

# A Christmas Carol

## Character List:

**Ebenezer Scrooge:** The protagonist of the story who transforms his miserly, cruel ways after being visited by Three Christmas Spirits.

**Jacob Marley:** Scrooge's business partner who dies before the start of the novella. He visits Scrooge to warn him of the Spirit's visits and that he must change or be damned for eternity.

**Bob Cratchit:** Scrooge's underpaid and abused employer. He has a large family to provide for and is a symbol for the poor working conditions faced by many poverty-stricken Victorians.

**Ghost of Christmas Past:** The first spirit to visit Scrooge. It is often represented as a candle, and is simultaneously young and old.

**Ghost of Christmas Present:** The second spirit to visit Scrooge. It is often represented as a jolly giant. He teaches about kindness and compassion.

**Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come:** The third and final spirit to visit Scrooge doesn't speak. It tends to represent 'death' in its appearance. This is the spirit that frightens Scrooge the most.

**Tiny Tim:** One of Bob Cratchit's sons who is gravely ill. He walks with crutches and is very loved by his family; he is thoughtful, patient and kind. Scrooge worries whether Tiny Tim will live (during his visit with the Ghost of Christmas Present) and realises that if he doesn't change Tiny Tim will die (as seen with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come).

**Little Fan:** Scrooge's younger sister and mother to Scrooge's nephew, Fred. She and Scrooge were close; she dies at a young age.

**Fezziwig:** Scrooge's first employer. He is a jolly, well-loved man who celebrates Christmas with great enthusiasm and treats his employees well.

**Belle:** Scrooge's first love who breaks off her engagement with Scrooge when he becomes obsessed with money and greed.

**Fred:** Scrooge's nephew whom he loves Christmas and invites his uncle over every year, despite Scrooge never turning up. He is jolly, compassionate and charitable.

**The Charity Workers:** Two portly gentlemen who ask Scrooge for a charitable donation, but are turned away following one of Scrooge's rants.

**Ignorance and Want:** Two meagre children that the Ghost of Christmas Present brings forward as a warning to mankind.

The plot of *A Christmas Carol* unfolds in a linear manner. Each of the sections are a catalyst for the next and Scrooge's inevitable transformation.

**Stave One:** Scrooge's business partner **Marley** has died, and **Scrooge** has continued to be a cold, cruel man who treats his employee **Bob Cratchit** terribly. Scrooge refuses to wish his nephew **Fred** a 'Merry Christmas' or visit him on Christmas Day. He also refuses to give money to some charitable gentlemen. Marley visits Scrooge and tells him that if he doesn't change his ways he is doomed to an afterlife of anguish.

**Stave Two:** Scrooge is visited by the **Ghost of Christmas Past**. This spirit takes Scrooge back to his past, and Scrooge sees **four** separate visions from his past:

1. He visits his boarding school where he was left alone at Christmas whilst his friends went back home.
2. His younger sister **Little Fan** visits him and says that their father wants them all together at Christmas. We find out that his sister died young.
3. He visits his old employer, **Fezziwig**, and Scrooge and the other apprentice are preparing for the annual Christmas Party that Fezziwig hosts.
4. Scrooge relives the moment that his fiancée, **Belle**, broke off her engagement to him due to his obsession with money and greed. We then see Belle's New Family; Scrooge sees what happened to Belle after their engagement broke off, and how she has become a loving mother and wife and her happiness that she has with her family. Scrooge begins to see how other people talk about him when he's not around, as Belle's new husband mentions that he saw Scrooge working at Christmas.

After these visits Scrooge tries to forget the past again, and 'puts out' the Ghost of Christmas Past.

**Stave Three:** Scrooge is visited by the **Ghost of Christmas Present**. This spirit takes Scrooge to moments that are happening around him that he is missing because of his negative attitude. The spirit shows Scrooge:

1. **The Cratchit Family:** Scrooge sees how poor they are, and this means that they can't buy their sick son, **Tiny Tim**, the medicine he needs. Scrooge also sees that despite this they are very happy people. Scrooge begins to soften his heart towards Tiny Tim and worries about his future.
2. **Christmases around the world:** Scrooge is taken to see how people celebrate Christmas and how they continue to carry the 'spirit of Christmas' (love, generosity, family) with them, despite their hardships and difficult situations.
3. **Fred's Christmas Party:** Scrooge sees how he is perceived by other people when he's not around and how much his nephew does care for him, and wants him to be a part of his life.

At the end of this Stave, the Ghost of Christmas Present starts to fade, and has a dire warning for Scrooge about the troubles that **Ignorance and Want** will cause the world. He illustrates with this two children to show who actually suffers due to ignorance and want.

**Stave Four:** The final Ghost's visit frightens Scrooge more than any other, because the **Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come** does not speak. This spirit takes Scrooge on a journey to what the future will be like if he doesn't change:

1. A man has died, and some of this man's business associates are indifferent about this man's death; commenting that they'll only go to funeral if lunch is provided.
2. The spirit takes Scrooge to a pawn shop where some unscrupulous characters are selling the dead man's higher priced items for personal gain, however they aren't ashamed of it because he wasn't a nice man to people when he was alive.
3. Scrooge visits the chamber of the dead man, which is empty and cold; he is overwhelmed by fear and isn't able to remove the cloth covering the man's face. He begs to be taken to a place where positive emotion about this man's death is shown: he is taken to a family's home where two people are pleased the man is dead, because they can't afford the interest rates on his loan and he wasn't a kind person so kept charging them higher and higher rates when they couldn't pay.
4. Scrooge begs to be taken to a place where sadness is shown about a death, and the Spirit takes us to the Cratchit house where Scrooge realises that Tiny Tim has died.
5. The spirit takes Scrooge to a forgotten graveyard, and Scrooge is still unaware of who the man is. He continues to ask the spirit who points at a gravestone. Scrooge pushes the dirt away and realises that the man was him. Scrooge begins to realise the error of his ways, and doesn't want to end up like the first man he visited.

**Stave Five:** Scrooge wakes up after an eventful night of ghostly visits and is overwhelmed with joy. He has realised the errors of his ways and wants to change. He asks a young boy to run to the local butchers and buy the prize turkey that is in the window and offers to pay him substantially if he gets it back here quickly; Scrooge sends this turkey anonymously to the Cratchit Family. He goes out for a walk and bumps into the charitable gentlemen he refused in Stave One, and offers to give them some money as well as a 'back payment' for all the years he has refused to give. He then nervously goes to his nephew Fred's house to reconcile with him, and they end up spending Christmas Day together. On Boxing Day, he gets to work early and plans to trick Bob Cratchit by acting his 'old self' (grumpy and mean!). After getting Bob Cratchit worked up for being late to work, Scrooge offers him a pay rise and supports his family. Tiny Tim gets better, and Scrooge becomes a close friend to all around him; celebrating Christmas with the best of them.

## Themes:

Compassion and Forgiveness	Family
Social Injustice	Time
Poverty	Choice
Christmas	Memory and Past
Redemption	Isolation

**Christmas:** Shown through the title and structure; Tiny Tim who is generous and kind; Fred who is the embodiment of Christmas Joy.

**Social Injustice:** Scrooge refuses to give money to help the poor; the characters of Ignorance and Want; the thieves dividing up Scrooge's belongings once he's died.

**Redemption:** Scrooge begins as miserable and miserly; he begins to see the error of his ways; he begins to transform and redeem himself.

**+1: Link the other themes to moments / characters in the novella.**

Form	Structure	Language						
<p>Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol in the <b>form</b> and a <b>ghost story</b>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Novella: longer than a short story, shorter than a novel. It could be read in a short space of time, making it ideal Victorian Christmas entertainment.</li> <li>Ghost Story: Features <b>four</b> ghosts (including Marley). This genre was traditionally read at Christmas.</li> </ul> <p>When discussing the <b>form</b>, refer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The type of text it is.</li> <li>The genre</li> <li>The style of writing.</li> </ul>	<p>The novella is written in <b>5 staves</b>. Staves are traditionally used to structure a Christmas carol. <i>A Christmas Carol</i> follows a similar theme to many Christmas carols and Dickens uses this structure to tell his tale of redemption.</p> <p>The <b>three</b> spirits are important: the number three is important in many stories (three wishes, three chances). Scrooge is shown the Past, Present and Future and then given the chance to change.</p> <p><b>How important is the overall structure of this novella?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the structure links to <b>the theme of Christmas</b> by reflecting the shape of a typical carol</li> <li>it has a clear <b>beginning, middle and end</b> through which we see a character's transformation</li> <li>the <b>structure of three</b> ghosts, showing the past, present and future, appeals to readers</li> <li>Scrooge's <b>redemption</b> in the <b>final staff</b> leaves the reader with a sense of both completion and possibility</li> </ul> <p><b>When writing about structure, think about:</b></p> <p>How is the text put together? How does it reflect the themes of the text?</p> <p>What is significant about this? What is the overall effect of the structure?</p>	<p>Dickens uses a strong narrative voice within <i>A Christmas Carol</i> and uses highly descriptive language to create a vivid sense of setting and place.</p> <p><b>When analysing the language Dickens has used, aim to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>examine <b>words</b> and <b>phrases</b></li> <li>think about the <b>sorts of words</b> he chose (positive, negative, descriptive)</li> <li>explore <b>layers of meaning</b> (what else could a phrase refer to or suggest?)</li> <li>notice any <b>literary techniques</b> (simile, metaphor, alliteration)</li> <li>explain the <b>effects of the language</b> used - how does it make you feel?</li> </ul> <p><b>Some examples of the type of language devices used are:</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Narrative Voice</td> <td>Simile</td> <td>Dialogue</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Metaphor</td> <td>Personification</td> <td>Humour</td> </tr> </table>	Narrative Voice	Simile	Dialogue	Metaphor	Personification	Humour
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**Context:**

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 and was sent to work in a shoe polish factory when his father was sent to a debtors' prison. *A Christmas Carol* was published in 1843.

During the Victorian Era there wasn't a 'welfare state' as we know it today; if you were poor and sick, you received very minimal assistance from the help. Many wealthy Victorians believed that people were poor because they didn't work hard enough. If you were too poor to pay rent, you were sent to live in a Workhouse where you had to work to keep your place. The jobs given to people in the Workhouses were often worst jobs that nobody, but the very desperate, would do. Many poor people tried to avoid the Workhouses as families were separated.

The poverty issues were further compounded in 1843 as 'The Poor Law' (the assistance given to the very needy) was amended to reduce the cost of helping the poor. Those who were desperate and had no other options were sent to the Workhouses. The desperation of the poor is presented in three ways in the novella:

<b>The Cratchit Family</b>	<b>The characters of Ignorance and Want</b>	<b>The thieves going through dead Scrooge's possessions.</b>
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Dickens felt strongly that Victorian society ignored the poverty of its underclass. On the one hand were the rich who enjoyed comfort and feasting at Christmas, and on the other were children forced to live in dreadful conditions in workhouses.

In 1861, 35,000 children under 12 lived and worked in workhouses in Britain. Living conditions there were unpleasant and the work was tough such as 'picking out' old ropes. Discipline was harsh and punishments included whipping. Food was basic and barely enough to sustain the children.

Not all wealthy Victorians ignored the plight of the poor, and the 'portly gentlemen' who visit Scrooge ask for a Christmas donation to help the destitute orphans are an example of this. Dickens used the novella to open many wealthy Victorians' eyes to the difficulties faced by the poor.

Working life for a Victorian clerk was generally repetitive and dull. They typically spent whole days in the counting-houses working out calculations for the benefits of other men. Dickens features more than 104 clerks in his collected works. Most of his clerks are presented as downtrodden characters, almost always wearing black.

**Christmas Context:**

Dickens wrote this story in 1843. At the time there was a tradition for reading ghost stories at Christmas, hence the numerous spirits that Scrooge encounters. The themes of wealth and injustice are clear comments on the inequalities of wealth distribution in Victorian England. Many of the Christmas traditions that we enjoy today began during the Victorian era. Before the 19th-century, Christmas was not celebrated in the way that it is today. It was not even considered a holiday by many businesses. The practice of sending Christmas cards began during the Victorian times, as did the giving of elaborate and increasingly luxurious gifts on Christmas Day. The Christmas feast has a longer history, though the popularity of turkey can be attributed to the Victorians. The focus on family and spending time with loved ones also came about in the 1800s. *A Christmas Carol* was written during this time and played its part in making these new traditions popular.

<b>Stave One:</b>		
'solitary as an oyster'	'Bah! Humbug!'	'Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it.'
'Decrease the surplus population'	'hard and sharp as flint'	'The chain...was long, and wound about him like a tail.'
'A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!'	'playing hide and seek with the other houses'	'Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern.'
<b>Stave Two</b>		
'The figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness'	'Father is so much kinder than he used to be that home's like heaven!'	
'I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master possession, Gain, engrosses you'	'He [Fezziwig] has the power to render us happy or unhappy'	'I should like to say a word or two to my clerk!'
'a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire'	'Another idol has displaced me... a golden one'	'Why, it's Ali Baba' Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy'
<b>Stave Three</b>		
'Its dark brown curls were long and free, ; free as its genial face'	'bright gleaming berries glistened'	Oh, a wonderful pudding!'
'Tiny Tim upon his shoulders'	'I see a vacant seat'	'This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want.'
'They were happy, grateful, pleased with one another'	'Every man among them hummed a Christmas tune.'	'Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish'
<b>Stave Four</b>		
'The phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached.'	'Shrouded in a deep black garment'	'It's likely to be a very cheap funeral'
'The whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery'	'we may sleep tonight with light hearts'	'My little, little child!' cried Bob'
'Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were still as statues'	'Read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, Ebenezer Scrooge'	'Assure me that I yet may change these shadows'
<b>Stave Five</b>		
'I will live in the Past, Present and Future!'	'no fog, no mist: bight, clear'	'A great many back payments are included'
'To Tiny Tim, who did not die he was a second father'	'Everything could yield him pleasure'	'Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness!'
	'I'll raise your salary!'	