



# KS4 English literature: A Christmas Carol - Core Knowledge



## Family

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.



## Greed and selfishness:

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.



## Themes

## Social Injustice

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## Transformation

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.



## Redemption

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.



Dickens originally planned to write a pamphlet which he intended to call 'An Appeal to the People of England on behalf of the Poor Man's Child'. However, within a week he decided he wanted to embody his arguments in a story that would be a 'sledge hammer blow'. A Christmas Carol was written.

## Characters

1. The character Ebenezer Scrooge is miserly, misanthropic and callous. At the end, he is warm-hearted, altruistic and redeemed.
2. The character Jacob Marley is terrifying, haunting and repentant.
3. The character Fred is warm-hearted, benevolent and idealistic.
4. The character Bob Cratchit is tolerant, dutiful and loving.
5. The Cratchit family are vulnerable, hardworking and resilient.
6. The character Fezziwig is jovial, magnanimous and charismatic.
7. The character Ghost of Christmas Past is ambiguous, ethereal and gentle.
8. The character Ghost of Christmas Present is ebullient, generous and compassionate.
9. The character Ghost of Christmas Yet to come is ominous, intimidating and prophetic.

## 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.



## Top 10 Key Quotations

1. **Scrooge:** "If they would rather die...they had better do it and decrease the surplus population." (Stave 1)
2. **Fred:** 'Christmas time... as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.' (Stave 1)
3. **Marley's ghost:** 'I wear the chain I forged in life.' (Stave 1)
4. **Ghost of Christmas Past:** 'From the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light.' (Stave 2)
5. **Scrooge about Fezziwig:** 'The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it costs a fortune' (Stave 2)
6. **Belle to Scrooge:** 'Another idol has displaced me ... A golden one'
7. **Ghost of Christmas Present:** 'Sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch.' (Stave 2)
8. **Ignorance and Want:** 'This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom.' (Stave 3)
9. **Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come:** 'A solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground towards him.' (Stave 4)
10. **Scrooge:** 'I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man.' (Stave 5)



# RS4 English literature: A Christmas Carol - Writing a Response



## Sophisticated Vocabulary

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

## Language Devices

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

## Killer Openings

### When answering a character-based question:

- **What** impression are we given of the character? (Think: VOCAB)
- **How** does Dickens explore this character through the novella? (Think: EVIDENCE)
- **Why** does Dickens include the character in the novella? (Think: INTENT & CONTEXT)

### When answering a theme-based question:

- **What** is Dickens trying to say about the theme? (Think: MESSAGE)
- **How** does he explore the theme through the play? (Think: CHARACTERS & EVIDENCE)
- **Why** focus on this theme? (Think: INTENT & CONTEXT)

## WAGOLL - Scrooge

In A Christmas Carol, Dickens initially presents Scrooge as misanthropic, miserly, and morally bankrupt, representing the damaging effects of greed and social indifference. As the novella progresses, the visits from the three spirits confront him with the consequences of his actions, prompting real emotional and moral change. By the end, Scrooge is portrayed as warm-hearted, altruistic, and redeemed, embracing generosity and human connection. Dickens uses Scrooge to critique the selfishness of the Victorian upper classes and to promote the importance of compassion, charity, and social responsibility. Through Scrooge's transformation, Dickens argues that personal change is both necessary and possible, and that individuals must play a role in addressing social inequality.

## Motifs/Symbols



## Writing structure - What/How/Why

### What — What impression does Dickens create?

- address the question by making a clear, concise point about what Dickens is doing

### How 1 — How do you know this? (quotation)

- make sure that you select a quotation that you can analyse in detail and embed it into your sentence fully. Crop the quotation as needed.

### How 2 — How can you explore this quotation?

- explain what the quotation means/implies
- zoom in on a particular word/phrase/technique – say a lot about a little

### Why — Why does the writer give us this impression?

- focus on Dickens' intention when crafting the text and relate this to the context and/or comment on the effect on the reader

## WAGOLL - struggles of the poor

One member of the Cratchit family who strongly highlights the struggles of the poor is Tiny Tim. In this extract, his hand is described as a 'withered little hand,' suggesting it has prematurely withered like a flower with no light. As the word 'withered' has connotations of a flower, this could perhaps be seen as a metaphor for how something beautiful has been hindered and killed by the tight-fistedness of the rich in society, which is something that Dickens was strongly trying to convey in this novella. Light is often a symbol of hope, so this flower could be shrivelled due to a lack of light, which is the lack of generosity from the upper classes. Dickens may have intended 'withered little' as a juxtaposition, as we would normally associate 'withered' with old age and 'little' with childhood. This contrast highlights how wrong it is that an innocent child should be so shunned by society due to his wealth and status, and this demonstrates Dickens' frustration over the inequality.