

Student Matinee Series Study Guide



**Recommended for Division II
and up**



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

CALGARY'S HOLIDAY TREAT
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STARRING STEPHEN HAIR AS SCROOGE

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A Christmas Carol

Student Matinee Study Guide

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Background Information on *A Christmas Carol*

**Information to help you better understand and appreciate
Theatre Calgary's performance of
A Christmas Carol.**

Who was Charles Dickens?

- ✚ Charles John Huffam Dickens was born on Friday, February 7, 1812 at Landport, England.
- ✚ In 1814, he moved with his family to London.
- ✚ Hard times intensify for his family in 1821 when his father loses his job. Two years later, his father is arrested for debt and is sent to debtor's prison. Charles spent the next few years working in a shoe polish factory. Dickens' father received money from a relative and was released from debtor's prison. This experience would haunt Dickens for the rest of his life.
- ✚ In 1827, Dickens ended his schooling and became an office boy at an attorney's office and eventually a journalist.
- ✚ 1833 marks the year that Dickens' first attempt at fiction appeared in print. It was called "Dinner at Poplar Walk," and was published in *Monthly Magazine*.
- ✚ In 1834, still working as a reporter, Dickens began publishing his stories, using the name "Boz" as a pseudonym.
- ✚ On April 2, 1836, Charles Dickens married Catherine Hogarth. He had 10 children with her.
- ✚ By this time, Dickens had become very popular and he toured Canada and the U.S. in 1842.
- ✚ The first of Dickens' Christmas books, *A Christmas Carol*, was published in December of 1843. Dickens traveled to Italy with his family in 1844. That December, he published his second Christmas story - "The Chimes."
- ✚ Dickens first love was the theatre. He had always wanted to be an actor. He put on many amateur theatricals and later in life traveled the world offering readings and one man performances of his works
- ✚ Between 1858 and 1868, Dickens conducted a series of public readings in London, Paris, Ireland and America. At the end of his tour, his ailing health worsened.
- ✚ In 1869, he resumed readings in England, Scotland, and Ireland - this despite having symptoms of mild stroke.
- ✚ In 1870, Charles Dickens suffered a stroke on June 8 and died the next day.

What else did Charles Dickens write?

1836	Sketches by Boz
1836-37	Pickwick Papers
1837-39	Oliver Twist
1838	The Strange Gentleman
1838-39	Nicholas Nickleby
1840-41	The Old Curiosity Shop
1841	Barnaby Rudge
1842	American Notes
1843	Martin Chuzzlewit
	A Christmas Carol
1844	The Chimes
1845	The Cricket and the Hearth
1846	The Battle of Life
1846-48	Dombey and Son
1848	The Haunted Man
1849-50	David Copperfield
1851-53	Bleak House
1854	Hard Times
1855-57	Little Dorrit
1859	A Tale of Two Cities
1860-61	Great Expectations
1864-65	Our Mutual Friend
1869-70	The Mystery of Edwin Drood (<i>unfinished</i>)

Begin your “A Christmas Carol scrapbook or journal”

On page 31 of this guide, you will find details that will help you complete a keepsake record of your learning experiences before, during and after viewing Theatre Calgary’s performance of *A Christmas Carol*.

In preparation for this activity, you should read the assignment on page 31 now and begin to work on and accumulate the responses, artifacts and activities to include in your scrapbook or journal.

Quotations about Christmas and Dickens

<p>"I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of other people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys"</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Fred in <i>A Christmas Carol</i></p>	<p>And the Grinch, ... stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Dr. Seuss</p>
<p>"a national benefit, and to every man and woman who reads it a personal kindness."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- William Makepeace Thackeray</p>	<p>"I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol"</p>
<p>"We have come to take Scrooge so much for granted that he seems practically a piece of Christmas folklore."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Edmund Wilson</p>	<p>"Next to a circus there ain't nothing that packs up and tears out faster than the Christmas spirit."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Kin Hubbard</p>
<p>Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveller, thousands of miles away, back to his own fire-side and his quiet home!</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Charles Dickens, <i>The Pickwick Papers</i></p>	<p>"There are people who will tell you that Christmas is not what it used to be ... Dwell not upon the past ... Reflect upon your present blessings ... Fill your glass again, with a merry face and a contented heart. Our life on it, but our Christmas shall be merry, and your new year a happy one."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Charles Dickens, 1836</p>
<p>Christmas is doing a little something extra for someone.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Charles Schulz</p>	<p>Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Norman Vincent Peale</p>
<p>Before the ice is in the pools, Before the skaters go, Or any cheek at nightfall Is tarnished by the snow, Before the fields have finished, Before the Christmas tree, Wonder upon wonder Will arrive to me!</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Emily Dickinson</p>	<p>Christmas gift suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To your enemy, forgiveness. To an opponent, tolerance. To a friend, your heart. To a customer, service. To all, charity. To every child, a good example. To yourself, respect. <p style="text-align: right;">- Oren Arnold:</p>

Adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*

Since its creation in 1843, there have been countless hundreds of adaptations of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. It has been adapted to virtually every genre of literature and entertainment.

What follows is a short list of the more memorable adaptations, including the first occurrence of an adaptation in a new medium.

1844	A Christmas Carol; or Past, Present and Future	Drama
1850	Christmas Shadows. A Tale of the Times	Prose Fiction
1867	A Christmas Carol. As Condensed by Charles Dickens	Public Reading
1901	Scrooge, or, Marley's Ghost	Silent film
1905	The Awakening of Scrooge	Sound recording
1910	A Christmas Carol - produced by Thomas A. Edison	Silent film
1921	A Christmas Carol. Suite for piano in two parts	Music
1928	Scrooge	Sound film
1933	A Christmas Carol - Lionel Barrymore	Radio production
1938	A Christmas Carol	Feature Film
1946	A Christmas Carol (BBC)	Television play
1947	Men of Goodwill: Variations on "A Christmas Carol"	Orchestra Music
1951	Scrooge (Starring Alastair Sim)	Feature film
1955	A Christmas Carol	Operetta
1956	The Stingiest Man in Town	TV Musical
1962	Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol	Animated film
1970	Scrooge (Starring Albert Finney)	Color feature film
1978	A Christmas Carol (Marvel Comics Group)	Classics Comics
1983	Mickey's Christmas Carol (Disney)	Animated Film
1988	Scrooged (Starring Bill Murray)	Film - comedy
1988	Blackadder's Christmas Carol	TV Special
1992	The Muppet Christmas Carol	Feature Film
1997	A Christmas Carol - Ballet Montmartre	Ballet
2004	Karroll's Christmas (<i>the ghosts go to the wrong house</i>)	TV Movie
2004	A Christmas Carol: The Musical	Musical

Interesting facts about *A Christmas Carol*

- ✚ This story has influenced how we celebrate and think of Christmas more than any other work of fiction.
- ✚ Christmas, previous to Dickens' influence, was a twelve day festival celebrated by the entire community. According to G.K. Chesterton, Dickens succeeded in turning this public Christmas holy period into a more private family festival of sharing and good will celebrated mostly over one or two days. Instead of the whole community gathered together in celebration, Dickens glorified the pleasures of small intimate family functions.
- ✚ Dickens was a down to earth family man. He had 10 children!
- ✚ Early in his career, he even planned on writing a cookbook.
- ✚ *A Christmas Carol* was written in six weeks when Dickens was in need of quick money to pay bills. The book was an instant success but it brought him little money.
- ✚ Within a year of its creation, eight different stage productions of the story were mounted. Since then, there have been at least 50 other dramatized versions of the story. There have also been more than 20 film versions and as many television plays based on the story.
- ✚ The philosophy expressed in *A Christmas Carol* is specifically that the Christmas spirit should prevail throughout the year and not just during the holiday season.
- ✚ According to a researcher with the American Journal of Diseases of Children, Tiny Tim most likely suffered from a kidney disease that made his blood too acidic. In Dickens' day, this could have been successfully treatable with alkaline solutions which would have counteracted the excess acid and Tim's recovery would have been swift.
- ✚ The first Christmas card appeared in the 1840s around the same time as this story was written.
- ✚ On December 18th, 1988, in recognition of Dickens' contributions to Christmas traditions, the London *Sunday Telegraph* declared Charles Dickens to be "The Man Who Invented Christmas."
- ✚ In the earliest drafts of *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's unique phrase was "Bah Christmas" and not "Bah Humbug."
- ✚ Besides *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens wrote four other Christmas stories:

1844	<i>The Chimes</i>	1846	<i>The Battle of Life</i>
1845	The Cricket on the Hearth	1848	The Haunted Man

Who's who in the play

<p style="text-align: center;">Scrooge and people in his life</p> <p>Ebenezer Scrooge – a miserly man Boy Ebenezer - Scrooge as a young boy Young Ebenezer - Scrooge as a young man Young Marley – Jacob Marley as a young man Belle – young Ebenezer's sweetheart</p> <p>Fred – Scrooge's nephew Sally – Fred's wife Maid – to Fred and Sally Topper – friend to Fred</p> <p>Mr. Fezziwig - kind hearted, old merchant and Scrooge's mentor Mrs. Fezziwig – his wife</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Cratchits</p> <p>Bob Cratchit - clerk to Ebenezer Scrooge Martha Cratchit - wife of Bob Cratchit</p> <p>Peter Cratchit Charlie Cratchit their sons Tiny Tim Cratchit</p> <p>Martha Cratchit Belinda Cratchit their daughters Elizabeth Cratchit</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Ghosts</p> <p>Jacob Marley - Scrooge's former business partner Ghost of Christmas Past Ghost of Christmas Present Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Townspeople</p> <p>Lena \ Joe > street vendors Toy Lady / Charwoman – servant Mrs. Dilber – servant Undertaker Poulterer Boy Thomas Shelley – Scrooge's tenant Mrs. Shelley – his wife</p> <p>First Solicitor \ Second Solicitor / collecting for charity</p>

Setting of the story and play:

London, England 1843

Summary of the play:

The story begins on Christmas Eve. Ebenezer Scrooge, in his first appearance on stage, threatens to evict a family on Christmas Day if they don't pay their overdue rent.

According to Scrooge, Christmas is a "humbug," a waste of time and money. He declines an invitation to celebrate the season with his nephew Fred and he also refuses to donate money to a Christmas charity.

That night, Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who had died seven years previously. The ghost informs Scrooge that he will be visited by three more spirits who will help him to avoid the terrible fate that Marley is suffering.

The first spirit to appear is the Ghost of Christmas Past who enables Scrooge to revisit his early childhood memories. Here he recalls the love he felt for his sister who is the mother of his nephew Fred. He also revisits the relationship he had with his sweetheart Belle.

The Ghost of Christmas Present enables Scrooge to see two different families engaged in holiday merrymaking. They first visit the home of Scrooge's poor employee, Bob Cratchit. Here Scrooge comes to appreciate the true meaning and joys of the Christmas season. At his nephew's home, Scrooge hears first hand what others think of him.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come completes Scrooge's education. Scrooge learns that in the near future, both he and Tiny Tim will die. Tim will be missed but Scrooge will be unmourned and soon forgotten.

The lessons of the three ghosts have been learned well and the next morning, Scrooge is relieved to discover that it is only Christmas Day. He sends a large turkey to the Cratchits and he invites himself for dinner at the home of his nephew. The next day, Scrooge gives Cratchit a raise and we are left with the impression that Scrooge will continue to be generous and that the spirit of Christmas will be with him every day of the year.

Student Activities

Before the Curtain Rises

Note to teachers:

It is not necessary for students to complete all of the following activities.

Consider only those activities that you believe meet the needs and interests of your students.

It is also recommended that, whenever possible, choices be offered and that students engage in group inquiry to complete the activities.

1. Explore unfamiliar allusions and vocabulary

Because the original story *A Christmas Carol* was written more than 160 years ago, the dialogue includes references to a number of things that you may not be familiar with. Before the performance, read the following information. If you wish to explore some of these items more closely, use on-line or print resources to find interesting facts that you can share with the class.

British Money during Dickens' Time

Bob – slang for a shilling. A shilling is equal to 12 pence.

There are 20 shillings in a pound.

In a pound, there are 5 crowns also referred to as a quid.

In the play, we are told that Cratchit earns 15 shillings a week. This works out to less than a pound a week or about 40 pounds a year!

Today a pound is equivalent to about \$2.50 Canadian.

Old Nick – Lena, a street vendor, says that if “anyone could beat a deal with Old Nick” it would be Scrooge. “Old Nick” is a slang term that refers to the devil.

Bedlam – At the beginning of the play, Scrooge is critical of Cratchit because he has five mouths to feed and a poor paying job. For this insanity, Scrooge thinks Cratchit should be sent to “Bedlam.” In London, at the time, there was an insane asylum at the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem. “Bedlam” is a contraction for Bethlehem. The word “bedlam” has entered our vocabulary and refers to a state of utter confusion and chaos.

workhouses – Scrooge suggests that a solution for the misery of poor people is to send them to prison or the workhouses. During Dickens' time, old, poor or sick people would be forced to go to a workhouse where they would be provided with food and shelter as payment for menial work. To discourage lazy persons from taking advantage of the workhouses, the authorities made these places terribly unpleasant. Families were separated and they were given unattractive clothes to wear

Poor people who could not pay their debts were thrown into prison where they were treated very badly indeed. The **Treadmill** is a reference to the practice of forcing prisoners to climb steps in a constantly rotating cylinder. This torture served not only to keep them active but also to tire them out physically.

When Scrooge is shown his past as a young boy, he recalls reading about Ali Baba, Valentine and Orson, and Robinson Crusoe. These characters all came from stage plays that were popular in Dickens' time. Ali Baba originally came from the story of the *Arabian Nights*. Valentine was a knight who had a savage brother named Orson. Robinson Crusoe was the protagonist of Daniel Defoe's novel (and its stage adaptation) of the same name.

Fezziwig tells his Christmas guests that there is “punch and ale and pudding and porter and **negus** to be had.” Negus is a traditional drink made with wine, hot water, sugar, nutmeg and lemon juice.

The closing song includes the line: “**Wassail, wassail, all over the town!**” “Wassail is a popular drink served during the Christmas season. It is a spiced ale or mulled wine. The word also refers to lively partying and revelry.

2. Vocabulary development

There are a number of words that appear in the dialogue of *A Christmas Carol* that may be unfamiliar to you. To better appreciate the dialogue during the performance, become more familiar with the words used in the following activity.

Match the words from the play in Column A with their appropriate definitions in Column B.

You may use online or print resources to check the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Write the letter of the correct definition in the middle column.

An excellent comprehensive online dictionary can be found at: <http://www.onelook.com/>

Check your answers on page 32.

Column A		Column B
1. skinflint	—	a. penalties
2. miser	—	b. avoid
3. humbug	—	c. enjoy; relish
4. dismal	—	d. spirit or ghost
5. ragamuffin	—	e. maker of hats for women
6. destitute	—	f. nonsense; rubbish; hoax
7. wastrel	—	g. one who feeds off the dead
8. scoundrel	—	h. working for another to learn a trade
9. shackled	—	i. a person who is stingy with money
10. ponderous	—	j. clergyman
11. shun	—	k. one who is reluctant to spend money
12. apprenticed	—	l. driven away, forced to disappear
13. savor	—	m. moneyless, poor
14. profaning	—	n. a person who is extremely poor
15. melancholy	—	o. dog; a despicable person
16. parson	—	p. chained
17. forfeits	—	q. depressing
18. anteroom	—	r. irreverent cursing or actions
19. pauper	—	s. a wasteful worthless person
20. precedence	—	t. money or goods acquired illegally
21. dowry	—	u. a raggedly clothed and dirty child
22. milliner	—	v. a house or office cleaner
23. odious	—	w. a gloomy depression or sadness
24. cur	—	x. a disreputable or wicked person
25. rail at	—	y. priority or coming first
26. perversion	—	z. extremely heavy
27. spectre	—	aa. a large entrance area
28. scavenger	—	bb. negatively changing something into a form it should not be
29. booty	—	cc. complain or criticize bitterly
30. charwoman	—	dd. money or property that a woman brings to a marriage
31. dispelled	—	ee. extremely unpleasant

3. Explore situations and themes

Before attending the play, consider some of the situations and themes that the play deals with. Below is a list of specific situations for you to consider.

Begin by asking yourself if you, or someone you know, have been in a similar situation. You can also consider stories or films that you have read or viewed that deal with similar situations or ideas.

Then explore your thoughts and feelings in regards to any of the following situations, issues or themes through personal journal writing.

Remember that *you do not have to respond to all* of the following - just the ones that you can most strongly relate to.

- a. Being in debt.
- b. Collecting money for charity
- c. Working for an unpleasant employer
- d. Feeling unwanted and being alone during a special holiday season.
- e. Being criticized for believing that success and material possessions are more important than relationships.
- f. Getting a second chance to do things differently.
- g. Sharing with others who are needy.
- h. Feasting and partying with family and friends.
- i. Undergoing a dramatic character and attitude change

4. Dickens and the theater

According to Paul Schlicke (*Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*. p. 194)

“In the theatre world, Dickens was never a passive observer. Drama was in his blood. He dressed, spoke, and acted with thespian panache, and, in his imagination, shaped his reading into drama ... With characteristic thoroughness, he studied acting techniques, and considered becoming an actor. Only a heavy cold kept him from attending an audition at Covent Garden and perhaps changing his career. In 1838 his farce *The Strange Gentleman* was enjoying moderate success. *Pickwick Papers*, however, taking off like a delayed rocket, then confirmed his novelistic vocation.”

Use the Internet or library resources, to find at least five interesting facts about what theatre life was like during Dickens' time and/or explore Dickens' other connections to the theatre world.

You may use the following site as a starting point in your research:

<http://charlesdickenspage.com/stage.html>

5. From prose fiction to stage

Find a copy of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and as a class, break it up into a series of short scenes. Each group is responsible for adapting a scene for the stage. You will need to create dialogue and stage directions. Rehearse your scenes and on performance day, be sure to wear basic costumes and to use appropriate props.

You can keep the length of your scene short by using a narrator to summarize action that will not be covered in the dialogue.

Groups should present their scenes in chronological order.

Check out this hyper-text version of the [story](#), complete with notes and illustrations

6. What do you remember about the story of *A Christmas Carol*?

Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is a story that is familiar to most people. In groups, create a list of narrative details that you recall of the various retellings of the tale that you have experienced. After seeing the play, you will be asked to revisit this list and check the accuracy of your collective memories.

7. Ghosts on stage

It is always a challenge for stage directors to convincingly project the illusion of a ghost on stage for a live performance. For the feature film or television director, creating this illusion is not as difficult. Stage directors cannot rely on the magic of film editing and special effects. All they can use are:

lighting (including projection devices)	trap doors
sound effects including music	costume and make-up
special effects (such as fog machines)	the audience's imagination

If you were the director of a play, how would you create the impression for the audience of ghosts appearing and talking on the stage?

8. How much do you know about Christmas traditions?

Test your knowledge of Christmas traditions by taking this [Christmas Trivia Quiz](#).

Don't stop there. At this site you will find a variety of other on-line quizzes to test your Yuletide knowledge.

9. Learn more about Christmas by using the Internet

Using the Internet and the recommended web sites, complete one or more of the following activities. Please do not limit yourself to these sites. There are countless other sites that contain similar material.

- a) There was a great deal of social injustice and hardship during the period of time that Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*. Using [The Workhouse](#) website, prepare a brief written or oral report on the social conditions in England during the middle of the nineteenth century.
- b) Christmas is celebrated differently in different countries. Go to the following sites and read about how Christmas is celebrated in countries that you are interested in.

[Christmas Around the World](#) [Yuletide Around The World](#)

Choose any three countries to focus on. Using a combination of graphics and words, describe how Christmas is celebrated in these countries.

These websites also contain how the greeting “Merry Christmas” is expressed in different languages.

Create a collage in which you include as many different ways of saying “Merry Christmas” as you can.

10. Review the Reviewers

By the time you are scheduled to attend the Theatre Calgary performance of *A Christmas Carol*, the local Calgary papers and magazines will have printed reviews of the play and because the play is so popular, there are also many reviews on the internet of other professional performances.

Find and read at least two of these reviews.

What did the reviewers think about the performance?

What did the reviewers like or dislike about the production?

What important information did you learn about the play and the characters by reading the reviews?

Based on the reviews, what are you looking forward to seeing in the Theatre Calgary performance of *A Christmas Carol*?

11. Prepare for the “Meet the Actors” session

After each student matinee performance, many of the actors make themselves available for a question and answer session with students.

From what you know of the play, which actors would you like most to talk with?

With a partner, generate at least three questions that you would like to ask these actors.

The questions can deal with any of the following:

- **when and how they got into acting**
- **their favorite roles in past performances**
- **what they do to prepare for their roles in the performance**
- **their interpretation of the work or the role they play**
- **special challenges of their roles**
- **any other aspect of acting or of the play that you are interested in**

12. Prepare to attend the performance: Theatre Etiquette

Theatre etiquette – what is appropriate and not appropriate to do when you are in the theatre - is an important matter to consider before attending a play with your classmates.

In groups, generate a list of as many theatre etiquette rules as you can. Make sure to include reasons for the rules. An example is provided in the box below.

Rule	Reasons
<i>a. Don't take pictures during the performance.</i>	<i>The actors are live. They must do rather difficult work. Noise or flashes from cameras can distract them and could make them stumble over lines.</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

If you are having problems generating your own list of rules, create reasons for the following rules listed at: <http://www.drdaveanddee.com/theater.html>

1. To avoid being late, plan to arrive 30 minutes early.
2. Turn off cell phones, pagers, watch alarms, and other electronic devices.
3. Do not talk, whisper, sing, or hum during the performance.
4. Do not eat and drink during the performance.
5. Unwrap cough suppressants during applause, laughing, or loud musical numbers.
6. Keep feet on the floor, not on the seat or balcony in front of you.
7. At the end of the performance during curtain call, don't rush for the exits.
8. Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause, but not whistling or shouting.
9. Do not use cameras or videotape during the performance.



Student Activities

While the Curtain Is Up

**Questions to consider
as you watch the play**

Consider elements of plot:

- ✚ The first two scenes of *A Christmas Carol* provide a great deal of exposition. This exposition or background information is intended to help audiences understand and better appreciate the rest of the play.

List at least five important pieces of information shared in the first two scenes of the play that help us to better appreciate what happens later in the play.

- ✚ *A Christmas Carol* is quite humorous in many places. Describe how humour is created in these scenes. What specific things did the actors do to create the humour? What effects are created or purposes served by using humour in this play?

- ✚ The climax of a story can be either the point of highest dramatic tension or the turning point for the protagonist.

In your opinion, what marked the highest point of dramatic tension in the play? Is this also the turning point in the play for Scrooge? Explain.

- ✚ How realistic were the ghost sequences? In your opinion, which of the ghost appearances was the most effectively presented? Why?

- ✚ The ending of this play makes a serious statement about life and about people like Scrooge.

Comment on the ending of the play.

To what extent was the ending realistic?

In other words, can people in real life change as dramatically as Scrooge does at the end of the play?

Share stories with the class about people you know who have undergone dramatic character changes.

- ✚ *A Christmas Carol* is basically a story about a bad man who by the end is redeemed and becomes a good man.

Can you think of any other stories that have a similar plot sequence?

Share these stories with your classmates.

- ✚ Flashbacks are frequently used in fiction and film to provide audiences with important background information. In a flashback, the reader or viewer enters the mind of a character and revisits some event in the past that serves to illuminate something that is happening or about to happen.

Flashbacks are rarely used in drama because audiences expect the action to be chronological and because it is difficult to project on stage the idea that one is revisiting the past.

What purposes are served by the flashbacks in the play?

What purposeful choices were made by the actors to create the effect of visiting the past?

Consider elements of character:

- ✚ Casting the characters of a play such as *A Christmas Carol* poses a number of challenges for directors. First of all, many of the characters are familiar to audiences, secondly, the play requires that children be cast in a number of roles, and thirdly, there are ghosts. Explain:

why it is difficult to cast characters that most audiences would be very familiar with.

what special challenges and difficulties have to be overcome in having children in the cast.

what you thought and how you felt when you first saw the ghosts appear on the Theatre Calgary stage.

To what extent were you pleased or disappointed by the casting choices? Explain.

- ✚ In your opinion, which actors did the best job of bringing their characters to life?
- ✚ According to Shakespeare "Action is eloquence." What this suggests, in terms of the theatre, is that deeds or actions often speak louder than words.

Can you think of specific scenes where what a character *did* on stage was more important in terms of revealing or developing character than what he or she said?

Describe these instances and identify what was revealed in terms of character.

- ✚ Much can be learned about a character by looking closely at how he or she reacts to something that is said on stage.

Can you recall any specific moments during the performance when a character's reaction to something that was said revealed something important about him or her?

Describe the moments and what was revealed.

- ✚ Contrast is an effective tool for characterization. Identify the ways in which a contrast is developed between the young boy Scrooge and the old man Scrooge? How did this production emphasize the contrast in their characters?
- ✚ Create a brief character sketch of Scrooge at the beginning of the play before the appearance of the ghosts.
Be sure to identify important traits, values, beliefs, attitudes, dominant emotions, strengths, weaknesses, etc.
Now create a character sketch of Scrooge at the end of the play.

Consider elements of setting, mood and direction:

- ✚ This play is a challenge to set designers in that there are so many scene changes and special effects.
What were your first impressions of the sets?
What did the set design and props contribute to the overall effect of the play?
Be specific.

- ✚ The sets should enable the audience to better understand and enjoy the play. In small groups, discuss how the sets helped you better understand and appreciate the purpose and intended effects of the play.

To deal with this task, you can begin by identifying the meaningful choices that were made in terms of colours, shapes, props and lighting effects that helped to set the mood of the various scenes and to establish that the scene takes place in the past or the future.

- ✚ Identify when and how sound, music and lighting effects were used effectively during the performance. What specific moods, atmosphere or effect did the use of sound, music and lighting help to create at various times in the performance?

What did the use of fog contribute to the mood of various scenes?

- ✚ A play such as *A Christmas Carol* is intended to appeal to a wide variety of people in the audience. What purposeful directorial choices (in casting, costumes, set, props, sound, acting, etc.) did you notice that succeeded in appealing to children and to adults alike?

- ✚ Some literature can be described as period pieces because they are dated and belong primarily to one specific period of time. However, some works are considered timeless.

The story that this play is based upon was written over 135 years ago. What has the director done to ensure that this play succeeds in appealing to modern audience?

Write a letter to the Director

Write a letter to the director commenting on what you enjoyed or did not enjoy about the production. Focus on how elements such as casting choices, use of lighting, sound and music, costuming and acting contributed to your enjoyment of the production.

Consider elements of theme:

- ✚ Why would Charles Dickens entitle his work “*A Christmas Carol*”? Before answering this question, check the [dictionary](#) for alternate meanings for the word, “carol.”
- ✚ Titles of works are very important in that they can suggest theme or contain symbolism that informs the audience as to what is important in the work. Create two alternate and appropriate titles for this play that suggest the important ideas in the play.
- ✚ To identify the theme or main idea of a work, it is often helpful to consider if the protagonist has undergone any significant character change or if the protagonist has learned anything significant about people or about life.
In what ways does Scrooge change during the process of the play?
What optimistic message does his positive change in character suggest about people and about life?
- ✚ It is well known that Dickens was very concerned about social injustice and worked hard to change how his society dealt with the poor and with lower class children.
Create three statements that Scrooge would agree with at the beginning of the play about how society should deal with those who are less fortunate.
- ✚ Now create three statements that he would agree with at the end of the play about how society should deal with the less fortunate.
- ✚ Some works are written merely to entertain and to help us escape from the real world. Such works of escape feature fantastical elements and exciting plots. These works are not intended to say significant things about life.
Other works are written to express significant insights about people and about life. Such serious works invite us to continue thinking about the ideas well after we have read or seen the work.
Still other works are created to teach moral lessons or to warn us about certain behaviours or attitudes. These *didactic* works tell us how to live our lives and how to avoid problems.
In what ways does *A Christmas Carol* accomplish all three purposes?
However, what do you think is the MAJOR purpose of this work?
Is it primarily to entertain, to reveal significant truths, or to teach?
Justify your opinion by using specific references to the play.

Exploring essential Questions:

We continue to relate to the characters and situations in *A Christmas Carol* because the play poses basic essential questions about life.

For example, here are some of the many essential questions posed in the play:

- Can bad people change for the better?
- Is it ever too late to change?
- What is happiness and success?
- What causes people to isolate themselves?
- What is the true nature of the Christmas spirit?
- Why do some stories continue to be popular and appreciated long after they were first created?

Choose any of the above essential questions to focus on as you are watching the play.

After the performance, complete any **two** of the following activities:

- a. Write a brief composition discussing what the play has to say about one or more of the essential questions.
- b. Create a poem (or series of poems) in which you share your thoughts and feelings on the treatment of any of the essential questions.
- c. Create a promotional poster advertising a performance of *A Christmas Carol*. The poster should draw people's attention to the fact that the play deals with one or more of the important essential questions listed above.
- d. Write a letter to Dickens or to the director of the play and share your thoughts and feelings about how the ideas and themes of the play are dealt with in the performance.
- e. Write at least three other essential questions that you think the play deals with.

Student Activities

After the Curtain Falls

Choose any of the following activities to deal with after viewing the Theatre Calgary performance of *A Christmas Carol*.

1. Reflect on pre-performance activities

What pre-performance information and activities best prepared you for the play?

What else could you have done or wished you had done to have better prepared for the theatre experience?

2. Cast a feature film version of the play

Imagine that the play is to be remade once again into a feature film.

What famous actors would you choose to play the major roles?

To justify your casting choices, you may refer to examples of other similar roles handled by the actors.

Which, if any, of the actors used in the Theatre Calgary production would you cast in your movie? Why?

3. Compare the story to the play

If you read the story before attending the performance, consider the differences between the two versions.

To what extent was the play faithful to the original story in spirit, purpose and content?

4. Create an Act Three for the play

What do you think happens next?

Assume that a year has passed and it is Christmas again.

Create a scene in which you dramatize what you think has happened in the lives of Scrooge, his nephew Fred and to the Cratchits.

You may begin by considering any of the following questions:

Does Scrooge honour Christmas in his heart and has he kept it all the year.

Does Tiny Tim get better?

What relationship does Scrooge develop with the Cratchits and with his nephew Fred and his wife?

5. Write a different ending for the play

How satisfied were you with how the play ended?

Assume that you have been given the task of creating an alternate ending for the play.

Write a new scene that serves to take the ending in a direction that you are happier with or that you find more interesting or dramatic.

6. Write a Review

Write a review of the play you have just seen.

Read several newspaper or magazine reviews to get a better idea of the style and structure of a typical drama reviews.

A good central source for reviews can be found at:

<http://www.curtainup.com/goingall.html>

Make sure that you do not follow any one review too closely.

Your review should reflect your personal take and evaluation of the performance.

7. Write a letter to the Director

Write a letter to the director commenting on what you enjoyed or did not enjoy about the production.

Focus on how elements such as casting choices, use of lighting, sound and music, costuming and acting contributed to your enjoyment of the production.

8. Reflective Writing on the Theatre Experience

Consider the reasons why so many people prefer attending a live sporting event such as a football or a hockey game over watching the same event on TV.

Now consider the ways in which attending a live theatre performance could be preferable to watching a feature film on the big screen or a DVD or video at home.

What did you enjoy most about being part of the audience attending Theatre Calgary and seeing *A Christmas Carol*?

Based on this experience, are you looking forward to attending another play in the near future? Explain.

9. Create a collage about what the Christmas season means

Viewing Theatre Calgary's performance of *A Christmas Carol* emphasizes that the Christmas season means many things to different people.

What does it mean to you?

Using a standard sized 8.5" x 11" piece of paper, create a collage in which you present **one** of the following:

- ✚ the ideal - what many people think the Christmas season should be
- ✚ the reality - what many people think the Christmas season has turned into
- ✚ a contrast between the ideal and the reality

If you do not celebrate Christmas, you can still deal with any of the above choices as an observer of how the holiday is thought of by people in your immediate society.

Your collage should have as its title a brief one sentence statement of the main idea you are projecting in your work.

Examples of titles:

- ✚ Christmas brings families closer together
- ✚ The giving of Christmas presents has gotten totally out of control
- ✚ Christmas is the best time of the year because ...

On the back side of your collage, include a series of sentences which explain why you chose the illustrations that you did.

10. Scrooge for Mayor - Interactive Internet Activity

Download The [Scrooge for Mayor](#) PDF file. In the document, you will find the following information about the background context for the assignment and detailed instructions in terms of what you need to do:

Background: You are working for SCROOGE! That's right, the grump turned into the friend of Tiny Tim is running for Mayor, and he needs you to design his campaign. He needs to know what the conditions are like for the people so that he can promise reform and get their votes. The issues he needs you to focus on are: Labor Issues, Social Issues, Health Issues, and Gender Issues. Scrooge will be your audience as you present your ideas to him and he selects the group that should run his campaign.

Assignment: You will be assigned to a group with 4 members. 2 of you will be Research Analysts, and 2 of you will be Public Relations Specialists. The entire group will be given one topic to study for Scrooge from the issues he wants his campaign to focus on: Labor Issues, Social Issues, Health Issues, and Gender Issues. The Research Analysts, after conducting research from the prepared online resources will create a campaign poster and a campaign pamphlet. The Public Relations Specialists will create and present a power point presentation.

http://www.silvercreek.wnyric.org/107610411101011593/lib/107610411101011593/Scrooge_for_Mayor.pdf

As a class and working in groups access the suggested websites, answer the questions posed for the issue that your group has been assigned and create the campaign poster and power point presentation.

11. Feature Film Assignment

There have been countless TV and Feature Film versions of Dickens' classic Christmas tale.

Locate/rent/view a feature film based on Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

A list is provided below of titles which are carried by most video stores.

Please note that some of these films may have an adult rating.

Please check the content advisories. If you feel that you cannot or should not view a particular film, find one that you would be more comfortable viewing.

Once you have viewed the video and attended the play, write a two page composition in which you share your observations, thoughts and feelings regarding:

- ✚ the similarities and differences between the film and the play
- ✚ the ways in which the film helped you to appreciate or understand the play better.
- ✚ which version you enjoyed more and why

1951	Scrooge (Starring Alastair Sim)
1962	Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol
1970	Scrooge (Starring Albert Finney)
1983	Mickey's Christmas Carol (Disney)
1988	Scrooged (Starring Bill Murray) Blackadder's Christmas Carol
1992	The Muppet Christmas Carol
2004	Karroll's Christmas
2004	A Christmas Carol: The Musical
2009	A Christmas Carol (IMAX version)

Note: Do not restrict yourself to this list.
Your video store may have more titles than those suggested above.

To research these and other feature films based on Dickens' works go to the Charles Dickens page at the [Internet Movie Database](#)

12. Create a Keepsake Scrapbook

As a permanent keepsake and record of your experiences with the Theatre Calgary performance of *A Christmas Carol*, create a scrapbook/journal which includes artifacts, assignments, and reflections.

Artifacts could include items such as theatre reviews from local newspapers, your ticket stub and program.

You should also include all the assignments and activities that you completed in preparation for your visit to Theatre Calgary as well as the “After the Curtain Falls” activities.

Here are some other ideas that you may wish to consider for inclusion:

- ✚ journal entry commenting on your opinion of the actors playing the various roles
- ✚ a published review of the play
- ✚ photographs taken before and after the performance (Remember that you are not allowed to take pictures during the performance.)
- ✚ drawings or sketches of the set
- ✚ questions you would like to ask the actors or director
- ✚ journal entry dealing with your thoughts and impressions of being a part of a live theatre audience
- ✚ graphics found on the internet relating to *A Christmas Carol* and its author, Charles Dickens. Be sure to credit sources.
- ✚ colourful cover and a detailed table of contents
- ✚ anything else that you think will make your scrapbook/journal worth going back to several years from now

Once your scrapbook/journal is complete, you may choose to share it with the staff at Theatre Calgary.

To do so, you should contact Ryan Bump and he will ensure that it gets shown to the right people.

Ryan Bump can be reached at 294-7440 ext.1391 or by email at:

rbump@theatrecalgary.com

Answers to Vocabulary Development Exercise – page 13

Column A	Column B
1. skinflint	k. one who is reluctant to spend money
2. miser	i. a person who is stingy with money
3. humbug	f. nonsense; rubbish; hoax
4. dismal	q. depressing
5. ragamuffin	u. a raggedly clothed and dirty child
6. destitute	m. moneyless, poor
7. wastrel	s. a wasteful worthless person
8. scoundrel	x. a disreputable or wicked person
9. shackled	p. chained
10. ponderous	z. extremely heavy
11. shun	b. avoid
12. apprenticed	h. working for another to learn a trade
13. savor	c. enjoy; relish
14. profaning	r. irreverent cursing or actions
15. melancholy	w. a gloomy depression or sadness
16. parson	j. clergyman
17. forfeits	a. penalties
18. anteroom	aa. a large entrance area
19. pauper	n. a person who is extremely poor
20. precedence	y. priority or coming first
21. dowry	dd. money or property that a woman brings to a marriage
22. milliner	e. maker of hats for women
23. odious	ee. extremely unpleasant
24. cur	o. dog; a despicable person
25. rail at	cc. complain or criticize bitterly
26. perversion	bb. negatively changing something into a form it should not be
27. spectre	d. spirit or ghost
28. scavenger	g. one who feeds off the dead
29. booty	t. money or goods acquired illegally
30. charwoman	v. a house or office cleaner
31. dispelled	l. driven away, forced to disappear