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Free Lesson of the Month December, 2009

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This month’s Free Lesson comes from author Douglas Grudzina and is excerpted from the [Prestwick House Spotlight: A Christmas Carol Teacher’s Edition](#). It includes an excerpt from the original tale along with directions for throwing your very own Dickens-style Classroom Christmas Party. Complete with period recipes, music, and dances, this activity is a great way to wrap up classes before a well-deserved holiday break!

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(Pardon the cliché, but ...)

Now You Can Host Your Own

Dickens of a Christmas Party!

As everyone knows (and if you don't, you should be boiled in your own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through your heart, you should!), when Charles Dickens's most notorious Christmas villain-hero encounters the Ghost of Christmas Past (we're talking, of course, about Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* if you haven't guessed), one of the visits he makes is to a Christmas Eve party hosted by a former employer, "Old Fezziwig."

Dickens's account of the party reads like this:

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here?"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

"Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

Scrooge's former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-prentice.

"Dick Wilkins, to be sure," said Scrooge to the Ghost. "Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick. Dear, dear."

"Yo ho, my boys!" said Fezziwig. "No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up," cried old Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of his hands, "before a man can say Jack Robinson!"

You wouldn't believe how those two fellows went at it. They charged into the street with the shutters—one, two, three—had them up in their places—four, five, six—barred them and pinned them—seven, eight, nine—and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

"Hilli-ho!" cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility.

"Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!"

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away, or couldn't have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life for evermore; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one, who was proved to

have had her ears pulled by her mistress. In they all came, one after nother; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and anyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again, as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them. When this result was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done." and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose. But scorning rest, upon his reappearance, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a bran-new man resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was negus, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind. The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him.) struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled with; people who would dance, and had no notion of walking.

But if they had been twice as many—ah, four times—old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs Fezziwig. As to her, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that's not high praise, tell me higher, and I'll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given time, what would have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsy, corkscrew, thread-the-needle, and back again to your place; Fezziwig "cut"—cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr and Mrs Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side of the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two prentices, they did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds; which were under a counter in the back-shop.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

It does sound like fun, doesn't it? And to think that, according to the Ghost of Christmas Past, the entire party (including the cost of the fiddler) came to a mere three or four pounds of mortal money. Even adjusting for inflation, it was not an extravagant expense.

So, you're coming up on the last days of school before the holiday vacation. Are your students *really* thinking about mid-term exams coming up in a few weeks or that research paper that's due on January 5?

They're probably nodding off from all those late nights performing in their band and chorus holiday concerts or earning extra cash during the mall's extended holiday shopping hours!

So here's how to keep them awake and engaged: *Give a party!*

Scrooge's favorite part of Fezziwig's ball seems to have been the dancing, especially the "Sir Roger de Coverly," during which the host and hostess really showed off their terpsichorean skill.

Here's the music they danced to—all you need is a keyboard or a recorder or a comb and a piece of tissue paper:

Sir Roger de Coverly
(slip jig)



Source: *The Session* (<http://www.thesession.org/tunes/display.php/1196>)

The Sir Roger de Coverly was, by the way, what they called a "finishing dance." It was a relatively simple dance with a lively tune that *everyone* could dance to. Reserved for the last dance of the ball, it gave everyone an opportunity to finish the party in high spirits and work up some body heat before venturing out into the cold. You'll notice that it is indeed the last dance of the evening at the Fezziwigs' Ball.

Now, knowing the music isn't worth much if you don't know the steps, so ... *here they are!*
Clear away your desks and get your students romping ...

It is danced like all country dances, the gentlemen in a line, and the ladies in another opposite to their partners. The first gentleman at the top and the lady at the bottom of the line have to begin each figure, and then the other gentleman and lady at the opposite corner have to repeat the figure immediately.

- 1) First lady and gentleman meet in the center of the line, give right hands, turn once round, and retire to their corners, the same for the other two at the top and bottom.

- 2) First couple cross again and give left hands and turn once; back to places. To be repeated by the others.
- 3) First couple give both hands, the others the same.
- 4) First couple back to back, and retire to places; the other corners the same.
- 5) The first couple advance, bow to each other, and retire; the same repeated by the other couples.
- 6) The top gentleman then turns to the left, and the top lady (his partner) turns to the right; all the other ladies and gentlemen turn and follow the leaders who run outside of the line, and meet at the bottom of the room, giving right hands, and raising their arms so as to form a kind of arch under which all the following couples must pass, joining hands, and running forwards when they have all passed under the arch. The first lady and gentleman remain the last at the end of the two lines, and the figures of right hands, left hands, both hands, back to back, bow, and running outside the lines are repeated by all, when the first couple will have arrived at their original place.

Excerpted from *Coulon's Handbook of 1873*

Source: StreetSwing.com (<http://www.streetswing.com/histmain/z3covrly.htm>)

As for the food ... well, negus is a hot, spiced red wine (your principal and some parents might object) ... and Dickens says that the celebrants were drinking beer (again, there are laws against that sort of thing in school) ... so we'll have to improvise a bit.

Dickens does say "there was cake," so here's a tasty possibility:

Christmas Cake

3 lb butter
 3 lb (6 3/4 C) Sugar
 32 Large Eggs
 3 1/2 lb (12 1/2 c) Flour
 3/4 lb (2 3/4 c) Patent Flour
 10 LB Currents
 1 1/2 lb Cut Almonds
 5 lb Candied Peel, Chopped
 a little Apple Pie Spice

Cream up the butter and sugar, and beat in the eggs in the usual way. Stir in the flours, fruit, etc., and thoroughly mix. Fill into papered cake hoops which are placed on well covered baking sheets. Bake in a moderate oven (350 degrees).

And everyone associates these with the old-fashioned Christmases of long, long ago ...

Sugar Plums

1 lb confectioners' sugar
 1/4 lb cold butter
 2 tb heavy cream

1 tsp vanilla or 1/2 tsp almond extract

pitted ready-to-eat prunes
candied cherries
pitted dates
walnut or pecan halves
granulated sugar for rolling candied cherries
silver dragees for garnish

Pour the unsifted confectioners' sugar into a large bowl. Cut the butter from the stick into small slivers, dropping them into the sugar. Add the cream and vanilla or almond extract. Work with your fingertips until the mixture clings together somewhat.

Turn the mixture onto a sheet of waxed paper. Knead by pushing the mixture against the surface with the heel of your hand, lifting the edges of the waxed paper to add and incorporate any crumbs of dough. Continue kneading in this manner until the mixture is well blended, smooth, and creamy. Wrap in waxed paper and chill just long enough so that the fondant can be handled easily without sticking.

PRUNES: Split the tops of the prunes and spread slightly. Roll a small portion of the chilled fondant into a ball and press into the cavity. Garnish with a sliver of candied cherry.

CHERRIES—Cut a cross in the top of each cherry and spread slightly to form petals. Fill with a small ball of fondant and decorate the tops with a few silver dragees. (NOTE: Candied cherries can be used by splitting them in half and filling with a small ball of fondant. Using the red and green cherries made for fruitcakes works well, and you can make plums that are half red and half green if desired. Allow the fondant to show for more contrast).

DATES—Cut the dates partway through and press a small portion of fondant onto the cavities. Roll the filled dates in granulated sugar.

WALNUTS OR PECANS—Shape the fondant into small balls; place between two walnut or pecan halves; press together lightly.

Store one layer in a tightly covered container in the refrigerator. The sugarplums will keep well up to two weeks.

Tiny Tim, in the next Stave of the novel, is the character who most enjoys his family's goose with its Sage and Onion Stuffing. Just add one goose ...

Sage and Onion Stuffing:

3 medium onions, peeled
4 large apples, peeled, cored & chopped (use tart apples like Granny Smith)
2 tablespoons loosely packed dried sage leaves, crumbled
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon butter, cut into tiny bits
Garnishes: sliced apples, parsley or watercress

In large bowl, combine onions, chopped apples, sage, pepper and butter. Stuff cavity of goose and sew or skewer the openings and truss in the usual way. (Or wrap in foil if you're not cooking a goose!) Bake at 450 degrees for one hour.

Finally, since you won't be serving negus or beer at your party (we're guessing, anyway), you'll want to offer some kind of beverage. Winters were cold in Dickens's day, and beverages were hot. Here's an old stand-by:

Hot Mulled Cider:

- 1 gal apple cider
- 2 "knobs" of fresh ginger
- 2 whole lemons, quartered
- 2 whole oranges, quartered
- pinch of allspice (optional)
- 10 whole cloves
- enough cinnamon sticks to place one in each cup of cider

Real apple cider from a fruit and vegetable stand is better than the bottled stuff, but the bottled stuff is better than nothing. Mix everything together (except the cinnamon sticks) in a large pan and heat until the cider is *almost* boiling. Reduce the heat and simmer for 15 – 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Serve the hot punch with a ladle in a cup or glass that won't melt (or burn your students' fingers). Garnish each with a cinnamon stick.

Now, Bob Cratchit makes his Christmas punch with hot gin and lemon, but you're probably best serving the cider to your students and saving the wine, beer, and gin for after you get home ... or if you want to give a *faculty* Dickens Christmas Party ...

The point is—and here's why a party might sometimes be a valid classroom activity—Dickens loved life. He loved holidays, and he hoped to teach others how to enjoy them as well. What better way to keep up the spirit (oops, unintended pun) of the holidays and the pass on the liveliness of great literature than to help your students experience the lives of the people on the pages?

Besides, you *know* you're not going to get them to review for that vocab quiz, so you may as well have a party.

And have a happy holiday and a richly, richly deserved vacation!