



A Christmas Carol Study Guide



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ABOUT WILD SWAN THEATER'S *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* AND THE STUDY GUIDE

A Christmas Carol has been especially adapted from the Dickens' original for family audiences by Wild Swan Theater's Co-Artistic Director Hilary Cohen, who also directs the production. *A Christmas Carol* tells the story of the amazing transformation of miserly old Ebenezer Scrooge after he is visited by three spirits on the night before Christmas. As the Ghost of Christmas Past leads Scrooge on a midnight journey to people and events from his past, his eyes are opened to the human misery he has been ignoring and sometimes even causing, most especially in the family of his clerk, Bob Cratchit and his son Tiny Tim. Scrooge's change of heart and his dedication to helping those less fortunate is a happy ending one can savor at any time of the year, but most especially at this holiday season.

A Christmas Carol Study Guide is an educational resource that offers discussion questions, activities, and resources to enrich your students' theater going experience. We have identified related Michigan Content Standards so you can see how curriculum goals can be explored and reinforced by attending *A Christmas Carol*. Wild Swan Theater strives to ensure that each Study Guide contain current information and is helpful to you, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any suggestions or comments at wildswan@wildswantheater.org.

ABOUT *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

From *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 19, 2016, by Kat Eschner

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-charles-dickens-wrote-christmas-carol-180961507/>

Why Charles Dickens Wrote *A Christmas Carol*

The beloved story sold 6,000 copies in its first week in print and 15,000 in its first year

A Christmas Carol is more than a timeless Christmas story. Its author hoped that its lessons would be remembered all through the year.

The publication of *A Christmas Carol* on this day in 1843 ensured that Charles Dickens' name would forever be linked with Christmas. In some ways, it's a very Victorian story of urban circumstances: extremes of wealth and poverty, industry and inability. But it also helped change Victorian society, [writes](#) historian Catherine Golden for the National Postal Museum blog. And that's why Dickens wrote it.

Aside from boosting people's awareness of the plight of the poor in Victorian England, though, Dickens also had a more immediate need: cash. He'd spent too much on his 1842 American tour, Golden writes, and he needed to support his large family. "Thinking creatively, he wrote himself out of his dilemma," she reports.

The book did have the cultural impact Dickens was hoping for, though. The writer came from a poor family and is remembered as a friend to the poor throughout his life. In the fall of that year, according to Ambrosino, the author had visited a Samuel Starey's Field Land Ragged School,

which taught poor children. “Dickens easily empathized with such children living in poverty, coming, as he did, from a poor childhood himself--a fact that set him apart from many other English authors,” writes Ambrosino.

“Even if economics motivated Dickens to write *A Christmas Carol*, his story stimulated charity,” writes Golden. Characters like Bob Cratchit’s family, Scrooge’s lost love and of course Scrooge himself paint a vivid picture of a time and place where need was everywhere, especially in London. And Scrooge’s redemption arc that anchors the story is an important voice to potential middle-class givers, writes Ambrosino. “Though he doesn’t give away any of his money [at the beginning of the story], and though he feels no sympathy for those less fortunate than he, Scrooge, as Dickens makes clear, is no criminal. He works hard for his money, day in and day out.” In the end, Scrooge becomes a sympathetic character. And his belief that prisons and workhouses were enough social aid for those in poverty--a common enough belief in Victorian times--is overwhelmed only when he realizes that the city needs something more: empathy, in the form of charity.

Like Scrooge at the end of the story, when he becomes “as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew,” Dickens himself was a charitable man. He made a good living, writes Ambrosino, “and he used his wealth and influence to help those less fortunate.”

Dickens may not have gotten rich off of the publication of *A Christmas Carol*, but he did make the world a little richer.

ABOUT WILD SWAN THEATER

Wild Swan Theater is dedicated to producing professional theater of the highest artistic quality for families and to making that theater accessible to everyone including low income, minority, and disabled patrons through low ticket prices and innovative outreach programs.

Founded in 1980, Wild Swan Theater has been delighting children and building imaginations with a potent combination of some of the world’s greatest stories, original music, dance, masks, puppets, and the visual poetry of American Sign Language (ASL). Since its founding, our company of professional adult actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, and ASL performers has performed for hundreds of thousands of children in its home base of Ann Arbor and in schools, theaters, museums and public libraries throughout Michigan.

We have presented world premieres of folktales and myths from other cultures such as *Under the African Sky*, *Marketplace Stories—Folktales from the Arab World*, *Tales from Egypt* and our bilingual production of Aztec mythology, *Musicians of the Sun*. We have developed historical dramas about women in the World War II workforce in *Rosie the Riveter*, Michigan’s maritime heritage in *Shipwrecked!*, and the Underground Railroad in *Along the Tracks*. All the components of Wild Swan productions, scripts, acting, music, and dance, are selected and developed for their outstanding artistry with the belief that children should experience the very best in the arts. For more information, please visit www.wildswantheater.org.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

1. About American Sign Language (ASL) in Wild Swan Theater Productions: Making Theater Accessible to Everyone

Materials Needed

- **Handout #1 American Sign Language (ASL) Alphabet Chart and Excerpts from Reviews of the Broadway Production of *Spring Awakening***

Objectives

By participating in this activity, students will:

- Understand the purpose and use of ASL in communications
- Develop some skill by practicing the use of ASL to communicate with others
- Reflect on the impact of ASL performers on a live theatrical production

Background

Wild Swan Theater strives to create theater productions that all audience members can enjoy. ASL is the language that children and adults who are deaf use to communicate. WST shadow interprets all of its performances for the Deaf that are part of its season of productions at Washtenaw Community College.

In the early 1980s, we were one of the first theater companies in the nation to incorporate ASL into all of our mainstage performances, and invented a new aesthetic for the theater by fully integrating ASL actors into the central action of the play. When you see a Wild Swan production, you will notice that the people who do the signing, the interpreters, are part of the production and wear costumes just like the rest of the actors. When you attend a WST production, you will also see the signing completely woven into the performance. That way people who are deaf can see what the speaking actors are doing and what the signing actors are doing at the same time.

In 2015, the Deaf West Theatre's production of *Spring Awakening* opened to widespread critical acclaim on Broadway. This new production revived an already revolutionary musical by choreographing ASL into the production. Its success demonstrates how arts and culture thrive by being inclusive and serving more communities.

Procedure

- Discuss with students how and why Wild Swan Theater uses ASL in its performances.
- Ask whether students have used ASL to communicate or if they have seen ASL performers in a production.
- Copy and distribute or project **Handout #1 American Sign Language (ASL) Alphabet Chart and Excerpts from Reviews of the Broadway Production of *Spring Awakening***
- Use the ASL alphabet to spell character names and words that are used in *A Christmas Carol* such as Scrooge, Christmas, Humbug, Ghost, Tiny Tim.
- Learn the ASL symbols to your favorite Christmas Carol. Sing and sign at the same time!
- Share the review excerpts of *Spring Awakening* with students prior to viewing the performance. Discuss and assess the reviewer's opinions of the play.

- Before attending the performance of *A Christmas Carol*, provide some specific questions to guide student observation during the performance such as:
 - How do the ASL interpreters and actors work together to communicate ideas, feelings, and emotions?
 - What do you think are the advantages for the hearing audience and the deaf audience of using ASL interpreters in a performance?

Assessment

- After students have seen the play, ask students to think about how these reviews aligned with their experience of *A Christmas Carol*. In what ways do they think ASL added a new dimension to *A Christmas Carol*? Discuss student observations by asking questions such as:
 - How did the ASL interpreters and actors work together to communicate ideas, feelings, and emotions?
 - What did you think were the advantages for the hearing audience and the deaf audience of using ASL interpreters in a performance?
 - Ask students to prepare written comments or an oral review of *A Christmas Carol* that focuses on how it uses ASL shadow interpreters help tell the story.

2. Exploring Characters Through Reader's Theater—*A Christmas Carol*

Materials Needed

- **Handout #2 -- Scene 2—At Scrooge and Marley's**

Objectives

By participating in this activity, students will:

- Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions influence events.
- Compare and contrast characters, settings, or events in a story.
- Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
- Recognize feelings and emotions in characters that are common to all humanity.
- Engage in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) to build on others' ideas and express their own clearly

Background

“Making theater” in the classroom can develop creativity, curiosity, communication, empathy, cooperation, leadership, and negotiation. Drama is ideal for cross-curricular learning and is a valuable tool for developing language arts skills of writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. Reader's theater is a way to involve students in reading aloud by having them “perform” by reading from a script. By combining reading practice and performing, students develop skills and confidence while exploring characters and culture.

Procedure

- Distribute **Handout #2** and select students to portray Scrooge, Fred, and Bob Cratchit
- Give the readers the opportunity to read the script silently to themselves. Invite them to read their parts from the script aloud and act it out.
- Encourage students to analyze and reflect on the characters, setting, and story for each Scene. Invite students describe what is happening by asking:

- Who are the characters in the scene?
- Where do you think the scene takes place?
- Describe what is happening in the scene?
- What characteristics or traits do the characters have?
- How would you describe each character's feelings? How are the characters interacting with each other in each scene?
- What information (personal, cultural traditions, economic status, etc.) is being learned or shared about each character?
- Divide your students into small groups of 3-4 students per group. Assign half of the small groups to be "before" actors and half of the groups to be "after" actors.
- Ask your students to think about Scrooge from the scene just read/performed and to imagine what events may explain why he behaved in the way they did. Have the "before" groups create a skit that shows what may have happened in the Scrooge's past that shaped his character and motivated the behavior.
- Have the "after" groups create a skit that imagines what Scrooge's behavior could be in the future.
- Invite students to perform the skits. Afterwards discuss the range of events or activities that preceded or followed the scene from Handout #2 they had read/performed. What decisions did they have to make when creating new skits or scenes?

Assessment

- After watching the play, have students compare and contrast the scenes they created with the Wild Swan performance. Initiate discussion by asking:
 - What did they learn about the characters that they did not know before seeing *A Christmas Carol*? What surprised them?
 - Invite students to share their stories of change and growth due to a specific event or series of events through telling or writing or making art or theater.

3. A Ghost Story of Christmas

Materials Needed

- Books, short stories, or recordings
- Flip chart for recording characteristics of scary stories or story telling

Objectives

By participating in this activity, students will:

- Describe characters in a scary story and explain how their actions build tension, suspense, or fright.
- Explore the connections between the oral traditions of ghost stories and epics.
- Discuss and define the qualities of effective ghost stories and storytelling.

Background

Telling melodramatic ghost stories around Christmas time was a popular practice in 19th century England. *A Christmas Carol* is essentially a ghost story as Scrooge is visited by three spirits and by the ghost of Jacob Marley who take him on the journey that results in his personal transformation. The original title is *A Christmas Carol, in Prose, Being a Ghost-Story of Christmas*. In the preface to *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens tells the reader: *I have*

endeavored in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me.

Procedure

- Read some of the following classic ghost stories in your classroom.
 - The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*: Washington Irving
 - The Hound of the Baskervilles*: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
 - The Fall of the House of Usher* or *The Tell Tale Heart*: Edgar Allen Poe
- Or select from a collection of ghost stories in the book *The Best Ghost Stories Ever*. Includes some of the spookiest ghost stories ever written, from authors including Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, Bram Stoker, and Henry James.
- Or listen to two classic ghost stories, *The Headless Horseman* and *The Tell Tale Heart* ,in your classroom from the recording **FAMOUS GHOST STORIES WITH SCARY SOUNDS (1975)** at <http://midnightsocietytales.com/2016/05/07/audio-terror-ghost-stories-scary-sounds-1975/>
- Ask students to brainstorm a list of the qualities that make the ghost story vivid or scary. Write the list on the board or on chart paper. Students will use this list as a checklist for their own stories. Focus on the following questions:
 - What makes a ghost story entertaining?
 - What makes characters in a ghost story strong, believable, and interesting?
 - What makes a setting appropriate for a ghost story?
 - How does the storyteller enhance the scariness of a story?
 - What are ways to connect to the history of a place or people that works well in a ghost story?
- As a writing assignment, ask students to imagine themselves in the dark or a scary place and write down a ghost story that they have heard, but have never seen written OR ask them to write a scary story that begins with the common first line, *It was a dark and stormy night...* Invite students to share their stories out loud and to add sounds effect or special voices to enhance the “fright level.”

Assessment

After seeing *A Christmas Carol*, invite students to discuss and/or write about it. Ask questions such as those below to prompt discussion or writing:

- Why and how does the story of *A Christmas Carol* use the characters of ghosts to lead the action? Can you think of other stories that use ghost or spirits to help the action along?
- Although it is a ghost story, *A Christmas Carol* is an uplifting tale. In what ways is it like other ghost stories? In which ways is it different?
- Do the ghosts of past, present, and future have separate personalities, or do they all seem to be alike to you? From which one would you most like a visit?
- Assess and identify the qualities, characters, actions, or events that made *A Christmas Carol* vivid or scary. Which ones were especially effective in creating suspense or fear?

Bibliography—Selected Online Resources

Online Lesson Plans for *A Christmas Carol*

<https://www.learningtogive.org/units/bridging-gap/philanthropy-christmas-carol> Through this lesson plan, *Philanthropy in A Christmas Carol*, students will be able to identify examples of philanthropy in a classic piece of literature. This source, Learning To Give offers handouts, vocabulary words, and assessments.

<https://edsitement.neh.gov/curricula/using-textual-clues-understand-christmas-carol> *Using Textual Clues to Understand A Christmas Carol--For Grades 6-8*, Learning Objective: Analyze the text to identify characterization, plot, themes, and conflicts.

<https://www.varsitytutors.com/englishteacher/christmas-carol-lesson-plans> Selected lesson plans and learning activities:*A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens:

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

How might students use storyboards to demonstrate and to extend their learning?

Includes essential questions, summary, conflict, vocabulary, character analysis, more.

Beyond the Story: A Dickens of a Party

Students are invited to attend a 19th Century party as a character from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." To play this role, students must understand the values and customs Dickens' characters represented in Victorian society. This lesson is divided into three stages: Group Investigative Roles, Individual Characterizations, and Individual Presentations. Students collaboratively research the life and times of Charles Dickens as it relates to a character, and write and present a first-person character analysis.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/a-christmas-carol-questions-study-discussion-739244> Discussion Questions for *A Christmas Carol*

Connections to Michigan Content Standards

English Language Arts

Listening and Viewing Response

Grade 5: L.RP.05.04 Listening and Viewing Response: Students will combine skills to reveal strengthening literacy (e.g., viewing then analyzing in writing, listening then paraphrasing in writing).

Grade 6: L.RP.06.05 Listening and Viewing Response: Students will respond to multiple text types when listened to or viewed knowledgeably, by discussing, illustrating, and/or writing in order to compare/contrast similarities and differences in idea, form, and style to evaluate quality and to identify personal and universal themes.

Grade 7: L.RP.07.05 Listening and Viewing Response: Students will respond to multiple text types when listened to or viewed knowledgeably, by discussing, illustrating, and/or writing in order to anticipate and answer questions; determine personal and universal themes; and offer opinions or solutions.

*Grade 8: **L.RP.08.05** Listening and Viewing Response:* Students will respond to multiple text types when listened to or viewed knowledgeably, by discussing, illustrating, and/or writing in order to anticipate and answer questions; determine personal and universal themes; and offer opinions or solutions.

*Grade 9 -12: **CE 3.1.2** Demonstrate an understanding of literary characterization, character development, the function of major and minor characters, motives and causes for action, and moral dilemmas that characters encounter by describing their function in specific works.*

Listening and Viewing Conventions:

*Grade 3: **L.CN.03.02** Listening and Viewing Conventions:* Students will listen to or view knowledgeably while demonstrating appropriate social skills of audience behaviors (e.g., eye contact, attentive, supportive) in small and large group settings.

*Grade 4: **L.CN.04.02** Listening and Viewing Conventions:* Students will listen to or view critically while demonstrating appropriate social skills of audience behaviors (e.g., eye contact, attentive, supportive) in small and large group settings.

L.RP.04.02 *Listening and Viewing Response:* Students will select, listen to or view knowledgeably, and respond thoughtfully to both classic and contemporary texts recognized for quality and literary merit.

*Grade 5: **L.CN.05.02** Listening and Viewing Conventions:* Students will listen to or view critically while demonstrating appropriate social skills of audience behaviors (e.g., eye contact, attentive, supportive) in small and large group settings.

L.RP.05.02 *Listening and Viewing Response:* Students will select, listen to or view knowledgeably, and respond thoughtfully to both classic and contemporary texts recognized for quality and literary merit.

*Grade 6: **L.CN.06.02** Listening and Viewing Conventions:* Students will listen to or view critically while demonstrating appropriate social skills of audience behaviors (e.g., eye contact, attentive, supportive); critically examine the verbal and non-verbal strategies during speeches and presentations.

L.RP.06.02 *Listening and Viewing Response:* Students will select, listen to or view knowledgeably, and respond thoughtfully to both classic and contemporary texts recognized for quality and literary merit.

L.RP.06.05 *Listening and Viewing Response:* Students will respond to multiple text types when listened to or viewed knowledgeably, by discussing, illustrating, and/or writing in order to compare/contrast similarities and differences in idea, form, and style to evaluate quality and to identify personal and universal themes.

*Grade 7: **L.CN.07.02** Listening and Viewing Conventions:* Students will listen to or view critically while demonstrating appropriate social skills of audience behaviors (e.g., eye contact, attentive, supportive); critically examine the verbal and non-verbal strategies during speeches and presentations.

L.RP.07.02 *Listening and Viewing Response:* Students will select, listen to or view knowledgeably, and respond thoughtfully to both classic and contemporary texts recognized for quality and literary merit.

L.RP.07.05 *Listening and viewing Response:* Students will respond to multiple text types when listened to or viewed knowledgeably, by discussing, illustrating, and/or writing in order to anticipate and answer questions; determine personal and universal themes; and offer opinions or solutions.

Grade 8: L.CN.08.02 Listening and Viewing Conventions: Students will listen to or view critically while demonstrating appropriate social skills of audience behaviors (e.g., eye contact, attentive, and supportive); critically examine the verbal and non-verbal strategies during speeches and presentations.

L.RP.08.02 Listening and Viewing Response: Students will select, listen to or view knowledgeably, respond thoughtfully to both classic and contemporary texts recognized for quality and literary merit.

L.RP.08.05 Listening and Viewing Response: Students will respond to multiple text types when listened to or viewed knowledgeably, by discussing, illustrating, and/or writing in order to anticipate and answer questions; determine personal and universal themes; and offer opinions or solutions.

Writing Genre

Grade 4: W.GN.04.01 Writing Genre: Students will write a cohesive narrative piece such as a myth, legend, fantasy, or adventure creating relationships among setting, characters, theme, and plot.

Grade 5: W.GN.05.01 Writing Genre: Students will write a cohesive narrative piece such as a mystery, tall tale, or historical fiction using time period and setting to enhance the plot; demonstrating roles and functions of heroes, anti-heroes, and narrator; and depicting conflicts and resolutions.

Grade 6: W.GN.06.01 Writing Genre: Students will write a cohesive narrative piece such as a personal narrative, adventure, tall tale, folktale, fantasy, or poetry that includes appropriate conventions to the genre, employing elements of characterization for major and minor characters; internal and/or external conflict; and issues of plot, theme, and imagery.

Grade 7: W.GN.07.01 Writing Genre: Students will write a cohesive narrative piece such as a memoir, drama, legend, mystery, poetry, or myth that includes appropriate conventions to the genre employing literary and plot devices (e.g., internal and/or external conflicts, antagonists/protagonists, personification).

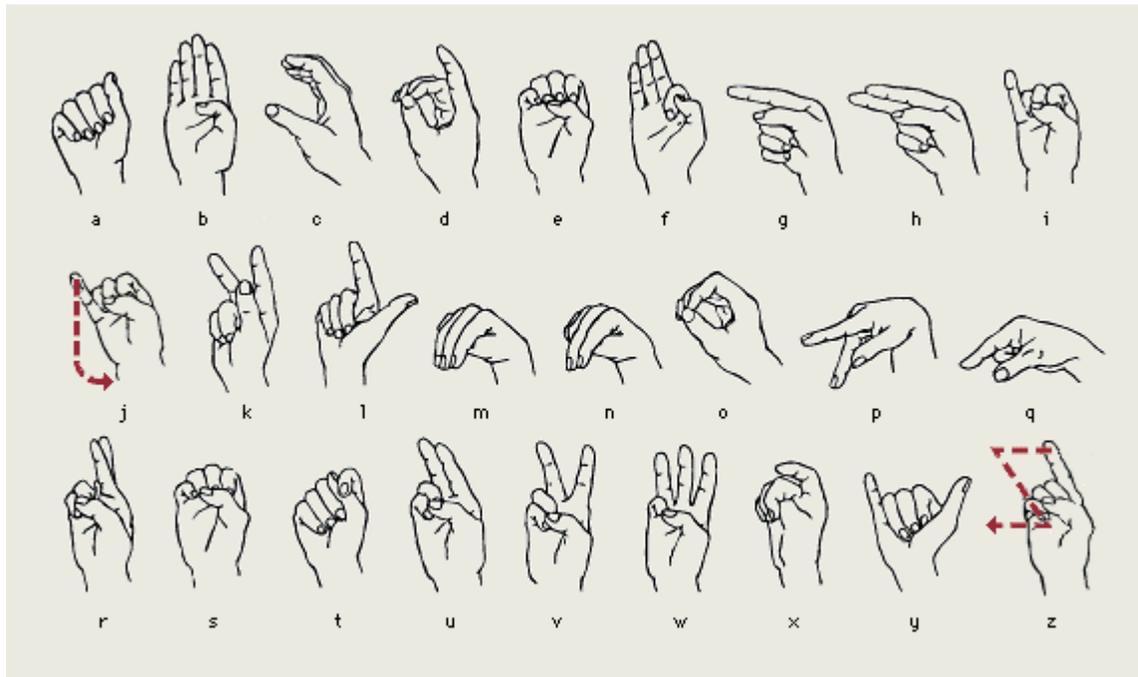
Grade 8: W.GN.08.01 Writing Genre: Students will write a cohesive narrative piece such as poetry, historical fiction, science fiction, or realistic fiction that includes appropriate conventions to genre employing literary and plot devices (e.g., narrator credibility, rising and falling actions and/or conflict, imagery and transitional language).

Arts Education Standards

Grades 4-12--Theater

- **1** Perform
- **2** Create
- **3** Analyze
- **4** Analyze in Context
- **5** Analyze and Make Connection

Handout #1 American Sign Language (ASL) Alphabet Chart and Excerpts from Reviews of the Broadway Production of *Spring Awakening*



Excerpts from Reviews of the Broadway Production of *Spring Awakening*

“Signing has been integrated here so deftly that you’re compelled to feel the language’s fluidity has a natural place in musical theater. It’s an example of the extreme care that’s been taken to make *Spring Awakening* a completely shared experience between deaf and hearing cultures.” *Washington Post*, September 27, 2015

“It almost goes without saying that the visual nature of ASL lends itself to this kind of theatrical impact, affecting even predominantly hearing reviewers...Even for deaf theatergoers accustomed to gathering meaning through visual language, the design elements of *Spring Awakening* create such an optically rich experience that audiences have no choice but to engage.” *The Atlantic*, October 18, 2015

“...the current relevance of ASL further enables *Spring Awakening* to bridge the divide between deaf and hearing worlds. The show’s critical success reflects some of the ways in which modern mainstream audiences are encountering ASL anew, but it also presents a vision of how culture can be simultaneously inclusive, revelatory, and thrilling, giving audiences a space to encounter both deaf and hearing experiences of the world.” *The Atlantic*, October 18, 2015

**Handout #2 Scene 2 – At Scrooge and Marley’s
Scrooge’s Nephew, Fred
Ebenezer Scrooge
Bob Cratchit**

(Fred enters as the others are exiting)

Fred:

A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!

Scrooge:

Bah! Humbug!

Fred:

Christmas a humbug, uncle? You don’t mean that, I am sure!

Scrooge:

I do. Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.

Fred:

Come then, what right have you to be dismal? You’re rich enough.

Scrooge:

Bah, humbug!

Fred:

Don’t be cross uncle.

Scrooge

What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this. Out upon Merry Christmas. If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with “Merry Christmas” on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.

Fred:

Uncle!

Scrooge:

Nephew, keep Christmas in your own way and let me keep it in mine. Good day.

Fred:

Keep it? But you don’t keep it. Come and dine with us tomorrow?

Scrooge:

I’d rather dine with the devil!

Fred:

But why uncle?

Scrooge:
Why did you marry against my will?

Fred:
Because I fell in love.

Scrooge:
Love. (*with a sneer*) Because you fell in love. Good day!

Fred:
I want nothing from you. And so I wish you Merry Christmas.

Scrooge:
Humbug!

Fred:
And a Happy New Year!

Scrooge:
(almost shouting) Good Afternoon!!

Fred
(pausing on his way out to collect his scarf/hat/or gloves from Bob Cratchit)
How are you Bob Cratchit?

Bob Cratchit
Very well sir, thank you.

Fred
And Mrs. Cratchit and all the young Cratchits?

Bob Cratchit
Well sir, thank you.

Fred
And how's the little lame boy? What is his name?

Bob Cratchit
Tim, sir. We hope he's getting stronger every day.

Fred
I hope so Bob. (they shake hands) A Merry Christmas to you!

Bob Cratchit
And to you sir.