Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol

School Matinee Series Study Guide
A CHRISTMAS CAROL
by CHARLES DICKENS
adapted by TOM CREAMER
directed by HENRY WISHCAMPER

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For more information about Education & Engagement at Goodman Theatre, click here.
With each passing year, more and more of our audiences have come to know Goodman Theatre as a major U.S. cultural organization with wide ranging productions and community programs. But this was not always the case. In 1978, the Goodman was only two years into its existence as an independent not-for-profit theater (instead of a department of the Art Institute of Chicago) and the pressure on the “new” Goodman to generate patrons and fill seats was enormous. To invigorate the theater’s artistic direction that year, the new board of trustees, under Stanley Freehling’s leadership, appointed Gregory Mosher as artistic director. I had worked with Greg as producer of the Goodman’s Second Stage, where David Mamet’s American Buffalo and A Life in the Theatre received their world premieres, giving the Goodman an unprecedented level of local and national visibility.

Our immediate planning priority was how to attract an audience during the month of December, when people are preoccupied with holidays, family and friends. As Greg and I discussed seasonal fare, we very quickly landed on Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol; we had both grown up with the Alistair Sim film version, and I remembered Marley’s chilling ascent to Scrooge’s chambers on my record player. The obvious appeal of this entertaining ghost story about forgiveness, redemption and love for our fellow human beings was irresistible.

We had to do it. But it was not easy, as not everyone thought it was a brilliant idea.

A Christmas Carol is an epic story, and at that time, it was the largest production that the Goodman had ever produced. It would have to run for three seasons to recoup its initial investment, and put a giant demand on our production resources and personnel. What’s more, being a well-known and beloved story made the task even more daunting, as audiences would take their seats with high expectations. If it failed, the financial repercussions would be very serious for the Goodman. Fortunately, the decision was made to proceed.

We knew we needed an artist of significant talent and ability to...
play Ebenezer Scrooge. After all, the character is on stage for the entire play, and largely carries the production. Besides stamina, he must make Scrooge as believable as the irascible miser as the warm and jovial figure he becomes at the end.

In 1978, William J. Norris was a charismatic Chicago actor doing incredible work with Stuart Gordon’s legendary Organic Theatre—and much too young to play Scrooge as a conventional “old codger.” But I felt strongly that his age would be an advantage to our production, turning Scrooge into a recognizable contemporary businessman. There was no question in my mind that Bill was up to the challenge, and he magnificently delivered an Ebenezer Scrooge who was at once terrifying, hilarious and profoundly moving as he contemplated his failure with Belle and his later reconciliation with Fred. There was not a dry eye in the house.

It was Bill’s performance that made the production a success from the outset, and helped establish *A Christmas Carol* as a new Chicago holiday tradition. The extraordinary Chicago actors who have followed in his footsteps include Frank Galati, Tom Mula, Rick Snyder, William Brown, Jonathan Weir and John Judd. This year, Larry Yando celebrates his 10th season in the role, having made a tremendous impact with his gruff, snide and endearingly heartwarming performance.

Over 40 years, we have learned to expect the unexpected on stage and off—including the memorable night when the young actor playing Tiny Tim initiated a food fight on stage during the Cratchit family dinner. Or the matinee when Scrooge’s flying apparatus suddenly malfunctioned, leaving him suspended (and swinging) midair—until a cherry picker entered to bring him down. Then there was the time when the life-sized replicas of Scrooge and Christmas Present once used in the production disappeared from storage, leading to the evening TV news headline: “Who Stole Scrooge?”

People have asked how we keep *A Christmas Carol* fresh and alive? The answer is that for all of us at the Goodman, *A Christmas Carol* is much more than a holiday entertainment or diversion. We believe that Charles Dickens’ “little Christmas story” promotes values that are universal and true everywhere in the world—compassion, understanding, love, empathy, forgiveness and redemption. Presenting this story each year to thousands of people is an enormous privilege we take very seriously, and hope contributes in some small way to building a better society.

Since 1984, *A Christmas Carol* has featured a culturally diverse cast, becoming the highest profile Chicago production to take that step. It was not a completely popular decision at the time—but it gives me hope to know that its casting is now largely embraced by our community.

We have now seen *A Christmas Carol* create several generations of new theatergoers. Youth who attended the early productions are now bringing their children (and grandchildren). From the outset, we wanted the production to be a family event—not a children’s theater performance. To see audiences of parents, children and relatives enthralled and engaged is totally inspiring. *A Christmas Carol* has been a key part of our School Matinee Series, the entry point for teachers working with us for the first time.

Did I know 40 years ago that all of this would take place? Well, no. But I was confident that we were producing *A Christmas Carol* for the right reasons, and that it would have an impact on audiences for a number of years. *A Christmas Carol* cannot stay the same—but we strive to only change it in ways we believe enhance the experience for the audience and all connected with it. To provide *A Christmas Carol* for Chicago over the past four decades is a highlight of my life in the theater, and I am grateful to all of the countless artists, professionals and patrons who make it possible.

Here’s to the next 40 years of *A Christmas Carol* at the Goodman!

Roche Shulfer, Executive Director
Goodman Theatre’s A Christmas Carol Through the Ages

by ELIZABETH RICE

This year, Goodman Theatre celebrates the 40th season of A Christmas Carol. Click on the title to take a look at our theatre’s long history with this Dicken’s classic!
The Science of Levitation
by KELLY REED
This year, Jacob Marley’s ghost is not playing around. In contrast to years past, the ghost heralding the apparitions of Christmas past, present, and future will appear on stage in fury of smoke and noise that is more spooky than magical. The changes to this scene made by Director Henry Wishcamper are so big that the production crew built an entirely new set piece for Scrooge’s bedroom. Matt Chandler, the Associate Production Manager for the Albert Theatre, oversaw the entire process of building this new piece. “We wanted to take a step in modernizing the unit while at the same time keeping it in the realm of the rest of the production,” says Chandler. “We wanted to tell the story in a more dramatic way, visually, than we have in years past.”

Although directors are constantly re-imagining the show like this, the production crew uses the same basic science and math concepts year after year to make changes to the set. The process of building the new “Scrooge Unit” started over a year ago, with designers discussing the artistic vision for the show with Wishcamper. After this, the designers drafted plans to bring that vision to life in the safest and most cost-effective way. Once Chandler approved the final plans, engineers and carpenters needed to translate them into a real, live set. Chandler talks about the excitement of using math and science skills in innovative ways to create theatre. “It’s the science behind it that I have always been the most excited about,” he says. “There’s something about being able to take all of these different things and in the end you create one massive theatrical project. In theatre, you’re always doing something different. There’s always a different challenge, and there’s always new technology.”

One of the main challenges in constructing Scrooge’s bedroom was that of levitation: during a pivotal scene, Scrooge’s bed must rise off the floor and carry him, floating, into the air. After testing different motor mechanics and simple machines, they decided to build a cable drive system to accomplish this. The system starts backstage, with motorized winches that rotate giant drums,
each with grooves on the outside to catch the cable as it wraps around. The cables connect to a forklift-type apparatus, which sticks through the wall and under the bed, lifting it up when the motors are switched on. This machine lifts not only the bed but the actor moving (and jumping) on top of it. Since the bed needs to remain absolutely still, the crew needed to figure out how much weight in addition to the bed the lift would need to hold, as well as the dynamic forces acting on it as the actor jumped up and down.

Once they determined this, they could choose the right type of casters to achieve the proper amount of torque to get the cable moving. The safety and the “look” of the scene both depend on the system starting and stopping smoothly, so the speed of the motors needed to accelerate and decelerate along a parabolic curve.

In the end, the engineers manipulated basic physics concepts—torque, equilibrium, acceleration, dynamic forces—to create the illusion of levitation. They used engineering techniques like simple machines, automation, and mechanics to build the systems that manipulate those concepts. When constructing the set piece as a whole, the production manager used math to calculate the total price of materials based on their current market price, after which carpenters used geometry to build a sturdy structure. By opening night, over 35 people will have contributed to the unit’s construction, mostly using the same concepts they began learning in high school.

Despite the huge role math and science play in building a set, working on the backstage team does not mean you were a math geek in high school. “I hated math in high school, frankly,” says Chandler. “It wasn’t until I got to grad school and I was taking structural analysis and physics for the stage that it put [math & science] into a real context.” When physics and geometry are necessary to build an actual set piece, using them suddenly becomes less about word problems and more about treating them like the tools they are to create something spectacular. “When we sit here on opening night and think, ‘All of that work went into creating this one thing,’ it gives you that moment of ‘Awesome. I did something really, really cool.’”

**GLOSSARY**

- **automation** - the use of various control systems for operating equipment with little to no human interaction
- **cable drive system** - for A Christmas Carol, it is a system comprised of metal cable, motorized winches, and pulleys, which attaches to the larger set piece and is custom-built to raise and lower Scrooge’s bed.
- **caster** - a type of wheel designed to be mounted to a larger object in order to make that object easier to move
- **drum** - a cylindrical container, around which a cable can be wound
- **dynamics** - a branch of physics focusing on forces and torques and their effects on motion (as opposed to studying motion without reference to its cause)
- **equilibrium** - within physics, it is when the sum of all forces acting on an object equals zero
- **force** - any influence on an object that causes it to change in movement or direction
- **motor mechanics** - a type of mechanics concerned with the behavior of objects when subjected to forces, specifically those driven by motors
- **simple machine** - a device without a motor that changes the direction or magnitude of a force.
- **torque** - the tendency of a force to rotate an object about an axis, fulcrum, or pivot
- **winch** - a device used to pull in, let out, or adjust the tension of a cable or rope.
Goodman Theatre on City Science

Have you ever thought about how math and science apply to the arts? If you’ve never thought a theatre person needs to have a knowledge of advanced math and physics, think again! Below are the three parts of an episode of City Science featuring Goodman Theatre artists. In this episode, City Science’s Professor Mike Davis explores how light is used in theatre through lighting, costume and scenic design. This episode goes behind the scenes to focus specifically on the science of the Goodman’s A Christmas Carol. The artists and staff involved with the production provide explanations and hands-on demonstrations. As you watch, be sure to pay attention to how all the different elements of theatre are linked through science and design.
In Victorian England, strict social rules determined interactions between men and women. Some of these may play into relations in *A Christmas Carol*, and may differ by class – but many, as you will see below, span social status. Think about it: are any of these rules, or variations of them, still followed in the US today? Which?

**The Gentleman**

1. In riding horseback of walking along the street, the lady always has the wall.
2. Meeting a lady in the street or in the park whom you know only slightly, you wait for her acknowledging bow, then and only then may you tip your hat to her, which is done using the hand farthest away from her to raise the hat. You do not speak to her – or to any other lady – unless she speaks to you first.
3. If you meet a lady who is a good friend and who signifies that she wishes to talk to you, you turn and walk with her if you wish to converse. It is not “done” to make a lady stand talking in a street.
4. If going up a flight of stairs, you precede the lady (running, according to one authority); if going down, you follow.
5. In a carriage, a gentleman takes the seat facing backward. If he is alone in a carriage with a lady, he does not sit next to her unless he is her husband, brother, father or son. He alights from the carriage first so he may hand her down. He takes care not to step on her dress.
6. At a public exhibition or concert, if accompanied by a lady, he goes in first in order to find her a seat. If he enters such an exhibition alone and there are ladies or older gen-
tlemen present he removes his hat.

7. A gentleman is always introduced to a lady – never the other way around. It is presumed to be an honor for the gentleman to meet her. Likewise (and it is the more general rule of which this is only a specific example), a social inferior is always introduced to a superior and only with the latter’s acquiescence.

8. A gentleman never smokes in the presence of ladies.

The Lady

1. If unmarried and under thirty, she is never to be in the company of a man without a chaperone. Except for a walk to church or a park in the early morning, she may not walk alone but should always be accompanied by another lady, a man, or a servant. An even more restrictive view is that “if she cannot walk with her younger sisters and their governess, or the maid cannot be spared to walk with her, she had better stay at home or confine herself to the square garden.”

2. Under no circumstances may a lady call on a gentleman alone unless she is consulting that gentleman on a professional or business matter.

3. A lady does not wear pearls or diamonds in the morning.

4. A lady never dances more than three dances with the same partner.

5. A lady should never “cut” someone, that is to say, fail to acknowledge their presence after encountering them socially, unless it is absolutely necessary. By the same token, only a lady is ever truly justified in cutting someone: “a cut is only excusable when men persist in bowing whose acquaintance a lady does no wish to keep up.” Upon the approach of the offender, a simple stare of silent iciness should suffice; followed, if necessary by a “cold bow, which discourages familiarity without offering insult,” and departure forthwith. To remark, “Sir, I have not the honor of your acquaintance” is a very extreme measure and is a weapon that should be deployed only as a last resort.
Today, marriage is still one of the central social contracts of human society. The state of the institution of marriage is consistently under debate in this country, whether it be lawful for same sex couples to marry or if the average age of bride and grooms is increasing. Marriage is still considered one of the largest milestones in a person’s life short of birth and death. Much of the importance that we place on the institution of marriage is residual from the Victorian Era, the time period in which A Christmas Carol is set. However, while marriage is still prominent in our society, thankfully the strictures that governed marriages, and thus the male/female dichotomy, have evolved since then.

At any social strata during the Victorian period, marriage was the guiding purpose for a person’s existence, both male and female. In the upper class, it was emblematic of worth. Purity, innocence, meekness, and submissive behavior were prized characters in young marriageable women. To further highlight this, young women were often dressed in white line to further symbolize their purity. The ideal wife was an “angel in the home.” When a young woman became of age, she was presented to society in hopes that she would interest a gentleman of similar social status and court her, eventually asking for her hand in marriage. For women in lower classes, marriage helped families relieved the financial burden of carrying for another child. However, the ideas of purity and innocence for marriageable women had also trickled down from the upper class. Women, although their husband was most often chosen or approved by their parents or guardians, looked for men of good social standing with certain financial stability. They appeared masculine and had the ability to protect their “weak nature”. Marriage did not only dictate the lives of women during the Victorian period but also the men. Thus, Ebenezer Scrooge’s late life bachelorhood adds to his definition as a social outcast, just as much as his curmudgeonly stinginess.

Once married, women would lose what few rights they had as single women and even worse, all sense of self-identity. Everything they did was to the benefit of their husband, especially to their husband’s reputation. Upper class women were expected to keep up with ever changing fashion, a signifier of their husband’s wealth. In addition, they should not have been seen cleaning or doing any housework, as the ability to have servants to do such chores also symbolized status and wealth. Instead, they were expected to run a tight house, making sure that the home was always presentable to her husband and guests. Like

Caroline Hodge, a noted Victorian feminist. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.
characteristics expected of young women, these habits of upper class women trickled down to the middle and lower classes. Even though families needed additional income to survive, women were not supposed to be seen working, lest it appeared that their husbands could not take care of their families. A women’s role was in the home, taking care of the children. To help supplement the much needed income, many women would take on projects that they could do in the home, especially sewing and needlework. In A Christmas Carol, Mrs. Cratchit has five children; one, Tiny Tim, who is ill. To be able to take care of her family and still bring in additional income, she mends clothes and embroiders for other families. Sometimes, her daughters assist her.

With the loss of their singular identity, came the loss of most of their rights. Married women were considered no better than “property” of their husband. This, perhaps, was harsher for upper class women. Any property or valuables owned by a woman before marriage became their husband’s. While English law required wives to be notified by their husbands and approve of any business dealings around property they formally owned, small things valuable objects like jewelry could be sold off with any sort of notification. It was uncouth for upper class women to deal with finances. Their husbands would usually allot them an allowance, often a small percentage of the actual income. However, the social niceties and strictures were less stringent in the lower classes. Often, the wife would control the money of the family, since they were the one who needed to cook and care for the house and the children. However, for someone like Mrs. Cratchit, it also meant making the hard heart breaking decision to pawn one’s belongings to make sure that there was enough food on the table.

Have some of the Victorian marital habits trickled down to our own modern times? Do you see the same expectations of women in your own lives?
From the Industrial Revolution in Dickens’ London to the Information Revolution in Today’s America
by TERESA RENDE

When Charles Dickens was born in 1812, Great Britain, and indeed the entire world, was entering a time of great change. From the mid-1800s onward, society moved toward an increasingly global economy. Improvements in transportation and communication resulted in more countries being able to sell their agricultural goods and raw materials at an international level. The industrial era was evolving quickly, and many countries sought to benefit immensely from it while others fell behind because of their inability to participate.

Britain’s success in industrialization was unmatched by any nation. The success Britain held from the late 1700s through the 1800s actually pushed other countries out of the competition. Countries like China and India experienced periods of de-industrialization as certain industries, such as the textile markets, became obsolete when compared to the cheap, high quality and swiftly produced British textiles. As such, these non-western countries suffered the plight of growing populations and decreasing household income. Furthermore, the prosperity and technological advances of western nations allowed them to travel more often, meaning western folk were spreading new goods, religions and diseases abroad, while using their advanced weaponry to further their own agenda in foreign countries.

Emerging philosophies of free trade and “international peace” (influenced primarily by the prosperity that followed international trade), only added to the economic situation that aided a number of western nations. This is not to say that international peace served as the standard. There was, in fact, the same fancy for conquest that European nations had exhibited in the past. As industrialization pushed on, the focus of conquest changed dramatically. Differing from the many Napoleonic battles of the late 1700s and early 1800s, conquest battles of mid-to-late 1800s were characterized by the overthrow of many less developed nations. Interstate battles still existed, but they were shorter and more internally isolated than were conquest and territorial battles of prior decades. Historian Paul Kennedy explains that, “In the year 1800, Europeans occupied or controlled 35 percent of the land surface of the world; by 1878 this figure had risen to 67 percent, and by 1914 to over 84 percent.”

Changes in international banking and the concept of “credit” also gave advantages to certain nations during this period. The new practice of amassing resources in a short time and winning any given conflict quickly moved the focus away from long-term military mobilization. Simply being a “wealthy nation” was not enough to ensure success. Instead, a country had to have a well-balanced economy with healthy credit, international trade and, most importantly, a national stake in industrialization. The combination of these varied factors made Britain more powerful than any nation in the world.

Of course, industrialization brought with it many horrors, even for Britain. One of the major themes of *A Christmas Carol* is the pitiable life of Britain’s poorest citizens. The people working in the factories that made Britain such an industrial powerhouse were, themselves, often powerless and penniless. The children “ignorance” and “want,” in *A Christmas Carol* speak to the especially sour situation poor children faced in London in the 1800s and the seemingly endless cycle of poverty. While there were free schools in London in the 1800s, they were known as “Ragged Schools,” free institutions, run through charity, in which the poorest children received religious instruction and a rudimentary education. These did little more than prepare the children for a life of labor themselves, and many children couldn’t attend these schools as, until child labor laws were enacted, they were expected to work as soon as physically able. Compulsory education wasn’t enacted in London until 1870, the year Dickens died.
In America, Common Schools developed in the late 1700s and continued on through most of the 1800s, giving way to a more regional education system in the 1900s. America’s public schools were based off the Prussian common school system, the Prussian belief being that all children needed a certain set of basic academic skills to live in an industrialized world, and that the nation would benefit if all people had these basic skills. The Kingdom of Prussia was one of the first countries in the world to introduce tax-funded and compulsory primary education, though post-primary education (what we would now think of as high school) was only available to the very wealthy in those times. The basic skills often taught in American common schools included “the three Rs” (reading, writing, and arithmetic), history, geography, and math. Championed by Massachusetts’ Horace Mann in 1830s, common schools sprang up across the nation, first in the north, then nationwide, throughout the 1800s. Compulsory education laws follow at the state level, eventually becoming a federal mandate in 1918. The public school system that developed in America was intended to give every child the basics, but much like London, the system was not developed such that every child has the opportunity to become a scholar or an academic.

Seth Godin, an American author and tech entrepreneur, describes it fantastically in his education manifesto Stop Stealing Dreams:

“A hundred and fifty years ago, adults were incensed about child labor.

Low-wage kids were taking jobs away from hard-working adults. Sure, there was some moral outrage about seven-year-olds losing fingers and being abused at work, but the economic rationale was paramount. Factory owners insisted that losing child workers would be catastrophic to their industries and fought hard to keep the kids at...
work—they said they couldn’t afford to hire adults. It wasn’t until 1918 that nationwide compulsory education was in place.

Part of the rationale used to sell this major transformation to industrialists was the idea that educated kids would actually become more compliant and productive workers. Our current system of teaching kids to sit in straight rows and obey instructions isn’t a coincidence—it was an investment in our economic future. The plan: trade short-term child-labor wages for longer-term productivity by giving kids a head start in doing what they’re told.

Large-scale education was not developed to motivate kids or to create scholars. It was invented to churn out adults who worked well within the system. Scale was more important than quality, just as it was for most industrialists.”

Godin poses that the American education system is failing our students because it is succeeding in its original intention: to produce predictable, obedient, testable, factory workers in a nation that no longer depends on factory jobs. We still have systems that constantly test students’ ability to memorize facts and data, despite student access to the internet which can pull up facts instantaneously. We’ve experienced a complete shift in economy, from one that produced things to one that produces thoughts, and yet we haven’t adjusted our education system to match it. Godin continues,

“The next century offers fewer new long-lasting institutions (we’re seeing both organized religion and the base of industry fading away), to be replaced instead with micro organizations, with individual leadership, with the leveraged work of a small innovative team changing things far more than it ever would have in the past. The six foundational elements (competition, the scientific method, property rights, medicine, consumption, and jobs) are taken for granted as we build a new economy and a new world on top of them.

Amplified by the Web and the connection revolution, human beings are no longer rewarded most for work as compliant cogs. Instead, our chaotic world is open to the work of passionate individuals, intent on carving their own paths. That’s the new job of school.

Godin continues, Not to hand a map to those willing to follow it, but to inculcate leadership and restlessness into a new generation.

We’ve moved far past the industrial revolution and into the information revolution, what do you think is next for the education revolution?
Charles Dickens was born the second of eight children in the town of Portsmouth, England on February 7th, 1812. His father, John Dickens, worked as a clerk in the Naval Pay office which forced him and his family to move constantly. As a result, young Charles’ early years were spent in various cities in England— including London.

The family moved to London just before Charles’ 12th birthday. Charles received some basic formal education at a private school before tragedy struck. His father was very irresponsible with the family’s finances, and constantly spent more money than he earned. Soon after moving into their new home, John Dickens was arrested for outstanding debt. The entire family, except for Charles, was sent to Marshalsea Debtor’s Prison; a prison specifically for individuals and their family members who were unable to pay back their debt.

Charles began to work ten hour days at Warren’s Boot-Blacking Factory. At the age of 12, he spent his days applying labels to jars of shoe polish, earning only six shillings per week—the equivalent of earning $26 per week today—the majority going to support his family.

After the family had been imprisoned for three months, John Dickens declared himself an “Insolvent Debtor,” one who has insufficient funds to get out of debt. This enabled him to release his family from jail. John removed Charles from the warehouse and promptly sent the adolescent to private school where he did extremely well.

Three years later, when he was fifteen, Charles began working as a clerk in a law office. Unhappy with the position, Charles left the profession of clerk to become a journalist, and wrote most about parliamentary debates and campaign elections. He also penned humorous sketches for magazines in his free time. As his popularity grew, these sketches were compiled and published in his first book, *Sketches by Boz* (1836). They were very well received by both critics and the public. He followed this success with his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), which was released in monthly installments (as were many of Dickens’ works, including *A Christmas Carol*). To this day, none of his novels have gone out of print in England!

As a result of his days working in the factory, Dickens was also very interested in social reform. Throughout his works, Dickens retains empathy for the common working man and skepticism of the upper classes. Unfortunately, his climb to success took a significant downturn during the next few years. *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), his follow-up to *Nicholas Nickleby*, was less than successful, and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) did even worse in sales.

During 1842 he toured the United States, where he enjoyed favor in all of his travels. He was keenly disappointed, however, by the social issues he identified in America. He upset his hosts by condemning slavery, in the spirit of the social issues he took to heart. This distaste was evident in his travelogue *American Notes*, written that same year, which was highly critical of the new nation. By the fall of 1843 Charles Dickens had lost social and financial favor.

The author was in need of a new source of inspiration. Considering Dickens’ own personal history and fierce dedication to exposing the conditions of the poor, it is not altogether surprising where he found this muse.

**How A Christmas Carol Came to be**

“In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice.” - Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

**The Impact of the Industrial Revolution**

In 1834, the year when Charles Dickens began writing *A Christmas Carol*, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing. With a mix of positive and negative results for the needy population of England. The Revolution caused a huge amount of low-paying, low-skill jobs to grow within the cities. Manufacturers began hiring chil-
Children in large numbers for these positions due to the fact these unprotected workers would do the job for little pay, leading to huge profits for the company. No laws protected children in the workplace. Some children were forced by their parents into the factories before the age of seven. These young workers often labored for more than 12 hours a day. Horribly dangerous and unsanitary conditions were common.

Enraged by the situation of the poor, Dickens continually chronicled these atrocities and searched for ways to change them.

**Ragged Schools: Ignorance and Want**

Dickens’ interest in education’s potential to save children from poverty rapidly grew. In the fall of 1843, Charles personally went to several institutions known as “Ragged Schools,” schools that were a direct product of the industrial revolution, which provided free education to inner city children searching for answers. One school in particular Dickens described as “more than a ‘ragged’ place.” He recalls that the children were filthy and dressed in tatters. Some had already succumbed to the pressures of poverty by becoming pimps and thieves – many had lost their innocence. The children’s schoolrooms were in an equally depressing state. He wrote to a friend about the experience, “On Thursday night I went to the Ragged School; an awful sight it is. I have very seldom seen in all the strange and dreadful things I have seen in London and elsewhere, anything so shocking as the dire neglect of soul and body exhibited in these children.”

In a piece for the Examiner, he wrote, “Side by side with Crime, Disease, and Misery in England, Ignorance is always brooding.” Thus the germinating image of A Christmas Carol was not that of the ghosts, Scrooge, or even Tiny Tim, but the two “monsters,” the allegorical children Ignorance and Want. Dickens had intended a tract on education for the poor, but he now decided to write a story that, he announced with justifiable hyperbole, would hit his readers over the head like a “sledge-hammer.” And this is exactly what it achieved.

Charles wrote non-stop for the six weeks following his visit. He notes that while writing A Christmas Carol he often “wept and laughed and wept again.” At times his agitation was so great that he would “walk about the back streets of London fifteen and twenty miles many a night when all sober folks had gone to bed.” During these six weeks, he was able to turn out the story of the Christmas of 1843 in the form of A Christmas
Carol. It was, in some ways, a push for a new literary hit as well as a cry for the public’s attention to a vast and deadly problem. He worked tirelessly to get the story into print by that Christmas, and put a lot of his own money into the publication process to do so.

Financial Problems
Response to A Christmas Carol was immediate and positive. A remarkable 6,000 copies were sold on the day of its publication. However, due to the book’s moderate price and beautiful but expensive packaging, profits were lower than Dickens originally thought and of which he was in need. In 1844 he complained to a friend, “Such a night as I have passed! The first 6,000 copies show a profit of 230 pounds! And the last four will yield as much more. I had set my heart and soul upon a thousand. What a wonderful thing it is that such a great success should occasion me such intolerable anxiety and disappointment!”

A Universal Success?
A Christmas Carol’s popularity turned the public eye back to Dickens’ work, dramatically increasing the sales of his future novels. He became one of England’s most beloved writers, and was similarly admired later in other countries, such as the United States. America had not been ready for a new Dickens book following the perceived injury of American Notes, but still, Dickens revisited America in 1867. He came for a speaking tour, during which he read excerpts from his books and acted out all of the characters. On the night before tickets went on sale in New York, a line of people stretched half a mile down the street and by morning more than 5,000 eager audience members were in line waiting. A Christmas Carol was the book most often requested.

The End of An Author’s Life
Charles Dickens died from a stroke on June 8th, 1870 at the age of 58. He was mourned by peers, friends, family, and the public at large. Charles Dickens is buried in the distinguished Poet’s Corner in Westminster Abbey, where his grave marker still stands today. The inscription on his tombstone reads: “He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England’s greatest writers is lost to the world”. A story circulated after his death. A man tells of when he was in a tobacco shop and a laborer came in and flung two pence on the counter for his shag. The shopkeeper asked him why he looked so wretched. “Charles Dickens is dead,” he replied, “We have lost our best friend.”
Charles Dickens’ House

To learn more about Charles Dickens the man, visit the Dickens Museum website for a virtual tour! The Charles Dickens Museum gives a photographic tour of the author’s former home at 48 Doughty St., London. Click here for the interactive tour, or view the video below!

Left: Penelope Walker (Mrs. Cratchit), Ron Rains (Bob Cratchit), Nathaniel Buescher (Tiny Tim), Amaris Sanchez (Emily Cratchit), Phillip Cusic (Peter Cratchit) and Skye Sparks (Belinda Cratchit). Right: Larry Yando (Ebenezer Scrooge), Aaron Lamm (Boy Scrooge), Emma Ladji (Martha Cratchit) and Travis A. Knight (Ghost of Christmas Past). Photos by Liz Lauren.
Click the title to see a timeline that details important events in Charles Dickens’ Life as well as happenings in Great Britain and around the world. As you look over the timeline, consider how Dickens’ life relates to what was happening elsewhere.
Charles Dickens called it a “ghostly little book,” and that wasn’t far from the truth. The famous spirits in *A Christmas Carol* helped to serve the messages of the novella and have become major part of our modern interpretations of the tale. The four ghosts have undergone various interpretations as the story has been produced for stage, film and television. Although the spirits of Jacob Marley and the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Christmas Yet to Come may appear differently dozens of times, their message and purpose remain the same.

Charles Dickens was not the first writer or storyteller to make use of a ghostly presence, either. He was most likely influenced by centuries of earlier English storytellers. Shakespeare’s powerful ghosts and spirits come to mind—*Hamlet’s* Ghost and *The Tempest’s* Ariel, among others, served as intervening forces in the lives of the mortals in his plays. And it wasn’t just Shakespeare! Ghosts and spirits have been used in storytelling in Western and Eastern cultures for hundreds of years. They can be found in everything from American folk tales to ancient Asian and European religious texts. Why are they a part of so many cultures, and what could their purpose be?

When you think of many ancient American, African or Asian indigenous cultures, you may think of a “witch doctor” or “medicine man.” They are shaman, spiritual healers thought to be able to travel between the physical and spiritual worlds. They heal by maintaining the balance between those two worlds. Calling on their connection to the ancestors to rid a patient of illness or negative energy, it is in part because of these powerful social figures that many of these cultures have such a close connection to ghosts and spirits.

Christianity takes a different stance on these beliefs; Catholic and Protestant priests are thought to have communication with the spiritual world and Christians believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and others all share a profound reverence for the dead, placing a great importance on the role of ancestors and the soul.

As such, ghosts can be connected to the concept of an afterlife. This is, however, not the only way in which ghosts appear. Many Native American and Southeast Asian folk stories, for instance, use ghosts as benevolent or malicious non-human forces. Spirits also can be manifestations of an environment, such as a forest spirit, as well as the immortal form of ancestors who have died recently or long ago. Some are spirits of those who have passed away, but others, as they’re found in belief systems and folk religions, are special beings that existed before humans and will exist after them. They serve a similar purpose to Dickens’ Christmas ghosts: they know more than mere humans and can do things that humans cannot. Although you can look into just

*Scrooge and the Ghost of Jacob Marley from Disney’s 2009 A Christmas Carol, courtesy of wired.*
about any religion and find evil spirits that are sent to harm and harass humankind, there are many who serve as guardians. And the idea of the guardian spirit isn’t just confined to worshipers in Bali or India: there’s no doubt you’ve watched a holiday film or a TV episode that features a character’s guardian angel.

But the ghost stories told around a campfire are the stories of people who died of sad or mysterious circumstances, with unfinished business, and horrify the living. They serve a purpose as well. Think of Scrooge’s first reaction to the ghost of Jacob Marley, or his visit with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Ghosts remind Scrooge, on one hand, that we don’t live forever. We may see them as a reminder of death, or a representation of the unknown. They might be strange, and we don’t necessarily understand who they are or what they want. Regardless of their purpose, they can be frightening because of one question that may plague him: how can something exist that is no longer living?

Ghosts are frequently used as warnings. Parents might tell a ghost story about a haunted forest, or an old haunted house, in an effort to scare children away from that place. Native Americans craft ghost stories about swamps to prevent people from wandering into them and drowning. Colonial Americans, well aware of the dangers of the new American wilderness, used folklore to scare their children and friends away from the “haunted” woods.

Ghosts and spirits are supernatural. They don’t follow the rules of what we think of as the “natural” world. They have powers; they do not die. Ghosts and spirits, whether human, angel, demon or something else, all have one thing in common: they are our attempt to find ways to explain the unexplainable, whether it be why nature behaves the way it does or what happens to people after death. For many living in modern society, this is the stuff of myth and legend. For others, ghosts are as real as any human being.

Dickens used them as sentient metaphors to explore a person’s past, present and future, as well as to look at why society behaves the way it does. He wanted these spirits to allow people to look at their actions and the world around them from an outside view. What do your ghosts do for you?

Haunted Chicago

Halloween has passed, but Chicago is still full of ghost stories. It is a city of the Great Fire, of theater fires, of mobsters and gangs, and of colonial battles with American Indians. Many consider it to be the most haunted city in the Midwest. Think about places around Chicago that are spoken of as haunted. Maybe you have heard stories about these places. Choose one and do some further research. Why do you think this place may be seen as haunted? Who believes it, and is there proper evidence one way or the other? Do you believe in ghosts? Finally, can you think of any other Christmas ghost stories? What about ghost stories around other holidays?
Christmas is a holiday both unique and familiar to many. Cultures all across the globe share similar traditions, especially with the influx of world travel and immigration, while maintaining local customs at the same time. For many Christian countries, the Advent season is a prevalent lead up to the Christmas celebration, while the Epiphany (January 6) is often the more important holiday. Perhaps the most common custom across the board is spending the holiday with friends and family. In *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens highlights many of the Christmas customs in Victorian England. How do they compare to the traditions of some countries across the world? How do they compare to your own family’s traditions?

**Ethiopia**

For many Ethiopians, Christmas, or Leddat, is a purely religious holiday. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians follow their own calendar, close to the Julian calendar, and therefore celebrate Christmas on January 7th rather than December 25th. Leddat is not the most important holiday. In fact, many people call it Genna, after the ball game many play only once a year, during Christmas afternoon. Christmas celebrations include processions with religious objects from churches carried through the street for the community to see. Many participate in an all night vigil on Christmas Eve, singing and praying. On Christmas morning, they attend mass where religious dances are performed. Ethiopians do not exchange gifts during Christmas.

**Mexico**

The Christmas season begins in on December 16 in Mexico with Las Posadas. Posada is the Spanish word for inn. During the nine days leading up to Christmas, a procession winds its way through town with a statue of Mary and Joseph. They recreate Mary and Joseph’s journey in Bethlehem, searching for an inn. The procession knocks on doors and are turned away by the inhabitants, symbolizing the way Mary and Joseph were turned away. After the initial refusal, the procession is
welcomed in to a party. This goes on until Christmas Eve. The procession is automatically invited in but told that the only room in the “inn” is in the stable. The statues are then placed in a Nativity scene and statues of the Baby Jesus and shepherds are added. Adults will then hang piñatas filled with sweets and small toys for children to take turns breaking open with sticks. At midnight, families will attend Misa de Gallo, or Midnight Mass. Misa de Gallo translates into Mass of the Rooster because legend has it that was the first animal to announce the birth of Christ at Midnight. In Mexico, children generally receive their gifts on the Epiphany, January 6th, the day the three kings, or Magi, brought their gifts to Jesus. It is known as El Diá de los Reyes or Three Kings’ Day.

**Sweden**

In Sweden, the Christmas season begins with St. Lucia’s Day on December 13th. The eldest daughter of the family dresses in a white gown and red sash and wears a wreath with candles on her head as she brings her family special buns for breakfast. While there are many stories of how this custom originated, one suggests that it commemorates St. Lucia who helped Christians hiding from danger during ages of persecution. She would go to their hiding places at night by lighting the way with candles on her head. Swedes often use straw to decorate their houses during the holiday. This reminds them that Jesus was born in a stable. Often, there will be a straw goat that guards the Christmas tree and protects the family from evil. Christmas dinner often consists of a smorgasbord of ham, pickled pigs feet and dried codfish. For dessert, they bake pepparkakor, cookies very similar to gingerbread.

**Philippines**

Occupied by both Spanish and
American forces over the course of its history, Filipinos mix customs from both these cultures along with rituals of their indigenous people to create unique Christmas rituals. Like in Mexico, the Christmas season begins on December 16th with the first of a series of early morning masses called Misa de Gallo. Not to be confused with Midnight Mass, Filipinos attend mass starting at 4am for the nine days leading up to Christmas. Bells ring, bands play, and firecrackers are lit to remind everyone to go to church. They will also attend a Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Gift giving, Christmas carols, Santa Claus, and nativity scenes are essential parts of the Filipino Christmas, just like they are in the U.S. When decorating for the holiday, fresh flowers are often used in this tropical country. The most important decoration is the parol, a star-shaped paper lantern lit with a candle or electric light.

**Poland**

Close to 90% of Poles identify as Roman Catholic, thus many follow Catholic rituals during the Christmas season. Traditionally, Poles will fast on Christmas Eve until the first star is sighted in the night sky. Before the Wigalia, or vigil, meal, many families will share an oplatek among them. Similar to the communion wafer at church, the father of the household will break the oplatek and share the pieces with all present, bidding members to be at peace with one another. Carp, pike, almond soup, beet soup, poppyseed cake, and ginger cake are all familiar dishes that can be served at the Christmas Eve dinner.

**Australia**

Australians share many of the same traditions as England and the U.S. However, Christmas falls during the summer there, since Australia is located in the Southern Hemisphere. Many families spend the holiday at the beach or barbequing outdoors. Santa Claus can even be seen sunbathing and surfing.

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**No wonder Santa can get it done all in one night. He has help!**

Not all, but many countries have some sort of Santa Claus figure. While not all are jolly fat men, most have beards, wear red and bring gifts to good little children. The following is a comprehensive list of the Santa Clauses of the world and what countries they hail from.

- **Christkindel:** or Christ Child, who brings gifts for children in southern Germany
- **Kriss Kringle:** United States, based off of the German Christkindel, or Christ Child, who brought gifts for children, brought over by German immigrants.
- **Père Noël:** France
- **Father Christmas:** England
- **Papai Noel:** Brazil
- **St. Nicholas:** France, Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia
- **St. Basil:** Greece
- **Grandfather Frost:** Russia
- **Jultomten:** Sweden
- **Weihnachtsmann:** northern Germany
- **Hoteiosho:** Japan, a Buddhist god of good fortune said to have eyes on the back of his head to watch all the good children
- **Babbo Natale:** Italy
- **Julemand:** Denmark, Female Versions of Gift Givers
- **Baboushka:** Russia, baboushka means grandmother in Russian
- **La Befana:** Italy
How the Consumer Stole Christmas
by ELIZABETH GOTTMANN

The word “Christmas” literally means “Christ’s Mass”. It originated as a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, a birth that many still celebrate today. What Christmas has come to mean however, is much different. How the birth of Jesus Christ became a secularized celebration of spending can be explained through a rapid progress of marketability and consumer spending combined with the adaptation of Pagan symbols and Dutch folk tales. How this evolution shifted the holiday was surely a complicated and tedious process, but there are some specific changes that occurred that can be seen as landmarks of this Christmas transformation.

One may assume that Christmas has always been a celebration that has taken place in the United States, this though is very untrue. The U.S. became a sovereign nation in 1776 after the signing of the Declaration of Independence; Christmas did not become a national holiday until president Ulysses S. Grant declared it so in 1870, about one hundred years later. Christmas traditions however, had been brought over by Europeans many years prior. In Europe, the folk tales of a Sinterklaas had been told for a long time. He would ride in on a horse and visit houses, children would leave carrots in their shoes for Sinterklaas’s horses to enjoy and he would leave presents (mainly some kind of candy) in the shoes in return. Sinterklaas was also said to have a group of playful helpers. When Christianity reached the Netherlands, Sinterklaas’s folk tale was celebrated and associated with the bishop Saint Nicolas. Saint Nicolas was said to have left money in the chimneys of women who were without a dowry, which was essential in marriage arrangements at the time. These tales combined and created America’s modern Santa Claus. A man with a group of elf helpers that brought presents to children through a chimney. Instead of the carrots for the horse, it became cookies for Santa. No more horses either, magical reindeer added to fantasy. When Santa reached the U.S., however, his image was still of a thin, basic looking man. Images of Saint Nicolas, too, were of a statuesque bishop who didn’t always wear a red robe. Our modern image of Santa came to be the same way many of our modern images are generated, through artists.

In the 20th century, as writers and artists such as Washington Irving, Clement Clark Moore, Thomas Nast, and Katherine Lee Bates began to artistically create Santa’s home, wife, workshop and overall story, one man would cement the image of Santa into our minds forever. Haddon Sundblom would create the image of Santa Claus we know today to be used as a marketing campaign for Coca-Cola. The friendly, plump and jolly face was seen enjoying a Coke. Wearing a red coat with white trim (Coca-Cola’s trademark colors). Coke sales sky rocketed and it did not take long for more companies to jump on the bandwagon. Soon images of Santa were everywhere. The epicenter of this Christmas market was New York and for good reason.

Shopping protestors outside Starbucks. Courtesy of UK Indymedia.
New York, formerly named New Amsterdam when it was first settled by the Dutch, was engulfed in Dutch traditions and folklore. Most importantly, Sinterklaas, the model for the modern Santa Claus. Big stores like Gimbel began having Santa characters taking requests from eager children as their parents shopped. Santa became the grand finale in the Macy’s Christmas day parade. Things such as the Yule log, Christmas tree, and mistletoe began to become symbols for the season, traditions also brought over by the Dutch and other European nations. Soon a medley of secularized carols and Christmas specials became season staples. Before long, everyone had somebody to celebrate on Christmas, and it was not (necessarily) Jesus Christ.

The transformation of Christmas into a more secular consumer holiday is not all negative, though! In present-day America, many of the messages associated with Christmas are accessible to those not wishing to partake in a religious celebration. Messages that encourage time spent with family, charity and peace are told through the lens of Christmas; it has become a time of family and friend togetherness, regardless of religious affiliation. Those wishing to celebrate Christmas in a more traditional, religious way still do so. A main success that Christmas accomplishes is bringing people together in a loving and joyous way. It is a time for all people to come together and bask in the things that connect us. The joy of Christmas time is a transcendent feeling that, even with a little bit of marketing coercion many are proud to celebrate.
By the beginning of high school, Yaron and I had a routine. Up too early for a vacation day, out of the house before my parents had finished their coffee, and starting the first *Harry Potter* at Yaron’s by 10am at the latest. We’d order takeout, or when we got a bit older, Yaron would borrow the keys to the minivan and we’d drive through the deserted streets to the only restaurant open in Sycamore, Illinois on December 25th – a Chinese buffet.

When I was a kid, we celebrated a vague version of Christmas with my non-religious grandparents. It was really just an excuse to get the whole family in one house. There was a tree, but there was also a menorah, and my older brother and I would teach and reteach our cousins the Hebrew prayers every year. The first time we didn’t go to my grandparent’s house, my brother asked if we were going to have tree. “No,” mom said, “We don’t celebrate Christmas.” and that was that. We didn’t celebrate Christmas.

As I grew up, and I created my own Non-Christmas traditions. With my best friend Yaron, it was *Harry Potter* and Chinese food – intentionally unreligious and rebellious. There were under 10 Jewish kids in our town, including the two of us and our older brothers, so we were used to people not really getting it. Every year, we were met with surprise that we didn’t celebrate Christmas and didn’t have anything to do on December 25th in our tiny, Christian, hometown. “Do you speak Jewish?” we were asked more than once. “Isn’t Hanukkah just the Jewish Christmas? Don’t you get, like, a Hanukkah bush?”

“It’s Hebrew,” I’d bite back. “And I don’t get why you put lights on your house. Hanukkah is the festival of lights. Lights should be our thing.” I was fiercely protective of my Judaism, clinging to my difference. I sat out of auditions for Christmas Madrigals on principle, rolled my eyes at Christmas decorations, and rejected Christianity as much as I felt my town rejected me. I was afraid that if I...
gave a single inch on Christmas, I would be compromising my identity; I would somehow be less Jewish.

When my boyfriend, Will, first asked me to go to his parent’s house for Christmas, I was hesitant. Will was, and still is, a “Christmas Person,” with the kind of enthusiasm for the holiday that is barely matched by actual cartoon characters. I envisioned this picture perfect celebration with a Jewish grinch dropped in the middle of it. I was terrified of feeling isolated and stupid, different and alone. And I was afraid that if I enjoyed it in any way, I’d be giving up the cynicism I had embraced for so many years as a proper Jewish response to the holiday season.

That year, the final night of Hanukkah was Christmas Eve, and as Will and I arrived at his parent’s house just before sundown, I saw something at their perfect celebration of Christmas I wasn’t anticipating: a menorah. Rachel, Will’s sister in law, lit the candles and gave me a knowing look. There we were: two Jews lighting Hanukkah candles on Christmas Eve. All of a sudden, I wasn’t alone or isolated, and I wasn’t a spectator. It was just another night with a Christmas tree and a menorah; another excuse to get the whole family in one house.

I go to Will’s parent’s house for Christmas every year now, and every year, Rachel makes potato latkes for the kosher Christmas morning breakfast. While I’m still not sure I’m the model of Christmas celebrating, I have discovered that being with my boyfriend and his family on December 25th isn’t a compromise of my identity, but just a compromise. For me, Christmas has become a whole new holiday, transforming into whatever I need it to be: a movie marathon with my best friend, quiet time with my parents, a blending of families and traditions, or just an excuse to drink eggnog. Whatever it is to you, I wish you a merry one. And while we’re at at...Happy Hanukkah.

Me with a Christmas gift from my boyfriend’s sister-in-law, a Santa Dreidel.
Building *A Christmas Carol*

Click here to view a gallery of 360 degree images of the load in of the 40th Anniversary PRoduction of *A Christmas Carol*, and see how the magic is made.
What Should I Wear?
For a lot of people, going to the theater is a special event, and they like to dress up for it. Remember: even though you are on a field trip you should dress according to your school’s dress code. The Goodman is air conditioned, so bring a sweater or extra layer in case you get cold.

Be respectful to the artists on stage, and to your fellow audience members. No talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking. No use of phones or electronic devices — the glow from the screen is distracting to your fellow audience members and the actors (and yes, they can see it)!

Please remember: no smoking, and no eating or drinking while inside the theater.

What if I need to leave the theater during the show?
Only if it is an emergency. Otherwise, it’s very disrespectful. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until intermission.

How should I respond to what’s going on on the stage?
Honesty but appropriately. Theatre is very different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you are in a room full of people who are there to watch the performance. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most importantly, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feedback but might be offended if it is inappropriate. Whether you enjoy the play or not, you owe respect to the actors.
What to do before the show:
When you arrive at the Goodman, you will be given a ticket and asked to. It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the performance. If you are late, often you will not be allowed to enter the show until after intermission. Once your group is called, an usher will lead you to your seats and hand you a program. Please promptly sit where you have been assigned. Remember that the show needs to begin on time and everyone needs to be seated.

What to do during Intermission:
Most plays have a 15 minute intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, use the restroom, get some water, and discuss the play with your friends. We do ask that you remain on the floor where your seat is – there are restrooms on both levels. When intermission is over, the lights in the lobby with flash several times. That is your cue to get back to your seat, because the performance is about to begin!

What to do after the show:
There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance. Members of the cast will come out on stage and answer your questions. Feel free to ask anything that’s on your mind about the show, but please remember to be respectful.
As a patron of the theatre, it is important to know how to read your ticket and find your seat. Generally, seats for all performances in the Goodman’s Albert Theatre are assigned seating, so be sure to know how to be able to find your seat. When you come with your school, you will be ushered to a section where you and your fellow students can sit and enjoy the play together.

Below is an explanation of how to read your ticket, and all of the information that you can get from your ticket. If you have any problems, ask an usher for help. They’re here for you!