Goodman Theatre
Student Subscription Series
2007/2008 Season

Student Guide

A Christmas Carol

By Charles Dickens
Adapted by Tom Creamer
Directed by William Brown

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Welcome to the Study Guide
A useful key for what’s inside

All of the pages have a title and subtitle. Not all of them rhyme (we’re not that clever), but they’ll give you a general idea of what type of information is on the page.

Whenever you see a black box with white text, read it before anything else! It contains the background information you need to understand the rest of the material on that page. You won’t see one of these on every page, but keep an eye out for them.

Text in bold throughout the guide highlights key words, phrases and ideas. Make sure you read it!

Think About It:
(Topic)

Dashed circles surround questions for you to consider as you discuss the play and other related topics. Rather than focusing directly on the text, most questions will encourage you to relate ideas from the play to your personal experiences.

All quotations are in cursive writing inside boxes. The quote below doesn’t have anything to do with the rest of the guide—it’s just Elizabeth’s favorite. However, all other quotes will relate to the topics of the pages on which they appear.

“A dream as though you’ll live forever; live as though you’ll die today.”
-James Dean

A happy computer symbol means the content on that page is expanded upon or included in full in our Knowledge Nucleus online at goodmaneneacp.typepad.com. Video clips, the full text of articles, interviews, etc. will be posted there along with other educational resources.

Activity
(Name of activity)

Stars like this are activities for you and your classmates: everything from group contests to individual acting exercises.
Exploring the Production
It feels good to give audiences the gift that is the essence of the play—the story of someone learning to share. As obvious as it sounds, the actor needs the audience, and many audiences need A Christmas Carol. For a few of them, it will be the only Christmas celebration they will have, and I’m glad that they will celebrate with us.

- William Norris (Scrooge ‘78-‘89)

A Christmas Carol is really a two-way gift, a present that you give the audience and yourself every night. It reinforces all the good things about Christmas that you learned as a child, and it does that without being just simple, light-weight entertainment. […] It’s a privilege to make so many people so happy.

- Belinda Bremner (Mrs. Cratchit ‘80-‘82)

I don’t know why I like it so much.

- Aaron Kramer (Tiny Tim ‘80-‘81)
It's a great role. It's an almost Shakespearean role.... this journey from the Scrooge we know and hate to someone who really finds a kind of peace and redemption at the end of the evening. We're all drawn to that.

- William Brown
from an interview on cbs2chicago.com

The Director Formerly Known as “Scrooge”

This is William Brown's second year directing Goodman Theatre's A Christmas Carol. However, he's been involved with the production since the late 1980's when he joined the cast as Scrooge's nephew, Fred. Since then, he's also played the ghost of Jacob Marley and the man himself—Ebenezer Scrooge—for four seasons.

In an interview with CBS 2 - Chicago last year, Brown said his 15 years of experience in the show, particularly as Scrooge, helped him direct the cast members last season. He also noted that there are social issues in the story that still ring true today.

"What Scrooge learns with those three spirits is that he cannot avoid being a part of his world, whether it's his family or his employees or the world at large where a lot of people go to bed hungry. All of that comes out.... Ignorance and Want turn into war and terrorism... It's [still] out there," Brown said.

His other directing credits include work with Northlight Theatre, Writers' Theatre, Time Line Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, American Players Theatre, Notre Dame Summer Shakespeare and Montana Shakespeare in the Parks, where he serves as Associate Artistic Director.
The timeline below details important world events throughout the 30 years Goodman Theatre has been producing A Christmas Carol. For more details about these and many other key world events, visit our Knowledge Nucleus online.

1978
- U.S. Senate approves Panama Canal neutrality treaty to turn canal over to Panama by 2000.

1980
- John Lennon of the Beatles shot dead in New York City; smallpox eradicated worldwide.

1986
- U.S. space shuttle Challenger explodes after launch in Cape Canaveral, killing all seven aboard; major nuclear meltdown at Soviet Union’s Chernobyl power station releases deadly radiation.

1989
- Thousands killed when Chinese leaders use tanks and troops to stop massive million-plus rally for democracy in Tiananmen Square: Berlin Wall opens to West after 28 years; Dalai Lama wins Nobel Peace Prize.

1991
- UN forces victorious in Persian Gulf War; Europeans end sanctions on South Africa; South African Parliament repeals apartheid laws; Soviet Union breaks up after President Mikhail Sergeyeyevich Gorbachev’s resignation.

1979
- Vietnam and Vietnam-backed Cambodian insurgents announce fall of Cambodian capital and collapse of Pol Pot regime.

1981
- U.S. President Ronald Reagan nominates Judge Sandra Say O’Connor as first woman on Supreme Court; AIDS virus first identified.

1988
- Benazir Bhutto, first Muslim woman prime minister, chosen to lead Pakistan.

1990
- World Wide Web debuts, popularizes Internet; South Africa frees Nelson Mandela after 27.5 years in prison; Hubble Space Telescope launched; Iraqi troops invade Kuwait and seize petroleum reserves, starting Persian Gulf War; Haiti elects leftist priest as president in first democratic election.

1992
- U.S. and Russia proclaim formal end to Cold War.

End Apartheid
South Africa Must Be Free
Divest Now
### Timeline

- **1994**: Rwandan genocide of Tutsis by Hutus begins, killing an estimated 800,000 in some 100 days; Nelson Mandela elected president in South Africa’s first interracial national election.
- **1998**: India conducts three atomic tests despite worldwide disapproval; Pakistan stages five nuclear tests in response.
- **1997**: U.S. spacecraft begins exploration of Mars, transmits thousands of pictures back to Earth; Kyoto Protocol encourages nations to limit greenhouse gas emissions.
- **1999**: World population reaches six billion; five-year-old Cuban refugee Elián González gets caught in politically charged custody battle; new Northern Ireland government begins self-rule for first time in 25 years.
- **2000**: Presidents of North and South Korea sign peace accord, ending half-century of antagonism; human genome deciphered; Mad Cow disease alarms Europe.
- **2002**: The Euro currency debuts in 12 European countries; North Korea admits to developing nuclear arms in defiance of treaty.
- **2004**: Same-sex marriages begin in Massachusetts, first U.S. state to legalize the unions; Sudan government and rebels reach accord to end 21-year civil war that claimed some 2 million people, while separate war in western Darfur region continues; enormous tsunami devastates Southeast Asia, killing at least 225,000.
- **2006**: U.S. Senate rejects proposed constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage; International Astronomical Union reclassifies Pluto as a dwarf planet; South African parliament votes to legalize same-sex marriage.
- **2011**: Terrorists attack U.S. World Trade Center and Pentagon, killing over 3,000; U.S. and British forces launch bombing campaign against Talibain government and al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan.
- **2005**: Hurricane Katrina on Gulf Coast kills over 1,000 and leaves millions homeless; Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement sign peace accord to end nearly 30-year-long civil war; massive earthquake in Kashmir region of South Asia kills over 80,000 and leaves millions homeless; Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf becomes Africa's first woman head of state.

### Think About It:

**What’s most important?**

Which three events from this timeline do you think are the most important of the past 30 years? What makes them so significant? What factors did you use to select them? Was this decision hard for you to make? Why or why not? Are there any events in the timeline above that you did not know about? Why do you think some events are taught or discussed more than others?
How much do you know about your city?
Now’s your chance to interview older friends and relatives, interview people around the city and do some research on the past 30 years of Chicago history! Want to know about the history of Italian restaurants? How about when and why the Chicago river was first dyed green for St. Patrick’s Day? The list below contains a few ideas to get you started, but be creative—anything goes! You can look into a broad topic, like poverty or education, or something as specific as Kanye West’s career and Chicago hip hop. Use the questions and project ideas at the bottom of this page for guidance.

1994 World Cup at Soldier Field
Holiday celebrations in the city
Mayor Richard M. Daley
Public transportation
Millennium Park
Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls
Destruction of public housing projects
Kanye West and the hip hop revolution
Advances in architecture
Poverty and homelessness
Education
Cubs/White Sox rivalry
Immigration today
The Taste of Chicago
Disparity of wealth
Movies filmed in Chicago

Project ideas:
♦ Write a two or three page story in first person from the perspective of someone involved in the event/theme you’ve chosen. For example, write from the perspective of a homeless person downtown about the services available to him/her, or as Mayor Daley discussing his projects with the Chicago parks.
♦ Using a large sheet of poster board, make a timeline of events, using pictures you’ve drawn or collected. Include people, places and dates related to the event/theme you’ve selected. For example, the people and key events of the Bulls’ championship seasons in the 1990s, or of the changes in education at Chicago public high schools over 30 years.
♦ Compose a song about the topic you’ve selected, using only the most important information in the lyrics of the song. Consider how you feel about the information you’ve discovered and how you want to communicate that to your classmates through rhythm and words.

Questions to consider:
♦ How did/does your topic affect the people of Chicago?
♦ What other events or ideas are related to your topic? How? (For instance, consider how betting in sports might have affected a team’s performance.)
♦ What has changed about your topic during your lifetime? The past 30 years?

The Chicago White Sox won the 2005 World Series.
Hip hop artist Kanye West grew up in Chicago.

The Cloud Gate sculpture in Millennium Park cost a total of $23 million. All funding came from private donations.
Exploring the Text
Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England on Feb. 7, 1812. His family was middle class and Dickens received some education at a private school — but that changed when his father was imprisoned for debt, mostly due to his spending too much money entertaining. The Dickens family went to Marshalsea debtors’ prison while Charles stayed behind to work ten hours each day at Warren’s boot-blacking factory. He was 12 years old. He put labels on jars of polish and earned only six shillings per week—the equivalent of earning $26 per week today—most of which went to support his family.

Once the Dickens family resolved their financial woes, Charles’ mother forced him to continue working at the factory. Resentment of his situation and the conditions under which working-class people were treated later became major themes of Dickens’ works. After leaving the factory, he tried his hand as a law clerk, but did not enjoy the profession. He became a journalist and wrote about parliamentary debates and campaign elections, also penning humorous sketches for magazines in his free time. These sketches were eventually complied and published in his first book, Sketches by Boz (1836), and were very well received by 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). Over the next few years Dickens wrote many popular novels, becoming the most popular writer in Britain. To this day, none of his novels have gone out of print in England!

Due to Dickens’ days of working in the factory, he was also very interested in social reform. Throughout his works, Dickens retained an empathy for the common man and a skepticism for the upper class. On a visit to America in 1842, he upset his hosts by condemning slavery. He even invested some of his money in radical newspapers such as All Year Round, which covered social issues. Two of Dickens’ novels ran in that newspaper, which he continued to publish until his death on June 8, 1870. The inscription on his tombstone in Westminster Abbey 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.

“I am sure that 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.” - Charles Dickens
Dickens published over a dozen novels in his lifetime, covering a broad range of topics. Below are seven of his novels in no particular order—to the left is a chronological timeline of the seven works, without the titles. See if you can match each novel below to its summary by using the titles and pictures! Write the corresponding letter on the line beneath each novel. The answers are in very small type at the bottom right corner of this page.

Timeline of Dickens' Works

A (1836) A collection of writings named after a pen name Dickens gave his younger brother Augustus: Moses. As a young child, Augustus pronounced the name “Boses.”

B (1836) Dickens' first monthly serial — a series of comic sketches that evolves into a loosely structured novel.

C (1837) An orphan meets a pickpocket on the streets of London and joins a household of boys who are trained to steal for their master.

D (1839) An exposé of schools that were little more than dumping grounds for unwanted children.

E (1849) The most autobiographical of all Dickens' novels, dealing with the life of the title character from childhood to maturity.

F (1859) London and Paris are the setting for Dickens' story of Sydney Carton and the French Revolution.

G (1860) A novel of crime and punishment narrated in the first person. It is often considered to be Dickens' greatest work.

1. Oliver Twist  
2. Sketches by Boz  
3. Nicholas Nickleby  
4. David Copperfield  
5. A Tale of Two Cities  
6. The Pickwick Papers  
7. Great Expectations
“It is required of every man...that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world...and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness.

[...]

I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you? [...] Or would you know the weight of the chain you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. And you have laboured on it, since.”

- Ghost of Jacob Marley, A Christmas Carol

What sort of mood does the text above evoke? Is it happy? Sad? Angry? What about the text makes you feel that way about it? Are there specific word choices or phrases that Dickens uses to build that mood?

________________________

________________________

Dickens writes that “the spirit within [a man] should walk abroad his fellowmen.” What does this mean? Are there other parts of the text above that give you clues?

________________________

________________________

Try reading the speech out loud. Does it read differently out loud than it does silently? Why do you think that is? What do you notice about the sounds of the words, rhythm and repetition? Why might a writer make specific choices for text and rhythm?

________________________

________________________

Can you think of another author or song writer that uses word choices and/or rhythms that directly affect the story s/he is telling? How does s/he do this?
Vocabulary
It does a conversation good

Straight from the Play

The following words can be found in the text of *A Christmas Carol*. How a word is used in the text—its context—can often help you figure out what the word means, even if you don’t know its exact definition. Hint: familiar words and phrases near the unknown word in a sentence can help!

- scuttle
- destitute
- keenly
- dismal
- busker
- tuppence
- beguiled
- ponderous
- sobriety
- dowry
- farthing

- liberality
- annum
- surplus
- homage
- gruel
- fathom
- shun
- frivolity
- mince pie
- bedlam
- sanctimoniously

- solemnized
- heresy
- shillings
- melancholy
- forbearance
- apparition
- benevolence
- reclamation
- spectacle
- vexed

“The only proper intoxication is conversation.”
- Oscar Wilde

Activity
The Dictionary Game

Instructions
- Your teacher selects a word from the list to the left.
- You and your classmates use identical pieces of paper to write your own made-up definitions of the word, making them sound like “real” dictionary definitions. (Hint: try to sound as “professional” as you can.) Don’t let anyone else see!
- Turn your definitions into your teacher, who also has a copy of the actual definition. S/he reads all of the definitions aloud once so everyone can hear them, then on the second reading you and your classmates vote on which definition is actually from the dictionary. (This is why you want your definition to sound “real,” even if you don’t know what the word really means.)
- You score one point for every person who votes for your definition, and two points if you choose the actual dictionary definition.
- The student with the most points at the end of the game is the winner!

Think About It: Word Imaging

Read some of the vocabulary words aloud. Do their sounds influence what you think their definitions might be? Why?

Choose one word and draw how it sounds on a piece of paper. What images do you think of when you hear the word? What emotions? Share your “word imaging” with your classmates, then look up the actual definition to see if your picture fits.
The story of *A Christmas Carol* takes place in three different time periods: the past, the present, and the future. Characters appear in one or more of the time periods, and they all have a reason for appearing where they do. As you read the play, use the chart below to keep track of the time period in which the characters appear. Be sure to include all of the characters. Remember, there are no small parts, just small actors!

Once you have filled in the chart, discuss the following questions with your classmates: *Which characters appear in more than one time period? Why do you think Dickens chose those specific characters to appear in more than one time period? Are there any characters that appear only once? Why?*

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**Think About It:**

**Different media, different *Carols***

The above pictures of the ghosts in *A Christmas Carol* are from a 1999 movie adaptation starring Patrick Stewart as Scrooge. Other film adaptations include *Scrooged* starring Bill Murray and *A Muppet Christmas Carol* starring Michael Caine.

Watch a film adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* and compare it to Goodman Theatre’s production. Do you think this story works better as a film or play? Why? What is similar or different about the way the story is presented in each form?

To view clips of several film adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*, visit our Knowledge Nucleus online!

Pictures from www.cedmagic.com
Although *A Christmas Carol* is often thought of as a holiday story, it is also very much a ghost story. Jacob Marley and the three ghosts of Christmas are the forces behind Scrooge’s transformation, and there are many scary moments in both Dickens’ original novella and Goodman Theatre’s stage adaptation. With that in mind, consider the following questions regarding the tale of Ebenezer Scrooge—one of the most famous ghost stories ever written!

Think of some other ghost stories you’ve heard. List a few of them below.


What themes are present in all or most of the ghost stories you are familiar with?


What about costumes? How would you dress the three ghosts in *A Christmas Carol*? What would you do to make each of them unique?


How would you design a set for a ghost story? How does this compare to the set for Goodman’s production of *A Christmas Carol*?


“The past is a ghost, the future a dream, and all we ever have is now.”

- Bill Cosby

For fun links to sites listing fictional and (allegedly) real ghost stories, visit our Knowledge Nucleus online!

Boo humbug!
1. Put your self in Scrooge’s shoes—pretend you are taken away to see your past and future. What would the ghosts take you to see? How would you feel about what you saw? If you could, would you want to know about your future, or would you rather wait for it to happen? Why?

2. Do you like ghost stories? Why or why not? Do you think fear is an important part of A Christmas Carol? Would Scrooge have gone through such a dramatic change if he hadn’t been scared by the ghosts? In what other ways could he have been made to look at his life? Would they be as effective as his ghost visitors?

3. A Christmas Carol is one of many value-based stories. What other stories do you know where values are taught? How are they conveyed? Is there always a dramatic change in the main character? Do you think our city/country today has made progress from London’s values during A Christmas Carol? Why/why not?

4. When a character does not change drastically (or at all) throughout a story, s/he is a static character. Can you think of any static characters in A Christmas Carol? Why do you think we need static characters?
Exploring the Context
A Global Perspective

The timeline below 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. Check out our Knowledge Nucleus online for a more detailed timeline of Dickens' life and works.

1812
Charles Dickens is born at Landport, Portsmouth on Feb. 7.

1822
Dickens and his family move to London. Due to limited finances, he can no longer attend school.

1824
Dickens' father is arrested for debt; he begins working at Warren's Blacking warehouse. Dickens resumes schooling after his father is released from prison.

1833
Dickens meets Catherine Hogarth, daughter of a Morning Chronicle music critic. Dickens works at the Morning Chronicle from 1833 to 1836.

1836
Dickens and Hogarth marry on April 2.

1842
Dickens and his wife go on a six-month American tour. His account of the trip, American Notes, criticized slavery and angered many Americans.

1853
Slavery is abolished in the British Empire.

1861
The American Civil War begins; following the Crimean War, the Emperor of Russia abolishes serfdom, or "enforced labor."

1864
Taiping Civil War in China ends; death toll is an estimated 20 million civilians and soldiers.

1865
American Civil War ends; death toll is an estimated 620,000 soldiers and undetermined number of civilians; Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolishes slavery in the United States.

Visit our Knowledge Nucleus online to read the full text of A Christmas Carol — and the condensed version that Dickens used for his readings!
London is as much a character in Charles Dickens' novels as Ebenezer Scrooge or Tiny Tim. To Dickens, London was a living, breathing entity for which he had an enduring fascination.

In the 19th century, London was the largest and richest city in the world, yet it was struggling to cope with large numbers of desperately poor people. The city was divided geographically between the very rich and the very poor. The aristocracy were building town houses in the elegant squares and crescents near Westminster in the West End. The bulk of the middle and lower classes lived down both sides of the Thames River from the Tower of London in what came to be known as the East End. Approximately one-third of London’s population lived in very unsanitary and neglected areas called the Slums.

These problems may have increased due to the city’s growth: between 1800 and 1880, London’s population soared from 1 to 4.5 million people!

**Problems in Dickens’ London**

- **Crime** — Rampant! The police believed that some 20,000 children were being trained in thieving in the 1860s, in the way Dickens describes in *Oliver Twist*.
- **Water** — Polluted! Many citizens drank water from the same part of the Thames where sewage was dumped.
- **Drainage** — Inadequate! Increased the spread of diseases.
- **Diseases** — Epidemics spread like wildfires, especially in the poorer districts where water and drainage were horrible.
- **Housing** — Entire families were crammed into one-room apartments.
- **Work conditions** — Employees were overworked and underpaid, and often worked in unsafe environments.

**London in 1862**

(after Stanfords' Library Map, showing the principal roads, railways, locks and canals)

**Camden Town** Where the Cratchits live!  
**East End**  
**West End**

**A sketch of the West End in 1847.**

**Dorset Street in the East End circa 1900.**
What’s a Ragged School?

In Victorian London, “Ragged Schools” were educational facilities set up by charities (often religiously affiliated) to provide education, food, clothing and lodging for poor children. The schools received no government support, however, and therefore were in poor condition. Additionally, only one out of every three children attended school during Dickens’ life—an estimated 100,000 poor children in Victorian London never even attended a Ragged School.

On Thursday night, I went to the Ragged School; and 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 the prodigious misery and ignorance of the swarming masses of mankind in England, the seeds of its certain ruin are sown. I never saw that Truth so staring out in hopeless characters as it does from the walls of this place.

- Charles Dickens
from a letter to Miss Burdett Coutts, Sept. 16, 1843

Notes from Goodman Theatre’s 1997 Playbill for A Christmas Carol

When he sat down to write A Christmas Carol in 1843, Dickens was already one of the foremost literary figures and social crusaders of his time, but little did he imagine that his ghostly Christmas tale would assure his future financial security, restore the then dying tradition of celebrating Christmas, and give life to characters that have endured over 150 years. After visiting several of London’s charity “Ragged Schools” for poor children, Dickens decided to write an article condemning the treatment of the poor and their lack of access to education. The working poor who crowded the factories and mines were often forced to choose between work in abysmal conditions for very little money or begging on street corners. Victorian society looked on this without concern, content to think that these conditions were a necessary evil for the advancement of the state.

Fortunately for us, Dickens never finished the article. Instead, he wrote an uplifting tale of holiday cheer and an old miser’s redemption. A Christmas Carol was written in a feverish six weeks. Dickens was so sure of the story’s potential for success that he paid all publication costs himself, insisting on an elaborate format with gilt edges, colored end papers, and four hand-colored plates by Punch* artist John Leech. He priced the manuscript at a modest five shillings to make it accessible to a wider audience. Dickens’ faith in his story was not misplaced. Six thousand copies of the first edition were sold on the day of publication.

* A British weekly magazine of humor and satire published from 1841 to 1992 and from 1996 to 2002.
Most of Dickens’ novels take place in London, the city in which he lived. He would often walk the streets, sometimes as many as 10 or 20 miles at a time! Due to this, his descriptions of 19th Century London allow readers to experience the sights, sounds, and smells of the city. **Using the map below, find a neighborhood you know well, and write a description of it.** Try to include both tangible and intangible qualities such as the sights, sounds, and smells, but also feelings you get while there and the atmosphere it has.

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**Chicago vs. Dickens’ London**

The following questions ask you to think about Chicago in relation to Dickens’ London. Use the information you know about London and the experience you have in Chicago to answer the questions.

- What similarities do you see between Dickens’ London and your Chicago? Does London have any advantages over Chicago?
- If Scrooge were to move to Chicago, what neighborhood do you think he would live in? Why? Where would the Cratchits live?
- If you could change something about the way Chicago is structured, what would it be?
- Do you think Chicago is divided? If so, along what lines do these divisions exist? For example, cultural, political, financial, etc.
- Color in on the map how you think Chicago is divided. What effect does this division have on the culture of Chicago?
- Do you think the CTA/public transportation could play a role in bridging this divide? If so, how?
- Look up pictures of Chicago in the late 1800s on the internet. How has Chicago changed over the years?

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Pictures from www.acweb.colum.edu and www.ucl.ac.uk
Christmas Trees

The Christmas tree can truly be called a Victorian innovation. The custom of a lighted tree began in Germany and German settlers brought the idea to America. However, it wasn’t until Prince Albert wedded Victoria, and brought the Christmas tree with him that the tree gained popularity. By 1847, the trees at Windsor Castle were laden with presents as well as wax candles. The tradition spread as English citizens followed the Royal example. The trees and other decorations were removed on Twelfth Night (January 6). To do so before or after was considered bad luck.

Carols

The Victorians loved music, so it is no surprise that they revived the old medieval carols and also composed new ones both secular and religious. Their interest in parlor singing sparked the use of cheerful, easily sung music in their Christmas celebrations. Musicians collected old nativity carols as well as writing new ones. During Christmas Mass, “O Holy Night” and the “Messiah” filled the churches.

Activity

Mrs. Cratchit’s Plum Pudding

Ingredients:
- 2 cups pre-cooked plums
- 2 cups sugar (granulated)
- 2 cups flour
- 3/4 stick butter or margarine
- 2 cups milk (less for thicker pudding)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Instructions: Melt butter and stir into plums. Stir in flour, sugar, cinnamon in that order and mix well. Stir milk in slowly; mix well. Pour into 9-by-8-inch cake pan and bake for one hour or less in 350 degree preheated oven. (Cutting baking time will create a juicier interior.)

For sauce, melt two tablespoons butter in a small saucepan over medium heat. Stir in two tablespoons of flour. When flour thickens, stir in plum juice, sugar to taste, and cook until sauce is desired thickness. Spoon hot sauce over pudding. Sauce will refrigerate well, and is as tasty cold as hot!

A New Kind of Christmas

Charles Dickens had a great impact on the way Christmas is celebrated today, perhaps more than any other individual. His Christmas stories captured the “spirit of Christmas” by encouraging the rich to give to the poor. Moreover, many modern Christmas traditions originated in the 1800s due to the revitalization of the holiday.

Food

Christmas dinner was a grand affair! Goose, chicken, turkey or a joint of roast beef took center stage on the table. Christmas pudding, made with beef, raisins and prunes, was mixed on Stir-up Sunday, the Sunday before Advent, in order for the mixture to mature. All present in the house took turns stirring the pudding with a wooden spoon (in honor of the Christchild’s wooden crib). The stirring had to be done in a clockwise direction for luck. Mince pies were another traditional dish. They were sweeter, made with mincemeat, fruit and spices, and had to be eaten for the 12 days of Christmas to ensure 12 months of luck in the coming year. Each one had to be baked by a different person, however, so there was much sharing with friends!
What's a Humbug?
Different times, different meanings

Although the spirited themes of *A Christmas Carol* ring as true today as they did 150 years ago, many of its expressions contained different meanings for Charles Dickens' first audience. Here are a few examples, taken directly from Goodman Theatre’s 1999 playbill for *A Christmas Carol*.

### Christmas Caroling

Today’s Christmas carolers may sing in the cold with hopes of being invited inside for hot chocolate and cookies, but in Dickens' time many carolers sang to keep from starving. This form of begging was illegal; it was a last resort for families trying to stay out of the poorhouse. Dickens may well have considered the irony between the joyous nature of the carols themselves and the pitiful situation of the people he heard singing them in the London streets when he titled his book *A Christmas Carol*.

### Merry Christmas!

Just as Scrooge’s persona is wrapped up in humbug, Charles Dickens’ is intertwined with Christmas. In one of Dickens’ obituaries it was reported that a young girl, upon hearing that Dickens was dead, asked: “Then will Father Christmas die too?” And J.W.T. Ley in the 1906 Christmas issue of the *Dickensian* noted that: “Beyond question, it was Charles Dickens who gave us Christmas as we understand it to-day.”

The writing of *A Christmas Carol* in 1843 took place at a time when what are now central Christmas traditions were being established. In the 1840s Prince Albert introduced the German Christmas tree to the English celebration, and in the same years Christmas cards became popular greetings to send friends and family. **One of Dickens’ best gifts to the holiday is a simple phrase we still use today. Scrooge’s nephew Fred’s cry of: “A Merry Christmas, uncle!” was the first use of this standard holiday greeting. As Dickens’ granddaughter Monica pointed out: “When you say ‘Merry Christmas’ you are quoting Charles Dickens.”**

In Dickens’ time the word “humbug” was a common and witty expression used to proclaim a hoax, trick or deception. A 1751 paper noted humbug as “a blackguard sound, made use of by most people of distinction! It is a fine, make-weight in conversation, and some great men deceive themselves so egregiously as to think they mean something by it!”

The word’s origins are unknown, but Scrooge’s use of “Bah! Humbug!” to belittle Christmas and Marley’s Ghost would have marked him as a man of fashion, albeit a grumpy one. Dickens’ conjunction of Scrooge and “Humbug” acknowledged the word’s popularity and made use of his readers’ associations of humbug with the model businessman of England’s Industrial Age, interested only in hard economic fact and with no time for useless sentiment. Today, the word humbug has slipped out of popular usage, but remains a symbol of Scrooge and his cantankerous manner. John Irving sums it all up in an article on *A Christmas Carol* when he states: “Ebenezer Scrooge is the original Bah-Humbug man.”

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What's the Industrial Revolution?

The Industrial Revolution was a period when much of society moved from working on the land as farmers to working in manufacturing and commerce in factories. It began in Britain, and spread throughout the rest of Europe and North America, lasting from the middle of the 18th century to the early 1900s. There were two main phases of the Revolution: the first was founded on iron, steam, and coal; the second was founded on steel, electricity, and oil. Throughout both of these phases, cities grew very quickly and modern sciences were developed. The new inventions, ideas and methods that resulted led to more efficient means of production.

Activity

Revolutionary Impact

Child Labor Environment
Literacy Housing
Gender Roles Organization of Labor

Grab a partner and choose one aspect of the Industrial Revolution from the list above.

One of you research the effect your topic had on society during London’s industrial revolution, while the other researches the issue and its current impact on the United States or Chicago.

Next, work together to write a short play, poem, story or song, or make a drawing/collage that summarizes your findings. Share your artwork with the rest of your class!

Class Conflicts

During the Industrial Revolution, ordinary people found increased opportunities for employment in numerous new mills and factories, but these jobs were often under strict working conditions with long hours and low pay. This caused the gap between the rich and the poor to increase dramatically.

Many individuals spoke out against the conditions of the working class and the effects of the Industrial Revolution, Karl Marx among them. According to Marx, the industrialization of society formed two different groups: the bourgeoisie (business owners) and the proletariat (working class). Marx asserted that the balance between these two groups was unfair. The bourgeoisie was becoming absurdly wealthy from the proletariats’ labor, while the lower class was not able to reap the benefits of their hard work. He felt the capitalist economy created by the Industrial Revolution was not beneficial to all of society.

Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote The Communist Manifesto, which set forth the foundation of communism. They believed peaceful negotiation of the class problem between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was impractical, and that a massive, well-organized and violent revolution would be required. Since the ruling class would not give up power peacefully, and the lower class outnumbered the ruling class, Marx thought this the best way to achieve a perfect society.

Visit our Knowledge Nucleus online to read the full text of A Communist Manifesto.

Important Terms

Bourgeoisie - the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and the employers of wage labor.
Capitalism - the socioeconomic system where social relations are based on commodities for exchange, in particular private ownership of the means of production and on the use of wage labor.
Communism - an ideology that seeks to establish a future classless, stateless social organization, based upon common ownership of the means of production and the absence of private property.
Proletariat — the social class which does not have ownership of the means of production.

“Mr. Watson — come here — I want to see you.”
- first words spoken on a telephone in 1876
With a new attitude towards life, Ebenezer Scrooge has decided to run for mayor of London! To help the common people understand his ideas, Scrooge must educate the public about his experiences and reasons for seeking reform. By looking at various aspects of life illustrated in *A Christmas Carol*, you will develop Scrooge's campaign points and strategies, using current presidential campaigns as a model.

Your class will break into groups of three students, each running its own campaign. One student in each group will play Scrooge in a final classroom debate on the issues! Which Scrooge will be elected? Campaign wisely, and it might be you!

**Instructions**

- The student playing “Scrooge” in each campaign group will select which campaign areas s/he wants to focus on (listed in the box at right). As a group, you will determine how you can make life for the people of Victorian London better in each of those areas.

- Other students in the group will take on the roles of “campaign manager” and “publicist.” These students’ main roles will be creating campaign advertisements and other materials based around the issues the group has selected. These items might include things like campaign posters/banners, brochures, bookmarks and buttons.

- While researching and collecting information about your issues, make sure to answer the following questions:
  - What is the life of the townspeople in London like?
  - What are Scrooge’s new viewpoints on daily life in London?
  - How will Scrooge's new viewpoints on daily life change his opinions on political policy in London?
  - What solutions/programs will Scrooge support as mayor?

- Once your campaign materials are ready, your “Scrooge” will face off against the others in a classroom debate on the issues, arguing the points your group has researched. Your class will then “elect” a Scrooge to be “mayor of London”!

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**Campaign Areas**

- Labor Issues
- Education Issues
- Industry Issues
- Quality of Life
- Health Issues
- Gender Issues

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This website is a great place to start your research:

http://www.coollessons.org/Dickensissues.htm

Pictures from www.time.com and www.bizarro.com
1. Does a person’s access to education depend on money? Why or why not? Where in Chicago or elsewhere in the country is this most clear? If there is a problem, what are some steps that can be taken to fix it?

2. What other popular authors have “written for change” like Charles Dickens, using their works to make a difference in the world around them? How did they attempt to do this? Were those works effective? Why do you think so?

3. How do you think people would celebrate Christmas today if A Christmas Carol had never been written? Do you think the popularity of the Christmas holiday today has to do more with its commercial aspect (decorating trees and houses, giving presents), religious aspect (the birth of Christ) or the values it promotes (goodwill, peace, love)? Why?

4. Do you think the class conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat described by Karl Marx still exists today? Why or why not? If so, where is this class conflict most evident? (Consider specific industries, countries, etc.)
Exploring the Social Issues
Turn off your MP3 player, even though you just found that pre-release single on Morpheus. Hold off on that Zappos search for cheap Nikes. Don't read that e-mail, even if your customized filter tells you it’s urgent. Don't enter another appointment into your Blackberry, and don't answer that cell-phone call, even if it's from your boss. Now is the time to stop and reflect on what technology has done to you. Over the past 20 years, it has gone from merely changing the way Americans get through the day to defining our way of life.

Though many countries are progressive in their adoption of technology, particularly in Western Europe and Asia, the United States still sets the pace for technological innovation, which can be attributed in part to the same risk-taking, entrepreneurial spirit on which the nation was built. From sequencing the human genome and mapping the universe to altering the rules of war, computing power has not only given us the power to solve some of life's greatest mysteries, it's also made the United States a technological hegemony.

The proliferation of the PC set in motion the most dramatic changes. The continual price drops have led to astounding increases in the computing power that's available to many Americans. In March 1982, $3,000 would get you a 4.77-MHz single-tasking PC with 64K of memory, no hard drive, and a fuzzy monochrome monitor. Today half as much money can get you a much faster processor, 2,000 times the memory, 300,000 times the storage, and an incalculably superior display.

And, of course, there is the Internet. Together the PC and the Internet have been able to bridge enormous physical and social gaps. This dynamic duo has put us on the road to realizing Marshall McLuhan's vision of the Global Village. It has broken down barriers from distance to disability and is considered the great leveler—at least by those who have access to it. In 1982, when there was no true commercial Internet, less than 1 percent of American workers had access to the Internet, but today more than half do. Similarly, less than 1 percent of Americans accessed an online service from home, but today more than half of all Americans can connect from home.

Of course, there are two sides to the story. Though technology has gone a long way toward improving our quality of life, it's also raised issues and concerns that give us pause. This pervasiveness of technology serves to widen the gap between those who have access and those who do not. The “digital divide” exacerbates other divides as well, economic and otherwise, in American culture and in the developing world.
There are still thousands of households in the U.S. without a computer. It’s great that inner-city fifth graders who never had access to computers can now run Bank Street Writer on their handed-down PC ATs, but children in the private school a couple blocks away are using Mathematica and Photoshop every day and are starting the ladder many rungs higher. In a time when some schools have trouble finding the money to pay for staplers, issues like Windows XP compatibility and broadband security still seem far away. Many kids are still getting left behind, especially as the high end of computing gets higher and higher.

Like the Industrial Revolution, as the pace of the technological revolution increases, so does the gap between the have and the have-nots.

**What are some of the ways the internet has affected your life? Can you think of any ways it has affected the economy? How about the arts – anything from music to storytelling?**

**What might happen if one part of the world is evolving at a much faster speed than others concerning the access of information?**

**Why do you think internet access is more available in big cities? What does that say about society’s priorities? What does it say about the economy?**

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**More Recent Technological Advances**

These inventions were featured in a recent edition of *Popular Science* magazine. For more information on these and other new advances in technology, visit our [Knowledge Nucleus](http://www.knowledgenucleus.com) online!

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Left/Below: The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is pooling the efforts of prosthetics experts nationwide to create a thought-controlled bionic arm that duplicates the functions of a natural limb. If all goes well, by 2009 the agency will petition the Food and Drug Administration to put the arm through clinical trials. Currently, prototypes are dexterous enough to play piano. The final version of the hand will be able to sense pressure, temperature and differences in the surfaces of objects.

Below: Scientists at Hitachi Research Labs in Japan have made the smallest radio-frequency ID tag ever, measuring only 0.05 millimeters by 0.05 millimeters—smaller than the width of a strand of hair (pictured here). The chip was unveiled in February, and Hitachi plans to take it to market in 2009. Wal-Mart has already shown interest in the product.
Poverty in America
Over 36 million in need

Children: Our Largest Poor Population

The following statistics are from the U.S. Census 2006 Report on Poverty and the UNICEF 2000 report of Children in Poverty.

The poverty rate represents an average over the entire population, and does not really tell us who, in particular, is well off, who is worse off. For that, it is necessary to examine poverty levels for particular groups. Most notably, blacks and Hispanics have poverty rates that greatly exceed the average. The poverty rate for all blacks and Hispanics remained near 30 percent during the 1980s and mid-1990s. Thereafter it began to fall. In 2000, the rate for blacks dropped to 22.1 percent and for Hispanics to 21.2 percent—the lowest rate for both groups since the United States began measuring poverty.

According to official statistics, 36.5 million people, 12.3 percent of the total U.S. population, lived in poverty last year. That equates to one in 11 families. The total United States population was 301,139,947. Children make up the largest poor population in the United States, with more than 12 million. According to UNICEF, that ranks the U.S. as the country with the second highest child poverty rate of all industrialized nations. By comparison, Sweden is less than 3 percent, the Czech Republic is less than 8 percent; France is just under 8 percent and Germany is just over 10 percent.

About 7.2 million people living in poverty are among the working poor. Most of them live in families with children. They are the fastest-growing segment of the poverty population.

A study by the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that children under the age of 18 accounted for 25 percent of the urban homeless. Families comprised 37 percent of the homeless population; single men and women comprised 45 percent and 14 percent respectively.
Poverty in Chicago
A city of homelessness and millionaires

According to the 2007 Report on Illinois Poverty by the Mid-America Institute on Poverty of Heartland Alliance, Cook County, IL—which covers the Chicago metropolitan area—has the second-highest number of millionaire households (167,873) and the second-highest number of poor households (273,658) of any county in the nation. For reference, there are currently 3,141 counties in the U.S. The disparity of wealth among Chicago citizens is second-highest of them all.

In 2006, the Chicago City Council voted for an ordinance that would have required mega-retailers such as Wal-Mart and Target to pay their workers higher wages, totaling at least $10 per hour by 2010. Mayor Richard Daley vetoed the ordinance in September of that year, in what was his first veto in 17 years in office. He reasoned it would cost the city jobs and hurt the people who need them most. In other words: a minimum wage job is still a job. Major retailers agreed they would be less likely to build stores in Chicago if the ordinance had been passed.

The minimum wage in the state of Illinois is currently $7.50 an hour, considerably higher than the federal minimum wage of $5.85 per hour. An estimate of the “living wage” in Chicago using the Living Wage Calculator—a computing website created by the Living Wage Project at Penn State University—puts this amount at $6.09 per hour for a single adult. Add a child to the picture, and that amount jumps to $12.52, five dollars more per hour than Illinois’ minimum wage.

Children play on statues made under the 1930s Work Projects Administration that sit outside of their homes at the Jane Addams projects in Chicago. The Addams homes are some of the oldest projects in the United States and will soon be demolished as a part of the Chicago Housing Authority’s “Plan for Transformation.”

The Great Divide

The City of Chicago’s Department of Human Services estimates that the homeless population numbers between 25,000-35,000 persons over the course of a year. Of this group, it estimates that 14,000 are minors.

“...”

- www.ProjectRUSH.com

Think About It:
Disparity of wealth

Why do you think there are so many millionaire and poverty-stricken households in Chicago? How has it come to pass that so many people have become either extremely wealthy or extremely poor? What social conditions or other factors may have led to this divide?

Do you agree with Mayor Daley’s decision to strike down the “living wage” ordinance last year? Why or why not? What other ways can you think of to introduce better-paying jobs in Chicago?

To read the full 2007 Report on Illinois Poverty, calculate the “living wage” for your hometown and look at other resources on poverty in Illinois and the city of Chicago, visit our Knowledge Nucleus online!
One of the central themes of *A Christmas Carol* is the value of money. Scrooge values money more than anything, and he believes money, class and rank are appropriate guidelines for determining human worth. Other characters, however, value quite different things. Some of the things are **tangible** (able to be touched, such as money or a car) while some of the things are **intangible** (unable to be realized by the senses, such as love or happiness). Dickens creates a world in which the values of these characters are shown in contrast, and it is the readers’ duty to uncover their own value system.

The many different characters in *A Christmas Carol* value many different things. In order to better understand the characters and the story, it is important to know what each character values most. Using the chart below, create a list of what the characters value most in life. Then **think about what you value most in your life**!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JACOB MARLEY</td>
<td>(before dying)</td>
<td>BELLE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR. FEZZIWIG</td>
<td></td>
<td>OLD SCROOGE</td>
<td>(before the change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOB CRATCHIT</td>
<td></td>
<td>NEW SCROOGE</td>
<td>(after the change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRED</td>
<td></td>
<td>TINY TIM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**“A business that makes nothing but money is a poor kind of business.”**

- Henry Ford

**Questions to consider:**
1. Which characters’ values are most similar to your own? Which are most different?
2. Which two characters’ values would you say are most different from each other? Is there a conflict between them in the story?
3. Which characters value mostly **tangible** things? Which characters value mostly **intangible** things? Is there a difference in how these characters act towards others?
4. How is wealth treated in the story? Is it a sign of moral corruption and greed, a sign of success, or does Dickens offer a different opinion?
5. What do you think Charles Dickens is saying about what people should value in *A Christmas Carol*? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

**Create your own Values Poster**
- Create a list of at least **10** things in your life that are most valuable to you. They can be tangible or intangible.
- Find images of the items. You can draw them, clip them out of a magazine or search the Internet and print them out.
- On a piece of poster board or construction paper, assemble the images in a way that’s meaningful to you. Be sure to share your work with the class!

Picture from www.lavender.fortunecity.com
In the United States, boys and girls wake up early and run hurriedly downstairs to see what Santa Claus has left for them under the Christmas tree...

Around the world, children celebrate Christmas and the winter holidays in many different ways. On this page are holiday traditions and greetings for each of the seven countries listed to the left. Write the number and letter of the corresponding greeting and tradition in the boxes next to each country’s flag. Then check your answers at the bottom of the page.

1 - Shub Naya Baras

A — Sinterklaas, dressed in red Bishop’s robes, arrives on a white horse and gives gifts to children on December 6th. Sarte Piet, a moor, accompanies him. Sarte Piet carries a birch rod to punish the naughty children.

B — On Christmas Eve, a child in the family reads the story of the Nativity. When the story is finished, a bonfire of dried thorns is lit. When the fire is reduced to ashes, everyone jumps over the ashes three times and makes a wish.

C — Children receive presents on New Year’s Day. The gifts are brought by the youngest of the camels that carried the Three Wise Men to Bethlehem. The children leave water and hay outside the house for the camel. In the morning the water and hay are gone, replaced by presents.

D — On New Year’s Eve, the house is cleaned and decorated for New Year’s Day. They dress in their finest, and the father marches through the house followed by the rest of the family. They drive out evil spirits and throw dried beans into the corners, bidding the evil spirits to leave and good luck to those who enter.

E — On Christmas Eve, thousands of people gather for “Carols by Candlelight.” The evening is lit by many candles. They surround themselves with Christmas Bush, a native plant with little red flowers. At many beaches, Santa Claus arrives on a surfboard.

F — On Christmas Eve, Christians go for Christmas shopping and buy new clothes and shoes. It’s a tradition to attend midnight mass with new appearance to bring Christmas spirit in families and communities. Once they reach home, they celebrate Christmas by lighting fire crackers.

G — The second Sunday before Christmas is Mother’s Day. Children creep in, tie her feet to a chair, and shout, “Mother’s Day, Mother’s Day, what will you pay to get away?” She then gives them presents. Children play the same trick on their father the week after. They bake a gold or silver coin into their cake, chestnuts, and whoever gets it can expect lots of good luck.

Answers: Yugoslavia 3G; Syria 6C; Australia 4E; India 1F; Iraq 5B; Japan 7D; Netherlands 2A
Now it’s time to explore other global holidays!

In groups or individually, **research any holiday in another country.** You will prepare a presentation for your class about that holiday. This could include making a traditional holiday food, singing a traditional song or making a representative ornament to hang in the classroom. Anything goes!

Fill in the form on this page as an outline for your presentation to the class, and be creative!

**Background**

Why is this holiday celebrated? Religious reasons? Cultural?

Why is the date chosen for the holiday important?

**Traditions**

Use this space to list or draw holiday traditions. Also include other interesting facts about the holiday!

**Food & Drink**

Are certain foods eaten for the holidays?

Is there a special dessert?

Are there any holiday drinks?

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A family dressed in traditional African clothing lights candles for Kwanzaa. Other symbols of Kwanzaa, including an ear of corn and the unity cup, are on the table.

Thai lion dancers perform on a Bangkok street, celebrating the Chinese New Year.

Pictures from www.thaistudents.com and www.britannica.com
Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in the hopes that his readers would experience a change as drastic as the one Scrooge experienced. He wrote in the preface: "I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it."

Did reading the play have that effect on you? Why do you think it did or did not? Do you think Dickens' audience would have been dramatically changed? Why or why not?

This documentary about climate change (specifically global warming) won the Academy Award for Documentary Feature in 2006. The companion book, authored by former Vice President Al Gore, was number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list in July 2006. While the facts and arguments presented in the film (and Gore's speaking engagements throughout the world) have garnered both praise and criticism, Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to draw the world's attention to the dangers of global warming.

**Think About It: Art for Change**

All artists, including Gore and West, have views they wish to express through their art. But is there a difference between writing a book about the plight of the poor and personally attacking the President on national TV? Are individuals such as Gore and West using their art to prompt change, or using their fame to voice their opinions? Does it matter?

Do you think movies, music and other art forms are more persuasive that speeches and public debate? Why or why not?
1. **Do you feel your school is at all affected by the “digital divide”? If so, how? Do you think technology and information resources are evenly divided among Chicago public schools? Why or why not?**

2. **How do you think poverty happens? What types of events can take an individual or family from a living wage (or even great wealth) to the poverty level? Can you think of any recent events where an upsurge in poverty was the result? Why?**

3. **Where did your values come from? What people, events or ideas most influenced the development of your values? Why? Do you think everyone has access to these same resources? How might level of education, financial means and exposure to pop culture influence a person’s values?**

4. **What type of art—a specific genre of writing, style of music or painting, fashion trend, etc.—do you think is used most often to express personal opinions? To attempt to inspire changes in society? Why do you think this is? What type of art do you have the most respect for? Are you more likely to listen to those artists’ opinions? Why or why not?**
Stocking Stuffers

A little something extra...
Norrie Epstein: Why do you feel you must do *A Christmas Carol* every year?

Patrick Stewart: This is going to be a long answer. I was on location in Derbyshire, and I was on standby, sitting in this little hotel waiting to be called. All they had in the lounge were some dog-eared paperbacks, and I was absolutely desperate for something to read. I pulled out this [holds up *Carol*] because it was the thinnest volume in the house. Thank God I was never called that day. I read all through the morning, all through coffee and all through lunch with the book propped up at my table, and then on into the afternoon hours. What surprised me was that the story was something very different from all the adaptations I had ever seen. All along I had carried around a sense of what *A Christmas Carol* was—a marionette version, a rather jolly, eccentric bit of mid-Victorian writing about some slightly bizarre and amusing characters—a harmless, soft piece of work. It’s interesting about *A Christmas Carol*. It’s like *Hamlet*—all the world knows “to be or not to be,” but very little else. Everybody knows “Bah, humbug!” but not the real Carol.

NE: When did you decide to make it a one-man show?

PS: After I started doing *Star Trek*, I wanted to do something so I wouldn’t lose my theater skills. I was asked by my brother, who sings in the choir at a small northern town in England, if I would perform something for their organ restoration fund, and I didn’t know what the hell to do. It quickly occurred to me that here was an excellent subject, an opportunity to get to know the piece. What impressed me was that on a bitterly cold December night, people were visibly moved. I was moved, too. Even now after eight years there are two or three sections of the story that overwhelm me emotionally, simply take me apart whenever I come to them. There are two moments—there are a lot of them—but there are two in particular that affected me that night in that church.

NE: You make it sound like the mystery of conversion. What are those two scenes?

PS: The most potent occurs just toward the end of the Cratchits’ Christmas Day; just after Tiny Tim sings a song [which Stewart sings in the reading in a high-pitched, sweet treble]. Dickens writes, “They were not a handsome family, they were not well-dressed, their shoes were well-worn, their clothes were scanty, but they were happy, pleased with one another and contented with the time.” It overwhelms me, that moment. There is something about the affirmation of domestic happiness that found very, very moving. The other is when Bob Cratchit breaks down when he talks about visiting the
cemetery where Tiny Tim is buried. But there are other places too: the moment of Scrooge’s most intense terror in the graveyard, when he tries to avoid looking at the grave and then he finally reads his name.

NE: How did you prepare the text?

PS: During the late summer, early autumn of 1987, I would work on the text every weekend. Looking back, those were some of my happiest days. And the more I worked on it, I felt I could almost feel the characters demanding that I get on my feet and perform. I found myself wanting to become the characters—they started to inhabit me. I put Dickens’ reading version and mine side by side, and it was a fascinating study! To have done mine blind, and then to see what Dickens did! Because in so many places our cuts were identical!

NE: Is there anything Dickens cut that you left in?

PS: He changed as the years went by. What is most interesting is that he sentimentalized it; he started taking out everything that was hard, dark, grim, or uncomfortable. [...] He was essentially trying to keep everything in the first part frothy, fun, and fantastical so he could heighten the dramatic effects in the second half. To my unimaginable horror, I discovered that during the last years of his readings, he never mentioned the two children, Ignorance and Want.

NE: Isn’t that an important moment?

PS: Ahh, it is for me, certainly; it is one of the two or three critical moments of the whole evening, that moment when he produces the two children. Because if the audience doesn’t get that, they won’t get anything I have to say.

NE: So the problem with our understanding of Carol is that we focus on Tiny Tim and “God bless us, everyone” and not on the social horrors that Dickens is trying to expose?

PS: Well, they aren’t seen for very long. One moment Scrooge is traveling around seeing all these wonderful Christmases with the Ghost of Christmas Present and then out of nowhere he is confronted by these two—as he calls them—Monsters. And he asks the question, “Have they no refuge?” This is a question that he never would have asked hours earlier.

NE: Why is Carol so potent? [...] is it because Dickens essentially affirms that redemption is possible? Is that why we return to this story, for solace?

PS: Well, Dickens wasn’t the first to do this. In many respects the story is like a lot of late Shakespeare. In the same way that Shakespeare needed elements such as magic, ghosts and spirits, and wild coincidence to complete his fables, so Dickens made the same choice with the meaning of his story. In The Tempest, and, most potently, The Winter’s Tale, the heroes are given [whispers] a second chance! I think we all possess a very fundamental, ancient hunger to believe that we can be saved.

NE: So it’s really about getting a second chance?

PS: Yes! That’s what’s so powerful about it! What happens to Scrooge is not that he’s told, “You’re going to die, mate.” It has already happened! He’s dead! The grave is already overgrown! That’s what’s so powerful about the scene at the graveyard! That’s why his waking up at the end is all the more powerful.

NE: What is the point that Scrooge finally “gets”?

PS: [Long pause.] He has a feeling, he has a gentle feeling about someone else.

NE: He feels tenderness? So the key is that he empathizes with himself too, and through that feels for others.

PS: That’s exactly what he does. He says, “I wish, I wish,”... and the ghost says, “What?” And Scrooge remembers the boy he sent away earlier.

NE: Does your audience go out afterward and do good deeds?

PS: I’m told they do. Joan Rivers came into the dressing room and said, “I am now going to do the typical Broadway audience leaving the theater: “Get out of my way. It’s my taxi!” Mean, snarling, angry, irritable. Then she said, “I’ve just come out of the theater, and I’ve seen people say, ‘No, no, after you. You go first, would you like to share my taxi?’ I heard people say these things, they looked at one another and smiled as they walked out of your show.”
Although none are as popular or as widely done as A Christmas Carol, there are other theatrical productions in Chicago and throughout the nation that capture the holiday season and have become annual classics.

One of the most beloved events is a presentation of Black Nativity by Langston Hughes. Hughes called it a “gospel song play.” You’ll find a production of this musical performed in churches, theaters, on college campuses and more in almost every major U.S. city and other regions. It is a joyful retelling of St. Luke’s story of the birth of Christ by way of gospel music, dance, poetry and narrative.

First produced on Broadway on Dec. 11, 1961, the original name for this play was Wasn’t It a Mighty Day? and it was adapted from Hughes’ 1958 novel Tambourines to Glory, which featured gospel music. Gospel music was popular at this time, and Hughes was inspired to incorporate more of the music into his dramatic writing. He was also aware of the popularity of Gian Carlo Menotti’s Christmas television opera, Amahl and the Night Visitors. Hughes decided that rather than write a play featuring a few gospel songs, he would create a Nativity play with gospel music at its heart.

The original Broadway cast included Alvin Ailey and Carmen de Lavallade, and its opening night audience was so enthusiastic that the cast sang for an additional half hour after the close of the show. Gian Carlo Menotti arranged to have the show taken to his Spoleto Festival in Italy in 1962, where it was the hit of the festival, then toured Europe for the rest of the year before returning to New York’s Lincoln Center for Christmas.

Many of the contemporary productions of Black Nativity have tweaked the original musical to reflect today’s cultural interests. Congo Square Theatre’s production, running in Goodman’s Owen Theater during the holidays, ushers in a hope-filled holiday season. Amidst troubling headlines of war, starvation and genocide, prayers for ‘peace on earth and good will toward men’ echo across the globe now more than ever. Director and co-choreographer Rajendra Ramoon Maharaj breathes new life into this holiday classic in a journey across the African Diaspora, celebrating the story of the birth of Christ while honoring the gift of life and strength of spirit that connects us all.

Although best known as a poet, Hughes wrote more than twenty plays and other musicals. Tambourines to Glory, Mulatto, Emperor of Haiti, Simply Heavenly and Jericho-Jim Crow are a few of the stage works by Hughes, a writer very interested in the African-American oral tradition. His political plays included Scottsboro Limited, Harvest, Angelo Herndon Jones, and De Organizer. He also wrote Mule Bone with Zora Neale Hurston.

“‘There are certain very practical things American Negro writers can do. And must do. There’s a song that says, ‘the time ain’t long.’ That song is right. Something has got to change in America—and change soon. We must help that change to come.’”

- Langston Hughes

To learn more about Langston Hughes and the other artists mentioned on this page, visit our Knowledge Nucleus online!
Writing Your Response Letter

After you have seen the show and discussed your responses in the classroom, it’s time to let us know what you thought! Your response letter plays an important role at Goodman Theatre. All of the letters we receive are forwarded to our artists, and you may get a response!

Pick one of the artists involved with A Christmas Carol whose work was particularly memorable to you—an actor, designer or the director—and write that artist a letter describing your experience at the show and your feedback about his or her work. Be honest and ask any questions that are on your mind.

Your teacher will send us your letter, and we’ll forward it on to that artist!

Important information to include:
♦ Your name, age and grade
♦ Your teacher’s name, school and the school’s address

Including these things will make it easier for our artists to respond!

Send your letters to:

Education and Community Programs
Goodman Theatre
170 North Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60601

Here are two great student letters we received in response to past productions of A Christmas Carol:

Dear Ms. Buckley (Director),

I want to start off by saying that I found this production of A Christmas Carol to be very enjoyable. I say this because in my mind, “enjoyable” was the ultimate goal for this play. Everyone in the audience knows the plot and the characters, but they still pay to see the show because people are buying into the Christmas spirit.

The whole play cohesively brought out the Christmas spirit, enough to bring a young child seated towards the front to yell out “Merry Christmas!” right after the show ended. The decision to have the ghost of Christmas past fly on stage brought out a rush of Peter Pan imagery that touches on the fantastical idea of a never ending childhood and a belief in the impossible, both of which feed in the Christmas machine. Also, the use of trap doors and flying, both relatively low tech special effects in comparison to fill today, allow the audience to very consciously let go of reality and accept the world of the play.

After seeing the play, I discussed it with a friend in the context of our religion. Both of us are Jewish, and both of us walked away feeling a little more distant from the play than our Christian classmates. A Christmas Carol, along with the entire Christmas spirit is a strong part of American culture, not Christian culture, but as a Jew, I think I approach that part of our culture a little more guarded than others. Did you ever think about the religious implications of the play, or if you would inadvertently ward off potential viewers? I did not feel like the play was not speaking to my morals, the moral implications apply to all of humanity, but I was cautious of being sucked into the Christmas spirit for fear of tainting my Jewish identity.

Sincerely,
Jake Baskin

Dear Mr. William Brown,

I will start by congratulating you on the marvelous performance you and your peers put on, on December 13, 2005. I must say that your character brought emotion and spirit to the play. As a selfish man, I felt hatred and pity for you. As a caring man, I felt inspiration and appreciation for you. That is what a great actor should be able to bring to the audience.

You played your part so realistically, that at times, I forgot it was a play. For example, when Marley appeared by your bed as a ghost, you seemed really scared as if you did not know it would happened and the sound scared me. The sound and special effects also helped you bring your character alive. This play had a lot of special effects which I enjoyed very much.

Also, your character took and brought the joy of Christmas very dramatically. You disliked Christmas so much that you made me feel like it wasn’t important and people go bankrupt each year just because of Christmas. However, when you changed your view of Christmas, I realized Christmas should be truly cherished and the purpose for the holiday is to unite and appreciate what you have.

Thank you once again for this wonderful experience and I will remember it every Christmas to come. I will carry on the message and hope many other people realize the importance of Christmas as well.

Merry Christmas (Mr. Scrooge),
Beatriz Hulzar
Chicago Discovery Academy