

# GCSE English Literature | 19<sup>th</sup> Century Novel | A Christmas Carol | All You Need to Know

## Characters

**Ebenezer Scrooge**  
Miserable | Tight-fisted | Redeemed by the end

Scrooge is the main character of Dickens's novella and is first presented as a **miserly**, unpleasant man. He rejects all offerings of Christmas cheer and celebration as 'Humbug!'. On Christmas Eve he is visited by the ghost of his old business partner, Jacob Marley, who warns that he will be visited by three ghosts. Each of the ghosts shows him a scene that strikes fear and regret into his heart and eventually he softens. By the end of the story, Scrooge is a changed man, sharing his wealth and generosity with everyone.

**Bob Cratchit**  
Humble | Hardworking | Family man

Bob Cratchit is Scrooge's clerk and works in unpleasant conditions without complaint. He obeys Scrooge's rules and is firm about asking to go home to his family early on Christmas Eve. When the Ghost of Christmas Present takes Scrooge to visit the Cratchits on Christmas Day, he sees Bob Cratchit carrying his sickly son Tiny Tim, and later raising a toast to Scrooge for providing the feast. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come shows the Cratchits in a future where Tiny Tim has died and here we see how sensitive Bob Cratchit is. His love for his son is shown through his grief. In the end, when Scrooge changes his ways for the better, Bob Cratchit is delighted. He welcomes Scrooge's new-found generosity and friendship.

**Fred**  
Cheerful | Generous | Kind-hearted

Even when Scrooge puts down all his talk of Christmas festivities, Fred persists with good cheer. Fred refuses to let Scrooge's miserly attitude dampen his spirits. When Scrooge finally turns up for Christmas dinner, Fred welcomes him in.

**The Ghost of Christmas Past**  
Young and old | Commanding | Streaming with light

The Ghost of Christmas Past is the first spirit to visit Scrooge after the ghost of Marley. It arrives as the clock chimes one. It is an **ephemeral** spirit that appears to be both old and young at the same time with light streaming from the top of its head. It takes Scrooge to scenes from his own past, showing him visions of his own childhood, of his young adulthood and of happier times. The final scene he presents is one that Scrooge cannot bear to witness: his lost love, Belle, with her family. Scrooge turns on the ghost and demands to be shown no more. He attempts to extinguish the ghost's light with his own cap, wrestling it to the ground. However, the light that shines from the ghost cannot be put out.

**The Ghost of Christmas Present**  
Jolly | Welcoming | Prophetic

The Ghost of Christmas Present is a huge and vibrant character who appears as the bell, once again, strikes one. It appears in Scrooge's room, surrounded by a feast. The generous nature of this ghost is reflected in the abundant vision of food. Scrooge is more humble in the presence of this second spirit and is willing to learn any lessons the ghost will show. It shows Scrooge visions of the world on Christmas Day, including heart-warming scenes of celebration at the homes of Bob Cratchit and Scrooge's nephew, Fred. Before it leaves Scrooge, the Ghost shows him two 'yellow, meagre' children who are hiding under its cloak. These are called Ignorance and Want and are a warning to Scrooge to change his ways.

**The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come**  
Silent | Dark | Ominous

The final Ghost is frightening and eerie. It doesn't say a word to Scrooge, but glides along and points out scenes to him. The spirit first shows Scrooge a funeral scene, with businessmen wondering about the money that the dead man has left. The Ghost then takes him through dark alleyways to a scene of three people picking through the belongings of the deceased. Scrooge recognises that his own death could be met this way. Next the Ghost takes him to the Cratchit household where Scrooge is upset to realise that Tiny Tim has died. Finally the Ghost shows him a tombstone engraved with the name: Ebenezer Scrooge. Clutching at the spirit's robes, Scrooge pledges to change his ways if he can avoid this solitary death. The Ghost disappears and leaves Scrooge clutching at his bed curtains.

**Tiny Tim**  
Kind | Disabled | Thoughtful

Tiny Tim is one of Bob Cratchit's sons. He walks with a crutch and has 'his limbs supported by an iron frame'. Despite his physical difficulties, he is a positive and generous child. He thinks of others and is well-loved by his family. Scrooge is affected by the child and when he is shown the Cratchit family Christmas by the Ghost of Christmas Present, he worries whether Tiny Tim will live. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come shows a possible future in which Scrooge's fears are realised and Tiny Tim has died. At the end of the novella, after Scrooge changes his character, we learn that he becomes like a second father to Tiny Tim.



### Scrooge makes his clerk work in the cold

The novella begins on Christmas Eve with Scrooge, a mean and miserly man working in his counting-house. His clerk, Bob Cratchit, is working hard and trying to warm himself over a candle as Scrooge refuses to give him more coal.

### He refuses Fred's invitation

Scrooge's cheerful nephew, Fred, arrives to wish him a Merry Christmas and to invite his uncle to a Christmas dinner. Scrooge responds with a grumpy 'Bah!' followed by 'Humbug!'

### Scrooge dismisses the charity collectors

Two gentlemen enter the office as Scrooge's nephew leaves. They are collecting for the poor and homeless. Scrooge refuses to give them a donation, claiming that the prisons and workhouses should provide for such people. He declares that if they cannot go to prison or the workhouses the poor should die 'and decrease the surplus population'.

### Scrooge is visited by Marley

Back at home, Scrooge has strange visions of the door knocker and tiles bearing the face of his old business partner, Jacob Marley. He refuses to believe his eyes, but then Marley's ghost appears and frightens Scrooge by rattling his chains. He tells Scrooge he will be haunted by three spirits.

### The Ghost of Christmas Past

As promised by Marley's ghost, Scrooge is visited as the bell tolls one o'clock by the first of three spirits: the Ghost of Christmas Past. The apparition is 'a strange figure' seeming to be both an old man and child.

The ghost shows Scrooge scenes from his childhood and a lively scene with his cheerful old boss, Fezziwig. Next he takes Scrooge to a time where his younger self is with his fiancée, Belle.

She is telling the younger Scrooge how she must leave him because he has changed and seems to love money more than her.

Then they see the girl become a woman, with her happy family. Scrooge is upset and the ghost returns him to his bed.

### The Ghost of Christmas Present

The second spirit is the Ghost of Christmas Present who takes Scrooge to the Cratchit family where he sees the humility with which the family tolerates its poverty. The sight of Tiny Tim, who is sick and weak, saddens him.

Next the spirit shows Scrooge his nephew and friends as they celebrate and joke about how Scrooge is a 'ridiculous fellow'. Lastly, the ghost shows Scrooge two poor children, Ignorance and Want. The ghost disappears and a dark hooded phantom comes towards Scrooge.

### The final spirit

The final spirit is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come who leads Scrooge through scenes relating to a man's death. He shows him the Cratchits whose son, Tiny Tim, has also died. Finally the ghost shows Scrooge the gravestone of the man the people have been talking about. It bears the name: Ebenezer Scrooge.

### Scrooge awakes on Christmas Day

Scrooge wakes up full of a zest for life. He presses the bed to check it is real and then laughing, proclaims himself as 'giddy as a drunken man'. He calls out of the window to a boy who tells him it is Christmas Day and Scrooge is delighted to find the spirits have done all their work in one night.

He gives the boy half a crown to buy the prize turkey from the butchers and have it delivered to the Cratchits. Then he dresses and goes out into the street where he meets one of the charity collectors from the previous day. Scrooge whispers his donation to the man, who is very grateful. Then Scrooge goes to church and at last to his nephew Fred's for Christmas dinner.

### Scrooge knows how to celebrate Christmas

The next day, Scrooge offers Bob Cratchit a pay-rise and promises to help look after his family. He learns how to laugh at himself and eventually becomes known as a man who knows how to celebrate Christmas.



## Terminology Relevant to this text

<b>Miser / miserly</b>	Cheap-skate; penny – pincher
<b>Ephemeral</b>	Temporary; brief; fleeting
<b>Prophetic</b>	Foretelling. Forewarning – to see the future
<b>Redemption</b>	To make up for your sins / wrong-doing
<b>Compassion</b>	To show care, kindness or sympathy towards another
<b>Stave</b>	A verse in a song; a chapter in the novel – a carol
<b>Omniscient Narrator</b>	A narrator that sees everything and is not involved
<b>Nominative Determinism</b>	When a name acts as a symbol of the qualities of a character
<b>Allegory</b>	A story with a hidden / symbolic meaning
<b>Parable</b>	A story meant to teach its reader a lesson
<b>Supernatural</b>	A force beyond scientific understanding
<b>Symbol</b>	An image which stands for an idea
<b>Transformation</b>	To change from one form to another
<b>Foreshadow</b>	To hint at later events / ideas in a text
<b>Poverty</b>	The state of being poor
<b>Empathy</b>	To put oneself in another's shoes to feel what they feel
<b>Penitence</b>	Feeling and showing sorrow / regret for one's actions
<b>Responsibility</b>	To take the blame; to have a duty towards something
<b>Humility</b>	To be modest / have a low view of your own importance
<b>Social Reform</b>	To change the social order to make life better for the poor
<b>Charity</b>	To give money for those less fortunate
<b>Workhouse</b>	Where the very poor worked for daily food and shelter
<b>Treadmill</b>	A mechanical moving staircase; a form of punishment
<b>Poor Law</b>	A law which was introduced to reduce the cost of looking after the poor; got poor people off the street; and encourage the poor to work hard to look after themselves. They were sent to the Workhouses to achieve this.

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## Themes

Christmas	Redemption	Social Injustice	Loneliness	Greed	Memory	Family	Choices	Generosity
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## Important Quotes

Stave	Theme	Quote	Stave	Theme	Quote	
One		'he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge!'	Three		'The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.'	
		'a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!'				'Another idol has displaced me'
		'Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire'				'You fear the world too much... I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you.'
		'secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster'				'The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove'
		'Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal.'				'The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney'
		'"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew'				'Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam.'
		'He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.'				'It was clothed in one simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare'
		'What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer: a time for balancing your books'				'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'
		'a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave'				'Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.'
		'we should make some slight provision for the Poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.'				'"There are some upon this earth of yours," returned the Spirit, "who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name'
		'"Are there no prisons? ...And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge. "Are they still in operation?... The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?" said Scrooge.'				'He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.'
		'I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there.'				'Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.'
		'If they would rather die... they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.'				'they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another'
	Two			'It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's'	Four	
		'A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!'				'"His wealth is of no use to him. He don't do any good with it. He don't make himself comfortable with it.'
		'Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it'				'They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish... This boy is ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both'
		'The chain he drew was clasped about his middle... it was made ... of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel.'				'The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently, approached'
		'I wear the chain I forged in life.'				'the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.'
		'Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business.'				'"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"
		'It was a strange figure—like a child; yet not so like a child as like an old man... Its hair, ... white as if with age, and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it... It wore a tunic of the purest white... from the crown of its head there sprang a bright clear jet of light.'				'"It's likely to be a very cheap funeral... I don't know of anybody to go to it"
		'The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."				'I don't mind going if a lunch is provided.'
		Poor Boy, he said, in pity for his former self. "Poor boy!" and cried again.'				'Every person has a right to take care of themselves. He always did.'
		'Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart!"				'"Assure me that I yet may change these shadows... by an altered life!"
		'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.'				'I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.'
						'I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody!"
						'I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family'
						'to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father'

## Context

**Charles Dickens** – 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 prison 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.

**The Victorian Era** – The Victorian Era describes the period in which Queen Victoria sat on the English throne – between 1837 and 1901. 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 double – from 16.8 million in 1851 to over 30 million in 1901.

**Workhouses** – 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.

**Class Divides** – 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 class families, money was so tight that they required their children to work in order to survive.

**Health and Medicine** – 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. In *A Christmas Carol*, the restrictions in healthcare are evident in Tiny Tim's continued suffering.

**Christmas** – 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, 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.

## Structural Features

**Five Staves** – The story is set out in five Staves – a structure that mimics musical organisation – the opening sets the scene, the middle is the turning point, and the last stave concludes.

**Surface Level Story** – 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.

**Symbolic Level Story** – 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.

**The Number 3** – Scrooge is visited by three ghosts: The Ghost of Christmas Past, The Ghost of Christmas Present and The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. This is a common feature in traditional fairy tales. This structural feature adds to the mystical feel of the novella.