

A Christmas Carol

Revision Guide

**AQA English
Literature**

Text guide and
practice exam questions

For grade 9-1
GCSE English Literature

**BEYOND
REVISION**

YOUR GCSE COMPANION

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How to Use This Guide

In this revision guide, you'll find a lot of useful information about *A Christmas Carol*, so it may be a little tricky knowing where to start. Here you can find out more about what's included, along with some ideas for how to make the most of it in your revision.

Summary

This section gives you a quick summary of all the events in the novella, stave by stave. You need to have a solid understanding of the whole plot of the novella for the exam, as well as understanding how the characters develop as the story goes on. To help you test your knowledge, there are quick questions throughout the summary section. You could work with a partner to test each other by reading the questions and answering aloud, or you could set yourself a quick timer (around five minutes) and write down the most detailed answer you can.

Context

This section gives you some general context about the time in which Dickens was writing *A Christmas Carol* and the influences that inspired him. You'll find more specific contextual information under each theme section.

Who's Who

Here, you'll find information on each of the key characters and their role in the novella, as well as key words you could use when describing them. If you click on each character's picture, you'll find a question to prompt you to think about the character in greater depth.

Themes

This section covers some of the main themes that Dickens explores in *A Christmas Carol*. Each theme is divided into the same sections to give you a thorough understanding of its importance in the novella.

Context

Within each theme, you'll find information about the novella's context (what life was like at the time the story was written and what influenced Dickens to write it). Try reading the information and then making your own context poster for each theme using your own words.

Key Quotes

These are some of the most important quotations to remember for each theme, with an explanation of what they mean in easier language. It's important that you memorise as many key quotations as you can because you'll only have an extract in the exam, not the full novella, and you get marks for precisely referencing the text. Try covering them up and writing them out until you can get them word-for-word.

Mini Exams

These questions will test your understanding of the themes and push you a little harder to think about how they impact the story. It's important to talk about why Dickens wrote the novella the way he did and how his choices affect the reader, and these questions will help you to think about this. You could discuss them aloud in a pair or a small group and mind-map your responses, or give yourself a ten minute timer to answer each one independently in writing.

Exam Questions

The exam questions are written in the same format and style as the one you'll answer in the real exam, so they're perfect to use as practice. You should set yourself a timer of 45 minutes to plan and write your response.

Sample Answers

For each exam question, there are two sample answers provided. The first one is a 'good' response and the second is a 'great' one. Each answer is labelled with a colour code to show you where it has met the different Assessment Objectives and some comments are provided to show where it has been successful and where it could be improved. Remember, the exam is about your own personal interpretation of the novella, so these aren't 'right' answers – you may have lots of other ideas that aren't included. They're simply meant to give you an idea of what an answer might look like. You could read them in a group and discuss how they could be improved or added to.

Useful Terms

Throughout this guide, terms that you might find unfamiliar are highlighted in **gold**. The definitions of these terms can be found on the **Useful Terms** pages, or alternatively by clicking the word with your cursor.

About the Exam

As part of the GCSE English Literature exams, you'll answer one question about *A Christmas Carol*. You won't be allowed to have a copy of the book with you in the exam, so it's really important that you revise thoroughly. The question will give you a short extract from the novella and ask you to write about how Dickens presents a particular theme or idea, both in the extract and the story as a whole.

The Assessment Objectives

You get marks in the exam for meeting the Assessment Objectives (AOs). The AOs are:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO1 means that you can show you have read and understood the text. You can give your own personal ideas and thoughts about the book and use quotes from the text as evidence to back up your points. The more detailed and developed your ideas are, the more marks you pick up.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO2 means that you can talk about the way that Dickens wrote the novella. You can analyse the language that Dickens used and why he used it, and you can analyse the way that he structured the story and why he chose to do it the way he did. You can talk about the effects that Dickens' choices make and how readers would respond to them.

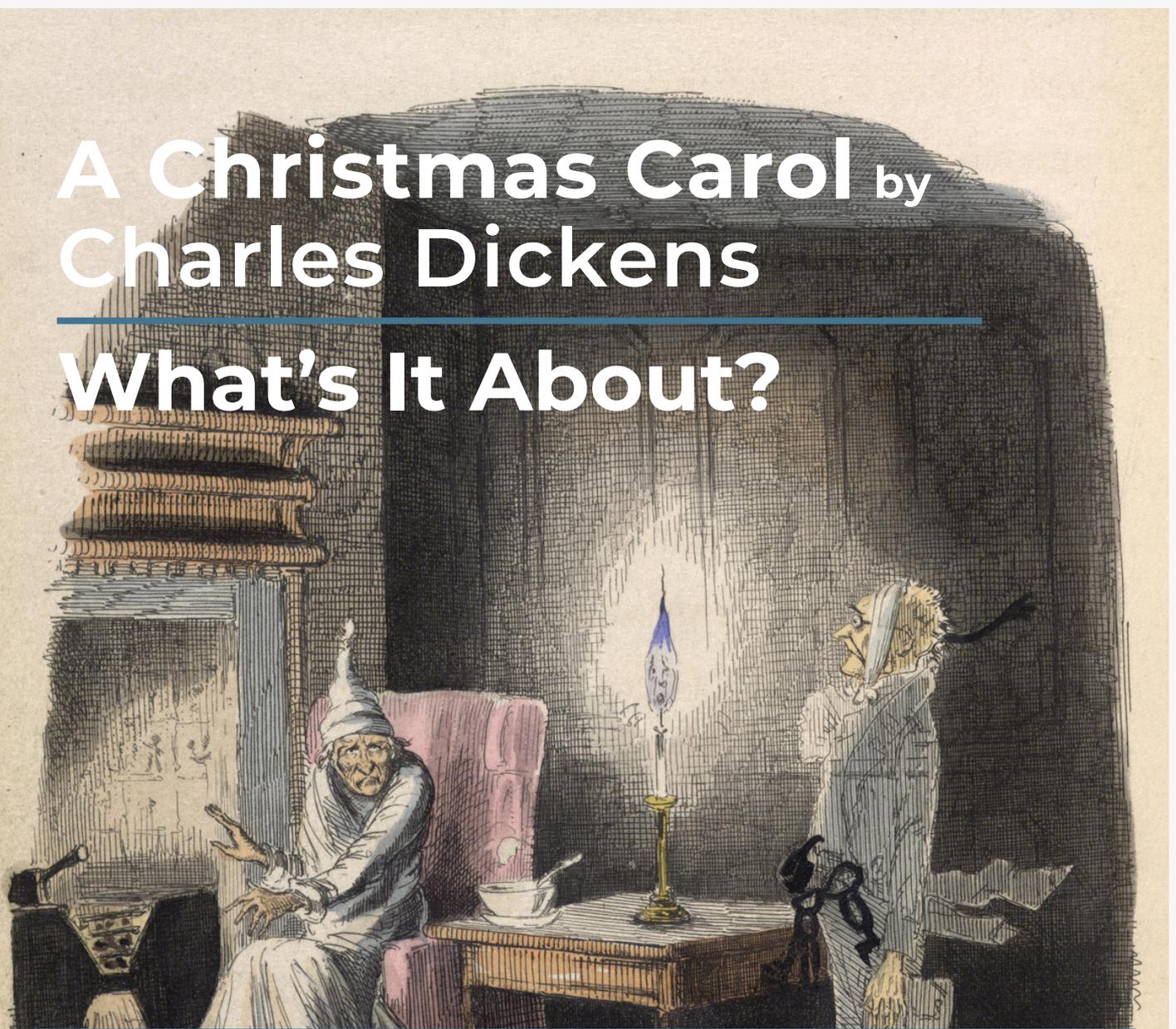
AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

AO3 means that you can describe how the novella's context affects the way it was written. You can show that you understand what life was like at the time the novella was written and what events influenced Dickens to write it, and talk about how this affected Dickens' writing. You can talk about how readers in Dickens' time would have reacted to the novella.

In this revision guide, there are sample answers to GCSE-style questions. These have been highlighted with the colour code above to show where they have met the AOs.

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

What's It About?



A Christmas Carol is one of the best-known works by the Victorian novelist Charles Dickens (1812-1870). It tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, a rich but cold-hearted man who is shown the importance of kindness and generosity.

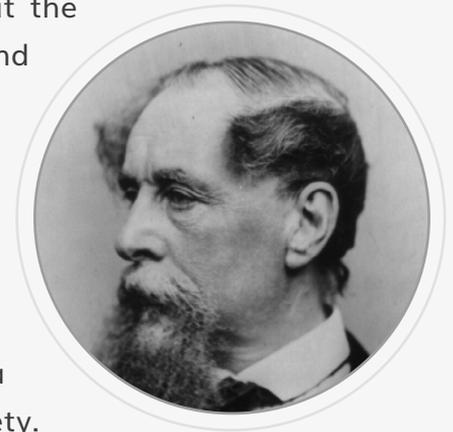
One cold and foggy Christmas Eve, Scrooge is haunted by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who warns that Scrooge's soul is doomed if he doesn't change his **miserly** ways. Scrooge is then visited by three spirits, who show him visions of past, present and future Christmases in turn. Through the visions, Scrooge begins to understand the errors of his past and he wakes on Christmas Day a changed man, promising to do good in the world and help those less fortunate than himself.

Through the story, Dickens uses the backdrop of Christmas to comment on the social problems that troubled Victorian Britain and explore themes of Christmas tradition, family and **redemption**.



Context

A Christmas Carol is written in the form of a **novella**. The story itself is highly **allegorical** - it's designed to give the reader a message about the real world and encourage them to reflect on their own behaviour. The book's title refers to songs about the Christmas season that bring people together and spread joy and cheer, as Dickens wanted his book to do the same thing. In keeping with this musical theme, Dickens titled the chapters of *A Christmas Carol* as **staves**.



At the time the book was written, the **Industrial Revolution** had transformed Britain, creating a huge divide between the richest and poorest in society. Many owners of and investors in factories and businesses became enormously wealthy while their workers lived in slums. Dickens had first-hand experience of the hard life experienced by the

poor; his father was sent to a **debtors' prison** when Dickens was 12 and the young Charles had to work in a warehouse gluing labels onto pots for ten hours a day. Although he became well-off as an adult, Dickens never forgot this experience and used his position as a famous author to campaign for better conditions for the poor.

First Marshalsea Prison,
18th century



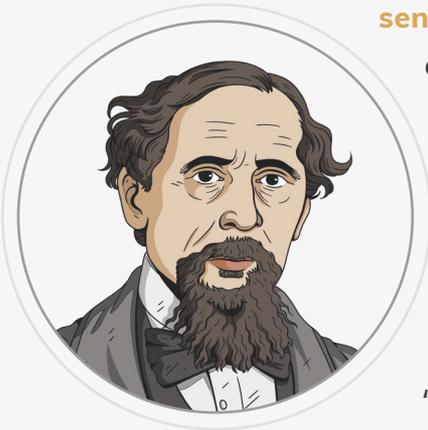
Dickens was especially concerned with the education of poor children. In 1843, he visited the Field Lane **Ragged School** in London and was appalled by the dreadful conditions he saw there. He became determined to raise awareness of the plight of children in poverty in England. Dickens initially planned to write a pamphlet arguing for better schools for the poor, but decided that a Christmas story would be more effective at getting his point across and set to work on *A Christmas Carol*.



THE RAGGED SCHOOL.
In West Street (late Chick Lane) Smithfield.
Drawn by George Cruikshank about 1843-4.

Although Dickens' main aim was to draw attention to social inequality, the Christmas setting allowed him to create a heartwarming and

sentimental story. Christmas was growing in popularity during the Victorian era and Dickens played into this trend by presenting Christmas as a joyful time full of feasting and partying. The book was a huge success and played a part in making Christmas the major celebration it is today - Dickens is often credited with popularising many of our most common Christmas traditions, including the phrase 'Merry Christmas'!



Who's Who

Ebenezer Scrooge

An elderly businessman who is notoriously greedy and mean-spirited. At the start, Scrooge values his money over the wellbeing of his staff or the affection of his family and shows no compassion for the less fortunate. By the end, thanks to the three spirits, Scrooge is a changed man, full of kindness and generosity for others.

Key words: miserly, bitter, repentant.

Bob Cratchit

Scrooge's clerk is a kind and gentle man who is devoted to his large family and especially his son Tiny Tim. He is loyal to Scrooge and dedicated to his job, despite being overworked and underpaid.

Key words: hardworking, grateful, cheerful.

Jacob Marley (Marley's Ghost)

Scrooge's former business partner, who died seven years before the story begins. In life, Marley was just as greedy as Scrooge and his ghost is doomed to walk the earth in chains as a result. He visits Scrooge to warn him that he will suffer the same fate if he doesn't change his ways.

Key words: restless, remorseful, prophetic.

The Ghost of Christmas Past

The first of the three spirits, this apparition shows Scrooge events from Christmases in his past. It appears as a strange figure that seems both old and young at the same time, with a glowing light shining from its head. The ghost carries a candle extinguisher as a cap.

Key words: enigmatic, androgynous, angelic.

Who's Who

The Ghost of Christmas Present

The second spirit appears as a jolly giant surrounded by a huge Christmas feast. It shows Scrooge joyful Christmas scenes, including the Cratchit family's Christmas dinner, but also shows him an image of poor and starving children.

Key words: joyful, welcoming, honest.



The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

The final spirit appears as a silent figure cloaked in black and shows Scrooge scenes from a possible future, including the death of Tiny Tim and Scrooge's own grave. The spirit leaves Scrooge begging for the chance to change his ways and avoid these events.

Key words: ominous, foreboding, frightening.

Tiny Tim

Bob's youngest child is disabled and walks on crutches but is full of happiness and optimism. Scrooge becomes determined to change his ways after seeing the vision of Tiny Tim's death and realising that he could have prevented it by treating Bob more fairly.

Key words: joyful, welcoming, honest.

Fred

Scrooge's cheerful nephew. Fred offers to have Scrooge round for Christmas dinner every year, an offer which Scrooge always refuses. At the end, Scrooge finally spends Christmas Day with Fred and his family.

Key words: benevolent, charitable, optimistic.

Who's Who

Mr Fezziwig

Scrooge's first employer, who treated him like a son. Mr Fezziwig is shown as the opposite of the old Scrooge: he is wealthy but jolly and generous with his money and shows great affection for his employees.

Key words: fatherly, generous, jolly.

Belle

The woman Scrooge loved as a young man. They were engaged but Belle ended the engagement when she realised Scrooge cared more about his wealth than about her. She went on to find love and happiness with another man.

Key words: beautiful, neglected, content.



Summary

Stave One

On a freezing and foggy Christmas Eve, Ebenezer Scrooge works in his **counting-house** with his clerk, Bob Cratchit. Scrooge's nephew Fred arrives to invite Scrooge to spend Christmas Day with him but Scrooge refuses the offer, claiming that Christmas is a "humbug" (a load of nonsense).

After Fred leaves, two men arrive to ask for charity donations for the poor. Scrooge refuses to donate, saying that the poor should be in prisons or **workhouses** if they can't support themselves, and the men leave. Scrooge reluctantly gives Bob Christmas Day off work but tells him to come in earlier

How does the reader feel about Scrooge based on these initial scenes?

the following day to make up for it.



That night, when Scrooge is alone, he is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who has been dead for seven years. Marley's Ghost is bound in heavy chains. He explains that he wears the chains as a punishment for a lifetime of greed

and selfishness and he is doomed to wander the world without peace. Marley's Ghost tells Scrooge that he faces the same punishment if he doesn't change his own selfish ways



What kind of atmosphere does Dickens create in the first stave? How does he achieve this?

Marley's Ghost tells Scrooge that he will be visited by three spirits that night and they are his only chance of escaping Marley's fate.



Stave Two

At one o'clock in the morning, Scrooge is visited by the first spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Past. The spirit transports Scrooge to a number of Christmases from his own life.

What do you think the first spirit's physical appearance could symbolise?

First, Scrooge sees himself as a young boy at boarding school. All the other students have left for Christmas and Scrooge is the only boy left behind. It's clear that the young Scrooge was lonely and neglected by his family. Next, Scrooge sees his younger self at school again, but this time his sister Fan arrives to tell him that their father has become kinder and will let Scrooge come home for Christmas. The old Scrooge explains that Fan died as a young woman and left behind Fred, Scrooge's nephew.



Next, the spirit takes Scrooge to see his first employer, a jolly man called Mr Fezziwig. Fezziwig throws a huge Christmas party for all his staff. The spirit points out to Scrooge that it hardly cost Fezziwig anything to make his staff happy and grateful.

The spirit then shows Scrooge himself as a young man talking to Belle, a beautiful young woman. Scrooge and Belle were engaged, but she breaks up with him because his greed has overtaken his love for her. Scrooge then sees Belle as a middle-aged woman, happily married to another man and surrounded by a huge family.

How do the events of this stave help us understand how Scrooge ended up the way he did?





Belle and her husband talk about how Scrooge is completely alone in the world. At this point, the old Scrooge can't bear to watch any longer. He extinguishes the Ghost of Christmas Past with its cap and reappears back in his bedroom.

Stave Three

Scrooge wakes up as the clock strikes one again. He walks into the living room and is greeted by the second spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Present, who has decorated the room and filled it with a huge feast. The spirit



takes Scrooge

to see scenes from Christmas Day.

They travel through city streets

full of happy and cheerful

people. The spirit takes Scrooge to Bob Cratchit's house, where the family is enjoying their Christmas meal. The Cratchits can't afford many Christmas treats but they make the best of everything they have and are joyful in each other's company. Bob's son, Tiny Tim, is very ill and Scrooge begs to know whether he will survive. The spirit says that unless things improve for the Cratchits, Tiny Tim will die.



How does the atmosphere change when this spirit appears? Why do you think Dickens does this?



The spirit takes Scrooge to see his nephew Fred's Christmas party, which is full of fun and games, and Scrooge is desperate to get involved. Fred tells his friends that he feels sorry for Scrooge and will always invite him over for Christmas, even if he is turned down every year.



Scrooge notices that the spirit has grown old and it tells him that its life only lasts one night. Before it leaves, the spirit shows Scrooge one last vision: two poor and starving children



named Ignorance and Want.

Scrooge asks if anything can be done to help these children and the spirit reminds Scrooge of his own words: "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?" As the clock strikes midnight,

the spirit disappears.

What changes do we see in Ebenezer Scrooge in this stave?

Stave Four

The final spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, appears. Scrooge is terrified of this spirit, although it doesn't speak a word to him. He tells the spirit that he's ready to learn its lesson and wants to change his ways.

The spirit shows Scrooge a group of men talking about an unnamed rich man who has recently died. They wonder if anyone will go to the funeral and joke that they will only go if there's a free lunch. Scrooge can't figure out who the men are talking about.



Next, Scrooge sees a dingy shop belonging to a **fence**, where a group of servants sell items they have stolen from the dead rich man's house, and the dinner table of a poor couple who are grateful that he's died as it gives them more time to repay their

How does the Cratchits' reaction to Tiny Tim's death compare to the reaction towards the rich man's death? What is Dickens' message here?

debt. Scrooge begs to be shown some tenderness connected to death and the spirit shows Scrooge the Cratchit household, where he sees that Tiny Tim has died. The Cratchits are full of grief for Tiny Tim's death

but express how happy they were to have been able to share his life.



Scrooge asks to know who the dead rich man was. The spirit takes him to a graveyard and points to a gravestone. Scrooge approaches the gravestone and is horrified to read his own name on it.



Scrooge begs the spirit for a chance to change his ways and avoid the future he has been shown, promising to remember the lessons he has learned from all three spirits.

As he grabs the spirit's hand, it vanishes and he wakes up back in his own bed.

What is the atmosphere of this stave? How does Dickens create it?

Compare this scene to Scrooge's first appearance. How different is he now?

Stave Five

As he reappears in his bedroom, Scrooge is overcome with happiness as he realises

he has been given a second chance at life. He thanks the spirits and promises to live by their lessons. Opening his window, he asks a passing boy what day it is and finds out that it's Christmas Day.

He immediately pays the boy to



buy a huge Christmas turkey and deliver it to the Cratchits' house.

Scrooge throws on his best clothes and goes out into the streets, where he wishes a merry Christmas to everyone he passes. He sees one of the charity collectors who came to his office the day before and apologises for his rudeness, promising to donate a huge amount of money to make up for it. He then heads to Fred's house and asks if he can join the party. Fred is shocked to see Scrooge but



is overjoyed that he's come, and Scrooge has a wonderful time.

The next day, Scrooge gets to work early, while Bob arrives 18 minutes late. Scrooge feigns disgust at Bob's lateness, before announcing that he's

What is the tone of the story's ending? How would you sum up Dickens' ultimate message?



giving Bob a pay rise and will do everything he can to help the Cratchit family.

Scrooge is as good as his word and becomes like a second father to Tiny Tim, who doesn't die. From that day on, he always remembers the lessons he learned from the three spirits and lives the rest of his life as a good man.

Themes Page

Poverty and Social Injustice

Throughout the novella, Dickens depicts the huge gap between the rich and poor in Victorian England. Scrooge represents the wealthy upper classes; at the beginning, he shows no sympathy for the poor, arguing that those who can't support themselves should be in prison, in a workhouse or dead. His attitude is based around the assumption that people are poor because of their own laziness. However, Dickens shows the reader that this is not the case.

The Cratchits are poor but it's clear that this is through no fault of their own; Bob is a hardworking, honest and kind person, and his eldest son Peter also works to support the family, but they still struggle for money simply because they are badly paid. Tiny Tim represents the thousands of innocent children who lived in poverty in Victorian England. His potential death shows the reader that the lives of the poorest people are dependent on compassion from those who are more fortunate: as Bob's employer, Scrooge is in a position to improve the lives of the Cratchits, but it's up to Scrooge to decide whether to do so or not. Dickens shows that a relatively small amount of money for someone like Scrooge can be life-changing for someone like Bob.

Dickens shows the reader that if everyone shares some responsibility for the welfare of the poor then all of society benefits. The appearance of Ignorance and Want exemplifies this idea. Through them, Dickens shows that children who are born into poverty and denied access to education have no chance of improving their situation and are stuck in poverty all their lives. He argues that generosity towards the poor is beneficial to all of society as it breaks this cycle of poverty. The alternative is for those poor children to grow up into desperate adults who turn to crime to make a living.





Themes: Poverty and Social Injustice

Context

There was a common belief among wealthier people in Victorian times that poverty was simply a result of laziness. The **Poor Law of 1834** removed any government support for people who struggled for money. Their only option was to enter a workhouse, which provided food and shelter in exchange for hard manual labour in cruel conditions. Those who got into debt were jailed in debtors' prisons until the money was paid. Scrooge refers to these establishments when he refuses to donate money to the charity collector in Stave One. Scrooge's description of the poor as the "surplus population" refers to an idea called Malthusianism, which Dickens strongly opposed. **Malthusianism** claims that poverty is caused by an excess of people and the only

way to reduce poverty is to reduce the size of the population.

Dickens had a lot of first-hand experience of the suffering of the poor. His own father was put in a debtors' prison when Charles was 12 and he was taken out of school and made to work, which gave him a strong sense of injustice. He realised that poverty was usually the result of bad luck or unfortunate circumstances rather than laziness. Dickens' books are full of **social commentary** on the gap between rich and poor; he went to visit many places where poor people lived and worked and wrote about the things he witnessed, and his descriptions were often shocking to the upper classes who were ignorant of how much the poor really suffered.

Key Quotes



"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."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

- **Stave One**

By describing the poor as 'idle', Scrooge shows his belief that poverty is caused by laziness. Dickens uses Scrooge to represent the callous attitude of many rich people towards the fate of the poor in Victorian England.



"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?" - **Stave One**

Marley's chains are a metaphor for his heartless treatment of the poor. Although he made himself rich, he did nothing to help others, even though he had the means to do so. Dickens presents selfishness and greed as grave sins.



"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."

- **Stave Three**

Tiny Tim represents the innocent and blameless poor who suffered through no fault of their own. Dickens shows the reader that the lives of many poor people are reliant on the generosity and compassion of the rest of society.



"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?" - **Stave Three**

The Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge Ignorance and Want to emphasise that poverty is a cycle - poor children grow up to be desperate adults if they are given no opportunities. Dickens makes it clear that prisons and workhouses don't give the poor any chance to escape poverty - only education can do that.

Mini Exams

Question 1

Explain how Scrooge's attitude towards the poor at the start of the book reflects society at the time the book was written.

Question 2

Of the scenes that Scrooge is shown by the three spirits, which one do you think is most effective at changing Scrooge's attitude towards the poor?

Question 3

'Dickens shows us that wealth has nothing to do with morality.'
Discuss.



Q

Exam Question

Read the following extract from *Stave Three of A Christmas Carol* and then answer the question that follows.

In this extract, the Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge a vision of two children.

From the foldings of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Oh, Man! look here. Look, look, down here!" exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

"Spirit! are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!" cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse! And bide the end!"

"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens presents social inequality in the novella.

Write about:

- how Dickens presents social inequality in this extract;
- how Dickens presents social inequality in the novella as a whole.

Themes: Poverty and Social Injustice

Sample Answer

Good Response

In this extract, Dickens uses the two children to represent social inequality. The Ghost reveals them to show Scrooge the consequences of his actions. Although the children are only really symbols of "Ignorance" and "Want", they are a practical way for Scrooge to understand that the way he behaves affects others.

Dickens uses lists of adjectives to describe the children which makes the reader feel overwhelmed by how much they are in need. He says "wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable" which really emphasises what a terrible sight they are. He personifies injustice as a "stale and shrivelled hand" and uses violent language like "twisted" and "pulled them into shreds" to show its physical consequences. He also juxtaposes angels and devils to contrast what the children could be like with how they actually are. This is important because although it is Scrooge who is being convinced in the novella, Dickens actually wanted to convince all of Victorian society about the way the poor were treated. He wanted his readers to see that the social injustice had a bad effect on children who were seen as innocent.

Dickens says that Scrooge is "appalled" by what he sees and he "choked himself" when he tried to say something nice. This shows how bad the children must be, because Scrooge is a hard man to shock.

Dickens also shows that "Ignorance" and "Want" will lead to "Doom" if Scrooge doesn't change his ways. He is saying that if Scrooge doesn't change the unjust way he treats people then he will be doomed just like Marley.

They relate their points to Dickens' intentions well.

The student focuses strongly on the specific language features Dickens uses to present the children.

How does this quotation relate to the context? What was Dickens trying to tell the reader about the real world?

Again, this point could be developed a lot further if it was linked to context.

At the end of the extract, the Spirit says "Are there no workhouses?" which is him repeating what Scrooge said earlier in the book. This is important because it shows Scrooge how his attitude has caused this situation and we remember when he refused to give money to charity in the first part of the book.

In the novella as a whole, Dickens shows that there is lots of inequality in Victorian London. He shows the difference between Scrooge and the Cratchit family.

The Cratchits are victims of social inequality and they are very poor, but they are happy because they have each other. But then in Christmas Yet to Come we see that because they are poor, Tiny Tim has died. This shows us that even though people do not deserve it and are good people, they die because they don't have enough money. This is what life was like in Victorian London when people were often starving and had to go to workhouses or beg on the streets. Dickens presents social inequality as something bad which everyone should be worried about and try to change. But he gives us a happy ending because in the end Scrooge learns the error of his ways and tries to fix the social inequality in his life.

The student links between the extract and the rest of the novella well.

There is a reference to context here, but this could have been developed much more throughout the answer.

This response shows a really good understanding of the events of the story and the second paragraph shows an excellent knowledge of language features. To improve this response, the student needs to really focus on why Dickens wrote about social injustice and what he wanted the reader to take away from the story. There is a lot of context to Dickens' attitude to social inequality and this answer could have been much more developed in its references to the world outside the novella.

Great Response

Dickens presents a powerful statement about social inequality through the vision of Ignorance and Want.

Clear introductory point which is related straight to the context.

The children represent those living in poverty in Victorian England who lacked resources and access to education. Education was not compulsory at the time the novella was written, and many poor children had no schooling. Dickens presents these children as corrupted and neglected; he uses lists of shocking adjectives to emphasise the misery of their appearance ("wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable... yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish") and contrasts their sorry state with the innocence that children should possess through the metaphor of "devils lurking" where "angels might have sat enthroned". The reader feels both sympathy for the children and horror for the conditions that have created them; Dickens hoped that this would inspire change and encourage the government to make education more accessible to poor children.

The student comments on both the effect on the reader and why Dickens wanted to create this effect.

Really good use of specific language terminology to identify language features.

Dickens emphasises that all of society is responsible for the fate of the children through the phrase "They are Man's". This personification of humanity implies both that the children were created this way by the society they were born into and that everyone has a responsibility for their welfare. This creates a sense of shame and responsibility in the reader for their own part in causing 'Ignorance and Want' and inspires a desire to take part in social change. Dickens appeals to those with wealth and good fortune in society to take responsibility for child poverty, showing that impoverished children become desperate adults, creating a vicious cycle. Scrooge represents those wealthy Victorians who denied responsibility for caring for the poor; by forcing Scrooge to meet the children face-to-face, the Ghost of Christmas Present makes Scrooge realise that Ignorance and Want have been created as the consequence of his own beliefs.

Another language feature is identified and linked directly to its effect on the reader.

This is emphasised by the Ghost repeating Scrooge's own words to him: "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?" Dickens makes the point that ignoring the poor or treating them as criminals only corrupts the young and ensures that poverty continues.

Dickens continues this point about social responsibility for the poor throughout the novella. Tiny Tim is used as a contrast to Ignorance and Want: he is sentimentally presented as perfectly innocent, good and kind. Tiny Tim's plight forces Scrooge (and the reader) to acknowledge the humanity of those living in poverty, creating sympathy for their situation. When Scrooge begs to know if Tiny Tim will live, the Ghost again echoes Scrooge's own words about "reducing the surplus population" back to him. When faced with Tiny Tim's humanity, Scrooge realises the callousness and inhumanity of his own Malthusian beliefs (a common philosophy in Dickens' time that claimed poverty was simply the result of excess population). By extension, Dickens shows that all wealthy people in society who ignore the plight of the poor are just as callous and inhumane as Scrooge. Dickens' message is clear: only through shared social responsibility for poverty and through compassion towards the poor can social inequality be reduced.

The answer stays tightly focused to the question while shifting to the rest of the novella.

The student again uses a good knowledge of the context to enhance and develop their analysis.

This is a really strong response. The student stays focused on the question all the way through, making clear points and supporting them with quotations. They identify language features and analyse their effect on the reader. This answer is particularly successful because the student consistently links their ideas to Dickens' intentions - they show an excellent understanding of why he wrote the novella, what he wanted to achieve and why he wanted the reader to feel a certain way. This is combined with a thorough knowledge of the context which is embedded in the response to develop the analysis.

Themes Page

Christmas Spirit

The celebration of Christmas is a central theme of *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens presents Christmas as a joyful time full of fun, games and feasting. Most importantly, he presents Christmas as a time to enjoy the company of family and friends and show generosity and compassion to others. As a result, Scrooge's hatred of Christmas is a particularly effective way of showing him to be cold, heartless and joyless.

The Christmas spirit is demonstrated through the characters of Fred, Fezziwig and the Cratchits, who all have very different social backgrounds but are all able to celebrate and enjoy Christmas in their own ways. By refusing to take part in the celebrations, Scrooge cuts himself off from the joy that spending time with family and friends brings. Dickens makes it clear that without the Christmas spirit, Scrooge's money can never bring him any happiness.

Christmas is presented as the **antithesis** of many of the ills of Victorian society. Dickens describes how the festive atmosphere overcomes the gloominess of the smoggy streets of London, and brings a sense of companionship and cheer to those who work tirelessly in dangerous conditions to keep the country running.

Dickens also shows us the importance of charity during the Christmas season. The happiness brought by Christmas serves to highlight the misery faced by the poorest members of society, who have little to celebrate. Dickens brings attention to their suffering and shows how Christmas serves as both a reminder and an opportunity to improve the lives of the less fortunate.





Themes: Christmas Spirit

Context

Christmas wasn't always the major holiday it is today. It was marked with 12 days of parties and feasts in medieval times, but these celebrations were banned by the Puritan government of the 1640s, which believed that they were a sinful distraction from its religious message. By the early 1800s Christmas was considered old-fashioned and marked with little more than a sombre church service. However, in the Victorian era there was a revival of interest in old Christmas traditions such as the singing of carols and the decorating of trees. It's thought that this was partly inspired by Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, who brought many

Christmas traditions from his native Germany to England. Dickens played a major part in this revival and wanted to bring back the traditional idea of Christmas as a season of goodwill and cheer; he saw Christmas as a way to brighten up a country which had been made dark and gloomy by the Industrial Revolution.

In Dickens' view, Christmas was a time not just for remembering the birth of Jesus but for following his example. He saw generosity, charity and helping the less fortunate as Christian values and believed that Christmastime was the perfect opportunity to live by these values.

Themes: Christmas Spirit

Key Quotes



"I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round [...] as 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, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys." - **Fred, Stave One**

Fred sums up the Christmas spirit here - to him, it means treating the less fortunate in society as equals and showing them kindness. To Fred, this brings rewards that are more important than money.



There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavoured to diffuse in vain. - **Stave Three**

Dickens describes the power of the Christmas spirit - even the miserable winter weather and the dirty streets of Victorian London can't overpower the cheerfulness spread by Christmas time.



"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."
- **Stave Three**

Bob Cratchit demonstrates the spirit of Christmas by giving a toast to Scrooge. Bob shows thankfulness for what he has and forgiveness to those who mistreat him, even if he gets no thanks in return.



"A merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. "A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you, for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! - **Stave Five**

At the end of the novella, Scrooge finally understands the spirit of Christmas - spreading kindness and joy to others brings more happiness than any amount of wealth.

Themes: Christmas Spirit

Mini Exams

Question 1

Describe Dickens' presentation of Christmas in your own words.

Question 2

Which characters in the novella display the Christmas spirit? Which character do you think represents the Christmas spirit best? Explain your answer.

Question 3

'The importance of Christmas is the most important lesson that Scrooge learns.'
Discuss.



Q

Exam Question

Read the following extract from *Stave One of A Christmas Carol* and then answer the question that follows.

In this extract, Scrooge is visited in his office by his nephew, Fred.

"Don't be cross, uncle," said the nephew.

"What else can I be?" returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will," said Scrooge, indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas,' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!"

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew!" returned the uncle, sternly, "keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it!" repeated Scrooge's nephew. "But you don't keep it."

"Let me leave it alone, then," said Scrooge. "Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!"

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew: "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as 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, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

The clerk in the tank involuntarily applauded: becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens presents the Christmas spirit in the novella.

Write about:

- how Dickens presents the Christmas spirit in this extract;
- how Dickens presents the Christmas spirit in the novella as a whole.

Themes: Christmas Spirit

Sample Answer

Good Response

This is a well-structured paragraph - the student makes a clear point, identifies evidence to back it up and gives an explanation of its effect.

In the first part of this extract, Scrooge is presented as totally lacking Christmas spirit. This shows Scrooge to be money-obsessed and mean-spirited – his description of Christmas in three phrases which start 'a time of..' show Scrooge's focus to be negative and based in the material world. He lists 'paying bills without money', 'finding yourself a year older' and says Christmas is a time for 'balancing your books'. His attitude to Christmas, because it is so extreme and unfamiliar, so opposite to what we traditionally think of as Christmas spirit, serves to highlight the majority view that Christmas is a time to celebrate and enjoy.

Scrooge's nephew Fred represents the attitude of the majority when he explains to Scrooge the good that Christmas (and its spirit) has done him, despite it not making him any money. He describes Christmas as '...a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.' This is a direct reference to the Christmas spirit - it's as if Christmas itself can inhabit people and make them take on a different aspect for a short while. He goes on to say Christmas gets into the hearts of people (the heart being symbolic as the seat of emotion): 'men and women...open their shut up hearts freely'. Most significantly, Fred sees the Christmas spirit as being a powerful force in humanity which helps people to be compassionate to others: '...think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave'. He suggests that for most of the year, without that special spirit, people higher in status in society think of the poor as 'another race of creatures'.

The student identifies a language feature (symbolism) but could do more to develop the analysis of its effect.

Good reference to Dickens' intentions - the student could go further by linking Dickens' views to the context.

The use of the word 'creatures' suggests that for most of the time the poor are considered as if they are not human at all, which is Dickens using this discussion as a way to advance his views that poor people are treated abominably.

Ironically, Scrooge actually comes face to face with the Christmas 'spirit' in the form of the apparitions that visit him over night. In this way Dickens personifies the Christmas spirit into three aspects: past, present and future. It is the Ghost of Christmas Present which most clearly shows Dickens' perception of Christmas spirit. This larger than life and jolly spirit exemplifies the joy and power of Christmas. Dickens describes him as 'genial' with a 'sparkling eye' and 'cheery voice'. He is welcoming to Scrooge, telling him to 'Come in and know me better.' This spirit is surrounded by the best food the season could offer, including 'sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters...' This spirit is warm and generous and brings an air of celebration. Further to this, the trip he takes Scrooge on shows that his influence stretches across the world. That people, in whatever circumstance, see Christmas as a time to enjoy and celebrate.

The student successfully picks out a language feature with accurate terminology.

This shows good understanding but the student needs to focus on analysing effects rather than retelling the story.

This student has structured their response well, with a good focus on the question. They show a very good understanding of the theme of Christmas spirit, but they need to focus more on how Dickens uses language to present the theme. They could also develop their references to context to improve their analysis. Towards the end of the response, the student begins to slip into retelling the story rather than analysing it - remember that your focus should always be on the effects Dickens creates on the reader.

Great Response

The student effectively embeds quotations into their writing to back up their points.

In this extract, Dickens presents contrasting attitudes to Christmas through the characters of Scrooge and Fred. Scrooge can only focus on the materialistic realities of Christmas as a "time for paying bills without money" and "balancing your books". His inability to see any value in Christmas beyond its financial impact presents him as cold and callous to the reader, which is emphasised by his ironic use of Christmas imagery in suggesting that someone should be "boiled with his own pudding" with "a stake of holly through his heart" for celebrating Christmas. Through Scrooge, Dickens associates a lack of Christmas spirit with meanness and misery.

In contrast, the character of Fred epitomises the Christmas spirit by recognising that Christmas enriches his life even if it doesn't make him wealthy. Dickens emphasises the value of Christmas through a long list of positive adjectives ("a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time") that contrast with Scrooge's coldness; the metaphor of people "opening their shut-up hearts" suggests that Christmas creates a spirit of kindness that doesn't exist for the rest of the year. Fred's reference to treating "people below them" as "fellow passengers to the grave" refers to the extremely divided society of Victorian England, in which the rich and poor lived hugely separate and different lives; however, Christmas brings them all together in a common spirit of compassion for each other. For Dickens, Christmas serves as a reminder for those who are fortunate in society to think of those less fortunate and treat them with kindness. Fred recognises that this spirit is worth more than money when he declares that it does him good "even though it has never put a scrap of gold in my pocket".

A relevant reference to context helps to develop the analysis.

Strong analysis including specific terminology of language features.

The student clearly identifies a key idea from the extract and links it to the rest of the novella effectively.

This message that Christmas spirit brings more happiness than money does is continued throughout the novella, particularly through the characters of the Cratchits. Bob demonstrates a spirit of forgiveness and thankfulness at Christmas, toasting Scrooge as the "Founder of the Feast"; he shows appreciation for what he is able to provide for his family thanks to his job, despite his mistreatment at Scrooge's hands. Dickens shows that Bob's Christmas spirit is rewarded in a happy life with his loving family even if he is poor; at the same time, Scrooge's lack of Christmas spirit results in loneliness and misery despite his riches. For Dickens, the spirit of Christmas is a connection with your fellow humans; the ultimate message of the novella is that this spirit can be carried beyond Christmas itself, as shown at the end of the story when the reformed Scrooge promises to "honour Christmas in [his] heart and try to keep it all the year".

Good focus on the author's intentions that relates clearly to the question.

This response is well-structured and tightly focused on the question, with linked ideas from across the novella. The student identifies specific language features with accurate terminology and explains how Dickens used them to present the theme to the reader. There's also some contextual information that helps to develop the analysis, although this could have been fleshed out even more.

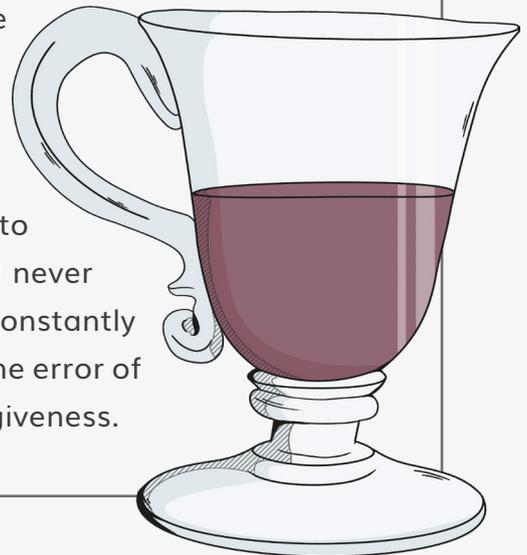
Themes Page

Family

In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens shows that a loving family provides companionship, support and strength, even in difficult times. The Cratchits **exemplify** the theme of family in the novella: although they are poor, they love each other, find joy in each other's company and look after each other in their hardest moments. Dickens presents family as bringing a level of happiness that no amount of money could buy.

Scrooge is alone at the start of the novella, but Dickens makes it clear that this is his own choice - he has his nephew, Fred, but rejects the chance to have a relationship with him. Scrooge is bitter about the neglect he suffered from his own father and the chance of a family of his own that he lost when Belle broke up with him. Dickens shows that Scrooge's bitterness about the past holds him back from the chance of happiness in the future. When he finally accepts Fred's dinner invitation and opens his heart to the Cratchits, Scrooge finally experiences all the joy of a loving family that he rejected for years.

Dickens also shows that family relationships last for a lifetime and that it's never too late to patch things up with a family member. Fred never stops showing Scrooge love, even though he's constantly rejected, and when Scrooge finally realises the error of his ways, Fred shows him unconditional forgiveness.





Themes: Family Context

Dickens had a complicated relationship with his own family. As a child, he was forced to live apart from his parents and work in a warehouse while his father was in prison, which made Dickens deeply ashamed. When his father was released, Dickens' mother argued that he should be sent back to work in the warehouse anyway. Dickens' feelings of neglect and rejection by his parents may have influenced the scenes of young Scrooge alone at school in *A Christmas Carol*.

As an adult, Dickens raised a large

family of his own. In 1843, when *A Christmas Carol* was released, he already had four children and his wife was pregnant with a fifth (they eventually had ten children, which was not uncommon for the time). He constantly struggled for money to support his family. In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens presents an **idealised** and **sentimental** view of family in which love and companionship are more important than wealth. In real life, though, Dickens was disappointed in almost all of his children and annoyed by the financial burden they caused him throughout his life.

Themes: Family

Key Quotes



"Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart!"

"So she had," cried Scrooge. "You're right. I'll not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid!"

"She died a woman," said the Ghost, "and had, as I think, children."

"One child," Scrooge returned.

"True," said the Ghost. "Your nephew!" - **Stave Two**

The Ghost of Christmas Past reminds Scrooge of the loving and affectionate relationship he had with his sister, Fan. The spirit shows Scrooge that he has the chance for a similar relationship with his nephew, but he has been rejecting it.



They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time... - **Stave Three**

Through the Cratchits, Dickens shows us the real importance of family - they have very little in terms of possessions, but they are happy anyway because they have each other.



"A Merry Christmas and a happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!" said Scrooge's nephew. "He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!" - **Stave Three**

Throughout the novella, Fred shows Scrooge unconditional love even when it isn't returned. Dickens uses Fred as an example of how family should treat each other - with an open heart and willingness to forgive.



Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. - **Stave Five**

Scrooge's reward for his transformation is the happiness that he's always missed out on. Dickens shows us that the ultimate happiness is found in a loving family.

Mini Exams

Question 1

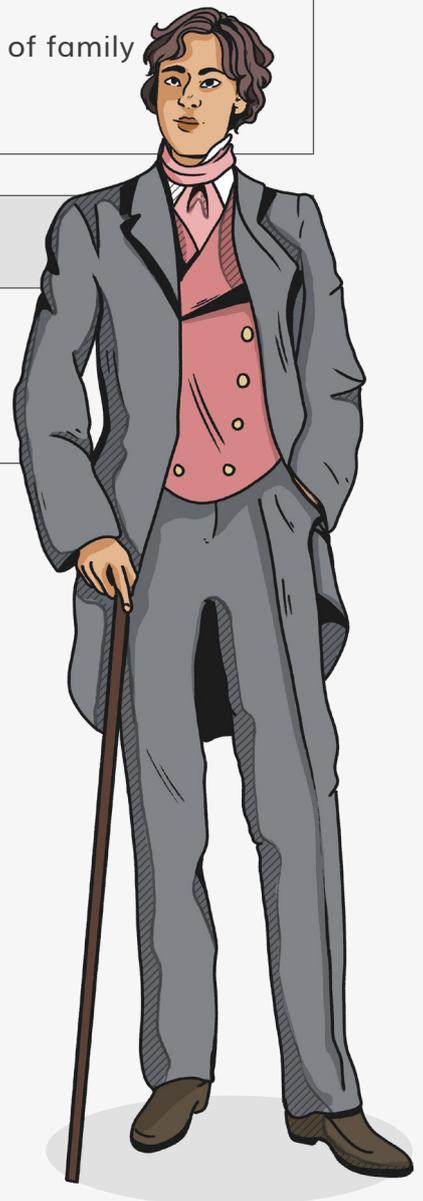
Why do you think Scrooge is so resistant to Fred's company at the beginning?

Question 2

How might Dickens' own life have influenced his portrayal of family in the novella?

Question 3

'In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens shows that you don't have to be blood relations to be family.' Discuss.



Q

Exam Question

Read the following extract from Stave Three of *A Christmas Carol* and then answer the question that follows.

In this extract, the Ghost of Christmas Present is showing Scrooge the Cratchit family's Christmas celebrations.

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. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass; two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

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.

Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens presents family in the novella.

Write about:

- how Dickens presents family in this extract;
- how Dickens presents family in the novella as a whole.

Themes: Family

Sample Answer

Good Response

The student makes a relevant point and backs it up with a quotation. How do we know the Cratchits are happy? The response needs to develop this.

In this extract, Dickens shows us that family is something really important that money can't buy. The Cratchits are very poor. We know this because it says they have a "small pudding for a large family" and their "family display of glass" is not very good. But they are happy and this is more important than having money. I think this is what Dickens wants us to understand from his book: that happiness is more important than money. This was really important in Victorian times because there were a lot of poor people and Dickens wanted people to understand that they were still good and kind even though they were poor.

The Cratchits are a very close family. We know this because Bob Cratchit praises Mrs Cratchit lots and says her pudding is "the greatest success". He calls the gathering round the fire a "circle" which everyone knows is wrong because it is half a circle, but they all understand what he means because they know each other so well. Dickens makes a list of jobs that are done after the dinner like sweeping and clearing the table and it is implied that everyone in the family helps out. Dickens is showing us that in a good family you all work together.

At the end of the extract we see that Tiny Tim sits near to Bob. It says he "dreaded that he might be taken from him". This emotive language shows us how important the bonds of family are and how much they love each other. Because there has been foreshadowing in the book we know that Tiny Tim might die and this makes us even more sad when we read this bit.

The student makes references to context and to the author's intent. Why was this message important to Dickens? How did he want people to react?

Accurate use of terminology for language features. Why did Dickens want to make the reader sad?

The response references the whole text.

In the novel as a whole we see two different families. We see Scrooge's family which is very cold and unkind and Scrooge's dad treats him really unfairly and sends him away to school so he doesn't know what it is like to grow up in a kind and loving family. Scrooge has a chance at making his own happy family but his fiancée turns him away because "another idol has displaced me" which means he has started to worship money instead of her. So he loses his chance of a family.

But then Dickens juxtaposes Scrooge's family with the Cratchits, who we can see are really nice to each other and Bob looks after his son like Scrooge's dad never looked after him. By seeing this with the ghosts Scrooge realises that family is important and so when it is Christmas Day he goes to visit Fred and makes it up with him. So the moral of the story is that you should look after your family and that families are really important.

Accurate use of structural terminology.

This response makes clear points throughout and the student uses quotations to provide evidence well. Although they show a good understanding of the story, the student needs to do more to analyse why Dickens makes the choices he has made. The student should try to talk more about why Dickens wanted to create certain effects and why he chose to show family in this way.

Great Response

This is a clear introductory point that the student goes on to develop throughout the answer.

In this extract, Dickens presents an idealised vision of the Cratchits as a model family. Dickens shows the reader that although the Cratchits are lacking in some material possessions, their love and support for each other matters more than their lack of wealth.

The Cratchits' Christmas meal is relatively meagre; Dickens implies that the pudding is "small for a large family", and drinks are served in "a custard-cup without a handle", emphasising their lack of means to the reader. However, the Cratchits make the best of what they have: the pudding is described as "wonderful" and the drink as "perfect", while it would be "heresy" to criticise the size of the pudding, and the mismatched cups hold their contents "as well as golden goblets". Dickens makes the comparison to gold in this simile as a symbol of wealth; he shows the reader that although money can buy expensive items, it cannot buy the opportunity to share a family's company and that is where the Cratchits' happiness lies.

Specific language analysis with relevant terminology.

The Cratchits present a sentimental image of unity and togetherness when Bob toasts them: as "all the family re-echo" Bob's toast, they act as one in wishing each other happiness and blessings. Dickens humanises the Cratchits by showing their united love for each other; in doing so he shows the reader that the poorer members of society are still just as human and worthy of compassion as their wealthier counterparts, and can even provide an example of how to find true happiness without money. This message is exemplified through the character of Tiny Tim. Dickens uses highly emotive language to present Tiny Tim, emphasising his frailty with his "little stool" and his "withered little hand", creating sympathy in the reader for his plight. Despite his condition, Tiny Tim is still full of happiness and optimism in his declaration "God bless us every one". Dickens shows the reader that a family's love

Carefully chosen quotations are embedded in the answer and support the student's points.

The student identifies a language feature with specific terminology and relates it directly to its effect on the reader.

overcomes the most difficult situations; Bob's "dread" that he might be separated from Tiny Tim demonstrates the love that can only be felt between family.

The student uses comparative language well to link between the extract and the rest of the novella.

The Cratchit family is contrasted throughout the novella by Scrooge's attitude towards his own family. While Bob lives for his family and dreads their loss, Scrooge actively rejects a relationship with his own family (his nephew Fred). In Stave Two, we see that Scrooge was "abandoned" at school by his own father and lost the opportunity to have a family of his own when Belle ended their engagement. This creates a sense of bitterness in Scrooge towards family that results in a self-imposed isolation and loneliness. However, Dickens shows us that family bonds are never broken; despite his constant rejection, Fred is ready to welcome Scrooge back into his life with forgiveness and open arms.

This student has written a very well structured response that is focused on the question throughout. They use quotations effectively and develop their analysis for each point. Although there are a couple of references to language features, this student could certainly try to pick out some more specific examples of language techniques to improve their answer. They could also try and relate some of their ideas to the context to make sure they pick up marks for AO3.

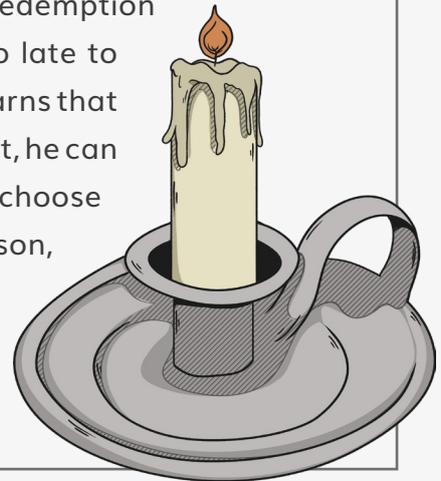
Themes Page

Transformation and Redemption

The overall story of *A Christmas Carol* is Scrooge's journey of transformation from a lonely old miser to a kind-hearted and generous man. Dickens shows the reader that regardless of our social situation, we all get to choose whether or not to show kindness to others. In *A Christmas Carol*, those who choose to show kindness are happy and fulfilled, while those who don't end up lonely and bitter.

At the start of the novella, Scrooge makes a conscious effort to reject acts of kindness: he turns down Fred's invitation and the chance to donate to the charity collectors. Through the visions of the three spirits, though, he begins to see that it is his own choices that have turned him into a miserable man, even if they have made him rich. He sees that after his death he will be forgotten and missed by no-one, just as Jacob Marley was. At the same time, he sees how other people who choose to live their lives with compassion are rewarded with happiness, even if they have less. Fezziwig, the Cratchits, Fred and Belle all do their best to be good to others and although they all have different social situations, they are all happy in their own ways.

The ending of the novella provides Scrooge's redemption as Dickens shows the reader that it's never too late to change and to start making amends. Scrooge learns that although he cannot change his choices in the past, he can control his actions in the present and future and choose to do good where he can. As a result of this lesson, Scrooge is rewarded with the happiness he was lacking, through the company of family and friends.





Themes: Transformation and Redemption

Context

Although Dickens doesn't give the novella an explicitly religious message, the setting of Christmas gives the story an **undertone** of Christian **morality**. Redemption is a key concept in Christianity that refers to the soul being saved from hell and welcomed into heaven. Christianity teaches that it's never too late to save your soul as long as you show genuine remorse for past sins, just as Dickens shows that it's never too late to change your behaviour to make amends for past misdeeds. At the time the book was written, the vast majority

of people in England were religious and would have picked up on the Christian allegory in Scrooge's transformation.

Free will is also a key concept for many Christians, who believe that while everybody is given the chance to enter heaven, God cannot force people to be good; it's up to us to decide for ourselves how to live our lives. Scrooge is shown the consequences of his own actions and makes the choice to be a better man. Dickens hoped that his readers would do the same after reading *A Christmas Carol*.

Key Quotes



Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. - **Stave One**

Dickens uses a variety of literary devices to describe Scrooge's isolation and misery at the start of the novella. The similes here emphasise Scrooge's total lack of warmth or friendship.



"Spirit," said Scrooge submissively, "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. Tonight, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it." - **Stave Three**

Although Scrooge is initially reluctant to hear what the spirits have to teach him, he begins to show a change of heart when the Ghost of Christmas Present arrives, promising to learn from its lessons.



"Spirit!" he cried, tight clutching at its robe, "hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?" - **Stave Four**

After the final spirit's visit, Scrooge promises to be a changed man. By declaring that he is not 'past all hope', Dickens shows us it's never too late to change and start making amends for past mistakes.



"I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!" - **Scrooge, Stave Five**

Scrooge's use of similes to describe his happiness after his transformation link back to the very start of the story and contrast with the similes that were used to describe his coldness and isolation in Stave One.

Mini Exams

Question 1

Summarise the lessons that Scrooge learns from each spirit. How does each one contribute to his transformation?

Question 2

What do you think is the most significant change in Scrooge's character?

Question 3

'Scrooge doesn't discover new qualities in himself; he simply rediscovers qualities he had all along.' Discuss.



Q

Exam Question

Read the following extract from *Stave Five of A Christmas Carol* and then answer the question that follows.

In this extract, Scrooge wakes on Christmas morning after the visits of the three spirits.

Yes! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down," cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here: I am here: the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will!"

His hands were busy with his garments all this time: turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

"I don't know what to do!" cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoön of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens presents Scrooge's transformation in the novella. Write about:

- how Dickens presents Scrooge in this extract;
- how Dickens presents Scrooge in the novella as a whole.

Sample Answer

Good Response

Through the visits of the spirits, Scrooge finds redemption and is transformed from a miser into someone who knows how to keep Christmas better than any man who ever lived.

The extract marks the moment at which Scrooge realises he is back in the present and still has the future ahead of him, which he celebrates like an excited child awaking on Christmas morning. 'Yes! and the bedpost was his own.' The exclamation signifies his delight at discovering that he is back in his own bed. The simple pleasure of having your own comfortable bed is something that Scrooge has taken for granted all his life but, having seen how poor the Cratchits are, he now recognises how lucky he is. Dickens was a social campaigner who used literature to draw attention to the suffering of the working class and change Victorian customs around their treatment, so part of Scrooge's redemption is that he will now start taking better care of his employees such as Bob Cratchit.

Scrooge becomes so delirious that he describes himself 'as light as a feather'. This simile shows that worries have been lifted from his shoulders. It could also indicate that he feels free and at one with nature, as opposed to being constrained by work and the metaphorical shackles that Jacob Marley warned of. The listing of similes reinforces different aspects of his transformation: 'as happy as an angel' has obvious religious connotations, whereas Scrooge was a godless man who previously refused to observe the main Christian holiday; 'as merry as a school-boy'

This is a well-structured paragraph with a clear point, quotation and explanation.

Good exploration of the ideas behind Dickens' use of language.

The student uses some contextual knowledge about Dickens to develop their analysis.

reminds us that Scrooge's own schooldays were not so merry; and 'as giddy as a drunken man' implies he is no longer the tight-fisted capitalist who's probably never experienced the excess of more than one drink.

The change in Scrooge is complete with his shouting out to the rest of society. He's gone from being cold and 'solitary as an oyster' to warm and welcoming: 'A happy New Year to all the world.' New Year is particularly symbolic because it traditionally heralds a fresh start; New Year's resolutions have been made since Babylonian times and Scrooge is here resolving to be a better man who looks out for others and not just himself. To demonstrate this, Stave Five continues with his purchase of the prize turkey to share with the Cratchits. This is particularly extravagant because turkey was only eaten by rich families, goose being the cheaper, more common option in those days.

At the start of the novel, Scrooge is bitter, selfish and lonely. But he learns from the spirits to embrace the Christmas spirit and change his ways, turning him into a charitable and respected figure who uses his money for good rather than mean-spiritedly hoarding it.

This is a neat summary of the theme but it doesn't really add anything in terms of analysis. The student needs to think more about why Dickens presented Scrooge's transformation.

Another relevant reference to context to develop an idea.

There's some good analysis in this response and the student shows a very strong understanding of the ways Scrooge has changed in the novella. To develop this answer, the student needs to dig deeper into Dickens' intentions - why did he want to show the reader Scrooge's transformation, and what message did he want them to take away from it? The student also needs to take a broader look at the novella as a whole in their answer to hit the higher marks.

Great Response

The student identifies language features and also embeds knowledge of the whole text into the analysis.

Dickens presents Scrooge as an entirely changed man in this extract from his presentation at the start of the novella. He emphasises this through the use of simile to describe Scrooge, which reflects his initial description at the beginning. Where he was "hard and sharp as flint" and "solitary as an oyster", he is now "light as a feather" and "happy as an angel". The use of identical literary devices to show Scrooge in the past and present creates a contrast that emphasises Scrooge's transformation. Dickens' choice of similes also reflect the change in Scrooge: the comparison to a "schoolboy" has connotations of childhood innocence, which Scrooge had lost and has now found again, while the image of a "drunken man" has connotations of festive merriment and celebration which Scrooge has previously rejected and is now ready to enjoy. Scrooge's "lightness" is a metaphorical reference to the absence of the heavy chains and shackles that Marley's Ghost was fettered with, indicating to the reader that Scrooge has avoided his partner's fate.

Scrooge demonstrates extremes of emotion in the extract; he has been "sobbing violently" but is "merry", and is "laughing and crying at the same time", showing his ability to express a wide range of feelings. This contrasts with his initial presentation in Stave One as a cold and emotionless man with "frozen features". Dickens shows the reader that Scrooge's transformation has awoken the whole range of human emotions within Scrooge and allowed him to fully feel both joy and sadness. This is reinforced by his newfound willingness to engage with the world around him; where he was formerly solitary and lonely, now he declares "a happy New Year to all the world". The joy Scrooge takes in his Christmas Day walk, his dinner with Fred and the chance to become a "second father" to Tiny Tim all stand in stark contrast to the

Again, the student makes direct comparisons with earlier parts of the text to emphasise the change in Scrooge.

Considers Dickens' intentions and the response he wanted to draw from the reader.

lonely Scrooge that we were introduced to at the beginning of the novella. In particular, his attitude to Christmas has fundamentally changed: where it used to be a "humbug", now Scrooge declares "Christmas Time be praised!" This reinforces Dickens' presentation of Christmas as a time for generosity of spirit, encouraging the reader to engage enthusiastically with Christmas to gain the same newfound happiness that Scrooge has discovered.

Dickens presents a religious undertone to Scrooge's transformation with references to Christian imagery: Scrooge offers "praise" to "Heaven", and compares himself to an "angel". The heavily Christian readership of Victorian England would have recognised the religious allegory presented by Scrooge's transformation: not only has he transformed in a personal sense, but his soul has been redeemed from damnation thanks to his change of heart. This encourages the reader to examine their own 'soul' and consider whether they are leaving a positive impact on the world around them or not. Scrooge also undergoes a transformation in circumstances beyond his personal transformation; by opening his heart to others, he replaces his solitary lifestyle for one surrounded by the friends and family he bitterly missed in his previous life.

Good use of specific contextual details to develop an idea.

This student successfully embeds their knowledge of the whole text throughout their answer - rather than just writing about the extract and then writing about another part of the book, they talk about both throughout their response to make direct comparisons. This is a really effective way to discuss Scrooge's transformation. They also consider Dickens' intentions behind presenting Scrooge's transformation in this way and the effect that it would create on the reader.

Useful Terms

allegorical

Something is **allegorical** if it has a deeper meaning or message that's designed to give the reader a moral or teach them a lesson. *A Christmas Carol* is an **allegory** as it has a moral lesson contained within it.

antithesis

The direct opposite of something.

counting-house

A Victorian term for the accountant's office in a business.

debtors' prison

In Victorian Britain it was a crime to owe someone money and not pay it back. People who got into debt that they were unable to pay were sent to debtors' prisons, where they were made to work until the money was paid.

exemplify

To give or act as a perfect example of something.

fence

Somebody who pays money for stolen goods.

idealised

Something that is **idealised** is presented as perfect or better than it is in reality.

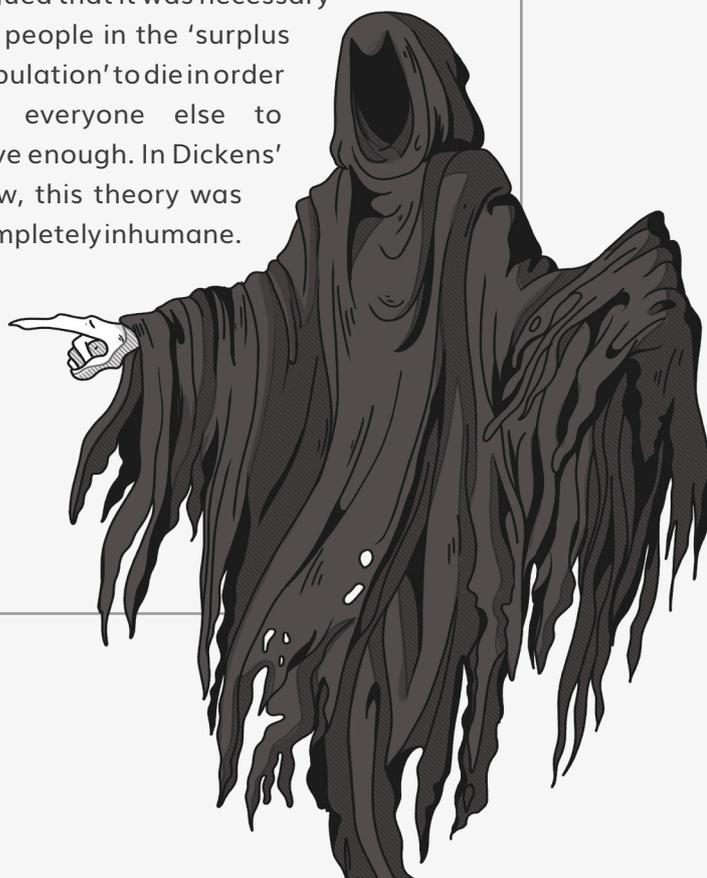
Industrial Revolution

A time period from around 1760 to 1840 in which huge progress was made in technology. Before the Industrial

Revolution, everything was made by hand, which took a long time. During the Revolution, machines were invented that could create many more products many times faster. This led to the development of modern factories, and huge numbers of people moved from the countryside to cities to work in them. The factory owners and investors became hugely rich, but the workers were very badly paid and their jobs were often very unsafe. The cities soon became overcrowded and dirty.

Malthusianism

A theory named after its creator, Thomas Malthus. Malthus argued that the population would always grow and eventually overtake the amount of food, jobs and housing available. As a result, he saw poverty as unavoidable, and argued that it was necessary for people in the 'surplus population' to die in order for everyone else to have enough. In Dickens' view, this theory was completely inhumane.



miserly

Tight with money. Someone who has a lot of money but spends very little (like Scrooge) is a **miser**.

morality

The idea of what is good and bad or right and wrong.

novella

A book longer than a short story but shorter than a novel, usually short enough to read in one go.

Poor Law of 1834

Before 1834, the government provided money, food and shelter to poor people who were unable to work. It was claimed that this system was being abused by the 'idle poor' (people who were able to work but chose not to out of laziness) so in 1834 the Poor Law was passed, which got rid of the previous benefit system and replaced it with the **workhouses**. Under the Poor Law, entering the workhouse was the only option for those who needed support.

Ragged School

A type of school for homeless children in Victorian Britain. Ragged Schools were run by charities to try to educate children who would have been given no schooling otherwise. Dickens visited one in 1843 and found it overcrowded, filthy and unable to control the children. It convinced him that much more money

needed to be spent on the education of poor children to give them a chance in life.

redemption

The act of being saved from sin or evil. Someone is **redeemed** if they turn away from evil and follow a better path.

sentimental

Something **sentimental** is deliberately designed to make the reader emotional. Dickens was a master of **sentimentality** - he often deliberately provokes pity or sadness in the reader to hammer his message across.

social commentary

Writing that directly talks about the issues in society to try to raise awareness or promote change.

stave

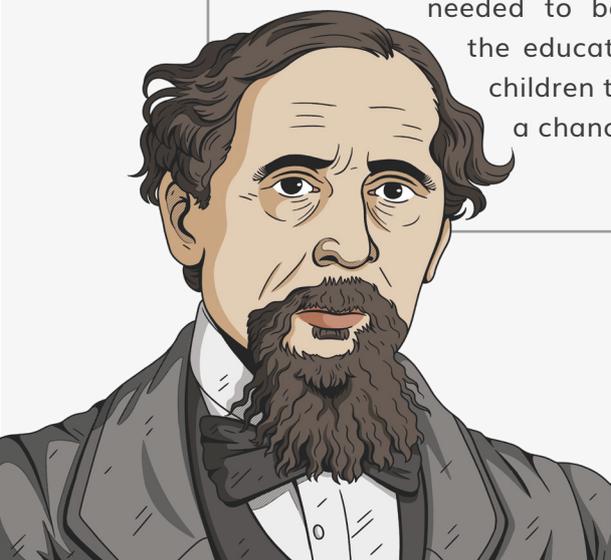
A verse of a song. The chapters in *A Christmas Carol* are titled 'staves' as the book has a similar structure to a traditional Christmas song.

undertone

A meaning or message in a story that is implied rather than said directly.

workhouse

An institution that gave poor people a place to live and kept them fed in exchange for hard and tedious work, such as breaking rocks into gravel or unpicking the individual threads from ropes. Workhouses were deliberately designed to be miserable places to live; this was to make sure that only really desperate people would turn to them. After the Poor Law was passed, entering the workhouse was the only option for many poor people as there was no longer a welfare or benefit system to support them.





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