

Two Poems for Teachers....

THE GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST

*For each of us there are the Christmas ghosts
who gather in the shadows by the door,
the living ghosts, the gentle dead
whose hearts now beat once more.*

*We meet them only at this time of year,
their warm, lost smiles come shining once again,
they step out from our memory
like rainbows in the rain.*

*I see you in your winter clothes, laughing.
Eyes that I loved are full again with joy.
You open wide your aching arms
that I may step inside.*

*A scent that was the scent of life returns,
darkness dissolves, old songs drift in the night air,
a dream becomes a tender touch,
frost lights your ghostly hair.*

*And, if I listen, I can hear your words
and say the things I never chanced to say.
Belief becomes an absolute,
for this short, winter day.*

John MacKenna

BC: AD

*This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.*

*This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.*

*This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.*

*And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect.
Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.*

U.A. Fanthorpe

(available in U.A. Fanthorpe,

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CHRISTMAS IN LITERATURE

Many Christmas based stories have been made into movies and, over the holidays, there are lots of these movies on the television and in the cinema. But, sometimes, it's nicer to read some of those stories. Often, the pictures that we create in our heads, as we read these stories, are better than the ones on television!



One of the stories most associated with Christmas is Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. It tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge. Scrooge is a miser, who, during the night of Christmas Eve, is visited by three ghosts (Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Future) who help him to mend his ways. The ghosts show him how things were in the past, in happier days; show him the life of his employee, Bob Cratchit, and his family as they prepare for Christmas dinner; and, finally, Scrooge sees the future and how, when he dies, no one will mourn his passing. As he looks into the house of Bob Cratchit, he is struck by the joy and happiness of this poor family – their happiness has no bearing on the fact that they are poor. He wakes up on Christmas morning a changed man. He becomes generous and happy again and, as it says at the end of the book, *“And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One!”*

The Welsh writer, Dylan Thomas, wrote a beautiful memoir of his Christmases growing up and how the memories of all those Christmases are joined together, *“One Christmas was so much like another, in those years around the sea-town corner now.... that I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and six nights when I was twelve or whether it snowed for twelve days and twelve nights when I was six”*.

The American writer, Louisa May Alcott, wrote about Christmas in *Little Women*, which tells the story of Jo, her mother and her sisters during the American Civil War. On Christmas morning, Jo finds a small book, a modest gift from her mother for Christmas. She tells of the joy she feels in the love that is shown by the gift. She calls it, *“that beautiful old story of the best life ever lived”* – it is a copy of the New Testament. As her sisters wake, they find similar gifts under each of their pillows. Even in times of shortages and poverty, the smallest of gifts can mean so much to the person that receives them.

OTHER BOOKS TO BE READ AT CHRISTMAS ARE:

The Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg (Houghton Mifflin, 1985)

*Fast becoming a classic Christmas favourite and celebrating its 215th anniversary. It tells the story of the train which takes a group of children to the North Pole to see Santa Claus, reminiscent of the other favourite from Christmas, **The Snowman** by Raymond Briggs.*

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey by Susan Wojciechowski (Walker Books, 1995) *A beautifully illustrated book, on the creation of a crib*

The Christmas Mystery by Jostein Gaarder (Phoenix 1996)

A story told in the days of Advent. Each chapter marks the days leading up till Christmas. It might be suitable for the senior classes – to be read individually or as part of an Advent reflection every day.

One Little Angel by Ruth Brown (Andersen Press, 1998)

Again, this is a beautifully illustrated book, suitable for the younger classes and with a delightful twist at the end.

Amazing Peace – A Christmas Poem by Maya Angelou (Schwartz & Wade, 2005)

This is a poem, written for the 2005 White House tree-lighting ceremony, by the unofficial American poet laureate, Maya Angelou.

12 Days of Christmas by Kathleen Darragh (Veritas 2006)

This is a different take on the traditional 12 days of Christmas story, and it is beautifully illustrated by Jeanette Dunne, who illustrated the Alive-O programme.

Two great books, suitable for reading in class or for older children are the two volumes of ***Irish Christmas Stories*** edited by David Marcus and published in 1995 and 1997 by Bloomsbury.

These next books have wonderful stories and poems set at Christmas from all different sources and suitable for all ages:

The Oxford Book of Christmas Poems (Oxford, 1983)

The Oxford Book of Christmas Stories (Oxford, 1986)

The Macmillan Book of Christmas (Ted Smart, 1995)

The Faber Book of Christmas (Faber, 1996)

Joy to the World – Two Thousand Years of Christmas (Four Courts Press, 2000)

Fill My Stocking – A Christmas Anthology (Alan Titchmarsh BBC Books, 2005).

The county library system should be able to find some or all of these books.

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

JANUARY 6TH, 2010



On January 6th we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, when the wise men came to worship the baby Jesus. Tradition tells us that their names were Caspar, Melchior and Balthassar. The men were astrologers, and their job was to study the sky and examine the stars. The Gospel tells us that the men were following one particular, bright star in the sky. They knew that this star would lead them to the Messiah, because they read about it in the Book of Micah, which is part of the Bible. The wise men first went to Jerusalem, but then the star led them on to Bethlehem. You can read about *Visitors from the East* in the Gospel of Matthew 2:1-12.

The wise men brought special gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh with them. These gifts were very meaningful. Gold was a very precious and expensive gift, and showed how important Jesus was. Frankincense is a sweet perfume which was often burned in the temple to worship God. It was a sign that Jesus should also be worshipped. Myrrh was used to keep things fresh, and it was used by the women to anoint Jesus' body when he died. By bringing it as a gift to the baby Jesus, the wise men foretold his suffering and death.

HELP THE WISE MEN FIND THEIR WAY TO JESUS BY MAKING CAMELS FOR THEIR JOURNEY!

What you will need:

- One cardboard egg carton between three children
- One cork per child (or half a cork between two)
- Pipe cleaners (six per child, but these can be halved)
- Black marker
- Scissors
- Paint, wool and wiggly eyes are optional!



What to do:

1. Divide the egg carton into three sets of two cups
2. Using the point of a scissors, an adult should make holes at the base of the cups for the four legs and holes at each end for the neck and tail. Make one small hole in the end of the cork.
3. Insert a pipe cleaner into each of the holes for legs and the tail.
4. Insert one end of a pipe cleaner into the cork; insert the other end into a hole at the end of the egg cups.
5. Add eyes, a mouth, and decorate!

If you would like to add the wise men to the camels (similar to those illustrated above), you can download a picture from <http://www.christmascoloring.net/religious>

Help each wise man find his gift for Jesus



Can you name the three Wise Men?

sCarpa

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haBlsarst