

A Christmas Carol- Play Review

Post-Show Activity, Grades 6-8

Drawing Key Moments

Goals:

- *Students will analyze and reflect on the performance of A Christmas Carol*
- *Students will express understanding through discussion and/or written response.*
- *Students will write structured play review, incorporating analysis of theatrical elements and personal response*

NOTE: This activity has been aligned with TEKS and [*Universal Design for Learning*](#). TEKS can be found at the end of this document.

Materials Needed

- Paper and pen or laptops/tablets for writing
- Whiteboard or digital board for group discussion
- Story Map or Review Organizer (optional- see the end of this document for a sample)
- Sample play review (*The Mirror Crack'd* review from Houston Press attached)

Introduction- Two Truths and a Lie

- Engage students with “Two Truths and a Lie” about *A Christmas Carol* to spark interest and recall.

Example statements:

- The story was written by Charles Dickens in less than six weeks (True).
- Scrooge is visited by four ghosts in the story (Lie).
- The play explores themes of redemption and social justice (True).
- Ask:
 - What was your initial reaction to the play?
 - What rating would you give it (stars, thumbs up/down, 1-10, etc.)?

Example- What is a Review?

- Present a sample play review highlighting structure and key components: introduction, summary without spoilers, analysis of acting, directing, design, and personal opinion.
- Discuss theatrical elements that critics analyze (acting, directing, set/costumes, sound, lighting, pacing).
- Explain the balance between objective analysis and subjective opinion.

- Introduce relevant theatre terminology connected to *A Christmas Carol* (e.g., suspense, atmosphere, character development, symbolism).

Guided Practice- Group Discussion

- Divide students into small groups; assign each a different aspect of the production to analyze:
 - Acting (e.g., Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, Ghosts)
 - Set and costume design (Victorian London, Christmas scenes)
 - Use of sound and lighting (ghostly effects, mood setting)
 - Themes (redemption, social justice, compassion)
 - Groups brainstorm observations and prepare to share key points.
 - Facilitate whole-class discussion to craft effective thesis statements for reviews, e.g., “A Christmas Carol is a powerful tale of transformation brought to life through vivid performances and evocative staging.”

Notes for UDL alignment: To provide multiple ways of expressing understanding, consider letting students act or physicalize their responses. You can also utilize Think-Pair-Share to provide additional solo and partner processing time.

Independent Practice | Writing Your Review

- Students draft a 500-word review of *A Christmas Carol* performance, using guided questions and the group’s observations:
 - What was the play about? (brief summary without spoilers)
 - Which performances stood out and why?
 - How did the set, costumes, and technical elements enhance the story?
 - How did the play make you feel? Did it surprise or engage you?
 - What themes or messages did the play explore?
 - Would you recommend this play? Why or why not?
- Scaffold writing with sentence starters such as:
 - “The play *A Christmas Carol* is set in Victorian London and tells the story of...”
 - “One of the most powerful performances was...”
 - “The use of lighting and sound created a magical atmosphere by...”
 - “The play explores themes such as...”
 - “Overall, I would rate this play...”
- Encourage use of theatre vocabulary and examples from the play’s script or performance.
- Optional extension: create a visual companion piece like a poster or digital presentation highlighting key points from their review.

Notes for UDL alignment: Students can record their reviews or present them as short videos. You can also allow alternative formats for students needing support: oral reviews, storyboards, or graphic organizers.

Reflection | Headlines

- Students write a headline that captures the essence of their review (e.g., “A Heartwarming Tale of Redemption and Holiday Spirit”).
- Share headlines with a partner or small group.
- Discuss which headline best captures the core of the play and why.

Notes for UDL alignment: Encourage students to share in pairs, small groups, or through written reflection to offer varied ways of participating.

A Christmas Carol Story Map & Review Organizer

1. Basic Information

- Title of Play:
- Date of Performance:
- Location (Name of Theatre):

2. Summary of the Play (Write 3-5 sentences summarizing the main story without giving away spoilers.)

- What is the main plot?
- Who are the main characters?
- Where and when does the play take place?

3. Characters & Acting

- Who were the main characters you noticed? (e.g., Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, etc)
- Which actor’s performance stood out to you the most? Why?
- How did the actors show the emotions and personalities of their characters?

4. Set, Costumes & Technical Elements

- Describe the setting and how it helped tell the story (e.g., Victorian London, Christmas scenes, etc)
- How did the costumes help you understand the characters or the time period?
- What technical elements did you notice? How did they add to the mood or suspense?

5. Themes and Messages

- What major themes did the play explore? (Examples: redemption, social justice, compassion)
- How were these themes expressed through the story or characters?
- Did any symbols or repeated images stand out to you? (Examples: chains, Christmas spirit)

6. Personal Response

- What did you enjoy most about the play?
- Was there anything confusing or difficult to understand?
- How did the play make you feel? (joyful, thoughtful, inspired, etc)
- Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not?

7. Your Review Headline (Write a catchy headline that sums up your opinion of the play.)

8. Optional: Additional Notes or Drawings

(Use this space to jot down extra thoughts, favorite lines, or sketch a scene or symbol from the play.)

TEKS

Fine Arts- Theatre, Middle School 6-8, High School Levels I-IV

(5) Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

English Language Arts and Reading, Middle School 6-8

6(H): respond orally or in writing with appropriate register, vocabulary, tone, and voice;

English Language Arts and Reading, High School- English I-IV

5(C): use text evidence and original commentary to support a response;

5(H): respond orally or in writing with appropriate register, vocabulary, tone, and voice;

Miss Marple Finally Takes the American Stage in Agatha Christie's *The Mirror Crack'd* at the Alley

D. L. GROOVER JULY 18, 2025



(L-R) Melissa Molano, Dylan Godwin and Susan Koozin

There's a new gal in town and she's a doozy.

When we first meet her in her cozy home in the sleepy English hamlet of St. Mary Mead, she's sitting in pain in her worn wing chair. She has sprained her ankle and awaits her new house girl to arrive to start breakfast. There's a knitting basket nearby and an old photo on the table of a young couple. She's still spry, you see, because this is the famous creation Miss Jane Marple, perhaps the most admired of all Agatha Christie's amateur sleuths.

As to why Miss Marple has waited this long to appear on any American stage is a mystery all its own, but Alley Theatre is to be commended for her sparkling debut in *The Mirror Crack'd*.

A spinster, "she knows people," Miss Marple says with just a whiff of self-satisfaction, and that makes her dangerous to those who commit crime. That also makes her a pain in the ass to Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard, Dermot Craddock, who Jane helped raise as a boy when his mother died. He has come to tell her of the murder at Gossington Hall of local woman Mrs. Heather Leigh at a party thrown by film star Marina Gregg, played with all the glamour and allure by Elizabeth Bunch (who has never looked so beguiling).

Craddock doesn't want to admit any more details than he has to, because he knows Miss Marple will be one – or two – steps ahead of him. He's already misread a previous murder case because of her. She figured it out first. It's a lovely game of cat and mouse. With Craddock as mouse.

That Miss Marple is played by Houston theater pro Susan Koozin and Craddock portrayed by Dylan Godwin, is a match to rival Wimbledon. Koozin oozes old world charm and a bit of crank, while Godwin is perpetually put off by her incessant nosiness and utter forthrightness and an almost infallible sense of the evils people do to one another. He sputters while she sparkles.

As this being a wickedly clever adaptation by Rachel Wagstaff from a minor outing from the "Queen of Crime," this game

is very much afoot and extremely entertaining.

Under the inspired direction from Delicia Turner Sonnenberg, *Mirror* reflects the glories that the august Alley Theatre can display in a rather B-type summer read. As Craddock explains to Miss Marple what transpired during the party, the guests (suspects) arrive in her living room for exposition and to set the scene. Typical of Christie, there's an array of characters who seemingly have no motive, but then again any one of them could be guilty. As more are introduced and tell their tales, the plot thickens exponentially.

The crazed carousel includes comeback film star Marina (Bunch); Cherry Baker, Miss Marple's house girl who's serving canapes at the party to make extra money (Alexandra Szeto-Joe); Marina's blustery and arrogant director husband Jason Rudd (Chris Hutchison); nobodies Mr. and Mrs. Leigh (Jamie Razanour and David Rainey); Giuseppe Renzo, Marina's trusted assistant who's been working for her for years (Christopher Salazar); Marple's best friend and village busybody Dolly Bantry (Michelle Elaine); Marina's sneezing and bossy secretary Ella (Ashlyn Evans); and film star wanna-be Lola Brewster, who's to co-star with Marina (Melissa Molano).

It's a heady mix and all delightfully portrayed without a trace of irony or one-upmanship. Since most of these actors are from the Alley's resident company, they all know how to play off, for, and against each other with unerring skill. They are delightfully comfortable and it shows.

Naturally, the plot ties itself into knots, leading us down cul-de-sacs and shooting off red herrings like a Covent Garden fish monger. The set designed by Paige Hathaway, in her Alley debut, is impressionistic and surprising with its giant sliding panels that reveal another finely wrought scene like the great Hall, a movie studio sound stage, a dressing room, with a pastel hint of English rolling countryside at the wings. Hathaway is invited back to Houston any time.

And the costumes by Nicole Jesinth Smith bespeak the '60s, old Hollywood glamour, and country tweeds with a smiling joy. Look at those marabou cuffs on Marina's aubergine peignoir. There is stellar work from everyone on the crew. All around, it is mighty impressive.

Although Wagstaff's update (this is not the 1980 Elizabeth Taylor/Angela Lansbury movie plot) retains many of Christie's politically incorrect thoughts on class and race, there's always Koozin's knowing wink, Godwin's slow burns, Rainey's Mr. Cellophane who nobody sees; Salazar's fiery Italian; and Hutchison's toxic masculinity to lead us into the macabre but familiar mood of a Christie mystery.

This may be the Alley's best Summer Chills in seasons.