



# A Christmas Carol



## Context – *A Christmas Carol* was written by Charles Dickens in 1843

<p><b>Charles Dickens</b> – Charles Dickens was born in 1812 and spent the first years of his life in Kent, England. At 9, he moved to London. At 12, his father was sent to debtors' prison for racking up huge debts, and Charles was given a painful job labelling bottles near the prison. He found this period in his life hellish, and it doubtlessly led him to draw readers' attention to the plight of the poor when he later found success as an author. Many of his works are about social hardships and inequalities.</p>	<p><b>Class Divides</b> – Despite industrial changes altering the social landscape, there were still relatively distinct social classes in operation: the nobility upper class, the middle class, and the working class. Life was terrible for the poorest: Lack of money resulted in a negligible food supply. For some working families, money was so tight that they required their children to work in order to survive.</p>
<p><b>The Victorian Era</b>– The Victorian era describes the period in which Queen Victoria sat on the English throne – between 1837 and 1901 (most of Dickens' life). Whilst this was a time of industrial revolution, it was also an extremely harsh time to live, and the differences between the lives of the richest and the poorest were exacerbated. The Victorian era was a period of great change. In this time, the population of England doubled – from 16.8 million 1851 to over 30 million in 1901.</p>	<p><b>Health and Medicine</b> – Healthcare was more of a luxury at the time, and medicine was nowhere near as advanced today. Many diseases were rife, and childbirth and poverty were very real dangers to people living in the era. As a result, a middle class person may expect to live to 45 at the time, whereas a working class person would have been lucky to have lived half that time. In <i>A Christmas Carol</i>, the restrictions in healthcare are evident in Tiny Tim's continued suffering.</p>
<p><b>Workhouses</b>– A workhouse was a place where a person went if they could not afford to financially support themselves and their families. Men, women and children (mostly orphans) lived and worked in the workhouses, which were very crowded – making living conditions unhealthy and unpleasant. People slept in dormitories, where disease was easily spread. In <i>A Christmas Carol</i>, Scrooge voices his support for workhouses.</p>	<p><b>Christmas</b>– We now associate Christmas as being a time of seasonal goodwill, love and friendship. However, before the Victorian era, when writers such as Dickens spread these messages through their novels, there was no Santa Claus, Christmas cards, and no holidays from work! Christmas Day was a far more low-key affair. Writers such as Dickens encouraged middle-class families to share their wealth and act selflessly.</p>

## Main Characters – Consider what Dickens intended through his characterisation of each of the below...

<p><b>Ebenezer Scrooge</b> – Scrooge is the lead protagonist of the novella. He is a miserly owner of a counting house (what would now be called an accountant's office). Initially greedy, selfish and cold, Scrooge hates Christmas and lacks any form of Christmas spirit. He experiences a moral and psychological transformation through his visits from the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come</p>	<p><b>The Cratchits</b>– Bob Cratchit is Scrooge's kind, mild-mannered clerk, who is treated terribly by his employer. He is a very poor man, with a large family, including Tiny Tim. Tiny Tim is a young boy who has been born with physical disabilities that his family are too poor to have treated. Despite these hardships, the family are cheery and determined to enjoy the few positives that they can get from life.</p>
<p><b>Jacob Marley and Fred</b>– Joseph Marley is Scrooge's late business partner, and Fred is Scrooge's nephew. They represent the two extremes of Christmas spirit. Joseph Marley symbolises the limitations of a life-lived focused on greed and selfishness, whilst Fred's life appears fulfilled through his perpetual joy, kindness and interactions with others. After his death, Joseph Marley has been condemned to wander the world as a miserable ghost.</p>	<p><b>The Ghost of Christmas Past</b> – This is the first spirit to visit Scrooge. He is a curious child-like figure that has an illuminated head, symbolising how shining a light on memories from the past can be used to illuminate one's thoughts and behaviours in the future. The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge to a number of places from his childhood and early adulthood, including his old school, hometown, and the scene of his engagement being broken off.</p>
<p><b>Quote:</b> "you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate."</p>	<p><b>Quote:</b> "Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!"</p>
<p><b>The Ghost of Christmas Present</b> – The Ghost of Christmas Present is the second of the three ghosts to visit Scrooge. He is a majestic jolly giant, who is dressed in a green robe. His lifespan is restricted to Christmas Day, and he has 'over 1800 brothers', representative of the other Christmas Days that were once in the present. He escorts Scrooge on a tour of how his contemporaries spend Christmas day, to force him to contemplate his own solitary existence. He also shows him the need to consider 'Want' and 'Ignorance.'</p>	<p><b>The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come</b> – The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is the third and final spirit to visit Scrooge. He is a silent phantom that is clad in robes (he rather resembles common characterisations of 'Death'). He presents Scrooge with an ominous view of his own death: the only people who his death remotely affects are those he owes money to (who are relieved), those who can make money from him (such as those dealing with his estate) and those who he could have saved (Tiny Tim).</p>
<p><b>Old Major Quote:</b> "Come in! and know me better, man!"</p>	<p><b>Quote:</b> "The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand."</p>



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<b>Themes</b> – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.		
<p><b>Greed and Selfishness</b> – Characters such as Scrooge represent the <u>selfish middle classes</u>, who sought to amass, rather than share their wealth. Jacob Marley demonstrates the burden that such a selfish life will inevitably bring. Through these characters and the events of the novel, Dickens criticises how wealth had become associated with the <u>root of happiness</u>, at the expense of close relationships and goodwill.</p>		
<p><b>Divisions</b>– Divisions are evident throughout the novel, as those with power and money seek simply to <u>exert and recycle</u> their advantages over those without (<u>rather than aiding</u> them). The book shines a light on the plight faced by poor families such as the Cratchits, which demonises the negative attitudes towards the poor held by the rich.</p>		
<p><b>Transformation</b> – <u>Physical transformations</u> are evident throughout <i>A Christmas Carol</i>, as objects, settings, and characters appear and vanish under the manipulation of the ghosts. <u>Spiritual transformations</u> take place too, as the reader witnesses a lonely boy's transformation into an embittered old man, and the efforts made to transform his character to reconnect with those around him.</p>		
<p><b>Time</b> – Time is <u>stretched</u> by the ghosts – the events that Scrooge experiences appear to have taken days, and yet all takes place in the space of one night. A <u>race against time</u> is also taking place, as the spirits work to prevent Scrooge (and in turn, Tiny Tim) from experiencing their fateful demise. The reader is taught to <u>value the time</u> that we have, and use it to spread happiness to others.</p>		
<b>Scene-by-Scene Summary</b> – Alongside key quotations from each scene.		
<b>STAVE ONE</b>	<p>It is a foggy Christmas Eve, and Scrooge is working in his counting house. He refuses to buy another lump of coal to heat Bob Cratchit's (his clerk's) office. Scrooge's cheerful nephew, Fred, enters, inviting Scrooge to Christmas party, but he declines. After he leaves, two gentlemen enter, asking if Scrooge is willing to make a charitable donation to the poor. Scrooge again declines. He begrudgingly gives Bob Cratchit the day off. Scrooge follows his usual routine on the way home. At home, he sees the ghost of his old business partner (Jacob Marley) in the knocker. Marley is in chains as punishment for his selfishness and greed when living. He says that he seeks to save Scrooge from the same fate, and hence Scrooge will be visited by 3 ghosts over the next 3 nights.</p>	<p><i>“Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it.”</i></p>
<b>STAVE TWO</b>	<p>Scrooge is confused to wake at midnight, as it was after 2am when he went to sleep. At one o'clock, Scrooge is visited by a strange child-like figure that emanates wisdom – The Ghost of Christmas Past. The spirit touches Scrooge's heart, granting the power to fly. The ghost takes Scrooge back to where he was raised – Scrooge is touched by memories of his childhood. He sees himself as a schoolboy spending Christmas alone, being visited by his sister, being at a party held by Scrooge's old boss Fezziwig, and with his old partner Belle, who is breaking off their engagement on account of his greed. He sees Belle in a more modern time, with her husband, discussing how Scrooge is now 'quite alone in the world.' Scrooge is upset by the visions, and begs with the ghost to take him back home. Scrooge finds himself back in his bedroom, where he once again falls asleep almost instantly.</p>	<p><i>“But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.”</i></p>
<b>STAVE THREE</b>	<p>The bell strikes one, and Scrooge is awake once more. At fifteen minutes past one, he wanders into the next room, where he finds the Ghost of Christmas Present waiting for him. He is a majestic jolly giant, and sits atop of a mountain of food. The spirit takes Scrooge to the bustling streets on Christmas morning, where passers-by joyfully greet each other. The spirit then takes Scrooge to the home of Bob Cratchit, where the family savour the Christmas that they can afford. Their visibly-ill son, Tiny Tim, is cheering despite his ailments. Scrooge begs to know whether he will survive. They also visit Fred's Christmas party, which Scrooge enjoys (though no one can see him). Eventually, Scrooge is brought to a vast expanse, where two sickly children, 'Want' and 'Ignorance' emerge. When Scrooge asks if there is anything that can be done, the spirit mocks his prior selfishness.</p>	<p><i>“Its dark brown curls were long and free; free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air.”</i></p>



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Scene-by-Scene Summary – Alongside key quotations from each scene.		
<b>STAVE FOUR</b>	<p>Scrooge is approached by a hooded phantom. The spirit is silent, and Scrooge is terrified by him. Scrooge pleads with him to provide his next lesson. The ghost takes him to the stock exchange, where men discuss the accounts of a rich man, a dingy pawn shop, where the rich man's stolen goods are being sold, and the Cratchit household, where the family struggles with the death of Tiny Tim. Scrooge is then taken to a freshly dug grave in a graveyard. The gravestone reveals that it is his own grave. Appalled, Scrooge begs with the spirit to give him another chance to show that he has learnt his lesson. The phantom begins to tremble and disappears, and once again Scrooge finds himself in the relative safety of his own bed.</p>	<p><i>I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart"</i></p>
<b>STAVE FIVE</b>	<p>Scrooge realises that he has been returned to Christmas morning, and is utterly overjoyed. He pays the first boy that he meets a huge sum to deliver a great big turkey to Bob Cratchit's household. He bumps into the gentlemen collecting for charity, apologises for his prior behaviour, and promises to donate lots of money to the poor. He attends Fred's party and is so happy and kind that the other guests can barely believe his behaviour. The next morning, he pretends to scold Bob Cratchit for arriving late, before promising to give him a large raise and to care for his family. As time passes by, he stays true to his word – he helps the Cratchits and becomes like a second father to Tiny Tim, who does not die. Scrooge brings Christmas cheer to every day, and shrugs off the doubts that others have about his changed behaviour. The narrator concludes by suggesting that Scrooge's changed attitude and behaviour should be shared by everyone.</p>	<p><i>"He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge....God bless us all, every one!"</i></p>

Dickens' Literary Devices		Structural Features
<b>Simile</b>	This gives the reader a better image of characters and places, e.g. Scrooge described as 'hard and sharp as a flint.'	<b>Five Staves</b> – The story is set out in five Staves – a structure that mimics musical organization – the opening sets the scene, the middle is the turning point, and the last stave concludes.
<b>Clear Narrative Viewpoint</b>	The narrator gives views to tell the reader how to think – e.g. Scrooge was a 'tight-fisted hand at the grindstone.'	<b>Surface Level Story</b> – A literal story that works on a surface level, e.g. The story of one cruel and harsh man being visited by ghosts who teach him a lesson, making him kind and compassionate.
<b>Metaphor</b>	Used to represent deeper meanings and ideas. For example, the children 'Want' and 'Ignorance' represent the poor in society.	<b>Symbolic Level Story</b> – A deeper, more hidden meaning to the story, e.g. There exists a selfish society, who needs to heed this warning, in order to become more caring.
<b>Personification</b>	To emphasise the atmosphere of places and settings: e.g. 'the crisp air laughed to hear it.'	<b>The Number 3</b> – Scrooge is visited by 3 ghosts: Past, Present, and Yet to Come. This is a common feature in magical fairy stories: e.g. 3 wishes, 3 choices etc. This adds to the mystical feel of the novella.