

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

PRESENTED BY

MOTUS O DANCE THEATRE

For A Man
Who Believed
In Nothing...
In One Night
He Would Believe
In Everything.



Adapted from the novel by Charles Dickens

Study Guide


Discussions- Background information- Classroom Activities

Developed by Pat McCarthy, Education Consultant
Kira McCarthy, Teacher, TDSB



MOTUS O dance theatre

260 Second Street, Stouffville Ontario Canada L4A 1B9
905-640-8647 motuso@sympatico.ca www.motuso.com




MOTUS O dance theatre began in 1990 by the company's artistic directors James Croker, Cynthia Croker and Jack Langenhuizen. The company is known for their physical inventiveness, lighting quick action, grace, raw energy and humour, all trademarks of their unique style earning them rave reviews and outstanding audience responses.

The night seemed like any other night for Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge. It mattered not to him that it was Christmas Eve. No festive lights shone from his window. This suited him just fine; for darkness was preferable, and cheap. But, his solitude would be invaded by three spirits; three chances for him to see what he had become.... three chances to reflect.... three chances for redemption.

WARNING:
loud laughter
highly likely

MOTUS O dance theatre brings to the stage this classic story of greed and hope and redemption. Weaving together dance and theatre you will follow our anti-hero Mr. Scrooge as he visits his faded hopes and his chilling fears. Propelling him to a heart stopping climax that unveils the true spirit of the season.

For a man who believed in nothing... one night he would believe in everything.



Christmas Carol



Theme Explored in Show:

- **Caring and Sharing**
- **Change and Redemption are possible**
- **What makes us happy?**
- **The healing power of celebration**

The Dance in the Show

There are several dance styles in the show including:

- Ballet dancing maids
- Tap dancing party cloggers
- Disco dancers
- Physical theatre
- and our favourite, contact improvisation

How does this all work you may ask? Each dance style is representative of the characters and time period in which they are set. For example, the Ghost of Christmas Past is a look back at Scrooge's childhood and teen years. Therefore we choose disco.

There are few words spoken in the show, most of the story is carried through movement. Song and spoken text are used to inform the plot line.

About this Study Guide

This study guide includes study questions and activities for junior/intermediate grades, but many of the activities in the junior section can be adapted for Primary students attending a performance. There is a list of possible Secondary Projects in the Teacher Resource Section.

The guide focuses on exploration of the themes in the story of the Christmas carol, using an integrated approach in which students will have opportunities to express their ideas through language arts, visual art, movement and drama.

- Pre-show Activities provide suggestions for preparing the students to get the most out of the experience
- Post-show activities give starting points for discussion, as well as classroom projects through which students can work together to explore what they have learned from the performance.
- Teacher Resource Section includes background information on the story and the historical period in which it is set. There are also suggested books and websites for further exploration of the story or the art form.
- Reproducible Student Pages where students can express their individual responses the performance and the follow-up discussions.



Christmas Carol



Teacher Talk
Students will more thoroughly appreciate and enjoy their visit from *A Christmas Carol* following the preparation that this study guide provides.

Talk About

Pre-Show Activities

Discussion

Junior

- Find out what the students know about the story of *A Christmas Carol*
- Have various students tell part of the story, to review or to introduce for those who are not familiar
- Discuss the themes and the lessons in the story. (greed/generosity, caring for others, how people change etc.)
- Talk about dance: who takes dance lessons and what kinds; who has attended a dance performance;
- Introduce the idea of dance telling a story, and ask for examples (ballet, (e.g. Nutcracker) ethnic dances, (e.g. Classical Indian) other)
- Introduce the Motus O performance of the Christmas Carol, explaining that they are going to see a dance performance which tells the story through dance, music and text.



Intermediate/ Senior

- Discuss the idea of adaptation of novels into movies, plays, and dance performances. List some examples. (Star Wars, Harry Potter, Wizard of Oz etc.)
- In each of the above, how faithful was the adaptation to the original? Why do artists adapt work from one medium to another?
- Find out what they know about *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens. Have they read it? Seen the movie? Seen the updated versions such as the movie “Scrooged” or *The Muppet’s Christmas Carol*?
- What are the main themes in all of these adaptations? Why are these themes popular at Christmas time?
- What holidays are there in other cultures/faiths that emphasize these same ideas? (get this information from students or research it beforehand)

Activities

- Make a list of the characters from *A Christmas Carol*. Organize them by major and minor characters.
- For the major characters, include a short character sketch
- List the theatrical elements you would expect to see in a dance adaptation of a story (music, costumes, props etc.)
- Compile a list of adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* (Movies, children’s books, TV specials, cartoons. Students can research on internet)





Christmas Carol



What to Watch and Listen for During the Performance

Junior

- The parts of the story that are the same or different from versions you know
- How the dancers take on different roles, and how they change from one character to another.
- The various dance styles that you see.
- How music and sound contributes to the performance

Intermediate Senior

- How faithful the performance is to the source
- Which drama/dance techniques the dancers use to change from one character to another. The various styles of dance and when they are used
- Any symbolism used to explore the themes of the story (e.g. Marley's chains as a symbol of the weight of his misdeeds)



Christmas Carol

Post-Show Activities

Discussion

Students can respond to the performance through discussion, drama, dance, writing, and oral presentations

Talk About



Junior

- Review the story, and the characters
- Discuss the differences and similarities to the original story
- Talk about their feelings about this version. Did they relate to the themes and the characters? Was the part that was told through dance clear?
- Revisit the “What to Watch and Listen for” section to see what they observed
- Talk about their favourite parts and characters, giving reasons for their choices.
- Recall the opening scene and talk about what the humans were doing that show that people need to change.
- Discuss Scrooge before and after the visit from the ghosts.
 - ⇒ How did he change?
 - ⇒ How did the artist show the change through his dance?
 - ⇒ Which of the ghosts did you find the funniest, the scariest?
 - ⇒ What theatrical elements were used to portray the ghosts? (Music, special effects, movement of dancers, costumes?)

Intermediate/Senior

- Discuss Motus O’s interpretation of the story and how they adapted it to dance. Did they retain the main ideas? Were they faithful to the characters? Were any important or favourite parts left out?
- Discuss the opening scene and why the angels are sent to prove that humans can change.
- Revisit the “What to Watch and Listen for” section and discuss what they observed.
- Discuss dance as a medium for telling this story, giving reasons for their opinions.
- Discuss how the music and other theatrical elements added to the performance.
- Give their impressions of the dance styles and whether or not it suited the story and themes.
- In the original book, Dickens describes Scrooge as “a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!” How did the choreographer, dancer and costume designer help us see such a character? How did they handle Scrooge’s transformation at the end of the play?
- Consider the same questions for some of the other characters. (Find descriptions of these characters in Dickens’ text.)
- How does the Ghost of Christmas Past show Scrooge his life? (through video). What would be in a video of your life? What ages would you highlight?



Christmas Carol



The following activities provide suggestions for individual, group or class projects, through which students can further explore the meaning of the story. Teachers should choose the ones that best suit the abilities and interests of their students. Teachers might want to choose one or two from each of the curriculum areas.

Activities and Projects

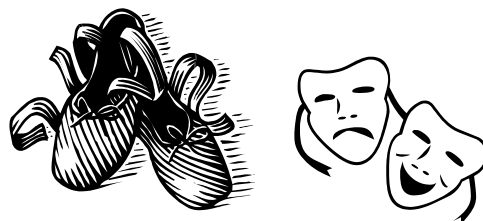
Junior/Intermediate

Language Arts

- Individually: Write a character sketch for one of the main characters in the show. Include physical description, character traits and relationship to the other characters (Primary- draw a character and write some descriptive words)
- In pairs: Conduct an interview with one of the characters, describing events from that character's point of view. Present the interview as a written newspaper report or a television interview.
- Whole group and Individually: Prepare written questions to ask Scrooge or Marley about their greed and lack of kindness, and how and why they changed.
- Individually: The angels at the beginning of the show have to choose someone who they think can change. Choose a famous person who you would like to change. Tell why, and what you would do to help them change.
- Individually: Imagine that you could be visited by a ghost from holidays past, which holiday would you choose, and what would the ghosts show you?
- In pairs: Prepare some trivia questions about one of the characters. In small groups or with the whole class, ask and answer the questions. (Primary- describe a character and see if the class can guess the identity.)
- Write a canquain poem to describe one of the main characters in the show. See Student Pages.

Drama/Dance

- In pairs: Act out a scene between Scrooge and one of the ghosts. Use movement and dialogue to portray the character
- Whole group: create tableaux to show a group of people at holiday time. Show both the good and bad aspects. Bring the tableaux to life, and show scene through movement.
- Whole Group: Begin by portraying one of the characters through body language, movement, facial expression. On a signal from the teacher, show how the character changed by the end of the story.
- Small groups: Hot seat a character to find out about their behaviour. Using the written questions prepared above, role-play scenes in which you question the characters about the behaviour.
- Pairs or small groups: Create a dance in which a ghost appears and persuades the others to trust and go on an adventure. Your dance should include a dramatic entrance for the ghost, some initial resistance on the part of the others, and a clear change of attitude to end the story.

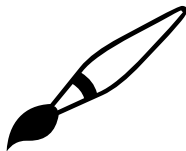


Christmas Carol



Visual Arts

- Individually: listen to or read a description of one of the characters. (See Student pages.) Draw a sketch of a costume for this character. Be prepared to explain your choice of style and colour.
- Individually, draw one of the four ghosts that appear in the story (remember that Marley is also a ghost).
- In pairs or small group: Choose one of the places that Scrooge visits and build a model, including figures that appear in the scene. In theatre this model is called a Maquette, and is used by the set designer before building the real set on the stage.
- In pairs: Design a Christmas Carol Board Game. It could be like snakes and ladders, monopoly, etc. Add the obstacles he had to overcome, the successes, he had etc. (e.g. If you land on “failed to give to the poor” go back to spaces) Write the instructions and exchange with other groups to play.



Music/Sound

- Pairs or Small Groups: Choose music for the dance created in the Dance/Drama section above.
- Decide on an instrument to represent each of the main characters of a *Christmas Carol*. Give reasons for your choice. If possible, present a recording of this instrument to illustrate your choice. (Of course students could also play the instrument if possible.)
- Individually, Find a piece of music that you think would be suitable for a scene from *A Christmas Carol*. Could be pop or classical. Play the piece for the class and explain your choice.
- Whole Group: Listen to selected pieces of music and move as the character you think it represents. If the music changes, the character must change attitude and action to suit the music. (see teacher resource section)
- Whole group: Recall the transition scene before the Ghost of Christmas past appeared, and we heard the sounds of the night. Create a soundscape, of nighttime sounds, using found instruments, vocal sounds, percussion instruments Intermediate/Senior



Senior: Literature Discussion or Essay Questions

- Write a character sketch of Scrooge, Fezziwig, Jacob Marley, or Bob Cratchit. Include physical description as well as character traits. Propose some reasons for the character’s behaviour.
- In Motus O’s version of the story, angels decide to try and change Scrooge to prove that people can change and become better. Do you agree or disagree. Give reasons for you opinion.
- The angels chose to save Scrooge. What famous person would you choose, and what ghosts might you send to visit that person?
- Scrooge is very rich and yet he doesn’t seem happy, while the Cratchit family seems very happy, in spite of their poverty. Why do you think this is so?
- What role do Bob Cratchit, Marley’s Ghost, Mr. Fezziwig, and Tiny Tim play in Scrooge’s conversion?
- At the end of *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge declares “I Am Not the Man I Was” Fill in the Character Change Chart in the Student Pages, explaining how and why he changed.
- Dickens uses a lot of symbolism in *A Christmas Carol*. (the chains on Jacob Marley, the flower given to Scrooge by Belle) Discuss these symbols in the dance version and explain the meaning.

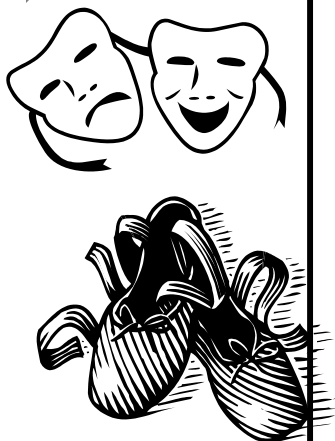


Christmas Carol



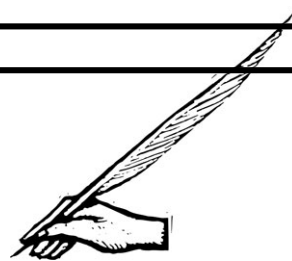
Senior

Drama/Dance



- Small Groups: role-play the scene with the three angels, and discuss your views on humans' ability to change. Decide what experiment you would carry out to prove your point.
- In Pairs: consider the scene in Scrooge's office and the relationship between Scrooge and Bob. Bob tries to do some things without the boss seeing. The boss is ever watchful. Create a dance in which one person has power over the other. The powerful person controls, while the powerless person does what is necessary to get what he wants. Share these dances with the whole group, who will critic for clarity, tension, etc.
- Whole group and small groups: With everyone working individually, create scene scapes of various environment, (the street outside Scrooges house, the party at Fezziwig's, the work-house where the poor must live.) begin with a tableaux and bring to life with movement and sound. In small groups, choose one of the scenes and choreograph a short dance to show a specific event in the venue.
- In pairs: Interview one of the characters in role as one of the main characters. Explain the events of this unusual Christmas to a reporter. (e.g. Tiny Tim tells about his attempt to give Scrooge a present, Scrooge talks about the ghosts who visited and their affect on him).
- Small group: Write, rehearse and present a scene that takes place after the story ends. What has happened to each of the characters? (Has Scrooge really changed? What happened to Nephew Fred? Has having money from his Uncle Scrooge changed Tiny Tim?)

Projects and Independent Studies



- Write in Role as a character in the story telling about one of the events
- E.g. Scrooge tells his nephew about the ghosts; Bob Cratchit complains to the newspaper about his working conditions; the ghosts write a report on Scrooge to their boss
- Research Victorian times, in terms of social class structure, daily life, values, attitudes of rich towards the poor etc. Prepare a visual or oral presentation
- Imagine that the three spirits paid you a visit. Describe and/or draw what each spirit would show you (characters, places and events). Sum up your experiences by writing about how this visit might help you be more philanthropic.
- Complete the Character Change Chart, describing the character, the precipitating event and the change in the character after the event.
- Compare and Contrast the Motus O version of the story with other version i.e. the original novel, a movie version etc.
- Research holidays from other cultures/faiths that have a theme of giving or transformation and present your findings to the class.
- Prepare and take part in a debate with the following resolution: A person's character is formed at very early age and therefore it is impossible to change. Choose who will take the affirmative and negative, prepare arguments, and present the debate to the class.
- Compose a poem that tells about the events in the show, or the feelings of the characters about the events.

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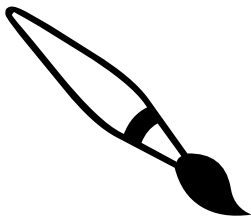
Music/Sound

- The video of Scrooge's past is presented with contemporary music that suits the character and the action. Create a sound track to accompany the story of Scrooge. Use contemporary or classical music. Design a CD cover and a play list with an explanation of your musical selections.
- Choose one of the scenes from the show, and create a sound effect track, using stock sounds from the net, vocal sounds, percussion instruments etc. Use this soundscape to accompany the dance created in the drama/dance activities
- Compose your own theme for the show, considering various elements of the show: Christmas, themes of change, hope, and Victorian period.



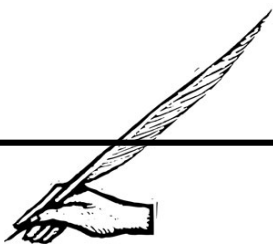
Visual Arts

- Create sketches of the main characters. Research clothing, accessories. Be sure to reveal character traits in your sketch
- Create a maquette of a set for one of the venues in the show. Place the characters on the set, to represent one of the scenes from the show
- Recall the special effects used to change scenes and to accompany the ghost scenes. Depending on the equipment available, create some lighting effects for the scenes with the ghosts. (use computer, stage lighting, colour gels with overhead projector etc.)



Secondary Journal Entries

- The ghosts visit Scrooge and help him see where he needs to change. Write about an event that caused you to change your outlook on some topic or person. Describe your feelings before, what caused the change, and how you are different now.
- Talk about Scrooge and what he gave up for the sake of money. Why do you think he made the choices he made? What choice would you make and why? (consider the scene with Belle)
- Discuss Motus O's interpretation of the Christmas Carol. Did it meet your expectations? What worked for you? What didn't? Do you think dance is a good medium to tell this story?
- Dickens wrote this novel to criticize the greed he saw around him and the abuse of the poor. He also set the story at Christmas time. Discuss how both these factors are relevant to present day Christmas and our attitudes to the poor.



Teacher Resource Section

Christmas Carol



Who were the Victorians?

The Victorians lived over one hundred and fifty years ago during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837 to 1901) in England, and was a time of enormous change in this country. In 1837 most people lived in villages and worked on the land; by 1901, most lived in towns and worked in offices, shops and factories.

What was happening in England?

- Britain became the most powerful country in the world, with the largest empire that had ever existed, ruling a quarter of the world's population.
- The number of people living in Britain more than doubled, causing a huge demand for food, clothes and housing.
- Factories and machines were built to meet this demand and new towns grew up, changing the landscape and the ways people lived and worked.
- Railways, originally built to transport goods, meant people could travel easily around the country for the first time.

What was life like?

The quality of life depended on whether you were rich or poor. If you were rich you could have a good and easy life. But if you were poor you could have a rough and hard life, often ending up in the workhouse or early death.

Family life was very structured, with the father as the head of the family. Children were expected to obey without question.

Rich children went to school, often away from home. The rich had many servants, who lived in their own part of the large mansions.

Poor children went to work in mines and factories at a very early age. There were no labour laws to protect them. If you did not work, or could not pay your debts, you might be sent to a workhouse, where you lived and worked in almost slave-like conditions.

(mentioned by Scrooge when asked to give money to the poor at Christmas.)

Who was Charles Dickens?

The name conjures up visions of plum pudding and Christmas punch, quaint coaching inns and cozy firesides, but also of orphaned and starving children, misers, murderers, and abusive schoolmasters. Dickens was 19th century London personified, he survived its mean streets as a child and, largely self-educated, possessed the genius to become the greatest writer of his age.

Dickens' ability to capture the imagination of his audience, many of them new to fiction due to a rise in literacy during the industrial revolution, was due largely to his amazing power of observation, incredible wit, unforgettable characters, and a command of the English language probably second only to Shakespeare. His fiction provided a voice for the causes and frustrations of the poor and working classes helping to assure popularity across class boundaries. Another factor contributing to Dickens' meteoric rise in popularity was the way in which he and his publishers, Chapman and Hall, chose to publish his books. All of Dickens' major novels were published serially, in monthly (or weekly) installments. A full length novel was out of the price range of most of his readers. Dickens wrote each installment with this type of publication in mind, many of the installments ended with a hook that kept the readers glued to the edge of their Victorian seats wondering what would happen next, thus ensuring the sales of the next installment. This type of arrangement worked perfectly for the workaholic Dickens, whose unbounded energy and inexhaustible supply of imagination enabled him to keep to the tight writing schedule required by serial publication for nearly 35 years. Dickens' novels continue to be published today in popular series like the Oxford Illustrated Edition, which include the original illustrations, and the Penguin English Library's paperback edition.

Dickens' describes the holidays 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". This was what Dickens described for the rest of his life as the "Carol Philosophy".

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Christmas Carol

Teacher Resource Section



Websites

<http://woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/victorians/#life> a question and format session from an elementary school

<http://www.nettlesworth.durham.sch.uk/time/victorian/vfam.html> a school website with information in kid friendly format

<http://ecole.orange.fr/college.saintebarbe/victoria/children.htm> information on the poor and children at work.

<http://www.teachwithmovies.org/guides/christmas-carol.html> movie and study guide

<http://dickensfordummies.homestead.com/carol.html> lists themes, symbolism, study notes and questions.

Books: Available on Amazon.ca

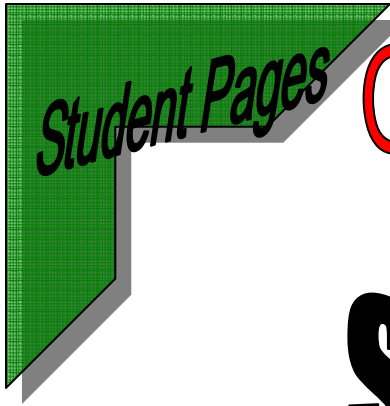
Dickens: His Work and His World (Hardcover)
by Michael Rosen

Christmas Carol
By Charles Dickens Collectors Library edition

Life in Victorian England
by Duane C. Damon

Notes on a Christmas Carol
Disney's Mickey's Christmas Carol: Based on a Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens (Library Binding)
by Jim Razzi





Christmas Carol



Shape Poem

Write a cinquain poem to describe one of the main characters in the show.

Line One: one word
(subject)

Line Two: two adjectives

Line Three: three
verbs relating to line
one.

Line Four: four
words (feelings or a
sentence that relates to
line one)

Line Five: one word

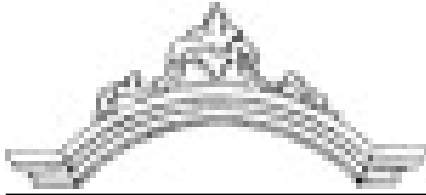


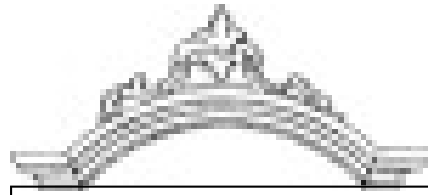
Christmas Carol

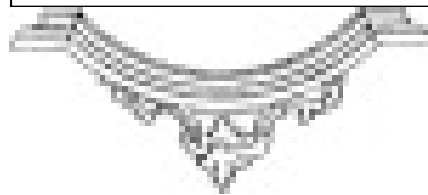
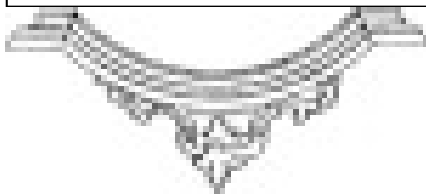


CHARACTER CHANGE

Write words or phrases that describe Scrooge before and after to show how his character changes.







Christmas Carol



CHARACTER SKETCH

Fill in the information in the canvases to paint a picture of one of the characters in the story.

Physical Appearance (gender, age, body type, hair, eyes, facial features, speech)



Other details

Personality (distinctive traits, sense of humour, code of ethics)

Background that may influence motivations (education, family, early childhood experiences, financial situation, relationships)

Story Relevance

Christmas Carol



Plot summary of Dicken's A Christmas Carol

A Christmas Carol is a Victorian morality tale of an old and bitter miser, Ebenezer Scrooge, who undergoes a profound experience of redemption over the course of one evening. Mr Scrooge is a financier/money-changer who has devoted his life to the accumulation of wealth. He holds anything other than money in contempt, including friendship, love and the Christmas season.

Dickens divides his literary work into five "staves" instead of chapters. The story begins by establishing that Jacob Marley, Scrooge's business partner in the firm of Scrooge & Marley, was dead—the narrative begins seven years after his death to the very day, Christmas Eve. Scrooge and his clerk, Bob Cratchit, are at work in the counting-house, with Cratchit stationed in the poorly heated "tank", a victim of his employer's stinginess.

Two "portly gentlemen", collecting charitable donations for the poor, come in afterwards, but they too are rebuffed by Scrooge, who points out that the Poor Laws and workhouses are sufficient to care for the poor. When Scrooge is told that many would rather die than go there, he mercilessly responds, "If they would rather die ... they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population." At the end of the workday, Scrooge grudgingly allows Cratchit to take Christmas Day off, but to arrive to work all the earlier on the day after.

Scrooge leaves the counting-house and eventually returns to his home, an isolated townhouse formerly owned by his late business partner, Jacob Marley. In keeping with his miserly character, Scrooge lives in a small suite of largely unfurnished rooms within the house which he keeps dark and cold (the rest of the rooms in the building having been let as offices).

While he unlocks his door Scrooge is startled to see the ghostly face of Marley instead of the familiar appearance of his door knocker. This is just the beginning of Scrooge's harrowing night. A spectral hearse charging up the broad staircase in the dark, the sliding of bolts and slamming of doors elsewhere in the house, and the inexplicable ringing of the ancient and neglected bell pull system precedes a visit from Marley as Scrooge eats his gruel by the fireplace.

Marley has come to warn Scrooge that his miserliness and contempt for others will subject him to the same fate Marley himself suffers in death: condemned to walk the earth in penitence since he had not done it in life in concern for mankind. A prominent symbol of Marley's torture is a heavy chain wound around his form that has attached to it symbolic objects from Marley's life fashioned out of heavy metal: ledgers, money boxes, keys, and the like.

Christmas Carol



Plot Summary Continued

Marley explains that Scrooge's fate might be worse than his because Scrooge's chain was as long and as heavy as Marley's seven Christmases ago when Marley died, and Scrooge has been adding to his with his selfish life. Marley tells Scrooge that he has a chance to escape this fate through the visitation of three more spirits that will appear one by one. Scrooge is shaken but not entirely convinced that the foregoing was no hallucination, and goes to bed thinking that a good night's sleep will make him feel better.

Scrooge wakes in the night and the bells of the neighboring church strike twelve. The first spirit appears and introduces himself as the Ghost of Christmas Past. This spirit leads Scrooge on a journey into some of the happiest and saddest moments of Scrooge's past, events that would largely shape the current Scrooge. These include the mistreatment of Scrooge by his uncaring father (who did not allow his son to return home from boarding school, not even at Christmas), the loss of a great love sacrificed for his devotion to business, and the death of his mother, the only other person who ever showed love and compassion for him. Unable to stand these painful memories and his growing regret of them, Scrooge covers the spirit with the large candle snuffer it carries and he is returned to his room, where he falls asleep.

Scrooge wakes at the stroke of one. After more than fifteen minutes, he rises and finds the second spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Present, in an adjoining room. The spirit shows him the meagre Christmas celebrations of the Cratchit family, the sweet nature of their lame son, Tiny Tim, and a possible early death for the child; this prospect is the immediate catalyst for his change of heart. Scrooge slowly warms to the idea that he can reinvent himself. The bell strikes twelve. The Ghost of Christmas Present vanishes and the third spirit appears to Scrooge.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come takes the form of a grim spectre, completely robed in black, who does not speak and whose body is entirely hidden except for one pointing hand. This spirit frightens Scrooge more than the others, and harrows him with visions of the Cratchit family bereft of Tiny Tim, of Scrooge's own lonely death and final torment, and the cold, avaricious reactions of the people around him after his passing. Without explicitly being said, Scrooge learns that he can avoid the future he has been shown, and alter the fate of Tiny Tim—but only if he changes.

In the end, Scrooge changes his life and reverts to the generous, kind-hearted soul he was in his youth before the death of his sister.

The story deals extensively with two of Dickens' recurrent themes, social injustice and poverty, the relationship between the two, and their causes and effects. It was written to be abrupt and forceful with its message.

