

KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER:

A Christmas Carol (1843)



Context

- The novella was written in the **Victorian era**. This was a time of significant **social inequality** between the rich and poor.
- The New Poor Law (1834) meant the poor had little support, so the destitute and desperate often had no choice other than **workhouses** or crime.
- The poor were **desperate for employment** due to their lack of support.
- The poor's desperation for employment was **exploited** by some middle class employers – workers did not have rights.
- Dickens believed **social reform** was needed to improve life for the poor.
- Dickens felt it was **unjust for poor children to suffer** for being born into poverty, and it was the responsibility of everyone in society to change this.
- Dickens believed **Christmas should be celebrated with family**, and that it is a time for generosity, benevolence and togetherness.
- Dickens believed being a good Christian meant treating others with kindness.

Dickens' Intentions

Dickens wrote the novella to:

- expose how prejudice against the poor was caused by **ignorance** and a lack of empathy [I]
- demonstrate that **time and love** are more valuable than money and material possessions [T]
- highlight the Christian **morality** in benevolence and philanthropy [M]
- emphasise that a successful society is one where people **take responsibility** for each other [R]

Characters

Ebenezer Scrooge

- Initially used to illustrate **prejudiced attitudes towards the poor** within Victorian society. These views are a result of his **ignorance**; he changes when he is **enlightened by seeing how the poor truly live**.
- His **character arc** represents the **reform** Dickens wanted to see in society: Scrooge **realises that he finds more joy in sharing his time and love with others than in his miserly obsession with profit and wealth**.
- Transforms from an isolated, unchristian 'sinner' who **exploits his employee to a benevolent philanthropist** as he becomes more moral.
- When his **ignorance is conquered**, he recognises his **social responsibility** to support the less fortunate, particularly children in poverty.
- Learns to **appreciate the time he can spend with his family**, and the happiness to be found in celebrating Christmas with loved ones.
- "Are there no prisons? ... And the union workhouses?" + "I can't afford to make idle people merry" + "If they would rather die ... they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population" (About the poor during his dialogue with the portly gentlemen, S1) | T M R
- "The insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust" (How the Ghost of Christmas Present describes Scrooge, S3) | T M R
- "Lead on!" and "precious time" (To the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, S4) | T M R
- "A great many back-payments are included in it" (Scrooge explaining his donation to the portly gentleman, S5) | T M R
- "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy" and "I'm quite a baby." (After the spirits' visits, S5) | T M R

The Ghost of Jacob Marley

- Represents the severe and terrifying **consequences of selfishness and a lack of social responsibility**: Marley **ignored the poor and needy in life**, so suffers in purgatory after death. He now has a desire to support the less fortunate, but is tormented by his inability to help them.
- His **chain**, made of items relating to money, **symbolises his sins and guilt** in failing to help his fellow man. It also suggests wealth can be a burden.
- "I wear the chain I forged in life ... of my own free will I wore it" (To Scrooge, S1) | T M R
- "Mankind was my business" (To Scrooge, S1) | T M R
- "No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse." (About his suffering, S1) | T M R

Bob Cratchit

- Scrooge's clerk, who **symbolises the exploited working class** in Victorian society and is used to **humanise** workers living in poverty.
- A **victim of Scrooge's prejudice**; his employer treats him with **contempt**.
- Humble and values time with his family, whom he loves dearly.
- "a dismal little cell ... a sort of tank" and 'the clerk's fire ... looked like one coal' (Description of the setting in which he works within Scrooge's counting house, S1.) | T
- "My little, little child!" (Remembering Tiny Tim, S4.) | T

The Cratchit family

- Used to **humanise** those in poverty & **challenge the ignorant stereotype of the 'idle' poor**: the Cratchits are loving, hard-working and grateful.
- They are humble, and show **family brings more happiness than wealth**.
- Each member has a role to play in preparing Christmas dinner, which is a **reflection of how everyone in society should work together**.
- A moral, Christian family – **shows the poor don't deserve their hardships**.
- Tiny Tim symbolises the vulnerability of children in poverty and the impact child mortality (death) has on poor families**. His survival at the end of the novella shows there is **hope, if society's attitudes change**.
- "the family display of glass. Two tumblers, and a custard cup without a handle. These held the hot stuff ... as well as golden goblets would have done" (S3) | T
- "Bob held his withered little hand" (Description of Tiny Tim, S4.) | T M R
- "God Bless Us, Every One!" (Tiny Tim in S3 and S5.) | T M R

The Ghost of Christmas Past

- Shows Scrooge visions of his past, revealing he is **capable of change, love and empathy**. Scrooge becomes **emotional at this enlightenment**. It also causes him pain so he tries to look away, but the ghost **overpowers him, forcing him to connect with his memories and conquer his ignorance**.
- Has an **angelic appearance**, which gives him a sense of moral authority and shows he carries a **Christian message**.
- The **light from his head symbolises enlightenment** and how **ignorance must be defeated**. It could also represent the biblical Light of Christ.
- The **extinguisher Scrooge uses to cover the light symbolises ignorance**.

The Ghost of Christmas Present

- The **personification of Christmas spirit**, who shows Scrooge different ways Christmas is celebrated. These visions show the importance of family, love, togetherness and benevolence at Christmas time, all **helping Scrooge to overcome his ignorance** and contempt for the festive season.
- His 'throne' of food and drink **symbolises the abundance in society**, which would help the poor if shared responsibly. This challenges **Malthusian attitudes** and shows the **importance of sharing and equality**.
- His **torch is a symbol of benevolence** and spreads Christmas cheer; his rusted scabbard indicates **Christmas is a time of peace and love**.
- Encourages Scrooge to **change his ignorant views & is a mouthpiece for Dickens' views on social reform**, particularly when revealing Ignorance and Want, who show all of society must take responsibility for children.
- "It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child" (To Scrooge about Tiny Tim, S3) | T M R

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

- The final and most **ominous spirit – a personification of Death** used to show the **bleak consequences of not taking social responsibility**, including the lack of **legacy** that Scrooge will leave behind.
- Shows Scrooge visions of the future and makes him **appreciate the time he has left before death** and use it to **share his money and also his love**.
- It never speaks, indicating the **future is yet unwritten and can be changed through enlightenment** and embracing social responsibility.

Fred

- Scrooge's nephew and **foil**: constantly **joyful** and loves Christmas and family. He **treats all people without prejudice**, and emphasises that **Scrooge's misanthropic prejudice just makes him miserable and isolated**.
- Used as Dickens' **mouthpiece and is a model of moral behaviour**.

Fezziwig

- Scrooge's employer when he was an apprentice and his **foil** in terms of the treatment of his workers: he is a model of how employers have a responsibility for the welfare of their employees.
- Embraces Christmas, inviting family, friends and employees to his ball on Christmas Eve, **showing no prejudice** while dedicating his time and love.
- "The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune" (Scrooge about Fezziwig, S2) | T M R

The portly gentlemen (charity collectors)

- Like Fezziwig and Fred, they are moral and **show that the middle class are capable of benevolence, empathy and love**. They are **philanthropic**, using their **time** to raise money for the poor and destitute, modelling how those fortunate enough to be wealthy should behave and the social responsibility they have.
- Foils** to Scrooge in terms of their attitudes to the poor, highlighting his **ignorance and prejudice** and emphasising the immorality and unchristian nature of such selfish perspectives.

Ignorance and Want

- Highlight the **devastating effects of destitution on innocent children** due to the **lack of responsibility** being taken for their suffering.

- They **symbolise** the consequences of two significant issues in Victorian society: the widespread **want** for basic necessities such as food and shelter, which was too often **ignored, leading to corrupt, animalistic children like these allegorical figures**.
- "yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish" (S3) | T M R
- "They are Man's ... they cling to me, appealing from their fathers" (S3) | T M R

Other minor characters

- Belle** is Scrooge's former fiancée. In Stave 2, we see that she leaves Scrooge because he has begun to focus on 'another idol ... a golden one.'
- Little Fan** is Scrooge's sister. She collects him from boarding school, showing he had love for his family; she also hints their father was 'cruel'.
- The **isolated characters** in Stave 3 (miners, lighthouse keepers, sailors) all share Christmas songs and spend time with (or think of) their family, showing there is no excuse for aloofness or not celebrating Christmas.

Other methods Dickens uses

- Motifs** such as **fire** (human warmth and love), **music** (Christmas spirit and joy), **food** (celebration and sharing) and **light** (enlightenment, hope).
- Settings** such as busy Christmas streets; Christmas parties; Scrooge's bleak workplace and his home surrounded by offices; the **juxtaposition** between the deathbeds of Scrooge and Tiny Tim; the poverty around Old Joe's beetling shop – an area that 'reeked with crime, with filth, and misery'.
- Pathetic fallacy** including the **fog** representing Scrooge's (and society's) ignorance in Stave One, which makes the church 'invisible' (highlighting Scrooge's unchristian immorality) and creates a **gothic** atmosphere. This is **contrasted** with the 'bright, clear' day in Stave 5, as Scrooge is enlightened and redeemed – he also hears the church bells ringing (moral Christian).
- Narrative voice** ranging from warm and familiar to didactic and solemn.

Plot

Stave 1	It's Christmas Eve in London. Scrooge uses very little coal to heat the Counting House. Two portly gentlemen enter seeking donations to charity; Scrooge refuses. Scrooge's nephew Fred then invites Scrooge to spend Christmas with him; Scrooge refuses that too. Scrooge begrudgingly gives Bob Christmas Day off. Scrooge is visited at home by Marley's ghost, who warns him of his fate: he will also suffer with regret after death.
Stave 2	Scrooge awakes at midnight and is visited by the Ghost of Christmas Past. He returns to his school days where he is a lonely boy. He grows older and his sister, Fan, picks him up from school. Time moves on to Fezziwig's, where Scrooge was an apprentice and enjoyed a Christmas party. He wishes he could speak to Bob. Lastly, we see Belle break off their engagement. Scrooge is upset to see Belle moved on and had a family.
Stave 3	The Ghost of Christmas Present appears, on a throne of food. He shows Scrooge the city on Christmas morning. He sprinkles his torch over people and raises their spirits. Scrooge sees the Cratchits' Christmas: they don't have much but all work together to make dinner and are grateful. At Fred's, the guests mock Scrooge. He sees how isolated people (miners, men in a lighthouse and sailors) have Christmas spirit. Finally, he sees two starving children, Ignorance and Want.
Stave 4	The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come approaches Scrooge but does not speak. Scrooge is terrified but wants to see what the phantom has to show him. He sees businessmen discussing a dead man, and a pawnshop where people are selling a dead man's possessions. The Cratchits are struggling to cope with the death of Tiny Tim but support each other. Eventually, Scrooge sees the dead man's grave and his own name on the headstone. He begs the spirit for a chance to alter the future.
Stave 5	Scrooge is grateful for a second chance of his life and sings the praises of Marley and Christmas. He pays a boy to deliver a huge turkey to the Cratchits, apologises to the charity workers and donates money, and attends Fred's Christmas party. On Boxing Day, he waits for Bob (who arrives late in the morning) but then promises to raise his salary. Scrooge becomes a 'second father' to Tiny Tim and learns to 'keep Christmas well'.

Key Vocabulary

Word	Meaning	Image
abundance	more than enough (of something)	
allegory	a story, poem or picture with a hidden meaning (usually a moral or political one)	
aloof	cool and distant, not warm or friendly – someone who keeps to themselves	
benevolence	the quality of being well-meaning	
character arc	the transformation or inner journey of a character over the course of a story	
contempt	a feeling that a person or thing is worthless or beneath you	

contrast	striking difference	
destitution	the state of being so poor that you cannot provide for yourself	
didactic	intended to teach, usually with a moral message	
empathy	the ability to understand and share the feelings of others	
enlightenment	the state of having greater knowledge or understanding about a subject or situation	
epiphany	a moment of sudden and important realisation or understanding	
exploitation	the act of treating someone unfairly to benefit from their work	
foil	a character who contrasts with another, to emphasise something about them	
gothic	associated with darkness, mystery, horror and gloom	
humanise	to show qualities or weaknesses making someone seem more human and deserving sympathy	
ignorance	a lack of knowledge, awareness or education	
jovial	cheerful and friendly	
legacy	what is left behind by someone after their death	
misanthropic	having a dislike of humankind and avoiding human society	
miserly	describes someone who hoards money and does not spend it (a miser)	
morality	knowing right from wrong	
motif	a symbolic image or idea that is recurring (repeated) in a text	
ominous	giving the impression that something bad is going to happen	
perspective	a way of seeing or thinking about something	
philanthropy	the desire to promote the welfare of others, especially through charity	
poverty	the state of being extremely poor	
prejudice	an unfair opinion or belief against a person/group, which is not based in truth	
redemption	the action of being saved from sin, error or evil	
remorse	deep regret or guilt for a wrongdoing	
responsibility	having a duty to deal with something/ someone and be accountable for it	
sceptical	doubtful and not easily convinced	
social commentary	writing about issues in society, usually in a way that promotes social reform	
social inequality	when people in society do not have the same status, rights or opportunities	
social reform	changes in society to raise the quality of life for groups of people	
symbol	something that represents or stands for a bigger idea	
unchristian	not following the beliefs or teachings of Christianity	

* Also revise and use key vocabulary from previous units! *