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A Christmas

Carol

AQA GCSE English Literature



YORK NOTES

York Notes Rapid Revision

A Christmas Carol

AQA GCSE English Literature

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INTRODUCTION Who was Charles Dickens?

Three key things about Charles Dickens

1. Dickens was born in 1812 and had a difficult early life due to his father's financial problems.
2. Dickens wrote over twenty books including **novels**, short stories and non-fiction.
3. Dickens was much loved in his lifetime and he travelled the country reading his books to packed halls.



What happened in Dickens's early life?

- He was born in Portsmouth and initially was sent to school.
- At the age of twelve, Dickens was forced to work in a blacking factory to help to support his family who were living in the debtor's prison with his father.
- Dickens became a journalist, which gave him such an eye for detail.

Why did he write *A Christmas Carol*?

- Dickens read a government report about child poverty in 1843 and was appalled. In response, he decided to write a story to 'strike a sledgehammer blow' on behalf of poor children.
- Dickens argued that employers, like Scrooge, should be held responsible for ensuring their workers had reasonable conditions.
- His description of Martha Cratchit working long hours for little pay was typical of the way young people were forced to live.

What was the response to *A Christmas Carol*?

- Most reviewers and readers praised it highly both for its characters and its powerful message.
- Fellow novelist William M. Thackeray suggested that people rush out 'and purchase five thousand more copies'.
- Ironically, Dickens was criticised for the high cost of the book, which was expensively bound and illustrated. Later editions were cheaper and more affordable for ordinary families.

INTRODUCTION *Plot summary*

Stave One

- It's Christmas Eve, and miserly Scrooge is introduced at work.
- He is visited by nephew Fred and charity collectors whom he rejects.
- Back at Scrooge's home, Marley's Ghost appears.
- Scrooge is told he'll be visited by Three Spirits to teach him to amend his ways.

Stave Two

- The first Christmas Ghost arrives at 1 a.m.
- The Ghost of Christmas Past changes shape, looking old and young.
- Scrooge is shown himself as a child and young man by the Ghost.
- Scrooge sees how his love of money began to develop.

Stave Four

- Scrooge is next visited by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.
- It shows Scrooge people's reactions to an unnamed dead man.
- Scrooge is horrified to see that Tiny Tim has died.
- Scrooge sees his own grave and vows to change.

Stave Three

- Scrooge is visited by the Ghost of Christmas Present.
- The Ghost shows Scrooge Christmas celebrations across the country.
- Scrooge learns Tiny Tim will die if he does not change.
- The Ghost reveals the figures of Ignorance and Want beneath his robes.

Stave Five

- Scrooge wakes up on a sunny Christmas Day morning.
- He realises that he now has a second chance and is delighted.
- Scrooge sends a huge turkey to the Cratchits.
- He goes on to live a happy and generous life.

PLOT AND STRUCTURE **Stave One**

Five key things about Stave One

This Stave introduces us to Scrooge and describes his encounter with Marley's Ghost:

1. We learn that Scrooge is the **sole surviving partner** of a successful business in the centre of **London**.
2. **Scrooge's mean character and hatred** of everyone around him are explored in detail.
3. Despite the **opportunities to be generous** presented by Christmas, Scrooge remains mean and unpleasant.
4. Marley's Ghost and his punishment introduce the themes of **responsibility** towards others, **greed and avarice** and a person's **ability to change**.
5. Dickens wants to keep to the style of the ghost story **genre**, so he is concerned that we believe in the existence of the ghosts in the story.



What happens when we first meet Scrooge?

- The Stave begins with a description of Marley's cheaply arranged funeral, at which Scrooge made an **'undoubted bargain'**.
- At his office, Scrooge is described as **'tight-fisted'** and **'hard and sharp as flint'** with a **'grating'** voice and a **'cold'** manner.
- Scrooge refuses to spend Christmas with his nephew Fred, threatens to sack his employee Bob Cratchit, will not donate money to the charity collectors, saying the poor can live in **'prisons'** and frightens a carol singer.

What happens when Marley's Ghost appears?

- As Scrooge arrives home, Marley's Ghost appears as a face in the doorknocker, and then makes Scrooge's bells ring before he enters the room.
- Marley explains that the chains he drags behind him were **'forged in life'** and that Scrooge has an even longer chain, reflecting Scrooge's longer life of avarice and miserliness.
- Marley warns Scrooge that he has a chance to change and that **'Three Spirits'** will visit him in order to help him avoid this punishment.

Five key quotations

1. Scrooge separates himself from everyone around him, preferring **'to edge his way along the crowded paths of life'**.
2. Scrooge hates Christmas: **'a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer'**.
3. Fred appreciates Christmas as: a time, **'when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely'**.
4. Marley's Ghost on responsibility: **'Mankind was my business'**.
5. The regret of the London ghosts: **'they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters and had lost the power for ever'**.

Note it!

Although Stave One introduces many serious issues, such as poverty and greed, there are typically Dickensian moments of humour, such as the reflection on the meaning behind the **phrase**, **'dead as a door-nail'**. Dickens's use of humour ensures the reader is always engaged.

Exam focus

How can I write about language? AO2

You can use Stave One to write about the use of language in *A Christmas Carol*.

Dickens's use of language is shown by the way that he describes Scrooge. His description of Scrooge as preferring to, 'edge his way along the crowded paths of life' is both **literal and metaphorical**. The verb 'edge' implies deliberate movement, keeping far away from anyone. Scrooge is also metaphorically distanced as he appears to have no empathy for other people, preferring to distance himself from all around him.

Topic sentence

Uses language terminology

Explains significance of quotation

Makes wider links

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about attitudes towards Christmas in Stave One. Use one of the quotations from the list.

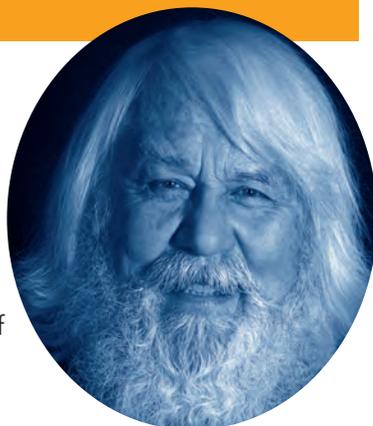
Fred and Scrooge have very different attitudes towards Christmas. Fred's attitude is positive

PLOT AND STRUCTURE **Stave Two**

Five key things about Stave Two

This Stave introduces us to the first Ghost and shows us Scrooge's childhood:

1. We meet the **Ghost of Christmas Past** who appears to flicker and change shape, looking like both **a child** and **an old man**.
2. **Scrooge's journey** in understanding who he is and why he needs to **change begins**. This means making Scrooge **confront** all aspects of his life.
3. The Spirit shows Scrooge his **school**, and his **sister, Fan**.
4. Scrooge is shown **Fezziwig**, his friendly first **employer**. Scrooge also sees **Belle**, his first love.
5. The **ghost story genre** is further developed as the reader is taken on a **supernatural journey** in time and place.



What happens when the first Ghost appears?

- The Stave begins in Scrooge's bedroom as the clock strikes one o'clock and Scrooge comes **'face to face'** with the **'unearthly visitor'**.
- The Ghost of Christmas Past appears as a changing human shape often with **'no outline visible'**. Scrooge asks for its light to be **'covered'** in his fear.
- The Ghost tells Scrooge he is there for Scrooge's **'welfare'** and takes Scrooge back in time to his school days. Scrooge sees himself as a lonely school boy.

What else does the Ghost show Scrooge?

- The Ghost shows Scrooge his sister, Fan, who we learn was a **'delicate creature'** and died after giving birth to Scrooge's nephew, Fred.
- Scrooge sees himself as a happy young man working for Fezziwig. Scrooge also sees his former sweetheart, Belle, who tells him he is too obsessed with money. Belle breaks off their relationship.
- The Ghost returns Scrooge to his bed. Shocked and **'exhausted'**, Scrooge falls fast asleep.

Five key quotations

1. The Ghost of Christmas Past is angry when Scrooge wants it to go away: **'would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give?'**
2. The **theme** of the supernatural: **'The city had entirely vanished.'**
3. Scrooge feels emotions that he cannot understand: **'Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they went past?'**
4. The theme of being responsible for others: **'The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.'** (Scrooge about Fezziwig).
5. Scrooge's greed: **'the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you'** (Belle).

Note it!

The Ghost's changing shape makes it look both old and young as it represents all the different people in Scrooge's life and the need for him to change. Its shining light reveals the truth to Scrooge about himself.

Exam focus

How can I write about themes? AO1

You can use Stave Two to write about the theme of responsibility in *A Christmas Carol*.

The theme of responsibility is shown by Fezziwig's treatment of his staff. This causes Scrooge to exclaim, 'The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune!' Here Scrooge learns that money is not the only key to helping others, and this theme is developed throughout the novel in Scrooge's evolving treatment of his own employee, Bob Cratchit.

Topic sentence makes overall point

Key quotation for theme

Explains significance of quotation

Makes links across the novel

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the presentation of Scrooge in Stave Two. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Dickens continues to develop the presentation of character in Stave Two. An important aspect of character is revealed when

PLOT AND STRUCTURE **Stave Three**

Five key things about Stave Three

This Stave introduces the second Ghost and shows us a variety of Christmas scenes:

1. We meet the **Ghost of Christmas Present** – the second of the Three Spirits who are due to visit Scrooge.
2. This Ghost's role is to make Scrooge understand the **importance of Christmas** for both rich and poor, people near and far, family and strangers.
3. The '**gigantic**' Ghost represents **all the wealth and generosity** that can be found at Christmas, but he is also there to remind Scrooge that it is equally important to be kind to each other.
4. The visit to the Cratchit house shows Scrooge beginning to feel **empathy** for the family's struggles.
5. The Stave ends with the terrifying Children '**Ignorance and Want**' who remind Scrooge, and the reader, of the book's **moral message**. The children **symbolise** Dickens's passionate belief in educating and helping the poor.



What happens when the Ghost visits Scrooge?

- The Ghost of Christmas Present arrives surrounded by Christmas food. The Ghost shows Scrooge 'jovial' shoppers and 'delicious' Christmas treats.
- Scrooge watches how the Cratchits enjoy Christmas. The Ghost warns Scrooge that Tiny Tim may die if the family are not helped.
- The Ghost takes Scrooge to a coal miner's home, a ship and even a lighthouse, to remind Scrooge that the Christmas spirit can exist anywhere.

What happens at the end of Stave Three?

- Scrooge and the Ghost visit Fred's house where they are celebrating Christmas.
- Scrooge hears Fred's wife say, '**I have no patience with him**', as they discuss Scrooge's mean behaviour.
- The Stave ends with the shocking image of the withered and monstrous children '**Ignorance and Want**' who represent the dangers of poverty.

Five key quotations

1. The Victorian Christmas: 'Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry ...'
2. The Cratchits enjoy their Christmas, despite their poverty: 'Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked.'
3. The **theme** of empathy: 'Oh no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared!' (Scrooge about Tiny Tim).
4. The feelings of the Cratchit family about Scrooge: 'Scrooge was the Ogre of the family.'
5. Ignorance and Want: 'wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable'.

Note it!

Dickens uses language techniques to describe the Victorian Christmas, such as the **personification** of Spanish Onions as 'winking from their shelves' and chestnuts 'like the waistcoats of jolly old gentleman', and active **verbs** 'clashing', 'tumbled' and 'jostled' to convey excitement.

Exam focus

How can I write about character? **AO1** **AO2**

You can use Stave Three to explore the characters of the Cratchit family.

Dickens presents the importance of being kind at Christmas. The Cratchit family's appreciation of their meagre dinner, 'Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked', represents that belief. This is juxtaposed with Mrs Cratchit's description of Scrooge as 'stingy'. The pitiful Tiny Tim forces Scrooge to be reminded of his own past cruelty and Scrooge's belief that if the poor died it would decrease the surplus population.

Topic sentence makes overall point

Quotation supports opening sentence

Describes a language technique

Makes wider links across the novel

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the presentation of poverty in Stave Three. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Another function of Stave Three is to explore the effects of poverty. Dickens presents the children 'Ignorance and Want' that live.....

PLOT AND STRUCTURE **Stave Four**

Five key things about Stave Four

In this Stave we meet the **Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come** and Scrooge sees his possible future:

1. This is the **most frightening** of all the Ghosts. Scrooge bends **'down upon his knee'** in fear of the Ghost and **pays close attention** to what he is shown.
2. Scrooge learns the **effect of living a greedy and unkind life** as he sees that people who knew him either do not care that he has died or are actually happy.
3. **The death of Tiny Tim**, in contrast, shows a family who are devastated by their grief and sadness and is a **powerful moment** in the **novel**.
4. Scrooge is shown his own grave which is the **climax** of the Ghosts' visits.
5. The Stave ends with **Scrooge's final chance to change** and gain future happiness.



What does the Ghost first show Scrooge?

- The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come appears. It does not speak to Scrooge. The Ghost shows him a number of different people talking about a man who has died.
- These include business people who knew the man, thieves who stole from him and a young couple who owed the man rent. None of them cares that the man has died.
- Scrooge refuses to look at the face of the dead man.

What does the Ghost finally show Scrooge?

- Scrooge watches the Cratchits mourning the death of Tiny Tim.
- The Ghost also shows Scrooge his office with someone he does not recognise working there.
- The Ghost takes Scrooge to a graveyard and shows him a gravestone that has Scrooge's name on it. The Ghost confirms that it was Scrooge the people were talking about earlier in the Stave. Begging for a second chance, Scrooge agrees to change and become a better person.

Five key quotations

1. People joke about Scrooge's death: **'It's likely to be a very cheap funeral.'**
2. The **theme** of poverty and its link to crime: **'the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, with misery'.**
3. Scrooge's isolation: **'He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead!'**
4. Strong family ties and emotions: **""My little, little child!" cried Bob. "My little child!""**
5. Change: **'Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!'**

Note it!

The Ghosts grow increasingly more frightening and more powerful as the story progresses. The first **symbolises** childhood and growth, the second **personifies** the spirit of Christmas, but the last Ghost is clearly symbolic of Death itself. It is therefore unsurprising that this silent Ghost wears a **'deep black garment'**.

Exam focus

How can I write about form? AO2

You can use Stave Four to write about the **form** of *A Christmas Carol* both as a ghost story and a morality tale.

As Scrooge looks to the Ghost to 'assure' him that he can change this terrifying future, the **verb 'assure'** reflects Scrooge's desperation to show **he has understood the Ghost's moral lesson of kindness and generosity**. The noun 'shadows' **signifies the future events that Scrooge has been shown** by the supernatural forces, and is typical of the vocabulary of a book written in the form of a ghost story, **alongside words such as 'Phantom', 'Spirit' and 'Spectre'**.

Uses language terminology

Topic defined as explanation of moral message

Explains significance of quotation

Makes wider links to other key vocabulary

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the presentation of emotion. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Stave Four presents different characters' thoughts and feelings about each other. An important aspect of strong emotion is explored when

PLOT AND STRUCTURE **Stave Five**

Five key things about Stave Five

In this Stave we see how Scrooge has finally changed:

1. This Stave **contrasts** with the rest of the **novel** in many ways. It is **funny** and full of sunlight and **happiness**, whereas so far the **mood** has been full of fear and misery.
2. Dickens was a **comic writer** and this Stave contains many **funny images** such as Scrooge struggling to put on his stockings.
3. Scrooge's **first acts of kindness** are anonymous. Scrooge realises **generosity** should not require thanks or praise.
4. Scrooge is now **realistic** about people's attitudes towards him. He admits to the charity collector that the name 'Scrooge' may not '**be pleasant**' to him. Scrooge also understands that some '**people laughed to see the alteration in him**' but accepts this.
5. Tiny Tim's line '**God bless Us, Every One!**' reminds us of the novel's **Christian message** and that Dickens's London was a Christian society.



What happens on Christmas Day?

- Scrooge wakes up on a sunny Christmas Day and is full of life and laughter. Scrooge knows this is his chance to put everything right.
- Scrooge sends a huge '**prize Turkey**' to the Cratchits and arranges to donate a large amount of money to charity, including '**many back-payments**'.
- Scrooge visits Fred. Scrooge's Christmas Day with his family is filled with '**won-der-ful happiness!**'

What happens after Christmas Day?

- On Boxing Day, Scrooge pretends to tell Bob Cratchit off for arriving late at the office. Scrooge quickly reveals he is joking.
- Scrooge increases Bob's pay and makes the office a much nicer place, crying '**Make up the fires**'.
- We learn that Scrooge becomes a '**second father**' to Tiny Tim and a good friend to people across the city.

Five key quotations

1. Brightness on Christmas Day: **'No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold'**.
2. Scrooge's newfound friendliness: he **'patted children on the head, and questioned beggars'**.
3. Scrooge is welcomed back to the family: **'He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier.'**
4. Scrooge's love for Tiny Tim: **'to tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father.'**
5. The significance of Christmas to the reformed Scrooge: **'he knew how to keep Christmas well'**.

Note it!

Dickens is a humorous writer although we may not always find his writing funny today. Try to recognise and understand his jokes. For example, in Stave Five, Dickens creates humour from Scrooge **'frisking'** the saucepan around and Scrooge greeting the Christmas turkey: **'Here's the Turkey. Hallo! Whoop!'**

Exam focus

How can I write about structure? AO2

You can use Stave Five to write about the structure of *A Christmas Carol*, as it is the end of the story.

Stave Five provides a **resolution to the novel and inverts (or turns upside down)** Scrooge's behaviour. Dickens portrays Scrooge putting right his earlier **wrongs by donating money to charity and even patting the doorknocker that once terrified him.** Scrooge interacts with people on the street, **'patted children on the head, and questioned beggars'** in contrast with the **Scrooge in Stave One** who avoids crowds at all costs.

Uses sophisticated vocabulary

Provides evidence for opening topic sentence

Gives relevant quotation

Links to the start of novel

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the setting in Stave Five. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Dickens deliberately changes the weather in Stave Five to reflect the change in Scrooge. The wintry weather is now described as

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Form and structure

Five key things about Dickens's use of form and structure

1. *A Christmas Carol* is written as a **novella** or short novel.
2. It is **divided** into five chapters, or 'Staves'.
3. The structure involves many **changes in time and place**.
4. The novella is written in the **form** of a **ghost story**, but it is also a **comedy and a morality tale**.
5. The novella has a **narrator** who sometimes comments on the action and characters.

What is the form of *A Christmas Carol*?

- The ghost story form allows Dickens to make the story both frightening but also to use the supernatural to travel in time and place.
- The form of a short novel means that the story could be read aloud and shared easily.
- The story is also in the **genre** of a morality tale. Such tales help readers to think about their own lives and how they could change for the better, like Scrooge.
- Dickens employs the form of social commentary, using the story's narrator to criticise Victorian society and its attitudes towards the poor.



How does Dickens structure *A Christmas Carol*?

- Dickens divides the novella into five 'Staves' which reminds the reader of lines of music, like a 'carol' to be shared at Christmas.
- The narrator gives us extra information about the characters and situations, such as the weather, to add realism to the story.
- Each Ghost contributes to a new stage in the **plot** and builds tension for the reader.
- The **climax** of the plot comes when Scrooge sees his own gravestone. This is Scrooge's **epiphany**, which is a moment of his life when he comes to a new understanding of the world.
- The **resolution** of the plot is Scrooge's change in character.

Five key quotations

1. Narrative **voice**: 'Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years.'
2. Changes in place and time: 'The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self'.
3. The traditional structure of a morality tale: 'Once upon a time'
4. Developing action through the Ghosts' visits: "'You will be haunted,'" resumed the Ghost, "by Three Spirits."
5. The plot's resolution: 'I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year.'

Note it!

Dickens wrote a **preface** to the novella that says he hopes it raises a '**Ghost of an Idea**' in the reader. This pun on the word 'Ghost' makes it clear that he wanted the story to make people think about their own behaviour.

Exam focus

How can I write about Dickens's use of form and structure? AO2

You can discuss the **genre** of *A Christmas Carol*.

Dickens uses the form of a ghost story to develop ideas and to provide a clear structure. Marley's ghost personifies the consequences of greed and furthermore begins the action, when he tells Scrooge 'You will be haunted ... by Three Spirits'. This initiates the structure of the three visits which grow increasingly serious and frightening, ending in the climactic moment when Scrooge sees his own grave.

Topic sentence about structure

Quotation providing evidence

Describes effect of structure

Use of key term

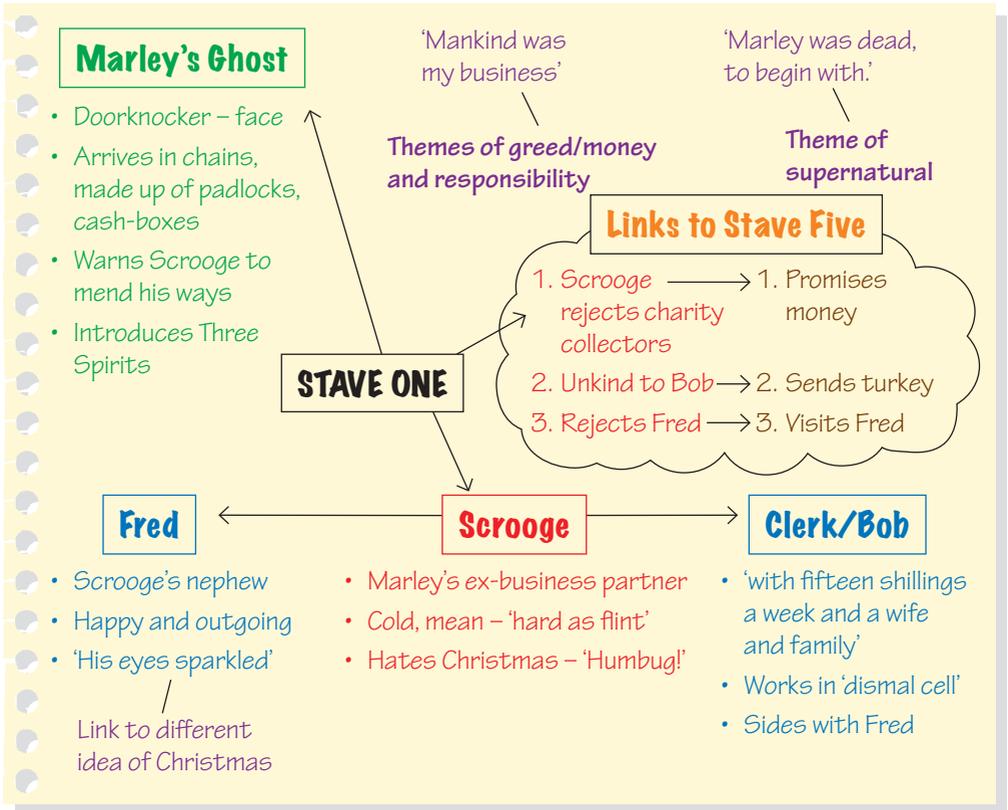
Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the narrative voice. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Dickens uses a clear narrative voice to imply that the story is being read out loud to us. The narrative voice sometimes makes first-person comments, such as

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Quick revision

1. Look at this ideas map representing Stave One. Is there anything else you could add?



2. Create your own ideas map for one of the other Staves.

Quick quiz

Answer these quick questions about Plot and structure:

1. Who was dead 'to begin with'?
2. Which relative comes to visit Scrooge, and for what reason?
3. Why does Scrooge refuse to give money to the charity collectors?
4. What weighs Marley down when he appears?
5. In Stave Two, where does the Spirit of Christmas Past first take Scrooge?

6. What has happened to Scrooge's sister, Fan, since she gave birth to Fred?
7. Why is Fezziwig throwing a party?
8. Why does Belle break off her engagement to Scrooge?
9. In Stave Three, what is the Ghost of Christmas Present surrounded by when it appears?
10. Where do poor families have their Christmas meal cooked?
11. How many rooms does Bob Cratchit's house have?
12. Who are Peter, Belinda and Martha?
13. Who are the two children at the feet of the Ghost?
14. In Stave Four, what colour is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come's hood?
15. Who is 'Old Scratch'?
16. How many people have stolen from Scrooge after he has died?
17. Who helps the family after the death of Tiny Tim?
18. What has changed about Scrooge's office?
19. In Stave Five, what can Scrooge hear outside when he wakes up?
20. Does Scrooge ever see any ghosts again after that Christmas Day?

Power paragraphs

Write **a paragraph in response to each of these questions**. For each, try to **use one quotation** you have learned from this section.

1. In what ways does Dickens contrast Fred and Scrooge in Stave One?
2. Why does Dickens choose to include the scene with Scrooge as a young schoolboy?

Exam practice

Reread the end of Stave Four where the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come shows Scrooge his gravestone.

Why is this moment significant in the text as a whole? Write **two paragraphs** explaining your ideas. You could comment on:

- Scrooge's lack of understanding until this point
- the promise that he makes once he realises who is in the grave.

SETTING AND CONTEXT Victorian society

Five key things about Victorian life and society

1. **Queen Victoria** reigned from 1837 to 1901. A *Christmas Carol* was published in **1843**.
2. There was **rapid industrialisation** which meant growth in cities, creating opportunity but also overcrowding, poverty and hardship.
3. Hospitals were privately funded so ill people **had to pay** for their treatment. This meant poor people **suffered** the most.
4. **Schools were developing** in Victorian times but often children from poor families had to work instead of attending.
5. Dickens was one of the many **influential Victorians** who saw that social conditions were **unfair** and led to poverty and crime. He tried hard to change this.

What was Victorian London like?

- Victorian London was growing quickly in size and population.
- It had huge numbers of people living in poor conditions.
- Some parts of the city were very dangerous due to crime and poor sanitation.
- There were also areas of great wealth.



What was the Industrial Revolution?

- The Industrial Revolution began in the 18th century.
- This was a time when machines were invented to do the work of many people.
- Britain became a global centre of industry.
- Thousands of people flocked from the countryside to the cities to work in new factories.
- Factory workers were often poor, even though factories created huge wealth.

How were the poor treated?

- The Poor Law of 1834 sent unemployed people to harsh workhouses to discourage 'laziness'.
- Workhouses were huge prison-style buildings where families were separated.
- The poorest did piecework, such as making matches, or casual labour such as street sweeping.

Three key quotations

1. Commenting on the provision for the poor: '**The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?**' (Scrooge).
2. Describing part of London: '**The ways were foul and narrow ... the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly.**'
3. Poor living conditions: '**a wretched woman with an infant ... upon a door-step.**'

Note it!

Although Dickens was a rich and successful writer, he grew up in a family that suffered periods of poverty. Dickens had a horror of poverty and a firm belief in the importance of education. This explains why Dickens made the 'ragged' child figures of Ignorance and Want so terrifying.

Exam focus

How do I link Victorian society to the novel? AO3

You can link to how Dickens presents support of the poor.

Dickens suggests that state support for the poor and uneducated is inadequate, and that personal kindness and commitment are needed. At the start of the novel, Scrooge asks the charity workers whether the 'Poor Law' is in operation, implying that's where his responsibility ends – even if workhouses are no better than prisons. It takes him until the end of the novel to understand that 'mankind' is his business, and he cannot turn his back on it.

Topic sentence introducing key theme

Gives historical context

Links across novel

Embedded quotation

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the presentation of the poor in the novel. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Conditions faced by the Victorian urban poor are explored by Dickens through the descriptions of London in the novel. For example, we see

SETTING AND CONTEXT Christmas and morality

Five key things about Christmas and morality

1. Many of our **ideas about Christmas** were popularised by Dickens and other Victorian writers.
2. Victorian Britain was **mainly Christian** and many people attended church.
3. Christmas was not as **widely celebrated** as today and many people worked on the day.
4. Many Victorians believed looking after the poor was a **moral duty**.
5. Some viewed poor people as 'immoral' if they turned to **crime**.

How did Dickens shape ideas about Christmas?

- Dickens popularised many of our Christmas traditions, such as the Christmas turkey.
- The Ghost of Christmas Present is surrounded by **'holly, mistletoe, and ivy'**.
- Dickens describes the idea of the Christmas spirit.
- Fezziwig's yard is an example of workplaces celebrating Christmas.
- Fred's family play **'wonderful games'** to celebrate the holiday.



What ideas about morality does Dickens present?

- Dickens believes that taking responsibility for each other is essential.
- Marley's punishment is to see others in need and not be able to help them.
- Scrooge's biggest fault is not caring about other people.
- The Cratchits demonstrate that family is more important than wealth.
- Fred shows that moral behaviour comes from kindness, not just giving money.

How important was Christianity in people's lives?

- In the mid nineteenth century, many people attended a church service regularly.
- However, the rise of scientific ideas meant many people questioned the Bible.
- Christianity was still the official religion of Britain.

Three key quotations

1. Fred's view of Christmas: 'a good time ... when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely'.
2. Marley's Ghost's view of morality: 'charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business'.
3. Christianity: workhouses 'scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude'.

Note it!

There are references to the Bible throughout the story. Tiny Tim says he hopes people will be reminded of Jesus, who made 'lame beggars walk', when they see his crutch, and Marley says he wishes that he had looked to the 'blessed star which led the Wise Men' to the stable.

Exam focus

How can I write about Christmas and morality? AO3

You can use the **themes** of Christmas and morality to explore characters and events.

Dickens uses Marley's Ghost to explain to Scrooge the consequence of not living by Christian morals and putting money and business before people. Marley is literally weighed down by the chains that attach him to his money boxes and he is tortured by seeing poverty that he is now unable to help. Marley wishes he had made 'charity, mercy ... and benevolence' his 'business' and through this list Dickens conveys Marley's anguish and regret.

Topic sentence

Relevant detail

Embedded quotation

Identification of language feature

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the presentation of Christmas in the **novel**. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Dickens presents Fred as a character who embodies the spirit of Christmas when he explains to Scrooge the importance of

SETTING AND CONTEXT Settings

Five key things about settings in the novel

1. The **novel begins and ends in London**: in and around Scrooge's house and office.
2. Dickens was inspired by **real places** in London.
3. The Ghosts take us to **different settings** such as the miner's house and the lighthouse.
4. The **supernatural element** means the novel is set in the past, present and future.
5. We see some settings **change over time**, such as the decline in Scrooge's school.



How do Scrooge's house and office reflect his character?

- The office is cold and **'dismal'**, reflecting Scrooge's **'hard and sharp'** character.
- Scrooge's house is also dark and cold, with a **'low fire'**, conveying Scrooge's **'own low temperature'**.

What does Scrooge's school reveal about his childhood?

- Scrooge is a **'solitary'** child at the school, which foregrounds his adult life.
- The **'chilly bareness'** of the school suggests Scrooge's childhood was lonely and unhappy.
- The school is neglected and becomes **'darker and more dirty'** as Scrooge grows older.

In what ways are Christmas scenes important to the novel?

- London on Christmas Eve is a place **'full of glee'** that contrasts with Scrooge's feelings of resentment at missing a day's work, illustrated by his exclamation, **'Humbug'**. These scenes set out very clearly how Scrooge has cut himself off from the rest of society.
- In these scenes the Ghost shows Scrooge how Christmas is celebrated in even the harshest circumstances, such as on a ship at sea. Watching Fred's family play Christmas games makes even Scrooge feel **'gay and light of heart'**.

What do Old Joe's den and descriptions of the City reveal?

- Scrooge is taken to the financial heart of the city called the 'Change (short for Exchange), where he sees business people joking about him. Dickens reveals their unkindness and their unpleasant displays of wealth as they '**chink**' their money and show off their '**great gold seals**'.
- Old Joe's den is a place where thieves sell stolen goods. It's cramped and filthy, filled with '**unseemly rags**' and '**masses of corrupted fat**' (used to make soap, for example), reflecting the depths that poor people are forced to go to make money.

Quick quiz

Answer these quick questions about Settings and context:

1. Who were workhouses intended for?
2. Why did poor children often not go to school?
3. Why did the Industrial Revolution make people go to the cities?
4. Name an example of a workplace that celebrates Christmas in the story.
5. What was the main religion in Victorian Britain?
6. What was the temperature of Scrooge's office?
7. What could people do at Old Joe's den?
8. What does Scrooge say 'Humbug' to?
9. Who 'chinks' their money to show off their wealth?
10. Who wishes they had looked to the 'blessed star' that led the Wise Men to Jesus?

Power paragraphs

Choose one key setting or context related to the novel.

Write **two paragraphs** explaining how Dickens makes use of this setting or context in relation to either theme or character.