



FLATIRON  
BOOKS  
NEW YORK

# *Mr. Dickens and His Carol*

## Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Mr. Dickens and His Carol*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Mr. Dickens and His Carol*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. Were you familiar with Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* before reading *Mr. Dickens and His Carol*? Did Samantha Silva's novel change how you viewed the classic? Discuss the ways in which Silva referenced and departed from Dickens' original story.
2. The city of London plays a key role in this novel: "A map of it was etched on [Dickens'] brain, its tangle of streets and squares, alleys and mews a true atlas of his own interior. The city had made him. It knew his sharp angles, the soft pits of his being. It was a magic lantern that illuminated everything he was and feared and wished would be true. It was his imagination—its spark, fuel, and flame." How does London inspire this story? Do you have a place that is similarly important in your life and imagination?
3. Clocks appear in many scenes, from Dickens' beloved fusee clock to the clock tower in the square, where he first meets Eleanor Lovejoy. What do you make of these representations of time? How does Dickens' view of time, and of his own history, change over the course of these pages?
4. When Dickens is suffering from writer's block, Eleanor tells him: "Then let the specter of your memory be the spark of your imagination." What is Dickens' relationship with memory, and with the past generally? How does his own life inspire *A Christmas Carol*?
5. Dickens is fascinated by costume, performance, and theater, and he dreams throughout the novel of going to India with Macready and performing Shakespeare. Why do you think acting holds such interest for him? How is it similar to and different from writing? What is the significance of his staged reading of *A Christmas Carol* at the end of the story?
6. In a couple of scenes, we see other famous Victorian writers, including William Makepeace Thackeray, discussing (and disparaging) Dickens' novels. Thackeray, a

satirist, criticizes Dickens' "gushing displays of the heart," while for Dickens, "It was all heart, or nothing." How does Silva play with sentimentality and other "Dickensian" qualities in *Mr. Dickens and His Carol*? Discuss the writing style here and the effect it had on you.

7. Dickens' relationship with Eleanor is complicated: "He didn't understand the kinship he felt toward her, or gratitude maybe, or some ineffable affinity of nature and qualities." How would you characterize their bond? Is it at all romantic? Why or why not?
8. When Dickens learns that Eleanor is a ghost, he reflects: "How real she'd seemed, and if not, at least as true as anything he'd ever known. Maybe she'd sprung from his imagination, his own roiling conscience, but it didn't matter now." Were you surprised by the twist? How did you interpret Eleanor's existence?
9. The world of spirits and ghosts was a point of intense fascination in Dickens' day. As Chapman says, "The public adore spirits and goblins in a good winter's tale." Why do you think Samantha Silva wrote a ghost story in this day and age? What are some of your favorite modern ghost stories?
10. On one of his London walks, Dickens watches a magic show and reflects on "the truth at the bottom of every illusion, every fiction: our own great desire to believe." Do you agree? Discuss the various illusions, fictions, and beliefs within *Mr. Dickens and His Carol*.
11. In her author's note, Silva writes: "I'm keenly aware that a good biography tells us the truth about a person; a good story, the truth about ourselves." What do you think she means? What did you learn about yourself from this novel?