Teacher Resource Guide For

A Play within a Play

By David McGillivray & Walter Zerlin, Jr.

A Circle Theatre Company Presentation

Produced by Becky Saunders

Directed by Linda Mementowski

Friday, December 4 at 7:30pm * Saturday, December 5 at 2:30pm and 7:30pm * Sunday, December 6 at 2:30pm
In a festive mood, the ladies’ dramatic society mounts an assault on the classics with their stage version of *A Christmas Carol*. Spurred on by the wild enthusiasm of stage-manager Gordon, the ladies portray a dizzying array of characters from the Dickensian favorite (and a few that aren’t). As usual, entrances and lines are blown, scenery and costumes fail. They also engineer a few show-stopping tunes, that, along with audience participation, turn into an unforgettable night.

**Synopsis of Scenes:**

**PROLOGUE**

**ACT I**

A London Street
Scrooge’s counting-house
Outside and inside Scrooge’s house
Christmas past:
  A market-town
  Another part of the town
  A warehouse
Back at Scrooge’s house
Bob Cratchit’s house
Fred’s house

**ENTR’ACTE**

(French for ‘Between the Acts,” – usually a musical interlude or Intermission)

**ACT II**

Scrooge’s again
Christmas yet to come:

*Synopsis, Cont.*
Still at Scrooge’s
Bob Cratchit’s house
A graveyard
Once more at Scrooge’s
A London street
Return to Bob Cratchit’s house
Return to Fred’s house
Meet the Characters

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild
Dramatic Society's Production of
A Christmas Carol

Thelma................................................................. Ebenezer Scrooge
Mrs. Reece................................. Tiny Tim; Fred’s Wife; A Gentleman; Mrs. Dilber;
                                           The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come
Mercedes............................................................ Bob Cratchit; Belle; A Boy
Gordon................................. Mrs. Cratchit; Jacob Marely; Half of the Ghost of
                                           Christmas Present; The Ghost of Christmas
                                           Past; Mr. Fezziwig
Felicity................................. Half of the Ghost of Christmas Present; Fred;
                                           Little Fan; Old Joe

Other parts played by members of the cast.

Setting: The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Community Center
About Charles Dickens

CHARLES DICKENS was born in Portsmouth, England, on February 7, 1812. He was the second in a line of eight siblings. He wrote some of our most well-read beloved classic novels, such as *Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield, A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations* and of course, our focus, *A Christmas Carol*, featuring protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, an old miser who finds the Christmas Spirit with some help.

Charles Dickens' father, John Dickens, was a naval clerk, but always had bigger aspirations, which spurred on his dangerous habit of living beyond the family's means. He was unfortunately sent to prison for debt in 1824, when Charles was just 12 years old. Charles was forced to leave school to work at a boot-blacking factory near the Thames River. Dickens had stated that he felt cast away at such a young age, saying good-bye to his youthful innocence, feeling abandoned by the adults that were supposed to take care of him. These thoughts became recurring themes in his writings.

Dickens was permitted to go back to school when his father received an inheritance and paid off his debts. However, when Dickens was 15, he had to drop out once again, but this time, he became an office boy. This job helped launch him into his writing career.

Within a year of being hired, he had begun freelance reporting in the law courts of London. This led to reporting for two major London newspapers in just a few short years. In 1833, he was submitting sketches to papers and magazines under the
pseudonym “Boz.” It was during this time his first book was born, *Sketches by Boz*. His early success caught the eye of Catherine Hogarth, and they were married. They later separated in 1858 after having 10 children.

Dickens may have been the first modern day celebrity, as he made his first U.S. tour in 1842, and spoke of his opposition to slavery and support for reform. His lectures were so widely attended that ticket scalpers would gather outside his events.

Dickens was a bit of a show-off and bragged about his celebrity status: “They flock around me as if I were an idol,” however, he grew to resent the invasion of privacy. He later expressed his view of American gregariousness and crude habits in something he wrote entitled *American Notes*. He later launched a more apologetic U.S. tour hoping to set things right with the public through reprints of *American Notes for General Circulation* and *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*.

During the 1850s, Dickens suffered some devastating losses: the deaths of his daughter and father. It was during this decade that he separated from his wife. His novels began to express a darkened worldview. He came out of his dark novel period, publishing *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1859, an historical novel that takes place during the French Revolution.

In 1865, Dickens was in an unfortunate train accident and never fully recovered. He continued to tour until 1870. Dickens died of a stroke on June 9, 1870, at the age of 58, in Kent England. He was buried in Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey. He left his final novel, *Mystery of Edwin Drood*, unfinished.

A Christmas Carol is a fairly straightforward allegory built on an episodic narrative structure in which each of the main passages has a fixed, obvious symbolic meaning. The book is divided into five sections (Dickens labels them “Staves” in reference to the musical notation staff -- a Christmas carol, after all, is a song), with each of the middle three Staves revolving around a visitation by one of the three famous spirits. The three spirit-guides, along with each of their tales, carry out a thematic function--the Ghost of Christmas Past, with his glowing head, represents memory; the Ghost of Christmas Present represents charity, empathy, and the Christmas spirit; and the reaper-like Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come represents the fear of death. Scrooge, with his Bah! Humbug! attitude, embodies all that dampens Christmas spirit -- greed, selfishness, indifference, and a lack of consideration for one's fellow man.

With A Christmas Carol, Dickens hopes to illustrate how self-serving, insensitive people can be converted into charitable, caring, and socially conscious members of society through the intercession of moralizing quasi-religious lessons.

With each Ghost's tale functioning as a parable, A Christmas Carol advances the Christian moral ideals associated with Christmas -- generosity, kindness, and universal love for your community -- and of Victorian England in general.

The book also contains a political edge, most evident in Dickens' development of the bustling, struggling Cratchit family, who are a compelling, if one-dimensional, representation of the plight of the poor. Dickens, with every intention of tugging on your
heartstrings, paints the Cratchits as a destitute family that finds a way to express profound gratitude for its emotional riches.

**Themes**

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol

The story deals extensively with two of Dickens' recurrent themes, social injustice and poverty, the relationship between the two, and their causes and effects.

**The Victorian Era**


The Victorian era of the United Kingdom marked the height of the British Industrial Revolution and the apex of the British Empire. The term “Victorian Era” is commonly used to refer to the period of Queen Victoria's rule between 1837 and 1901.

**Social Institutions**


Prior to the Industrial Revolution, Britain had a very rigid social structure consisting of three distinct classes: the Church and aristocracy, the middle class, and the working class. The top class was known as the aristocracy. It included the Church and the nobility and had great power and wealth. This class consisted of about two percent of the population, who were born into nobility and who owned the majority of the land. It included the royal family, lords spiritual and temporal, the clergy, great officers of state, and those above the degree of baronet. These people were privileged and avoided taxes.

The middle class or bourgeoisie was made up of factory owners, bankers, shopkeepers, merchants, lawyers, engineers, businessmen, traders, and other professionals. These people could be sometimes extremely rich, but in normal circumstances they were not privileged, and they especially resented this. There was a very large gap between the middle class and the lower class.
The British lower class was divided into two sections: "the working class" (laborers), and "the poor" (those who were not working, or not working regularly, and were receiving public charity). The lower class contained men, women, and children performing many types of labor, including factory work, seamstressing, chimney sweeping, mining, and other jobs. Both the poorer class and the middle class had to endure a large burden of tax. This third class consisted of about 85 percent of the population.

Industrialization changed the class structure dramatically in the late 18th century. Hostility was created between the upper and lower classes. As a result of industrialization, there was a huge boost of the middle and working class. As the Industrial Revolution progressed there was further social division. Capitalists, for example, employed industrial workers, who were one component of the working classes (each class included a wide range of occupations of varying status and income; there was a large gap, for example, between skilled and unskilled labor), but beneath the industrial workers was a submerged "under class" sometimes referred to as the "sunken people," which lived in poverty. The underclass was more susceptible to exploitation, and it was exploited.

The government consisted of a constitutional monarchy headed by Queen Victoria. Only the royalty could rule. Other politicians came from the aristocracy. The system was criticized by many as being in favor of the upper classes, and during the late 18th century, philosophers and writers began to question the social status of the nobility.

**Writing Prompt**

Two common Dickensian themes include social injustice and poverty. Ask students to consider and discuss modern day social injustices and write a short essay bringing one to light.
About the Playwrights

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society’s Production of A Christmas Carol

David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin, Jr. have written many plays in the Farndale series. Zerlin’s mother was the inspiration for the Farndale concept: “My mother had been in her drama group for years,” he has said. “I always remember seeing her in shows with women playing men’s parts, and doing it dreadfully. But throughout it all was the fun and drive they had, no matter what problem beset them.” After seeing one of his mother’s performances, Zerlin with McGillivray concocted The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society’s Production of Macbeth. That show premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1976 and launched the pair on a long relationship with the Farndale ladies.

So what do the fictional Farndale women do? They put on shows. Badly. Very badly. They are the prime example of what makes for horribly bad theatre. And there are many elements which must work together in artistic, and fatalistic unison, which make for bad theatre. Foremost is bad acting, and then there’s a bad set design which follows a bad costume design which gets lit by horrible lighting which also helps to show the tremendously bad props and other furniture pieces onstage. The Farndale women get it all right, er. . . . .wrong. ☺

Bad Acting, Sets, Costumes

There are many, many ways of doing theatre dreadfully wrong. Let’s start with acting. Michael Green wrote a wonderful book in the 60’s called, Downwind of Upstage: The Art of Course Acting. In this book, Michael Green explains some of the small idiosyncrasies that separate talented actors from really bad actors, or “Coarse Actors.” One example is: A Coarse Actor is one who can remember his lines but not the order in which they
come. The Farndale Ladies certainly live up...er, down, to that. Another example shedding light on the professional grade of the Farndale Ladies is when Mrs. Reece explains that the photocopy machine started acting up and left a large blank strip down the right-hand side of their script on page 34. A professional actor, or even an actor worth half their weight, would naturally recopy the page or at least write in the dialogue, but, oh no, not a Coarse Actor. A Coarse Actor like Mrs. Reece would merely tell the audience, “We were only able to rehearse what we could read. Anyway you know the story basically, don’t you?” Be sure to note how the Farndale actors simply continue with the show while cutting off the end of lines that weren’t photocopied onto their pages.

When it comes to costumes, continuity and believability are bolstered by the right look across the production. Clothes that confuse time periods interfere with that. Remind students to look for places where costuming and set design purposely interfere with the audience’s willing suspension of disbelief.

**What’s a Housing Estate?**
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housing_estate

A housing estate is a group of buildings built together as a single development. The exact form may vary from countries to countries. Accordingly, a housing estate is usually built by a single contractor, with only a few styles of house or building design, so they tend to be uniform in appearance.

**What’s a Townswomen’s Guild?**
http://www.townswomen.org.uk/aboutUs.asp

It was 1928 in the UK; at last women had won the right to vote. The Suffragettes who had battled so vigorously for this right had grabbed enough headlines to mark themselves down in the history books. Chaining themselves to railings, going on hunger strikes – these women were
determined to draw attention to the campaign for full voting rights for women. But alongside them, there were many other women fighting for the vote in quieter, constitutional ways - these were the Suffragists. With a new-found freedom, these women led by Eva Hubback and Margery Corbett Ashby saw the need to create an organization aimed at ordinary women living in the nation's towns and cities; an idea that led to the Townswomen’s Guilds movement.

Today, Townswomen’s Guilds remain one of Britain’s leading women’s groups. With a 40,000 strong national membership, the organization prides itself in the involvement with radical local, national and global concerns. Members meet regularly to develop new skills, exchange ideas, discuss topical issues and organize charitable events nationwide. More importantly, Townswomen’s Guilds provide the opportunity to belong to an organization within which members offer support, companionship and encouragement for women to honor their past and realize their future.

taproottheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/Study Guides/
Pre-show Activities

1) Have students think about their expectations for seeing a live performance. Ask them to write down three of their expectations and share it with two or three other people. Ask the groups to talk about why they have those expectations and why it is important to them.

2) Give students time in the library to research Charles Dickens and the Victorian Era. Ask them to find some of the aspects and elements that create the style of the Victorian Era, i.e. social class rules, manners, social expectations etc. and discuss the impact of each item.

3) Students should research famous British comedy shows. Some of the most popular are Monty Python, Mr. Bean, Faulty Towers, and Benny Hill. How is British humor different from American Humor?
Post-show Activities

1) Class Discussion Topics
   a. What impressions were created by your first view of the set? What expectations did you form about the play’s tone as you listened to the music before the performance started?
   b. What about the production surprised or impressed you?
   c. Were the actors believable in their roles?
   d. What do you think would happen next if the play were to continue?
   e. The characters keep performing A Christmas Carol although many things go wrong throughout the show. Have you ever been involved in an event where everything seemed to go wrong?
   f. One of the funny elements of this show is that the costumes don’t really match the time period. Have you ever been to an event where somebody didn’t dress properly?
   g. What was the purpose of doing a production like this? Did you learn anything from the production?

2) Have the students think back to the expectations they wrote down before they came to see the production. With the same groups ask them to share those again and then talk about whether or not their expectations were met when they saw the production. Ask them to think about why they were or were not met and if that influenced whether or not they liked the production.

3) Have students write a critique of the production. Encourage them to be specific about their likes and dislikes, and their reasons for each. Help them to understand the differences between critiquing the play (text, storyline, character development) and the production (acting, lighting, directing, sound, set, costumes).
4) Have students read a newspaper review of the production. Ask them to write two paragraphs explaining why they agree or disagree with the newspaper review. Encourage them to use specific examples from the play and quotes from the newspaper article to support their argument.

5) Frames are frozen pictures that students make with their bodies. Divide students into groups of four or five and give them 15 minutes to come up with five frames from the play and a title for each one. There should be no talking or movement.

   a. They should pick the five most important points of the story so if someone who had not seen the play saw their frames, they would be able to understand what happens.
   b. Ask students to assign one person in their group to say the title of each frame as they work on their interpretation.
   c. When time is up have students show their frames to the whole class.
   d. Allow the students that are watching to ask questions of the performing group at the end of their frames. Encourage them to ask a question about something that wasn’t clear.
   e. Groups can then redo a frame to clarify the picture.
Glossary

Farndale Avenue – A street in London.

Charles Dickens’ novel *A Christmas Carol* – One of the best-known Christmas stories of all time. It was written in 1843 by Charles Dickens and has been remade into countless movies, radio shows and other productions.

Skinflint - A skinflint is a person considered so miserly that he would even "skin a flint” to save something of it. A tightwad.

Spoilt - Spoiled

Frankie Vaughan – Legendary singer in England during the 1950’s and 60’s. Dubbed "Mr. Moonlight" after one of his hits, “Give Me The Moonlight.”

Reprieved – Relieved or released from duty.

Supermarket Trolley – Shopping cart

Snapdragons – A type of flower

Compote - A preparation of fruit in syrup in such a manner as to preserve its form, either whole, halved, or quartered; as, a compote of pears.

Dartmoor – A National Park in the center of the English county of Devon, in the southwest of England.

Beetle Drive – A British dice and card game.

Rotter – scoundrel

Pence – A penny in the UK -- about four cents in America.

Farthing – a quarter penny -- one cent in America.

Shilling – In the United Kingdom, a shilling was a coin used before decimalization in 1971. A shilling had a value of 12d (old pence), and was equal to 1/20th of a pound: there were 240 (old) pence to the pound.

Hunt the Thimble – A party game in which all but one partygoer leaves the room. The person remaining in the room hides a thimble or other small object somewhere in the room. When everyone comes back in, they must locate the hidden object.

Curling Tongs – British for “curling iron”

Budgie’s – Consisting of fur. Perhaps a pet dog or cat.

Pesetas – The currency of Spain.
Marbella – A popular Mediterranean vacation spot in southern Spain.

Crown - A silver coin worth 5 shillings or just over $1.20

Osteopath – A doctor who manipulates muscles and bones to restore the body to its natural state.

Bedraggled – Wet and limp, as if dragged through the mud.

Waif – A person, especially a child, with no home or family.

Urchin – A mischievous boy.

Belgravia – A London neighborhood just southwest of Buckingham Palace.

Interval – A period of time. In this case the actors are referring to an Intermission.

Wanton – Reckless.

Ignominy – Public disgrace.

Squat - To settle on unoccupied land without legal claim.

Bereft – Destitute, to deprive.

Surrey – County, just outside, (southwest), of London.

Camden Town – A section of town in the northern part of the city of London.

Regent’s Park West End - The West End of London is an area of Central London, England, containing many of the city’s major tourist attractions, businesses, and administrative headquarters.

Perish la pense – French for “perish the thought.”

Noddy and Big Ears - Noddy is a character created by British children’s author Enid Blyton, originally published between 1949 and 1963. The television show based on the character is the longest running show in British television since 1955, and continues to appear to this day. Big Ears is Noddy’s best friend.

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Resources

Notable Works by David McGillivray & Walter Zerlin Jr.
From http://www.colonytheatre.org/shows/FarndaleAvenueHousing.html

1976, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society’s Production of Macbeth*

1978, *The Farndale Follies*

1980, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery*

1982, *Chase Me Up Farndale Avenue, S’il Vous Plait*

1984, *The Haunted Through Lounge and Recessed Dining Nook at Farndale Castle*

1986, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery (Revised)*

1987, *They Came From Mars and Landed Outside the Farndale Avenue Church Hall in Time for the Townswomen’s Guild’s Coffee Morning*

1988, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society’s Production of A Christmas Carol*

1990, *We Found Love and an Exquisite Set of Porcelain Figurines aboard the S.S. Farndale Avenue*

1991, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Operatic Society’s Production of The Mikado*

[link to taproottheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/Study Guides/]
Suggested Reading:

*A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

Suggested Listening:

Free online audio *A Christmas Carol* audio books:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolradio/subjects/english/a_christmas_carol
http://www.storynory.com/2005/12/02/a-christmas-carol-part-one/

Suggested Movies:

There are many wonderful versions of *A Christmas Carol*.

Online Resources:

*How to roast chestnuts*:

http://startcooking.com/how-to-roast-chestnuts

A fantastic website for traditional English Christmas crafts, recipes, songs and traditions: http://www.victoriana.com/christmas/dickenschristmas.htm

An online quiz to test your knowledge of theatre terms:

http://quizlet.com/42804/theatre-vocabulary-flash-cards/
Theatre etiquette

How to be a great audience!

☐ Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early. This allows time to find a parking spot, make your way to the Commons, and be seated by the time the show starts.

☐ Be respectful of other audience members and performers by not talking during the show.

☐ Our actors use all walkways and aisles during the performance. Please stay seated during the show. It’s best to use the restroom before the show or during intermission.

☐ Turn off all cell phones and electronic devices.

☐ Photography and videos are not allowed to be taken during in the performance. Not only is it distracting to the actors, but it breaks our licensing agreement.

☐ Enjoy the show! Feel free to laugh, cry, and applaud when appropriate.

Stage Directions

How do you tell the difference between stage left and stage right? Downstage and upstage? Stage directions are detailed in the diagram below.
Theatre Terms

Ad-lib: To make up words or dialogue on the spot, to speak at liberty.

Blocking: Stage directions and movements given to an actor by the script or director.

Call time: The time actors or production crew must be at the theatre.

Callback: A second, more specific audition where a director looks closer at a given actor.

Center Stage: The middle point of the performance space.

Cue: A signal or line that prompts the next action.

Downstage: The area of the performance space that is closest to the audience.

Dress Rehearsal: The final rehearsal of the play before it opens to the public utilizing all costumes, props, lighting, sound, and set changes.

Dry Tech: A rehearsal that is run without the actors, bringing together all the technical aspects of a show.

Fourth Wall: The imaginary divide that separates the audience from the performance space.

House: The area of a theatre where the audience sits.

Major Role: A character part that is dominant in the plot of the play, having many scripted lines.

Minor Role: A supporting character to a story. Having less stage time and lines than a major.

Monologue: A speech performed by one actor, giving depth and insight into a character’s thoughts or feelings.

Pit: The area, usually below the front part of the stage, where the orchestra is set up to play.

Sides: Selections taken from a script used for an actor to read a scene aloud usually at an audition.

Stage Manager: The head technician for a production; responsible for all backstage duties and jobs.

Stage Right/Left: Side of the stage that is determined according to the actor’s point of view facing the audience.

Strike: To take down a set and remove scenery, props, and costumes from the theatre. Happens immediately at the end of a production.

Technician: One who works on a crew for a production doing lights, sets, sound, costumes, etc.

Understudy: A performer who studies the role of another actor, so that they might perform it in the absence of the actor who was originally cast.

Upstage: The area of the performance space that is farthest away from the audience.
On the Stage

There are several types of theatre stages. Some are used for a smaller audience and give a more intimate feel to the production. Others are better for larger productions with larger sets or for musical productions which require more room for dancing and movement. The most common stage is the **proscenium stage** also called an end stage. For this type of stage, one side of the stage is open and the other sides are hidden from the audience and used as back stage area with the audience located on the front side of the stage.

The **thrust stage** extends out into the audience area. The audience is located on three sides of the stage. In the **theatre in the round**, the stage is located in the center of the audience which is located on all four sides of the stage. Similar to the theatre in the round, the **traverse stage** divides the audience into two sections with the stage in the middle, and like the thrust stage and the theatre in the round, allows for a more intimate experience for the audience. The **Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society’s Production of A Christmas Carol** will be performed on a proscenium stage. [http://www.ia470.com/primer/theatres.htm](http://www.ia470.com/primer/theatres.htm)
Circle Theatre Company Information

Circle Theatre Company is part of Circle Christian School’s School of the Arts, offering classes from grades K-12. At the high school level, students audition to be part of Circle School of the Arts theatre track (Company). Our CSA Theatre Track is a pre-professional program geared towards the serious high school student that focuses on four years of training through a rigorous, supportive environment that requires dedication, commitment, and a strong sense of responsibility.

Students who successfully complete a four year track will be eligible to receive an ARTS HONOR DIPLOMA distinguishing them and their time in high school as dedicated to a specific arts discipline. Having successfully completed four years of intensive study in a discipline and receiving an ARTS HONOR DIPLOMA will give the student a stronger advantage as they apply, audition, and compete for placement in universities and conservatories with other seniors graduating from public and private performing arts high schools.

Circle Theatre Company is dedicated to providing opportunities for artists to develop their God-given gifts and abilities while creating an innovative learning environment that transcends disciplinary boundaries including mentoring and leadership classes specially designed to prepare the young Christian artist to be a “light” in a dark world. We believe not only in academic excellence in the arts; but also in traditional academic subjects to prepare our students to reach their full potential educational and artistic goals. If you are interested in learning more about our K-12 theatre program, please contact Company Administrator Becky Saunders, beckys@circletheatrecompany.com.