

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE



STUDY GUIDE

December 13 – 21, 2025 at Westport Country Playhouse

A SHERLOCK CAROL

Written/Directed by Mark Shanahan based on characters created by Charles Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
Presented by Westport Country Playhouse. December 13-21, 2025.

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

“A Sherlock Carol” is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC, servicing the Dramatists Play Service imprint. (www.dramatists.com). “A Sherlock Carol” was originally produced off-Broadway at New World Stages in New York City, opening on November 21, 2021. It was produced by Raymond Bokhour, Drew McVety, and Fred Lassen for Fat Goose Productions, Laura Z. Barket for Theatre Nerd Productions, and executive produced by Nathan Gehan and Jamison Scott for ShowTown Productions. ShowTown Theatricals was the general manager. It was directed by Mark Shanahan, the set design was by Anna Louizos, the lighting design was by Rui Rita, the original music and sound design was by John Gromada, the costume design was by Linda Cho, the hair and wig design was by Charles G. LaPointe, the fight choreography was by Seth Andrew Bridges, the assistant director was Camden Gonzales, and the stage manager was Jill Cordle Mont. The original cast was Drew McVety as Sherlock Holmes, Thom Sesma as Ebenezer Scrooge, Dan Domingues as Dr. Timothy Cratchit, Anissa Felix as Emma Wiggins, Mark Price as Dr. Watson, and Isabel Keating as The Countess.

A STUDY GUIDE

This study guide was designed to enrich students’ experience of “A Sherlock Carol” at Westport Country Playhouse. It provides context, analysis, and insight into Mark Shanahan’s inspirations, themes, and characters while highlighting elements specific to our production. The guide aims to deepen understanding, spark discussion, and help students engage more fully with both the play’s social satire and the unique artistic choices of our theatre’s interpretation.

NOTE

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SPECIAL THANKS

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CONTACT

Prepared by Maggie Meath, December 2025

WestportPlayhouse.com/Education

educationteam@westportplayhouse.org



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BEFORE THE CURTAIN RISES

A Primer for the Keen Observer

Theater Audience Etiquette

Welcome to Westport Country Playhouse! Attending a live performance is a special experience. Each show is unique, and every audience plays an important role in making it come to life. Whether this is your first time at the theater or one of many, here are a few tips to help you enjoy the performance and support the artists and audience members around you.

- Please do not bring food or drink into the theater.
- Turn off all phones or anything that makes noise or lights up.
- No texting, please.
- Please talk only before or after the performance or during intermission.
- Remember that this is a live performance, and that in addition to being disruptive to your neighbors, unruly behavior can be heard by the actors on stage.
- Act with maturity during romantic, violent or other challenging scenes.
- Open your eyes, ears and mind to the world on stage. Theater has the power to transport us to another place; open your heart to that experience.
- When we enter the theater, try to look around. There are all kinds of cool posters from shows and interesting things to see. If you have questions about a show or our theater, just ask any Playhouse staff member, and they'll be happy to chat with you.
- Please don't take any photos or videos in the theatre at any time.
- Enjoy the show!



...you don't want to miss this crowd pleasing yet sophisticated show...clever and entertaining ...fresh, imaginative, and engaging...it's important for kids to be introduced to the best of the arts...seeing excellence in the performing arts will be indelible in their brains.

-Broadway World



Glossary of Theatre Terms

Act — A major division of a play, similar to a chapter in a book.

Aside — A short remark a character says to the audience that other characters don't hear.

Backdrop — A large cloth or background piece showing scenery.

Blocking — The planned movement of actors onstage.

Cue — A signal telling an actor or technician when to speak, move, or activate a tech effect.

Dialogue — The spoken lines between characters.

Director — The person who leads the creative vision of the production and works with actors and designers.

Ensemble — A group of performers who work together without one main star.

Foreshadowing — Hints or clues about events that will happen later.

Fourth Wall — The imaginary wall between performers and audience.

Ghost Light — A single light left onstage when the theatre is empty, both for safety and as a long-held tradition to keep the space "alive" between performances.

House — The area where the audience sits.

House Manager — The person responsible for the audience's experience, overseeing front-of-house staff, seating, and safety during the show.

Monologue — A long speech spoken by one character to another character or the audience.

Parentheticals — Brief notes in parentheses that show how a line should be delivered.

Prop (Property) — Any object an actor uses onstage.

Scene — A smaller division within an act, often marked by a change in time or place.

Set — The physical environment onstage that shows where the story happens.

Soliloquy — A speech in which a character shares thoughts aloud, usually alone onstage.

Stage Manager — The person who coordinates every element of a production, ensuring rehearsals, cues, and performances run smoothly from first read-through to final curtain.

Stage Directions — Written instructions about movement, behavior, or tone. Not spoken aloud.

Stage Left / Stage Right — Directions from the actor's point of view while facing the audience.

Understudy — An actor who learns a role and can step in if the main performer cannot.

Upstage / Downstage — "Upstage" is the back of the stage; "downstage" is the front, closest to the audience.

Wings — The hidden areas just offstage where actors wait and scenery is stored before entering the playing space.

FURTHER VIEWING

CHECK OUT [THIS VIDEO](#) FROM WCP'S THROWBACK THURSDAYS ON HOUSE MANAGER AND STAGE MANAGER ROLES AT A GLANCE: <https://youtu.be/sU6Ps6rjxII?si=ciyMd9pM93uNpOTa>

ARCHITECT OF FOOTLIGHTS AND FOOTNOTES

The Mind Behind the Magnifying Glass

A Biography of Writer and Director Mark Shanahan

Mark Shanahan was named Westport Country Playhouse incoming artistic director for 2023-24. He assumed the position in February 2024. Since 2018, he has been the curator of the popular Script In Hand series originated by Annie Keefe.

Shanahan is the writer/director of The New York Times Critics' Pick "A Sherlock Carol" (Off-Broadway Alliance nomination, Best New Play 2021), which he wrote as a sequel to his own "A Merry Little Christmas Carol". "A Sherlock Carol" played two seasons in New York and plays annually at London's Marylebone Theatre. He directed his own adaptation of "Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd," in partnership with Agatha Christie Ltd. in a World Premiere production at the Alley Theatre. Additionally, he is the author of "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," "See Monsters of the Deep," the Off-Broadway and regional hit comedy "The Dingdong," and numerous radio plays as creator of the White Heron Ghost Light series, featuring Christopher Plummer, Judith Ivey, Rhonda Ross, and other notable actors.

Shanahan has directed at stages around the country such as Alley Theatre, George Street Playhouse, Virginia Stage, Arkansas Rep, White Heron, Mile Square Theatre, Hudson Stage, Theatre Squared, Fulton Opera House, Weston Playhouse, Orlando Shakespeare Festival, Florida Rep, Penguin Rep, Merrimack Rep, The Cape Playhouse, and many more. As an actor, he has appeared on and Off-Broadway ("The 39 Steps," "Tryst," "The Shaugraun," and others) and at many celebrated regional theatres.

Shanahan has appeared on the Westport Country Playhouse stage as an actor in "Journey's End" (2005) "David Copperfield," directed by Joanne Woodward and Annie Keefe, (2005), "Sedition" (2007), "Tryst" (2008), and "Around the World in 80 Days" (2009) and over twenty Script In Hand readings. He has also directed his play "A Sherlock Carol" on the Playhouse stage.

During the pandemic, he was the creator of the Westport Country Playhouse Radio Theater, in partnership with WSHU Public Radio, and served as writer/director of the Playhouse radio adaptation of "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," and served as as director of scripts commissioned for the series. For more, please visit mark-shanahan.net.

A List of Plays by Mark Shanahan

- "Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" – Adapted for the stage from the novel
- "The Dingdong (or *How the French Kiss*)" – Adapted from Le Dindon, by Georges Feydeau
- "A Merry Little Christmas Carol" – Adapted from the novella by Charles Dickens
- "A Sherlock Carol" – Based on characters by Charles Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
- "See Monsters of the Deep" – From a concept by Mark Shanahan and Steve Pacek
- "The Chronology Protection Case" – Adapted for the radio from the short story by Paul Levinson
- "Whistle" – A short ghost play based on a story by M. R. James

A BRIEF INQUIRY INTO THE CONSULTING DETECTIVE

On the curious habits of Mr. Sherlock Holmes

A Snapshot

Sherlock Holmes stepped onto the literary stage in 1887 and quickly became one of the most enduring fictional figures in modern storytelling. He is a consulting detective—sharp-eyed, cool-minded, and famously uninterested in anything that does not engage his razorlike intellect. Holmes is known for his ability to observe small details that others overlook and to construct logical conclusions from those details. Alongside him stands Dr. John Watson: friend, biographer, and the emotional ballast to Holmes’s startling brilliance. Together, they inhabit a London filled with swirling fog, cryptic clues, and the constant hum of human unpredictability.

Holmes appears in four novels and fifty-six short stories. These tales have been retold in countless forms: theater, film, radio drama, television series, and modern adaptations that continually reinterpret him. He has become less a character and more a cultural landmark—the kind of figure audiences feel they know even if they’ve never read the original stories.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), Holmes’s creator, balanced two lives: one as a physician and one as a writer. Born in Scotland and trained in medicine, he began writing while waiting for patients who never quite arrived. Doyle wrote historical novels, science fiction, political essays, and a vast range of short stories, but Holmes overshadowed them all. Doyle famously tried to kill Holmes off in 1893, hoping to focus on other projects. The public revolt was so fierce that Doyle eventually brought the detective back from the brink.

Doyle’s work shaped the modern detective genre. His stories helped standardize the “eccentric genius detective,” the loyal companion, the red herring, and the climactic reveal—storytelling patterns still used in mysteries today. At the same time, Doyle was a complex figure whose interests ranged from military history to spiritualism later in life, a shift that stands in striking contrast to Holmes’s cool rationality.

Character Traits

Holmes is often described as brilliant, analytical, and sometimes aloof or emotionally detached. He notices details that others overlook, such as small physical marks, unusual behaviors, or subtle changes in a scene. He often makes deductions based on careful observation and deductive reasoning, which combine logic with



knowledge of human behavior. Despite his brilliance, Holmes can also be eccentric, obsessive, and socially distant. His famous companion, Dr. John Watson, serves as his friend, biographer, and a grounding presence for both Holmes and the audience.

Famous Cases and Stories

Some of Holmes's most well-known stories include *A Study in Scarlet* (his first appearance), *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*. The stories often involve mysterious deaths, thefts, disappearances, or criminal plots. Holmes's methods rely on gathering evidence, questioning witnesses, and thinking logically, often while others are misled by appearances.

Setting and Themes

Holmes's adventures are primarily set in Victorian London, though he occasionally travels elsewhere. Many stories feature foggy streets, mysterious houses, and atmospheric settings that heighten suspense. Common themes include justice, the pursuit of truth, and the tension between reason and deception. Some stories also explore morality, human nature, and the contrast between science and intuition.

Cultural Impact

Holmes has had a lasting influence on literature, television, film, and popular culture. He has been adapted into countless movies, TV series, and modern reimagings. Phrases like "Elementary, my dear Watson" (though not verbatim in the original texts) are widely recognized. The character of Sherlock Holmes has inspired real-world forensic science and detective work, particularly in his methodical approach to observation and deduction.

Enduring Legacy

Holmes continues to thrive because each generation finds something new in him: a model of clear thinking, a symbol of curiosity, or simply a companion in the dark corners of a good mystery. Whether he is reimaged in Victorian fog, modern London, or a new holiday mashup, Holmes remains a figure who invites readers to look more closely at the world around them and trust that even the most tangled problems can be unraveled with patience, observation, and a bit of daring intellect.



In "A Sherlock Carol," Holmes is transported from his traditional crime-solving context into a story that also incorporates elements of *A Christmas Carol*. Understanding Holmes's focus on logic, observation, and deduction helps students appreciate how his character interacts with the supernatural and emotional elements of the Dickensian world. His rational, methodical mind contrasts with the magical and moral lessons of the Christmas story, creating tension and humor.



CONCERNING THE MOST FAMOUS HAUNTING

A short account of Spirits, Scrooges and Second Chances

A Snapshot

Charles Dickens (1812–1870) was one of the most widely read writers of the nineteenth century and remains a defining voice of English literature. His childhood was marked by instability and financial hardship—experiences that later fueled his empathy for society’s most vulnerable and his lifelong interest in justice, reform, and the human capacity for change. Dickens wrote serialized novels that reached enormous audiences, turning each new installment into a kind of literary event. Many of his works—*Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*—explore poverty, morality, and the struggle to remain kind in a world that often forgets to be.

Published in 1843, *A Christmas Carol* became one of Dickens’s most beloved works. The novella follows Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly old man whose icy view of the world is challenged by a night of spectral visitations. Through the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come, Dickens examines memory, compassion, and the possibility of redemption. At its heart, the story is a call for generosity and community—a reminder that no one is beyond transformation.

Dickens’s storytelling helped shape the modern idea of Christmas as a season of goodwill, reflection, and human connection. His vivid characters and emotionally charged scenes gave the holiday a narrative shape that still echoes in contemporary culture. Like Sherlock Holmes, Dickens’s creations have traveled far beyond the printed page, inspiring films, plays, musicals, and adaptations across nearly every medium.

In “A Sherlock Carol,” Dickens’s ghost-haunted tale becomes the warm hearth around which a new mystery is lit, blending the moral imagination of Dickens with the sharp intellect of Conan Doyle’s world.

A Christmas Carol

Ebenezer Scrooge is a cold-hearted, solitary businessman who sees Christmas as nothing more than a nuisance. On Christmas Eve, he is visited by the ghost of his former partner, Jacob Marley, who warns Scrooge that his own soul is in danger. Throughout the night, Scrooge is guided by three spirits—Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet to Come—each revealing visions that illuminate the consequences of his choices. He witnesses moments from his own youth, the quiet struggles of the Cratchit family, and the bleak future that awaits if he continues down his current path. Shaken and newly aware of his impact on others, Scrooge awakens on Christmas morning transformed. He opens his heart, embraces generosity, and begins to repair the relationships he once neglected.

The Lessons

The supernatural visitors show Scrooge the consequences of his selfishness, the joy and suffering of those around him, and what may happen if he does not change. By the story's end, Scrooge transforms into a generous and compassionate man, embodying the themes of redemption and goodwill.

Main Characters

- **Ebenezer Scrooge** – The central character, initially cold-hearted and greedy.
- **Bob Cratchit** – Scrooge's kind and hardworking clerk, father of Tiny Tim.
- **Tiny Tim** – Cratchit's disabled and cheerful son, symbolizing innocence and moral conscience.
- **Jacob Marley** – Scrooge's deceased business partner, who warns him to change his ways.
- **The Three Spirits** – Supernatural guides who reveal lessons from the past, present, and future.

Cultural Impact

A Christmas Carol is one of Dickens's most enduring works, inspiring countless adaptations in theater, film, television, and literature. Its moral message about kindness, generosity, and reflection during the holiday season has made it a cultural touchstone for Christmas traditions worldwide.

A Note from Mark Shanahan on *A Christmas Carol* from an article for Virginia Stage

"*A Christmas Carol* has always had a bit of theatre in its bones. Under financial pressure, Dickens wrote the original novel like a man possessed. His family stood outside his study doors and heard him acting out the scenes, laughing and weeping as the now-iconic characters poured out of him. When the book was published in 1843, Christmas itself was revitalized, almost overnight. Within months, theatres across England were competing with their own adaptations. Dickens himself began performing public readings of the story, acting out every role with relish. It's been said that he terrified audiences with his Jacob Marley and brought them to tears performing dear ol' Tiny Tim."



In "A Sherlock Carol," Dickens's story provides the moral and emotional framework. Scrooge's character, his fear of his past mistakes, and the supernatural elements from the original story all intersect with Sherlock Holmes's detective logic. Understanding the original story helps students see how Shanahan blends mystery and moral lesson, creating a unique crossover that combines suspense with holiday reflection.



DIVING DEEPER: ON BRECHT

There are several techniques used in “A Sherlock Carol” that are inspired by theatre innovator Bertolt Brecht. The following article from [Virginia Stage Company’s Dramaturgy Blog](#) delves deeper into these methods.

Bertolt Brecht was a visionary theatre practitioner whose contributions transformed the art form in profound ways. His innovative ideas and techniques left an indelible mark on theatre, reshaping how stories are told on stage. Modern theatre owes much of its evolution to Brecht's groundbreaking approaches, which continue to influence productions today.

Brechtian theatre encourages audiences to actively engage with the performance by employing specific theatrical techniques. Rather than presenting a world that is detailed and realistic, the production design emphasizes a sense of theatre. Through these methods, he aimed to remind audiences that what they were witnessing was a representation of life, not life itself. This approach became known as Epic Theatre.

Several Brechtian techniques are woven into the fabric of *A Sherlock Carol*, including:

- **Narration:** Used to reinforce the storytelling aspect, narration reminds the audience that they are watching a constructed tale rather than a slice of reality.
- **Breaking the Fourth Wall:** Actors directly address the audience through speeches, comments, or questions, dissolving the barrier between performers and spectators.
- **Song and Music:** Songs and musical elements are strategically placed to disrupt realism, encouraging viewers to reflect critically rather than becoming lost in the narrative.
- **Multi-Role Playing:** Actors portray multiple characters, often with minimal costume changes. This technique highlights character shifts through voice, movement, and gestures, making it clear that a single actor embodies multiple personas without attempting to create a seamless illusion.

These methods infuse *A Sherlock Carol* with a distinctly Brechtian flair, creating an engaging and thought-provoking theatrical experience.

About Bertolt Brecht:

Brecht is a key figure of our time, and all theatre work today at some point starts or returns to his statements and achievements. Peter Brooke Bertolt Brecht was born in Germany in 1898 and died at the age of 58 in 1956 in the city of Berlin, East Germany. He is best known for his literary works, poetry, being a playwright, a theorist of epic theatre and the Brechtian acting method. Brecht lived in Munich during the Weimar Republic and then during Nazi Germany, he fled to seek exile first in Scandinavia and then in the United States. As a prolific writer and theorist of modern dramaturgy, Brecht's work was deeply influenced by the political and artistic climate of early twentieth-century Germany. Amid the aftermath of World War I and the rise of fascism, Brecht and other politically conscious artists were compelled to confront the new social and political realities through their productions.

A DETECTIVE, A MISER, AND A KID IN THE BACK ROW

Origins of a Sherlock Carol

The following article was written in 2022 by Mark Shanahan about how important the world's greatest detective is to him.

Heroes often reveal themselves, without fanfare, at precisely the moment we need them most.

When I was ten years old, my father was battling a tough illness. At home, there was constant worry, but my dad knew just where to take me to escape from the uncertainty and anxiety.

On rainy Saturday afternoons, we'd trudge downtown to the East Village in New York City and visit Theatre 80 St. Mark's, a revival house which showed double features of old movies. I am convinced that my chosen career in the theatre can be traced back to the joys of sitting with my dad in the darkened audience at Theatre 80, becoming fully immersed in the stories which came to life before my eyes. It was...to put it simply, pure heaven at a time when heaven seemed a bit out of reach of my ten year old arms.

The theatre was a dimly lit cave where, briefly, all seemed right with the world. There, I met heroes from Hollywood's heyday, usually in thrillers because I liked them best. On those afternoons, we'd stumble upon Cary Grant climbing Mt. Rushmore, or one of Bogart's world weary tough guys, or Orson Welles in Vienna. Once we even took a detour and came across some sled with a funny name.

One particularly rainy Saturday right before my father was to return to the hospital for treatment, we arrived at Theatre 80 and a remarkable character flickered to life on the screen. Sherlock Holmes had showed up in that movie theatre, just when I needed him most.

It was Basil Rathbone in the role, smirking with knowing charm. And there, too, was his best and most loyal pal, Dr. Watson, played by Nigel Bruce. The Hound Of The Baskervilles and The Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes splashed onto the screen that day, and those two movies, generally considered Rathbone and Bruce's finest outings as the duo, were filled with foggy London streets, mysterious handsome cabs, evil villains and brilliant deductions, the likes of which only Sherlock Holmes could make. I was hooked.

Like so many other ten year olds who come across the character, I immediately wanted more. A month later, under a Christmas tree, I found a wrapped copy of The Complete Stories of Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle, and I devoured each and every story.

The tales were perfect for my ten year old love of adventure stories, uncomplicated by the anxieties of adult matters in the real world. At the heart of the every story I found a kind of warmth- exhibited by the friendship shared between a hero and his sidekick. I felt that friendship somehow extended to me, too. Oh, I was convinced that I would surely have made as great a sidekick to Sherlock as Watson did. As worrisome as life could be, Holmes suggested that somehow, a solution was always on the way- and I believed him.

I marveled at each adventure in the volume. There was the one with the poisonous snake, the one with the missing blue diamond, the one with the impossible secret code, and then the one... where he died.

Wait a minute. Had I read that right? Sherlock Holmes - dead? Never to show up again?

Surely that couldn't happen! After all, Conan Doyle would never ever ... Wait. Would he?

I needed to do some investigating myself. The forward in my collection, written by a pompous sounding scholar, provided some explanation. Holmes had in fact been killed. And there was no mystery as to whodunnit.

For a time, Doyle hated the popularity of his very own creation. "Holmes takes my mind from better things," the author complained to his mother. And so, in 1893 he published *The Final Problem*, sending Sherlock to a certain death, plunging him over the Reichenbach Falls in battle with his arch nemesis, Professor Moriarty.

Fortunately, Victorian readership shared my outrage. Hate mail poured in. Readers begged Doyle to reconsider. "Keep Holmes Alive" campaigns thrived as fictional obituaries were written in newspapers across the globe. The Strand Magazine, where Doyle's stories appeared, barely survived the experience, with 20,000 readers canceling their subscriptions.

Holmes' death left Watson as heartbroken as I was. He eulogized his friend as "the best and the wisest man whom I have ever known." If only the good doctor had been a little more observant, he may have deduced that the case of Holmes' death was not quite closed.

Consider that no body had ever been found in the story. Had Conan Doyle given himself a convenient "out" with what those who work in the theatre might recognize as an "offstage death?" Had the detective's demise merely been an elaborate act?

After all, there had always been more than a little bit of theatre about Sherlock Holmes. And a penchant for drama is what would ultimately allow him not only beat Moriarty, but cheat death itself.

Certainly, Sherlock held the theatre in regard. "The best way of successfully acting a part is to be it," stated Holmes in *The Case of The Dying Detective*. In stories, Holmes himself was an excellent actor, often donning disguises to ferret out clues, fooling even his closest confidant and most critical audience, Dr. Watson.

Watson gave him glowing reviews. "It was not merely that Holmes changed his costume." He stated. "His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part that he assumed." One client, noting Holmes' propensity for disguises, noted that "what the law had gained, the stage had lost," when Holmes took up his role as detective. Even a Scotland Yard detective had to complimented him, "You'd have made an actor, and a rare one!"

And of course, the theatre was where Holmes flourished as a character even during that period Doyle felt done with him.

Holmes first showed up onstage played by the American actor, William Gillette, who had campaigned to play the role. He sent a telegram to Doyle, asking "May I marry Holmes?" The still-indifferent author replied, "You may marry or murder or do what you like with him." Upon their first meeting, Doyle saw the character come to life as Gillette stepped off the train in full Holmes costume, the first in a long line to don the deerstalker and pipe which would come to define the character behind what Doyle had written.

And so, Sir Arthur gave in. "Very well," he scribbled on a postcard to his agent. And just like that, Holmes returned to life in 1903's *The Adventure Of the Empty House*. As it turned out, Holmes had merely faked his death! What a performance! After all, doesn't every good actor long to play a juicy death scene?

A Sketch of Holmes by 10-year-old Mark Shanahan



Whereas I had only to turn the page in my collection to learn Sherlock's happy fate, Victorian readership had been forced to wait ten long years to learn a simple fact... Sherlock Holmes can never die.

Adapted in every conceivable medium and with no end in sight, the detective has, much to his originator's chagrin, arguably become the most famous character in literature. Holmes' adventures continued for the rest of Doyle's writing career and eventually passed into the hands of many successors, eager to write new tales of Holmes' exploits. The Detective may ebb in and out of fashion occasionally, but he's always waiting in the wings to be reborn, reinterpreted, and resurrected. One never knows when and how he will show up in his next iteration, but rest assured, he will.

In recent years, Holmes has become a vehicle for new television and film adaptations, gaining more acclaim than ever before. But what of those who followed in the footsteps of Gillette? Surely Holmes, great actor that he is, would always lay claim to a place in the theatre. And, the theatre was just where I would come to find Holmes waiting to meet me time and again over the years, showing up at different stages of my life, just as he had greeted me at Theatre 80.

I admit that as a kid, I had a touch of stage fright and often begged out of the school play. But as a young man, I found the theatre was my home, a place in which imagination and stories are given life. After years working as an actor, I was cast in *The West End Horror*, an adaptation of Nicholas Meyer's Holmes novel about murder in the Victorian theatre scene. What a thrill to play even a supporting role and walk into Baker Street to greet Holmes and Watson in the flesh. Working on that show I met my future wife. So, I find I have Holmes to thank for giving me a wife and eventually a daughter, among other things!

Since then I have directed numerous Holmes plays on stages across the country, from serious takes on the character to loving spoofs. With all that in mind, eventually it came time for me to gin up a little bravery and try my own hand at writing a Holmes story for the stage.

I must admit, with respect to Rathbone, I had long since outgrown his version of Holmes, especially in those silly later films set in World War II. Of course, many actors have taken a shot at the role through the years (I happen to like Peter Cushing's Holmes more than the Benedict Cumberbatch version). But, I had never truly seen the version of Holmes on a stage or screen to match the image I had in mind when I first read the stories as a boy.

And now, I had become an adult. By the time in 2019 I told my friend, the wonderful actor Drew McVety, that I wanted to write a Holmes script in which he'd play the detective. He replied simply in his best Holmes voice, "then you must do it!"

And so, I did.

Freely borrowing elements from Doyle's stories and combining them with another titan of Victorian



Mark Shanahan

literature in Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge, I fashioned a holiday mashup of a mystery titled, *A Sherlock Carol*. I littered the tale with all the characters I loved, placing Watson and Lestrade alongside a grown-up Tiny Tim Cratchit and a few Fezziwig relatives, writing as if I was introducing old friends to each at a Christmas party- and hoping like hell they'd all get along.

Certainly, Holmes had given me hope and inspiration as a boy. Now, I felt I would write a play to remind my hero that he, too, could always find a way through hard times. Does that sound insane? Can one really return a favor to a fictional friend? I say, why not!?


With Dickens and Doyle as my guides, I banged out a draft which was ready to premiere in the fall 2020 at a theatre Off-Broadway, right in the heart of the theatre district with Drew primed to play Holmes. The stage was set!

But as in many mystery stories, there was a twist in the tale. The unforeseen occurred and the theatre itself was forced to close up shop. The world, rocked by a pandemic, faced a profound and difficult challenge - and the stage was no longer available as a place to gather, a place to investigate our fears, our joys, our anxieties, our hearts.

But, the theatre, like Holmes, is resilient. We merely had to wait, and surely the theatre would return.

At its heart, *A Sherlock Carol* is a tale of resurrection of the spirit, in which Sherlock Holmes, freshly returned from Reichenbach but not feeling like his old self, struggles his way back from a dark place on Christmas Eve. He is guided by the spirit of Ebenezer Scrooge, who seemed the perfect character to remind Holmes that we are all "fellow passengers to the grave," charging Holmes with becoming his best self and live up to his talents.

When we finally opened *A Sherlock Carol* in the fall of 2021, as the New York theatre itself was struggling to return to life, my mom and dad sat beside me.



THE GHOST CLUB

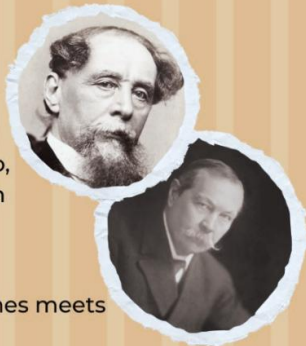
Did you know Charles Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle were **real-life ghost hunters**?

Both Victorian legends were members of **The Ghost Club**, a **19th-century paranormal investigation society** where séances, spirits, and strange stories met literary genius.

Dickens **filled his tales with ghosts** and moral reckonings.

Doyle **sought evidence of life beyond the grave**, so much so, he once claimed to speak with Dickens' spirit himself!

Their connection lives on in *A Sherlock Carol*, where Holmes meets the ghosts of Dickens past.



My dad had long ago battled and beaten his illness. It was as remarkable a victory as any survival at Reichenbach Falls, and even more heroic. At curtain call on *A Sherlock Carol*'s opening night, my parents leapt to their feet to applaud not only the actors, but the characters and stories I had loved since I was a boy. I am convinced that a good story well told - and often one with a good hero at its center - can help see us through any of life's challenges and hard times. Those Saturdays at Theatre 80 seem long ago now, and yet I know they remain remarkably present. Over the years, I have met my fair share of true heroes, both real and imagined. But I'm particularly grateful to Sherlock Holmes for showing up at a musty old theatre when he did, conjured by a clattering film projector on a rainy Saturday afternoon.

If you need Holmes for any reason, I know he will be there for you, too. Whenever you're troubled, just pick up a book and lose yourself in one of his stories. Or maybe, if you're lucky, buy a ticket and see him come to life on a stage. Because, Sherlock Holmes always shows up when you need him most. It's as simple, as that. In fact, it's elementary.

From Lyric Stage Boston

AUDIENCE FINDINGS: A BRIEF DOSSIER

Nominated, Best New Play - Off Broadway Alliance Awards

Two literary legends collide when a grown-up Tiny Tim calls on Sherlock Holmes to investigate the mysterious death of Ebenezer Scrooge. This wildly inventive holiday mashup of Dickens and Doyle blends mystery, heart, and humor in a witty and wondrous theatrical treat. A *New York Times* Critic's Pick and international sensation, *A Sherlock Carol* returns with members of its original, off-Broadway cast and some exciting new faces—ready to warm the coldest heart and delight audiences of all ages. **The game is once again afoot.**

"Mark Shanahan remixes Arthur Conan Doyle and Charles Dickens into a clever, crowd-pleasing holiday comedy that happens also to be a murder mystery. An arch-charmer of a holiday mashup... a streamlined affair looking for - and, crucially, finding - silly, festive fun... This production is in good hands, and so are we. There is a curious shortage lately of plays to make us laugh, let alone to tickle both children and adults. For admirers of Doyle and Dickens, here's one.... "

--
The New York Times Critics' Pick

"Quality stuff, performed with total commitment and aplomb by a cast of top-shelf pros. The writer-director Mark Shanahan cleverly entwines Doyle's and Dickens's tropes until it feels like they were meant to coexist in the same pan-Victorian universe. The merger is funny, but it's much more homage than parody. "

-- The New Yorker

*"Thanks to the ingenious play *A Sherlock Carol*, written and directed by Mark Shanahan, holiday audiences are starting to associate the creation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with the Christmas season. ... For fans of Doyle's and Dickens' creations, this is the gift that keeps on giving."*

--Hollywood soapbox

"The show is joyful, playful, and clever, and it's clear just how much fun Shanahan and the cast are having — and that joy transfers to the audience. 'A Sherlock Carol' invites you to 'the holiday spirit' — and you do."

-- Theater Mania

★★★★ "Delightful" - The Guardian

★★★★ "A very merry mash up of Dickens and Doyle" - The Times

★★★★ "A wonderful festive play to get the entire family into the Christmas spirit" - Lost in Theatreland

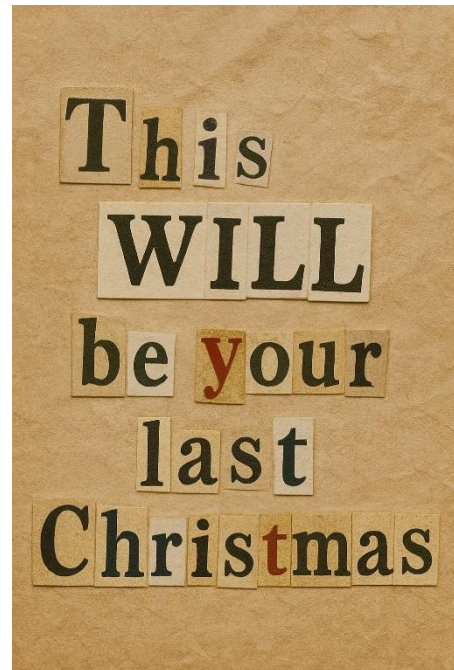
★★★★ "Entertains from start to finish" - Broadway World

CASE NOTES & CHRISTMAS ECHOES

In Which Two Worlds Collide: A Guide to the Tale and Its Players

The Locations (Scenes)

A Street in London, 1894
Baker Street, London
A Tavern
The Home of Ebenezer Scrooge
The Theatre at the Cosmopolitan Hotel
St. Bernard's Hospital
A Small Shop
A Street
Somewhere...Beyond
The Alpha Inn and Covent Garden
The Home of Ebenezer Scrooge
St. Bernard's Hospital
Watson's Home



The Characters (Dramatis Personae)

SHERLOCK HOLMES: The World's Foremost Consulting Detective, in decline.

EBENEZER SCROOGE: Formerly a miser. One Christmas, Scrooge transformed into as good a man as the good old city ever knew. (Also is noted as a GHOSTLY VOICE)

DR. TIMOTHY CRATCHIT: Tiny Tim, all grown up. Now, a doctor at St. Bernard's Hospital for Children. He speaks with a more refined accent than his sister.

EMMA WIGGINS: A good-spirited and brave 13-year-old, she is a former Baker Street Irregular.

DR. WATSON: Sherlock Holmes' best and most loyal friend. The Boswell to Holmes' Johnson.

THE COUNTESS OF MORCAR: American. An old love of Holmes' who also goes by Irene Adler.

MARTHA CRATCHIT: Tough and a bit lower-class than her brother. She is as smart and observant as any detective she might happen to meet.

MR. TOPPER: The manager of the Cosmopolitan Hotel. A bit older, a bit pompous. Easily irritated. Supposedly a friend of Fred, Scrooge's nephew.

RALPH FEZZIWIG: A nervous, wiry young man. The misfit member of a proud family. Engaged to Fannie.

CONSTABLE BRADSTREET: A seemingly upstanding member of Scotland Yard.

FAN "FANNIE" GARDNER: Scrooge's grandniece. A refined young woman, she works backstage at the theatre in the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Engaged to Ralph Fezziwig.

INSPECTOR LESTRADE: Blustery, easily confounded member of Scotland Yard. He has grudging respect for Holmes.

MRS. WINDIGATE: A Scottish tavern-keeper and member of the Goose Club. Giggly, a whirlwind.

MRS. DILBER: Mr. Scrooge's housekeeper of over 30 years. An emotional creature with a connection to the spiritual realm.

HENRY BURKE: An Irish candlemaker, an old friend of Mr. Scrooge.

OLD JOE BRACKENRIDGE: The owner of Old Joe's in Covent Garden. Gruff, a born salesman.

CAROLER: A cheerful person in the street.

ELDERLY WOMAN: A London Lady.

MARY MORSTAN: Watson's elegant and brave wife.

ABIGAIL "ABBY" FEZZIWIG: Runs a business fattening geese for market. She is no-nonsense and direct — a proud member of the hardworking Fezziwig family.

Plot Synopsis

Set in Victorian London on Christmas Eve, 1894, *A Sherlock Carol* brings together characters from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.

At the start, Sherlock Holmes is in a melancholic state. Having survived his infamous battle with his nemesis Professor Moriarty (who perished at Reichenbach Falls), Holmes finds himself lost — disillusioned, purposeless, and haunted by his own ghosts.

Into this darkness steps Tiny Tim: now grown into Dr. Timothy Cratchit, working at a children's hospital. He comes to Holmes with a desperate plea — investigate the suspicious death of his benefactor, Ebenezer Scrooge.

Scrooge, having once been the miser from Dickens's tale, had earlier redeemed himself, transforming into a generous, kind-hearted man. But just before his death, multiple mysteries swirl: a valuable diamond (the "Blue Carbuncle") is missing; Scrooge's will has vanished; and he received a threatening note: "Your ghosts have returned. This WILL be your last Christmas."

As Holmes begins his investigation, he is further unsettled by ghostly visitations — particularly from Scrooge's spirit, who returns to guide Holmes. This spectral Scrooge, along with reminders of Holmes's own past (especially Moriarty), forces Holmes to confront his despair and reawaken his sense of purpose.

Through deductive brilliance, Holmes unravels the tangled web of intentions, lies, and supernatural interference. He tracks down the missing diamond, resolves Scrooge's murky death, and restores order — but more importantly, he reclaims his own drive to help others.

By the end, Holmes has "gotten his mojo back": the game is afoot once more. The play closes on a spirit of redemption, unity, and reclaimed purpose — combining holiday warmth, mystery, and a heartfelt exploration of change.

Scene-by-Scene Summary

Act One

Prologue – London at Christmas: The play opens on a cold Christmas Eve. Sherlock Holmes, recently returned from Reichenbach Falls, wanders London in a fog of purposelessness. The world feels quieter without Moriarty, and Holmes is restless. The festive season only sharpens his gloom.

Scene 1 – Baker Street: Watson tries to rouse Holmes from his malaise, but the great detective is adrift.

Scene 2 – A Tavern: Into a tavern steps Dr. Timothy Cratchit (formerly Tiny Tim), now an adult physician. He delivers troubling news: Ebenezer Scrooge has died, and Tim suspects foul play. He begs Holmes to investigate. Holmes resists—until a strange, icy disturbance suggests this case may be unlike any other.

Scene 3 – Scrooge's House: Holmes visits Scrooge's quarters. Scrooge's transformation from miser to benefactor is well-known, but the circumstances of his death are not. Something in the air feels... haunted.

Scene 4 – The Theatre at the Cosmopolitan Hotel/Dressing Room: Holmes reunites with a friend, The Countess of Morcar, who used to be in possession of the missing Blue Carbuncle. She reveals that Scrooge saved her life after falling into the wrong crowd. Holmes learns that the diamond was stolen from The Countess' dressing room the day before.

Scene 5 – St. Bernard's Hospital: Holmes interviews staff, including those who benefited from Scrooge's generosity. Motives surface like ripples: money, resentment, desperation. Holmes begins to assemble a more tangled picture, one that reaches back into Scrooge's past and sideways into Holmes's own. The Blue Carbuncle is found in a goose by Martha Cratchit.

Scene 6 – The Olde Chandlery and A Street: Holmes meets Henry Burke, who claims to have earlier lost his goose and hat to ruffians in the street. Holmes learns of the Goose Club and, after wandering back to the street, comes face to face with the ghost of Ebenezer Scrooge!

Act Two

Scene 7 – A Street and Somewhere...Beyond: Holmes is confronted by the spirit of Scrooge, who shows the detective memories and stories from his past, present realities and a dark vision of the future.

Scene 8 – The Alpha Inn and Covent Garden: Holmes embarks on a goose chase. Clues collide.

Scene 9 – Scrooge's House: Holmes pieces together the truth behind Scrooge's final hours. Secrets snap into place: who took the diamond, who forged the threatening message, and who hoped to profit from Scrooge's death? Supernatural moments give way to human motives. It adds up.

Scene 10 – St Bernard's Hospital and Watson's Home: In solving the case, Holmes discovers something unexpected: a rekindling of his own spirit. Scrooge's final "visit," whether ghost or memory, reminds him why he chose his life's work. Watson sees the change immediately. London feels alive again.

Epilogue – Christmas Morning: The loose threads tie neatly: justice for Scrooge, peace for Tim, and a restored sense of purpose for Holmes. The story closes in a warm hush—mystery resolved, hearts reoriented, and the detective once again ready for the next impossible puzzle.

Glossary of Terms

Afoot – In progress or underway; often used by Holmes to indicate that a mystery or investigation is currently happening.

Apothecary – A person who prepares and sells medicines; the Victorian equivalent of a pharmacist.

Bah humbug – Ebenezer Scrooge’s famous expression of disdain for Christmas cheer and festive sentiment; in “A Sherlock Carol,” it reflects moments of grumpiness or skepticism.

Benefactor – Someone who gives help, money, or support to others

Bleedin’ – A slang exclamation or mild curse used in British English, often to emphasize frustration.

Blue Carbuncle – A rare, valuable gemstone; central to one of Holmes’s classic cases.

Chandlery – A shop that sells supplies for lighting, such as candles; evokes Victorian London commerce.

Cyanide – A deadly poison occasionally involved in criminal plots; Holmes may encounter it in a case.

Deerstalker Hat – The iconic cap associated with Sherlock Holmes, symbolizing his role as a detective, even if never explicitly described by Doyle.

Elementary – Holmes’s famous way of stating that a deduction is simple or logical, though often delivered with irony.

Fiver – Slang for a five-pound note in British currency; money in Victorian London settings.

Flapdoodler – A humorous or archaic insult meaning a silly or foolish person; Victorian-era slang.

Fowl – Birds, (chickens or ducks); sometimes part of Holmesian mysteries or festive Christmas feast.

Heathen – A term used in Victorian England to describe someone outside Christian faith or manners, sometimes used humorously or critically.

Malmsey-nosed blunderbuss – A colorful insult; a blunderbuss is a type of old firearm, malmsey refers to a sweet, strong wine. It evokes someone spoiled, soft or pampered, as if their nose were accustomed to something delicate or luxurious.

Moriarty – Prof. James Moriarty, Holmes’s arch-nemesis, a criminal mastermind central to stories.

Pigeon-livered bungler – Playful Victorian insult implying cowardice; means weak and incompetent.

Pungent – Strong or sharp in smell or taste; could describe chemicals, tobacco, or food.

Seance – A meeting intended to communicate with spirits

Steamer – A steam-powered ship; common transportation in Victorian London

Thames – The major river running through London; often shrouded in fog.

The Strand – A famous street in London, home to many shops, theatres, and the original publication venue of Doyle’s stories (*The Strand Magazine*).



HOW THE PRODUCTION SPINS THE TALE

Behind this particular door on Baker Street

Westport Country Playhouse is a nationally recognized, not-for-profit, professional theater under the artistic direction of Mark Shanahan and management leadership of Beth Huisking. The mission of Westport Country Playhouse is to, through the art of theater, bring stories to life that reexamine our own experiences, shine a light on those that have been ignored, and ensure a space for those yet to be told.

Originally built in 1835 as a tannery manufacturing hatters' leathers, it became a steam powered cider mill in 1880, later to be abandoned in the 1920s. Splendidly transformed into a theater in 1931, it initially served as a try-out house for Broadway transfers, evolving into an established stop on the New England straw hat circuit of summer stock theaters through the end of the 20th century. Following a multi-million-dollar renovation completed in 2005, the Playhouse became a state-of-the-art producing theater, preserving its original charm and character.

Today, the not-for-profit Westport Country Playhouse serves as a cultural nexus for patrons, artists and students and is a treasured resource for the State of Connecticut. There are no boundaries to the creative thinking for future seasons or the kinds of audiences and excitement for theater that Westport Country Playhouse can build.

Land Acknowledgement

The Playhouse sits on land once forcibly taken from the Paugussett people.

The Westport Country Playhouse acknowledges the indigenous peoples and nations of the Paugussett that stewarded the land and waterways of Westport, Connecticut. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that exists between these peoples and nations and this land.

It is our goal to do more than just print the words above. We want to understand the history of this land long before the theater opened in 1931, and long before the barn was built as a tannery in 1865.

In September 2020, we began our research into the history and displacement of the indigenous people of Connecticut. We wish to form an ongoing relationship with these peoples and current tribal communities. Our goal is to be able to honor their cultural heritage as well as their present-day stories.

We will be sharing what we learn with the Playhouse family. We welcome all to join us on this path and help us build a stronger community in the future.

If you would like to learn more about the land you sit on as you read this, visit [Native Land Digital](#).

Meet the Team



Joe Delafield (Dr. Watson/Others) Westport Country Playhouse: Richard Hannay in *The 39 Steps*, *A Sherlock Carol*, *Valère* in *The School for Husbands* and *the Script in Hand* playreading of *Christmas at Pemberley* and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Joe has been seen on Broadway as *Damis* in *Tartuffe* (Roundabout) and Off-Broadway in *Fashions for Men* (Mint), *Outward Bound*, *Theophilus North*, and *The Breadwinner* (Keen Company). Regionally, he has performed at the Guthrie, the Alley Theater, Pittsburgh Public, Virginia Stage Company, La Mirada, the Odyssey, the Fountain, Florida Rep, Hudson Stage, the White Heron, and LA's Antaeus Company. TV/Film credits include "The Sopranos," "All My Children," *Filmic Achievement*, and *Company K*. Joe holds a BA from Columbia University and an MFA from NYU's Graduate Acting Program.



Dan Domingues (Cratchit/Others) Off-Broadway: *The Public* (*The Tempest*, *Wild Goose Dreams*, *Fidelis*, *The Great Immensity*), *Gingold Group*, *Sheen Center*, *Rattlestick Playwrights Theater*, *Abingdon Theatre*, *BAM*, *59E59 Theaters*, *INTAR*, *Atlantic Theater*, *Cherry Lane Theatre*. Regional: *Bay Street*, *Alley Theatre*, *White Heron Theatre Company*, *Arena Stage*, *The Guthrie*, *Goodman*, *NY Stage & Film*, *Hangar Theatre*, *Studio Theatre*, *Cape Playhouse*, *Weston Playhouse*, *Kansas City Rep*, *Rep of St. Louis*, *Pioneer Theatre*, *Long Wharf*, *Florida Stage*, *Portland Stage*, *George Street Playhouse*. Film: *Run All Night*, *Future '38*, *In Stereo*. TV: "5A5B," "West 40s," "The Blacklist," "Royal Pains," "Law & Order." MFA: A.R.T. Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard. Assoc. artist: *The Civilians*, *NY Classical Theatre*. Creator and co-host of *Hot Date*, a podcast for movie fans.



Anissa Felix (Emma Wiggins/Others) Anissa Felix has performed in several TV shows as well as Broadway shows including *Motown the Musical*, *Sunset Boulevard* starring Glenn Close, and *Donna Summer the Musical*. Her most recent work can be seen in Netflix's *Survival of the Thickest*. She's excited to return to the *A Sherlock Carol* family as an Assistant Director. And will be making her Directorial debut for WCP's *Script in Hand* Series.



Alexandra Kopko (Countess/Others) Alexandra Kopko is a bicoastal actor, voice over artist, and comic who is thrilled to be making her WCP debut! Recent stage credits include *A Sherlock Carol* (New World Stages), *Peter and the Starcatcher* (White Heron Theatre), *The Great Gatsby* (Bay Street Theater), *The Full Monty* (Theatre Workshop of Nantucket), *The Two Foscari* (Evening Crane Theater), and *The Bloody Beginning* (Speakeasy Dollhouse). She is one half of the chatty comedic podcast *The Film Bros*, which can be streamed on all major platforms. You can catch her comedy videos on Instagram and TikTok @alexandrawideeyes.



James Taylor Odom (Holmes/Others) National Tours: *Wadsworth U/S* in *Clue*, *The D'Ysquith Family* in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder*, and *Admiral Von Schreiber* in *The Sound of Music*. Regional credits include: *An Old Fashioned Family Murder* (George Street Playhouse), *The Rainmaker* (Laguna Playhouse), *The 39 Steps* (Virginia Stage Company), *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure* (West Virginia Public Theatre), *A Christmas Carol* (TheatreSquared), *It Came From Outer Space* (World Premiere), *Grumpy Old Men* (U.S. Premiere), and *God of Carnage* (Shadowland Stages). He holds a BA in Theatre from Brenau University and an MFA in Acting from the University of Arkansas. Represented by Avalon Artists Group. AEA.



Byron St. Cyr (Scrooge) Byron St. Cyr is a theatre artist, writer, and musician who strives to ignite the fire inside of others, highlight the joy in the simple things, and tell stories that push against limiting stereotypes. Favorite credits include *A Sherlock Carol* (Off-Bway), *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* (The MUNY), *Dames At Sea* (Bucks County Playhouse), *Billy Elliot* (Goodspeed), *Miss Saigon* (Nat'l Tour) and *My Fair Lady* (Nat'l tour), among others. Thank you to Gregg and the GBM team. For more visit www.byronstcyr.com or follow at @bscjr.

The creative team includes **James J. Fenton**, set design; **Linda Cho**, costume design; **Alyssandra Docherty**, lighting design; **Josh Leibert**, sound design; **John Gromada**, music and sound design; **Seth Andrew Bridges**, fight choreography; **Bruce Warren**, assistant director; **Alex Fetchko**, associate lighting designer; **Alisa Rabin**, production assistant. Production stage manager is **Becky Fleming**. Assistant stage manager is **Lauren Goldman**. Props are loaned by the original production designed by **Anna Louizos**. Additional support provided by **Fat Goose Productions** and **TheatreNerd Productions**.

READING THE CLUES

Examination of Evidence: Themes & Theatrical Craft

THEMES

1. Redemption and Second Chances: At the heart of the play lies the idea that people can change — sometimes dramatically, sometimes quietly. Scrooge embodies the classic Dickensian transformation, but here his influence stretches beyond his own lifetime, nudging Holmes toward a path of renewal. Holmes, weary and hollow after Moriarty's fall, must rediscover his purpose. The play suggests that even the most brilliant mind needs renewal, and that redemption isn't a one-time act but an ongoing turning toward better choices.

2. Purpose, Grief, and Reawakening: Holmes begins adrift, as if the world has gone dim around the edges. His investigation becomes a kind of spiritual scavenger hunt: tracking clues that ultimately lead him back to himself. Tim's plea, Scrooge's legacy, and even the hint of ghostly guidance help Holmes rise out of his emotional winter. The theme underscores how loss can hollow someone out — and how connection, curiosity, and service refill the space.

3. Logic vs. the Unseen: Holmes is a creature of evidence; Scrooge's ghost is a creature of memory and moral consequence. The tension between deduction and the supernatural creates a shimmering line throughout the play. Whether the ghost is real matters less than what it provokes in Holmes. The story invites students to consider worlds where logic and wonder coexist, each sharpening the other.

4. The Ripple Effect of Kindness: Scrooge's generosity reshaped the Cratchits' lives — and Tim, now a doctor, extends that generosity into the world. Scrooge's good deeds become a chain of lanterns lighting the paths of people he never met. The play suggests that kindness has a long half-life, echoing outward in ways the giver may never see.

MOTIFS

1. Letters, Wills, and Written Messages: The missing will, the threatening note, the evidence scrawled in ink — written items appear throughout the story like breadcrumbs. They symbolize both the fragility and permanence of intention. A life can turn because of a sentence on a page.

2. Holiday Atmosphere (Snow, Caroling, Warmth vs. Chill): The play leans on the visual and emotional vocabulary of Christmas: candlelight, cold streets, generous tables. These elements create a motif of contrast — warmth against winter, renewal against despair — mirroring Holmes's internal thaw.

3. Dual Worlds Intertwined: The merging of Dickens and Doyle creates an ongoing motif of blended genres: the moral fable woven with the detective mystery. Characters cross narrative borders, showing how stories can converse with each other across decades.

SYMBOLS

1. The Blue Carbuncle (the Diamond): This jewel serves both as a literal object of the mystery and a symbol of value — not just monetary, but moral. It reflects the costs of greed, the temptation of wealth, and the clarity that comes when

truth catches the light. In its disappearance, it echoes Scrooge's own missing will: the idea that what is precious can be threatened by human flaws.

2. Scrooge's Ghost / Apparition: Whether supernatural or psychological, the ghost represents memory with a pulse. He is the embodiment of change already accomplished, a reminder that transformation sticks. For Holmes, the ghost is a mirror tilted slightly — showing what renewal might look like for him.

3. Tim Cratchit (as Doctor): Tim symbolizes the future shaped by past generosity. His adult self is living proof of Scrooge's redemption. He also symbolizes the continuity of compassion: the once-helped child becomes the helper.

4. Holmes's Deduction Tools: His notebook, his observations, his precise methods — these symbolize order in a disordered world. Early in the play, he neglects them; by the end, he's using them with renewed vigor. The tools become a quiet barometer of his spirit.

Discussing this Production

1. How did the actors' physicalizing of their characters enhance the interpretation of each character? Give specific examples such as the way the characters walked, chewed food, sat, gestured, etc.
2. Discuss the actor's use of their voices. Did each character have a distinct voice?
3. Who was your favorite character? What was it that the actors playing their roles did to make you feel positively?
4. Do the physical elements of the WCP production (sets, props, costumes) suggest different things about the characters? Discuss the many ways that the set props and costumes serve the director and actors in this production. Consider each element individually.
5. What did you think about the production? What did you like? Dislike? What worked especially well and why? What would you have changed? How would you have changed it?



A concept sketch by Mark Shanahan showing Holmes confronted by Scrooge!

The sketch comes alive on the Playhouse stage.



A TEST OF DEDUCTIVE POWERS

The Case of Missing Answers

Part 1: Multiple Choice Questions

- 1) Why is Sherlock Holmes in a gloomy state at the beginning of the play?
 - a) He is ill
 - b) He has no new cases and feels purposeless after defeating Moriarty
 - c) Watson has moved away
 - d) London is unsafe during the holidays
- 2) Why does Dr. Timothy Cratchit seek out Sherlock Holmes?
 - a) He wants Holmes to locate his missing father
 - b) He hopes Holmes can prove the Blue Carbuncle is real
 - c) He suspects something suspicious about Ebenezer Scrooge's death
 - d) He is writing a book about famous detectives
- 3) Which item connected to Scrooge goes missing, causing part of the mystery?
 - a) His cane
 - b) His will
 - c) His spectacles
 - d) His gold watch
- 4) What is the Blue Carbuncle?
 - a) A rare diamond associated with Scrooge
 - b) A ship that sank near London
 - c) A holiday charity founded by Scrooge
 - d) Watson's pet bird
- 5) Scrooge appears to Holmes as—
 - a) A newspaper headline
 - b) A child
 - c) A ghostly figure or vision
 - d) A rival detective
- 6) How does the motif of ghosts function in the play?
 - a) It is used only for comic relief
 - b) It connects Holmes to Moriarty
 - c) It shows the importance of confronting the past
 - d) It reveals the true villain



Part 2: Short Answer

- 7) Describe how Holmes reacts to seeing Scrooge's ghost or vision. What does this moment reveal about Holmes's inner conflict?
- 8) How has Tiny Tim changed since *A Christmas Carol*? Why is his new role important to the plot?
- 9) Identify one clue Holmes uses to uncover the truth about Scrooge's death. Explain why it helps move the investigation forward.
- 10) The play blends mystery with holiday themes. How does the Christmas setting influence the story's tone?
- 11) By the end of the play, what personal transformation does Holmes experience? Give one example from the play that shows this shift.

Part 3: Essay and Discussion Prompts

- 12) "A Sherlock Carol" combines characters from two literary worlds. Why do you think the playwright chose to merge Dickens's themes of redemption with Holmes's world of logic and deduction?
- 13) How does the playwright use wordplay (ex: a spirit can be a ghost, alcohol, and a mood) to create foreshadowing of future events in the play? Provide examples.
- 14) How does the use of Victorian London as a setting influence the mood and themes of "A Sherlock Carol"? Give examples of how the playwright incorporates historical or cultural details to enhance the story.



POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Debate by Gaslight: Questions for the Curious Mind

Big Ideas & Themes

Redemption and Renewal

- How does the play use Scrooge's legacy to explore the idea of second chances?
- In what ways does Holmes need "saving," and who helps him begin that process?
- Do you think the holiday setting changes the impact of the play's message about transformation?

Logic Meets the Supernatural

- Sherlock Holmes is a character grounded in deduction, yet he encounters ghostly elements connected to Scrooge. How does the play balance rational investigation with hints of the supernatural?
- Do you think the "ghost" of Scrooge is meant to be real, symbolic, or psychological?

The Meaning of Kindness

- Scrooge's generosity transformed the lives of the Cratchit family and others. How does his influence linger in the story, even after his death?
- Where in the play do we see small acts of kindness making a large difference?

Character Exploration

Sherlock Holmes

- How is Holmes different at the beginning of the play compared to the end?
- What does the story suggest about how people find purpose after loss or change?

Ebenezer Scrooge

- Compare the Scrooge we hear about in this play to the Scrooge at the end of *A Christmas Carol*. What has stayed the same? What has changed even more?
- Why is Scrooge's presence—spiritual or otherwise—important to Holmes's journey?

Dr. Timothy Cratchit

- How does Tim represent Dickens's themes in a new way?
- What motivates Tim to seek Holmes's help, and what does this reveal about his values?

Detective Work & Mystery Structure

Clues and Red Herrings

- What clues were most important to solving the case?
- Did the play use any "false leads" or moments meant to misdirect the audience? How did those moments contribute to the suspense?

The Role of Observation

- Holmes often notices details others miss. Can you recall a moment where close observation changed the direction of the investigation?
- How might Tim's medical training mirror Holmes's investigative style?

Staging & Production Choices

Lighting & Atmosphere

- How did the lighting create a sense of mystery or ghostliness?
- What theatrical choices helped differentiate the Dickens world from the Doyle world?



Character Doubling or Ensemble Work

- This production uses the same actors for multiple roles. How does doubling characters affect the storytelling?
- Did it help emphasize any themes or relationships?

Setting the Tone for the Holidays

- How did costumes, sound, or sets evoke the Victorian holiday season?
- Did the festive environment make the mystery feel warmer, or did it sharpen the contrast?

Reflection & Connection

Cross-Story Connections

- What did you recognize from *A Christmas Carol*?
- What felt familiar from Sherlock Holmes's stories?
- How did merging the two change your understanding of either world?

Personal Insight Question

- Which character do you think changes the most over the course of the play? Explain your choice.



Moral or Message

- If the play has a takeaway message, what do you think it is?
- Does that message feel more "Dickens," "Doyle," or both?

FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO FOLLOW THE TRAIL

Additional Evidence for the Avid Sleuth

Further Reading

Efran, Lea. [‘A Sherlock Carol’: The Art of Combining Two Epic Stories](#): Writer/Director Mark Shanahan on changing the meaning of the word “Scrooge”. *Our Town*, December 16, 2021

Virginia Stage. [A Holiday in Rep: Mark Shanahan on Reimagining the Classics.](#)

Review from *The Lyric Stage Company*

A detailed review of a specific staging — discusses acting, staging, doubling of roles, and thematic tone.

Further Viewing

Florida Rep Theatre. Meet Mark Shanahan Playwright of *A Sherlock Carol*: <https://youtu.be/jv4EbYWasM8?si=HOPvOtodjWWIGz70>

Westport Country Playhouse. *A Sherlock Carol* Trailer with footage from the original off-Broadway production:
<https://youtu.be/Aa4zeDYH5RM>

Westport Country Playhouse. The official trailer for *A Sherlock Carol*:
https://youtu.be/DmdE_eOsXqI?si=TjDFiPtS3eVYzdQX

Westport Country Playhouse. *A Sherlock Carol* cast's favorite lines:
https://youtu.be/2m2cYm9Eb14?si=lweURWBNHtQX_v5c

References

Virginia Stage. [Diving Deeper: Brechtian Elements in A MERRY LITTLE CHRISTMAS CAROL and A SHERLOCK CAROL.](#)

The Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia — *A Sherlock Carol* (2022–2025)

Overview of multiple productions (London and NY), creative team, and performance history. [Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia](#)

Event Listing – *A Sherlock Carol* 2025 - [A Sherlock Carol – Westport Country Playhouse](#)

Production Photo Credits: Evan Zimmerman, T Charles Erickson, and Andrea Quiles.



NOTES FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Answers (Such as They Are)

Part 1: Multiple Choice Questions

- 1) **B** — He has no new cases and feels purposeless after defeating Moriarty.
- 2) **C** — He suspects something suspicious about Ebenezer Scrooge's death.
- 3) **B** — His will.
- 4) **A** — A rare diamond associated with Scrooge.
- 5) **C** — A ghostly figure or vision.
- 6) **C** — It shows the importance of confronting the past



Part 2: Short Answer (Samples)

- 7) (Sample Response) Holmes is startled and unsettled by the apparition of Scrooge, unsure whether it is real or a projection of his own doubts. The encounter forces him to confront his emotional burnout and reconnect with his sense of purpose.
- 8) Tiny Tim is now Dr. Timothy Cratchit, an adult physician working to help others. His transformation from a frail child to a healer mirrors Scrooge's own transformation and sets the plot in motion when he seeks Holmes's help.
- 9) Students may choose any credible clue: the missing will, the threatening note, the disappearance of the Blue Carbuncle, or inconsistencies in witness accounts. These clues point Holmes toward motives, suspects, and the real circumstances of Scrooge's death.
- 10) The Christmas setting softens the mystery with warmth, generosity, and themes of reflection. It creates a hopeful tone, balancing the darker investigative elements with a sense of renewal and community.
- 11) Holmes regains his sense of purpose and emotional clarity. By the end of the play, he is once again ready to take on challenges, thanks in part to the investigation and guidance (ghostly or otherwise) from Scrooge.