Three tableau activities
KS3 > Prose > A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

How it works
This resource doesn’t come with any instructions, so you kinda need to know what a tableau activity is in order to use it. In a nutshell it’s a drama-based activity for the acting-terrified. That doesn’t mean it’s any easier than full-on performance, but it doesn’t involve any movement or speaking so (a) you can cajole more students into doing it and (b) it’s easier on a teacher’s eardrums, in the performance if not the preparation.

Basically, in small groups, students each take on a character or role; they read a short, often intense or epiphanic, scene from the text; they present a tableau or ‘frozen moment’ that seeks to encapsulate the spirit of the scene. To do this, they need to think about such matters as where characters are positioned in relation to each other, eye contact, gesture, body language, etc. Each group then presents its tableau for other students to observe closely and then discuss what it adds to their understanding.

Each of these three resources gives you an oven-ready short extract from A Christmas Carol that is ideal for this purpose. These have been turned into a simple handout for students, with a list of the characters needed. You will either need to explain the task verbally, or add in some written instructions to the sheet. I’d do both.

Try this!
You could have all the groups working on the same tableau, but if/when you have a large class the performance can get a bit tedious, so I’d use all three scenes here. If students’ drama skills lack pzazz, it can help to allocate one or two directors in each group, who take responsibility for making sure it looks good. They can be given a bit of extra instruction about the need for strong visual statement. Another way is to do it as a class, with a group of hardy volunteers at the front, guided through the process of producing a tableau through your questions, and immediate feedback from other class members.
1. The Christmas Pudding Arrives

CAST

You will need: Bob Cratchit
Mrs Cratchit
Scrooge

Optional: Tiny Tim
Martha Cratchit
Peter Cratchit

Hallo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house, and a pastry cook’s next door to each other, with a laundress’s next door to that! That was the pudding. In half a minute, Mrs Cratchit entered: flushed, but smiling proudly: with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half a quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so.
2. The Family Toast

CAST

You will need:  
Bob Cratchit  
Tiny Tim  
Scrooge  
Ghost of Christmas Present

Optional:  
Mrs Cratchit  
Other Cratchit children

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and crackled noisily. Then Bob proposed:

‘A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!’
Which all the family re-echoed.
‘God bless us every one!’ said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father’s side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

‘Spirit,’ said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, ‘tell me if Tiny Tim will live.’

‘I see a vacant seat,’ replied the Ghost, ‘in the poor chimney corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die.’
3. The Toast to Scrooge

CAST

You will need:  
Bob Cratchit  
Mrs Cratchit  
Scrooge  
Tiny Tim

Optional:  
Ghost of Christmas Present  
The other Cratchit children

‘Mr Scrooge!’ said Bob; I’ll give you Mr Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!’

‘The Founder of the Feast indeed!’ cried Mrs Cratchit, reddening.
‘I wish I had him here. I’d give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he’d have a good appetite for it.’

‘My dear,’ said Bob, ‘the children; Christmas Day.’

‘It should be Christmas Day, I am sure,’ said she, ‘on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow!’

‘My dear,’ was Bob’s mild answer, ‘Christmas Day.’

‘I’ll drink his health for your sake and the Day’s,’ said Mrs Cratchit, ‘not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy new year! – he’ll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!’

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness in it. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn’t care twopence for it.