



This study guide is researched and designed by the Education Department at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, this study guide is intended to prepare you for your visit. It contains biographical and historical information that will deepen your understanding of and appreciation for this production. We've also included discussion questions and activities for you to explore before and after the performance of A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

To schedule a classroom visit,
or if we can help in any other way,
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Student Matinee Performances

December 2

December 7

December 8

December 14

December 21

All shows at 10:30 am

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Edited By:

Jenny Kostreva, Education Director

About the Author

On the night before Charles Dickens was born, his affectionate but often impractical mother went dancing. Despite what must have been an unusual night, Charles Dickens was born without complication in Portsmouth, England on February 7, 1812.

His father, John Dickens, worked as a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, which meant the family moved whenever and wherever the Navy demanded. At the age of five, the Dickens family moved to Chatham where they would remain for six years. During this time, Charles shared his parents' home with five brothers and sisters. This was a period Charles would always refer to as "a time to be remembered like a happy dream through all our life after."

Among the joys of this time was being cared for by a woman named Mary Weller who often read stories to the children. Charles suffered from seizures which often kept him from going outside to play, so he poured his energy into reading and acting.

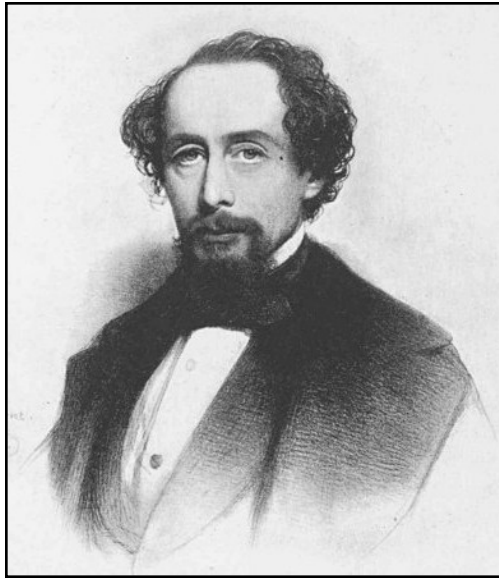
Unfortunately, this period of happiness ended quite abruptly in 1823. Unable to pay his debts, Charles' father was arrested and taken to a debtors' prison. With his father in jail, Charles could not go to school because he was expected to make money to feed his family. Two days after his twelfth birthday, Charles was sent to work at a factory. The rest of Charles' family, excluding him and his sister Fanny, went to live with his father at the prison. Charles continued working and living alone near the factory and Fanny attended the Royal Academy of Music on scholarship. Both went to visit their family every Sunday. It was during this time that

Charles was able to see the disgusting conditions in which the poor people of London were forced to live.

Upon his father's release from debtors' prison, Charles went to school at Wellington Academy

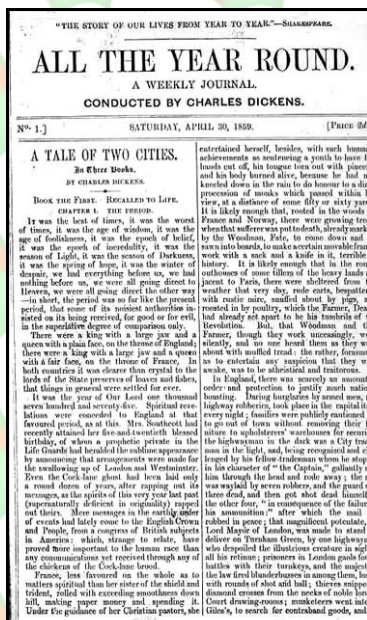
and, in 1827, became a clerk at a legal firm.

Charles developed excellent shorthand skills at the legal firm and quickly landed a job at the Doctors' Commons. This was where all the legal offices and courts were located. While Charles was reporting on what was happening in the courts, he learned of all the problems in the British legal system. Charles would use what he had seen and heard in the courts to criticize them in his later novels.



Charles liked journalism, but he also enjoyed acting. It has been argued that the only reason Charles became a great novelist was because on the night of a big audition, he got sick and was unable to perform. Only a year after this disappointing experience, in 1833, Charles saw his first story published in "Monthly Magazine." The magazine immediately wanted more stories and Boz, Dickens' pen name, soon became known throughout England and the United States.

Charles married Catherine Hogarth in 1836, the same year he began his first novel *The Pickwick Papers*. This book, written originally in segments for a magazine, would become a national favorite. Writing for a magazine was a way in which many people published books at this time. Chapters were printed in each publication, so people would keep buying the magazine in order to finish the story. In fact, many of Dickens' successful novels, such as *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, began



A copy of *All the Year Round*, featuring the first chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

as magazine installments.

Dickens had many fans in America, so in 1841 he and his wife decided to brave the Atlantic and take the long and dangerous journey to the United States. Dickens was not accustomed to the roughness of American society: for example, spittoons and chewing tobacco were unknown in England. He was especially horrified by slavery. The longer he spent

in America, the more he wanted to go home.

Soon after returning to England in 1843, Dickens began work on the first of five books he wanted published at Christmas. During his careful writing of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens reported that he “wept and laughed and wept again.” The book was immediately popular, but Dickens received very little money due to poor contract arrangements.

He followed up on the success of this holiday book with another called *The Chimes*. He was eager to complete the book, claiming to have worked himself into a “regular ferocious excitement” about it. Upon its completion, he reported, “I have had a good cry. I am worn to death. I was obliged to lock myself in yesterday, for my face was swollen for the time to twice its proper size.” When Charles performed a reading of the book for a few close friends in 1844, a career of oral interpretation was born. Dickens performed public readings for charity and pleasure for most of the remainder of his life.

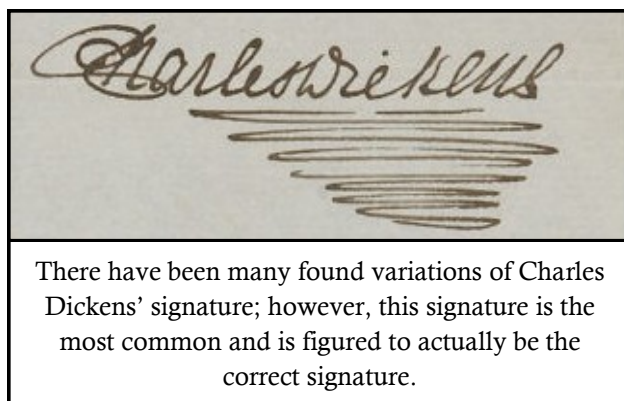
Dickens’ career would soon take two more interesting turns. In 1848, Dickens organized an amateur theater company. During their ten years of operation, they gave over sixty

performances for charity in London. Dickens himself served as manager, producer and frequently as an actor. During this time, he realized what he had frequently referred to as his fondest daydream, “to settle down for the remainder of my life within easy distance of a great theater in which I should hold supreme authority.”

In 1858, after separating from his wife, he began his own magazine called “All The Year Round” which featured weekly installments of his new book, *A Tale of Two Cities*. Following the book’s completion in 1860, Charles began work on *Great Expectations*.

While writing, Dickens continued to do public readings of his works. They were very popular throughout London; unfortunately, they were also extremely draining. Five years later, in 1865, Dickens was involved in a train wreck. After the accident, he experienced dizzy spells, arthritis, gout and swelling of his left foot which further complicated his already failing health.

On June 8, 1870, Dickens wrote all day, which was unusual for him. Normally, he would reserve only a few hours a day for writing. Later that night, he complained of a toothache and shortly thereafter fell out of his chair and lost consciousness. He was diagnosed with a brain aneurysm and died the following day. His body is buried in Westminster Abbey in Poets’ Corner. The words he spoke on the night of his last public reading seem a fitting capstone to his remarkable life: “From these garish lights, I now vanish forevermore, with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful, affectionate farewell.”



There have been many found variations of Charles Dickens’ signature; however, this signature is the most common and is figured to actually be the correct signature.

Victorian England

Victorian England was much different from the world we live in today. Living conditions were much worse and London provided few opportunities for the lower class to achieve success. Dickens often observed the city for days at a time in order to accurately reproduce the horrible state of affairs in his books. These thorough descriptions allow the reader to experience the sights, sounds and smells of the old city.

Government

Unlike the democracy that exists in America, England has a constitutional monarchy. Today, Queen Elizabeth II rules England. In Dickens' day, Queen Victoria ruled the country. Under her direction, England gained control of India, Burma, New Zealand and Hong Kong, making England a very strong imperial power in the world. While Victoria did many good things to help improve her country, her main weakness was her willingness to let the rich become richer, while the poor continued work themselves to death.

Working Life

Life was difficult for the working class in Victorian London. Today, in the United States a typical work week is about 40 hours or five eight-hour days. In Victorian London it was not unusual for employees to work six twelve-hour days or 72 hours per week. Most workers were given days off every Sunday, May Day and Christmas. However, businesses were not required to give their employees

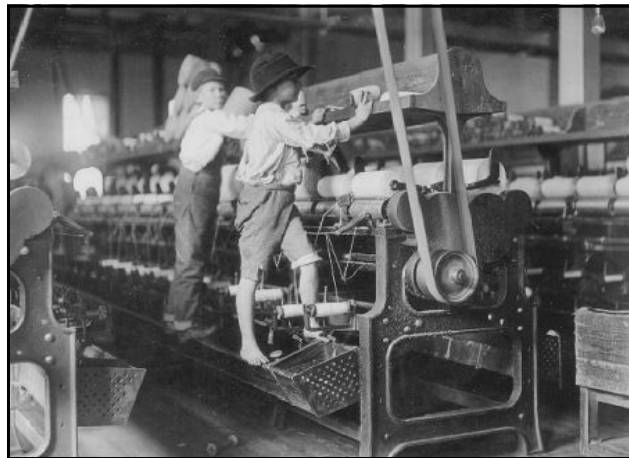
these days off so some unlucky souls had to come to work year round. In Dickens' time, a typical clerk made about £80 (around \$130) per year: just enough to rent a house and raise a family. In *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*, Scrooge pays his clerk Bob Cratchit "fifteen bob a week" or about £39 per year.

Health

"The Fever Patch" was the nickname for Victorian London due to overcrowding, pollution and poor public sanitation. The city was rampant with disease, including the most life-threatening disease, cholera. It killed 140,000 Londoners during Dickens' lifetime. Cholera is caused by impurities in drinking water, which half the city took from the Thames River, London's central waterway. Unfortunately, it was also the main waste-disposal system where 200 open sewers ran into the Thames. The Thames was so disgusting that it created a stench so horrible it gave people headaches, made them nauseous and sometimes forced Parliament to take a break.

The city's health problems were compounded by the ignorance of its medical professionals. At this time, doctors believed that disease was spread through tainted air rather than water. Throughout the nineteenth century, it was widely accepted

that proper ventilation was the key to preventing disease. Hospitals were also of little help because they were few and far between and often times unaffordable as well



It was not uncommon for children to work in factories during this era. Here, two young boys work on a cotton gin.

as unsafe. Due to crude surgical techniques and a flawed understanding about the nature of infection, the spread of hospitals led to an increase rather than a reduction in the death rate. According to mortality statistics, at this time it was actually safer to deliver your baby at home than in a hospital.

Industry

During the first half of the nineteenth century Great Britain was adjusting to the effects of the Industrial Revolution, when the previously farming-based economy of the country changed to one relying more on industry and manufacturing. Britain

underwent a period of swift urbanization, the movement of large populations from the countryside to cities. Scores of young men and women were drawn to London by the promise of work and entertainment. The rural poor were also attracted to the city, seeking employment or at least a dry place to sleep. Between 1800 and 1850 the population of London doubled, topping at 2.3 million people. The city could not support such a rapid increase in its populace, and soon became massively overcrowded. Says Kitson Clark, social historian, "Suitable housing did not exist, and the 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."

The creation of the steam railway made the problem worse. The first steam locomotive was built in 1804 and rail transport proved so profitable that the countryside was soon crisscrossed with lines. Unfortunately, these railways were built by private companies who

had few restrictions on their behavior. Entire neighborhoods in London were demolished to make room for tracks, with no thought or aid given to the families who lived there. By the time laws were put in place to control the rail companies, over 76,000 people had been uprooted.

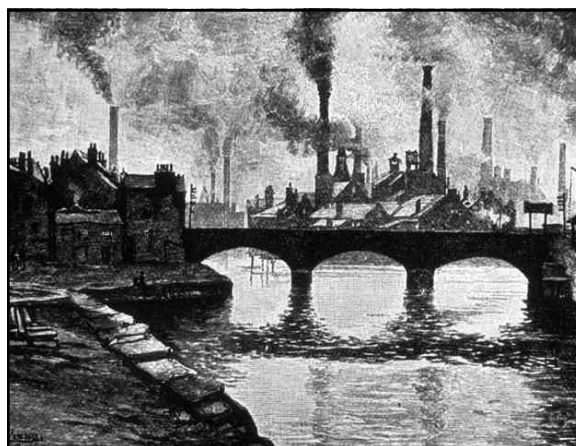
Education

Education in the Victorian Era was a privilege enjoyed by those who could afford it. In many cases money was so scarce that children from poor families were sent to work in factories as soon as they were old enough. Whenever possible, these children would attend charity

schools (ragged schools), where they were taught basic mathematics, reading and scripture.

Children from wealthy families had more options. Young ladies were taught by a governess, a woman who taught in the family's home and sometimes lived there. Governesses taught the "delicate" skills of dance, drawing, music and French; subjects generally

accepted as appropriate and necessary for upper-class young women. Boys were typically sent to live in boarding schools, where they were taught a more rounded curriculum (reading, writing, history and mathematics). Boarding schools were harsh places, where beatings were an accepted method of discipline, and dunce caps (cone-shaped hats which labeled the wearer a "dunce" or idiot) were used to humiliate students who didn't learn fast enough. 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.



During the Victorian Era, industry was booming. Factories were built all over in order to encourage urbanization.

Glossary of Terms

Assign: One to whom the property and affairs of a deceased person are transferred.

Bedlam: A London hospital for the insane

Blindman's Bluff: A popular English parlor game in which one person is blindfolded and must catch others.

Brazier: An open pan used for holding coals.

Carol: A joyous song or ballad; a song of praise

Chaise: A two-wheeled vehicle with a folding top, drawn by a single horse.

Charwoman: A woman, most typically hired by the day, to do housework.

Coach-and-Six: A coach driven by six horses.

Comforter: A scarf.

Copper: A large pot used for washing or cooking.

Counting House: An office in which a commercial company carries on bookkeeping, correspondence.

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.

Old Screw: Slang for "Miser", hence possible the name "Scrooge."

Porter: A dark brown English beer.

Repeater: A watch or clock fitted with a device that causes the repetition of the last hour struck.

Scrooge: The character in A CHRISTMAS CAROL was based in part on the old gravedigger in "The Pickwick Papers."

Pence and Shillings, Pounds and Guineas: Victorian Currency

Farthing	¼ of a Penny
Ha'penny	½ of a Penny
Pence	Penny
Shilling	12 Pence (<i>also known as a "Bob"</i>)
Half-a-crown	2 ½ Shillings, or 30 Pence
Crown	5 Shillings, or 60 Pence
Pound (or notes)	20 Shillings, or 240 Pence
Guinea (or notes)	21 Shillings

Copper

Copper

Silver

Silver

Silver

Silver

Gold

Gold



Christmas Traditions

Christmas in Victorian England shared only a few similarities with the way it is currently celebrated in homes that recognize the holiday. During this time, traditions were being joined by newer methods of celebrating that many people still enjoy today.

BEFORE 1840

January 6th, for a long time, was celebrated as “Twelfth Night.” In Christianity, this night was the supposed night that the wise men arrived in Bethlehem. The celebration usually included a twelfth cake, similar to pound cake, which often had a lucky bean or coin baked inside.

A long time non-religious tradition of singing door to door throughout the entire year gave birth to what we now know as caroling, which is done specifically during the holiday season. Its origins date back to the middle ages when peasants would offer a song in exchange for food and drink.

In Ancient times, mistletoe, holly and ivy were associated with pagan midwinter celebrations. However, by the time *A Christmas Carol* was written, these greens were accepted decorations in Christian homes as well. Mistletoe, or the kissing bow, was usually the centerpiece of a room’s decorations.

Gift giving originated in the middle ages; however, gifts were only a very small part of most celebrations. Wealthy families might exchange a few simple gifts, but poor families usually did not.



Georgina McKee, Jonathon Smoots, Joetta Wright and Mariel Neto in The Rep’s 2009 production. Photo courtesy of Jay Westhauser

AFTER 1840

The very first Christmas Cards were printed in England in 1843. However, it would not be until the early 1900’s that they were a regular part of holiday celebrations.

Santa Claus arose from the stories of St. Nicholas, a saint admired by Dutch immigrants. The image we recognize today was actually made popular by author Clement Clarke Moore who wrote *The Night Before Christmas* in 1822. However, Santa Claus did not become accepted in England until the 1870’s.

The Christmas tree had been prevalent in Germany even before the 1800’s. It did not become popular in England until after Queen Victoria married a German man who wished to include the Yuletide tree in the royal celebrations. After the 1850’s, English families who could afford a tree would have one.

The candy cane was originated in the 1600s to look like a Sheppard’s crook and then was given to children in church to keep them quiet. People started to use the candy cane as an ornament for trees during the mid-1800’s because they were sturdy and colorful. Eventually, they became a Christmas treat.

Questions and Activities

- ♦ A CHRISTMAS CAROL takes place in Victorian England. Societal and economic conditions of the time a great influence on people, their attitudes towards class, money and values. Compare Victorian England to American society today. What are the similarities and differences? What are some examples of how we are still preoccupied with money and material objects? Do you think these attitudes need to change? Why or why not?

- ♦ Dickens did not have the modern conveniences that we have today: electricity, telephones, computers, or kitchen appliances, among other things. Think about what it would be like to not have any of these conveniences. What difficulties might you have? How would you have to adapt in order to live without them? For half a day turn off the lights, take the phone off the hook, shut down all the computers and have a full class without any electricity. Was it difficult to go through half a day without any of these conveniences? Why? What do you think it would be like to never have any of these things?

- ♦ Scrooge is given the chance to see his past, present and future. Imagine you were given an opportunity to see the

future. What would you want to see? Why?

- ♦ Imagine that you work for Scrooge before his transformation. How would you handle a person like this? Would you be mean or would you try to be nice to that person? What would your actions say about you as a person?

- ♦ If you had to choose only one among the many he made, what do you think is Scrooge's biggest mistake? Why?

- ♦ Scrooge is visited by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future. These three figures help Scrooge go through a major transformation. Think about a time in your life when someone helped you change your behaviors. How did you feel about this

person at the time? How did you change? What did you learn about yourself?

- ♦ Each of the Ghosts that visit Scrooge behave and look different? Which one had the most profound effect on Scrooge? Why?

- ♦ During the play, we meet two young children named Want and Ignorance. What do you think Dickens was trying to show us about ourselves by including these children?



Scrooge, played by Resident Acting Company Member James Pickering, during The Rep's 2009 A CHRISTMAS CAROL production. Photo courtesy Jay Westhauser.

Victorian England Crossword

C	T	S	N	I	A	R	T	A	V	A	C
L	H	A	M	S	T	E	A	M	I	C	H
D	P	O	A	P	B	Q	X	K	C	V	A
J	C	S	L	T	I	A	C	H	T	Y	R
K	P	V	Y	E	T	T	O	S	O	U	I
U	A	H	C	F	R	H	P	R	R	S	T
E	R	F	R	H	W	A	E	H	I	T	Y
S	L	B	A	U	S	M	C	M	A	V	S
E	I	A	F	C	F	E	N	S	U	I	C
T	A	U	L	M	T	S	U	E	Q	Z	H
O	M	R	E	T	B	O	D	R	I	L	O
N	E	N	V	H	L	A	R	A	U	T	O
B	N	U	W	L	I	C	Q	Y	P	R	O
A	T	K	J	F	M	K	W	B	B	A	L
R	A	I	L	C	O	M	P	A	N	Y	S
S	K	W	P	J	U	T	S	R	U	N	P
U	S	M	O	N	A	R	C	H	Y	T	D

VICTORIA

TRAINS

CHOLERA

RAIL COMPANY

ETON

PARLIAMENT

STEAM

MONARCHY

FACTORY

DUNCE

THAMES

CHARITY SCHOOLS

The Rep's cast of the
2009 A CHRISTMAS
CAROL production.
Photo courtesy of Jay
Westhauser.



Questions and Activities Continued

- ♦ Color is important when trying to create a certain mood. Draw a picture of your favorite scene in *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*. Be sure to use appropriate colors to show the mood of the scene.

- ♦ Consider the set, props, costumes and music for *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*. How do each of these things help tell the story?

Which elements did you find most effective? Would you have done anything differently? How so?

- ♦ Scrooge was able to turn his ways around and help out someone less fortunate than him. With your class, do something for the less fortunate this Christmas-- have a food drive, buy gifts or donate coats and blankets to shelters. Invite other classes, friends and family members to help make a difference in the lives of others.

- ♦ *A Christmas Carol* was originally written in 1843 and had been adapted into many plays, movies, books and more and The Rep has been doing *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* since 1975 (35 years!!). Why do you think this story stands the test of time. Why is this story an important one to tell?

- ♦ Winter holidays are celebrated differently all over the world depending on



Nell Geisslinger, Gerard Neugent and James Pickering in The Rep's 2009 production of *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*. Photo courtesy of Jay Westhauser.

what country you live in and what religion you practice. For example, in France Christmas is called Noel. Different religions celebrate Ramadan, Kwanza or Hannukah. In small groups, pick a country or religion and research how they celebrate their holidays. Share what you have found with the rest of your class.

- ♦ There are many Christmas traditions and celebrations that are seen in *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*: Fezziwig's party, the gathering at Fred's and the Cratchit family dinner. What winter traditions does your family have? Have you started any new traditions? Write briefly about a special tradition or celebration that you enjoy.



The cast of *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* in the 2009 production. Photo courtesy of Jay Westhauser

Answer Key for Crossword

C	T	S	N	I	A	R	T	A	V	A	C
L	H	A	M	S	T	E	A	M	I	C	H
D	P	O	A	P	B	Q	X	K	C	V	A
J	C	S	L	T	I	A	C	H	T	Y	R
K	P	V	Y	E	T	T	O	S	O	U	I
U	A	H	C	F	R	H	P	R	R	S	T
E	R	F	R	H	W	A	E	H	I	T	Y
S	L	B	A	U	S	M	C	M	A	V	S
E	I	A	F	C	F	E	N	S	U	I	C
T	A	U	L	M	T	S	U	E	Q	Z	H
O	M	R	E	T	B	O	D	R	I	L	O
N	E	N	V	H	L	A	R	A	U	T	O
B	N	U	W	L	I	C	Q	Y	P	R	O
A	T	K	J	F	M	K	W	B	B	A	L
R	A	I	L	C	O	M	P	A	N	Y	S
S	K	W	P	J	U	T	S	R	U	N	P
U	S	M	O	N	A	R	C	H	Y	T	D

Resources and Further Reading

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Visiting The Rep

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater is housed downtown in the Milwaukee Center at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. Our building was formerly the home of Electric Railway & Light Company. This name is still carved on the wall outside.

You'll enter on the Wells Street side into a large, open space. Our box office will be visible on your left as you come through the front doors. The large space is the main hub for the businesses that share this building: a bank, an office tower, the Pabst Theater and the Intercontinental Hotel. Our production of A CHRISTMAS CAROL will be held in the Pabst Theater. If you enter from the Wells Street side of the building, the box office of the Pabst Theater will be immediately to your right. The entrance to the theater is next to the Pabst box office or through the doors on Wells Street. School groups should follow the directions mailed to you. For student matinees, a staff member will greet your bus upon arrival.

Inside the lobby are restrooms, water fountains and a coat check. If you decide to bring a snack, please know that food and drink are NOT permitted in the theater. However, you can leave things (at your own risk) in the coat check room, and enjoy them outside the theater during the intermission. A CHRISTMAS CAROL typically runs two hours with an intermission. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the specific "running time" of the play.

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"YOU NEED THREE THINGS IN THE THEATRE – THE PLAY, THE ACTORS AND THE AUDIENCE, AND EACH MUST GIVE SOMETHING." – KENNETH HAIGH

Theater is described as a collaborative art form. The success of a production relies upon every member of the process: playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, actors and the audience.

Plays require audiences to give a new life to performances through their careful attention and enthusiastic reactions. The audience has an active role to play and the actors rely on you to be respectful and attentive. Through your observation of sets, costumes, lighting and the work of the actors, you'll be better able to follow the story and enjoy the live presentation. You are important in the final performance and your participation is what makes this process worthwhile.

MILWAUKEE REPERTORY THEATER DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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