aspect of family, which is so important in the novel, is so important in the execution of the play as well. Theater is a ritual: it was born a ritual, it's done as a ritual, and there are rituals backstage that keep the show ticking.

And you know, there's a certain legacy for anyone who writes something of lasting importance. Dickens has a legacy to pass on, and anyone who reads *A Christmas Carol* or sees our production is part of that legacy. And there is a passing down even within the children who work on the show. They do a role and then graduate into a role that their big sister or brother has played. We have people that have played two different roles as they have grown older and older in the show, or inherited the role that their siblings retired from, and there is a legacy in that passing the production down from generation to generation, or at least age to age. Also, Tommy [Thompson] has written some really beautiful legacy moments in the piece itself. For instance, there's a moment where Mrs. Cratchit teaches Belinda, her daughter, how to make the pudding. And the thing that makes that so vibrant is that she might not get a chance to teach Tiny Tim because he may not survive to that age when one learns how to make a pudding. The music box is a very obvious legacy element: Scrooge's sister gives him a music box when he is a child, which he has long ago put away and forgotten about. He's reminded of it as he looks back on his past, and he gives it to Tiny Tim, and the legacy is passed down. So there are lots of traditions and legacies present in the piece, and they also reverberate out into the cast and the production and the experience of *A Christmas Carol* every winter.

::Interview with Cheryl Mintz::

Production Stage Manager of A Christmas Carol

What does a Stage Manager do, anyway?

The Production Stage Manager is the organizational nucleus of a theatrical production. The Production Stage Manager is also the right hand to the Director.

As a stage manager, I am involved in pre-production, setting up the rehearsal hall with my staff, coordinating and running the rehearsals with the Director, making sure all the departments of the theater know what's going on in rehearsal and helping them meet our needs. Once a show moves into the theater, the Stage Management Team runs the technical rehearsals. Throughout the preview process [performances for audiences before the official opening of the show] we run the performances, as well as coordinate and run any rehearsals. Once the show has opened, generally the Director leaves, and it's up to the Production Stage Manager to maintain the Director's artistic integrity and artistic vision.

A big part of a Production Stage Manager's job during performances is "calling the show." What does "calling the show" mean, exactly?

During the technical rehearsals the Production Stage Manager coordinates the technical needs of the production with lighting, sound, the rail (which makes the scenery fly in and out), the winches (which track scenery on and off), the special effects and the stage crew. Backstage, many people wear headsets or takes their cue from a cue light. So when I "call the show," I coordinate all the cueing. If everyone on the production operated their scenery or pressed the button on the computer to change the lights when they thought it was the right time, there'd be a train wreck! But a stage manager, by "calling the show," choreographs the backstage world of the show. I'm taking the director's vision and making it happen technically. So basically, I say, "Sound Cue WWW, Rail Cue 38, Light Cue 385, Winch Cue U and Tombstone Down, GO!" and when I say "GO" everybody executes their cue, and it happens all together

Do you have a favorite section of *A Christmas Carol* that you like to "call"?

I have three favorite chunks. I just love calling the Fezziwig Dance because it is our "Broadway" moment. But what I truly love are my duets with Scrooge: when Scrooge is in the streets of London reacting to the Ghost of Marley, which segues directly into him entering his bedroom, undressing and reacting to all the effects that happen around him, and again at the end of Act I, when he goes to sleep back in his bedroom, and Christmas Present arrives. First of all, I enjoy putting those scenes together because it's always fun for Michael and me to help the new Scrooges do those sections. It's also exciting because there are a lot of technical elements that involve his safety. I just love clicking into the mind of whoever the Scrooge is and being his scene partner. Scrooge is alone on stage, I'm calling all the effects and cues and he's reacting to, and making them happen at just the right moment.

How do you put the show back together each year?

Archiving *Christmas Carol* each year is incredibly important, because each year we build on what we learned from the year before. We're not coming in each year and trying to reinvent the wheel. We take everything off the shelf, all of our paperwork, all of our archives, and use them as a basis to remount. It's very important that we take excellent notes so that the information is there for next year.

Could you describe these "archives" more specifically?

We bring in a professional Video Archivist who records the production from a single camera. Each season a production book is kept with all the actors blocking and stage management has photographs of everything – how backstage is set up and how the rehearsal hall is set up. There are other ways to archive a production, and every department has their own way of keeping track of the show from year to year. For example, the Costume Department has a “Costume Bible,” down to exactly where every piece of fabric and every button was originally purchased in New York. So if they ever have to rebuild a costume from scratch they have swatches and examples of every costume along with photos of the costume on the actors and the original costume sketches that Jess Goldstein designed. And also in terms of archiving, the Stage Management archives have running sheets that are given out to our twenty-plus crew members. The master for *A Christmas Carol*, is over 35 pages long. And we’re talking small type! So the paperwork grows each year, because each year we build on our knowledge.

As a Production Stage Manager, you are used to working on new plays. What’s the experience of working on a show like *A Christmas Carol* that is recreated year after year?

When I first came to this show twelve years ago, the archives were incomplete and fragmented because in the first three years of the production at McCarter there had been four different Production Stage Managers. I knew I was coming into a machine that worked due to McCarter’s terrific stage crew and was figured out to an extent, so I didn’t want to come in and change everything in terms of “doing it my way.” I had to come to it the first year, conquer it, become part of the machine, and understand how everything worked before I could then go the next step in my second year and really polish the archives and production calling script.

At the same time, even though we have the show so well archived, what’s very important is reinventing it. We really want to give the new cast members the feeling that they’re discovering their roles, and not just being plugged in to a show that already exists. We don’t want them to feel like they’re at an understudy rehearsal. And that starts with the five and six year-old kids who are playing the beggar children, all the way up to Scrooge.

As the Production Stage Manager, what role do you take in creating a festive atmosphere backstage?

During the rehearsal process, we do things that are fun for the kids – which are ultimately fun for the adults – such as “Wacky Shirt Day,” “Silly Hat Day” and “Wear Your Pajamas to Work Day:” everyone shows up wearing pajamas that day, and we take group pictures! Usually Hannukah falls during tech or early in the performance process. We light the candles and celebrate Hannukah each evening, and the invitation extends to all company members, whoever wants to come and participate. Michael has this ritual every year of singing a Hannukah song and dancing through the halls with the company. And then, come Christmastime we always turn the “Company Dinner” into a Christmas Party—oh I’m forgetting, and Secret Santa

Don’t forget! It’s the best part!

...which is the centerpiece of fun. Secret Santa—everyone just loves it, and it usually goes on for a week of, and at the Christmas Party everyone exchanges their final gift. Everything just gets wild during Secret Santa. It’s very festive and I’d say 99 % of the companies and crews over the last twelve years have participated in Secret Santa. Also, what has become a trend for many years among the adults is decorating dressing rooms. Everybody tries to out-do each other, even though we’re here for 3 weeks of performances. So it’s very fun, it’s very festive, and the festivity reaches everyone, even the parents and siblings of the Young Ensemble!

What makes Christmas Carol special to you?

The whole year is spent doing classic productions and world premieres from scratch, to return each year to a big Broadway-style production each year uses a whole different set of stage management skills. I always find *A Christmas Carol* refreshing.

::Drama and assessment::

in the elementary, middle and high school classrooms

The Visual and Performing Arts are considered Core Curriculum areas for the New Jersey State Department of Education. As such, the study of drama (and music, visual art and dance) is being gradually phased into the new Elementary, Middle and High School Proficiency Assessment, and success is required for graduation. This production of *A Christmas Carol* is designed to give your students exposure to the specific Core Curriculum Standards listed below.



A Christmas Carol and Curriculum Standards

This production of *A Christmas Carol* and related study materials will provide students with specific knowledge and skills to address the following Core Curriculum Content Standards in the Arts:

- 1.1 All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater, and visual arts.
- 1.2 All students will refine perceptual, physical and technical skills through creating dance, music, theater, and/or visual arts.
- 1.5 All students will identify the various historical, social, and cultural influences and traditions which have generated artistic accomplishments throughout the ages and which continue to shape contemporary arts.

A Christmas Carol is also designed to address the following Core Curriculum Standards in Language Arts Literacy and Social Studies:

- 3.2 All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources.
- 3.3 All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
- 3.4 All students will read various materials and texts with comprehension and critical analysis.
- 6.4 All students will acquire historical understanding of societal ideas and forces throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.
- 6.5 All students will acquire historical understanding of varying cultures throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.

::Drama and assessment::

in the elementary, middle and high school classrooms



Suggested Activities / Questions

For K-5 students:

1. Have your students read Dickens's original story of *A Christmas Carol*, or read it to them in class. (Standards 3.2 or

3.4)

2. Ask your students which characters they liked best and least in the story, and why. (Standard 1.1)
3. Ask your students why they think Scrooge became so selfish. (Standard 3.4)
4. Hold a discussion with your students about why they think some people become too interested in money and material things. Do they think this is good or bad? (Standard 6.4)
5. Discuss other holidays with your students, such as Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. Make sure to mention the importance of symbols (such as a Christmas tree, a menorah, and a kinara) to each of the holidays. What other symbols can your students think of that are important to these holidays? (Standards 1.5 and 6.5)
6. Have older students research holiday traditions around the world. (Suggest that the students choose the country from which their families originated.) (Standards 1.5 and 6.5)
7. Ask your students to share some of their family holiday traditions with the class. If they did activity six, ask them to share how their own celebrations compare or contrast to those they discovered in other countries. (Standards 1.5 and 6.5)
8. Have your students create their own class holiday custom. Spread the idea around the school, and have each class share their new custom with the others. (Standards 1.5 and 6.5)

For Middle and High School Students:

1. Have your students read Dickens's original story. Hold a discussion or have them write a short essay about the similarities and differences between Dickens's story and our production. (Standard 3.4)
2. Divide your students into groups, have them choose their favorite section of the story, and give them a chance to dramatize the scene for their classmates. Encourage them, if possible, to use simple costumes, set pieces and music to enhance their scenes. (Standard 1.2)
3. Dickens wrote many holiday stories, such as "Cricket on the Hearth" and "The Goblins Who Stole the Sexton." Ask your students to read some of Dickens's other Christmas tales. What similarities and differences did they discover between the stories and *A Christmas Carol*? (Standard 3.4)
4. Hold a discussion with your students about our society's preoccupation with money and material objects. How important are money and things to them? Do we, as a society, need to change our opinions about the importance of money? (Standard 6.4)
5. Hold a discussion with your students to compare society's treatment of the holidays (i.e., the decorations at the mall, advertisements on TV, holiday specials) with what Dickens was trying to say about Christmas in *A Christmas Carol*. (Standard 6.4)
6. What do your students think is the true meaning of the holidays? (Standard 6.4)
7. Ask your students to write their own short story or play about the meaning of the holidays. (Standard 3.3)
8. Hold a discussion with your students about holiday customs here and around the world. If you plan to have a holiday party with your class, encourage them to create a new holiday custom. (Standards 1.5 and 6.5)

::Additional resources::

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Jackson, T.A. *Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical*. New York: International Publishers, 1987.

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"Grandpa's Visit Christmas Morning" photo by Griffith & Griffith, Philadelphia, 1897 Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-100241



A McCarter Theatre production | December 3 - December 24, 2006

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