

A Christmas Carol

The works of Dickens in their original form (even short stories like A Christmas Carol) are difficult for primary school children to read and comprehend (*I think they'd also challenge most adults*) but luckily there are plenty of publishers who have abridged versions of his work that can be read as serials (even picture story books) and enjoyed. (Usborne books, Ready Read, Fast Track Classics and others all available from books shops and online) There are also DVD versions of most of Dickens's best known works by the BBC and there are also some animated versions available.



A whole class to study A Christmas Carol (What better way to lead into Christmas) is a perfect way to study Christmas. This unit is ideal in a small school setting using a personalized learning approach to finish off the school year with a 'flourish of Dickens' and can also be used as a whole class teaching unit with the story read as a serial.

By T. Shaw

Charles Dickens

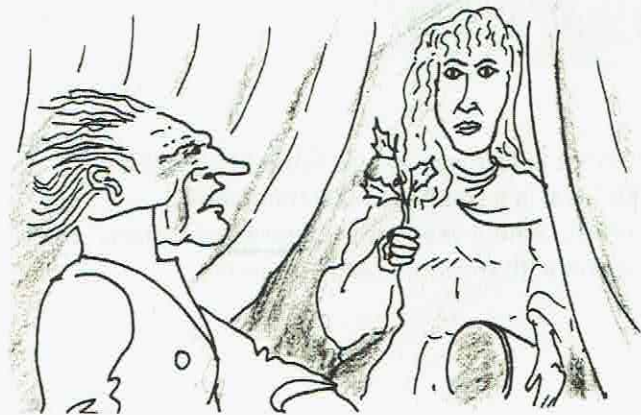
This unit is based on the works of Charles Dickens. Dickens was born into the embryonic working class of post Napoleonic England. Hard times saw his family imprisoned in Marshalsea and the young Dickens was sent out to work in a factory. He rose above these modest beginnings to become arguably the English language's most famous author and along with characters such as Brunel and Nightingale, one of the 19th centuries 'superstars'.

A Christmas Carol was written by Dickens as magazine fodder at Christmas time in 1843. *A Christmas Carol* is an exceptionally well crafted story. Dickens draws us into the events and makes us care about his wonderful characters. Although there have been many film versions of the story, the written word retains its special power. (It's probably my favourite book to read aloud.)

There are many typical Dickensian highlights in this short ghost story.

First, there is the Dickens' overall depiction of London. Even at Christmastime, London is a dark, cold and dirty place peopled with those left behind by the rise of industrial Britain. The fog is so thick that it creeps into buildings through keyholes and chinks in the doorways. It is so heavy that church steeples disappear into it. And this is not fog created by weather conditions. It is the industrial revolution at its most oppressive. The forces of power and industry are pressing the life out of the city.

Also note that everyone, everywhere in this city is cold. The businessmen who solicit Scrooge for a donation wish to provide the poor with a "means of warmth" in addition to food. Even Bob Cratchit wraps himself in a comforter because he cannot afford a great coat. But Scrooge seems quite comfortable and untroubled in this environment. As for the fog and the gloom, "Darkness was cheap," we are told "and Scrooge liked it." Consider also Scrooge's home. His is the only occupied flat in the building. Most people would find such a place lonely and desolate, but Scrooge feels at home there. And then there's the fact that it was once occupied by Jacob Marley. We are never told how Scrooge came to move in. How did Marley die?



Also consider some details about the appearance of Marley's ghost. Marley appears to Scrooge with a bandage tied around his head, holding his jaw in place. But at one point, Marley unties the bandage, allowing his jaw to freefall all the way to his breastbone. (This to

my knowledge has never been adequately portrayed on film but is a truly horrible image to conjure.) Before he leaves Scrooge, he ties the bandage again, snapping his teeth shut with an audible click. The effect is as chilling for the reader as it was for Scrooge. The most endearing aspect of the story is Ebenezer Scrooge's "conversion", Dickens does not intend Scrooge's awakening to be a promise for all covetous old sinners, but only a possibility to be individually hoped for." As with Oliver, there is always hope.

Dickens himself felt poverty and feelings of abandonment when he was a child. Because he was removed from school and sent to a boot-blackening factory. Dickens considered this period to be the most terrible time in his life. These feelings were unknown to his readers until after his death but these were a heavy influence on his views on social reform and the world he created through his fiction

perspective

An excellent site full of essays and quality Internet links
<http://42explore.com/dickens.htm>

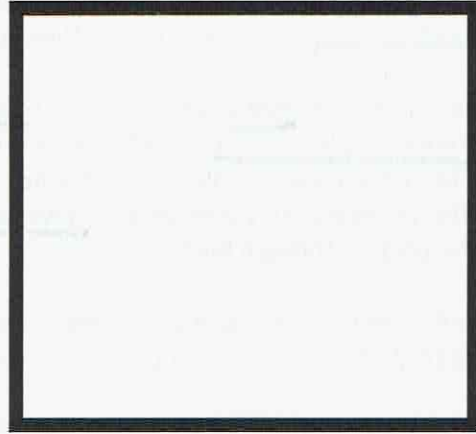
This unit would be enhanced by a visit to an historic Victorian era home and a study of a Victorian era Christmas (traditions brought to England at the time of A Christmas Carol by Prince Alfred from Germany). I have used abridged versions of this story for this unit as they are more accessible to young readers and I've also used an excellent BBC adaptation on DVD to help. 9There is also the recent animated movie, the 1960s musical called Scrooge, the adult comedy called Scrooged (I wouldn't show that to kids!) and even the Muppet version to bring Dickensian England to life for students.) There are many film versions featuring Disney characters and even Smurfs!(There are also some excellent iPad app versions of the story.)

T. Shaw



(Understanding)

Create a comic strip showing Scrooge's conversion. (Enlarge to A3 size)



Christmas Bells

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on Earth, good will to men

And thought how as the day had come
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on Earth, good will to men

And in despair I bowed my head
"There is no peace on Earth" I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on Earth, good will to men

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep
God is not dead nor does He sleep
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on Earth, good will to men.