

**GREAT  
LAKES  
THEATER**

# THE 32ND ANNUAL *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* WRITING CONTEST



PRODUCED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



**CLEVELAND  
METROPOLITAN  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

# The Thirty-Second 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 two 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.

We were especially impressed by how many of our participants chose to reflect the current moment in their written works. Each grand prize winning writer will receive a plaque commemorating their achievement, a beautifully illustrated hardcopy of *A Christmas Carol*, and audio recordings have been created featuring Great Lakes Theater acting company members reading their work.

**The 2020 grand prize stories are:**

**“True America” by Kaelyn Justiniano – page 2**

Grade 6, Robinson G. Jones School, Teacher: Vickie Shucofsky

**“A Christmas Carol Retold” by Rondasia Mason – page 3**

Grade 6, Daniel E. Morgan School, Teacher: Kimberly Hall-Chambers

**“The Appearance of Max” by Armonie Gray – page 4**

Grade 7, Andrew J. Rickoff School, Teacher: Angela Oliverio

**“The Change of Scrooge” by Dalma Onelia Cintron – page 6**

Grade 7, Walton School, Teacher: Kristen Danna

**“A Christmas Carol as told by Edgar Allen Poe” by Janiyah Hands – page 7**

Grade 8, Wade Park School, Teacher: Melissa Moran

**“A COVID Christmas Carol” by Evan King – page 10**

Grade 8, Newton D. Baker School of Arts, Teachers: Christine Champion & Vickie Orozco

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

TRUE AMERICA  
BY KAELYN JUSTINIANO

America, why are we split in colors of red and blue?  
The color we should be is the color true.  
What do colors really mean?  
We are all the same inside when we bleed.  
In this great country we need freedom instead.  
Are we subjected to what we believe in?  
When our first right is to march and speak.  
Can we be heard and are they listening?  
All of our words should be glistening.

America is our country, so beautiful and rich.  
The place where dreams are made to come true.  
Where home is on the range and the sky is almost always blue.  
For us the children we hear what goes on today.  
The changes that we endure so fast like a pitch.  
For our education we should enrich.  
The struggle is not easy with every lesson learned.  
Our absences in the halls and no voices are heard.  
In our rooms we learn, we see our friends on the screen,  
No recess for us the classes in between.  
After lunch break then it's back to the screen.  
I never thought how much I'd miss all my classmates' screams.

America is not red, blue, black or white.  
It is 50 stars, it is 13 stripes, it is believing in freedom and having basic rights.  
America is ours and we are stronger together.  
It is held together by the people for the people forever.  
It is love, caring and nurturing for the whole planet with the help of the world's best people,  
doctors, nurses, scientists, judges, teachers, front line workers and the children who learn from you!  
We should always have a government that is true.

So America I believe in one color and that color is staying true to you!



**Laura Welsh Berg (center) as Mother Cleaveland in the Great Lakes Theater production of *A Christmas Carol*.**

~ End ~

A CHRISTMAS CAROL RETOLD  
BY RONDASIA MASON

Ebony Scrooge is my name, making big money is my game. I am a big time owner of my fashion company which is located in downtown Cleveland. I employ over 500 people at my company which is named Ebony Unlimited. One thing about me is that I love money and hate all holidays, especially Christmas. My employees always ask for that day off. I just respond with a "ba-humbu." Let me tell you about this crazy experience that changed my whole life in the blink of the eye.

It was a snowy and cold Christmas Eve the year was 2020. I had just arrived home from a long day at work. My luxury apartment has a beautiful view of Lake Erie and I decided to sit in my comfortable chair to take a little break. My employees had been begging me to allow them to take tomorrow off as the day would be Christmas. As usual I told my employees "No way"! Just as I was about to drift off to sleep, I felt a cold hand on my shoulder. I heard a voice faintly say, "Come with me". All of a sudden I was looking at myself as a twelve year old girl sitting in my class all by myself. I didn't have many friends and that's how I wanted it because friends are nothing but trouble. From the age of twelve I knew that making money was my major goal in life.

Suddenly, I was back in my comfy seat and I had wondered what was happening to me. No longer was I in my past, I was in my present. I started to drift off to sleep again and felt another cold hand on my arm. This time, I was taken by the ghost of Christmas present to my office located in downtown Cleveland. There I saw my staff, crying because they had to work on Christmas day. There were missing all the fun times with their family and friends. I felt a little bad for them but they were making money for me. I knew that's if I would just give them the day my employees would be so grateful.



D.A. Smith as the Ghost of Jacob Marley in the Great Lakes Theater production of *A Christmas Carol*.

All of a sudden, I was back in my comfy chair again afraid of drifting off to sleep.

A cold hand appeared upon my back. I thought to myself, here we go again. You guessed it, it was the ghost of Christmas Future. All of a sudden, it was the year 2022 and I was standing in my office surrounded by my employees, family and friends. It was Christmas Eve and people were singing, eating and having a wonderful time with each other. I had actually become a new person with a new attitude. Back in 2020, I had a revelation about the importance of being a nice person. I now understand that developing relationships are much more important than making money. I have also realized that Christmas is the best day to show my love for everyone. Merry Christmas to all!

~ End ~

THE APPEARANCE OF MAX  
BY ARMONIE GRAY

It was February 24, 1965, in Maryland, and a little basket appeared in the middle of the doorway at Heck's Adoption Center. A lady named Mary was doing her usual job when she heard a baby crying from the basket in the doorway. Ms. Mary didn't know where the baby came from or who the parents were, but she quickly ran to the baby. She was careful, she didn't know what to do with an unknown baby. Mary walked up to the basket that the baby was in and she said, "What an ugly basket." When she was about to get the basket, she saw a note on the floor, so she picked it and the basket up and went into a room.

So, Mary sat the basket on the table and opened the note, but the note was a little dusty, so Mary shook the paper a little to get the dust off it. Mary read the note and it said, "This is Max my baby and I had him a couple of days ago, but I am poor. I thought I would give Max up for adoption so he could have a better life. So please take good care of him. After Mary read the rest of the note, she placed it on the table and removed the blanket off the baby and picked him up. Then Mary did what she was supposed to do and set him up for adoption. Years passed and Max was now seven years old and still in the adoption center.

No one had wanted a kid who had popped up out of the blue. That's how people responded when Ms. Mary told them the details of what happened and why Max was in the center. People thought he would be sick and have a disease or something. So, every time someone came to the center and Ms. Mary told them the story. The people always decided that they didn't want Max. The people who worked there would put Max in a separate room away from the other kids. Even though they were just like him, they didn't come from nowhere. They were kind of mean to Max all the time.



Lynn Robert Berg as Ebenezer Scrooge in the Great Lakes Theater production of *A Christmas Carol*.

One rainy day a couple named Samantha and Brian Willer came in looking for a kid to adopt. They went to the front desk and the Willers saw a lady behind it. There was a sign on the desk that said Ms. Lather. The Willers talked with Ms. Lather and she took them to meet some kids. They really didn't see any kids they wanted so they told Ms. Lather that they would be back in a couple of days and they left.

A couple of days later the Willers came back and when they did, they heard an unusual voice coming from the door, all the way in the back of the building. When they saw a movement, Samantha asked Ms. Lather if there was a child in the back. She was silent for a minute and then Ms. Lather said, "No, well yes there is, but you wouldn't want him." Brian asked, "Why not?" Suddenly, Ms. Lather yelled out, "MS. MARY!!!" Ms. Mary came from the other

room and walked towards the Willers and Ms. Lather and said, "Yes, what do you need?" Ms. Lather told Ms. Mary to tell her story about Max. An hour later the Willers asked to see the child in the back.

So, Ms. Lather looked at Ms. Mary and said, "Are you sure?" The Willers both said, "Yes!" Before they knew it, they were walking to the back door .. As Ms. Lather opened the door, they saw Max and he smiled at them and the Willers smiled back. The lady left them alone and went to get the paperwork for Max. As the door closed, Max walked to the table and the Willers did too. They were quiet for a minute and then Samantha said something to Max and then Max answered her question. He then asked them some questions. After talking and laughing for about twenty minutes Ms. Lather came back, but she wasn't alone, Ms. Mary came in too.

Ms. Mary was looking a little worried about their decision, but she didn't care as long as Max was finally going to get a good home. She thought that after they signed the papers Max would need to get all of his drawing, bears, and other stuff. He then left with the Willers. Max never thought he would get adopted. More years passed, it was now July 16, 1978, and Max is now thirteen years old. He has been with the Willers for six years now and everything was going great. He had been to so many places and had done so many fun things. Max could not wish for anything more. He had been to the movies, carnivals, parties, and much more. Max never had to worry about going back to Heck's Adoption Center ever again and the Willers were grateful to have a kid like Max. Who knows maybe next year he might not be the only child ...

~ End ~



The company of Great Lakes Theater's *A Christmas Carol*.

THE CHANGE OF SCROOGE  
BY DALMA ONELIA CINTRON

I am Ebenezer Scrooge  
I am always considered an old man that's  
rude

I've never had a wife  
I've always had a pretty sad life

My love for money overruled  
My love for others everyone knew

I didn't have such a great soul  
On holidays I only got coal

I really never cared about anyone or  
anything  
You can say I was a pretty selfish old man

But now enough about how selfish and rude  
I was  
Let's talk about my change on one cold  
night

Christmas eve of course my friend Jacob  
Marley gave me a little visit  
I was kind of shocked to see him he warned  
me about three spirits visiting

The first spirit was a woman she said she  
was the ghost of Christmas past

She showed me how I have changed from a  
sweet little boy to a selfish old man  
But then before I knew it, she was gone

Then a few minutes after I heard a noise  
from then kitchen it was the second spirit  
He said he was the ghost of Christmas  
present

He showed me the how Christmas was in  
the Cratchits house

They didn't have much money but some  
how

They still looked happy and once again  
before I knew it, he had disappeared  
And I was back in my kitchen so I then I  
waited for the final spirit to appear

And then finally a cold breeze swept  
through the doors

He was the ghost of Christmas yet to come  
he took me to a grave stone and there was  
a sign

That said here lays Ebenezer Scrooge and  
suddenly I had shivers down my spine

I realized that he wouldn't be showing me  
this if I didn't have time to change  
And then the ghost disappeared, it was  
strange

After I woke up, I wasn't too late it was  
Christmas day  
I was still in time to change my wrongs to  
rights I should say

So that's exactly what I did

I was once a man  
Who destroyed other's plans

But now,  
I have changed I have rearranged

I have seen my own grave  
Now changing my ways is my only crave

Making people happy was my thing  
Now, joy around the town is what I bring.

Sincerely,  
Ebenezer Scrooge

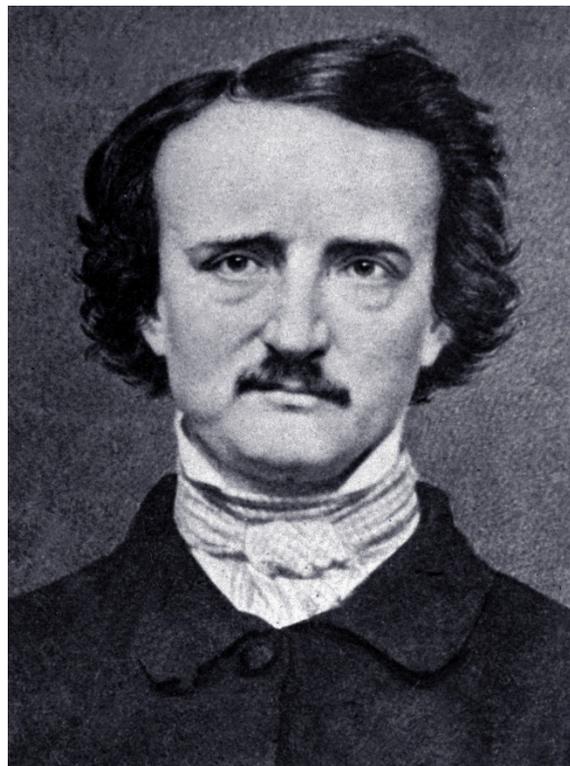
~ End ~

A CHRISTMAS CAROL  
(AS TOLD BY EDGAR ALLEN POE)  
By JANİYAH HANDS

I was not at fault and you may think me mad, but know this I was driven to the place that I now reside. By the spirits and the ghosts that now taunt me, on the day of the birth of the holy son, I am tormented. How could it be a holy day when I am forced down to the deepest pits of hell on that dreadful day. Now this story that I tell you now, is the furthest from fiction as the earth to the moon.

I loved her, no matter what the clergyman or the policemen may tell you. That is the sacrifice of love you must be willing to cherish your lover and rid them of all earthly desire and pain. That is what my sacrifice did for her. Margo always found me intoxicated with and befallen with slurred speech. I grew more and more irritable; moody. I would have outbursts of anger. I was prone to inflicting pain on the ones around me, including my sweet Margo. One of these moments, where I was deeply affected by the effects of the fiend substance, I did something that I shall be tortured for the rest of my days. I can hardly solicit the idea that the outcome of that foul day affected Margo as much as it did I. On that day, on the first day of the month of the lord and holy son, I killed her, I shall not put it in layman's terms or put any ideas in that statement that may solicit the belief that I did not do as such. I killed her in cold blood. The neighbor's heard the shrieks and didn't waste any time in notifying the authorities. They came as quick as the life drained from her body. In court, I pleaded mental- which in no way I am or shall be described as such- and was sent to the asylum. But the story that I pen today doesn't end there, that is just where it began.

The outside of the asylum was the part that frightened me the most. It was a dark and foul smelling place. The paint off the walls



**Edgar Allan Poe (1809 – 1849) was an American writer, poet, editor, and literary critic. Poe is best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre.**

was peeling, of the paint that still resided on the walls, well it was this deep black that looked like the innermost bowels of one's soul. It had the look of a castle and you could tell, this place was one of death and sorrow. Once I entered the place I knew it was no place for a man of my standard and rank. These people, they were really and truly mad. They twitched and laughed and stared. They told tales of murder and sin. I also met Tommy, a guard who barely makes ends meet. It was laughable really that I, a supposedly convicted Madman, had it better than a man who was a guard and got to see his family every day. And when I got to my room on the day of the son's birth,



Alex Syiek as the Ghost of Christmas Present in the Great Lakes Theater production of *A Christmas Carol*.

Christmas, that was the first time that it happened.

I tried to rest peacefully that night, but instead of being awoken but the screams of the patients, I got awoken by a ghost, and this is where the story goes into the realms of fiction but I swear to that I am not mad nor is this story fiction.

"Margo, is that you, my love?" I asked questionably and rubbed my eyes to assure myself that I had not still been sleeping.

"Yes, my love." She answered just louder than a whisper.

I got up from my bed and enveloped her in my embrace, but when I reached her there was nothing to grab.

"I'm sorry, my love," said Margo, "I am nothing more than a spirit of someone you lost, I have no body to reside in."

"I believe I understand," I said "But what brings you here?"

"I am here to take to a place that exists but in a way that it was in the past, a place that exists somewhere else and a place that exists but not in the way that we know it today."

She always spoke in riddles and rhymes, It was quite childish to me but was one of the reasons why I adored her. She always tried to make me happy with said riddles. But before I could respond, we were in front of a bar. I had recalled this place from my memory in that moment and a shudder passed through my body. This was the place where I met her. We were both young and spry.

"Do you recall this place?" Asked Margo.

The establishment looked new, contrasting drastically to how it looks now.

I answered Margo with a "Yes" and she led me into this place, for a strange reason which I am unable to explain. I was filled with a sense of dread.

The first person I laid my eyes upon was myself. Margo and I were dancing and laughing, we were young and in love, I hadn't started becoming intoxicated yet.

"Welcome to Christmas past, my dear. This is the day where we first met, Christmas." Said Margo.

That is when I realized that Margo hadn't forgiven me, she was sent from down below to torment me.

"I don't want to remember this!" I screamed at her.

"Oh, my love, but you must I have suffered and you shall too." Margo said. My sin had caused this, this wasn't a happy reunion akin with a family reunion where family

rejoiced in one another. This was torture at its purest form.

I woke up again back in my room. And Margo.

"Leave me at peace, you damned spirit!" I screamed. Of course, she still resided in the place where she stood.

"We must go, my love, to the present to Tommy's house," said Margo.

Suddenly, without our warning I was in Tommy's home. A few children, a woman and Tommy were sitting around the table, with little to eat. Another child came down the stairs. He had a wooden cane and had a broken leg. Tommy picked him up and sat the child down at the table.

"Why would you bring me here? I asked. "And what fate shall befall that child?"

Margo answered, "I brought you here to show you that even a poor man surrounded by his family is better than a rich madman who killed his wife." "I am not mad!" I yelled again and was immediately silenced because suddenly we were in a graveyard with Tommy looking at a grave sorrowfully. It read tiny Tim. And a cane was placed on top of the grave.

I looked down almost as sorrowfully as Tommy did. Across the grave yard, I saw an unmarked grave. Against my good judgement, I proceeded towards it and looked inside it, there was nothing there.

"Whose grave is this?" I asked

Margo pushed me into the grave and I heard screams and yells all throughout the night. When I woke up on the 26th the next day, I felt worse than I could have ever imagined in my worst nightmare.

Every single year on that dreadful day, she visits me and take this letter as the last one before death because I can no longer take it anymore, it has been 13 years of this torture, and I can't stand it. I should have appreciated her and loved her. That was what that day was about. And now it is too late to turn back. I just wish I could have figured out this fact before my worst sin and before it was too late. Goodbye, this so the last thing I shall pen and you shall know my story.

~ End ~



"The Raven" by Philip Henry Gosse, 1849  
Image from *The Natural History of Birds*

## A COVID CHRISTMAS CAROL

BY EVAN KING

It was the day before Christmas in the year 2020. Scrooge was busy fretting about the costs of cleaning and sanitizing products. He was seeing how many places he could cut back. He had laid off most of his other workers already. He had lost his business partner Jacob Marley earlier in the year to the on-going coronavirus. Scrooge refused to purchase a computer or programs for his only remaining employee, Mr. Bob Cratchit. He didn't want to spend the money on things that he felt were unnecessary. In his opinion, Bob had a perfectly good working computer at his desk in the office, and he could work there just fine.

At the close of business that day, Scrooge locked up shop and headed home. When he arrived home, he kept getting the feeling he was being watched. Then, he heard what he thought to be the voice of his former partner Jacob. It was. Jacob came to warn Scrooge that disaster lay ahead if he didn't change his ways. He warned him that things could get even worse than they already were. Scrooge wanted to hear none of it. Before Jacob left he told Scrooge that he would be visited by three sprits and with that he left.

Scrooge thought he was imagining things. As he watched the evening news, he heard of the spikes in the coronavirus cases all over the country. Even though Scrooge knew that Jacob had passed from the coronavirus, he felt that it wasn't going to touch him any more than it already had. Shaking his head he shut off the television and headed for bed. As he began to drift to sleep, a bright light filled the room. The Ghost of Christmas Past stood at the bottom of his bed. He took the covers away from Scrooge and pulled him out of bed. He showed Scrooge the joy he had when he was a young man. The fun of family and friends getting together to share meals and each other's company. Hugs and laughter,



**Lynn Robert Berg as Ebenezer Scrooge in the Great Lakes Theater production of *A Christmas Carol*.**

games and gifts and smiles all around. None of this was in Scrooge's life now.

In a blink of his eyes, Scrooge was back in his bed. Just when he began to think it had all been a dream and was dozing off to sleep, a rush of air blew into the room. It was the Ghost of Christmas Present. She came to show him how things really were. She showed him the Cratchit household. Scrooge could not understand how the family could be happy with the tiny bit of food that they had and were calling it a feast. He heard Mrs. Cratchit saying that she was so happy that they were able to make such a feast and so thankful for the food bank. The ghost explained to Mr. Scrooge that Mr. Cratchit did not make enough money to fully support his family, so they had to seek out additional means. After the dinner, the older children took out their school issued computers and hot spots so that they could talk with their

grandparents on Zoom, since they couldn't be in person due to the pandemic. Scrooge didn't truly understand the need for this connection. He was about to start asking questions, but when he turned around, he saw that he was back in his bedroom.

For the third time he tried to go to bed. Sleep did not come, but the third ghost did. This was the Ghost of Christmas Future. This ghost was the most intimidating, it had no face, just a shadowy, hooded figure. Scrooge asked it to leave. The ghost simply pointed in the direction of the wall. As Scrooge slowly got up to see what the ghost was pointing at, he saw a mourning Mrs. Cratchit.

She and her older children were crying over the loss of their youngest son and sibling Tim. The oldest child was asking Mrs. Cratchit if their dad was going to make it. She told them that she didn't know. She explained she can only check in with the hospital when school is over so she can use the computer to see their dad, as he had contracted coronavirus.

She blamed Scrooge under her breath for making Bob go to work and catching the virus. This was what took the life of Tim as he was vulnerable to begin with. At the sight of this scene, Scrooge pleaded for the spirit to stop and take him home. The spirit had one more stop for Scrooge, this was his own grave site. As Scrooge begged and pleaded he fell to his knees crying for forgiveness and mercy. When he looked up he found that he was back in his bed. It was Christmas Day, though the coronavirus still around, he was still resolved to change his ways.

In his effort to change his ways, Scrooge bought a computer and internet access for Bob Cratchit to work from home with. He gave Bob a raise and had the Cratchit children show him how to conduct Zoom conferences online. He purchased cleaning and sanitizing supplies for the business and the Cratchit household. He gave a generous donation to the food bank and volunteered his time too. He had truly learned his lesson and changed as a person.

*~ End ~*



**Mr. Fezziwig (Aled Davies, center) dances with his employees in the Great Lakes Theater production of *A Christmas Carol*.**

## ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER



### **Charles Fee, 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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[greatlakes theater.org](http://greatlakes theater.org)

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and to our reader-judges:

**Michelle Arendt   Chennelle Bryant-Harris   Gail Cudak   Carol Dolan   Kelly Schaffer Florian  
David Hansen   Diane K. Hupp   Katie McVoy   Lisa Ortenzi   Kristine Tesar   Art Thomas**