

'A Christmas Carol' Key Information Sheets



1. Context (AO3)

- Dickens criticises the **social injustice** and **inequalities** of Victorian England.
- Dickens wanted richer members of society to recognise their **social responsibility**.
- Dickens presents **Christmas** as a festival of celebration; perfect as a vehicle for promoting kindness and the importance of families/friends
- The Victorians were beginning to recognise the importance of **education** for all.
- Dickens criticises the **Malthusian** idea of the poor being surplus to society.
- Dickens warns the readers of the risks of Capitalism on the more vulnerable in society.

2. Themes (AO1 and AO3)



- Dickens uses the **supernatural** as **catalysts** for **redemption**: the Ghosts reveal the potential for change in Scrooge and Victorian Capitalist society.
- Dickens promotes the values of **redemption** and **forgiveness**.
- **Social reform**: The impact of **poverty** and **social injustice** is explored through the Cratchit family, in particular Tiny Tim, and also Belle's reaction to Scrooge's fear of poverty.
- The spirit of **Christmas** and the impact of **nostalgia**, family bonds and **agape** is explored through the different depictions of Christmas scenes past, present and future.
- Dickens presents the idea of **redemption** as critical for society: **Scrooge's redemption arc** forms the main plot device of the novella.

3. Key events (AO1)

- Stave 1: Scrooge presented as miserly. Fred's greetings are rejected and the charity collectors sent away. Jacob Marley's ghost warns him of his fate if he doesn't change and sets up the idea of the three ghosts visiting him to teach him a lesson.
- Stave 2: Ghost of Christmas Past. We see a few years of Scrooge as a miserable schoolboy, eventually rescued by his sister. Fezziwig's ball shows us Scrooge as a happy apprentice. Belle breaking off the engagement concludes his lesson about money taking him over.
- Stave 3: Ghost of Christmas Present – he shows him the possibilities of a happy gathering regardless of wealth. We see the Cratchits, some miners, lighthouse keepers, people on a ship and also Fred's party.
- Stave 4: Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come – this is the predicted future for Scrooge. Tiny Tim has died in this alternate reality and Scrooge has died a lonely and unmissed man.
- Stave 5: Redemption – Scrooge reveals his capacity for change.

4. Literary features (AO2)

- The novella is structure with **five staves**: these are split into the four ghosts and the resolution
- The novella has a **cyclical structure**: it begins and ends with Scrooge, but with direct contrasts of character, weather.
- The novella is presented as a **ghost story** – the ghosts structure the novella with their moral lessons.
- **Lists** are often used to create the atmosphere of merry chaos.
- The **motifs** of light and darkness and heat and cold are used to emphasize the characters' personalities and reflect key themes.
- **Pathetic fallacy** is used to mirror Scrooge's character changes: it is cold and foggy at the start to represent Scrooge's unfeeling nature and myopic idea of poverty in society.



5. Prepared introduction to adapt for the exam question:

Dickens presents **[key focus]** to demonstrate the importance of a kinder and more charitable society. Inequality in Victorian London is shown by Scrooge whose avarice is contrasted against the plight of the poor presented by the tragic situation of characters such as Tiny Tim. Dickens' intentions were to use the novella as an allegory to demonstrate the potential for progress shown by Scrooge's redemption arc from a "covetous, old sinner" to becoming "quite a baby" at the end symbolising his – and Victorian London's – rebirth.

6. Key Vocabulary:


Agape: (noun)	Unconditional love, charity. Christians believe this is the highest form of love and is the type of love Jesus has for humans.
Austere: (adjective)	Very severe and unfriendly.
Avarice: (noun)	<i>extreme greed for wealth and the desire to hoard it</i>
Benevolence: (noun)	The quality of being kind and helpful.
Callous: (adjective)	Cruel and insensitive; not thinking about other people's feelings
Catalyst: (noun)	A condition, event, or person that is the cause of an important change
Charity: (noun)	The act of choosing to give help, especially money, to those who need it
Compassion: (noun)	Concern towards other people
Condemnation: (noun)	The Christian concept of being destined for divine punishment (hell) due to terrible sin.
Deprived: (adjective)	Suffering from a damaging lack of basic needs e.g. food, water, shelter, love
Ephemeral: (adjective)	Lasting only a short time.
Generous: (adjective)	happy to share or give away something, especially more than expected
Idol: (noun)	A picture or object that people pray to as part of their religion. Someone / something admired very much.
Ignorance: (noun)	Lack of knowledge, understanding, or information - often through a deliberate desire not to want to know
Insidious: (adjective):	Something unpleasant or dangerous; gradually and secretly causing serious harm.
Mammon: (noun)	The Christian concept of money as an evil force that turns people against God and makes them selfish.
Metamorphosis: (noun)	A complete change.
Misanthropic: (adjective)	having or showing a dislike of other people; unsociable.
Miser: (noun)	A mean person who is unwilling to spend or share money.
Nostalgia: (noun)	A feeling of pleasure, and also slight sadness, when thinking about things that happened in the past.
Philanthropy: (noun)	Helping the poor, especially by giving them money.

Pity (noun)	The feeling of sorrow and compassion caused by the suffering and misfortunes of others.
Redemption (noun)	The action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil.
Repentance: (noun)	Feeling sorry for past sins, accompanied by commitment to and actual actions that show and prove a change for the better
Shrouded: (verb)	Hidden by covering or surrounding
Surplus: (adjective)	More than is needed.


7. Key Quotations:

"solitary as an oyster"

- The **simile** implies Scrooge's misanthropy and isolation from society.
- The **symbolism** of the potential pearl **foreshadows** Scrooge's redemption.
- The **image** of something that needs to be forced open mirrors the idea that Scrooge requires the **catalyst** of the ghosts for his metamorphosis.




Key words:
Metamorphosis
Redemption
Foreshadows




"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"

- The **list of similes** implies that Scrooge is elated and overwhelmed with joy with his transformation.
- The **semantic field** of joy and fun suggests that the avarice was weighing him down.




Key words:
Metamorphosis
Redemption
Joy




"I wear the chains I forged in life"

- The **first person pronoun** "I" suggests that Marley acknowledges his part in his punishment.
- The **industrial verb** "forged" implies fire, which in turn links with hell and damnation.
- The **verb** "forged" suggests hard work and perseverance; the punishment has taken multiple negative actions to build the chains.
- The **noun** "chains" links to prison, confinement and a lack of freedom.




Key words:
Punishment
Damnation
Free will




"I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby"

- The **infantile metaphor** suggests Christian rebirth and innocence through redemption.
- The **personal pronoun** "I" implies that Scrooge has undergone introspection and understands his metamorphosis.
- The **short sentences** convey a sense of euphoria and excitement at Scrooge's new chance at life.




Key words:
Metamorphosis
Euphoria
Redemption
Rebirth




"They had better do it and decrease the surplus population"

- The **economic adjective** "surplus" suggests that Scrooge only sees others through the lens of financial gain.
- The criticism of Malthus' economic ideas suggests Dickens' concerns about society's dehumanising treatment of the poor.
- The **euphemistic pronoun** "it" implies that Scrooge can't quite bring himself to condemn people to death.



Key words:
Economics
Misanthropic
Social responsibility
Dehumanising



"This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both."

- The **allegorical figures** of Ignorance and Want **personify** the sins of the Victorian society and imply that ignorance of poverty would lead to chaos.
- The **command** "Beware" is a warning to the Victorian **middle class** readership of the insidious nature of industrialisation and alienation of the poor.




Key words:
Allegory
Industrialisation
Social responsibility




"another idol has displaced me... A golden one."

- The **Biblical allusion** to a golden idol implies that Scrooge has been worshipping money (a heretical idea).
- The **verb** "displaced" suggests that Scrooge's love of money has meant that there is no room for romantic love.
- The **metaphor** of a golden idol suggests that Scrooge's obsession is superficial and without real worth.



Key words:
Mammon
Worship
Obsession



"as good as gold."

- The **simile** suggests that the Cratchit family prize Christian goodness more than money.
- The **image** of gold implies wealth, treasure and precious items: Tiny Tim is valuable to the family.
- The **idolisation** of Tiny Tim suggests that he is a figure to admire as he is thoughtful of others.



Key words:
Agape
Christian values



"from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light." (Ghost of Christmas Past)

- The **symbolism** of light is associated with knowledge and guidance: Scrooge is going to be enlightened on his past.
- The **energetic verb** "sprung" suggests that the knowledge and insight the Ghost will bring will be irrepensible: the Ghost will be a catalyst for change.



Key words:

Enlightenment
Catalyst



"a jolly Giant, glorious to see, who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge" (Ghost of Christmas Present)

- The **classical allusion** to the 'Horn of Plenty' or Cornucopia implies that Christmas is a time for generosity and abundance.
- The **symbolism** of the Ghost being a 'giant' implies that Christmas is a significant event: one that cannot be ignored.
- The **motif** of light represents the knowledge and guidance that the Ghost will provide for Scrooge: the Ghost sprinkles joy/light to society.



Key words:

Generosity
Christmas spirit
Social responsibility



"shrouded in a deep black garment" (Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come)

- The **symbolism** of the 'black' and lack of light indicates that Scrooge's future and manner of death is uncertain.
- The **secretive verb** 'shrouded' suggests that Scrooge has to unmask the knowledge that he has concealed. It also carries the associations of a death shroud/covering.



Key words:

Redemption
Death
Uncertainty/free will



"The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house"

- The **symbolism** of the 'fog' indicates a lack of knowledge and awareness: Scrooge can't see how to change.
- The **motif** of cold 'frost' implies that Scrooge's character needs to become more philanthropic and less metaphorically icy.
- The **pathetic fallacy** of the weather at the beginning creates the mysterious ghostly setting as well as indicating Scrooge's misanthropy.



Key words:

Motif
Isolation
Ghost genre



"no fog, no mist; clear, bright"

- The **symbolism** of 'no fog' indicates that Scrooge understands his purpose.
- The **repetition** of 'no' reinforces that there is nothing left of the supernatural element of the opening of the story.
- The **adjectives** 'clear, bright' imply a jolly and optimistic end to the novella.



Key words:

Optimism
Redemption
Transformation
Metamorphosis

