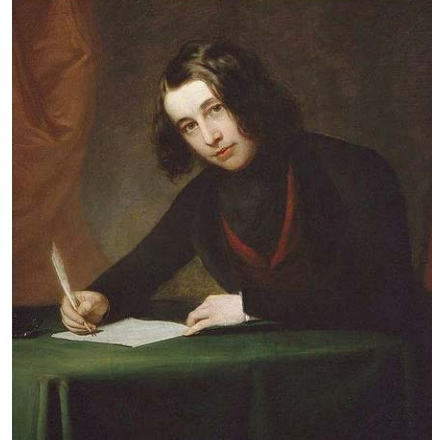


CHARLES DICKENS

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England, on February 7, 1812. His father, John Dickens, worked as a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, constantly moving his family of seven and eventually settling in Chatham, where they remained for six years. As a young boy, Charles suffered from seizures, which kept him from playing outside, so he poured his energy into reading.

In 1823, unable to pay his debts, Dickens' father served time in debtors' prison in London. As the oldest son, Charles had to provide for his family. Two days after his twelfth birthday, his family moved to live with his father in London, and sent Charles away to work in a factory. When he visited his family on Sundays, the conditions of the poor in London appalled him.



Charles Dickens, 1843

After his father's release, Dickens attended Wellington Academy. In 1827, he landed a job as a clerk in the legal offices and courts of the Doctors' Commons. During this time, Dickens learned about the British legal system, which he later criticized in his novels.

In 1833, Dickens published his first short story and became widely known throughout England and the United States. He married Catherine Hogarth in 1836, and began writing his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. Written in installments for a magazine, the book soon became a national favorite.

After a brief stint in the United States, Dickens returned to England in 1843 and began writing a series of five novellas about Christmas, the first being *A Christmas Carol*. While writing the story, Dickens reported that he "wept and laughed and wept again." *A Christmas Carol* became an immediate success.

Dickens had many interests throughout his career, including starting an amateur theater company in 1848, traveling around Europe to promote and to perform public readings of his books, and starting a magazine entitled "All Year Round" in 1858. It was in this magazine that Dickens published weekly installments of his novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, followed by *Great Expectations* in 1860.

Dickens' health began to deteriorate in 1868. On June 8, 1870 Dickens suffered his second stroke and died the next day. His body rests in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner in London, England.

LEARN MORE

- The line, "Old Marley was dead as a door-nail," came from a dream in which a doctor used the phrase to report the death of one of Dickens' close friends.
- Dickens created 989 named characters during his career.
- In 1867, Dickens performed a public reading of *A Christmas Carol* in Chicago. The story moved one of the audience members, a factory owner named Fairbanks, so much that he decided to "break the custom we have hitherto observed of opening the works on Christmas day." He gave all his employees a turkey and told them to take the day off.

OTHER SELECTED WORKS BY CHARLES DICKENS

The Pickwick Papers
The Adventures of Oliver Twist
Nicholas Nickleby
David Copperfield
Bleak House
Hard Times: For These Times
A Tale of Two Cities
Great Expectations
The Mystery of Edwin Drood

CHARLES DICKENS ON HIS BICENTENNIAL



Charles Dickens

The year 2012 marks the 200th anniversary of Charles Dickens' birth. Today, Dickens remains one of the best-known and most-read English authors. Inspired by his father's copies of 18th Century satirical novels, as well as fables from *The Arabian Nights*, Charles Dickens carved out his own writing style. His stories gave the average Londoner a voice and brought awareness of social issues to his readers.

Dickens' work highlights the life of the poor, the forgotten, and the destitute. He drew on real-life experiences to create the fourteen novels that he published, along with his numerous poems, plays, and short stories, including the beloved novella, *A Christmas Carol*. He based many of his characters on his friends and family and wrote of the prison system and industrial working conditions from firsthand experience. However, ashamed of his upbringing, Dickens never revealed where he gathered such realistic accounts of the poor and the homeless, or admitted to any autobiographical elements in his work.

Oliver Twist, published in 1838, charmed readers with the story of an innocent orphan finding refuge in a gang of pickpockets. *Nicholas Nickleby*, in 1839, criticized educational institutions. *Hard Times*, published in 1854, focused on the poor conditions of the industrial working class. In *Little Dorrit*, published in 1857, Dickens mocked England's government and the debtors' prison system. In depicting the criminal underbelly of London in many of his novels, Dickens wrote of people forced into a life of crime as their only means of survival. This shocked the middle class in London, and changed some people's outlook on crime and poverty in the city.

Some regard Dickens as one of the greatest creators of character, and many of his figures now have lives of their own outside of Dickens' work. Writers continue to base characters on the originals that Dickens made famous, such as Ebenezer Scrooge, Tiny Tim, Ms. Havisham, the Artful Dodger, and Fagin. Some of these characters passed into common language. For example, today, a "scrooge" is someone who hoards wealth.

Dickens also established writing techniques popular in entertainment today. Because magazines published Dickens' work in monthly or weekly installments, Dickens perfected the art of the cliffhanger. This made each new installment highly anticipated from month to month. Dickens' work has also been translated into television, film, and theater. Two hundred years after Charles Dickens' birth, people all over the world continue to read and perform his work. There are at least two film adaptations of all of his novels. From the musical *Oliver!* to the BBC version of *Bleak House*, Dickens' writing transcends time and culture.



Some of Dickens' Novels



The cast of *A Christmas Carol*

Christmas Eve

The story begins with Charles Dickens' original words: "Marley was dead to begin with." In Scrooge's counting house, where the sign "Scrooge and Marley" hangs outside, Ebenezer Scrooge works in his cold, dim office on Christmas Eve with his clerk Bob Cratchit. Two philanthropists visit Scrooge, asking him to donate money to people in need. Scrooge denies them any contributions, pointing out that he already pays taxes for prisons and workhouses. Fred, Scrooge's nephew, arrives to invite Scrooge to his home for Christmas dinner. Rudely declining the invitation, Scrooge insists that Fred leave and take his Christmas joy with him. Scrooge resentfully grants Bob Cratchit Christmas day off, and heads home.

Scrooge arrives home and the knocker on his front door transforms into the face of his deceased business partner, Jacob Marley. Startled, Scrooge does not trust what he saw. Later, Jacob Marley's ghost appears to Scrooge in his bedroom. Draped in shackles and chains of greed, Jacob Marley warns Scrooge that three spirits will visit him before the night is over and that Scrooge must listen to them if he hopes to escape the fate that Marley endures.



Gerard Neugent as Marley and Christopher Donahue as Ebenezer Scrooge

Christmas Past

As the clock strikes midnight, the Ghost of Christmas Past appears before Scrooge. The ghost transports Scrooge to the Christmases of his past. First they travel to Scrooge's childhood, where he sees his beloved sister, Fan, coming to take a young Scrooge home for Christmas after being alone at boarding school. Next, Scrooge sees himself as a young man at a company Christmas party with his old employer, Mr. Fezziwig, and remembers when he asked Belle to marry him even though they would live a hard life with little money. This moment warms Scrooge's heart until he relives the decision he made to leave behind a community of family and warmth in the Fezziwigs and Belle in order to make more money. Before returning home, the Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge himself as a young man letting his fiancée, Belle, slip away because he came to value money more than her. Scrooge is heartbroken, as Christmas Past returns him to his bedroom.



Anastasia Brasser-Vos as Fan and Seth Horne as Boy Scrooge

SYNOPSIS (continued)

Christmas Present

Back in bed, Scrooge awakes to the Ghost of Christmas Present. The ghost whisks Scrooge to the Cratchits' household as the family gathers for their humble Christmas dinner. The ghost tells Scrooge that Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchits' sick son, will die if nothing changes. The news troubles Scrooge and he demands to know what can be done to spare Tiny Tim; the Ghost will not answer. Bob Cratchit proposes a toast in honor of Scrooge, saying that Scrooge is alone with no cheer in life, and therefore less fortunate than the impoverished Cratchit family. Cratchit's kindness moves Scrooge. The Ghost of Christmas Present then takes Scrooge to his nephew's house where friends and family play games and make fun of Scrooge for his cold attitude. Their time together fading, Christmas Present reminds Scrooge of need in society, showing him two figures: want and ignorance.



The Cratchit Family and Ebenezer Scrooge



Christopher Donahue as Ebenezer Scrooge

Christmas Future

The Ghost of Christmas Future appears and Scrooge and the ghost visit two businessmen discussing an old man's death. Scrooge watches and questions the ghost about what he sees, but the ghost does not respond. Instead, he shows people pawning off the property of the deceased man. Scrooge realizes the dead man is himself. Finally, the Ghost of Christmas Future shows Scrooge the funeral of Tiny Tim. Scrooge feels helpless, and begs for a second chance. Without a word, the ghost leaves.

Christmas Day

Scrooge awakens invigorated with a newfound Christmas spirit. Surprising everyone with Christmas cheer, Scrooge purchases a prize turkey for the Cratchit family and tells his nephew he would like to join him for Christmas dinner. The next morning at work, Scrooge gives Bob Cratchit a raise and promises to help the Cratchit family. Filled with newfound spirit, Scrooge donates money to the poor, and vows to do so every Christmas. Scrooge regains his humanity and pledges to keep his giving spirit throughout the rest of his life.



Christopher Donahue as Ebenezer Scrooge

VICTORIAN ENGLAND

Government

England is a constitutional monarchy. In Dickens' day, Queen Victoria ruled the country. Under her direction, England gained control of large areas of land including India, Burma, New Zealand, and Hong Kong, making England the largest imperial power in the world. Victoria improved her country in many ways and historians associate her with Britain's age of economic progress, industrial expansion, and empire. While extreme poverty existed across England during her reign, she supported measures to improve the life of the poor, as well as charities that benefited education and hospitals. Queen Victoria remains the longest reigning monarch in Britain's history, reigning from 1837 to 1901.



Queen Victoria in 1843



Children Working in a Factory

Working Life

Today in the United States, a typical workweek is about 40 hours, or five eight-hour days. In Victorian London, it was not unusual for working class employees to work six twelve-hour days or 72 hours per week. Businesses usually granted Sundays, May Day, and Christmas off to their employees, but they were not required to do so. In Dickens' time, a clerk made about £80 per year, barely enough to rent a small house and raise a family.

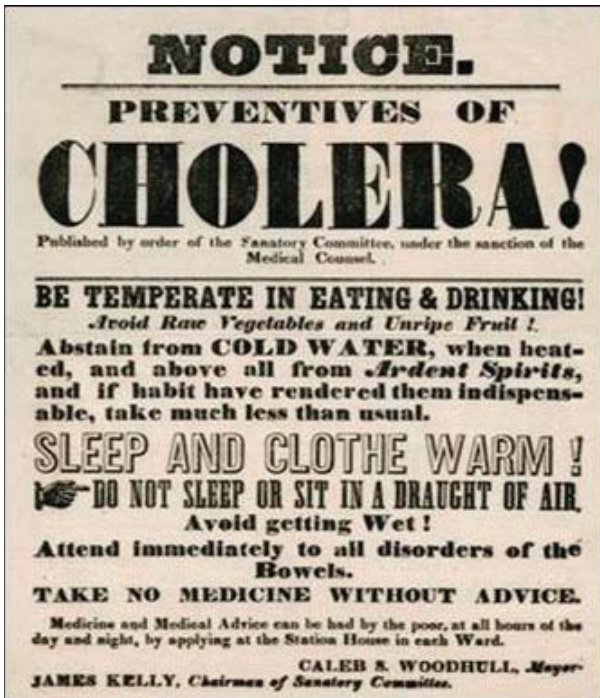
Industry

Previously a farm-based economy, Britain underwent a swift period of urbanization in the late 1800's as large populations moved from the countryside to cities to work in factories. London drew scores of young men and women with the promise of employment and entertainment. Between 1800 and 1850, the population of London doubled, reaching 2.3 million people. The city could not support such rapid increase in populace. According to social historian Kitson Clark, in London "suitable housing did not exist, and...additional numbers were crammed into every nook and cranny from attic to cellar of old decaying property...with little or no access to light and air." Moreover, the creation of a steam railroad in 1804 proved incredibly profitable, but demolished entire neighborhoods to make room for tracks. By the time laws to control the rail companies came into effect, the railroad had uprooted over 76,000 people.



Factories in London

VICTORIAN ENGLAND (continued)



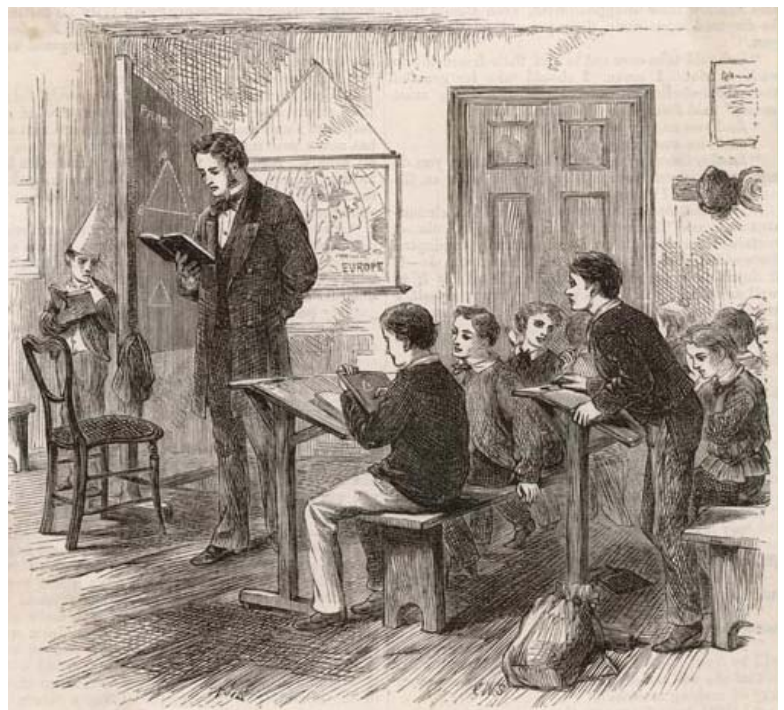
Cholera Notice

Health

Victorian London suffered from overcrowding, pollution, and poor public sanitation. Diseases spread quickly throughout the city, especially water-borne diseases like cholera. Cholera spread through the Thames River, London's central waterway and main waste-disposal system. Two hundred sewers ran into the river, carrying bacteria from waste products that people then consumed in their water. Doctors believed the disease traveled through tainted air rather than water, so the city's health problems spread. Hospitals proved to be unaffordable as well as unsafe. Due to crude surgical techniques and flawed understanding about the nature of infection, hospitalization often increased deaths.

Education

In the Victorian Era, those who received the benefits of education were those that could afford it. With money scarce, most poor families sent children (often as young as six) to work in factories. Only a few underprivileged children attended charity schools. Wealthy young girls, taught in their homes by governesses, learned the "delicate" skills of dance, drawing, music, and French, subjects generally accepted as appropriate and necessary for upper-class young women. Typically sent to live in boarding schools, boys received a more rounded curriculum (reading, writing, history, and mathematics). At Eton, one of the most prestigious schools of the time, boys were locked in their rooms from 8:00 pm until the next morning. Boarding schools used beatings as an accepted method of discipline and dunce caps (cone-shaped hats that labeled the wearer a "dunce" or idiot) to humiliate students who did not learn fast enough.



Boys' Boarding School

VOCABULARY

- Cravat:** Neckwear worn in a slipknot with the long ends overlapping vertically in the front.
- Bedlam:** A London hospital for the mentally ill
- Brazier:** An open pan used for holding coals
- Chaise:** A two-wheeled vehicle with a folding top, drawn by a single horse
- Comforter:** A scarf
- Copper:** A large pot used for washing or cooking
- Counting House:** An office in which a commercial company corresponds and book-keeps
- Fathom:** A measurement of six feet used for calculating depths at sea or in mines
- Garret:** A room or set of rooms in an attic
- Gratis:** Freely, without expense
- Gruel:** Broth or soup of oatmeal and chopped meat
- Humbug:** An attitude or spirit of pretense and deception.
- Kipper:** A type of fish generally eaten for breakfast or as a treat with high tea.
- Old Screw:** Slang for “Mister”
- Porter:** A dark style of beer originating in London in the 18th century
- Simpleton:** An offensive term for someone regarded as lacking intelligence or common sense

MONEY IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

Prior to 1971, British money consisted of overlapping units and sub-units called Pounds, Shillings, and Pence.

- Pound:** Also known as a ‘quid,’ a pound originally had the same value as a gold ‘sovereign coin.’
- Shillings:** Twenty shillings create a pound. A shilling is also known as a ‘bob.’
- Pence:** A shilling is made up of twelve pence. There are 240 pence in a pound.



MONEY IN A CHRISTMAS CAROL

NAME	VALUE	MATERIAL
Farthing	1/4 of a Pence	Copper
Ha’penny	1/2 of a Pence	Copper
Pence	1/12 of a Shilling	Silver
Shilling	12 Pence (a “bob”)	Silver
Half-a-Crown	2 1/2 Shillings, or 30 Pence	Silver
Crown	5 Shillings, or 60 Pence	Silver
Pound	20 Shillings, or 240 Pence	Gold
Guinea	21 Shillings	Gold

THEMES

The Christmas Spirit

A Christmas Carol presents Christmas as a time to focus on love, friendship and charity. Throughout *A Christmas Carol*, characters such as Cratchit, Fred, Belle, and the Fezziwigs embody this Christmas spirit. Once all three ghosts visit Scrooge, he finally understands the importance of embracing the Christmas spirit year-round.

Questions

- What is the important value found during Christmas time?
- Which ghost – Past, Present, or Future – do you feel influences Scrooge the most during its visit?
- How can you embody the Christmas spirit throughout the entire year?

Forgiveness

Throughout the play, Scrooge transforms from a money-pinching miser into a generous, loving person. The Ghost of Christmas Future shows Scrooge that his present choices determine his future. Scrooge realizes that he can change the future by being caring and understanding. This, however, involves forgiveness from others for Scrooge's harsh and rude behaviors in the past.

“Forgive me, Fred, I shall write a different record, every day, as long as I shall live.”

- Scrooge

Questions

- Why is Scrooge given a second chance to choose a different ending to his life? What choices does he make knowing what the future could be like?
- How does Scrooge's transformation affect those around him?
- Why is it important to forgive others?

Greed and Generosity

At the beginning of the play, Scrooge refuses to donate money to the poor and thinks only about himself. Scrooge only focuses on his own wealth. He is a mean and selfish person at the beginning of the play, who disregards his own family members and employees. However, through his transformation, Scrooge becomes generous and caring. He learns that it is better to give than to receive, and does so generously.

Questions

- When does Scrooge allow greed to overtake his life? What event in his past symbolizes this moment?
- Throughout the visits with the ghosts, Scrooge feels remorse and shame for being greedy. How does this self-realization make Scrooge a better person?
- Are there times where you have been too selfish or too generous? Can there be a healthy balance between being generous and greedy?

“ I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut up hearts freely, and to look upon people less fortunate as if they really were fellow, passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.”

- Fred

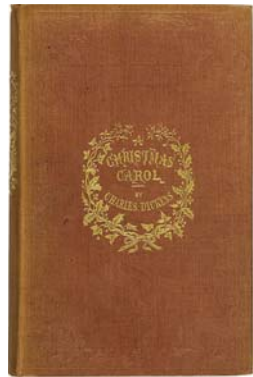
“I wish to be left alone. I don't make myself merry at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. My taxes help to support the establishments I have mentioned: they cost enough, and those who are badly off must go there.”

- Scrooge

A CHRISTMAS CAROL HISTORY

In September of 1843, Dickens began writing the novella, *A Christmas Carol*.

Chapman & Hall published Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* on December 19, 1843. Priced at 5 shillings, Chapman & Hall sold 6000 copies before Christmas Eve.



The Original Red Cover for the first printing

In December of 1844, Edward Stirling's staged version of *A Christmas Carol* opens at New York City's Park Theatre. In February, Stirling's adaptation gets its London premiere. Charles Dickens sanctioned Stirling's production. By the end of February, eight other stage adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* opened.

In 1853, Dickens began touring public readings of his work, the first being *A Christmas Carol*. He performed an abbreviated version of *A Christmas Carol* 127 times before his death.

There have been 7 silent films made of *A Christmas Carol*. *Scrooge; or Marley's Ghost* (1901), is the oldest existing version. Thomas Edison also produced a silent version in 1908.



The Cratchit Family, 1901 Silent Film

Lionel Barrymore played Scrooge in a radio version in 1934. Orson Welles was the narrator.

1938 MGM filmed *A Christmas Carol*, which became the most popular version until 1970

when a musical adaptation entitled *Scrooge* starring Albert Finney won a Golden Globe for best actor.



Albert Finney as Scrooge



1962-Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol

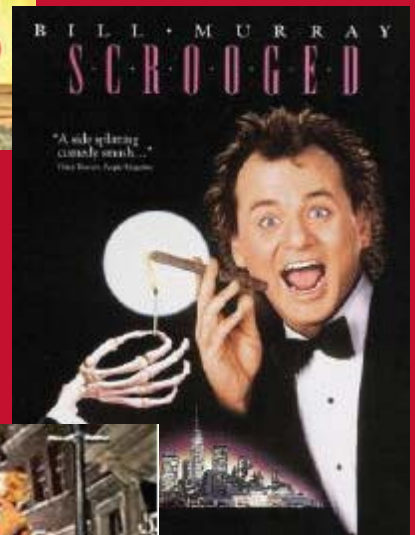
Other well known Christmas Carols



1979-Bugs Bunny's Christmas Carol



1983-Mickey's Christmas Carol



1988-Scrooged, starring Bill Murray



1992-The Muppet's Christmas Carol



2009-Disney's *A Christmas Carol: An Imax 3D Experience*, starring the voice of Jim Carrey