

# ***A Christmas Carol***

## **A Ghost Story of Christmas**

by Charles Dickens

**a solo performance in one act**

adapted by Mark Cabus  
for Green Room Projects

TPAC Education  
HOT in-school tour 2006  
Performance Guide

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# What to Expect

Dear Teachers,

Please prepare your students for this unique experience by sharing with them certain elements to expect during this one-man production.

**Tell your students that one actor performs the roles of many different people, including the narrator who speaks directly to the audience. The actor finds unique ways to become each character and to shift back and forth between them. Here's an example from the script:**

(as the actor, with increasing volume)

His color changed though – when without a pause – it came through the heavy door. And passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in – the dying flame leaped up as though it cried – I know him! Marley's Ghost! And fell again.

The actor crumples in place. Slowly, he rises again as Marley's Ghost and crosses down stage, center. A spirit weighed down by a massively heavy length of chain moves with great difficulty. Like a balloon dragging an anvil.

(as Marley)

The same face. The very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots. The tassels on the later bristly. Like his pigtail. And his coat skirts. And the hair upon his head.

**Prepare your students to use their imaginations and not to expect elaborate set and props. The actor will have a few props, but will expect the students to engage their imaginations as he describes the scene. For example:**

(as the 1<sup>st</sup> Ghost)

I am . I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

(as Scrooge)

Long past?

(as the 1<sup>st</sup> Ghost)

No. Your past.

The Spirit turns toward the audience and the scene changes.



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## What to Expect (cont.)

It is an awe-inspiring sight.

As the words were spoken, they stood upon an open country road – with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it – for it was a clear, cold winter day. With snow upon the ground.

Scrooge looks all around him.

(as Scrooge, dumbstruck)

Good Heavens! I was bred in this place. I was a boy here.

**Finally, this is an interactive play. Prepare your students to participate in the action when the actor tries to draw them in. For example:**

Scrooge takes a tentative step, then with a deep breath, marches out into the street.

(as the actor)

The people were by this time pouring forth – as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present.

He shakes hands with members of the audience.

And walking with his hands behind him – Scrooge regarded everyone with a delighted smile.

**Enjoy yourself!**



# Questioning Mark

## an interview with Mark Cabus

**Describe, in general, the way one-man shows work.**

Though the solo performance, or "one person show," idea took real shape in the performance art movement of the 1970s, its roots dig deep into the soil of live performance. From the cave fires of shaman and tribal leaders of primitive peoples to vaudeville, stand up, and cabaret, the solo performance is considered a testing ground for both performer and audience, a live presentation of themes and ideas by artists exploring their own limitations as a performer.

More than any other form of live performance, the solo show expects and demands the active involvement of the people in the audience. They are watched as they watch, they are directly addressed, their energy resonates with that of the lone actor, and their presence in the room can trigger new levels of performance. The presence of this single performer in front of an audience instantly creates conflicting roles for both actor and viewer -- great power and great vulnerability. In "The Nature of the Monologue," written in 1917, the anonymous author writes, "The monologue means 'to speak alone' -- and that is often how a monologist feels. If in facing a thousand solemn faces he is not a success, no one in all the world is more alone than he."

Solo performance thrives on the coexistence of illusion and reality. There is a thrilling quality to live solo shows, infused with infectious, raw energy of spontaneous storytelling. However, the semblance of "spontaneity" is carefully fostered by the actor and the director.

All solo performers are storytellers, whether performing original or, as in my case, pre-existing work. And if we assume that the very first performances in human history consisted of an individual telling stories in front of other members of his society/tribe, then this form is the most elemental, primal, and, undeniably, essential.

**What should we know about your one-man version of *A Christmas Carol*?**

Charles Dickens himself used to perform staged readings of CC throughout Europe and America. Sometimes on a bare stage and sometimes utilizing "magic lanterns," a Victorian state-of-the-art projector of scenic images, he toured extensively, engaging audiences with his holiday ghost story.

In the same spirit, my CC uses the original text exclusively. With the exception of added traditional carols, what you hear are Dickens' own written words, plucked from the page, and spoken aloud. Much the same as the author did over a hundred years ago.

### **How many different characters do you portray?**

In this incarnation of the play, I portray 18 different characters in the course of an hour.

### **What is the process of "switching characters"?**

The "switching" of characters was, for my teenage self, the central reason for becoming an actor. To be someone else, to *not* be one's self, is a teen's ideal, and for me this was no different. I discovered at an early age that I had a real talent for mimicry and transformation. My brother claims that there are no clothes in my closet, only costumes. He says that on more than one occasion he would witness me standing in front of my wardrobe, deciding who I was going to be for that day.

Getting inside the skin of another soul has allowed me to view the world through another's eyes. I've been kings, murderers, lawyers, thieves, and preachers (though not all in the same performance). Some of my favorite shows have been ones in which, rather than assuming the leading role, I have had the opportunity to portray several, if not dozens, of minor characters. And frankly, they're my favorite, the "little people;" especially in *Christmas Carol*.

### **What do you want students to go away with?**

Oh gosh, so many things. The love of reading. The fun of imagining. The joy of giving unselfishly. That's not asking too much, is it? (laughs)

### **What type of theater is this piece considered? Please explain.**

This style of theater is storytelling or "story theater," which is based in the great ancient oral traditions.

The *griot*, the traditional African oral historian, was not only the purveyor of the tribe's stories, but was allowed to verbally confront his audience without censure to assure the truth of those stories. The Greek monologist (the most well-known of which was Homer), the French *troubadour*, and the medieval English traveling minstrel were all appreciated for their inventiveness in the presentation of their community's contemporary tales. In America, the lecture circuits, the medicine and Chautauqua tent shows, and the vaudeville routines of the 1800s and early twentieth century, are all a part of the tradition of storytelling. This tradition continues today with folks like Garrison Keillor and the *Prairie Home Companion*, as well the annual Jonesboro Storytelling Festival and other like events around the country and around the world.

It's my favorite type of theater, due to the unwritten contract it establishes between the teller and the listener. "We're making this journey together," it says, "Are you with me?" I love that.

# A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

## Summary

A mean-spirited, miserly old man named Ebenezer Scrooge sits in his counting-house on a frigid Christmas Eve. His clerk, Bob Cratchit, shivers in the anteroom because Scrooge refuses to spend money on heating coals for a fire. Scrooge's nephew, Fred, pays his uncle a visit and invites him to his annual Christmas party. Two portly gentlemen also drop by and ask Scrooge for a contribution to their charity. Scrooge reacts to the holiday visitors with bitterness and venom, spitting out an angry "Bah! Humbug!" in response to his nephew's "Merry Christmas!"

Later that evening, after returning to his dark, cold apartment, Scrooge receives a chilling visitation from the ghost of his dead partner, Jacob Marley. Marley, looking haggard and pallid, relates his unfortunate story. As punishment for his greedy and self-serving life his spirit has been condemned to wander the Earth weighted down with heavy chains. Marley hopes to save Scrooge from sharing the same fate. Marley informs Scrooge that three spirits will visit him during each of the next three nights. After the wraith disappears, Scrooge collapses into a deep sleep.

He wakes moments before the arrival of the Ghost of Christmas Past, a strange childlike phantom with a brightly glowing head. The spirit escorts Scrooge on a journey into the past to previous Christmases from the curmudgeon's earlier years. Invisible to those he watches, Scrooge revisits his childhood school days, his apprenticeship with a jolly merchant named Fezziwig, and his engagement to Belle, a woman who leaves Scrooge because his lust for money eclipses his ability to love another. Scrooge, deeply moved, sheds tears of regret before the phantom returns him to his bed.

The Ghost of Christmas Present, a majestic giant clad in a green fur robe, takes Scrooge through London to unveil Christmas as it will happen that year. Scrooge watches the large, bustling Cratchit family prepare a miniature feast in its meager home. He discovers Bob Cratchit's crippled son, Tiny Tim, a courageous boy whose kindness and humility warms Scrooge's heart. The specter then zips Scrooge to his nephew's to witness the Christmas party. Scrooge finds the jovial gathering delightful and pleads with the spirit to stay until the very end of the festivities. As the day passes, the spirit ages, becoming noticeably older. Toward the end of the day, he shows Scrooge two starved children, Ignorance and Want, living under his coat.

He vanishes instantly as Scrooge notices a dark, hooded figure coming toward him. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come leads Scrooge through a sequence of mysterious scenes relating to an unnamed man's recent death. Scrooge sees businessmen discussing the dead man's riches, some vagabonds trading his personal effects for cash, and a poor couple expressing relief at the death of their unforgiving creditor. Scrooge, anxious to learn the lesson of his latest visitor, begs to know the name of the dead man. After pleading with the ghost, Scrooge finds himself in a churchyard, the spirit pointing to a grave. Scrooge looks at the headstone and is shocked to read his own name. He desperately implores the spirit to alter his fate, promising to renounce his insensitive, avaricious ways and to honor Christmas with all his heart. Whoosh! He suddenly finds himself safely tucked in his bed.

Overwhelmed with joy by the chance to redeem himself and grateful that he has been returned to Christmas Day, Scrooge rushes out onto the street hoping to share his newfound Christmas spirit. He sends a giant Christmas turkey to the Cratchit house and attends Fred's party, to the stifled surprise of the other guests. As the years go by, he holds true to his promise and honors Christmas with all his heart: he treats Tiny Tim as if he were his own child, provides lavish gifts for the poor, and treats his fellow human beings with kindness, generosity, and warmth.

Source: Brian Phillips; Sparknotes. <<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/christmascarol/>>.



[www.allthingschristmas.com](http://www.allthingschristmas.com)

# The *Fear* Factor

Preface of *A Christmas Carol*

*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.*

[*A Christmas Carol*] is a ghost story. Victorian authors enjoyed ghost stories where it is murky whether or not the person experiencing the visitation is "awake" or not. Victorians believed that ghosts would visit people in their dreams or while they were just waking. Thus the scenes in the novel are not flashbacks - where a character remembers - they are "glimpses," where a character is shown scenes from his life by a third party, a ghost or goblin, against his will. You'll notice that there are present and future glimpses as well. <http://dickensfordummies.homestead.com/carol.html>

Dickens' portrayal of the ghosts is also effective for the reader simply because ghosts are scary. They creep us out. Think of other stories or movies that have ghosts or elements of the supernatural. What is the purpose of the ghost, etc. in that story? (An example is the ghost of Hamlet's father.) Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting the purpose of the ghosts or the use of fear in *A Christmas Carol* and in one of the stories you considered. Is one more effective than the other? Ask students to read their paragraphs aloud or discuss in class.

## Why Do We Like to be Scared?

According to psychology professor Robert Beck, people like controlled fear -- the kind that haunted houses and scary movies provide. Beck says we seek an "optimal level of excitement." For some, a Dracula movie can provide that. But, for others, the optimal level is only reached through sky-diving, bungee-jumping or another high-risk behavior. Although not everyone likes to be scared in the same way, Beck says, "no one likes to be pushed beyond the 'optimal level' to the panic level." Wake Forest University <http://www.wfu.edu/wfunews/1996/101796ts.htm>



# From *Bah Humbug* to *God Bless Us Every One.* – the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge.

When we first meet Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, he is a grumpy old miser with no noticeable good qualities. We soon learn, however, from his experience with the ghost of Christmas past, that he was a lonely child, his sister's death hurt him deeply, and he gave up his true love for the love of money. Throughout the visions, we learn that events occurred over which young Scrooge had no control; but he also made choices that helped determine the type of person we would become. He had experiences that made him happy, and experiences that, when revisited, caused him to beg the ghost to take him from the vision.

With each ghostly visitation, Scrooge sees things he wished he had done differently. In the end, he decides to change his path. How many of us would like the same opportunity?  
Now's your chance.

## Begin a journal.

*For the first chapter,*

Imagine you have been visited by someone from your past – someone that will help you re-visit important moments.

What are those moments?

Did you have any control over them?

What did you contribute, negatively or positively to the situation?

(You may not have been able to contribute anything.)

How does this memory make you feel?

Did the circumstance(s) influence who you are today?

Do you like the way it transformed you?

*In the second chapter,*

Imagine you are visited by someone from the present that takes you to an event or moment that you resisted being a part of.

What is happening there?

Why did you want to stay away?

Do you regret your decision?

*In the third chapter,*

Imagine you are pulled into the future.

How have past and present experiences influenced who you've become?

Do you see yourself as happy?

What, if anything, would you change?

Do you like who you have become?

If not, in what ways can you become the person you wish you would be?



**“A solitary child, neglected by  
his friends, is left there still.”**

**Scrooge said he knew it.**

**And he sobbed.**

**He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew . . .**

## Transformation (cont.)

*In the fourth chapter,*

Imagine yourself as the person you want to be.

What qualities do you possess?

What kind of person are you?

How do you treat your loved ones, neighbors, friends, co-workers?

Describe your transformation.

1... 2... 3... Now think of three things you can begin to do today to move toward the person you want to be. Remind yourself daily. When you have mastered these three things, think of three more. And so on, and so on.

Read and re-read your journal to remind you of promises to yourself.

As you get older, your goals may change, and that's okay.

Continue your journal or begin a new one and repeat this exercise.

### **Additional questions to ponder for your journal:**

Who did you choose as your guide to the past? Present? Future?

Why did you choose him/her?

If someone/something else was your guide, would your journal entries be different?

How?



*Is Christmas Carol a Dream?*

Yes. All of Dickens' ghost stories are. In this case, the dream is psychological. Scrooge is in turmoil because deep down he does have a conscience. Awakening dreams were some of Dickens' favorite plays on psychology, and he loved to have people "wake up" to a new reality. In this case, Scrooge realizes who he has become and snaps out of it. He is skeptical at first, but has his life's journey replayed for him. He is shown his present as well, and through the spirit how fleeting it is. His fear of the future and what he knows he'll become also haunts him. So in truth, Scrooge is haunted by his own ghosts.

<http://dickensfordummies.homestead.com/carol.html>

# About Charles Dickens



**Charles Dickens** was born on February 7, 1812, and spent the first nine years of his life living in the coastal regions of Kent, a county in southeast England. Dickens' father, John, was a kind and likable man, but he was financially irresponsible, piling up tremendous debts throughout his life. When Dickens was nine, his family moved to London. At twelve, his father was arrested and sent to debtors' prison. Dickens' mother moved seven of their children into prison with their father but arranged for Charles to live alone outside the prison, working with other child laborers at a hellish job pasting labels on bottles in a blacking warehouse.

The three months Charles spent apart from his family were severely traumatic. He viewed his job as a miserable trap--he considered himself too good for it, stirring the contempt of his worker-companions. After his father was released from prison, Dickens returned to school, eventually becoming a law clerk. He went on to serve as a court reporter before taking his place as one of the most popular English novelists of his time. At age 25, Dickens completed his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, which met with great success. This started his career as an English literary celebrity, during which he produced such masterpieces as *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Dickens' beloved novella *A Christmas Carol* was written in 1843, with the intention of drawing readers' attention to the plight of England's poor. (Social criticism, a recurring theme in Dickens' work, resounds most strongly in his novel *Hard Times*.) In the tale, Dickens stealthily combines a somewhat indirect description of hardships faced by the poor with a heart-rending, sentimental celebration of the Christmas season. The calloused character of the apathetic penny-pinching Ebenezer Scrooge, who opens his heart after being confronted by three spirits, remains one of Dickens' most widely recognized and popular creations.

*A Christmas Carol* takes the form of a relatively simplistic allegory--it is seldom considered one of Dickens' important literary contributions. The novella's emotional depth, brilliant narration, and endearing characters, however, offer plenty of rewards for literature students, Dickensian fans, and Grinches alike. Like *A Tale of Two Cities*, *A Christmas Carol* has won much appreciation among general readers despite being dismissed by scholarly critics of Dickens' work.

Source: Brian Phillips; Sparknotes. <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/christmascarol/>>.

Picture from: <http://www.online-literature.com/authorpics/dickens.jpg>



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