

The Christmas Ghost Story

In our **Victorian Christmas in Wales** workshop, we began looking at some of the reasons why the ghost story gained popularity in Victorian Britain.

This pack contains six stimuli pictures which represent a cause of the growth of the ghost story genre

- Newspaper: as printing technology became cheaper thanks to the industrial revolution, newspapers' circulation grew rapidly. In 1815, 5000 copies of each issues of The Times were produced. By 1851 this had risen to 40 000. Ghost stories were great filler for newspapers as they were exciting, easy to serialise and the writers were not well paid. As a result, lots of newspapers started printing them and their popularity grew.
- Servant: the industrial revolution meant that more people were getting rich and could afford to employ servants. Many of these servants were unnerved by the big, grand homes they worked in. Many Victorian homes also had back stairways and passages for the servants' use, meaning they could appear unannounced at any time. These circumstances inspired a lot of ghostly stories.
- Séance: spiritualism spread around the world from the middle of the nineteenth century. Communicating with the dead became increasingly popular and mediums made a lot of money. This obsession with the occult fed a British love of ghost stories.
- Gas lighting: the flickering light in homes and on streets made it easy to imagine a ghostly presence. Gas lights in homes sometimes led to hallucinations among inhabitants, due to the noxious gasses they expelled.
- Radio: the new inventions of the radio and telephone were unsettling for a lot of people. With disembodied voices entering the home for the first time, it was easy to image that they were actually the voices of the dead.
- Spirit photography: a photographer called William Mumler capitalised on the new crazes of photography and spiritualism by inventing a developing technique to impose the image of an actor behind the subject of the photograph, which was believed to be the image of a dead loved one. He was only caught out when people started noticing the same actors appearing in numerous photographs!

Suggested activity

- Ask your pupils to work out what these pictures represent about why the ghost story grew in popularity.
- Refer back to the workshop: why was Christmas thought to be a good time to tell ghost stories?
 - ⇒ The dark, cold, flickering lights, staying up late etc created the perfect atmosphere.
 - ⇒ Trend started by *A Christmas Carol*.
- Ask your pupils to use one of the stimuli pictures to inspire their own Christmas ghost story. You may want them to complete this individually as a piece of written work, or you may prefer them working in groups to perform/tell their story.

May the Spookiest Story Win!

The Evening Star.

THIS IS STRONG
MICHIGAN PAY
AGREEMENT IN HOUSE

HOW ABOUT WITH
IF WILSON BY LAW

WADDS SAID TO BE
BURLESON'S CHOICE
FOR PRESIDENCY



TURKEY CABINET
FALLS AS RULES
REACH DECISIONS

WIND EXPLODED
UNDER CONGR
OF U.S. IN TUR

SENATE CHANGES
RESERVATION ON
SIGHTING ISSUE

WINTER'S HARDEST
STORM HITS WEST

WINDMAID FOR
FRIDAY AFTERNOON

NEW JERSEY SEES
30 END BY LAW

V. R. L. F. F. F. F. F.
HEADING HARDS

ALLES ARE FOR
AGAINST RETURN



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