

Adapted from the novel by Charles Dickens by Joseph Hanreddy and Edward Morgan
November 27 to December 2, 2009 Pabst Theater

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Study Guide for Students and Educators for

A Christmas Carol



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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.

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About the Author

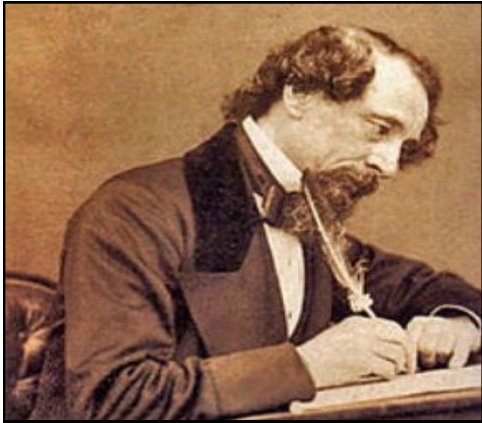


PHOTO OF CHARLES DICKENS

Imagine yourself at the age of twelve. Imagine that instead of living with a kind and affectionate family, you live by yourself in a small shack. Imagine that instead of going to school to learn, you work in a factory every day for twelve hours. Imagine that instead of sleeping in a warm bed at night, you sleep on a cold sidewalk. Can you imagine growing up in these conditions? Unfortunately, this was how Charles Dickens grew up during the early 1800's.

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England on February 7, 1812. On the night before Charles Dickens was born, his affectionate but often impractical mother went dancing. Considering the circumstances, the birth was normal and Dickens was born healthy.

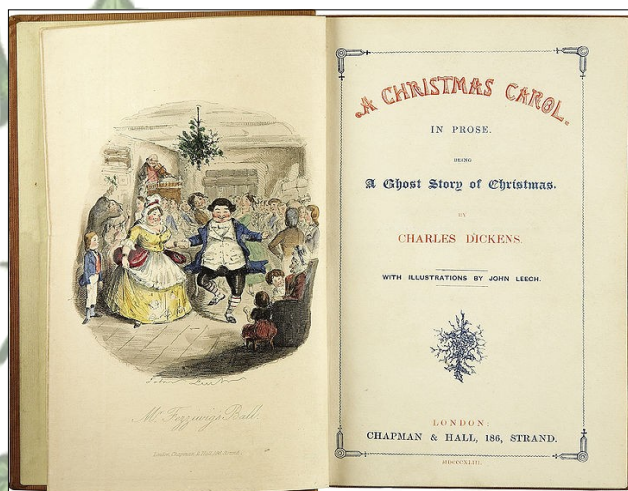
His father, John Dickens, worked as a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. This meant that the family moved whenever and wherever the Navy demanded. When Dickens was five, his family moved to Chatham where they remained for six years. Dickens had five other brothers and sisters, making their home quite crowded. This was a period Dickens 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. Dickens suffered from seizures which often kept him from going outside to play, so he poured his energy into reading and acting, which were encouraged by Weller.

This period of happiness ended quite abruptly in 1823. Dickens' father was unable to pay his debts and was arrested and taken to a debtors' prison. With his father in jail, Dickens could not go to school because he was expected to make money to feed his family. Two days after his twelfth birthday, Dickens was sent to work at a factory. The rest of Dickens' family, except for Dickens and his sister Fanny, went to live with his father at the prison. Dickens continued working and living alone near the factory while Fanny attended school at the Royal Academy of Music. Both Dickens and Fanny went to visit their family in prison every Sunday. It was during this time that Dickens was able to see the disgusting conditions in which the poor people of London were forced to live.

When his father was released from debtors' prison, Dickens went to school at Wellington Academy and at the age of twenty-five, became a clerk at a legal firm. At the legal firm, he quickly developed excellent shorthand skills and landed a job at the Doctors' Commons— where all the legal offices and courts were located. Reporting on the courts, Dickens learned first hand of many problems with the British legal system. In later works, Dickens satirized the courts, drawing on these early experiences.

While Dickens enjoyed writing, he actually preferred acting. It has been argued that the only reason Dickens became a great novelist was that he got sick and was unable to perform on the night of a big audition. Only a year after this disappointing experience, in 1833, Dickens saw his first story published in *Monthly Magazine*. After the great success of this story, the magazine immediately wanted more, and Dickens' pen name, Boz, soon became known throughout England and the United States.

In 1836, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the same year he began his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. This book, originally written serially for a magazine, would become a national favorite. Writing stories in installments for a magazine was often a gateway to having books published. Magazines would print one



COPY OF *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*, PUBLISHED 1843

wanted published at Christmas. During his careful writing of *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*, Dickens reported that he “wept and laughed and wept again.” Although the book was immediately a success, Dickens received very little money due to poor contract arrangements.

Dickens’ career would soon take two 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, what he referred to as his fondest daydream was becoming a reality: “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, Dickens began working on *Great Expectations*.

While writing, Dickens often times performed public readings of his works. These performances 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 now buried in Westminster Abbey in the Poets’ Corner.



Jonathan Smoots, Jenny Wanasek and Paul Hurley have fun at the Fezziwig Party with the cast of The Rep’s 2008-2009 production of *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*.

Photo courtesy of Jay Westhauser.

Charles Dickens Word Game

1.) After his father was released from prison, what school did Charles go to?

— — — — — — — — — —

2.) Who did Charles marry?

— — — — — — — — — —

3.) After separating from his wife, what magazine did Charles write?

— — — — — — — — — —

4.) When Charles Dickens first began writing, what was his pen name?

— —

5.) In 1827, what job did Charles have?

— — — —

6.) What aspect of American life was Charles horrified by?

— — — — — —

7.) What did Charles Dickens die from?

— — — — — — —

8.) Where was Charles Dickens born?

— — — — — — — , — — — — —

9.) How many brothers and Sisters did Charles have?

— — —

10.) Where was Charles' father taken when he couldn't pay his debts?

— — — — —

11.) Who went to the Royal Academy of Music?

— — — —

12.) Where is Charles Dickens buried?

— — — — — — — — — —

— — — — — , — — — — — !

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7 8 7 6 9 6 10 11 2 12 6

Answers on Page 11

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.



QUEEN VICTORIA



WOMEN IN A FACTORY ROLL CIGARS

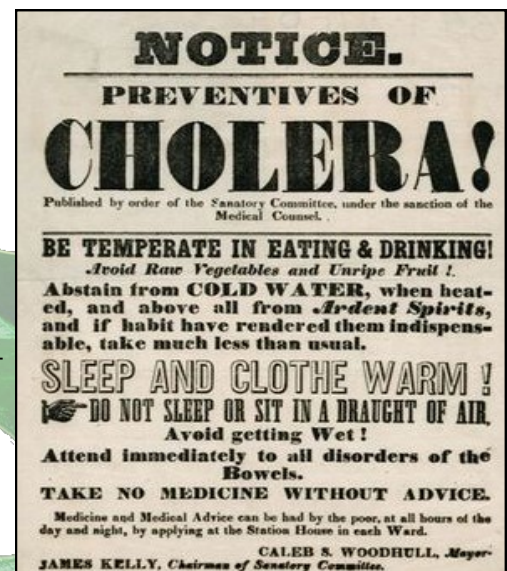
Working Life

Life was difficult for the working class in Victorian London. Today, in the United States a typical work week is about 40 hours. 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 recess.



POSTER FOR PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF CHOLERA

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 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.



A CHARITY SCHOOL

Victorian England Crossword

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

Words to Find:

VICTORIA

THAMES

LONDON

FACTORY

CHOLERA

ETON

RAGGED SCHOOL

DUNCE

FEVER PATCH

TRAINS

BOARDING SCHOOL

GOVERNESS



Photo from The Rep's 2008-2009 production of A CHRISTMAS CAROL. Resident Actors Laura Gordon and Torrey Hanson (top right) with the cast.

Photo Courtesy of Jay Westhauser.

Answers on Page 11

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.

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 1600’s 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.



The cast of The Rep’s 2008-2009 A CHRISTMAS CAROL singing a carol. Photo courtesy of Jay Westhauser.

Questions and Activities

For Younger Students

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?

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.

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? During one of your class periods turn off the lights, take the phone off the hook, shut down all the computers and have a full class without any modern conveniences. Was it difficult to do one class period without any of these things? Why? What do you think it would be like to never have any of these things?

For Older Students

Look back on the information about Victorian England and how people were treated. Do you think that conditions for the poor are better or worse today? What about the wealthy? Why? With your classmates, discuss some of the positive and negative ways with which we view poor people and wealthy people today.

The Ghosts of Past, Present and Future visited Scrooge in the play. Imagine that you were given the opportunity to view these three things. What would you most want to see? What might you cherish or regret? What do you hope to see in the future? What factors influenced your decision?

In the play, Scrooge is visited by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future. These three figures help Scrooge go through a major transformation and help change his behavior. 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?



The Ghost of Christmas Present, portrayed by Jonathan Smoots, visits Scrooge and shows him how others celebrate Christmas. Photo courtesy Jay Westhauser.

For All Students

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?

In the beginning of the play, Scrooge is obsessed with money. Why do you think people become so interested in money and other material things? Do you think it is a good thing or a bad thing? Why? Do you think there are outside factors that make people become like this? What are they?

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.

Winter holidays are celebrated differently all over the world depending on 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.



Scrooge and Mr. Cratchit, portrayed by Rep Actors Jim Pickering and Torrey Hanson, share a handshake after Scrooge is visited by the three ghosts. Photo courtesy Jay Westhauser.

Resources and Further Reading

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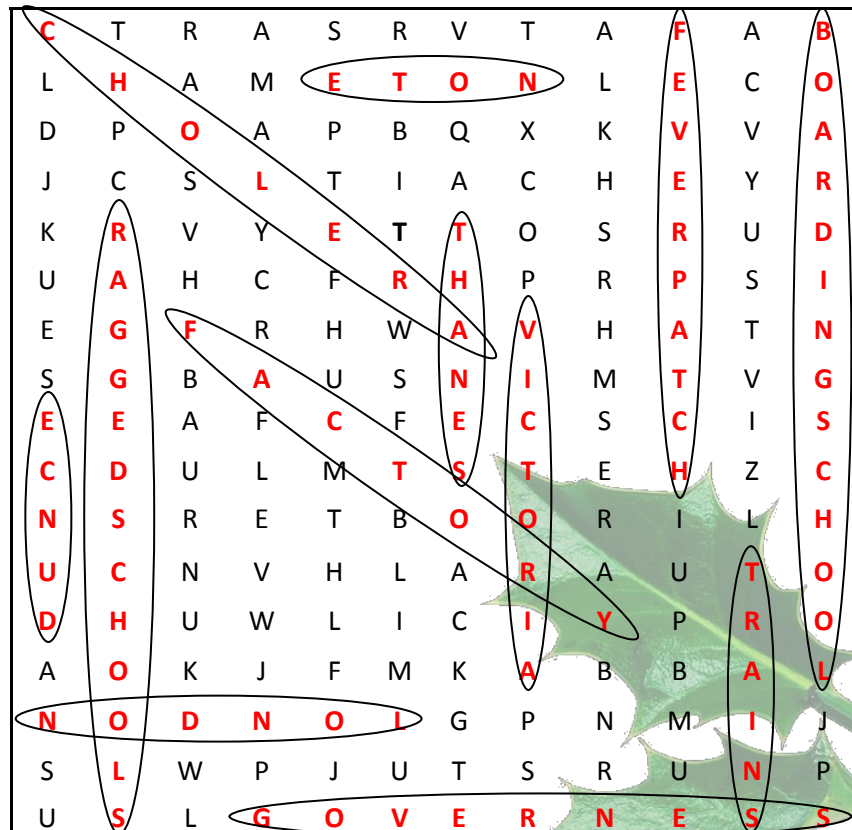
Answer Keys

Charles Dickens Word Game

- 1.) WELLINGTON ACADEMY
- 2.) CATHERINE HOGARTH
- 3.) ALL THE YEAR ROUND
- 4.) BOZ
- 5.) CLERK
- 6.) SLAVERY
- 7.) BRAIN ANEURYSM
- 8.) PORTSMOUTH, ENGLAND
- 9.) FIVE
- 10.) PRISON
- 11.) FANNY
- 12.) WESTMINSTER ABBY

GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE!

Victorian England Crossword



*"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.

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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.

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 and 30 minutes with an intermission. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the specific "running time" of the play.

**FOR INFORMATION ON OUR EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND OUR PRODUCTIONS,
VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.MILWAUKEEREP.COM**

PROGRAMS IN THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT RECEIVE GENEROUS FUNDING FROM:

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National City Bank

Northwestern Mutual Foundation

The Rep Milwaukee

THEATER ♦ TRAINING AT ITS BEST

Jonathan Smoots, Jim Pickering, Connor Mills and Peter Silbert in The Rep's 2008-2009 production of A CHRISTMAS CAROL. Photo courtesy of Jay Westhauser.