

# 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens – Knowledge Organiser

**a. Stave 1:** The narrator describes Scrooge's parsimonious, curmudgeonly nature. Scrooge is in his counting house, watching over his clerk (who has a very low fire, and is kept in a "cell"). Scrooge's jovial nephew, Fred, interjects and breaks the melancholy scene. Fred proclaims his love for Christmas and invites his Uncle to follow suit. Scrooge refuses. Fred invites his Uncle to dinner which Scrooge rebukes. Scrooge confronts his clerk, Bob Cratchit, complaining about Bob's wish to take a day off for Christmas. Begrudgingly Scrooge agrees but says he must arrive earlier the following morning. Scrooge enters his home and by a low fire, eats his gruel when the sound of heavy chains are heard. The Ghost of Marley appears and tells Scrooge that he is here to warn him, to give him a chance to escape his fate. Marley tells Scrooge about his own "chain" and tells Scrooge that he will be haunted by three spirits and that without their lessons, Scrooge has no hope of changing his fate.

**b. Stave 2:** Scrooge is visited by an "Unearthly visitor", the Ghost of Christmas Past. The spirit takes Scrooge to his childhood village and school. We see a "solitary child neglected by his friends". Scrooge watches his younger self absorbed by reading and kept company by the characters from novels including Ali Baba. Fan, Scrooge's sister, arrives one Christmas to take Scrooge home. We then see Scrooge apprenticed at Fezziwig's, Fezziwig is described as a joyful, benevolent benefactor: the clear antithesis to Scrooge. Scrooge is then shown his break up with Belle who explains that a "golden idol" (money) has come between them and that Scrooge is no longer than man he was. Scrooge is then shown Belle's family home which whilst not particularly handsome, is full of love, children and comfort; a clear contrast to Scrooge's situation. Scrooge is "broken" and asks to leave, Scrooge wrestles with the ghost and extinguishes the cap.

**c. Stave 3:** Scrooge encounters the Ghost of Christmas Present, essentially the personification of the Christmas spirit. The "jolly giant" is described as sitting on a "throne" of food and wearing a green robe with white fur cuffs, reminiscent of common images of Father Christmas. The Ghost shows Scrooge homes across London and in all occasions, despite their situation people are together and celebrating Christmas. The spirit then takes Scrooge to the meagre home of the Cratchit family where we see the family prepare a modest Christmas meal of goose. The family are clearly poor but are wealthy in love and affection. The spirit also takes Scrooge to see Fred's home where there is lots of laughter and love. Before the spirit leaves, Scrooge asks about the "claw" underneath the spirit's robes. The spirit explains they are Want and Ignorance: symbolic of the abhorrent treatment of the poor.

**d. Stave 4:** A "phantom", approaches Scrooge. The ghost takes Scrooge to a series of places including the London Stock Exchange where a group of businessmen discuss the death of a rich man. They explain they will only attend the funeral if there was food. We then visit a pawn shop in the underbelly of London where a group of thieves sell personal effects stolen from the dead man. Scrooge asks to see someone emotionally affected by the man's death and we are shown a couple in debt who are elated/relieved by the death of the man. Scrooge is then taken to the Cratchit home where we see the family struggling to cope with the death of Tiny Tim. Scrooge asks to know the identity of the man and is taken to a graveyard, overrun by weeds and neglected. Scrooge finds a grave with his own name. Appalled, Scrooge clutches the spirit and begs to allow him to change his fate. He promises to honour Christmas and live a new life following the lessons of the three spirits.

**e. Stave 5:** Scrooge is grateful for a second chance and transforms into a different man. Scrooge runs into the street and asks a local boy to go and buy the biggest turkey and it is sent to Bob Cratchit's. He meets one of the charity workers from stave 1, apologises and makes a generous donation. Scrooge then attends Fred's for Christmas dinner. The following morning, Scrooge plays a prank on Cratchit pretending to be annoyed by his lateness however then tells him he is to raise his salary and orders him to make up the fire and buy some more coal. The narrator finishes by telling us Scrooge was "better than his word" and was a "second father" to Tiny Tim.

## f. Key Contextual Information

### A Christmas Carol was published in 1843

#### Charles Dickens

In 1824, Dickens' father is sent to debtors' prison and Dickens is forced to give up his education until his father inherits some money to fund his education. Dickens was forced to take on a job labelling bottles in a workhouse. Dickens understood the hardships of poverty. Dickens was concerned with the social injustices of the Victorian epoch and his writing sought to expose the plight of the poor.

#### The New Poor Law

In 1834, the Poor Law Amendment Act was introduced. This led to a cut in aid given to the destitute to help them remain in their homes. As a result of austerity, workhouses were established and now if the poor required help, they would have to go to a workhouse to receive this. The very structure of workhouses were designed to encourage segregation and to ridicule the poor. The aim was often for them to be worse than the streets to discourage the poor's use of workhouses and encourage them to find their own means of making money.

#### Christmas and Tradition

A Christmas Carol profoundly criticizes the laws, policies, and economic system that promote such poverty. In this way, by allowing Dickens to use the harshness of winter to portray the terrible difficulty of the life of the poor, Christmas served Dickens as a vehicle not just for showing Scrooge's transformation but to appeal to readers' Christianity as well in an effort to change a society that was organized in some ways that Dickens saw as being profoundly un-Christian.

## g. Key Vocabulary

- **allegory** – a story that uses symbols to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one
- **epoch** - a particular period of time in history or a person's life
- **Malthusianism** - the idea that population growth is exponential while the growth of the food supply or other resources is linear, which eventually reduces living standards to the point of triggering a population die off
- **miser** – a person who hoards wealth
- **misanthropic** - having or showing a dislike of other people; unsociable.
- **philanthropic** - seeking to promote the welfare of others
- **avaricious** - having or showing an extreme greed for wealth or material gain.

h. Stave 1	Key Quotes
Scrooge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!”</li> <li>“secret and self-contained and as solitary as an oyster”,</li> <li>“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”,</li> <li>“are there no prisons?” “and the union workhouses’ demanded Scrooge ‘are they still in operation?”</li> <li>“If they would rather die...they had better do it and decrease the surplus population”</li> </ul>
Fred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Christmastime...a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time”</li> <li>“his nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk”</li> </ul>
Cratchits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>describing Bob Cratchit’s office “a dismal little cell”</li> <li>“Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk’s fire was so very much smaller”</li> </ul>
Marley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“chain he drew was clasped about his middle; it was long and wound about him like a tail and it was made...of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds...”</li> <li>“I wear the chain I forged in life...I made it link by link, and yard by yard”</li> <li>“mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance and benevolence were, all, my business”</li> <li>“I am here tonight to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate”</li> </ul>
Thematic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Charity worker</u>: “At this festive season of the year...it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time” (Poverty, social injustice, charity, Christmas spirit)</li> </ul>

j. Stave 3	Key Quotes
Scrooge	<p>“Scrooge entered timidly”</p> <p>Tonight if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it”,</p> <p>“Spirit’ said Scrooge with an interest he had never felt before ‘tell me if Tiny Tim will live”,</p>
GOCPresent	<p>“jolly giant”</p> <p>“clothed in one simple deep green robe...bordered with white fur”,</p> <p>“on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath”</p> <p>“They are Man’s...and they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both”</p>
Cratchits	<p>“Mrs Cratchit...dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap”,</p> <p>“such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds</p> <p>“They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being waterproof; their clothes were scanty...but they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time”,</p>
Thematic	<p><u>Fred’s home</u>: “A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, wherever he is! He wouldn’t take it from me, but may he have it nevertheless” (Love, family, spirit)</p>

i. Stave 2	Key quotes
Scrooge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Remember it! I could walk it blindfold”,</li> <li>“a solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still</li> <li>“During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self”</li> <li>after being shown his break up with Belle “Why do you delight to torture me?”</li> <li>after seeing Belle’s family “Spirit!” said Scrooge in a broken voice “Remove me from this place”</li> </ul>
GoCPast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“unearthly visitor”,</li> <li>“it was a strange figure -- like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man”</li> <li>“It wore a tunic of the purest white”</li> <li>“the strangest thing about it was that from the crown of its head there sprang a bright clear jet of light, by whole all of this was visible”</li> <li>“Rise! And walk with me!”,</li> </ul>
Thematic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Fezziwig</u>: “Yo ho, my boys! No more work tonight”</li> <li><u>Belle</u>: “a nother idol has displaced me...a golden one” “I release you” (capitalism, greed, Scrooge’s change)</li> </ul>

k. Stave 4	Key Quotes
Scrooge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I fear you more than any spectre I have seen.”</li> <li>“I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been”</li> <li>“I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!”</li> </ul>
GOCTC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“a solemn phantom, draped and hooded, coming like a mist”, “slowly, gravely, silently approached”,</li> <li>“it was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand”</li> </ul>
Thematic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Two business men talking</u>: “It’s likely to be a very cheap funeral...I don’t mind going if lunch is provided” (isolation, loneliness, irony)</li> <li><u>Couple emotionally affected by man’s death</u>: “There is hope yet...such a miracle has happened...we may sleep tonight with light hearts”</li> </ul>

l. Stave 5	Key quotes
Scrooge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“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”,</li> <li>“A Merry Christmas to everybody! A Happy New Year to all the world “</li> <li>“I’ll raise your salary and endeavour to assist your struggling family”</li> <li>“to Tiny Tim...he was a second father”, “Scrooge was better than his word”</li> </ul>

