

# arena's page

student study guide

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## the play

This version of the Charles Dickens classic takes place in Washington, D.C. after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. **Elijah Strube** is a greedy business owner, taking advantage of his employees and using the war to increase his profits. One night, he is visited by his deceased business partner, **Jack Marley**, who warns him against greed and dishonesty. To save his partner from the pain and torment he suffers in the afterlife, **Marley** sends the statues **Victory**, **Freedom** and **Grief** to show Elijah scenes from Christmases in his past, present and future. Can they show him the error of his ways?

- ▣ **Attack on Pearl Harbor**— On December 7, 1941, the Japanese army launched a surprise attack on the U.S. Naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. More than 2,300 people were killed, and the United States entered World War II soon after.



*"The new year 1942 will call for the courage and the resolution of old and young to help to win a world struggle in order that we may preserve all we hold dear."* —President Franklin Delano Roosevelt

## CHRISTMAS CAROL 1941

Now Playing in the Fichandler  
November 16 – December 30, 2007  
Adapted from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*  
by James Magruder  
original songs: music by Henry Krieger, lyrics by Susan Birkenhead  
directed by Molly Smith



## MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



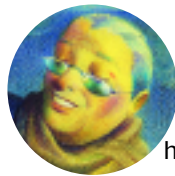
**James Magruder**

In eighth grade, James Magruder went to a nearby high school to see the spring musical, *Bye Bye, Birdie*. Magruder said, "As I watched the kids singing 'The Telephone Song,' my hair went up on end and I said to myself, I want to be a part of that."

Magruder has successfully created a career in theater. He has his PhD from the Yale School of Drama. He has been a dramaturg – like an editor and researcher for playwrights and directors – at Center Stage in Baltimore. He has also translated and adapted several plays for the stage.

In this adaptation, Magruder weaves imagination and the personal history of his family with the classic *A Christmas Carol* story and the history of Washington, D.C. in 1941. He said, "A *Christmas Carol* is a story of sacrifice and redemption – 1941 in Washington, D.C. was a time of sacrifice and redemption in this nation."

# CHARACTERS AT A GLANCE



## **Elijah Strube,**

the Scrooge-like character, is a selfish D.C. businessman, who cares more for profits than his fellow man or country.

## **Henry Schroen,**

the Bob Cratchitt character, is Elijah's poor clerk, who supports his family with his extraordinarily fast typing.

## **Margarette Schroen**

is Henry's wife, who represents the can-do attitude of women during World War II.

## **Butch Schroen**

is Henry's son who wants to join the army, but is too young.

## **Carolyn Schroen**

is Henry's elementary school aged daughter, who adores her older brother and does her part for the war effort by collecting money for Polish orphans.



## **Albert Schroen**

is Henry's brother who fought in World War I and marched for his bonus (see Bonus March). He hasn't spoken since returning from the war.



**Activity:** Traditionally in *A Christmas Carol*, Bob Cratchitt has a son named *Tiny Tim*, who is ill but still symbolizes the true spirit of Christmas. Which character is *Tiny Tim* in this adaptation? Why? What does he or she symbolize?

## THE PLAYWRIGHT'S INSPIRATION

The Schroen family is based on playwright James Magruder's maternal grandparents – Henry and Margarette Schroen – and their two children – Magruder's mother and uncle. The Schroen family lived in Anacostia, a neighborhood in Washington, D.C., during World War II.

The real-life Henry Schroen supported his family through the Great Depression because he could type 120 words a minute, faster than the electric typewriters. Margarette Schroen was known for making a delicious pineapple upside-down cake.

Magruder said, "It was a joyful experience to write something so close to my heart – it's my family. The play is honoring their memory, capturing part of their personal history on stage. They were some of the millions of anonymous Americans who pitched in during World War II."

# CHRISTMAS: 1941

December 1941 was a time of great uncertainty and patriotism in the United States. For two years, the Allies (including France and Great Britain) had been fighting the Axis powers (including Germany, Italy and Japan). The world was at war. Although the United States had supplied money and weapons to Britain, it had not fully committed to the war.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese army attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, killing over 2,300 people. The next day, over 60,000 people listened

to their radios as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared war on Japan. Three days later Germany declared war on the United States.

Immediately, the United States mobilized for war. People flooded Washington, D.C. to contribute to the war effort. Young men enlisted in the armed forces. People rushed to grocery stores and stocked up on supplies they thought would become scarce during wartime.

When Christmas came in 1941, families like the Schroens had much to worry about. Men like Henry, Butch,

Albert and Donald could be sent to war without warning. Women like Margarette and Hazel had to find ways to support themselves and their families while the men were away. Just three weeks after the United States entered the war, their lives had changed.



**Activity:** Your grandparents or older neighbors probably have memories of living on the home front during World War II. Interview someone who was alive at this time about their experiences, and share your findings with your class.

# SPOTLIGHT: THE THREE GHOSTS



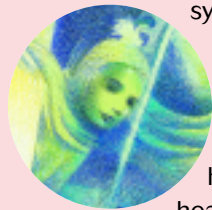
Since it was written in 1843, Charles Dickens' novella, *A Christmas Carol*, has been rewritten countless times for television, film, opera, theater and radio. With minor variations, the characters and their story remain the same. What changes, more often than not, are the creative forms writers choose for the Christmas spirits that visit Scrooge.

In *Christmas Carol 1941*, James Magruder chose various monuments from around D.C. for his spirits.



## WINGED VICTORY

The Ghost of Christmas Past is portrayed by Winged Victory, the statue atop the First Division Monument, located near the White House. The monument was constructed to honor those members of the Army's First Division who died during World War I.



## FREEDOM

Freedom, the statue atop the Capitol building, is the Ghost of Christmas Present. She holds a sword and laurel wreath, symbolizing the power of freedom in the United States in times of war and peace. Symbols of the United States (like the stars and stripes and its motto "**E. Pluribus Unum**") decorate her clothing. She also wears an eagle's head, feathers and talons to represent Native Americans.

▣ **E. Pluribus Unum**—Latin for "from many, one." This refers to the union of many states in one country and the diversity of U.S. citizens.

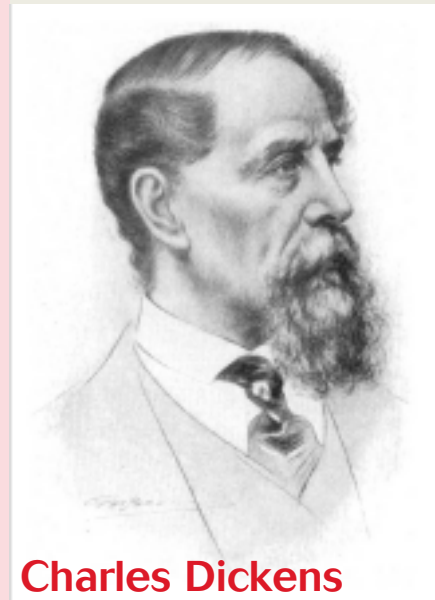


## GRIEF

The statue at a memorial for a man's wife in Rock Creek Cemetery is The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Commonly called "Grief," the statue is a seated figure, neither male nor female, meant to show acceptance that death comes for every person.



**Activity:** Imagine you are writing your own version of *A Christmas Carol*. What kind of ghosts would you have?



Charles Dickens

Generally considered the greatest Victorian novelist, Charles Dickens lived from 1812-1870. He wrote many novels including *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *David Copperfield*. Most of his novels were written as serials – stories that appeared one or two chapters at a time in literary magazines, much like television shows today appear in episodes.

*A Christmas Carol* was the first and most celebrated of Dickens' Christmas writings. He loved the holiday, and wrote many stories and novels about it including *The Chimes* and *The Cricket on the Hearth*.

▣ **Victorian**—from or typical of the time period when Queen Victoria I was Queen of England (1837-1901).



**Activity:** Imagine you are a writer in Victorian England. What would you write your serial about?

Who would the characters be? How would you build suspense to keep readers?

## THE BONUS MARCH

After World War I, Congress voted to give all who had served in the armed forces a bonus of \$1 - \$1.25 for each day of service. Veterans would receive their bonuses by 1945.

In 1932, about 20,000 veterans of World War I gathered in Washington, D.C. to demand that Congress pay them, as promised, for their service. Though their bonuses were not due, **the Great Depression** left them too poor to support themselves. The "Bonus Army" set up tents and makeshift houses around the Capitol.



Most went home when Congress denied them the money, but 5,000 stayed and protested for weeks. The character Uncle Albert was one of them. President Hoover sent the army to drive the protestors out. They used bayonets and tear gas and burned the camp (pictured). One marcher was killed and many were wounded.

■ **The Great Depression**—a period of extreme economic hardship between 1929 and 1939 when many were unemployed and those who had jobs made very little money. Many people went without basic necessities.



## SCARCITY & RATIONS

Margaret Schroen can't make pineapple upside-down cake for Christmas because there is no pineapple at any of the grocery stores. During World War II, some items were in such low supply that the government **rationed** them to make sure that everyone (especially American soldiers) got what they needed. Each week, a family got a certain number of coupons for rationed items like gasoline, sugar, coffee and canned fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables were so scarce that many families began growing their own in "Victory Gardens." Posters like these encouraged women to can and preserve fruits

and vegetables to feed their families.

■ **ration**—to restrict the amount people can have of an item that is in short supply.

## WORLD LEADERS IN WAR

**A**fter the United States entered World War II, the leaders of the United States and Great Britain met in Washington, D.C. to plan their war strategy. This meeting took place in December 1941.



### WINSTON CHURCHILL

In *Christmas Carol 1941*, Elijah and Henry listen to Winston Churchill's Christmas Eve address to the American people. As the Prime Minister of England between 1940 and

1945, Churchill led his country to victory in World War II. He was famous for his talent as a speaker and was also a Nobel Prize winning author.



### FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Christmas Eve Message to the Nation begins the play. He was the only American President to be elected

four times and saw the United States through both the Great Depression and World War II.

## Additional Resources

### Books/Plays:

*A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens  
*The Cricket on the Hearth* by Charles Dickens

### On the Web:

Northwestern University Library:  
WWII Posters Collection: [www.library.northwestern.edu/govinfo/collections/wwii-posters/](http://www.library.northwestern.edu/govinfo/collections/wwii-posters/)  
On the Homefront: America During World War I and World War II:  
<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/homefront/index.html>  
The War: [www.pbs.org/thewar](http://www.pbs.org/thewar)

### Video:

*The War*  
(documentary by Ken Burns)  
*Scrooged!*  
*A Muppet Christmas Carol*

## Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, **YOU** are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

Arrive at least 30 minutes early.

Visit the restroom before the show starts.

Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers, and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.

Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.

Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!

Do not talk, whisper, sing, or hum.

Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.

Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.

Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

*Enjoy the show!*



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