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INSIGHTS

DTC's Teacher Resource



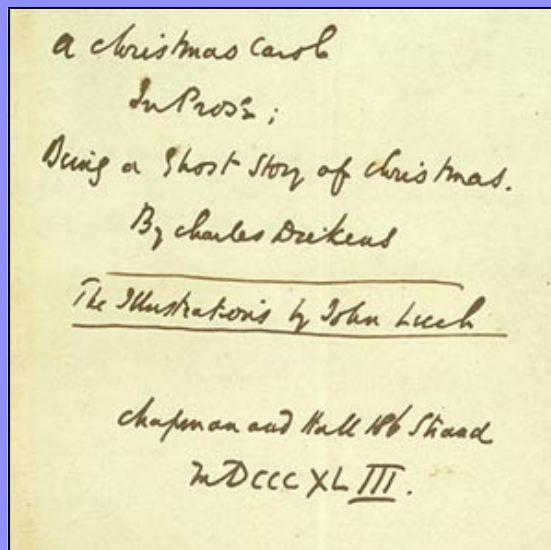
*By Charles Dickens
Adapted by Patrick Barlow
Directed by Brendon Fox
December 4 - 29, 2019*

A Word from Mr. Dickens...

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.

Their faithful Friend and Servant,

*C.D.
December, 1843*



Inscription written by Charles Dickens in his novel.

INSIGHTS

Published December 2019

Delaware Theatre Company

200 Water Street
Wilmington, DE 19801
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**41st Season
2019-2020**

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Adapted from Charles Dickens' novel
by

Patrick Barlow

Directed by
Brendon Fox

Delaware Theatre Company
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Bud Martin

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Community Engagement

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Portions of this study guide have been adapted from the 2012 and 2016 DTC publications of Insights: A Christmas Carol.

Delaware Theatre Company thanks the following sponsors for supporting its educational and artistic work.



Delaware Division of the



This program is supported, in part, by a grant from the Delaware Division of the Arts, a state agency, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts. The Division promotes Delaware arts events on www.DelawareScene.com.



Characters and Summary

A Note to Readers: To assist educators in preparing their students for seeing our shows, the Department of Education and Community Engagement at DTC prepares and shares detailed summaries of the plots of our productions. These summaries disclose important plot points, including the climax and resolution of each play. Furthermore, our study guides are constructed under the premise that the educator has read our summary, and additional articles herein may reference these same plot points. This notice is intended to provide a “spoiler alert.”

Main Characters

The five actors in the play take on many roles. Here are some of the most important characters they play.

Actor 1

Ebenezer Scrooge is a stingy man who has cut off all of his relationships in his pursuit of earning more money. He makes loans to people and charges them a fortune in interest, and seems to have no regard for people or their situation. He hates Christmas and the Christmas spirit of love, forgiveness, and generosity.



Mary Martello (above) plays the role of Ebenezer Scrooge, and Charlotte Northeast (below) plays Bob Cratchit and others in DTC's production of A Christmas Carol.

Actors 2—5

Bob Cratchit is one of the protagonists of the story. A loving husband and father, he works hard to support his family although he is paid very little by his employer, Mr. Scrooge. He is somewhat timid when confronted by Scrooge, knowing that he cannot afford to lose his job.

Mrs. Lack is a poor woman who goes to Scrooge for a loan to help her pay her bills and put food on the table for her children.

Jacob Marley is Scrooge's former business partner. Marley, who died on Christmas a year earlier, comes back as a ghost to warn Scrooge to change his ways and become a kinder, more generous person.

Fran is Ebenezer Scrooge's sister. She was devoted to her brother and is seen by Scrooge when he visits his past. Fran has since died, but her son Frederick lives on.

Isabella is Scrooge's former fiancée. Though he loved her, he chose work and the pursuit of riches over his relationship with her, so she broke off their engagement, leaving Scrooge hurt and bitter about relationships.

The Ghost of Christmas Past is a ghost who takes Scrooge on a journey to watch scenes from his life in order to learn what he used to value in his heart.



(continued)

Characters and Summary (continued)

Main Characters (continued)

The Ghost of Christmas Present is a spirit who tries to teach Scrooge about the current and ongoing joys in the world around him.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is a ghost who shows the cold and empty future Scrooge has in store for him.

Mrs. Cratchit is Bob's loving wife and the mother of his children.

Frederick is Ebenezer Scrooge's nephew. The son of Fran, Frederick tries to honor his mother's memory by inviting his Uncle Scrooge back into the family fold at Christmas. Despite his uncle's rude behavior, Frederick manages to keep a cheerful attitude towards Ebenezer.

Mr. Grimes was Ebenezer's cruel schoolmaster when Scrooge was just a child.



Liz Filios, Sarah Gliko, and Michaela Shuchman (left to right) play multiple roles in the 2019 production of A Christmas Carol at DTC.

Characters and Summary (continued)

Summary

As the play opens, a group of actors from the Victorian Age reads from Charles Dickens' book *A Christmas Carol* about the miserable character that is Ebenezer Scrooge. The actors breathe life into a heap of props, and Scrooge appears as the action begins. It is Christmas Eve, 1842, in London, England, and one year since the death of Jacob Marley, the business partner of Ebenezer Scrooge. The scene follows Scrooge and his employee, Bob Cratchit, who are both working hard at Scrooge's counting-house where Scrooge makes loans to people in need of money. A customer, Mrs. Lack, enters and speaks of financial difficulties, and Scrooge seems to take delight in her troubles. Scrooge's nephew Frederick arrives to invite him to Christmas dinner, but Scrooge angrily refuses and demands that he leave. Late in the day, Cratchit asks off work for Christmas Day. Scrooge bitterly denounces Christmas and demands that Cratchit make up the hours off by coming in early the following day. Alone at the end of the work day, Scrooge greedily looks at a box containing a lot of money.

That evening, Scrooge is alone at home when the ghost of Jacob Marley arrives. Although frightened at first, Scrooge refuses Marley's admonishment to repent of his sinfully selfish behavior. Marley then warns Scrooge that he will be visited by three more spirits through the nighttime hours. Scrooge scoffs at the warning.

Later that night, Scrooge is visited by the Ghost of Christmas Past, who looks remarkably like a more vibrant, younger version of Scrooge. The ghost drags him out to revisit his childhood and his life as a young man. Scrooge recalls his school days and the cruelty of his teacher, Mr. Grimes, who confiscates a storybook about Ali Baba that Scrooge loved as a boy. The spirit takes Scrooge to watch a scene of his younger self talking with his beloved sister, Fran. Scrooge is uncomfortable with the emotions this scene raises. The spirit then shows Scrooge the fun he used to have when he worked for his former employer, Mr. Fezziwig, who held wonderful parties in celebration of Christmas. Scrooge is then reminded of his former fiancée, Isabella, who left him when he became ensnared in the pursuit of money. When Scrooge sees a scene with Isabella and the man she ended up marrying, he becomes defiant towards the Spirit of Christmas Past, trying to convince the ghost—and himself—that he made the right choices in his life.

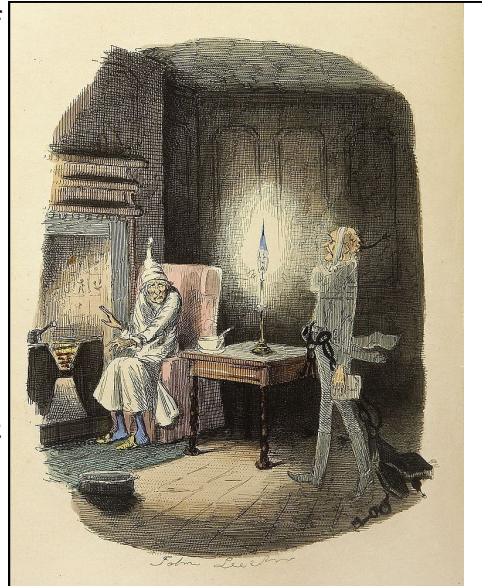


Illustration of Marley's ghost visiting Scrooge, as created by John Leech for the first edition (1843) of Dickens' A Christmas Carol.

Scrooge is then greeted by the Ghost of Christmas Present. This spirit takes Scrooge on a journey through the streets of London to see Christmas as it is now, first visiting Frederick's Christmas party, then showing him the poor yet cheerful home of the Cratchit family. Scrooge is moved by the sight of

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Characters and Summary (continued)

Summary (continued)

Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit's youngest son, who has a joyful manner despite his illness. Scrooge is further taken with Tim when the boy delights in the story of Ali Baba, the same story Scrooge loved as a boy. The spirit returns him to the scene of Frederick and his wife Constance, who share a tender moment. Scrooge angrily rants at the Spirit of Christmas Present, steeling himself against any emotion he has felt. The spirit disappears, leaving Scrooge alone again.

Scrooge seems as feisty as ever when the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come approaches. Scrooge is confused when he cannot find his key or his locked money box. As he frantically searches for these items, the frightened man sees Bob Cratchit enter. Cratchit does not see or acknowledge Scrooge. Cratchit opens what Scrooge thinks is the money box. Instead of money, however, Cratchit finds the book about Ali Baba there, and he tenderly recalls Tiny Tim, who has died. Scrooge's anger is melted. Cratchit reads the inscription in the book, lovingly written to a young Ebenezer by his mother. Mr. Grimes reappears to torment Scrooge about the book as he did before, but this time, Scrooge stands up to him, banishing the pain the evil man has caused and replacing it with loving thoughts of his mother. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come tells Scrooge that he is dead, and in a nightmarish sequence, all of the spirits—as actors—drag Scrooge to his “end.” Scrooge, a changed man, begs for another chance to mend his ways and live again.

In his panic, Scrooge wakes up, and he realizes that he is back in his own bedroom. He joyfully hails townspeople from his window and learns that it is still Christmas Day in 1842, not the future. He visits his nephew to accept the invitation to the family Christmas dinner. In the final scene of the play, Scrooge is again in his counting house, where he greets Bob Cratchit with the news that he will give both financial and emotional support to his family. Scrooge looks forward to reading books with Tiny Tim, and the two men share a joyful moment. The play ends as the company wishes a merry Christmas to all as they sing a cheerful carol.

A Note from Director Brendon Fox...

“I think what makes this [version of the play] worth seeing is the way our storytelling is both intimate —five actors—and epic. We are taking the audience inside the mind of Scrooge and show how lonely he is at the start and in need of connection—even though he doesn't think so. The production really focuses on the power of empathy and transformation. We need empathy more than ever now, and mortals and ghosts who surround Scrooge show him moments of his life when there was love, hurt and above all connection. The importance of reaching out to another human being is not a message just for the holidays, but all year long. And we're thrilled to share that message with the audience..”

Teachable Themes and Topics

A Christmas Carol: One Novel, Hundreds of Adaptations

Hardly a day goes by during the holiday season between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day that some version of *A Christmas Carol* is not found on television. From a classic film version of 1938 starring Reginald Owen to the ever-popular *Muppet Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens' story of the redemption of Ebenezer Scrooge has been a favorite for the ages, having been adapted to stage and screen almost since its original publication in book form in 1843. As of 2019, the Internet Movie Database lists 80 different television programs or feature films titled *A Christmas Carol*—not including individual episodes of television series that take main characters on a similar three-ghost journey at Christmas. One of the major publishers of plays, Samuel French, Inc., lists nineteen plays that are driven by the same story, though countless others make reference to it in reimagining the characters in various contexts. Delaware Theatre Company's production of *A Christmas Carol*, adapted by award-winning playwright Patrick Barlow, was premiered here in 2012, and thus is one of the newest incarnations of this old story. Would Charles Dickens have been surprised at the way his written work has become a dramatic sensation?

Probably not! Interestingly enough, those dramatizations began within a few weeks of the book's December 1843 release. In and around London, various theatres chose to stage the story, hoping to draw large audiences by capitalizing on the immediate popularity of the book, which had already sold thousands of copies in the few weeks it had been in print. At the time, there was no legal copyright protection forbidding unlicensed dramatic adaptations of literary works, and Dickens was powerless to stop these productions. However, he did get behind one production, entitled *A Christmas Carol; or Past, Present and Future*, an adaptation by Edward Stirling that premiered at London's Adelphi Theatre in February of 1844—a mere two months after the book appeared on store shelves! By giving his permission to Stirling's work, Dickens raised the profile of the production above the others that were "unofficial," thus opening the door to others interested in garnering his approval for the use of his material. Audiences packed the houses, purchased more books (and even sheet music derivations of the story), and Dickens then was able to receive payment for the use of his story in other media.



Charles Dickens was no stranger to the theatre even before *A Christmas Carol* became popular onstage. As a child, Dickens enjoyed performing in little plays and comedies with his friends and family. A sudden illness at age 20 forced him to abandon his plans to audition for the Lyceum Theatre; shortly thereafter, he took a job as a reporter, launching his writing career. Yet even after achieving so much success as a writer, Dickens still felt a connection to the theatre, performing in amateur productions and charity theatricals.

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Charles Dickens at his writing table.

Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

A Christmas Carol: One Novel, Hundreds of Adaptations (continued)

In one such venture, Dickens played the character of Shallow in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in a charity performance intended to raise money for a foundation to purchase William Shakespeare's house at Stratford-on-Avon to preserve it for the people of England. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert saw Dickens perform in a production of Ben Jonson's play *Everyman in His Humour*. In addition to performing in plays, Dickens began staging readings of his own stories, traveling around the world and often donating the proceeds of his performances to charity. Only a few years after the publication of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens brought the book to life onstage in a series of charitable and public readings that delighted working-class men and women in Birmingham, children in a hospital in London, and even theatre-going audiences in the United States. In fact, it was reported that audiences camped out overnight on the sidewalks of New York for tickets to Charles Dickens' readings of *A Christmas Carol* at Steinway Hall.

What is it that makes this little novel come alive on the stage? In addition to acclaimed performances from Charles Dickens himself or great 20th century actors like George C. Scott, Lionel Barrymore, or Carroll O'Connor (the voice of Oscar the Grouch as Scrooge in *A Sesame Street Christmas Carol*), it is notable that so many adaptations maintain much of the novel's language in dramatized versions. This faithfulness to the language may be due to the way that Dickens, rather than relying on narration, used dialogue to illuminate his characters and advance the plot. In plays and musicals, dialogue and behaviors are the main vehicles for telling a story. From this excerpt of the novel, it is clear how easily the prose writing could be transferred into the form of a script:

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew gaily. "What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough."

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said, "Bah!" again; and followed it up with "Humbug."

"Don't be cross, uncle!" said the nephew.

"What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas!"

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Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

A Christmas Carol: One Novel, Hundreds of Adaptations (continued)

While a narrator's description could have told us about Scrooge and his nephew Frederick, their words and tone show the contrast in their characters—one cheerful, one misanthropic--and also provide an expository example of Scrooge before his transformative evening. By using conversation in almost every scene in the book, Charles Dickens wrote like a playwright, and actors, directors, and adapters have been given all the necessary tools for creating voices and behaviors that bring these characters to life on stage and screen. Whether he intended to do so or not, Charles Dickens created in *A Christmas Carol* a masterpiece that embodies the best of the genres of prose and dramatic literature.



Illustration of the crowds attending Dickens' reading of A Christmas Carol at Steinway Hall in New York City. Dickens visited America three times, presenting a dramatic reading of his book about Scrooge and the Spirits on an 1867 tour. The New York Times wrote of the event, "When he came to the introduction of characters and the dialogue, the reading changed to acting, and Mr. Dickens here showed a remarkable and peculiar power. Old Scrooge seemed present; every muscle of his face, and every tone of his harsh and domineering voice revealed his character."

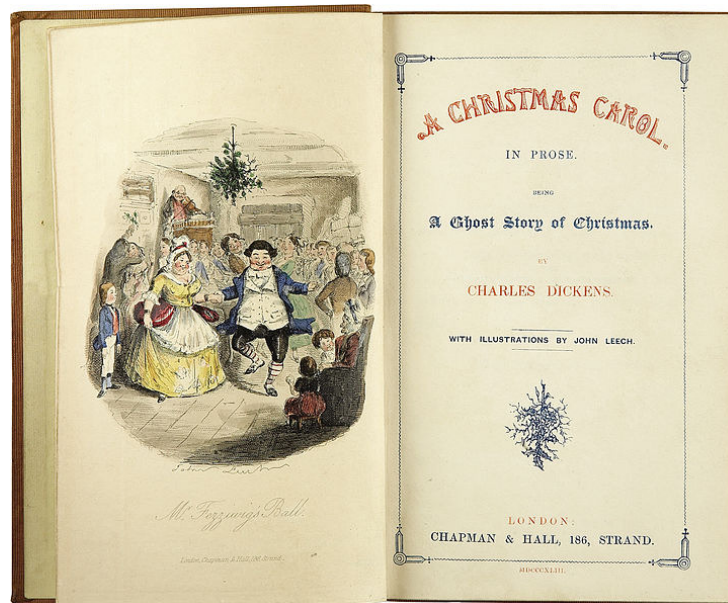
Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Charles Dickens and the Forty Thieves

In Patrick Barlow's adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, a pivotal scene occurs when young Ebenezer Scrooge has his favorite storybook taken away by the stern schoolmaster, Mr. Grimes. Grimes refers to stories such as *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and *Robinson Crusoe* when he rebukes the boy Scrooge for spending time reading fiction instead of doing his mathematics lessons. Although many film and stage versions of *A Christmas Carol* do not make reference to the storybooks Scrooge loved as a boy, in the original novel, Dickens does indeed characterize the young Scrooge as a reader delighting in tales of adventure about Ali Baba, Robinson Crusoe, Valentine and Orson, and other heroes and villains.

In fact, many of Charles Dickens' characters in his other novels have a similar love for the romance of an adventure story. David Copperfield takes refuge from his wicked stepfather by reading the storybooks such as *The Arabian Nights*, *Don Quixote*, and *Robinson Crusoe* left to him by his father. Pip of *Great Expectations* and Little Nell of *The Old Curiosity Shop* at times find their situations similar to characters from stories they've read or been told. Dickens' own love for stories bubbles forth in his essay "A Christmas Tree" as he tells of seeing objects on the tree that remind him of his favorite storybook characters—Robin Hood and the Sultan, Red Riding Hood and Ali Baba. Dickens was clearly a lover of books and literature, and he paid homage to the glory of stories in many of his works.

Some of the scenes in this production of *A Christmas Carol* that give great import to the meaning of storybooks are not in the original Dickens tale, such as the scene in which Bob Cratchit finds Scrooge's old storybook. Yet for his adaptation, Patrick Barlow uses this joy of books as one of the vehicles that transforms Ebenezer Scrooge from a coldhearted miser to a warm and generous man. Though not entirely faithful to the language of the original novel of *A Christmas Carol*, these changes to the tale are based in the histories Charles Dickens has given to his characters, and even celebrate that same love of literature Dickens enjoyed.



Photograph of first edition of A Christmas Carol, written by Charles Dickens and illustrated by John Leech.

Teachable Themes and Topics *(continued)*

British Money: Pounds, Shillings, Pennies, and Bobs?

In the opening scene of the play, Ebenezer Scrooge is visited in his counting-house by Mrs. Lack, a woman who has seven children, a husband out of work, and bills to pay.

Scrooge: So, what shall we say? . . . Five pounds?

Mrs. Lack: Five pounds sir! Oh, my goodness, thank you sir!

Scrooge's suggestion of "five pounds" is his offer of a loan of about \$500 in today's American money in terms of what an average person could purchase (food, clothing, shelter). Throughout the play, the characters refer to several different denominations of British money, from pounds (abbreviated with the symbol £) to shillings to farthings. Below is a table explaining the different forms of British currency of the 1840s, with approximate values compared to today's American dollar.*

** Values of money change constantly depending on circumstances such as inflation and global exchange rates.*

British Currency used in 1840s	Worth (compared to other British currency of the time)	Form of Money	Comparison to Today's Purchasing Power in U.S. Dollars*
Penny	Basic unit	Coin	About 40 cents
Shilling	Equal to 12 pence (pennies)	Coin	About \$5
Bob	Slang term for a shilling	Coin	About \$5
Crown	Equal to 5 shillings or 1/4 of a pound	Coin	About \$25
Pound	Equal to 20 shillings, or 4 crowns, or 240 pence	Pounds came in coins and paper notes (for larger amounts).	About \$100
Sovereign	The same as a pound	Gold coin	About \$100; however, the value of a gold piece is also measured by the price of gold at a particular time.

Other old terms for British money include "guinea," which was a gold coin worth just over 1 pound, and a "farthing," worth just one-fourth of a penny. A "quid" is a slang term for a pound.

Just as American currency has changed over the years, so has British money. One of the biggest changes to British currency values occurred in 1971 when "decimalization" occurred, making British

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Teachable Themes and Topics *(continued)*

British Money: Pounds, Shillings, Pennies, and Bobs? *(continued)*

money based in powers of 10. Therefore, a pound is now worth 100 pence. Rather than shillings, the British now use a coin worth five pence. Although not a general custom, some British citizens still use the familiar term of “bob” for the five-penny coin.

Charles Dickens makes a pun on the senior Cratchit’s name “Bob” as a connection between him and his small salary paid him by Scrooge. Certainly the many references to poverty and wealth in *A Christmas Carol* would have made readers and audiences understand Bob Cratchit’s meager earnings early in the story, and the impact of Scrooge’s raising his salary after the night of ghostly visitors.



A British shilling from 1819. Coins are usually in circulation longer than paper money because they withstand the wear-and-tear of daily use and exchange, so a coin like this would have been used also during the 1840s when Dickens wrote the novel.

About the Playwright...

Patrick Barlow is a British actor, comedian, and playwright. The founder and artistic director of a comedy duo known as The National Theatre of Brent, Barlow has created dozens of comedy shows based upon characters imaginary and real such as the Count of Monte Cristo, Lady Chat-terly, Prince Charles and Princess Diana, and Rasputin. His adaptation of Alfred Hitchcock’s *The 39 Steps* was immensely successful in London’s West End, and critically acclaimed during its Tony-Award winning Broadway run. *A Christmas Carol* is one of his more recent endeavors in creating an inventive retelling of classic stories and films.

***Teachable Themes and Topics* (continued)**

Women on the Stage

Delaware Theatre Company has produced Patrick Barlow's adaptation of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* twice prior to this 2019 staging. Barlow wrote the show for five performers, one to play Scrooge and four to play the remaining roles by changing costumes, voices, and other elements to illuminate the qualities of the characters they play. Both the 2012 and 2016 productions used a combination of male and female performers to play multiple roles, and sometimes a man played a woman or a woman played a man in a supporting role. In both of those earlier productions, a male actor played the central character of Ebenezer Scrooge. However, in this new production of this engaging adaptation, DTC and director Brendon Fox have cast a woman as the male Ebenezer, and women play all the remaining roles, too—male and female. Though he did not set out to make this an all-female cast, in seeking the best performers for his vision of the show, director Fox realized in the casting process that the performers who stood out most to him were all women. His casting choices do not change the genders of the characters—all characters remain the same in gender, age, and style as were scripted by Barlow's adaptation. But the novelty to many audiences of an all-female cast of *A Christmas Carol* brings to mind the complicated journey of women actors in the theatre.

A theatre history class often begins with the classical age of Greek drama, when playwrights such as Sophocles and Aristophanes wrote their tragedies and comedies that included both male and female characters but were performed exclusively by men. Around this age (circa 500 B.C.E.), what little is known of the average woman entails her subservience to men, her roles chiefly within the home, and her lack of social and civic rights. Women were forbidden from acting (and it is thought they were also forbidden from attending the theatre as an audience member, too). Men played all theatrical roles in the great Greek amphitheatres. Likewise, women were generally banned from theatre during the height of the Roman Empire and its dramatic and comic spectacles. Actors during this age were considered to be of the lowest social class, commensurate with prostitutes or petty criminals, in some circumstances. Women were "protected" from this atmosphere by the societal strictures that kept them from the public eye. Whether that protection was of benefit to women or simply a way of maintaining the male-dominated culture is certainly debatable, particularly when viewed with the lens that things do not change for the better when there is no force for positive change in practice.

During the Dark Ages and Medieval times that followed the fall of the Roman Empire, most people were uneducated, and their focus was on survival in the face of the chaos of governmental instability and the spread of disease. The Christian Church was the primary stabilizing force in people's lives through these centuries. Yet surprisingly, it is during the Medieval age that European women began to gain a foothold in the world of theatre. European theatre in general was limited mostly to sacred plays' being performed by priests or monks in churches as way to educate illiterate populations about religious doctrine or morality or to illuminate stories from the Bible. While theatre historians have often referred to plays by cloistered nuns for other women religious as part of their education and worship, newly uncovered evidence of religious plays and even writings akin to stage directions found in convent records demonstrates that some of these women performed with priests or laity for the general congregation in certain sacred plays. Usually the nuns played important biblical women, such as the three Marys who visit the tomb of Jesus. Regardless of their characters portrayed, though, these women elevated theatre to a more respectable position in society through their involvement and through the content performed, and by doing so, elevated the status of women as performers.

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Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Women on the Stage (continued)

As the Middle Ages wore on and sacred plays often became so elaborate and popular that they were staged outdoors of the actual church building, a trade for traveling actors who made theatre their artistry and livelihood developed. The religious nature of the plays began to shift outside of the Church, too, so that secular references and even broadly comic scenarios became the focus of these plays.

During the Renaissance, women joined men onstage in Italy in *commedia dell'arte* performances, comic shows that relied on stock plots and characters and often featured slapstick and suggestive humor. Female actors usually played the “young woman in love” stock characters or waggish servant girls. Certainly many women performers were forced to use their sexuality as a part of their job. Not viewed as a profession for a respectable woman, actresses were often viewed as prostitutes or women of questionable reputation for taking part in bawdy public performances. These theatrical events were frowned on by the Church, but as time passed, the Church’s once-singular authority over a community was no longer as powerful as before, partially due to the schisms brought about by the reformation movement, and partially as the stabilization of Europe allowed for the flourishing of arts, sciences, and education again. Women also began to act professionally in France, and there, as in Italy, the art of opera blossomed and invited the participation of female singers; but in England in the late 1500s and early 1600s, theatre performance was still strictly a man’s profession. Shakespeare’s *King’s Men* famously featured young men or boys playing female roles to great acclaim. Women might attend plays, but they were not on the public stages of London. Yet within the walls of royal courts, Queen Anna (wife of King James I of England) and her ladies were known to perform in elegant “masques” alongside male performers. These masques were usually celebrated private events held as part of a festive gathering of the aristocracy. Anna and the other female performers used costumes and lyrical movement to tell stories and to assure the wealthy audiences within court walls that these performers were, indeed, women.



Portrait of Restoration-era actress Nell Gwynne (Gwynne)

Rather than growing from courtly influence, women’s roles in English theatre—and English theatre itself—were brought to a halt following the death of James I. Puritan influence on English culture led to the demolition of the Globe Theatre and other public theatres, the rise of Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell, and eventually a civil war that resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy in 1648. But only a few years after Cromwell’s death, King Charles II was restored to the British throne in 1660. Charles was a lover of theatre who had spent his exiled years in France where theatre and opera flourished and men and women performed onstage. As he breathed new life into British theatre by licensing two major theatre companies (including the famous Drury Lane theatre), he also decreed that women should play women’s roles, ruling that, “We do likewise permit and give leave that all the women’s parts to be acted in either of the said two companies may be performed by women...” And in December of 1660, a female actor—possibly Anne Marshall or Margaret Hughes (the woman’s name was not recorded and research offers those two as the strongest possibilities)—played Shakespeare’s famous tragic heroine Desdemona in a historic production

of *Othello*. Throughout the Restoration era, more women such as Nell Gwynne, Elizabeth Barry, and

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Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Women on the Stage (continued)

Anne Bracegirdle took to the stage and performed some of the greatest female roles of the day.

Though men for hundreds of years had played women's roles onstage, it was still somewhat taboo for women to play men's roles in a public theatre in most of Europe unless the role were a subservient role, such as a servant or page. Not only did this casting reinforce the notion of women's being of a lower social status than men, but it also at times used costuming—more form-fitting men's attire on a woman—for the purposes of exploitation, revealing more of a woman's body than her traditional dress might have at the time. Yet over time, things began to change as actresses in these “breeches roles,” as they were called, pursued greater theatrical challenges as artists. One highlight was in the mid-19th century as American actress Charlotte Cushman played Romeo in a British production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Cushman had already been an established actress known for playing strong female roles, and was clearly devoted to the world of theatre, even managing Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theatre for a period in 1842, so her playing Romeo made headlines. And perhaps the most famous woman in theatre history, Sarah Bernhardt, continued the tradition of women's taking on strong male characters as she played Hamlet to great critical acclaim, and even transferred a scene from the play to an early silent film.



Lithograph of sisters Charlotte and Susan Cushman playing the title characters in Romeo and Juliet.

Into the 20th and 21st centuries, women have found greater opportunity to explore new characters, claim leading roles, and command the respect they deserve as professional artists. There are still, though, cultural and societal pressures that influence expectations for both women and men in the arts. These pressures about which roles are appropriate for certain actors and which ones are inappropriate come not only from outside forces such as critics' reviews, box office returns, and public opinion, but also within the theatre and film industries themselves as audiences and artists grapple with offering more opportunity while still honoring the creative intent of writers or the central questions and themes within a story. However, more local, regional, and even big commercial theatre and film production companies are taking risks with nontraditional casting, a concept in which physical qualities of an actor are not a limiting force in determining which roles an actor or actress may audition for or perform onstage or on camera. Brendon Fox, the director of DTC's current production of *A Christmas Carol*, remarked, “When I saw men *and* women audition for Scrooge and the other roles, I was in that mindset. I also believe deeply in equity, diversity and inclusion in theater, and champion whenever I can more opportunities for actors who don't traditionally get to play certain roles, like Scrooge. As the callbacks went on, I was committed to also finding the five best actors I could, who play mortals, spirits, children, adults, and furniture! And that's who we have in [the show].” Often this nontraditional casting—sometimes called “open casting” for its flexibility—offers to the artistic company and the audience a new perspective on the world of characters and their journeys, bringing out a humanity that is more universal, and providing greater connections between audience and art.

Questions for Classroom Discussion

Knowledge and Comprehension

1. Give two examples in the play that show that Scrooge is an unkind person.
2. Who is Fred? How is he related to Scrooge?
3. Describe Bob Cratchit's family and the situation at his home.
4. What acts of kindness do we see Scrooge doing at the end of the play?

Application and Analysis

1. How do Scrooge's feelings change during the visits made by the various ghosts? When does he show sympathy towards other human beings?
2. Compare and contrast Scrooge's relationship with Bob to Mr. Fezziwig's relationship with his employees.
3. What types of adjustments in their performances do the actors make when they switch playing one character to another? How do these adjustments connect with the characters portrayed?

Synthesis and Evaluation

1. What might have caused Scrooge to be so greedy? Explain your reasoning.
2. What event or events cause Scrooge to change to a kinder, more sympathetic person? Explain your reasoning.
3. How effective were the actors in changing from playing one character to another? Support your evaluation with examples of what you saw or heard in the performance.
4. Would you say that religion is central to this play? Why or why not?
5. Was there anything that stood out about having a cast of only women playing all of the roles, male and female? What stood out, and why did that strike you as memorable? Do you think casting of plays and musicals should try to match actors' genders, ages, and other physical features with their roles, or do you see a place for flexibility when casting? What might be advantageous about flexibility in casting? What might be disadvantages of casting "nontraditionally"?

Classroom Activities

1. After visiting the list on IMDB.com or a video library source such as Netflix or the public library, select and watch several different versions of *A Christmas Carol*, and note the similarities and differences between the versions. How are the characters portrayed? Which elements of the story receive a strong treatment or are virtually ignored in the various versions? What stands out about each version you have seen? Which version(s) do you like the best, and why? After viewing the different versions and making your notes, create a chart or other graphic organizer comparing and contrasting the versions. Alternately, create an audio-visual presentation using video clippings illustrating the various points you are making about each version. Share your work with your class.
2. Consider one of your favorite non-Dickensian characters from a novel, from television, or from a film. Write a new dramatized adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* with that favorite character as a central figure in the story. For example, how might Reggie or Cheryl from *Riverdale* be viewed if they were Scrooge-like characters in their own version of the story? Or Sharpay from *High School Musical*? Or Gru from *Despicable Me*? Or could you imagine Ron Weasley from the *Harry Potter* series as a Bob Cratchit-type? Your new version could be just one scene or even a full retelling of the *A Christmas Carol* story. Think of ways that you might adapt the dialogue, language, and/or cultural references to fit your character to the traditional three-ghost story. Use your fellow classmates as actors and stage a reading of your drama to share with the class.
3. Create a “wish-list” for Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit, Mrs. Cratchit, and Frederick, listing items each might buy (or want to buy) to celebrate the holidays. Then look for contemporary prices for these items. If, for example, a turkey dinner is on the shopping list, find out what it would cost in today’s dollars to buy that dinner. After finding out the contemporary prices for each item, use the conversion chart in the study guide, or look for other conversion charts to convert the price from dollars into British pounds. Share your pricing guide with your classmates.
4. Many cultural historians credit Charles Dickens with reinvigorating the celebration of Christmas in Great Britain and with establishing new Christmas traditions in Europe and America. Examine the history of Christmas traditions in England, America, or other countries around the world. How did traditions develop over the years? Who or what were the factors that influenced the way people celebrate the holiday? Create a photo story or other visual representation to illustrate your findings, and share what you’ve learned in a presentation to your class.
5. Invite a local theatre director and/or your school’s drama director to your class to discuss casting practices from their perspectives. Have they ever cast “against type”? When might this flexible casting style work well? Are there any types of shows or roles for which they would look for a strong match of an actor’s physical traits with the character description? What traits influence a director’s decision to cast or not cast an actor for a particular role or show? Broaden the conversation to include actors’ perspectives—those in your school as well as actors in the community. What might each person’s dream roles be if they had their choice? What role does imagination and suspension of disbelief play in theatrical productions?
6. Using plays, musicals, or videos you know, choose a role that intrigues you as a performer that is against your type in terms of traditional casting methods. What about that character is intriguing to you? What about their story would you want to bring out in your performance? Identify a scene, monologue, or song from that character, rehearse it, and share it with your class. Afterwards, discuss with the class any new understandings, perspectives, etc. that came to you as an artist or audience member as a result of this nontraditional casting/performing experience.

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Why Go to the Theatre?

State and National Education Standards Addressed Through Taking Your Students to a Live Theatre Production

When your students view live theatre, they are taking part in a learning experience that engages their minds on many levels. From simple recall and comprehension of the plot of a play or musical to analysis and evaluation of the production elements of a show, students receive and interpret messages communicated through words, movement, music, and other artistic devices. Beyond “I liked it; it was good,” students learn to communicate about the content and performance of an artistic piece and to reflect on their own and others’ emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual points-of-view and responses. And the immediacy of live theatre--the shared moments between actors and audience members in the here-and-now--raises students’ awareness of the power and scope of human connection.

The following educational standards are addressed in a visit to a performance at Delaware Theatre Company along with a pre-show DTC classroom presentation and post-show talkback session at the theatre. *(Additional standards addressed through the use of the study guide or through further classroom study are not included here.)*

Common Core English Language Arts Standards:

Reading: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, 6

Language: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, and 5

National Core Arts Standards—Theatre:

Responding: Anchor Standards 7, 8, and 9

Connecting: Anchor Standard 11

Delaware Standards for English Language Arts (DOE):

Standard 2: 2.2a, 2.4bl, 2.5b, 2.5g, 2.6a

Standard 3: 3.1b, 3.3b1, 3.3b2

Standard 4: 4.1a, 4.1b, 4.1c, 4.2f, 4.3a, 4.4b

Teamwork in Theatre = Artists + Audience

Going to the theatre is a wonderful way to experience **TEAMWORK**.

The **ARTISTS** who put on the show—that includes people like actors, musicians, sound designers, costumers, painters, carpenters, and even electricians—are not only involved in the performance, but have often spent weeks or months getting the show ready. That's a lot of work! And there would be no show without the efforts of these artists. They are very important!

The **AUDIENCE** who comes to see the show is also important. There is no show if there is no audience! The actors, musicians, and technicians can practice all they want to, but it takes an audience to turn all that work into a theatre performance!

THEATRE is not the same as a movie or a TV show. Theatre is **LIVE** in front of you. The actors onstage? They are real people in the room with you! The lights shining onstage? They are controlled by real people in the room with you! The sound of applause during the bows? That comes from real people in the room with you! **Everything anyone does in the room, whether that person is an ARTIST or an AUDIENCE member, affects everyone else.** If an actor decides not to wear his costume, it disrupts the performance, surprises the other actors, and confuses the audience. If an audience member decides to play a video game during the show, it disrupts the performance, creates strange lights and sounds that don't fit in the show, and distracts other audience members and the artists involved with the performance. When you are in the theatre, your words and actions are observed by everyone in the room, and these words and actions can make the theatre experience a good one for everyone else or a bad one for everyone else. This is why **TEAMWORK** is so important in theatre. Everyone in the room needs everyone else to **DO THEIR PART** for the experience to be successful.

What must the ARTISTS do during the theatre performance?

Do the show as rehearsed, and not suddenly change something or surprise other actors or technicians.

Give full attention to your job, whether that is acting or moving scenery or opening a curtain on time.

Give full energy to the performance, showing that you care about what the audience sees and hears.

What must the AUDIENCE do during the theatre performance?

Give full attention to the activity onstage, with no talking during the show, no sleeping, and no playing with or using things like phones, toys, or papers.

Practice courteous behaviors towards other audience members, not making noises during the show, keeping hands and feet to yourself, and staying in your seat rather than distracting others by getting up and down.

Show respect for the place and the people in it by doing things like arriving on time; waiting until after the curtain call to leave; not eating, drinking, or chewing gum in the theatre; and responding to the show in a way that recognizes the efforts of the **ARTISTS** and the **AUDIENCE** in making the experience positive.

When **ARTISTS** and **AUDIENCE** members all do their part, they show respect for each other and for the work involved in creating theatre. **That mutual respect and the efforts to make the experience a positive one for all add up to make TEAMWORK in the theatre!**