

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
CHILDREN'S ACTOR PACKET

[Pick the date]



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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME!

We are so happy to have you with us for this year's production of *A Christmas Carol*! This show has become a well-known and loved tradition in Hartford, and we hope you have fun participating in it. This packet is designed to help you learn some new and interesting facts about theatre and the story you will helping us tell! To help you get an idea of what rehearsing and performing will be like, we have an interview with someone who's been in *A Christmas Carol* in the past.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE PART OF THE SHOW

Auditions

- Why did you decide to audition for Christmas Carol?
- What did you do at auditions?
- What advice would you give actors about auditioning?

Tech Rehearsals:

- What's the funniest thing that's happened at a rehearsal?
- How did you learn your lines and/or songs?
- What did you do when you weren't on stage?

Performances:

- Did you get nervous before your first performance?
- Do you have any advice for other actors who might have stage fright?
- How did you feel when you got to bow after the performances?

About the show:

- If you could play any role in Christmas Carol who would you want to play?
- What was most fun about being in the cast?
- Did you make any friends from Christmas Carol?
- What is the moral of A Christmas Carol?
- How does being in the show put you in the holiday spirit?

Answer These Questions as Your Character!

- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- Is your family rich or poor?
- Are there any rules you have to follow at home?
- Do you have any toys?
- What games do you play in the street?
- Do you ever go on trips or vacations? If so where?

ACTIVITY

On this page, draw your character! What do you think they would look like? Are they from a rich or poor family? Here are some ways children during this time dressed:



What do YOU look like?

KNOW YOUR THEATRE TERMS

Whether it's your first show or your 100th show, there are a few words/terms that have important meanings in the theatre. Let's go over them now!

STAGE RIGHT – Stage right is a term used to let actors know where to stand so they'll be on the RIGHT side of the stage when the audience watches the show. If you're onstage, "stage right" will actually be to your LEFT.

STAGE LEFT - Stage left is a term used to let actors know where to stand so they'll be on the LEFT side of the stage when the audience watches the show. If you're onstage, "stage left" will actually be to your RIGHT.

UPSTAGE – When you're on the stage, you can either walk towards the audience or away. When you go upstage, you're going AWAY from the audience.

DOWNSTAGE – When you go downstage, you're going TOWARDS the audience.

CENTER STAGE – Just what it sounds like: center stage is right in the middle of the stage!

BLOCKING – The process of writing down and memorizing where you will be standing and moving onstage, as well as when to enter/exit.

WINGS – This is the place you will be while you wait to go onstage. The wings give actors a secret place to sit/stand without being seen by the audience!

TECHNICAL REHEARSAL – This type of rehearsal happens when the play is almost ready to be shown in front of an audience. During these rehearsals, you might have to wait a while in between scenes. This is because the people who are going to help with the lights and sound for the show need to make sure everything looks and sounds right for the real performances!

STAGE MANAGER – A stage manager is the person who makes sure the show runs smoothly. During rehearsal, they'll be taking notes and telling everyone when to take a break. While you're onstage during performances, they'll be in the booth behind the audience, calling cues for lights and sound. The SM uses a headset to communicate with people backstage.

VOMS – Don't worry, this doesn't have to do with anything gross! Vom is an abbreviation of the word "vomitorium," which is a corridor/aisle built underneath seats in a theatre.

THRUST STAGE - A thrust stage refers to a stage where the audience can be seated on three different sides.

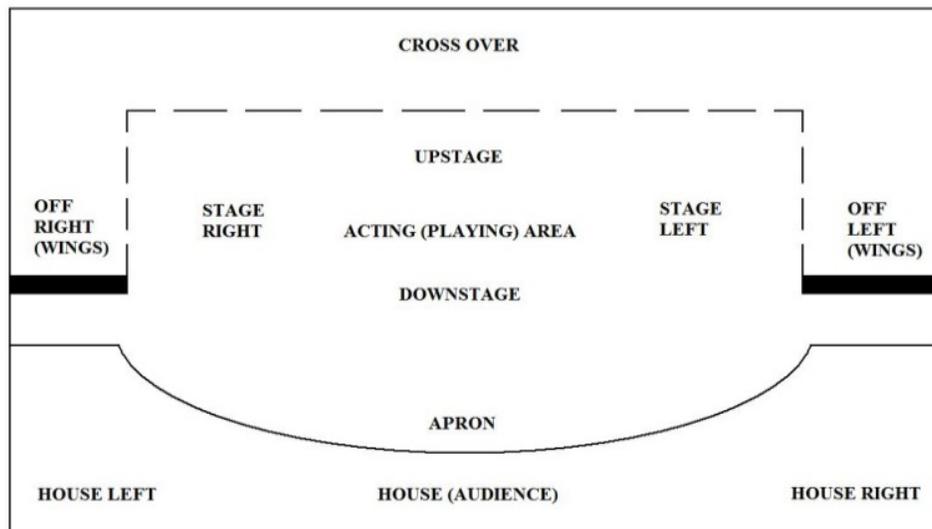
"ON DECK" – If your scene is coming up, you should be "on deck," which means that you are in the wings and ready for your cue!

"IN THE HOUSE" – During performances, the "house" means the audience/lobby areas.

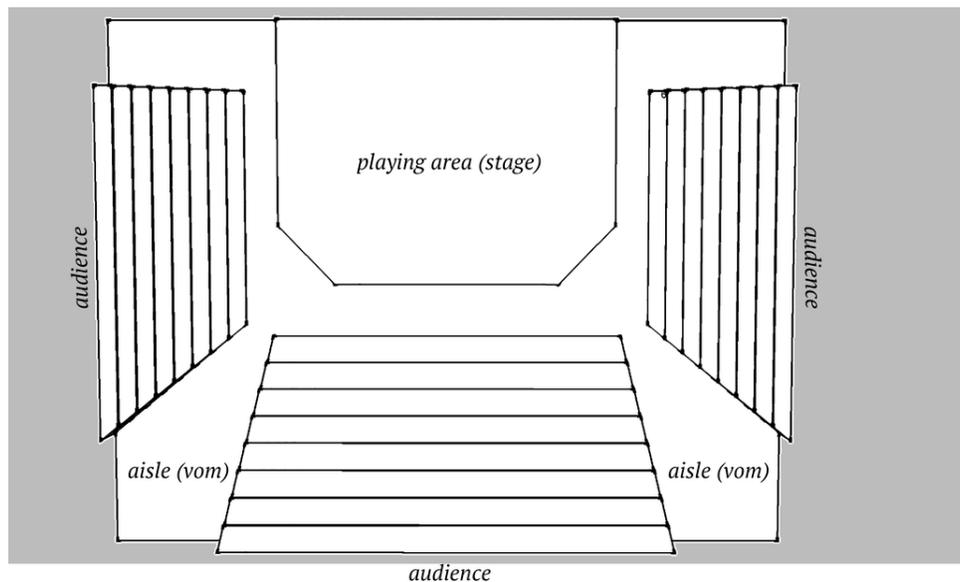
GREEN ROOM – The green room is a space for actors to hang out in before or during a performance (only if you're not supposed to be on deck!)

TRAP – A trap refers to the door onstage that can open and close, giving the actors an alternative way to enter the stage.

Proscenium stage



Thrust Stage



Activity: Use the Thrust Stage diagram to write down your **blocking** for your scenes.

CHARLES DICKENS

Who was he?

Charles John Huffam Dickens (say that 5 times fast!) was born on February 6, 1812. Dickens had a hard childhood. When he was 12, his father was sent to jail for unpaid debts. Because of this, Dickens began to work at a factory labeling “blacking” (used to clean fireplaces), and made about 6 shillings a week - that’s only about \$35 in our money today! Eventually, his father was released and Dickens was able to go back to school for a while, but, more money problems came up, which forced him to leave again. Now that he’d had some school experience though, he was able to get a better job.

He worked for a law firm for a while, but didn’t enjoy it. Dickens was more drawn to literature and theatre, and even considered becoming an actor. However, he chose journalism over acting, and began his writing career as a court reporter. Eventually, he began writing short stories about everyday life, and submitted one to a magazine called *Monthly Magazine* in 1833. The story was accepted, and his career as a journalist/writer took off! In 1837, Dickens published his first novel, *Oliver Twist*. From there, he would go on to publish **14 books** and **6 short stories**.

Did you know...

Charles Dickens wrote a book called “The Mystery of Edwin Drood”, which was never finished, due to his death. In 1985, a musical version of the story opened on Broadway where each audience got to choose a new ending for their performance! There was a recent revival in 2012, too.

Here is a list of the books and stories Dickens wrote. See if you know any of the titles!

Books

- *Oliver Twist*
- *A Christmas Carol*
- *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*
- *The Old Curiosity Shop*
- *Barnaby Rudge*
- *David Copperfield*
- *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*
- *A Tale of Two Cities*
- *Great Expectations*
- *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son.*
- *Bleak House*
- *Hard Times*
- *Little Dorrit*
- *Our Mutual Friend*

Stories

- *The Haunted House*
- *A House to let*
- *The Long Voyage*
- *A Message from the Sea*
- *Mugby Junction*
- *The Signal-Man*



At every fresh question Scrooge's nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter.

ACTIVITY

Color Charles Dickens



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

What Inspired *A Christmas Carol*

In the fall of 1843, Dickens visited a school that taught poor children from the slums. Dickens easily empathized with poor children and could imagine himself in their shoes, since he had a poor childhood himself. His past made him different from most other popular English authors who were born into wealthy families with a lot of social class and privilege. To this day, Dickens is remembered for his kindness to those living in poverty. As his tombstone reads, "He was a sympathizer with the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed..." Dickens had first planned to write a pamphlet titled, "An Appeal to the People of England on Behalf of the Poor Man's Child" in order to teach people about the problem of poverty in England. However, Dickens decided instead to tell people his ideas through characters he created in a story he titled *A Christmas Carol*.

How Dickens Wrote *A Christmas Carol*

- It took six weeks, working on the project day and night.
- He would take long walks through London while writing it, sometimes walking 20 miles a night
- It was officially published as a book on December 19, 1843.

Where Did the Characters Come From?

- Dickens usually created characters that were based on real people he met or heard about.
- Jacob Marley was named after Dr. Miles Marley, an Irish doctor who worked near Dickens' home. While at a party, Dr. Marley told Dickens he thought his own last name was unique. Dickens replied, "your name shall be a household word before the year is out."
- The Cratchit family is very similar to Dickens' own family since they both have six children.
- Tiny Tim may have been based on Dickens' sick nephew, who died of tuberculosis at the age of nine. He may have also been based on Dickens' younger brother Fredrick, since Tiny Tim was originally called "little Fred" in the first drafts of the story.
- Ebenezer Scrooge was inspired by the grave marker for Ebenezer Scroggie in an Edinburgh cemetery. The marker read that Scroggie was a "meal man," or a corn merchant, but Dickens misread this as a "mean man," because of the fading light outside. Dickens wrote that it must have "shriveled" Scroggie's soul to carry "such a terrible thing to eternity."

Did you know?

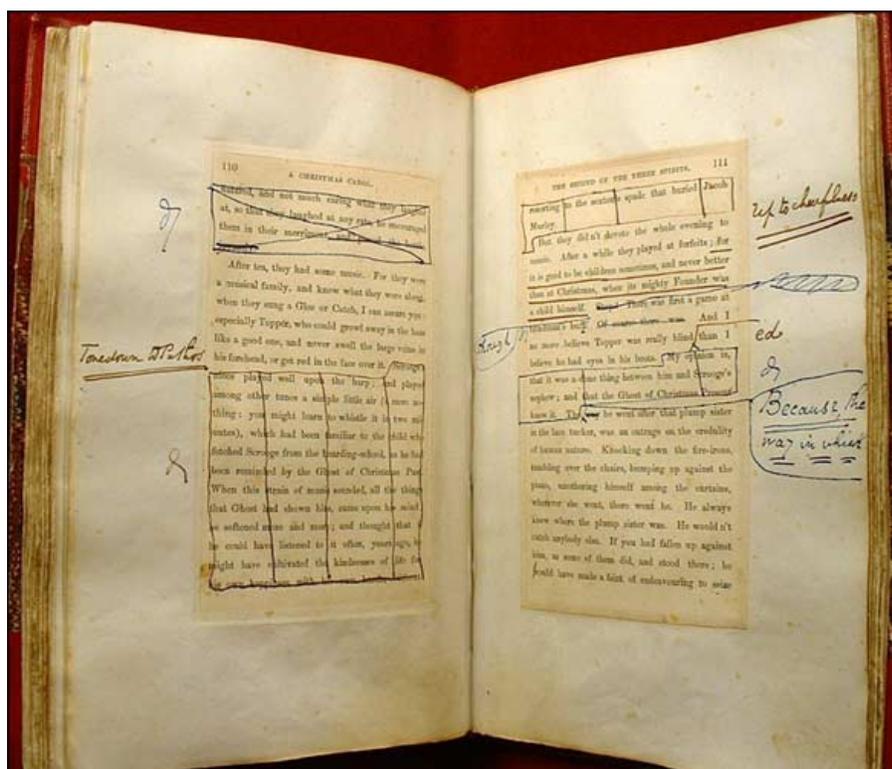
Dickens was the first famous writer to give public readings of his work—the first being *A Christmas Carol*. The reading took place in front of a crowd of 2,000 people in the town hall of Birmingham, England, 10 years after the book was published. But, instead of just reading parts of his stories out loud, Dickens loved to perform them. Dickens visited America twice for these reading tours.

The second tour took place at Christmastime in 1867. People were so excited to see him that they camped out in the snow to make sure they got a ticket. By opening time, the line was a mile long. The second tour earned him £19,000— worth almost 2 million dollars today!

Importance of Children

A big theme in the show is how greed can have a bad effect on people. During the Industrial Revolution, a time when a lot of new machines were being used for new inventions, no one really stopped to think about how their want for new things was making life harder for others who had to work to make them. Charles Dickens wanted to make people aware of what was happening. He did this by showing how greed and want affected children, which is why your role in the show is so important!

Charles Dickens figured that if things such as Ignorance and Want were shown as children, people would be more sympathetic and would pay more attention to what he was trying to say. He also used Tiny Tim to show how bad things can come from greed and lack of help.



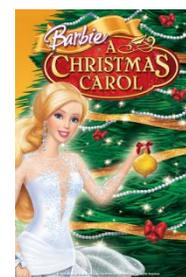
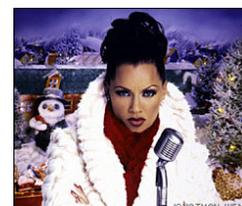
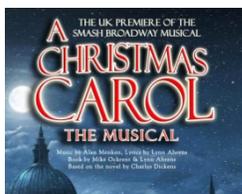
Dickens' Prompt Book for *A Christmas Carol*

To make the story easier to perform, Dickens created his own special version of *A Christmas Carol*. First, he tore the pages out of a copy of his book, and stuck them onto the big blank pages of another book. Then, he cut out the parts of his story that described what the scenery looked like. Finally, he added stage directions for himself all over the pages so he knew what action to do while he was performing. Now he had a script!



COOL ADAPTIONS OF A CHRISTMAS CAROL

- *A Christmas Carol's* first movie adaption was in 1939
- Some of your favorite classic cartoons have done Christmas Carol movies/ episodes including: *The Flintstones*, *Mickey Mouse*, *The Smurfs*, *The Jetsons*, *101 Dalmations*, and even *Barbie*!
- In 1970 there was a **musical** adaption of the story. Imagine Scrooge singing with a bunch of ghosts!
- In 2009, Disney came out with a **3D animated** adaption! The voice of Scrooge was Jim Carrey, who has also played the Grinch in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. It's funny when you realize both of these characters are grumpy about Christmas, and then learn to love it!
- Even the Muppets have a version! In this version, your favorite Muppets characters take on roles like Bob Cratchit and Charles Dickens himself
- In 2000, a movie titled *A Diva's Christmas Carol* came out with a female version of Scrooge – Ebony Scrooge! In this version, Ebony is a career-driven singer who needs to be reminded about the true meaning of Christmas.
- Actor Patrick Stewart has a one-man version of the story. Imagine playing a child, Scrooge, and all the ghost parts on your own, just like Dickens did when he would give his readings!
- Alan Menken, who has worked on Disney movies like *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, and *The Little Mermaid* (to name a few!), helped write music for *A Christmas Carol* the musical in 1994!



FUN FACTS!

Scrooge McDuck from Duck Tales and other Disney shorts was actually named after Ebenezer Scrooge! This explains why he's so careful with his money.

Every year, *American Theatre* magazine has a "Top Ten" list of the most-produced shows by the nation's theatre companies. A *Christmas Carol* is left off the list so other shows can have a chance.

"Don't be a Scrooge" is a popular phrase when you want to tell someone to be less mean, or more generous!

The first time "Merry Christmas" was ever said was by Fred, Scrooge's nephew. Thank Dickens the next time you say that phrase to your friends and family!

Dickens published *A Christmas Carol* himself, after being rejected by almost every publishing house he submitted to. He also kept the price low, so many could afford it. This didn't make him a lot of money, but the book still sold well, and has gone on to become a holiday staple!

VICTORIAN LIFE

What was your day like?

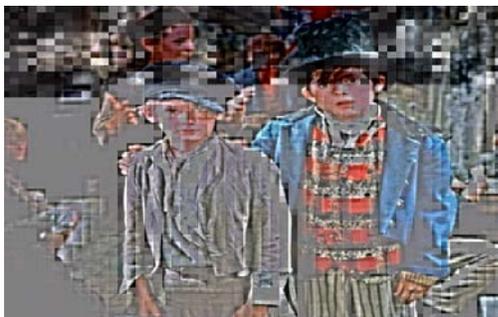
Typical Day for a Poor Child

School:

Poor children often didn't go to school, and instead worked to help their families make money. Sometimes, if their families were able to afford it, poor children would be sent to a "Dame School." In this school, a single woman was in charge of a group of children. The woman was often not a trained teacher, but the children would be able to learn basic things like the alphabet and how to sew. Children could also attend "Ragged Schools," which had older children as the teachers. The older children would teach the younger ones in a single room of a house or in an old barn.

Play:

Though they worked a lot, poor children still found time for play. Because their homes were too small for playrooms, poor children went outside into the streets to play games. Some popular games that were played are ones you may enjoy playing too, like tag or hopscotch!



Typical Day for a Rich Child

School:

Rich children were able to go to schools. During the Victorian Era, school was usually for rich boys, although girls could sometimes be homeschooled or go to a boarding school. Victorian schools were very strict, and children had to be on their absolute best behavior at all times. Rich children stood out because they often looked very healthy and had nice clothes, which poor children could not afford. They also didn't have to worry about working to help their families earn money.

Play:

During playtime, rich households usually had a special playroom or a nursery with toys and games. Books specifically written for children were becoming more popular, and stories such as *Treasure Island* or *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* were loved by many.



Children's Entertainment

Nursery Rhymes

Lots of nursery rhymes we still sing today came about during this era. Are these familiar?

Hush a bye, baby, on the tree top,
When the wind blows the cradle will
rock;
When the bough breaks, the cradle
will fall,
Down will come baby, cradle, and all.

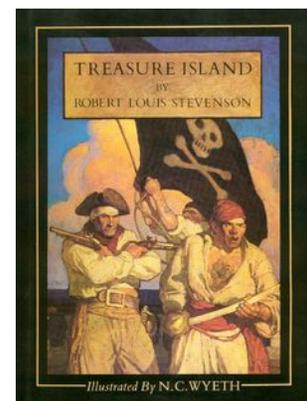
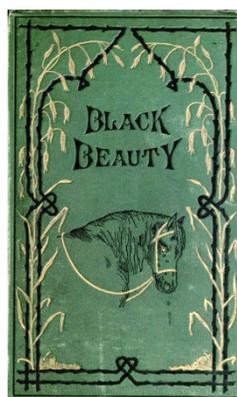
London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down,
Falling Down.
London Bridge is falling down,
My fair lady.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's horses, and all the king's men,
Couldn't put Humpty together again!

Toys



Books



Problems With Child Labor

The Problem

Child labor- children working at jobs and how they were treated- was a big problem while Charles Dickens was alive. During the Victorian era, there were no laws that said how long children could work for or how much they should be paid, so factories and coal mining companies were able to make children work a lot and for only a little money. Children as young as 5 could start working, as long as they were strong enough and could fit into small spaces.

What Were the Conditions?

Factories

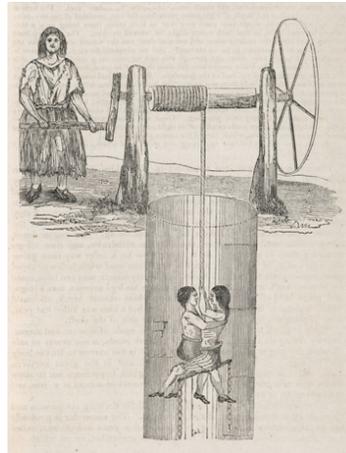
The factories could be loud and scary, and children were sometimes around dangerous machines that could hurt them if they weren't careful.

Mines

Coal mines were also dangerous, and because they were underground, accidents like floods could happen easily.

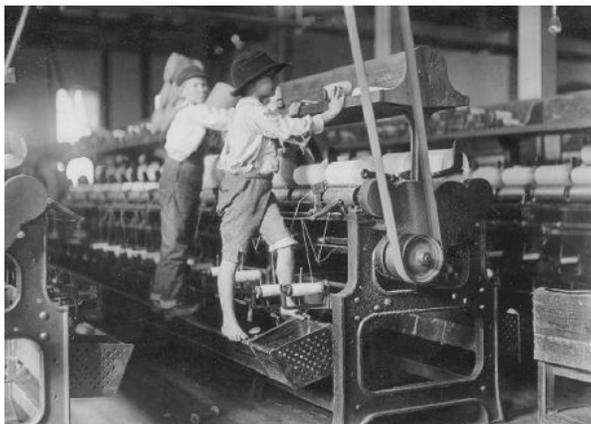
Help Arrives

Luckily, between 1841 and 1874, some laws were passed that helped protect child laborers. The laws passed during this time made it illegal for children under 10 to work in mines or factories, and said that children were not allowed to work more than 10 hours a day.



A diagram showing how children small enough to fit in mine shafts were lowered

Children working underground



Children working with factory equipment

Why Does Tiny Tim use a Crutch?

In *A Christmas Carol*, Tiny Tim walks using a crutch because he is sick and his family can't afford to pay for treatment to help him feel better. However, Charles Dickens never mentions what made Tiny Tim sick. Many people who have studied the novel believe that Tiny Tim was sick with a virus called Polio. During the Industrial Revolution-- a time when many people in England switched from being farmers to working in factories-- there were more people trying to live in the city than there were clean and affordable places to live. This means that many poor people ended up living in slums without access to clean water. Because people didn't have clean and healthy places to live, many diseases began to spread. One of these diseases was Polio, which people caught from drinking or bathing in unclean water. Polio mostly affected children, and even though most of the people who caught it only suffered from cold and flu symptoms, 2% of those who caught it suffered from paralysis.

Sometimes people who recovered from Polio were able to regain the use of paralyzed muscles, depending on how badly they were damaged. However, even if someone regained the ability to move, they were still weak and often had trouble growing properly. This is why many people affected by the virus, like Tiny Tim, needed to use crutches, braces, and wheelchairs to help them get around.

But, having a disability like Tiny Tim doesn't mean a person can't achieve great things. US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was paralyzed from Polio. In addition to leading the country through the Great Depression and World War II, he created the March of Dimes, which raised money to help treat other people who suffered from Polio. Fortunately, in the 1950s, Dr. Albert Sabin discovered a vaccine that prevented people from catching Polio. Because of scientific advances and healthier living conditions, Polio has since been eradicated in the Western Hemisphere, and children in America no longer need to be afraid of catching it.



CHRISTMAS

Why Ghost Stories?

You might have already noticed, but our show is called *A Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story of Christmas*. Where do the ghosts come from? Don't they belong in October for Halloween?

In the Victorian era, ghost stories were actually a very popular holiday tradition! This was because Christmas happened around the time of the Winter solstice, which means the shortest day of the year. During this day, some people believed ghosts could walk around and be seen as normal people. This idea was a big influence when Dickens was writing *A Christmas Carol*, and the reason he uses ghosts as characters. The stories were also sometimes used to spook children into behaving.



Victorian Traditions

Aside from ghost stories, a lot of Christmas traditions we do today started in the Victorian era. Charles Dickens reminded everyone of the power of Christmas when he published *A Christmas Carol*. Up until that time, factories didn't really let their employees go home for the holidays, and presents and trees weren't a big deal. After everyone read about Scrooge and how Christmas changed his heart, some businesses began to close on Christmas, just like in the book! The same year that *A Christmas Carol* was published, Christmas cards became popular. Soon after, Christmas trees were brought into homes, where decorations became another holiday tradition.

For dinner, there was often a wide spread of food. A typical Christmas meal consisted of things like a roasted turkey or goose, plum pudding, gravy, mince pies, and a spiced rum punch or eggnog. Stuffing, and a lot of other sides we have today, like mashed potatoes, could also be on the table. Christmas feasts were the biggest of the year, so the Victorian people, rich and poor, went all out!

For fun, families would play parlor games, read stories, and sing carols, which we still sing today. Sometimes they would act out short plays in their living rooms, or use shadow puppets.



ACTIVITY!

Decorate your own Victorian Christmas Tree

Some traditional ornaments include: apples, candles, paper chains, candy, and colorful ribbons! How does your family decorate for the holidays?



THINK ABOUT IT...

What are some of YOUR favorite holiday traditions?

History of Caroling

Throughout the show, there are a lot Christmas songs. These songs are called **carols**, which is a word that means “a dance or a song of praise and joy.” Caroling is very fun, and has a unique history!

A Winter Solstice celebration



Originally, carols were sung for the Winter Solstice, which is the shortest day of the year. Eventually, the Winter Solstice celebrations changed to and become Christmas celebrations. The songs sang during the Winter Solstice celebrations were rewritten for Christmas, with one of the earliest Christmas carols being written as early as 129! These early carols weren't very popular, because they were in Latin, which was becoming an unpopular language. Caroling began to die out until around 1410, when Carols began to be featured in nativity plays. These new carols were in a language almost everyone could understand.



A scene from one of the first Nativity Plays

The act of caroling experienced a few more problems in 1675, when stricter religious practices in England made Christmas celebrations almost nonexistent. But as Victorian times approached, two men called William Sandys and Davis Gilbert collected lots of old Christmas music from villages in England. Because of this, caroling became popular again, and has been a well-loved tradition ever since!

Victorian carolers



ACTIVITY

Traditional Carols

Many of the same carols we sing today were first sung in the Victorian era! Below is a list of traditional carols. Circle the ones you know!

The First Noël	We Three Kings of Orient Are	Jingle Bells
God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen	O Little Town of Bethlehem	Joy to the World
I Saw Three Ships	Away in a Manger	O Holy Night
God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen	Angels from the Realms of Glory	O Christmas Tree carol
Oh Come all ye Faithful	Ave Maria	O Come O Come Emmanuel
Once in Royal David's City	Carol of the Bells	Silent Night carol
It Came Upon a Midnight Clear	Christians Awake	The Holly and the Ivy
Here We Come A-Wassailing (a Caroling)	Ding Dong Merrily on High	The 12 Days of Christmas
See Amid the winter Snow	Good Christian Men Rejoice	We Three Kings of Orient are
Angels We Have Heard on High	Good King Wenceslas carol	We wish you a Merry Christmas
Deck the Hall	Hark the Herald Angels Sing	While Shepherds Watched

THINK ABOUT IT...

What are some of YOUR favorite, more modern Christmas carols/Holiday songs you don't see on this list? Write them down!

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