

A Christmas Carol
By Charles Dickens
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Dramaturge: Brynne Lamb

“God Bless Us, Every One!”

These famous words, uttered by the purest soul Tiny Tim in “A Christmas Carol,” have been running through my head as I’ve been collecting information for this packet. How blessed we are to be together during these troubling times, how blessed we are to have this beautiful piece of literature that we have been allowed to bring to life, and how blessed we are to have the opportunity to make changes in our lives during the holiday season.

The following pages are full of information that will hopefully, allow a glimpse into what life was like when this story takes place as well as a glimpse into Charles Dickens’ life. Use the information as you will, whether it is simply used to learn about the author’s life in 1843, to learn about the beloved story itself, to bask in the Christmas spirit, or to formulate your own ideas as to who your characters are or what they could be.

I hope you enjoy learning about the world of “A Christmas Carol” as much as I did.

Bah Humbug and Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays,
Brynne Lamb

Charles Dickens

Charles Huffam John Dickens was born on the 7th of February, 1812. He was the second oldest of ten children. His father worked as a naval clerk and had always hoped to make it big, but he frequently lived outside of what the family needed, which landed him in a debtor's prison. Because his father was in prison, Dickens left school at the age of twelve to help support his family. Eventually, he returned back to school after his father used a family inheritance to bail himself out of prison, but he left school again to once again provide financial support for his family. The hurt and betrayal he felt started to filter into his writing.



Dickens began work as an office boy, which would then launch his career in writing. He wrote for two different newspapers and also worked as a freelance reporter.

He has a total of fifteen published works, which launched him into a world wide success. Some of his most famous works include "A Christmas Carol," "Oliver Twist," and "Great Expectations."

Dickens was a survivor of a train accident, but he never really fully recovered. He died at his home in Kent on June 9th, 1870 from a stroke.

A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens said in regards to ACC, "I have endeavored in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an idea, which shall not put my readers out of humor with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it."

Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol in a span of six weeks. While writing the book, Dickens was working with charities that were providing aid for the impoverished children of the city. The book was an instant success, selling more than six thousand copies in its first publication. It was also published during a time of religious controversy, which is why we see a combination of christian christmas and yuletide celebrations in the book.



In the book, there are four ghosts. But why are there ghosts, which are generally associated with the Halloween season, in a Christmas story?

One particular reason is the history they carry. Christmas ghost stories go way back to times where Yule was more widely celebrated. They were typically stories of rebirth and death that were also topped with the usual holiday cheer.

Christmas and Yule

Christmas begins on the 24th (Christmas Eve) and ends on the 26th. It is a time where gifts are exchanged, Christmas carols are sung, and the birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated. However, as previously stated, Christmases were not always celebrated in this way. ACC takes place during the time period where the celebration of Christ's birth was just starting to become popular. Before this, a celebration called Yule was celebrated. Yule began on December 21st, the winter solstice, and officially ended on New Year's Day. Most Yuletide traditions were primarily Scandinavian and Germanic traditions, and some Christmas symbols that we know and love come from Yule celebrations.

Mistletoe: Today, we view mistletoe as a romantic gesture, but there is a lot more to the story behind the plant. In Norse mythology, it was used to pay tribute to the fallen god Baldur. Other traditions included. It was also used in druidic traditions where it served as a symbol of fertility, luck, and friendship.

Christmas Trees: Not only used for fun and memorable decorations, the christmas tree also symbolized new beginnings and branches were commonly used to decorate the home in pagan tradition.



Yule Log: Not only a delicious dessert, the yule log was also a pagan symbol for luck. According to tradition, the log has to catch fire in order to have good luck for the next year. If it took multiple attempts to light the log, you would have bad luck.

Christmas Caroling: This tradition hasn't really changed, however caroling was a way to banish spirits away and to bring luck to your neighbors.

Santa Claus



Although Santa is not explicitly mentioned in ACC, one cannot help but notice the resemblance of the Ghost of Christmas Present to Santa. Santa Claus is a Christmas figure that has taken many different shapes and forms. In Pagan tradition, he was often portrayed as Odin, king of the Norse Gods. Here are a few other identities that are associated with Santa.

Saint Nicholas: A Turkish monk who was known for giving away everything he had to the poor and to children. He is now widely regarded as the Patron Saint of children. People would celebrate Saint Nicholas on December 6th, and that tradition was carried to the U.S. by the Dutch in the late 18th century.

Kris Kringle: Not only the character from "Miracle on 34th Street," he is also the bringer of gifts to good little children in Swiss and German traditions.

Pere Noel: This French interpretation of Santa put gifts in children's shoes.

Baboushka: In Russian folklore, Baboushka was an old woman who led the wisemen in the wrong direction when they were seeking baby Jesus. She felt so bad that she began to leave gifts on children's beds in hopes that one of them was the baby and has continued doing it.

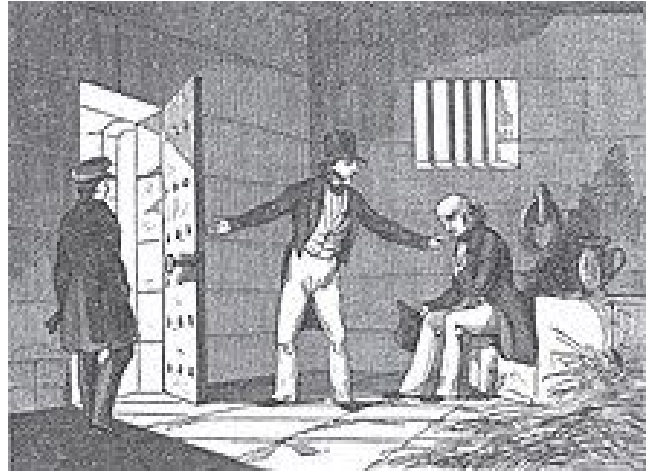
La Befana: In Italian folklore, La Befana was a kind witch who would drop gifts to good children through their home's chimneys.

Debtor's Prisons and Poorhouses

In the play, Scrooge's father is desperately attempting to pay off his debts and trying to keep out of a debtor's prison or a workhouse. Dickens' own father was in a similar position and actually ended up in

a debtor's prison. The rise of poorhouses and debtor's prisons rose with the beginnings of the Industrial revolution

A debtor's prison was exactly what it sounds like; you went there if you were unable to pay off your debts. Depending on your social status, conditions varied from either decent living accommodations to the worst place ever. You were allowed to pay off your debt(s), and sometimes, if you were lucky enough to be a trader/merchant, you could completely avoid debtor's prison by declaring bankruptcy.



If you were unable to find work, you were sent to a poorhouse. Poorhouses were typically filled with the poor and destitute; orphans, elderly people, and unfortunately, people with certain disabilities. When you were at the poorhouse, you worked for the basic necessities of life, where conditions weren't always the best with many people often having to share beds with one another and other things that we today would consider untidy, unhealthy, and overall unfortunate.

Sources for Further Education

For further education on Charles Dickens:

<https://www.biography.com/writer/charles-dickens>

For further education on A Christmas Carol and 1843:

<https://www.charlesdickensinfo.com/christmas-carol/>

https://dickens.ucsc.edu/resources/teachers/carol/england_1843.html

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-do-ghost-stories-go-christmas-180961547/>

For further education on Christmas, Yule and Santa Claus:

<https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas>

<https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/santa-claus>

<https://www.learnreligions.com/christmas-customs-with-pagan-roots-2563021>

For further information on London in 1843

<https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/victorian-era-timeline>

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/all-notices/content/100938>

A Christmas Carol

Task -

Write a diary entry for the boy who sang carols outside Scrooge's house who Scrooge wouldn't give any money to.

You could mention -

- What people think of Scrooge.
- What Scrooge's house looks like.
- How nasty Scrooge is to people.
- How the boy felt brave singing at Scrooge's door, but how Scrooge scared him by shouting at him and not giving him any money.

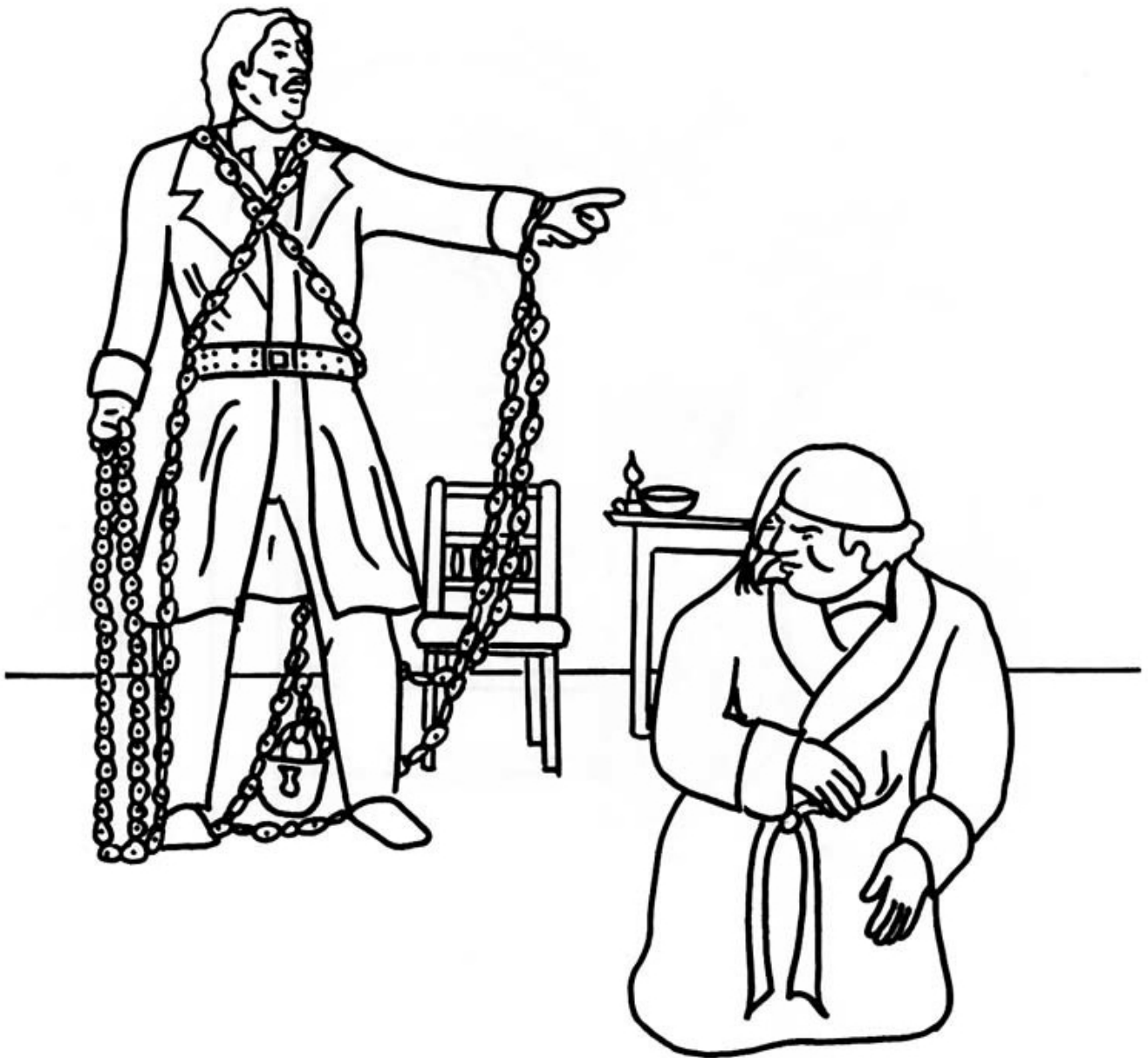
Dear Diary,



A Christmas Carol

Handwriting practice lines consisting of solid top and bottom lines with a dashed midline, repeated 10 times for writing practice.

*I wear the chain I forged in life.
You have your own chain, Ebenezer*



God bless us every one!

