



KS4 English Literature – A Christmas Carol



Key Knowledge

Key Terminology

Characters/Symbols

1. The character Ebenezer Scrooge is miserly, crass and insensitive. At the end, he is warm-hearted, altruistic and redeemed.
2. The character Jacob Marley is terrifying, haunting and reformed.
3. The character Fred is warm-hearted, benevolent and empathetic.
4. The character Bob Cratchit is tolerant, deferential and loving.
5. The Cratchit family are vulnerable, hardworking and moral.
6. The character Fezziwig is jovial, generous and sociable.
7. The character Ghost of Christmas Past is contradictory, mysterious and gentle.
8. The character Ghost of Christmas Present is cheerful, generous and compassionate.
9. The character Ghost of Christmas Yet to come is ominous, intimidating and prophetic.

Themes

Greed and Selfishness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characters such as Scrooge represent the selfish middle classes, who sought to amass, rather than share their wealth. • Jacob Marley demonstrates the burden that such a selfish life will inevitably bring. • Through these characters and the events of the novel, Dickens criticises how wealth had become associated with the root of happiness, at the expense of close relationships and goodwill.
Social Injustice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dickens felt very strongly that Victorian society ignored the impoverished underclass. At the exposition of the novella, Scrooge's refusal to help others through charity reflects the selfishness of the richer parts of Victorian society and the injustice of wealth distribution. • Scrooge learns that he can share some of his wealth to make other people's lives more comfortable. • The Cratchits show how you can be poor but happy. • Ignorance and Want remind Scrooge that turning a blind eye to the plight of the poor creates desperate people who turn to crime to support themselves.
Redemption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrooge is transformed from a miserly misanthropist to a joyful philanthropist who is kinder to others. • At the exposition of the novella, Scrooge rejects any compassion and celebration linked to the festive season but is ashamed when the Ghost of Christmas Present uses his own words against him to reflect his unacceptable behaviour. He transforms into a generous and happy character who is full of life and is welcomed into the lives of others.
Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrooge is cold, lonely and miserable at the start of the book. The spirits show him scenes that prompt his transformation. • Empathy helps him to understand those less fortunate than himself. • Memory reminds Scrooge of how he was once connected to other people. • Being shown the reaction to the death frightens Scrooge into changing his personality to change his destiny.
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrooge is miserable and lonely because he refuses to socialise with his family. • The closeness of the Cratchit family demonstrates how being together and supporting each other is more important to them than anything else. • Seeing Belle reminds Scrooge that he is lonely in his old age due to his own actions. He chose money over a family with Belle.

Context

Charles Dickens – At 12, his father was sent to debtors' prison for racking up huge debts, and Charles was given a painful job labelling bottles near the prison. He found this period in his life hellish, and it doubtlessly led him to draw readers' attention to the plight of the poor when he later found success as an author. Many of his works are about social hardships and inequalities.

The Victorian Era – Whilst this era was a time of industrial revolution, it was also an extremely harsh time to live, and the differences between the lives of the richest and the poorest were exacerbated.

Workhouses – The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 allowed the poor to receive public assistance only if they went to the workhouse. Men, women and children (mostly orphans) lived and worked in the workhouses, which were very crowded – making living conditions unhealthy and unpleasant. People slept in dormitories, where disease was easily spread.

Christmas – Before the Victorian era, there was no Santa Claus, Christmas cards and no holidays from work! Christmas Day was a far more low-key affair. Writers such as Dickens encouraged middle-class families to share their wealth and act selflessly.

Key Vocabulary

Allegory	A story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.
Avaricious	Having or shown an extreme greed for wealth or material gain.
Benevolence	The quality of being well meaning; kindness.
Bildungsroman	A novel dealing with one person's formative years or spiritual education.
Misanthropic	A person who dislikes other people.
Morality	Awareness of the principles of right and wrong conduct.
Ostracised	Cut off from society.
Penitence	The action of feeling or showing sorrow and regret for having done wrong.
Philanthropy	An act of helping those less well off than yourself, especially involving donations of money.
Political Diatribe	An angry piece of writing that severely criticizes something or someone.
Zeitgeist	The defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time.

Language Devices

Allusion	A figure of speech in which something is referred to covertly or indirectly
Antithesis	A person or thing that is the direct opposite of someone or something else
Characteronym	A name of a fictional character that suggests a distinctive trait of that character.
Figurative Language	Use of metaphor, simile, personification etc
Asyndetic listing	A list which omits conjunctions between words.
Pathetic Fallacy	When human emotions are projected onto nature, especially weather, often to create a mood.
Sibilance	Repetition of 's' sounds
Symbolism	A literary device that uses symbols (words, people, marks, locations, or abstract ideas) to represent something beyond the literal meaning.
Third Person Limited Omniscient Narrator	A narrator who relates only their own thoughts, feelings, and knowledge about various situations and the other characters.