

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE'S  
**45<sup>TH</sup>**  
**SEASON**  
MRT.ORG

**STUDY  
GUIDE**



**A  
CHRISTMAS  
CAROL**

BY **CHARLES DICKENS**    ADAPTED AND DIRECTED BY **COURTNEY SALE**

STUDY GUIDE BY **ALLISON BACKUS**

DESIGNED BY **EMILY BOYER**

**NOVEMBER 29-DECEMBER 24**



MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE  
WWW.MRT.ORG | 978.654.4678



PRESENTS

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BY  
**CHARLES DICKENS**

ADAPTED AND DIRECTED BY  
**COURTNEY SALE<sup>+</sup>**

FEATURING | ADULT CAST  
**ALEXIS BRONKOVIC\***  
**TOM COINER\***  
**KAREN MACDONALD\***  
**CHRIS THORN\***  
**KRISTIN YANCY\***

FEATURING | YOUTH CAST | GREEN  
**ELLIE BRANCO**  
**BROGAN W. ROURKE**  
**SHAYLA ROURKE**  
**CAMERON STRAKER**  
**VIVIAN STRAKER**

FEATURING | YOUTH CAST | RED  
**NATHAN ICART**  
**ZOLIVIA NASTASIA**  
**SKYLER ROY**  
**AUDREY MARIE WENTWORTH**  
**MAGGIE WILSON**

SCENIC DESIGNER  
**SHELLEY BARISH**

COSTUME DESIGNER  
**BECCA JEWETT**

LIGHTING DESIGNER  
**BRIAN LILIENTHAL<sup>^</sup>**

SOUND DESIGNER  
**ROB WITMER<sup>^</sup>**

MUSIC DIRECTOR  
**KAREN OSTER**

STAGE MANAGER  
**SUSAN L. HUDSPETH\***

DIRECTED BY  
**COURTNEY SALE<sup>+</sup>**

### ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

Jordan E. Moore\* ..... Assistant Stage Manager  
Amanda Davis ..... Production Assistant  
Ally MacLean ..... Youth Cast Supervisor  
David Hochoy ..... Choreography

**NOVEMBER 29-DECEMBER 24, 2023**

**WWW.MRT.ORG/CHRISTMASCAROL**

FOR THE FULL A CHRISTMAS CAROL PROGRAM WHICH INCLUDES  
COMPREHENSIVE SHOW CREDITS, CAST AND CREW BIOS, AND MORE!



\*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.



<sup>+</sup>Member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, a national theatrical labor union.



<sup>^</sup>The Scenic, Costume, Lighting, and Sound Designers in this production are represented by United Scenic Artists (USA) Local USA-829, IATSE.



Merrimack Repertory Theatre is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre.



Merrimack Repertory Theatre operates under agreements between the League of Resident Theatres (LORT), a consortium of regional theatres throughout the nation, and AEA (Actors' Equity Association), SDC (Stage Directors and Choreographers Society), and USA (United Scenic Artists).

### INTERVIEWS

#### GRADES 4-12

Theatre Arts – *Responding*  
F.T.R.07, F.T.R.08, A.T.R.08, A.T.R.09  
English Language Arts – *Reading Literature*  
RL.7

### ACTIVITY: BAH! HUMBUG!

#### GRADES 1-8

Comprehensive Health – *Physical Health*  
CH.PH.02.01, CH.PH.02.02, CH.PH.02.07,  
CH.PH.02.15  
English Language Arts – *Speaking and Listening*  
SL.PK-12.2

### ACTIVITY: TABLEUX

#### GRADES 4-12

Theatre Arts – *Creating*  
F.T.Cr.01  
English Language Arts – *Reading Literature, Speaking and Listening*  
RL.3, SL. 2

### ACTIVITY: DEAR DIARY

#### GRADES 4-12

English Language Arts – *Writing, Speaking and Listening*  
W.1, W.2, W.3, W.10, SL.1, SL.4

### THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION | VICTORIAN BRITAIN

#### GRADES 9-12

History and Social Sciences I – *US History I, World History II*  
USI.T3.02, WHII.T2.01, WHII.T2.02,  
WHII.T2.04, WHII.T2.05, WHII.T3.02  
English Language Arts – *Writing*  
W.7, W.8, W.10, WCA.7, WCA.8

### CHARLES DICKENS: BIOGRAPHY | DICKENS, SCROOGE, AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE

#### GRADES 6-12

English Language Arts – *Speaking and Listening, Writing*  
SL.1, SLCA.1, WCA.1, W.1, W.2, W.7, W.8, W.9

### AMERICAN NOTES: DICKENS IN LOWELL

#### GRADES 6-12

English Language Arts – *Reading Informational Text*  
RI.6, RI.9  
History and Social Sciences – *US History I, World History II*  
USI.T3.02, USI.T6.02, WHII.T2.01,  
WHII.T2.02, WHII.T2.04

### LIFE IN THE LOWELL MILLS | REMEMBERING THE LOWELL MILL GIRLS

#### GRADES 6-12

English Language Arts – *Reading Informational Text*  
RI.6, RI.9

### ACTIVITY: MILL GIRL LETTER WRITING

#### GRADES 6-10

English Language Arts – *Writing, Reading Informational Text*  
W.2, W.3, W.10, WCA.1, WCA.2, WCA.10, RI.6,  
RI.9

### FROM THE LOWELL OFFERING: "LEAVES NO.2"

#### GRADES 6-12

English Language Arts – *Reading, Reading Literature, Speaking and Listening, Language*  
R.9, RL.9, SLCA.1, L.4, L.6

### PROJECT: 2022/2023 LOWELL OFFERING

#### GRADES 4-12

English Language Arts – *Writing, Language*  
W.2, W.3, W.10, WCA.1, WCA.10, L.9,  
Media and Visual Arts – *Connecting, Creating*  
MA.Co.10, MA.Co.11, MA.Cr.01, V.Cr.01,  
V.Cr.02

### TIMELINE

#### GRADES 6-12

History and Social Sciences I – *US History I, World History II*  
USI.T3.02, WHII.T2.01, WHII.T2.02,  
WHII.T2.04, WHII.T2.05, WHII.T3.02





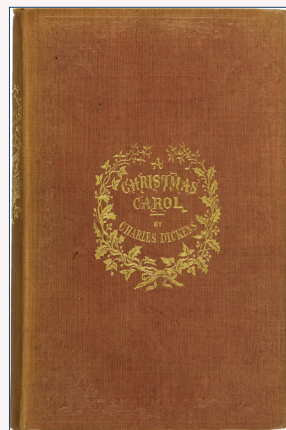
# SYNOPSIS



IT IS 1842, and English novelist Charles Dickens explains that he has just begun his tour of America. Beginning in Boston, Dickens tells the audience that he will visit Lowell before leaving New England. He visits the Lowell Mills and visits with many of the female mill workers. The women share their writing – poetry, short fiction, and essays – with Dickens, who is mesmerized by the heart and beauty

these stories possess. He tells the audience that their writing inspired his famous novella, *A Christmas Carol*.

With the placement of a top hat, Dickens becomes Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserable man despite



A CHRISTMAS CAROL BY CHARLES DICKENS. CLOTH FIRST EDITION COVER (1843). | WIKIPEDIA

his financial success as a businessman. The townspeople explain that Scrooge’s business partner, Jacob Marley, has died, leaving Scrooge to run his financial business alone, with the exception of the overworked and underpaid Bob Cratchit, who serves as Scrooge’s clerk. Scrooge is visited by his nephew, Fred, who wishes him a Merry Christmas and asks Scrooge to join him for Christmas dinner. Scrooge declines, calling Christmas an inconvenience and a waste of time. After Fred exits, the Sisters of Mercy enter, asking Scrooge for a donation for the poor. Scrooge refuses to give a cent – saying that the prisons and workhouses see to the poor well enough. The Sisters of Mercy leave.

With the next day being Christmas, Bob Cratchit asks for his one day off a

year. Scrooge grudgingly gives him the day. Scrooge has dinner alone and returns to his house. Before opening the door, Scrooge sees the face of Jacob Marley in his door knocker. Perturbed, Scrooge locks up his valuables and then bolts the door to his home. Shortly thereafter the ghost of Marley enters. Bound in chains, Marley tells Scrooge that in death, he must “wear the chain” he “forged in life;” because he was cruel, selfish and monetary-minded; his afterlife is filled with regret and unrest. He warns Scrooge that his fate will be the same if he does not change his ways. Marley explains that he will be visited by three spirits and then, disappears.

Scrooge is awakened by the Ghost of Christmas Past, who takes Scrooge to revisit the days of his youth. There, we see a young, lonely Scrooge in a school house. His beloved sister, Fan enters. She tells him that their father has become kinder with age, and that Scrooge must come home for Christmas. Scrooge is reminded of his nephew Fred, the only child of Fan, who died young. Next, the spirit takes him to a Christmas party held by Fezziwig, who Scrooge apprenticed under as a young man. Fezziwig was a jolly man who cared deeply for his employees. At the party, the young Scrooge dances with his sweetheart, Belle, but the scene

quickly changes. Belle tells Scrooge, now her fiancée, that a “golden idol” had replaced her in his heart. She tells him that his fear of the world has caused him to care only for money. She breaks off their engagement, leaving him alone. The Ghost of Christmas Past returns Scrooge to his bed.

Scrooge is awoken again, this time by the Ghost of Christmas Present, who leads him to the current home of his poor clerk, Bob Cratchit. There, Scrooge witnesses Mrs. Cratchit and her children eagerly await Bob’s arrival home. Although they are poor, the Cratchits take pleasure in each other’s company and in celebrating the Christmas season. Bob enters with his youngest child, Tiny Tim, a kind and thoughtful boy with a disability. The spirit then takes Scrooge to his nephew’s home, where Fred is entertaining guests. Fred admits that he pities his uncle and toasts to him, wishing him a Merry Christmas, wherever he is. Scrooge is once again returned home.

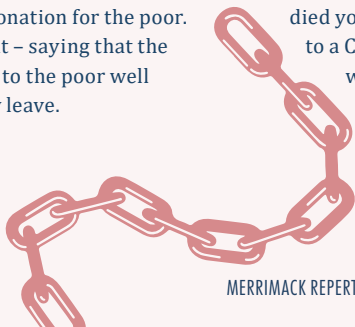
Finally, Scrooge is visited by the silent and frightening Ghost of Christmas Future. Together they visit a future where Scrooge has recently died. Two businessmen joke that no one will attend his funeral. Elsewhere, a laundress and a boy work to gather the late Scrooge’s things in order to pawn them for money. The spirit then takes him to Bob Cratchit’s home where the family mourns the loss of Tiny Tim, who has died. Bob comes



THE GHOST OF MARLEY VISITS SCROOGE. ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN LEECH (PUBLIC DOMAIN).

home, telling his family that Fred has offered his condolences. He is soon wracked with grief. Last, the Ghost of Christmas Future takes Scrooge to the cemetery, where he is presented with his own grave. Scrooge falls to ground, begging for a second chance, swearing that he is “not the man” he once was.

He awakens at home, gleeful and giddy to be alive. He rushes to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and hires a boy to deliver the fattest roast turkey to the Cratchits for Christmas supper. He gives generously to the Sisters of Mercy and even joins Fred for a Christmas celebration. When he greets Bob Cratchit the next morning, he raises his salary and promises to help look after and provide for his family. Scrooge keeps his word, and becomes like a “second father” to Tiny Tim, who does not die. As a changed man, Ebenezer Scrooge goes on to be a beloved neighbor and friend, a joyful man who imbues the Christmas spirit year-round.





# FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT & DIRECTOR: AN INTERVIEW WITH COURTNEY SALE

Courtney Sale is the Artistic Director at Merrimack Repertory Theater. Her new adaption of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* pays homage to the Mill Girls who inspired Dickens' on his visit to Lowell.



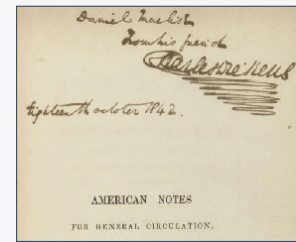
## WHAT WAS YOUR INTRODUCTION TO A CHRISTMAS CAROL?

My first interaction with this story was the George C. Scott film version which, as a child, I found incredibly bleak. I remember feeling deep sadness in Scrooge's past about how neglected and unloved he was as a boy. The starkness of that reality impacted me as a young person. It was hard for me to shake off that loneliness and surrender to the rest of the story. Of course, as I grew up, spent more time in the theatre, and experience different iterations, I've come to really treasure the journey of transformation. Scrooge's renewal can be our renewal through the witnessing and sharing of the story. Redemption from past wrongs just doesn't go out of style.

## WHAT WAS YOUR WRITING PROCESS LIKE? HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT ADAPTING THE ORIGINAL STORY?

When we were planning this season, we knew we wanted to produce a version that would feature local young talent, would give a special nod to Dickens' time in Lowell, and would call upon a fiercely talented small group of actors to tell this story. Our literal stage is not very big and one of the perimeters I love about making theatre in Liberty Hall is you often can't solve theatrical problems with more stuff or more people. There isn't enough room. The adaptation needed to possess those three ingredients, and it simply didn't exist!

Because I have directed the show multiple times in other venues, I had a very strong hunch of how I wanted the show to move and thus took on the task of adapting. The process actually started in April when I was out of the office with COVID. I had blocked off writing time for the spring, but in my COVID fatigue, I was able to put together a first draft from my bed in one week. In many ways, I felt like Scrooge in a fever dream trying to write my way to feeling better. Writing is really rewriting. Since that time, I've gone through several drafts and hosted an in-house staff reading which was amazing. It's wonderful to build a production with everyone's fingerprints who



TITLE PAGE INSCRIBED BY THE AUTHOR TO ILLUSTRATOR "DANIEL MACLISE FROM HIS FRIEND CHARLES DICKENS, EIGHTEENTH OCTOBER 1842", ONE DAY PRIOR TO ITS OFFICIAL PUBLICATION.

**WHEN WE WERE PLANNING THIS SEASON, WE KNEW WE WANTED TO PRODUCE A VERSION THAT WOULD FEATURE LOCAL YOUNG TALENT**

works at MRT on the final product.

## WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE DICKENS AND LOWELL CONNECTION?

This version of *A Christmas Carol* starts with Dickens' visit to Lowell. He chronicles this life changing trip in his travelogue, *American Notes*. There is a lot of scholarship and study about how the writing of the mill girls influenced Dickens and how similar themes from the women's publications show up in *A Christmas Carol*. One of the aspects I love that Dickens highlights is how new Lowell feels. There's a great line we've kept in the play; "When I see a baby of ten days old in a woman's arms at a street corner, I find myself wondering where it came from: never supposing for an instant that it could have been born in such a young town as this." The sense of curiosity and aliveness jumps out at me. Ultimately, that is what Scrooge finds at the end of the play and to read it in the resonances of our city is deeply inspiring.



## WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

The many hats I am wearing on this production to be sure! As the Artistic Director/director/adaptor, I have to hold this prismatic approach to the big picture, while also being able to answer small details, questions about what a particular prop should look like. It requires some mental gymnastics. I am very up for this challenge for *A Christmas Carol* because of my relationship and history with the story.



FROM SCROOGE, HERSELF:

# AN INTERVIEW WITH KAREN MACDONALD

## WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST INTRODUCTION TO THIS STORY?

I don't recall exactly, but it was probably my mom reading some version of it to me or seeing it on TV around the holidays. It was certainly a part of Christmas every year.

## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT COME WITH ACTING IN SUCH A WELL-KNOWN STORY?

People have certain expectations of how they see Scrooge. And with so many productions and films out there, I need to make the character my own. But I think that using Dickens' text as a guide, will

lead me to my own "Scrooge." Over the years, many productions have put their own spin on this story, and MRT will do just that. I love that Courtney's script includes some of the details of Dickens' trip to Lowell. It personalizes the story for the audience. It is clear that the encounter with the mill girls inspired Dickens to write this tale. And this production will have local actors and music and will be a reflection of the city we are performing in. A celebration for all.

[INCLUDING SOME OF THE DETAILS OF DICKENS' TRIP TO LOWELL] PERSONALIZES THE STORY FOR THE AUDIENCE.

causes him to act as he does? What are his flaws? Does the possibility of redemption exist for him? Where is his humanity? Can he be saved? Did he ever know joy, love? Taking all these threads and weaving them into a living, breathing person is the challenge, the fun, the thrill of being an actor. And with Courtney's guidance and collaboration, I hope we will create our own distinctive Scrooge.

## IS THERE ANY OTHER DICKENS CHARACTER YOU WOULD LIKE TO PLAY?

Miss Havisham, from *Great Expectations*, please!

## WHY IS THIS STORY SO BELOVED? WHY DO YOU THINK IT'S

### STILL SO POPULAR?

It is a story of redemption, of hope. I think of Christmastime as a time of renewal and joy and family and friends. Scrooge has shut down and denied himself access to that joy, and it's heartwarming to see the cracking open of one human heart. The light pouring in and the possibility of a changed life is still a message that resonates.



A LONG BRICK BOARDINGHOUSE WITH WORKERS (LOWELL MILL GIRLS) POSED OUTSIDE | NPS.GOV

## WHAT'S YOUR PROCESS LIKE FOR GETTING INTO CHARACTER?

I will be reading the Dickens text often as I learn the script. Looking at images of the character through the years is also very helpful. It will be fun to play with physicality and to immerse myself in the mind of Scrooge. What

## ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY **BAH! HUMBUG!**

ACTIVITY **TABLEAUX**

ACTIVITY **DEAR DIARY**

SEE PAGES 26-28 FOR ACTIVITY DETAILS & INSTRUCTIONS



# THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION | HISTORY.COM

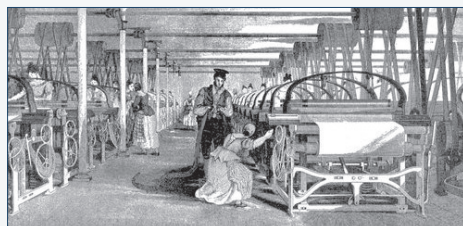
British economic historian and social reformer Arnold Toynbee coined the term “Industrial Revolution” to describe the period in Britain between 1760 and 1840. This era was marked by significant economic growth that sprang from new technological advancements that revolutionized industry, transportation, and communication.

Thanks to numerous inventions that utilized steam and water power, basic hand production methods were gradually replaced with fast and efficient machines. These machines revolutionized the textile industry in particular, drastically increasing the production of fabric, thread, and yarn for clothing, upholstery, and bedding. John Kay’s invention of the flying shuttle allowed a single weaver to create thicker fabric at a faster rate without a need for extra hands. Lewis Paul and John Watt mechanized the spinning of yarn and thread with the spinning frame, which was later adapted by Richard Arkwright to create the first water frame, or water-powered, cotton-spinning machinery.

Overtime, wooden machines gave way to metal ones, largely thanks to John Bessemer, who became the first person to mass-produce steel. The Bessemer converter successfully removed

carbon and other impurities from molten pig iron, creating up to five tons of steel in as little as 20 minutes. The mass production of steel allowed for

**TRAVEL BECAME EASIER AND FASTER, AND PRODUCTION DRASTICALLY INCREASED.**



A ROBERTS LOOM IN A WEAVING SHED IN 1835 | WIKIPEDIA

stronger factory machinery as well as stronger boats, buildings, and bridges.

Steam power similarly replaced water power, allowing for factories to be built anywhere, not just close to a water source. Steam engines also revolutionized transportation with the innovations of steamboats, canals, railroads, and later, the first locomotives. Travel became easier and faster, and production drastically increased.

The unprecedented increase in output of goods led to a high demand, which in turn spurred re-settlement and population growth. Factories filled with workers as people left rural Britain for manufacturing jobs in industrial cities like London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool. While those in the middle and upper-classes enjoyed higher standards of living, the lower classes dwelled in overpopulated

and unsanitary neighborhoods and worked unbearably long hours in often dangerous factory environments.

Social and income inequality were only the beginning of the issues exacerbated by industrial growth. With few government regulations, there was a drastic increase in air, soil, and water pollution.

The American and British economies also became more reliant on slave labor; even though parliament abolished slavery in Britain in 1833, the country continued to benefit from the slave labor in the United States, importing American cotton, tobacco, and sugar. Despite its official statement of neutrality regarding the American Civil War, many British arms companies and financiers provided the Confederate Army with weapons and ammunition in exchange for exported cotton.

In the overpopulated industrial cities of Britain, a high demand for workers led to an increase in child labor, causing children to abandon their education in order to earn income for their struggling families. Unsanitary conditions and overpopulation caused diseases like tuberculosis, cholera, influenza, small pox, and typhus to spread throughout the country. Constant hunger and malnutrition plagued the

**SOCIAL AND INCOME INEQUALITY WERE ONLY THE BEGINNING OF THE ISSUES EXACERBATED BY INDUSTRIAL GROWTH**

underpaid and undervalued workers, who were largely responsible for Britain’s status as the world’s greatest commercial power.

As the first great industrial power,

Britain paved the way for industrialization across the rest of world. The innovation and discovery during this period shaped the Victorian Era socially, economically, and politically, and these changes reverberated throughout the world, shaping and modernizing

nations on every continent.

The suffering of the working classes eventually gave rise to trade unionism, despite the British government’s efforts to stifle and criminalize the organization of labor unions. By the turn of the 20th century, working conditions, health, sanitation, and education began to improve the lives of the men, women, and children who made up the British work force. Women heavily dominated the mill workforces, becoming more financially independent. This increase in working women eventually led to the suffragette movements in Britain and beyond.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How did the social structure of Britain change during (and after) the Industrial Revolution? Write a research paper exploring how the lower, middle, OR upper classes changed.
2. Why were health and sanitation made worse by the Industrial Revolution? Explore how and why the cholera, tuberculosis, OR typhus epidemic emerged during this time.
3. How did the invention of new textile machinery change manufacturing during (and after) the Industrial Revolution? Reference three textile machines and how they changed the textile industry.
4. How did the role of women change during (and after) the Industrial Revolution?
5. What caused the rise of trade unionism? Explore the causes and effects of labor unions and the British laws that tried to stifle them.
6. Explain how the Bessemer Converter revolutionized manufacturing, travel, OR architecture.



INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: SPINNING ROOM | BRITANNICA



# VICTORIAN ENGLAND

WILLIAM POWELL FRITH (1819-1909), ENGRAVED BY FRANCIS HOLL (1866) THE RAILWAY STATION (1862), ORIGINAL OIL ON CANVAS, THIS PRINT MIXED MEDIA ENGRAVING ON WOVE, FINISHED WITH HAND COLOURING, 66 X 123 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION. | WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**The Victorian Era lasted from 1820-1914**, roughly corresponding with Queen Victoria's reign as Queen of England. During this time, England was among the most powerful nations in the world. With a booming economy, industrial advancements, and a large empire that reached across Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania, Britain held enormous political power. At the start of the Victorian Era, Britain controlled a population of 61,157,433 people, and by the end of the 19th century, that number had grown to 449,223,000 people: at the height of its imperial power, Britain controlled almost a quarter of the world's population.

Controlling such a sizeable empire meant Britain had access to valuable exports from all around the globe: cotton and tea from India and Asia; sugar, salt, cacao and fruit from the Americas; and gold, diamonds, rubber, coal, and palm oil from Africa. With access to an abundance of valuable natural resources, manufacturing and industry flourished. By 1840, Britain was the wealthiest nation in the world.

Considered the world's first great industrial power, Britain produced massive amounts of coal, iron and steel, leading to technical advancements in factory parts, locomotives, and architecture. The industrial growth saw many people leave the countryside for cities like London, Liverpool, and Manchester, and by the end of the era, more than 75% of the British population resided in large cities.

Despite the abundance of industry and resources, the Victorian era was rife with wealth inequality. As people poured into the cities, poverty, illness, famine and overpopulation thrived. Many people worked in mills and factories, docks and mines, where wages were low, hours were long, and working conditions were dangerous. Men, women, and children could work up to 18 hours a day, and those who became unemployed were subject to workhouses or debtors prisons. Some government acts in the 1830s made working

conditions slightly better, but trade unions weren't fully decriminalized until 1871, leaving the poor working class with little political power. Struggling to afford housing and food, many families were forced to send their children off to work in factories and mills. Education for children under 10 wasn't mandated by law until the end of the 19th century.

While the impoverished struggled, the growing middle class began to enjoy the luxury of goods and services previously only afforded by the wealthy elite. They employed domestic servants and decorated their homes with novelties from across Britain: glassware from Liverpool, silverware from Birmingham, and pottery from Staffordshire. Middle and upper-class women wore new, richly colored fabrics and dresses, thanks to those who toiled in the mills, and upper classes enjoyed the luxury of goods and services provided by the lower classes.



FIGURE 1: A 1859 PORTRAIT OF QUEEN VICTORIA BY FRANZ XAVER WINTERHALTER

Despite the great disparities between classes, the Victorian Era did provide entertainment for both the wealthy and the poor. Theatres, libraries, museums, and music halls sprung up in major cities and towns, and sports like rugby, cricket, croquet, and tennis were hugely popular. Literature also became more widely available, and many novels were released serially in newspapers and magazines, allowing even the poor to have access to the works of many great writers like Charles Dickens, Willkie Collins, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy, and Robert Louis Stevenson.



**Charles Dickens was born in 1812, in Hampshire, England.** Dickens was born as the second son in a large middle class family. As a boy, Dickens and his family moved to London where his father worked as a clerk. However, Dickens' father was often extravagant with his money, leading the family into debt and social embarrassment.

In 1824, when Dickens was only 12 years old, his father was sent to debtor's prison, and Dickens and his elder brother were forced to leave school to help support the family. Dickens worked 10 hours a day at a blacking warehouse, where he pasted labels onto containers of shoe polish. These long and arduous days in the warehouse exposed the young Dickens to the harsh realities of child labor and working class life, as well as the embarrassments and struggles that came with poverty.

When Dickens' father's debts were paid, Dickens was allowed to return to school. He remained at an all-boys school until 1827, when he began work as a junior clerk at a law firm. Dickens' literary career began in 1833, when he began writing essays and short stories for magazines and newspapers under the pseudonym "Boz." With the popularity of these short pieces, Dickens was then asked to write a serial to accompany the illustrations and caricatures of Richard Seymour. Published as *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens first novel was an enormous success: witty and heartfelt, *The Pickwick Papers* contained a large swath of colorful characters that charmed and engaged English readers of all backgrounds.

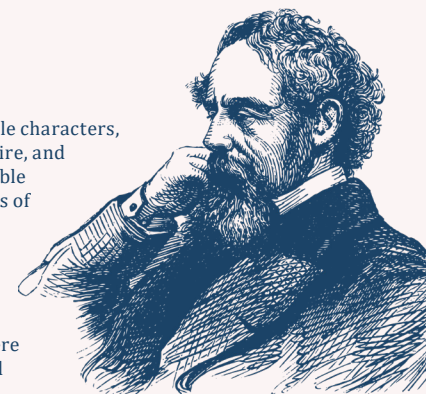
In a literary career that spanned almost 40 years, Charles Dickens became known for his

# CHARLES DICKENS: BIOGRAPHY

(L) A PORTRAIT OF CHARLES DICKENS PAINTED BY FRANCIS ALEXANDER IN 1842. | IMAGE BY JAMES T. FIELDS COLLECTION

memorable characters, social satire, and his relatable depictions of English life. Nearly all of Dickens' works were published serially; chapters were published one at a time in weekly installments featured in magazines and newspapers. Because of this, Dickens' work was readily accessible and widely read – people wanting to read Dickens' stories didn't have to pay for an expensive leather bound book, they only had to pay for their daily newspaper. Serial publishing also allowed Dickens to gauge the response of his readers and craft characters and plotlines based on their feedback.

Heavily influenced by his time as a child warehouse worker, Dickens frequently wrote about the grim and dangerous realities of working class life in industrial London. Despite the tragic elements of some of his plots, Dickens' work was also largely sentimental. Heroes and heroines, after lengthy struggles and misfortunes, often found love and fortune and happiness. Among Dickens most famous works are *A Christmas Carol*, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *Bleak House*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Still widely read today, Charles Dickens is considered one of the most prolific and popular English writers from the Victorian Era.



# CHARLES DICKENS AS A SOCIAL CRITIC

**THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE**, Charles Dickens was an outspoken advocate of social reforms. He argued in favor of bettering the housing and sanitation of poor communities and supported the mandatory education of children. Having worked in a factory as a child, Dickens was also critical of the working conditions faced by men, women, and children throughout Britain. He viewed the greed and ignorance of the upper classes as dangerous hindrances to British society and often used his novels to highlight and critique the social inequalities and injustices that existed within everyday Victorian Britain. *A Christmas Carol* is rife with such social critiques.

Dickens' biographer and literary critic, Edgar Johnson notes that the character of Ebenezer Scrooge functions as a critique of Victorian economic behavior. "With the growing importance of commerce in the eighteenth century, and of industry in the nineteenth," writes Johnson, "political economists rationalized the spirit of ruthless greed into a system claiming authority throughout society." With manufacturing booming and a growing middle class, monetary gain — no

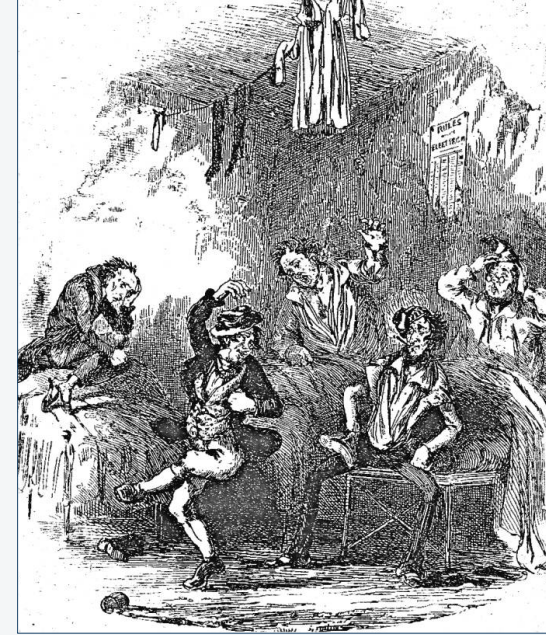
matter the cost — was often viewed as being of the utmost importance. Scrooge, Johnson writes, embodies the concept of the "economic man;" a rational, unemotional business person whose every action is driven by a desire for financial gain. Indeed, Scrooge's actions seem solely driven by his desire to accumulate more wealth: he underpays Bob Cratchit and begrudgingly allows him only one day off. He keeps his office bitterly cold so as not to waste money on heat, and he is unwilling to give any money or resources to the poor. While Scrooge can adequately be described as financially successful, his success comes at a high cost: he lives in miserable isolation with no meaningful human connections.

Furthering Dickens' critique of society is his utilization of the "Christmas spirit." Dickens' portrays the Christmas spirit as being less about religiosity and more about man's humanity to his fellow man. Highlighting the benevolence and good will that exist around the Christmas season, Dickens calls to attention the greed and selfishness that exist in society every season but Christmas. Just as Dickens is deeply critical of the "economic man," he is similarly critical of being charitable only at Christmas time. The purpose of human life, Dickens suggests, goes far beyond financial gain, which can easily corrupt and warp our more altruist habits of charity and kindness. Practicing goodwill only during the Christmas season, does not undo the injustice and selfish disregard perpetuated the rest of the year. To solidify this message, Dickens' makes clear that Scrooge's rehabilitation is permanent, that he is a changed man, that he imbues — as everyone should — the Christmas spirit all twelve months of the year.

EXAMPLE OF ONE OF DICKENS'S DARKER VISIONS IN PHIZ'S ILLUSTRATIONS, WHICH DICKENS CLOSELY SUPERVISED: A SCENE IN DEBTOR'S PRISON: MR. PICKWICK SITS FOR HIS PORTRAIT. | VICTORIANWEB.ORG



ONE EXAMPLE OF DICKENS'S IDEAL WORLD AND ONE OF HIS DARKER VISIONS IN PHIZ'S ILLUSTRATIONS, WHICH DICKENS CLOSELY SUPERVISED: (L) CHRISTMAS EVE AT MR. WARDLE'S. TWO SCENES IN DEBTOR'S PRISON (SEE PG. 14) AND (R) THE WARDEN'S ROOM. | VICTORIANWEB.ORG



## DISCUSS

1. Dickens believed that some people were irredeemable, once writing that, "some insensible and callous natures, that do become *utterly and incurably bad*." He continued: "whether every gentler human feeling is dead within such bosoms, or the proper chord to strike has rusted and is hard to find, I do not pretend to know; but the fact is as I state it, I am sure." Scrooge is not such a person, for Dickens' shows him to be capable of changing his ways. How often do you think such drastic changes happen? How much can people really change? What helps them to change?
2. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's time with the Ghost of Christmas Past shows readers and audiences that he was not always the greedy and cruel person we see at the beginning of the tale. Why did he become so miserable and mean? What hints are we given about his childhood and adolescence that might explain his change into greedy curmudgeon?
3. Do you think Scrooge was always destined to become corrupted by greed? Is this greed specific to him, or do you think others in the story are similarly susceptible to becoming greedy and cruel? Could Bob Cratchit ever become a Scrooge? Could Tiny Tim?

## ESSAY PROMPTS

1. How does *A Christmas Carol* serve as a social critique? What does Dickens suggest should be done for the betterment of society?
2. What does *A Christmas Carol* reveal about Dickens' own beliefs regarding human nature? What does the character of Scrooge suggest about human nature? What about Bob Cratchit? Jacob Marley?
3. Which character, aside from Scrooge and Marley, do you think is most likely to fall into the same traps of selfishness and greed? Who might become an "economic man"? Why? Use examples from the story to help your argument.



# TIMELINE | US EVENTS

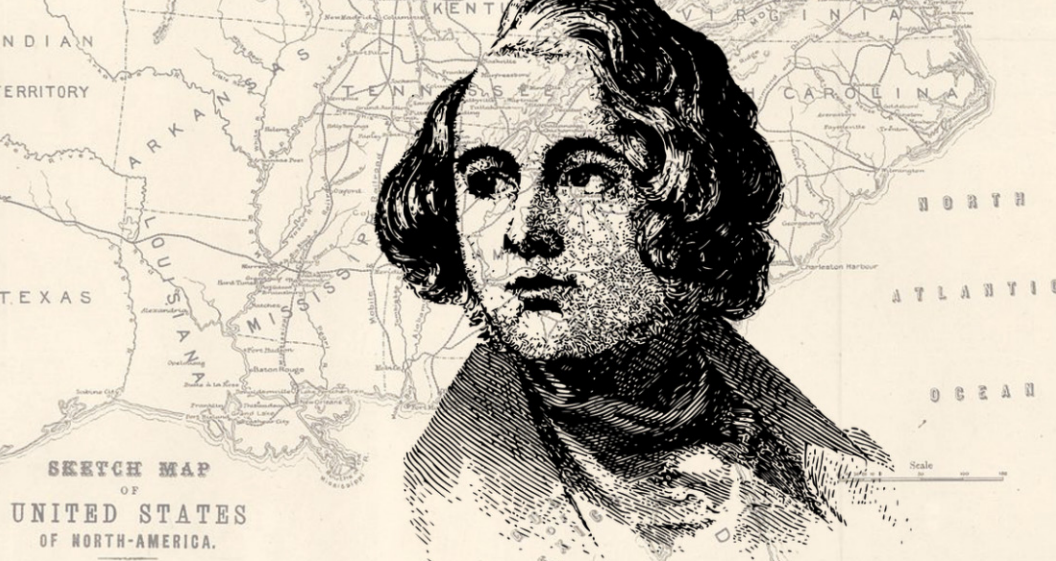
## EARLY 1700s

EARLY 1700s	Lowell, then a part of Chelmsford, establishes its first gristmill and a fulling mill.	
1776	The United States declares itself independent from British rule, starting the Revolutionary War.	1776
1783	The Revolutionary War ends.	1783
1787	The first cotton mill in America opens in Beverly, Massachusetts.	1787
1807	The United States enacts the Embargo Act, cutting off all imports from Great Britain and forcing American merchants to purchase goods from inside the US.	1807
1811	American merchant, Francis Cabot Lowell tours mills in Britain, memorizes the design of the power loom, and remanufactures it in the United States	1811
1823	The Merrimack Manufacturing Company is founded.	1823
1826	Lowell is chartered as a town separate from Chelmsford, with a population of 2,500.	1826
1831	Massachusetts native Eli Whitney invents the Cotton Gin, a device that removes the seeds from the cotton plant, allowing for faster and easier picking and production.	1831
1834	The first Mill Girls Strike in Lowell: Female workers strike after their wages are decreased. The strike is unsuccessful.	1834
1835	Boston and Lowell Railroad is established, as is Boott Cotton Mills.	1835
1836	Lowell becomes a city. Following the Mill Board of Directors' decision to heavily increase the cost of rent, the "Mill Girls" strike a second time. This time their demands are met.	1836
1839	Massachusetts Mills and Whitney Mills open in Lowell.	1839
1840	The first <i>Lowell Offering</i> is published. The population of Lowell nears 21,000.	1840
1842	Charles Dickens visits Lowell on his American tour and publishes <i>American Notes</i> upon his return to England.	1842
1845	The Lowell Female Labor Reform Association is founded. (The woman officers actioned for reforms, set up Association branches in other towns, advocated with working class male-led unions, and hosted social gatherings.)	1845
1848	President Lincoln visits Lowell.	1848
1850	Lowell produces a total of 50,000 miles of cloth per year, making it the most productive industrial city in the United States. With a population of 33,000, it is the second largest city in Massachusetts.	1850
1860	Abraham Lincoln is elected as the 16 <sup>th</sup> president of the United States.	1860
1861	The American Civil War begins	1861
1862	The United States begins construction on a transcontinental railroad, seeking to connect the East and West coasts.	1862
1863	President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation.	1863
1865	The American Civil War ends. Five days later, President Lincoln is assassinated by John Wilkes Booth.	1865
1867	The Reconstruction Act is passed, beginning the "Radical Reconstruction Era." Southern States were governed by United States military governors. In order to be readmitted to the Union, southern states had to ratify the 14 <sup>th</sup> amendment, and allow all men, regardless of race, the right to vote.	1867
1877	The Compromise of 1877 brings Reconstruction to an end.	1877

# TIMELINE | BRITISH EVENTS

## LATE 1700s

	In England, the Industrial Revolution spurs the invention of the first steam engine, the cotton-spinning mill, the power loom, and the spinning mule, all of which revolutionize industry, transportation, and mass production.	LATE 1700s
1799	In England, the Combination Acts make it illegal for industry workers to unionize.	1799
1811	In Britain, the Luddite Rebellion begins. Opposed to new technology and fearing an eventual end of human work, Luddites smash and destroy factories and machinery.	1811
1812	Charles Dickens is born. Parliament passes a law making the destruction of factory machinery punishable by death.	1812
1833	Dicken's literary career takes off when he begins submitting short articles and stories under the pseudonym "Boz." The 1833 Factory Act provides the first regulations regarding child labor in Britain.	1833
1837	Queen Victoria becomes Queen of England at the age of 18. Charles Dickens publishes his second novel, <i>Oliver Twist</i> , which is released in installments. <i>Oliver Twist</i> tells the story of an orphan boy growing up on the streets of London and the colorful characters he meets.	1837
1838	Slavery is abolished in the United Kingdom.	1838
1843	Dickens publishes his novella, <i>A Christmas Carol</i> .	1843
1845	The Irish Potato Famine begins.	1845
1848	The National Health act is passed in an effort to keep water clean and free of waste. The General Board of Health is established in order to investigate and regulate sanitary conditions.	1848
1849	Dickens publishes his eighth and favorite novel, <i>David Copperfield</i> , in instalments.	1849
1856	Henry Bessemer develops a new process for manufacturing steel from iron, revolutionizing metal and architectural industries and leading to the building of larger buildings, bridges, boats, and trains.	1856
1860	Dickens publishes <i>Great Expectations</i> , a novel about a poor boy with hopes of becoming a Gentleman.	1860
1863	The opening of the London Underground, the first underground railway in the world.	1863
1870	Foster's Education Act makes education mandatory for all children ages 5-10. Charles Dickens dies at the age of 58.	1870
1871	The Trade Union Act is passed, allowing trade unions to be recognized as legal organizations entitled to legal protection.	1871
1875	Striking and picketing is legalized in Britain.	1875



# AMERICAN NOTES DICKENS IN LOWELL

BLOG.TCEA.ORG | HOW CHARLES  
DICKENS SAW AMERICA

In 1842, Charles Dickens travelled to the United States on a four-month tour. Already a literary giant, Dickens hoped to find writing inspiration in America. He took extensive notes while abroad, and upon his return to London, he published his findings in a travelogue titled *American Notes*. In *American Notes*, Dickens recounted his visits to Boston, Lowell, New York, Richmond, Washington D.C., Louisville, and St. Louis. A strong proponent of social reform, Dickens visited a number of American institutions in the hopes of comparing them to the English institutions he knew so well. He wrote extensively on the conditions of American prisons and workhouses, schools and hospitals.

Dickens' found a number of things he disliked in America. Chiefly among them was slavery, which horrified him, and which he condemned in the latter part of his travelogue. Dickens also felt that Americans were more distrustful, violent, uneducated, and more commercially minded than the English. Indeed, today, *American Notes* is best known for its critiques of American society, not its compliments.

However, Dickens' time abroad was not entirely a disappointment. He recalled his time in Massachusetts with great fondness, writing how he loved the history, cheerfulness, and brightly-colored houses of Boston, Worcester, and Lowell.

Above all, though, Dickens was deeply impressed by the "public institutions and charities" he found in the Bay State, which he believed vastly surpassed the schools, prisons, asylums and hospitals in his home country. He wrote:

**"I SINCERELY BELIEVE THAT THE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND CHARITIES OF THIS CAPITAL OF MASSACHUSETTS ARE AS NEARLY PERFECT, AS THE MOST CONSIDERATE WISDOM, BENEVOLENCE, AND HUMANITY, CAN MAKE THEM. I NEVER IN MY LIFE WAS MORE AFFECTED BY THE CONTEMPLATION OF HAPPINESS, UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES OF PRIVATION AND BEREAVEMENT, THAN IN MY VISITS TO THESE ESTABLISHMENTS."**

Dickens spent only one day in the industrial town of Lowell, which he described as a "large, populous, thriving place." He visited a number of mills, including a carpet factory, a cotton factory, and a woolen factory. He was deeply impressed by the working conditions of these factories, which differed, he wrote, from the harsh and brutal conditions in the English factories of Manchester and London. He described the factories in Lowell as being well lit and well-aired, with green plants perched in the windows. The factories, he said, also contained designated places where the workers could leave their belongings, as well as designated places for washing.

Dickens was charmed by the young female workers, who he found to be healthy, clean, well mannered, and well dressed in "serviceable bonnets, good warm cloaks, and shawls." These women seemed largely happy in their work, and Dickens wrote that, "from all the factories" he toured, he could not "recall or separate one young face" that gave him "a painful impression."

Most of the young women working in these factories lived in respectable boarding houses many of which contained both pianos and libraries for the enjoyment of the women during non-working hours. What impressed Dickens the most however, was *The Lowell Offering* - "A repository of original articles, written exclusively by females actively employed in the mills." Dickens left Lowell with "four-hundred good pages" of the *Lowell Offering*, which he read thoroughly from "beginning to end." While many of the mill workers were not overly educated, Dickens was deeply impressed by the stories and essays he read. Dickens wrote that rather than tales of fine clothes, fine houses, and advantageous marriages, the women writers preferred to tell "tales of the mills and those who work in them." These stories often contained morals that taught "good doctrines" and "benevolence." *The Lowell Offering* also inspired "strong feelings" towards the beauties of nature, friendship, and solitude, and these feelings "breathed through its pages like wholesome village air."

The first edition of *The Lowell Offering* was published in 1840, organized by the Unitarian minister, Reverend Abel Charles Thomas, who had become the minister of the Second Church

**...THE WOMEN WRITERS [TOLD] "TALES OF THE MILLS AND THOSE WHO WORK IN THEM." THESE STORIES OFTEN CONTAINED MORALS THAT TAUGHT "GOOD DOCTRINES" AND "BENEVOLENCE."**

in Lowell the previous year. Thomas and other Lowell ministers expressed concern for the young women working in the mills. Most were away from their homes and families and navigating work and financial independence for the first time. In many Lowell churches, mill workers had begun "Improvement Circles," discussion groups where the women shared their experiences and their writing. Thomas and his fellow Unitarian minister, Thomas Thayer, saw these circles as an opportunity to enrich the lives of the mill workers, while simultaneously easing the minds of critics who disapproved of women working and living independently.

To encourage the women, Thomas and Thayer encouraged these groups and offered to edit and publish the women's stories, poems, music, and essays. Subtitled "a Repository of Original Articles written by Females Employed in the Mills," Thomas claimed the periodical to be the first in the country written solely by women.

*The Offering* was an enormous success, with loyal readers throughout New England. After two years, Thomas stepped down as editor, and the publication was run solely by the writers themselves until the last issue was published in 1845.

By the mid 1840s, *The Lowell Offering* faced harsher critics who believed that the periodical served as a mouthpiece for the mill owners, who often overworked and underpaid their female employees. Nevertheless, *The Offering* brought attention and acclaim to the new class of working women who populated mills in towns like Lowell. The writing found in the periodical was often witty and heartfelt, and the stories portrayed both the difficulties of mill work and the value of female independence and friendship. Even today, the work in *The Lowell Offering* seems deeply human. The periodical paints a beautiful and complex portrait of the joys and sorrows of working class girlhood and womanhood in 19<sup>th</sup> century Lowell.

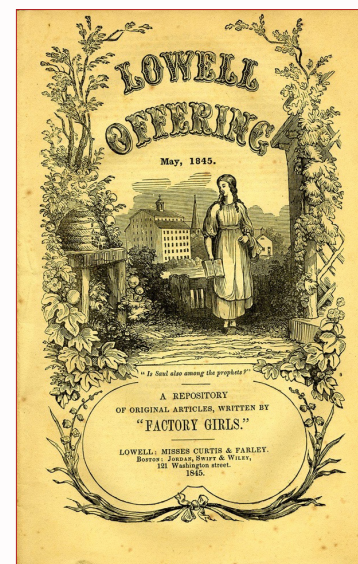


FIGURE 3: A 1845 EDITION OF THE LOWELL OFFERING.

# “LEAVES NO.2” FROM THE LOWELL OFFERING

The following excerpt is from a story written for *The Lowell Offering* in 1841. Written the year before Dickens’ visit to Lowell, it is likely that this particular story was among the 400 pages he mentions reading in *American Notes*. The short story is titled “Leaves No. 2: From the Portfolio of a Dreamer” and written under the pseudonym “Isabella.” In the story, a young, wealthy, and well-traveled woman falls asleep at a happy gathering, only to awaken and find herself withered and old. The personification of Time visits her, telling her she has wasted her time on earth by being selfish and uncaring. Read the excerpt below:

## LEAVES NO. 2: FROM THE PORTFOLIO OF A DREAMER

...While I was yet admiring this **assemblage** of beauty and grace, a bright figure flitted by me, to join the happy group. I turned to look after it, and in so doing presented myself before a large mirror. But oh! what a change had a few hours **wrought!** My dark hair, that had been the theme of general admiration, had become silvered, and hung in **disheveled** masses upon my shoulders; my form was bent, and my complexion, that had blended in delicate proportions the lily and the rose, presented a sallow hue; my teeth too had decayed and fallen out; and my nose and chin were rapidly approximating to each other.

I looked and wondered! Surely, thought I, *some magician has transformed me into the figure of old age.* Almost in anger, I threw myself upon an ottoman, and endeavored to forget myself in sleep. But scarcely was I seated, ere a **fiendish** looking form entered the banqueting hall unannounced. In his hand he held an hour-glass, and he drew his mantle more closely about him. But none noticed his approach, and he made his way to the place where I was reclining. His brow was wrinkled, and a horrible smile rested on his **countenance** as he motioned me to follow him.

It was not until we had entered a **bower** of myrtle and jessamine, that the truth flashed upon my mind, that Time had come with

his glass and sickle; and a shudder ran through my frame, at the thought that I must die. The thought of death’s cold embrace sent a thrill of agony to the heart, that nearly stopped the **languid** pulse of age.

We seated ourselves on a green, mossy bank; he then broke the silence, and it seemed as if his voice came from the very depths of **pandemonium**—it was so husky and hollow. He thus addressed me:

“Mortal! your sands

are almost run. Can you look back upon a life well spent? What is the world better for your having lived in it? And with all your wealth, have you ever made the heart of the widow and the orphan glad? You have never exerted yourself to contribute ought to the happiness of others; you thought it **sufficient** to say you had unbounded wealth to secure your entrance into the society of the great and good; but you will soon go where gold will not be the criterion by which you will be judged. The sand runs low,” he continued; “have you naught to say, before a farewell look is taken of this beautiful earth?”

“Oh yes,” I

exclaimed. “I would ask if there is no such thing as giving youth to the aged? Nay, I will not ask for youth nor for the flowers of life, if you will but add a few more to the many years I have already spent. I will not live for my own selfish enjoyments; but, I

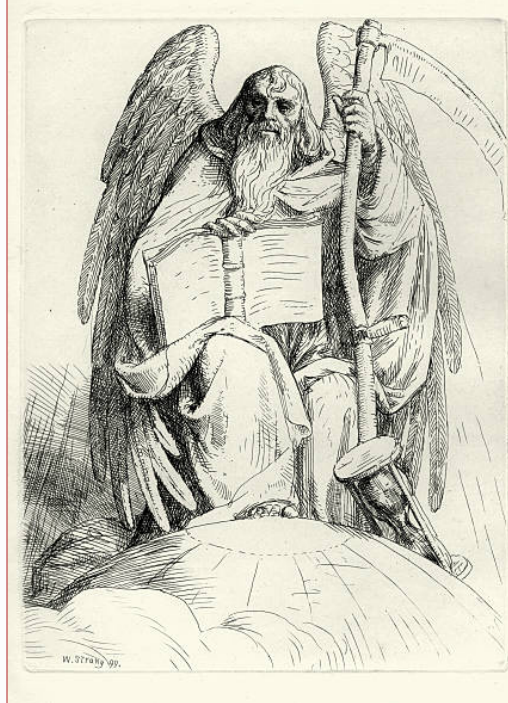


FIGURE 5: A DEPICTION OF TIME WITH A SCYTHE AND HOUR GLASS

will go about doing good. Alas! why did I not **commence** in the hey-day of my life?”

“I can tell you,” said Time; “it was because it required a little **exertion** on your own part. You thought if you did not do it, someone else would; and then the thought would intrude itself upon your mind, that you were rich, and none would dare question your merit.” He continued, in a decided tone, “Go, and hereafter do better.” These were the last words that fell on my eager ear—for the cold dew of death started from my forehead, and the most **excruciating** pain that was ever **inflicted** upon mortal frame, passed over mine. It drained my very life’s blood!

Then all was calm again, and I saw bright spirit forms gliding around me. All was still there, for it seemed to be the land of the blessed. I awoke, and found my mother trying to place in my hand a beautiful rose that she had brought from a neighboring garden. I told her my dream of joy and sorrow. And she said, “My child, let your future life be so blended with love and goodness, that Time will not have to **admonish** you to do better; and may it be said of you when you have reached your journey’s end, that you improved. And I would have you bear in remembrance those beautiful lines of the poet—

‘Count that day lost, whose low descending sun,  
Views from thy hand no worthy action done.’”

“Isabella,” 1841, Vol.

## DISCUSS

1. What similarities do you notice between “Leaves No.2” and *A Christmas Carol*? Characters? Plot? Language? Imagery?
2. Compare and contrast Scrooge and the unnamed protagonist in Isabella’s story.
3. In “Leaves No.2,” Time is holding an hourglass and a scythe (a long sharp instrument that used to be used to cut grass). What do you think these items symbolize?
4. Why do you think Isabella chose to personify Time? How affective is personification as a literary device? Can you think of other examples of personification?

## WRITE

1. Examine the bolded words in the text. Define these words and use each of them in a sentence.
2. The protagonist in “Leaves No. 2” is visited by the personification of Time (the concept of time in human form). Think of the spirits in *A Christmas Carol*. Are these spirits personifications? What might they represent beyond simply past/present/future? Think of how they act, what they say, what they wear, and what they show Scrooge. Write a short essay/journal entry arguing what you think one of the spirits symbolizes, and why.
3. In the last lines of “Leaves No.2,” the protagonist’s mother recites lines from a poem by the writer, George Eliot. What do these lines mean? Do you agree? Can the meaning of these lines be applied to *A Christmas Carol*? Why or why not? Use references to the play to support your answer.



# THE LOWELL OFFERING 2022-2023

Keep the memory of *The Lowell Offering* alive! As a class, have students compile poems, essays, sketches, and stories for their own *Lowell Offering*. These submissions can simply be a collection of what students are most proud to have written over the course of the year, or students can submit writing designed specifically for this purpose.

This project is an opportunity for students to take pride in their writing and their community, and to share their hard work with family and friends. Class time for peer-reviewing is strongly encouraged for students to give and receive feedback and learn how to be excellent editors as well as writers.

## IDEAS TO CONSIDER

- Reflections, personal essays, poems, or raps about the natural world, friendship, work, literature, family, or school.
- Depictions of daily life in contemporary Lowell.
- Black-out poems created from Dickens' writing and the writing of the Mill Girls (various volumes of the *Lowell Offering* are available digitally for free at Internet Archive).
- Short story adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* or stories from the *Lowell Offering*.
- Diary entries, interviews, or letters from the perspectives of the Mill Girls or characters from *A Christmas Carol*.
- Drawings or comics depicting Lowell life and architecture.

## FUNDING PROVIDED, IN PART, BY

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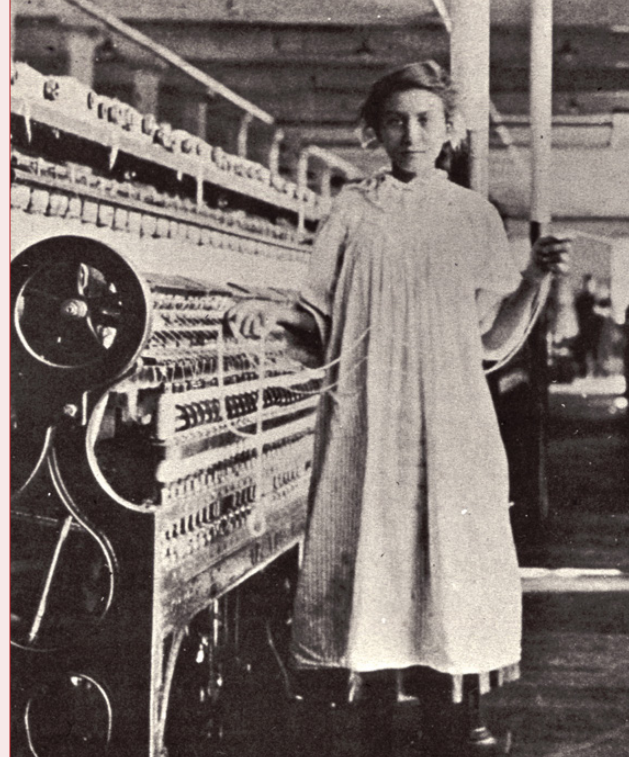
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# LIFE IN THE LOWELL MILLS

LIFE AS A "MILL GIRL" IN LOWELL, MA | RESOURCES.SUN-ASSOCIATES.COM

**Charles Dickens's was deeply impressed with the conditions of the mills he toured in Lowell. Was Dickens' depiction of Lowell in *American Notes* an accurate one? What was life really like for the mill girls of Lowell?**

It may be that life for industry workers in Lowell was better than life for industry workers in Britain, but this doesn't mean that the life of a working mill girl was an easy one. Most mill workers were woman and girls between the ages of 12 and 35. These women toiled up to 12-14 hours a day in the mills, where they worked eighty to a room operating looms and other machinery. Despite Dickens' cheery account of Lowell working conditions, some women painted a different picture: hot, stifling rooms with poor air quality and the impossibly loud noises of the machinery. In 1846, a mill girl named Julianna, wrote to a Lowell newspaper in an effort to paint a more realistic picture of mill life, one that contrasted with what Dickens and other tourists had witnessed:

**"THOSE WHO WRITE SO EFFUSIVELY ABOUT THE 'BEAUTIES OF FACTORY LIFE,' TELL US THAT WE ARE INDEED HAPPY CREATURES, AND HOW TRULY GRATEFUL AND HUMBLY SUBMISSIVE**

**WE SHOULD BE...PIANOS, TEACHERS OF MUSIC, EVENING SCHOOLS, LECTURES, LIBRARIES AND ALL THESE SORTS OF ADVANTAGES ARE, SAYS HE, ENJOYED BY THE OPERATIVES. (QUERY—WHEN DO THEY FIND TIME FOR ALL OR ANY OF THESE? WHEN EXHAUSTED NATURE DEMANDS REPOSE?)...WE WHO WORK IN THE FACTORY KNOW THE SOBER REALITY TO BE QUITE ANOTHER THING ALTOGETHER."**

Julianna went on to describe industry in America as a "deep festering rotten system." A system, she wrote, that would rather "swallow up the laboring classes in dependent servitude and serfdom" than help workers achieve fairer wages and better lives.

Despite being overworked, the Lowell mill girls were a force to be reckoned with. In 1834, women working in the mills went on strike after their wages were drastically cut. The greater public failed to support the protesters, and the strike was unsuccessful in raising pay. However, two years later in 1836, mill workers went on strike again when the Mill Board of Directors

years later, the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (FLFRA) was founded. The association worked towards work-place reform, set up union branches in other New England towns, advocated for workers' rights with male-led unions, and hosted social gatherings.

While many of the Lowell Mill Girls worked for a short number of years (often before marriage), their time as working women left a lasting mark. Thanks to the FLFRA, many women gained experience in leading and organizing, and many went on to become suffragettes and abolitionists. Other women were shaped by being writers and readers of *The Lowell Offering*, going on to become writers, teachers, and editors.



FIGURE 4: A SKETCH OF MILL WORKERS IN LOWELL.

decided to heavily increase the cost of rent. This strike attracted over 1,500 working women, and, unlike the strike two years prior, this protest had popular support. After weeks of dangerously low output, the Board of Governors was forced to give in to demands and not rise the cost of living. Almost ten

IMAGE (BELOW) SOURCE: (TEENAGEFILM.COM) VIA HISTORYDAILY.ORG



**ACTIVITY**  
**MILL GIRL**  
**LETTER WRITING**

SEE PAGES 28-29 FOR ACTIVITY  
DETAILS & INSTRUCTIONS

**Harriot F. Curtis** was originally from Vermont, but moved to Lowell in 1837 to work as a harness knitter at Lawrence Manufacturing Company. Harriot joined Harriet Farley as co-editor of *The Lowell Offering* in 1843. Harriot enjoyed great professional success when she began working as an editor for the *Lowell Weekly* newspaper in 1854. Such success was rare for women during this time, and Harriot often used her platform to write about the inequalities facing working women.

**Harriet Hanson Robinson** was born in Boston where her father was a carpenter and her mother ran a small shop. In 1836, Harriet began working part-time at Tremont Mills where she was a bobbin doffer. She participated in the 1836 strike and recounted it in her autobiography, *Loom and Spindle*, writing how she led a group of women on strike by being the first to leave her post. Recalling with fondness the comradery of her fellow working women, Harriet wrote that she was "more proud" than she had ever been when she saw the "long line" of women that followed her out of the mill. "I was more proud than I have ever been since at any success I may have achieved," she continued, "and more proud than I shall ever be again until my own beloved State gives to its women citizens the right of suffrage." Harriet wrote stories and poetry for *The Lowell Offering*. In 1848, Harriet married the newspaper editor William Stevens Robinson, who was impressed with her writing.

## REMEMBERING THE WOMEN AND GIRLS OF THE LOWELL MILLS

**Lucy Larcom** began working as a Mill Girl at the young age of 11 along with her siblings, and her mother worked as supervisor at a local boardinghouse. Lucy worked as a mill girl for ten years, and her last two years were spent bookkeeping. In her free time, Lucy was an avid reader and academic, and she studied grammar, literature, and arithmetic. She published many poems and articles for *The Lowell Offering*, and became close friends with the poet and abolitionist, John Greenleaf Whittier. After her time in Lowell, Larcom moved west and taught in the prairie of Illinois for a number of years before settling back in Massachusetts where she taught rhetoric, literature, composition, and science at the Wheaton Female Seminary. She wrote poetry throughout her life, and she was published in the *Atlantic*, *Sartain's Magazine*, and *The Independent*.

**Lydia Sears Hall** arrived in Lowell from Maine around 1838. She used the pseudonym "Adelaide" to write poems and short stories for *The Lowell Offering* and the *Operative's Magazine*. She was well known and respected for her poems, "The Tomb of Washington" and "Old Ironsides," both of which were reproduced for other publications. Lydia went on to teach in Lowell and in a Choctaw school in Kansas. When the Civil War began in 1861, she moved to Washington D.C., where she worked as both a nurse and an inventor.

**Sarah Bagley** was born and raised in rural New Hampshire. In 1937, Sarah came to Lowell and began working as a weaver in the Hamilton Manufacturing Company. Bagley wrote for *The Lowell Offering* and was best known for her 1840 essay, "The Pleasures of Factory Work," where she countered many of the arguments made by critics of the working mill girls. However, Sarah's view of factory life became critical as conditions worsened and manufacturers demanded faster work and larger output. She became the first president of the LFLRA, advocating for 10-hour workdays and women's rights. Bagley also served as editor and writer for the magazine the *Voice of Industry*, where she publicly criticized *The Lowell Offering* as being a publication in service of corporations and not workers.

**Eliza Jane Cate** was born and raised in New Hampshire, and worked at a cotton mill there before moving to Lowell. Eliza wrote many pieces for *The Lowell Offering* under various pseudonyms including "E.J.D." and "Franklin, NH," and "Jennie." She went on to write essays and fiction for other women's publications, and she successfully published eight books during her lifetime. Her best known work is *Lights and Shadows of Factory Life*, short fictional stories following the lives of women working in the mills.

**Betsey Guppy Chamberlain** came to Lowell in the early 1830s with her three children. She worked as a textile worker and a boardinghouse keeper, and wrote over 30 works of prose for *The Lowell Offering* between 1840 and 1843. A woman of both English and Algonkian descent, much of Betsey's stories were folktales that advocated for better treatment of indigenous Americans. In *Loom and Spindle*, Harriet Hanson Robinson recalled Betsey's writing as being among the "most original, the most prolific, and the most noted of all the early story-writers."

**Harriet Farley** grew up in a large impoverished family in New Hampshire. After working as a schoolteacher, Harriet came to Lowell at the age of 25 to work in the textile mills. She wrote articles and editorials for *The Lowell Offering* and served as its editor from 1842-1845. While Harriet sought to keep *The Offering* itself apolitical, she herself was an ardent abolitionist, joining the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. In 1847, Harriet began the publication, the *New England Offering*, which sought to address social and labor reform more than *the Lowell Offering* had. She married an inventor named John Intaglio Donlevy in 1854.

## BAH! HAMBUG!

### WHAT IT IS

A fun vocal and movement warm up, helpful in getting students to move around, this game helps to teach quick listening and responding, encourages instruction-following, and gets kids thinking about how to show character traits and physicality.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Standing at the head of the classroom, explain to the student that you'll be yelling out a series of names and phrases. Each name/phrase has an attached action/movement that they're to do as soon as they hear it. Begin with 3-4 commands, and add more as you go. For older students, allow volunteers to take turns standing at the head of the class and give commands.

### POSSIBLE COMMANDS

Dickens: Students pretend to write, thoughtfully.

Scrooge: Students put their hands on their hips, make a mean face and shout, "Bah! Humbug!"

Benevolence: Students (gently) clasp each other on the shoulder and smile.

Goodwill: Students hug their bodies and sway back and forth.

Charity: Students find a partner (or two) and mime exchanging small gifts.

Fred: Students tip an invisible top hat and jovially say "Merry Christmas, Uncle!"

Fezziwig: Students link arms with a partner (or two) and jig about.

Belle: Students brush away tears and say "Goodbye, Ebenezer."

Tiny Tim: Students crouch down, smile and say "Bless us, everyone!"

Jacob Marley: Students put their hands to their brows and wail.

Turkey Feast: Students pair up. One student is a turkey and puts their elbows out like wings. The other, as Scrooge, points and says, "It's twice the size of Tiny Tim!"

Mrs. Cratchit's Pudding: Students shake their bodies like they're Jell-O/pudding.

At the Grave: Students fall to their knees and say "I'm not the man I was!"

Ghost of Christmas Past: Students hold out their hands and say, "rise and walk with me."

Ghost of Christmas Present: Students dramatically touch an item of their clothing and say, "place your hand upon my robe."

Ghost of Christmas Future: Students point ominously with straight faces.

Good Morning: Students yawn and stretch like Scrooge waking up and then shout "yippee!" "woo-hoo," etc.

## TABLEUX

### WHAT IT IS

Dramatic Tableaux are a classic theatre exercise designed to help students create a poignant stage picture. In a tableau, students are arranged, frozen and silent, in dramatic poses that give a clear illustration of what is happening in the scene. As a theatre exercise, Tableaux help students understand what makes an interesting and evocative stage picture. However, as an English classroom game, Tableaux can help students understand story structure and moments of climax in a given text. Skills to be learned include: creative expression, leadership, collaboration, and narrative and emotional comprehension.

## TABLEUX (CONT.)

### INSTRUCTIONS

Organize a list of dramatic moments from *A Christmas Carol*. These can be printed on slips or simply be a reference list. Take volunteers from the class (between 3-7 students). Explain that a tableau is a frozen, silent stage picture that is meant to clearly show what is happening in a given moment in time. To demonstrate the activity, act as "director," and organize/instruct the student volunteers on how they should pose their bodies and facial expressions. When you are content with the picture, have the students "freeze" and hold it for 10 seconds. Call up another group of volunteers, this time casting one student as the "director" to cast and direct their peers in a new scene. Continue on.

### POSSIBLE TABLEUX

**Scrooge at Work on Christmas Eve** | "Bah Humbug!"

**Fred asks Uncle Scrooge to Christmas. He declines.** | "Nephew. Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

**Sisters of Mercy implore Scrooge to give to those in need.** | "I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry."

**Scrooge meets the ghost of Marley.** | "I wear the chain I forged in life."

**Fan collects a young Ebenezer from school.** | "You are never to come back here. We are to be together all the Christmas long and have the merriest time in all the world."

**Fezziwig's Dancing Christmas Party** | "And in came a fiddler with a music-book, and all the people employed in the business!"

**Belle breaks off her engagement to a young Ebenezer.** | "You fear the world too much. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one. You care more about money than anyone or anything. Is it not true?"

**At home with the Cratchits** | "God bless us every one!"

**Scrooge meets the last spirit.** | "Ghost of the Future, I fear you more than any specter I have seen."

**In the future, the brokers and the laundresses mock Scrooge's death.** | "It's likely to be a very cheap funeral, for upon my life I don't know of anybody to go to it."

**In the future, the Cratchits watch Bob return home, and they mourn Tiny Tim.** | "But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother."

**Scrooge is presented with his grave by the last Spirit.** | "Spirit! Hear me! I am not the man I was!"

**Scrooge awakens on Christmas day.** | "A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Hallo here! Whoop!"

**Scrooge enlist the help of a young boy to deliver a Christmas turkey to the Cratchits.** | "It's twice the size of Tiny Tim!"

**Scrooge wishes a shocked Bob a Merry Christmas.** | "A Merry Christmas, Bob! A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you, for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavor to assist your struggling family."

## DEAR DIARY

### WHAT IT IS

A creative writing exercise designed to help students consider narrative voice, character development, and plot development.

*DEAR DIARY instructions continued on next page*

## DEAR DIARY (CONT.)

### INSTRUCTIONS

Begin with a class discussion about the characters in *A Christmas Carol*, how they change (personality, fortune, etc.). Based on the discussion questions, students will pick one character and write two diary entries from their point of view: One diary entry from before their change, and one after.

Examples include: An entry written from the perspective of Belle when she is happy and in love, and an entry written after she has had her heart broken by young Ebenezer; An entry from the perspective of the overworked and underpaid Bob Cratchit, and an entry after Scrooge promises to help him look after his family, pay him more, etc.; An entry from Fred after he has been rebuffed by his Uncle, and an entry after his Uncle arrives for Christmas dinner.

Encourage students to consider character traits, and to make explicit references to major events from the play. To add a performance element, have students read one of their entries as a fun, dramatic monologue for the class.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How does Scrooge change in *A Christmas Carol*? What is he like at the start of the story versus the end?
2. What about Jacob Marley? What was he like when he was alive? What is he like as a spirit?
3. How does the fortune of Bob Cratchit change? What is his life like at the start of the story? What does the epilogue tell us about his future?
4. What about Belle? How does her fortune change?
5. How does the plot affect the other characters? Fred? Tiny Tim? Fan? What changes do they undergo? What changes *around* them? How do these changes affect them?

## MILL GIRL WRITING

### WHAT IT IS

A creative writing and research exercise. Historical letter writing is a fun and creative way for students to practice both research and creative writing. Skills learned include historical research, formal writing practice, character voice, and narrative development.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Have students read letters from the Lowell Mill Girls. [Persis Edwards' April 1839 letter](#), [Emmeline Larcom's 1840 letter](#), and [Mary Paul's December 1845 letter](#) are all excellent examples.

After students have read the letters (in groups, individually, "popcorn" reading, etc.),

## MILL GIRL WRITING (CONT.)

### INSTRUCTIONS (CONT.)

have students do some research on what life was like for the Mill Girls. [The National Park Service](#) page, [The Gilder Lehrman Institute](#) page, [The AFL-CIO](#) page, and [The Bill of Rights Institute](#) page are good places to start.

After students have done some research on what life was like for the mill girls of the 1800s, have them craft a character and write a letter as that character using as much of their research as they can. They can write either as a mill girl, or the friend/relative of a mill girl. Topics for students to write about include: working conditions, *The Lowell Offering*, the boarding houses, holidays, family, friends, strikes, and social gatherings. Encourage students to make their letters descriptive and personal (i.e. not a simple regurgitation of facts.)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES | BIBLIOGRAPHY

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