

YORK NOTES for
GCSE

STUDY GUIDE

New for GCSE (9–1)



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Charles Dickens





A CHRISTMAS CAROL

CHARLES DICKENS

NOTES BY LUCY ENGLISH

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PART ONE: GETTING STARTED

PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT

HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED ON MY WORK ON A CHRISTMAS CAROL?

All exam boards are different but whichever course you are following, your work will be examined through these four Assessment Objectives:

Assessment Objectives	Wording	Worth thinking about ...
A01	<p>Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response ● use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How well do I know what happens, what people say, do etc? ● What do I think about the key ideas in the novella? ● How can I support my viewpoint in a really convincing way? ● What are the best quotations to use and when should I use them?
A02	<p>Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What specific things does the writer 'do'? What choices has Dickens made (why this particular word, phrase or paragraph here? Why does this event happen at this point?) ● What effects do these choices create? Suspense? Ironic laughter? Reflective mood?
A03	<p>Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What can I learn about society from the book? (What does it tell me about poverty and inequality in Dickens's day, for example?) ● What was society like in Dickens's time? Can I see it reflected in the story?
A04	<p>Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How accurately and clearly do I write? ● Are there small errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation I can get rid of?

Look out for the Assessment Objective labels throughout your York Notes Study Guide – these will help to focus your study and revision!

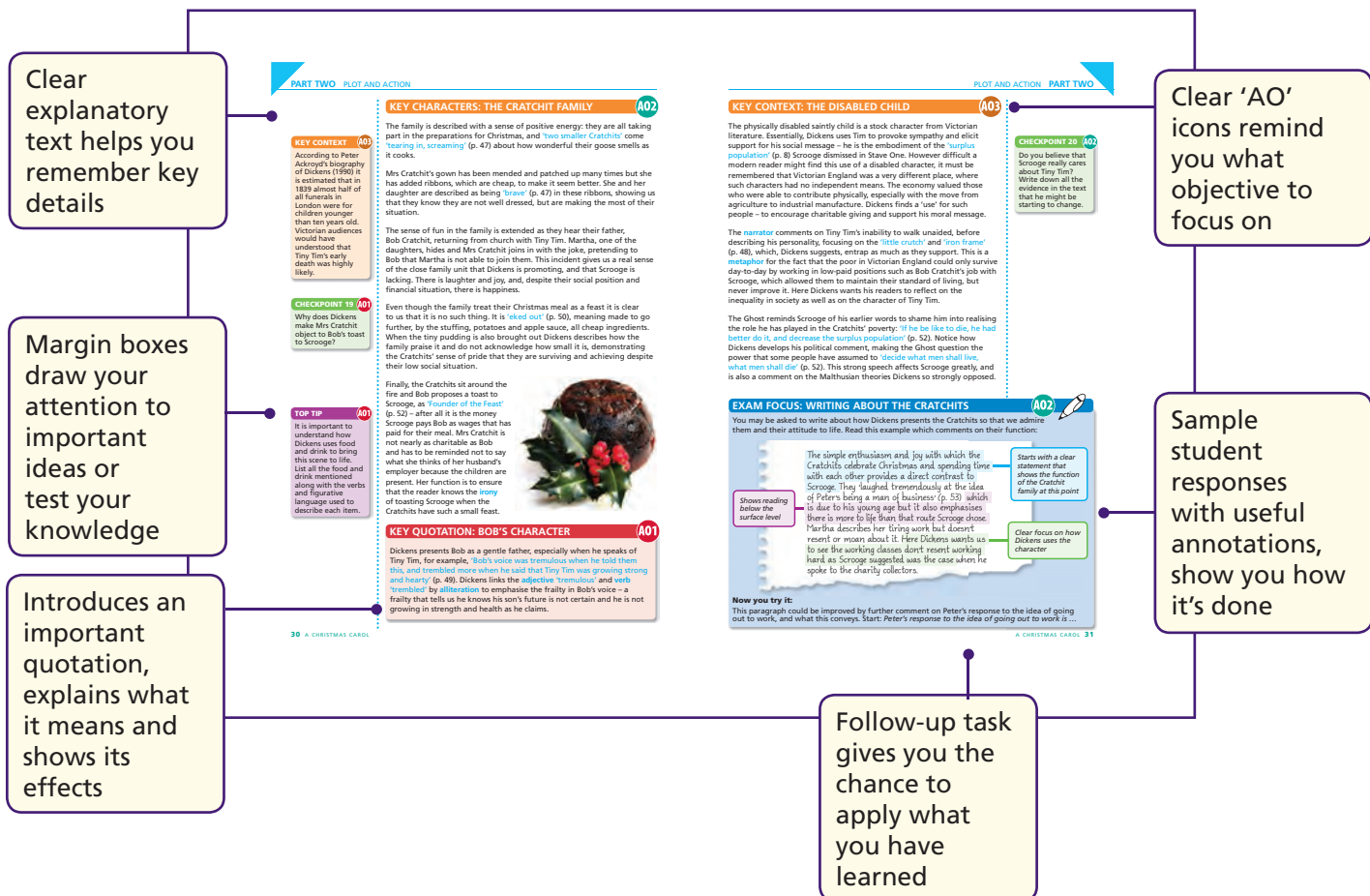
The text used in this Study Guide is the New Windmills edition, 1992.

HOW TO USE YOUR YORK NOTES STUDY GUIDE

You are probably wondering what is the best and most efficient way to use your York Notes Study Guide on *A Christmas Carol*. Here are three possibilities:

A step-by-step study and revision guide	A 'dip-in' support when you need it	A revision guide after you have finished the novella
<p>Step 1: Read Part Two as you read the novella as a companion to help you study it.</p> <p>Step 2: When you need to, turn to Parts Three to Five to focus your learning.</p> <p>Step 3: Then, when you have finished, use Parts Six and Seven to hone your exam skills, revise and practise for the exam.</p>	<p>Perhaps you know the book quite well, but you want to check your understanding and practise your exam skills? Just look for the section which you think you need most help with and go for it!</p>	<p>You might want to use the Notes after you have finished your study, using Parts Two to Five to check over what you have learned, and then work through Parts Six and Seven in the immediate weeks leading up to your exam.</p>

HOW WILL THE GUIDE HELP YOU STUDY AND REVISE?



PART FOUR THEMES, CONTEXTS AND SETTINGS

KEY CONTEXT 400

Dickens is credited with establishing many family traditions at Christmas because of this novella. As you read of the Christmas activities, think about which of them are still prevalent today.

THEME TRACKER 401

The family

- Stave Two, p. 29: The young Scrooge is rejected by his father and saved by his sister.
- Stave Three, p. 53: The Cratchits are shown as the model happy family.
- Stave Five, pp. 86–7: The transformed Scrooge enjoys being part of his own and the Cratchit family.

ISOLATION

Dickens demonstrates the need for companionship and company:

- Left to himself as a boy, Scrooge finds companionship in stories – ‘a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire’ (p. 27) – but as an adult he focuses on making money at the expense of personal relationships.
- The difference between Scrooge at the beginning of the novella and the redeemed Scrooge is considerable, and we see that it is not just due to his helping the poor; it is as a result of his rejoining society, ‘as good a man, as the good old city knew’ (p. 87).
- Becoming a second father to Tiny Tim means Scrooge gets some of the love and support he has been missing or refusing.

THE FAMILY

Dickens balances Scrooge’s isolation with vibrant vignettes that show us the positive benefits of a close and loving family life:

- The lonely young Scrooge is rescued by his sister and returns home.
- The apprentice Scrooge is part of Fezziwig’s Christmas party, along with countless locals ‘full of gratitude’ (p. 33).
- With the party Fezziwig reaches out to anyone such as ‘the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master’ (p. 32) and Dickens wants to show the impact small actions can have.

For a focus on the immediate family we are offered the Christmas celebrations of the Cratchits and Fred’s family, both showing the need to laugh together:

- Bob’s ‘sudden dejection in high spirits’ (p. 48) when he thinks Martha can’t come home for Christmas shows us the need for families to be together at key times.
- The closeness they have here allows the Cratchits to deal with the foreshadowed death of Tiny Tim in Stave Four.
- Fred’s Christmas includes games and music, key elements of a traditional Victorian Christmas that have continued to today for many families.

AIMING HIGH: COMMENT ON DETAILS OF FAMILY LIFE ★

An interesting area to explore is Dickens’s presentation of Bob as the loving, caring father, ‘he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side’ (p. 51), because it contrasts with the relationship Scrooge seems to have had with his father. ‘Father is so much kinder than he used to be’ (p. 29). Dickens doesn’t ever show us Scrooge’s father, he merely makes Fan refer to him and lets us work out what might have happened. This emphasises his absence from Scrooge’s childhood, something Dickens himself experienced as a child, although for different reasons. Through these varied presentations of fatherhood, and then the joyful conclusion of the transformed Scrooge as ‘a second father’ (p. 87) to Tiny Tim, Dickens constructs an ideal for the reader, showing that the past can be overcome.

Extra references to help you focus your revision

Themes are explained clearly with bullet-points which give you ideas you might use in your essay

This section helps you tackle or explore challenging ideas or gives you a deeper insight into the writer’s methods

Parts Two to Five each end with a Progress and Revision Check:

PART TWO PLOT AND ACTION

PROGRESS AND REVISION CHECK

SECTION ONE: CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Answer these quick questions to test your basic knowledge of *A Christmas Carol*, its characters and events:

- Who says ‘I wear the chain I forged in life’ (p. 16)?
- How many sets of visitors does Scrooge have at the office on Christmas Eve?
- What does Scrooge say the poor should do if they don’t want to go to the Union workhouse?
- Why is Bob Cratchit cold at the office?
- Whose face does Scrooge see in his door knocker?
- Who says ‘keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine’ (p. 59)?
- What do the ghosts outside Scrooge’s window in Stave One carry around with them?
- Why does the young Scrooge depend on books at school?
- How does Scrooge respond to seeing Fezziwig’s party?
- How do Scrooge’s actions show Belle that she needs to break their engagement?
- Who is ‘brave in ribbons’ (p. 47)?
- Why does Bob toast Scrooge at Christmas?
- Why does Dickens show Christmas being celebrated in so many different places?
- Why is ignorance more dangerous than Want?
- How does the charwoman justify her theft of the dead Scrooge’s belongings?
- Who is ‘the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard’ (p. 77)?
- What is the significance of the churchyard being overgrown with weeds?
- Why is Bob late for work on Boxing Day?
- Why doesn’t Scrooge mind people laughing at him when he changes his ways?
- Why does Dickens end the novella with Tiny Tim’s words?

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PLOT AND ACTION PART TWO

PROGRESS AND REVISION CHECK

SECTION TWO: CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Here are two tasks about the significance of particular moments in the novella. These require more thought and slightly longer responses. In each case, try to write at least three to four paragraphs.

Task 1: In Stave Four, pages 66–7, what does the conversation between the merchants tell us about the world of business and money-making? Think about:

- What it tells us about that world
- How Dickens wants us to respond to that approach to life

Task 2: In Stave Five, page 82, why is the description of the weather important? Think about:

- What Dickens tells us about the weather
- How the weather is used to convey ideas about Scrooge’s change of character

PROGRESS CHECK

GOOD PROGRESS

I can:

- understand how Dickens has sequenced and revealed events.
- refer to the importance of key events in the novella.
- select well-chosen evidence, including key quotations, to support my ideas.

EXCELLENT PROGRESS

I can:

- refer in depth to main and minor events and how they contribute to the development of the plot.
- understand how Dickens has carefully ordered or revealed events for particular effects.
- draw on a range of carefully selected key evidence, including quotations, to support my ideas.

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A set of quick questions tests your knowledge of the text

Further substantial and ‘open’ tasks test your understanding

Self-evaluation – so you can keep a record of how you are getting on

Don’t forget Parts Six and Seven, with advice and practice on improving your writing skills:

- Focus on **difficult areas** such as ‘context’ and ‘inferences’
- **Short snippets of other students’ work** to show you how it’s done (or not done!)
- Three annotated **sample responses** to a task at **different levels**, with **expert comments**, to help you judge your own level
- **Practice questions**
- **Answers to the Progress and Revision Checks and Checkpoint margin boxes**

Now it’s up to you! Don’t forget – there’s even more help on our website with more sample answers, essay planners and even online tutorials. Go to www.yorknotes.com to find out more.

PART TWO: PLOT AND ACTION

PLOT SUMMARY

TOP TIP

A02

It is vital to understand how the **narrator's tone** directs the reader's response. Read the opening of Stave One carefully and identify the different ways Dickens tells us to reject Scrooge's approach to life.

THE PREFACE

- Charles Dickens writes a note to his readers to explain that he wants to introduce an entertaining idea to them.



STAVE ONE: MARLEY'S GHOST

- The reader is introduced to Ebenezer Scrooge who only cares about making money. It is Christmas Eve and he won't pay to heat the office properly. This means that his clerk, Bob Cratchit, is very cold.
- Scrooge has four Christmas visitors: his nephew, Fred; two charity collectors; and a carol singer. Scrooge is rude to all of them and sends them away.
- That night the Ghost of Jacob Marley, his dead business partner, appears. He tells Scrooge that his mean way of life will lead to misery and that three Ghosts will visit him to show him the error of his ways.

STAVE TWO: THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

- The Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge his unhappy childhood.
- They visit the house of Scrooge's first employer, Fezziwig, who is holding a Christmas party. Scrooge notices how much happiness can be obtained from very little money.
- Scrooge sees himself as a young man with Belle, the woman he was engaged to marry. Belle breaks off the engagement because she thinks Scrooge loves money more than he loves her.

STAVE THREE: THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

- The Ghost of Christmas Present takes Scrooge to visit Christmas preparations at the Cratchits' house. Scrooge learns that Tiny Tim will not survive unless the future changes. This knowledge upsets Scrooge.
- The Ghost takes Scrooge to see different groups of people enjoying themselves at Christmas. Scrooge sees his nephew, Fred, with his family. They are discussing Scrooge and Fred is full of pity for him.
- At the end of the night the Ghost shows Scrooge two children: a boy, called Ignorance, and a girl, called Want. The Ghost says they belong to Man and warns Scrooge to beware of them both, but especially to beware of Ignorance.

KEY CONTEXT

A03

Dickens wrote this story to be shared and read out loud at Christmas. This worked very well because he had already created a strong narrative voice in the story. Look out for the points where he speaks directly to the reader and think about how it makes you regard characters or events in certain ways.

STAVE FOUR: THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

- The mysterious Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come takes Scrooge into the future to witness different conversations about a dead man. No one cares that this man has died, and the thieves have so little respect that they have stolen the clothes from his corpse.
- In contrast, the Ghost then takes Scrooge to see the Cratchits who are deeply upset because Tiny Tim has died.
- Finally, Scrooge is shown a gravestone with his own name on it. He realises he is the dead man whom the people were talking about. He promises to change his ways.

STAVE FIVE: THE END OF IT

- Waking up in his own bed, back in the present, Scrooge is delighted to be given a second chance and makes Christmas happy for everyone. He sends a turkey to the Cratchits, gives money to the charity collectors, and joins Fred for Christmas. The next day he raises Bob's wages and promises to become a friend to Tiny Tim, who does not die.



KEY CONTEXT (A03)

Dickens toured America reading *A Christmas Carol* to audiences. One observer at a reading said Tiny Tim's death 'brought out so many pocket handkerchiefs that it looked as if a snow-storm had somehow gotten into the hall without tickets' (reported by Michael Patrick Hearn in *The Annotated Christmas Carol* (2003)).

REVISION FOCUS: MAKING SURE YOU KNOW THE PLOT



It is important that you know all the key events in the **novella** so that you can make reference to them if needed in the exam. Create a visual reminder chart to make sure you know what happens and when. Either draw images or print them from an internet image search to create a page for each Stave. When you have finished, cover them up and see if you can remember each one. Keep testing yourself until you know exactly what happened in each Stave.

THE PREFACE: CHARLES DICKENS'S MESSAGE

SUMMARY

- Dickens speaks directly to his readers and tells us that his story has a key idea behind it.
- He hopes his readers will not be offended by this idea and will adopt it themselves.

CHECKPOINT 1 **A02**

Why does Dickens start by directly addressing the reader?

WHY IS THIS SECTION IMPORTANT?

- A It tells his readers that Dickens is going to be the **narrator** of this story.
- B He wants us to think seriously about the **message** in the book.
- C The **theme of ghosts** is introduced.

KEY CONTEXT **A03**

Telling ghost stories at Christmas was a Victorian tradition, so Dickens was tapping into this custom with *A Christmas Carol*. He wrote and published it in the same year the first commercially produced Christmas card was sent (1843). This suggests there was a growing interest in celebrating the time in a secular (non-religious) way and this novella should be understood in this light.

TOP TIP: WRITING ABOUT STYLE **A02**

It is important that you can write about Dickens's style. Here he over-uses the **semantic field** of the supernatural to establish the subject matter of the **novella** and to show us that it's not intended to be frightening. He calls the novella a '**Ghostly little book**' and refers to his '**Ghost of an Idea**'. This makes the idea sound insubstantial and harmless, and certainly not threatening. Dickens wants his ideas to '**haunt**' the '**house**' of the reader – the house in this case is not just the reader's home, but also their body and mind.

Dickens wants the reader to accept and embrace the ideas in this book, and not just dismiss them when they finish reading it. He also uses the term '**lay**', which can mean to put away. When used in relation to ghosts, however, it means to exorcise a ghost, or stop one appearing. These **puns** set the **tone** of this story and show it is meant to entertain as well as convey his message.



STAVE ONE, PAGES 1–3: MARLEY IS DEAD AND SCROOGE CARES ONLY ABOUT MONEY

SUMMARY

- We learn that Jacob Marley was Scrooge's business partner but has been dead for seven years.
- Scrooge was the only person at Marley's funeral but immediately after it he went back to work.
- Scrooge hasn't painted out Marley's name on the sign and doesn't care if that causes confusion.
- All Scrooge cares about is making money.
- We are told that Scrooge is colder at heart than the winter weather.
- We first meet Scrooge on Christmas Eve. He is at work and it is very cold and foggy.

TOP TIP

A02

It is important to understand how Dickens emphasises Scrooge's cold and harsh character through the language he uses. Go through these pages and list each aspect Dickens tells us about.

CHECKPOINT 2

A02

What is the impact of listing so many negative descriptions of Scrooge?

WHY IS THIS SECTION IMPORTANT?

- A We need to know that **Marley is dead** so we believe in his ghost when it appears.
- B Dickens uses the opening line to hint at the **supernatural story** to come: '**Marley was dead to begin with**' (p. 1).
- C Scrooge's **mean** and **harsh** nature is described.
- D Dickens uses the **weather** to set the tone and reflect Scrooge's state of mind.

KEY THEME: LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

A02

Dickens makes it very clear to us that Scrooge cares only about making money and doesn't have any friends; in fact even guide dogs avoid him. Scrooge was the only person directly affected by Marley's death but hasn't let this upset him at all. The repetition of '**sole**' (p. 1) emphasises the fact that Marley was so focused on business he didn't have time for any other friends or family. It also makes us think of the spiritual '**soul**'; something this novella is concerned with. This is developed by the **simile** '**solitary as an oyster**' (p. 2) suggesting there might be something precious inside Scrooge (like a pearl) but it is closed up and protected against the world.



STAVE ONE, PAGES 3–10: SCROOGE HAS VISITORS AT THE OFFICE

SUMMARY

- Scrooge doesn't trust his assistant, Bob Cratchit, and keeps an eye on him at work.
- The office is very cold because Scrooge won't spend money on heating it.
- Fred, Scrooge's nephew, comes to wish Scrooge a merry Christmas but Scrooge calls him a fool for being happy when he doesn't have much money.
- Two charity collectors ask Scrooge for money to help the poor. Scrooge is rude to them and says the poor should either go to the Workhouse or die.
- The weather gets even worse and we are told a church bell can just be seen through the fog, looking down on Scrooge.
- Away from the office lots of people are having fun getting ready for Christmas.
- Reluctantly, Scrooge says Bob Cratchit may have Christmas Day off.
- Bob goes home in a playful mood and slides on the snow. This contrasts with Scrooge, who follows his usual routine and walks through the dark to his 'gloomy' (p. 10) home.

TOP TIP

A01

Make sure you understand how Dickens uses the character of Fred to present an alternative way of living and treating others. Go through the **novella** and note all the times Dickens uses Fred. Ask yourself how his actions and language combine to convey Dickens's message.

CHECKPOINT 3

A01

What does the different behaviour of Scrooge and Cratchit on their way home tell us about their characters?

WHY IS THIS SECTION IMPORTANT?

- A We learn just how **unpleasant** Scrooge is to everyone he encounters.
- B The '**problem of the poor**' is introduced and we are reminded that not everyone has fun at Christmas.
- C We can see what Bob Cratchit **experiences** in his job.



KEY LANGUAGE: PATHETIC FALLACY

A02

The **narrator** introduces the **image** of Scrooge counting money, even though it is Christmas Eve. It is cold, and the fog is almost alive, 'pouring in at every chink and keyhole' (p. 3). This is an example of **pathetic fallacy** (a form of **personification**), where inanimate objects of nature such as the weather reflect human emotions – in this case, Scrooge's bad temper is made visible in the fog. The fact it is getting everywhere demonstrates how infectious negative emotions can be.

KEY CHARACTER: FRED

A02

The atmosphere is transformed with the cheerful entrance of Scrooge's nephew, Fred. He has come to wish Scrooge a merry Christmas and represents all Scrooge is not. He is 'all in a glow' (p. 4) because he has been walking fast, and is happy. This also suggests that he has a warm personality, the opposite of Scrooge's. Fred doesn't allow himself to be disheartened by Scrooge's gruff replies, and stands up for himself and his beliefs even though Scrooge calls him a fool. As well as providing a contrast with Scrooge in terms of character, we also learn that Fred does not have Scrooge's wealth – in fact, one of the reasons Scrooge calls Fred a fool is because he got married for love rather than money.

TOP TIP

A02

It is important to understand how Dickens makes the weather worsen through this section. Draw a line that tracks how bad it is following Scrooge's words and actions.

EXAM FOCUS: WRITING ABOUT CHARACTER

A01



You may be asked to write about how Dickens uses the supporting characters such as Fred. Read this example, commenting on how Fred provides a contrast to Scrooge:

Starts with a clear statement that shows Fred's function at this point

Fred's enthusiasm and passion for the potential good Christmas can do is inspiring and highlights Scrooge's cold and unpleasant nature. Dickens uses Fred to remind us of our mortality, when he remarks that all people are 'fellow-passengers to the grave' (p. 5), which summarises the journey on which Scrooge is about to embark.

Clear focus on how Dickens uses Fred's character

Good interpretation of character and meaning

Fred's focus on togetherness and value that isn't merely monetary makes Scrooge seem very short-sighted in contrast and we question what he actually wants all his money for – it's not as if he enjoys it.

Now you try it:

This paragraph could be improved by further comment on the role of Fred. Add another sentence, picking up on the language Fred uses and its effect. Start: *Fred's use of language ...*

KEY CONTEXT

A03

Thomas Robert Malthus was an economist who predicted that food supplies and resources would never be enough for the whole population, meaning that poverty and hunger were inevitable for some. Dickens did not agree, as we can see from the way he invites us to reject Scrooge and his use of Malthus's theory (now thought to be incorrect).

CHECKPOINT 4

A02

Why does Dickens show us so many quick snapshots of people getting into the Christmas spirit?

KEY THEME: RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS

A03

Dickens introduces his moral message through Scrooge's conversations with Fred and the charity collectors. Scrooge believes that financial profit is all that matters but his visitors provide the opposite argument. Fred states that men and women should 'open their shut-up hearts freely' (p. 5) and think of others as well as themselves, and the two 'portly gentlemen' (p. 6) ask Scrooge to give them some money to help 'the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time' (p. 7). Rather than give them money, Scrooge demands to know whether the prisons, the 'Union workhouses' and the 'Treadmill and the Poor Law' (p. 7) are still in operation. As far as he is concerned, these places are meant to provide for the poor and he doesn't see why he should contribute anything to them. He has to pay a tax to support these institutions, and he thinks that is enough.

However, the workhouses were well known for being hard and demeaning and the charity collectors point out that 'Many can't go there; and many would rather die' (p. 8). Here we see Scrooge's harsh and callous nature: he thinks if the poor would rather die they should hurry up and do so as that would 'decrease the surplus population' (p. 8). This is a disturbing idea to us, as Dickens intends it to be. He is presenting an accepted economic theory of the time, suggested by Thomas Malthus, and he wants us to reject it as we reject Scrooge's attitude to the poor.



KEY SETTING: OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

A02

Away from Scrooge's office the atmosphere is very different; we are shown snapshots of people getting ready for the festive season – labourers gather together to enjoy a warming fire while traders display their goods with style. There are also carol singers on the street – but the singer who dares to stop outside Scrooge's door is rudely chased away by Scrooge.

Scrooge follows his usual routine on his journey home, showing that he is not willing to make any changes for Christmas. He eats by himself at a tavern, reads the newspapers and does some work. Finally, he walks home. He lives in 'a gloomy suite of rooms' (p. 10), stuck at the back of a dark and dreary yard. Dickens has gradually increased the fog and it is now so thick that Scrooge has to find his way with his hands; this physical loss of sight **metaphorically** highlights the emotional lack of understanding that Scrooge has about the meaning and value of life and how we should treat others.

STAVE ONE, PAGES 10–20: MARLEY'S GHOST HAS A MESSAGE FOR SCROOGE

SUMMARY

- When Scrooge gets to his front door, his door knocker changes into the face of his old business partner, Jacob Marley.
- Scrooge goes up to his rooms, checks them and then locks himself in.
- As Scrooge sits in front of his fire he hears bells ring and then Marley's Ghost appears. It is covered with chains of keys, padlocks and other items associated with the money-lending business he and Scrooge ran together.
- Marley explains that he is in torment because he only cared about money when he was alive and he now knows how wrong that was – he tells Scrooge that he should have cared about people.
- Marley's Ghost informs Scrooge that he will be visited by three more spirits.
- Scrooge doesn't want to think about what has happened and goes straight to bed.

TOP TIP

A02

Make sure you can provide quotations to illustrate how Marley's Ghost is presented. Find quotations to show its appearance, behaviour and response to Scrooge. For example, Scrooge describes how 'the spectre's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones' (p. 15).

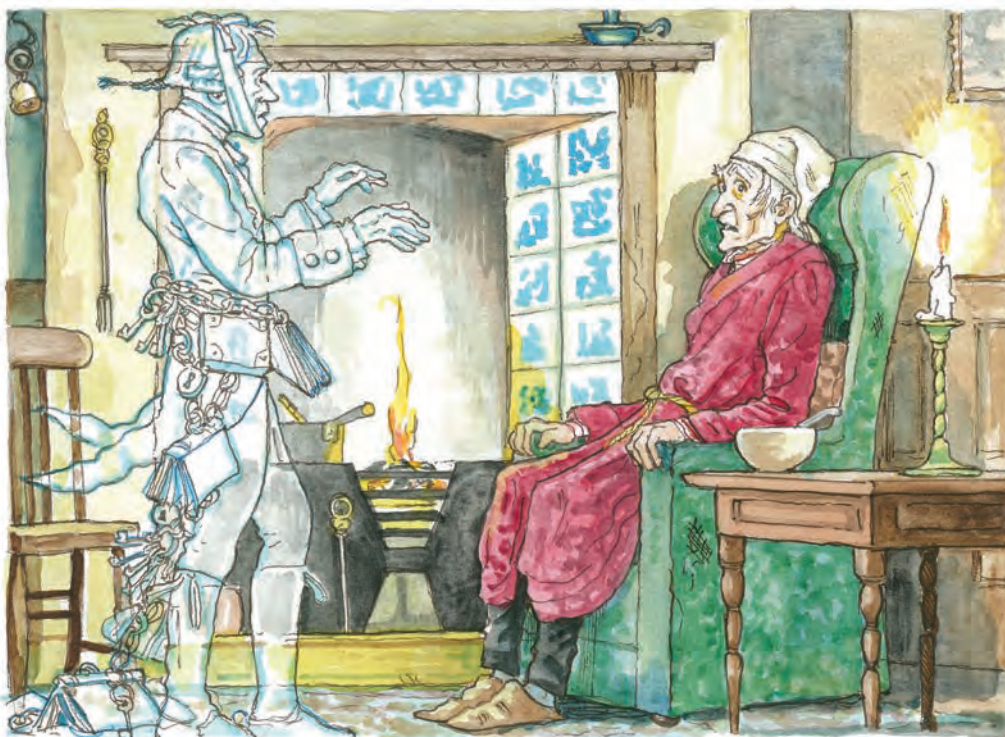
WHY IS THIS SECTION IMPORTANT?

- A We see that Scrooge is **strong-willed**: he resists believing that he is seeing and speaking to a ghost and tries to find **excuses** to explain it away.
- B We learn that Marley **regrets** caring only about money and now sees he should have cared for people.
- C The plot is set up: Scrooge will have **three more ghostly visitors** that night, all with the aim of saving him from Marley's fate of eternal regret.

CHECKPOINT 5

A02

Look at the description of Scrooge's journey upstairs (pp. 11–12). Why is it described so carefully and slowly?



KEY CONTEXT

A03

Dickens's simile of the lobster is unusual but would have made more sense for his Victorian readers who didn't have fridges. This meant shellfish, like lobsters, would have been kept in cold places such as cellars. However, if a lobster started to decay it would attract bacteria that glow in the dark (now known as photobacteria). For the contemporary audience it would have added an extra layer of warning to the **image**, suggesting it could lead to poisoning!

CHECKPOINT 6

A02

Is Scrooge the hardened character he pretends to be? Find the joke he tries to make. Why does Dickens make him do this?

KEY LANGUAGE: THE DOOR KNOCKER

A02

Dickens devotes a whole paragraph to the description of Scrooge's door knocker, helping the reader to visualise it, but also ensuring that we understand its full significance – Scrooge isn't the sort of person who 'sees things' and Marley has been dead for years. The use of **similes** is rather unusual; the face has 'a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar' (p. 11). This suggests it has a strange glow, indicating its otherworldliness.



As Scrooge looks at the face it becomes a knocker again, as if he had just imagined it. We are told he doesn't react, but he does look behind the door before closing it, as if he expected to find the back of Marley's head sticking out. The **narrator** emphasises this by the repeated use of italics when we are told Scrooge '*did pause*' and '*did look*' (p. 11). His expression of dismissal, '*Pooh, pooh!*' (p. 11), is perhaps an indication that the sight has affected him, and he feels the need to verbally reject it. In this paragraph we see Dickens's careful choice of words – both in visual descriptions but also in how he presents Scrooge's reactions – all the time drawing the reader into the scene and what is happening.

KEY QUOTATION: SCROOGE'S CHARACTER

A01

The narrator repeatedly emphasises that Scrooge isn't the type of person to imagine the ghostly events he is about to experience: '*Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes*' (p. 11). Dickens makes this statement of fact to encourage us to accept Marley and the other Ghosts as real, and not a figment of Scrooge's imagination. You could argue that the use of the word 'echoes' is **ironic**, however, as Scrooge is about to be haunted by past events.

KEY LANGUAGE: DICKENS'S USE OF SOUND

A02

Dickens makes sure we know it is dark, reducing Scrooge's use of the sense of sight. This makes the use of sound even more effective.

The chilling atmosphere is extended by the description of the sound of the door closing. The noise '*resounded through the house like thunder*' (p. 11), reminding us of the poor weather outside. It is not just the echo of the door closing that can be heard; all the bottles of wine in the cellars below '*have a separate peal of echoes*' (p. 11). This reminds us of church bells ringing, a sound that will be heard throughout the **novella** signalling the arrival of each Ghost.

Before we see Marley's Ghost, Dickens uses sound to set up our expectations: there is '*a clanking noise deep down below*' (Stave One, p. 13) and Scrooge remembers that ghosts drag chains. Dickens is careful to set this up before we see Marley to ensure we accept him as a ghost.

KEY CHARACTER: SCROOGE'S DETERMINED CHARACTER

A02

Dickens helps us understand that Scrooge is strong-willed and determined, even when things aren't as he expects. He checks all his rooms, indicating he has been unsettled by what he has seen. He double-locks himself in, something we are told '**was not his custom**' (p. 12), thus increasing our sense of unease. Dickens deliberately lists all the checks he makes; this list builds our knowledge of how Scrooge lives and our sense of nervousness and suspense – we know something is going to happen.

As well as being too mean to have a large fire at work, Scrooge is too mean to have a large one at home, and he has to sit near the fire to feel its warmth. The fireplace surround has decorated tiles with pictures of Bible stories, but when Scrooge looks at them all he can see is Marley's face. Scrooge refuses to believe it but still walks across the room to get away from the sight, showing us that the unflappable Scrooge is unnerved by what he has seen.

CHECKPOINT 7 A02

Why is each Ghost always referred to as 'it'?



KEY QUOTATION: MARLEY'S TORMENT

A01

Marley's Ghost tells Scrooge of the terrible situation it is in. Its punishment for being too concerned with making money when it was alive is to '**wander through the world – oh, woe is me! – and witness what [I] cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!**' (p. 16). The language used to support these ideas is strong. Words such as '**doomed**', '**fettered**' and '**ponderous**' (p. 16) add to the sense of weight and make us take this message seriously. As Scrooge is being told of the Ghost's situation, so we are made to think of our own. The key message here is that happiness comes from helping and working with other people, not from making as much money as possible.

CHECKPOINT 8 A01

Look at Scrooge's behaviour at the end of Stave One. How do we know that he has been affected by what has happened?

TOP TIP A01

It is important to be clear about the order of events in the novella. Make sure you know the order of all the interactions that Scrooge has had in this Stave, from Fred arriving to wish him Merry Christmas to Marley's Ghost. Reread the whole Stave and write down the name of each character and what their interaction tells us about Scrooge.

KEY CONTEXT: THE 1834 NEW POOR LAW

A03

Dickens makes a direct criticism of politics and the latest version of the Poor Law through Marley. At the end of its visit the Ghost opens the window and shows Scrooge the air full of tormented ghosts. The language used to describe this scene emphasises its misery and horror: the sounds are 'incoherent' and 'inexpressibly sorrowful' (p. 19). The ghosts are all suffering from being unable to help humans who are in need, something they didn't consider whilst they were alive but they now understand was key to their happiness and that of others. Dickens returns us to reality by making the political point that ghosts of 'guilty governments' (p. 20) are being made to suffer as a group for failing to help those in need.



AIMING HIGH: NARRATIVE TRICKS



If you want to show your understanding of the **novella** as a piece of fiction, it's important to be able to discuss the key role of Dickens as **narrator**. Dickens is rather an intrusive narrator and he manipulates and includes the reader throughout the novella. When the door knocker is introduced he draws our attention to it, emphasising the fact that there is nothing unusual about it except its large size. When it mysteriously changes into the face of Marley, Scrooge's dead business partner, the narrator again uses the first-person **narrative** to ask if any reader can explain why the knocker has changed. We tend to forget it is the author who makes a direct appeal to us in this way: it has a double effect of engaging us and making the events seem out of the narrator's control because he isn't able to explain them.

Dickens uses a similar narrative technique when we are made to imagine for ourselves the horrors Marley's Ghost is experiencing. By suggesting that the wailing sounds the ghosts make are beyond the narrator's description, readers have to use their imagination. Again, the scene is enhanced and enriched by our own ideas of how terrible these ghosts might sound. It is an example of Dickens inviting his audience/readership to participate in the story.

STAVE TWO, PAGES 21–3: WAITING FOR THE FIRST GHOST

SUMMARY

- Scrooge wakes up and the bell of the church clock rings twelve times even though Scrooge went to bed after 2 a.m.
- He looks out of the window – it is still very cold and foggy and there is no one to be seen.
- Scrooge listens for the bell to chime 1 a.m., the time that Marley said his first visitor would arrive.
- The first Ghost arrives just as the bell chimes.

WHY IS THIS SECTION IMPORTANT?

- A We see that although Scrooge says he doesn't believe that he saw Marley's Ghost he is still **anxious** about what might happen.
- B Dickens continues to use weather and sound to reflect **tension**.
- C The narrator creates a sense of **anxiety**.

KEY STYLE: CREATING TENSION

A02

We know a ghost is about to visit but Dickens makes this more dramatic by building up **tension** and suspense through the gloomy atmosphere and the bell ringing the time. The reminders of the cold, dark weather outside and the chiming of the bell contribute to the sinister atmosphere. The bell is in a nearby church clock, connoting God watching over Scrooge, making judgements about him. Dickens makes Scrooge systematically count the time to further build tension and make us uneasy. As 1 a.m. approaches, we, like Scrooge, wonder what will happen. Dickens tells us twice that the curtains of his bed were drawn open. He also tells us that the Ghost is as close to Scrooge as the narrator is to us, reminding us that this story was written to be read out loud to groups at Christmas and to make us feel physically close to what is happening.



CHECKPOINT 9 A02

Why does Dickens describe the wait in so much detail?

TOP TIP A02

It is important to explore Dickens's style and use of language. He likes to extend his **metaphors** through his writing. Go through the novella and list all the times a church, church clock or church bell is mentioned and work out what each one tells us about Scrooge's greed.

KEY CONTEXT A03

Four-poster beds would have been luxury items but it is likely that Scrooge owns one not for style but because the curtains round it would have kept him warm. The curtains are mentioned again later in the novella as expensive items. Dickens uses them here for drama and tension and later to show the nature of greed.

STAVE TWO, PAGES 23–5: THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

SUMMARY

- The Ghost looks like a child and an old man at the same time.
- It is the Ghost of Scrooge's past.
- Scrooge asks the Ghost to wear its cap, which would put out its light. The Ghost doesn't want to and says this is what Scrooge has made him do for years.
- The Ghost says it is here for Scrooge's welfare and reclamation.

WHY IS THIS SECTION IMPORTANT?

- A We learn about the Ghost of Scrooge's **past**.
- B We can see Scrooge doesn't want to **embark on this journey**.
- C The creative description helps us willingly **suspend disbelief** and accept this Ghost can **travel in time**.

CHECKPOINT 10 A01

How would you describe this Ghost?

KEY CONTEXT A03

The Victorians often used flowers and plants to convey meaning (they called it floriography). Many of Dickens's readers would have understood that holly refers to forgetting the past as well as being a symbol of winter.

KEY CHARACTER: THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST A02

The description of the Ghost is detailed and apparently contradictory; it is like a child and like an old man all at the same time. It has long white hair but its face is unwrinkled and its skin has a youthful glow to it. It is strong and muscular but also delicate. These apparent contradictions can be explained when we realise that this is the Ghost of Scrooge's past, and it therefore has the physical properties of his youth – hence the **'tenderest bloom'** (p. 23) on its skin. However, Scrooge is now an old man and it is a long time since he was a child. The physical properties of the Ghost thus resemble the memories of childhood – the memories are old and perhaps dulled, but they are nevertheless made up of youthful moments. The Ghost's clothing continues this theme; it holds a branch of holly, **symbolising** winter, but its robe is trimmed with summer flowers.



KEY LANGUAGE: DICKENS'S USE OF LIGHT

A02

The Ghost has a very strange 'bright clear jet of light' (p. 23) springing from its head which Scrooge can't bear; he actually asks the Ghost to put its hat on. Dickens uses Scrooge's response to the light to show us that he is uncomfortable in the presence of this being. Light is traditionally associated with purity, goodness and truth – traits often linked to the innocence of childhood. So here, Scrooge's reaction to the light coming from the Ghost might indicate that he recognises the difference between how he was as a child and his current approach to life, which Dickens has associated with darkness, cold and fog. Dickens will later use the sunny light of Christmas morning to symbolise new hope for Scrooge.

In addition, the Ghost's belt 'sparkled and glittered' (p. 23) in different places, making the shape of the Ghost difficult to pin down. Dickens creates a sense of memories always changing and being reshaped by experience, suggesting events from the past can have different significance to us through life.

CHECKPOINT 11 A01

Why does Scrooge want the Ghost to put its cap on?

EXAM FOCUS: WRITING ABOUT THE TEXT

You may be asked to write about significant moments in the text. Read through this example by one student, commenting on the characterisation of the Ghost of Christmas Past:

Uses the **adverb** 'perhaps' to show this idea is an interpretation of the text

Dickens tells us the Ghost's voice is 'soft and gentle' (p. 24) and appears to come from a distance away; perhaps this is intended to add to the impression that the Ghost has come from the past. However, Dickens gives the Ghost a series of exclamations, suggesting that this gentle voice has power and impact.

Starts with a clear point and short quotation

The **connective adverb** 'However' introduces complexity to the analysis, showing the student is linking and contrasting ideas from the text

Now you try it:

This paragraph needs to link the ideas to show how they work together to create character. Continue the paragraph and suggest why Dickens has done this and the effect he has achieved. Start: *This creates the sense that the Ghost ...*

STAVE TWO, PAGES 25–30: SCROOGE'S UNHAPPY CHILDHOOD

SUMMARY

- The Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge a scene from his childhood, when Scrooge had to spend Christmas at school with only books for company.
- Scrooge remembers the carol singer he chased away from the office and regrets his actions.
- They see another Christmas where Scrooge is once again left at school for Christmas. However, this time his sister, Fan, arrives to take him home after persuading their father to let him return to the family.
- The old Scrooge responds emotionally to these memories.
- We learn that Scrooge loved his sister but she is now dead. Fred is her son.

WHY IS THIS SECTION IMPORTANT?

- A** We learn that Scrooge had an **unhappy childhood** and was left at school when everyone else went home for Christmas.
- B** We see that Scrooge starts to **regret** some of his adult actions.
- C** Dickens tells us that Fred is Scrooge's **much loved sister's son**. This makes us start to wonder why Scrooge is so **unfriendly** towards him.

CHECKPOINT 12 **A03**

What exactly does the contrast between the countryside and the city suggest?

KEY CONTEXT **A03**

Victorian literature often had a romanticised view of the countryside, and that is what Dickens presents here. The Industrial Revolution had created rapid change but much of the countryside remained the same and agriculture dominated life. It wasn't a romantic, beautiful life but hard work. However, Dickens uses the idealised romantic view in order to emphasise how different Scrooge's childhood was from his current life.

KEY SETTING: THE COUNTRYSIDE **A02**

The Ghost takes Scrooge to the countryside where he went to school. Its fields and clean air are a real contrast to the dirt and darkness we have seen in the city. Dickens presents this as an idyllic scene, away from the dirt and pollution of London where grief and greed are found everywhere.



TOP TIP: WRITING ABOUT IMAGERY

A02

Notice how Dickens uses **personification** and **pathetic fallacy** to create atmosphere and emphasise the contrast between the countryside and the city. Boys are having fun and their shouts and laughter echo around the fields. The **narrator** tells us that **'the crisp air laughed to hear it'** (p. 26), suggesting that the air is so full of the sound of laughter it is itself laughing. This conveys a joyful, happy atmosphere far from the oppressive, dismal atmosphere of the city. Make sure that you can pick out key **images** and write about their effect.

KEY CHARACTER: SCROOGE

A02

Scrooge's response to being shown the countryside of his childhood is immediate: his lip trembles, there is a catch in his voice, and the Ghost suggests he is crying. Dickens develops our understanding of Scrooge as he reacts emotionally to the memory of the boy left at school for Christmas. The narrator encourages us to work out that Scrooge was that boy. This makes us more involved in the story and increases our sympathy for Scrooge. The short statements, **'Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed'** (p. 26) are bleak and moving. The lack of detail suggests that Scrooge is too upset to develop the description. His emotional state contrasts with that of the proud, mean-spirited man we met in Stave One, but we must not forget all that we have previously learnt about him – this is just the start of the change and it is not going to be a fast process for Scrooge.



CHECKPOINT 13 A01

What is your response to Scrooge at this point?

KEY CONTEXT A03

Ali Baba and the Genii are characters from the *Arabian Nights* (a collection of short fairy tales). These were very popular in Victorian times and Dickens uses them as a kind of short-hand to tell his readers that the young Scrooge immersed himself in a variety of fantastical and imaginative stories. This helps to emphasise the difference between the young and the adult Scrooge.

AIMING HIGH: DICKENS'S USE OF CHARACTERS



It's important to consider how Dickens uses his characters in this **novella**. He uses Scrooge's younger sister, Fan, to provide contrast to Scrooge. When she arrives to collect young Scrooge so that he can join the family for Christmas she is full of life and joy: she comes **'darting in'** (p. 28) and is **'brimful of glee'** (p. 29), suggesting abundant energy. Dickens makes this touching scene sharper by suggesting that the only reason the young Scrooge was left at school by himself over Christmas was that his father didn't want him at home.

Fan describes their home as transformed into **'Heaven'** (p. 29). The idea that their father has changed from someone who sends his son away and refuses to have him in the house, to a parent who makes a home heavenly, suggests that Scrooge too can change. To top it all, the young Scrooge will not have to return to school but is **'to be a man'** (p. 29), meaning that he will be apprenticed and learn a trade. Here Dickens is suggesting that Scrooge had a future to look forward to.

KEY LANGUAGE: DICKENS'S USE OF HUMOUR

A02

Before he leaves the school, the young Scrooge and his sister have a glass of poor-quality wine and some indigestible cake with the schoolmaster. This little scene is typical of Dickens – it is humorous and telling. Everything seems to be done for show – the 'best-parlour' is freezing cold and even the traditional pictures and fittings have been affected by the cold. They are offered a glass of 'curiously light wine' and a piece of 'curiously heavy cake' (p. 29). Dickens's description is amusing because cake is supposed to be light and wine is meant to have 'body' or depth to it. The use of the **adverb** 'curiously' implies the viewpoint of the **narrator**, and reminds us that it is he who is relaying the events. Use of vocabulary such as this is typical of Dickens's work.

TOP TIP

A02

It is important to understand how Dickens presents children and childhood. Go through the **novella** and make a list of the children mentioned and the way that they are presented in relation to Scrooge.

AIMING HIGH: COMMENT ON THE PRESENTATION OF CHILDHOOD



Despite the fact that they sent children to work down mines, up chimneys and in dangerous factories, the Victorians held an idealised view of childhood as a time of innocence and purity. It is important to consider how Dickens presents this view: throughout this text the child has redemptive powers for Scrooge, starting with these **images** of Scrooge as a child, 'a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire' (p. 27), and of Tiny Tim, 'Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence was from God!' (p. 78), which is the final jolt in the closing pages that Scrooge needs to reform.

We are shown that Scrooge had an unhappy childhood, but knew love from his sister who is presented extremely positively. Dickens shows that Scrooge experienced sad, lonely times in his childhood but also happy ones.

Reconnecting with these past feelings – either of being lonely and vulnerable, or of being joyful and surrounded by loved ones – enables Scrooge to begin to feel sympathy for others.



REVISION FOCUS: CHARACTERISATION OF FAN AND FRED



Make sure you understand how Dickens uses characters. The way Scrooge feels about Fan directly affects the way he regards Fred. Reread the novella and pick out the descriptions of Fan and Fred and note where they are similar.