

GREAT
LAKES
THEATER

THE 37TH ANNUAL A CHRISTMAS CAROL WRITING CONTEST



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CLEVELAND
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The Thirty-Seventh Annual “A Christmas Carol” Writing Contest

Every year since 1989, Great Lakes Theater has partnered with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District in producing our annual “A Christmas Carol” writing contest. Over one thousand CMSD students per year, in grades six, seven, and eight compose original stories inspired by the universal themes in Charles Dickens’ timeless classic. Then, each school selects one winner per grade level to submit to Great Lakes Theater for judging. Of these submissions, a panel of judges vote for the top six grand prize-winning entries.

Each grand prize-winning writer will receive a plaque commemorating their achievement, a beautifully illustrated hardcover edition of *A Christmas Carol*, and audio recordings will be created featuring Great Lakes Theater acting company members reading their work.



Mother Cleaveland (Laura Welsh) reads "A Christmas Carol"

The 2025 grand prize stories are:

Briana Barron “A Christmas to Remember” – page 2
6th Grade, Buhrer Dual Language Academy, Teacher: Megan Parker

Ma’Kyah Walton “Mrs. Melton’s Christmas” – page 4
6th Grade, Daniel E. Morgan School, Teacher: Kimberly Hall-Chambers

Greatness Brooks “The Fright Before Christmas Night: Shadow of Krampus” – page 5
7th Grade, Buhrer Dual Language Academy, Teacher: Megan Parker

Alana Williams “A Christmas Redemption” – page 8
7th Grade, Cleveland Metro Remote School K-8, Teacher: Jackie Collins

Zaydah Howard “The Song Beneath the Lake” – page 10
8th Grade, Stonebrook White Montessori, Teachers: Michelle Breehne

Natalie Shienkaruk “Thawing of the Iron Heart” – page 11
8th Grade, Riverside School, Teacher: Domenic DiPuccio

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Support Provided By – back cover

Great Lakes Theater “A Christmas Carol” production photography by Roger Mastroianni.

A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER

BY BRIANA BARRON

"Scott, grab the flour," Allison said.

They were making cookies for Santa. They set everything up. The green and red lights, elves, the Christmas tree.

"Umm, there's a problem," Scott said in a panicked voice.

"What? Do the lights look okay should I put them in a different place?" Allison said.

"It's not that. We don't have any more flour!"

Allison's eyes were wide. "What do you mean we don't have flour!" Allison started to panic. She thought about this perfect moment for weeks!

She took a deep breath and said, "I guess we have to go to the store. Get your coat, hat, and gloves."

"Okay," Scott answered. He was so relieved that Allison didn't have a meltdown.

A few minutes later they had all their things and were headed to the store on their bikes. It was eight in the evening and the store was fifteen minutes away.

"You sure we'll make it in time? It closes in one hour," Scott said. He was worried that they would not make it because of the snow.

"Of course we will silly. This weather won't stop us just because it's cold! We can do it. Where's your ... "

She trailed off. There was something in the distance. Like a cloud of bright red smoke.



Ebenezer Scrooge (Nick Steen) returns home.

They looked a little closer. They looked like bats coming at them, but there were bigger ... way bigger.

"What is that," Scott said in a monotone voice, trying not to panic. They were coming straight at them.

"Don't ... move." Allison was frozen from fear. "I thought they were gone. I thought the military took them down."

A few years ago there were these things called demonbats. It took two years to get rid of them.

"It's okay. The sheriff's station is two blocks away, pedal as fast as you can on three."

Allison shook her head slowly.

"One ... two ... three!"

Their legs were hurting after a few minutes, but they couldn't give up yet. Not when they were this close. After a few more minutes they were there. Breathing heavily. Scott



Actor Nick Steen (Ebenezer Scrooge) awards a school winner after the performance.

was asthmatic and was wheezing. It did not matter at that moment. They busted in the doors just to find it empty. No one was there. All of a sudden, the radio turned on.

There was Christmas music playing. It was cut off. All you heard were bats screeching.

“AHHHHHH!”

Allison ran into his room. "What's wrong!?"

He realized it was just a dream. After he calmed down Allison asked, “Want to make cookies now? We have all the things for it!”

~ End ~



Great Lakes Theater's 37th Annual production of "A Christmas Carol"

MRS. MELTON'S CHRISTMAS
BY MA'KYAH WALTON

Mrs. Melton, the volleyball coach, sat in her room surrounded by kids. Mrs. Melton only cared about volleyball and winning the Finals. She didn't think about her team's jolliness. She practiced with them for hours and hours. Coach Melton really didn't care about Christmas.

On one snowy winter night, a ghost from an old friend was lurking around Coach Melton's window. The ghost was swaying by the window. The ghost talked about some of the memories that Coach Melton forgot about through the past years.

The Ghost of Christmas Past took Coach Melton on a little trip to her past life. She saw herself as a young person practicing volleyball and helping to teach others the skills that her former coach taught her. She also saw herself being excited on her first game against Dunbar Middle School. She was so amazed at how eager she was to learn, teach, and play the game. Now she realized that since becoming a volleyball coach that she only cares about winning the Finals.

Once again, another ghost approached Coach Melton. It was the Ghost of Christmas Present. The ghost showed Coach Melton how her team was struggling. They pushed themselves way too much and never had family time because they were always

practicing after school. Coach Melton saw how her tough rules were hurting her team. For the first time ever, she felt really bad.

Finally, Coach Melton was visited by the Ghost of Christmas Future. The ghost showed Coach Melton what would happen if she didn't change her ways. She showed her how her volleyball team would fall apart and be now more. The ghost showed her how she would lose everything that she had worked so hard for. The ghost also talked to her about how making money is not everything and that she should be kind and show others compassion, especially around Christmas time.

After seeing these ghosts, Coach Melton decided to change her ways. She started helping her team and working carefully and kindly with them to make sure they understood where she's coming from. She decided to not push her team so hard and let them spend more time with their families. Coach Melton spent more time with her son for the holidays. Coach Melton knew that being kind was very much more important than being disrespectful and unjoyful. She had a new way of life and her team made sure that they showed her how appreciated she was.

~ End ~

THE FRIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS NIGHT: SHADOW OF KRAMPUS
BY GREATNESS BROOKS

Snow was falling in thick, twisting sheets on Maple Street, and the wind sounded almost like whispers. Every house glowed with Christmas lights, but this year, the lights seemed ... different – like they were flickering in fear. Inside our house, I could hear the fireplace crackling, the smell of cookies drifting from the kitchen, and my little brother Max humming a Christmas carol nervously.

"I don't like this wind," Max said, shivering. "It sounds ... alive."

I nodded, gripping the windowsill. "I feel it too. Something's ... wrong."

Just then, there was a knock at the window. Slow. Hollow. Tap ... tap ... tap. I froze. My stomach dropped.

"Probably just a branch," Max whispered, but even he didn't sound convinced.

That's when my friend Mia, who had been staying over for the holidays, stepped closer. Mia always had a flashlight in her backpack-like she was ready for anything. "You guys are freaking out over nothing," she said. "It's just snow. Come on."

But then we all heard it – chains dragging across the wooden porch outside. Clink ... clink ... clink ... And the snow moved ... but not like wind. It moved like ... footsteps.

"That's not a branch," I muttered, my hands shaking.

Mia shined her flashlight toward the window. Her face went pale. "What... what is that?"

I swallowed hard. A figure was there. Tall. Horned. Eyes glowing red. Fur black as soot. Its claws scraped the snow like knives. I could feel it staring at me. My Christmas spirit wanted to tell me everything would be okay – but my fear froze me in place.

Krampus growled, and the sound rattled my teeth. "The naughty are mine," he hissed.

Max gasped, "I – I didn't mean to be bad! I swear!"

"You're lying," Krampus said, his tongue flicking out like a snake's. "All liars ... go with me."

Before I could move, his claw shot out grabbing Max's ankle. He yanked him up, and for a horrifying moment, I thought my brother was gone. I could feel the air turn icy, like the frost itself was alive, crawling over my skin.

"Let him go!" I shouted, my voice cracking.

Mia stepped forward, her flashlight pointed like a sword. "He's not taking him! Back off, monster!"

Krampus hissed and turned toward her, and for a moment, I thought we were done for. Then he bellowed in a voice that sounded like broken ice and fire, "Cowards! I hunger!"

I remembered the stories I had read about Krampus – he feeds on fear, but courage weakens him. My Christmas spirit flared up. "I'll take him instead!" I yelled, stepping in front of Max, "He's my brother! He's good!"

I'm the one who dared him to sneak cookies!"

Krampus froze. His red eyes narrowed. "You ... sacrifice yourself?"

"Yes!" I said, teeth chattering, "Take me! Not him!"

Mia shouted, "He's brave! You can't win against him!"

The chains rattled violently, the air swirled with frost. and for a terrifying second, it felt like we were being pulled into the snow itself. Then something miraculous happened – Krampus's growl became a hiss of frustration. He dropped Max into the snow, and the world around us began to twist and blur.

Suddenly, we were standing in a dark, frozen forest. The trees were twisted, black, and dripping with icicles that looked like teeth. The moon glowed red, casting long shadows. The wind whispered like a thousand voices. I could hear the faint cries of children, somewhere beyond the trees. Krampus dragged Max toward a cave that glowed with firelight, and I could see the flicker of frozen skeletons and toys that had been shattered.

"Run!" Mia yelled, grabbing my arm. "He can't take both of us if we fight!"

I sprinted after him, my heart hammering. "Take me instead! He's my brother!" I shouted again. The cold ripped through me, but somehow, my spirit of Christmas – hope, love, courage – kept me moving.

Krampus stopped, his chains rattling louder than ever. "Your courage burns ... it is ...

unbearable," he growled. He took a step toward me, claws outstretched. For a moment, I thought I was done for.

"NOW, MIA!" yelled. She swung the flashlight like a hammer. Its beam struck Krampus's chest, reflecting in his glowing eyes. He shrieked – like metal twisting in fire – and the ice around him began to crack.

With a roar that shook the forest, he threw Max toward me and vanished in a whirlwind of black smoke and frost. The frozen trees splintered, and suddenly, we were back in my bedroom. The fireplace roared, the lights blinked, and the snow outside fell quietly. Max and I were gasping, shaking, but alive.

Mia collapsed onto the floor, laughing nervously. "That... that was insane!"

Max hugged me tight, shivering. "I thought ... I thought he was gonna take me!"

I smiled, even though my hands were still cold and trembling. "We ... we survived. Christmas is still here."

When morning came, the sun glowed on the snow outside. Presents were under the tree – but sitting on top of them was one black lump of coal. Carved into it, jagged and frightening, was one word:

"REMEMBER."

And every Christmas Eve since, I feel it – the wind, the snow, the chains. I feel the fear creep in, but also my hope, my courage, and the Christmas spirit. Because no matter how terrifying Krampus gets ... he can't take away that.

~ End ~

A CHRISTMAS REDEMPTION
BY ALANA WILLIAMS

Dear Mr. Scrooge,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for the kindness and generosity you have shown to me and my family since that remarkable Christmas morning. To be quite honest, sir, I can hardly believe the change I have witnessed in you - it is as

if a light has replaced the darkness that once filled your heart. The man who once counted every penny now counts every blessing, and we are so fortunate to be among them.

Since your transformation, life at the Cratchit home has been brighter in every way. Your raise in my salary lifted a great weight off our shoulders. For the first time, we can keep our home warm through the winter without worry. My dear wife, Emily, smiles more often these days, and the children's laughter fills our little house from morning till night. You cannot imagine how much joy it brings me to see them so happy.

Most of all, sir, we are thankful for what you have done for our Tiny Tim. Your generosity has given us the means to afford the medicine and care he so desperately needed. He is growing stronger each day, and the doctor says that with continued care, he will live a long and healthy life. When Tim bows his head to



Ebenezer Scrooge (Nick Steen) is visited by the Ghost of
Christmas Past (Ángela Utrera)

pray each night, he always includes you in his prayers. "God bless Mr. Scrooge," he says, with such warmth that it could melt even the coldest heart.



Bob Cratchit (James Alexander Rankin) with Tiny Tim and the Cratchit family.

You have taught me, and truly everyone who knows you, what redemption looks like. It is never too late to change, never too late to open one's heart to compassion and love. You have shown us that a man's worth is not measured by the gold he keeps, but by the kindness he gives. The whole town speaks differently of you now-with respect, admiration, and even affection. You have become, as

Tiny Tim puts it, "a second father to everyone."

Thank you, Mr. Scrooge, for proving that miracles are not just things we read about in books - they are living, breathing acts of kindness, made real through people like you. May your days be long, your heart remain warm, and your name forever be remembered as a symbol of hope.

Sincerely,

Bob Cratchit

THE SONG BENEATH THE LAKE
BY ZAYDAH HOWARD

Blackwell Lake sat on the edge of town, quiet and still. People said the water held memories that others forgot: laughter, dreams, and sometimes people. If you looked into the lake, you might see your own reflection, even when you were not smiling.

Every century, the lake would quietly recede, revealing fragments of a long-forgotten village. Villagers around warned everyone: 'Don't visit at dusk when the tunes turn strange.' Even the bravest birds veered wide at twilight.

But Lila didn't scare easily. Especially not after her brother Ben vanished on a stormy, unpredictable Tuesday. With boots squishing through the rain, determination blooming, she followed a trail of Ben's favorite candy wrappers to Blackwell's edge just as the sky began to hum.

A sweet, sleepy melody wove through the reeds, blending with the gentle splash of water against stone. It was Ben's lullaby: "Down by the willow, where wishes wade, let secrets sleep in shadow's shade."



Party goers kick up their heels at Mister Fezziwig's.

Lila snickered and called out, "Not bad, Ben. Hiding in fog for dramatic flair? Classic." But the song tickled her ears, tugging her closer. She dipped a toe, then a foot, and soon she was wading in. The water was cold, but the song felt familiar.

Beneath the rippling surface, the lost village appeared. Houses seemed slightly slanted, as if caught mid-tumble. Shop signs drifted in slow circles, and a bell tower gave a faint ding in the distance. Villagers lined the square, motionless, their faces frozen in moments of absurdity – Mrs. Wick clutching her pastry, the mayor with toes poking out of mismatched slippers, even Old Tom apparently caught mid-fish tale.

Each mouth was open, and the whole gathering buzzed with that haunted, wordless tune. In every glassy eye, Lila glimpsed her own face reflected back.

There, in the center, was Ben – arms out, grin lopsided, joy and fear mingling on his lips.

"What, Ben? Is this your idea of a family reunion?" Lila bravely joked, though inside, her courage shook a little. She reached for his hand.

Suddenly, the world shifted – whoosh. The lake drained away, the village rose like an old stage set, and every villager's eyes

blinked open-every single one the very same shade as Lila's. Her legs felt heavy and still, as if the whole world wanted her to stand very, very still.

She realized the old warning was true: "To hear your own song from beneath is to finish someone else's verse." Now, if you pass by Blackwell Lake and hear a tune that sounds a bit like a family rhyme, keep walking. Lila and Ben still lead the song below, waiting for the next verse-and maybe a good punchline-to join in their echoing, eerie chorus.

~ End ~



School winners from the 37th Annual "A Christmas Carol" Writing Contest, November 25, 2025

THAWING OF THE IRON HEART
BY NATALIE SHIENKARUK

The cold winter air moved in a quick flurry of white, sending the feeling of melancholy throughout the entire lit up city. Ace took his first step out of prison. He was finally free again but had nowhere to go or roam. He decided to take a familiar stroll through the alleyways where he normally would hang out. The city streets were filled with child-like wonder and Christmas spirit, but not for him. You see, Ace doesn't see the world as a happy place. He saw it as a rigged game. You could play your hand perfectly, but the outcome was always decided against you.

Ace remembered the day he went to prison when he got framed for stealing something. Sure, he stole a lot of stuff before, but he didn't do anything that time. It was the wrong place in the wrong moment type of problem. No matter how hard he tried to explain himself, the world only saw him for who he was. A rude, selfish, and dangerous delinquent. Ace hied to change before; he really did, but he saw it as useless as getting blood out of a stone.

Through the cold, yet brisk wind of the winter night, Ace finds himself back at the



The Cleaveland Family

place that made him realize that life isn't always going to be kind to you. He knocked on the door of the shelter, only to be met with angry blazing eyes. It's clear that he wasn't missed. The only reason he was even let in is because of the harsh cold outside. Because Ace saw no point in following rules, he did his own thing, and his defiance caused lots of people to realize that he's a spontaneous delinquent. He went to bed that night, staring out of the window wondering, what would he do with his life now?

His first day back in the city dragged on. There was just something so lonely about it. He watched as families, children, and lovers all had fun, knowing it's something he would never have. But after watching it for a while, he scoffed. "I don't need anybody." He watered the wilting flower of his independence once again.

As he walked through the frigid streets, the sound of a nearby wail caught his attention. The wail cut through the air like a knife ... but it seems only he paid attention to it. He wanted to ignore it, but he found himself getting a bit curious. "What a pain ... "

And with that, he traveled in the direction of the shrieking, but the entire way there he couldn't help but feel apprehensive. His eyes widened as he saw a young boy, no older than nine, cornered by a group of unfriendly looking men. Normally, he wouldn't care at all and would walk on like nothing happened, but something told him that this needed to be stopped.

"Hey! Beat it!" he yelled toward the group. They turned around to look at Ace.

"Why should we?" They all snickered, and Ace's agitation started to rise at that moment. The men began to surround the boy completely, and one of the men held up a

hand to strike the young boy. Ace must do something now!

"Oh, I'll show you why!" He was livid. Before the leader even got a chance to retort, it was too late, Ace had him knocked out on the cold cement. The little boy watched it in amazement. The other men decided to back off, and they ran with their tails between their legs and gave Ace one last glare.

He let out a sigh. "You alright kid." He said gruffly, feeling embarrassed. Ace had actually helped someone.

"I'm okay! Thank you so much, sir!" He stood up and looked at him gratefully.

"Yeah, yeah whatever. I just did it so I wouldn't have future trouble with them." He tried to play it cool, but he knew deep down that it was another lie.

"So where are your parents ...?" He hid the concern in his tone.

"I lost my mom ... " When Ace heard those words, his expression softened.

He then set off to look for the boy's mother, something very unlike him, but it seemed as if a new version of himself began to take over like a coin being flipped to reveal a new face. After a while searching, he found a mother weeping on a park bench. The little

boy ran into the relieved mother's open arms, and for the first time in a blue moon, Ace cracked a small smile on his face. He nodded to himself; his job was done. He began to walk away when a hand on his shoulder stopped him.

"Take this ... for helping me find my son ... "

She handed Ace an invite to her Christmas party. He took it, walked away, and scoffed.

Days before the party, he couldn't stop thinking about what he did. He didn't want to go to the party, but maybe he would swing by to explain the entire story. Yeah, that's what he would do.

When the day of the party arrived, he dressed in the nicest clothes he had. His clothes weren't the nicest, but they were good enough just to swing by. He arrived at the party looking grumpy as usual, but something about the warm environment calmed him from all the burdens tugging in his heart. He was greeted by the warm eyes of the mother and other family members. It is obvious the mother had told everyone about what happened that day.



The ghost of Jacob Marley (Jeffrey C. Hawkins) visits Ebenezer Scrooge (Nick Steen).

"I would like to thank this young man for finding my son for me and bringing him back safely. He has a pure heart of gold." Ace looked at her in surprise at her comment but quickly shot back.

"No ... you have it all wrong ... don't have a pure heart."

"Oh, but you do! You hid it for so long, and it was about time for you to let it shine again. You showed us all that no matter how chaotic the world is, there's always some hope left in one small act of good."

~ End ~

ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER



Sara Bruner, Producing Artistic Director

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, offering an annual series of student matinees and, for over 30 years, an acclaimed school residency program led by teams of specially trained actor-teachers.

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Special thanks to all participating CMSD teachers and staff, and to our reader-judges:

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